

The World's Wildest Bass Pro Shop

– Hunter Braithwaite



The space comes complete with its own big fish legend: A few years back Bass Pro Shops owner Johnny Morris was fishing with legendary angler Bill Dance on the Mississippi outside of Memphis. A bet was made. If they caught a catfish weighing at least 30 pounds, Morris would bring his outdoor emporium to the Memphis Pyramid, a 32-story, steel-clad ruin that had been vacant since 2004. They caught a 34-pounder that day and, so the story goes, a bet's a bet. Today, the pyramid is buzzing with shoppers, outdoorsmen, and tourists looking to shop, eat, drink, and tease some gators in this massive facility. Here are 8 very good reasons to join them.

The Lodge

Styled after the company's Big Cedar Lodge in Ridgedale, Missouri, the Big Cypress Lodge wraps around the second and third floors of the Pyramid. But once inside you really will forget you're staying in what amounts to a giant Bass Pro-styled mall. Each of the 103 rooms is designed like a hunting lodge with electronic fireplace, taxidermied animals (most rooms have deer and pheasant, but book the deluxe Governor's Suite and you can spend the night staring into the marbled eyes of a moose), chandeliers made out of antlers, and even screened porches that look over the retail floor — and the gator pond.



The Alligators

Three alligators lurk within the 600,000-gallon pond on the ground floor, along with 1,800 fish (36 species including catfish, sturgeon and gar) and an unfortunately growing constellation of coinage tossed in by guests who mistake this aquarium for a wishing well. One pond is dedicated to a catch-and-release program teaching inner-city kids the basics of sustainable fishing.

The Tallest Freestanding Elevator in the Country

Standing like a tent pole in the middle of the Pyramid is a 28-story ride up through a canopy of 100-foot-tall artificial cypress trees draped with Spanish moss. For \$10 (it's free for hotel guests), you too can ride the tallest freestanding elevator in the country.



Mississippi Views

Barry Hannah wrote that "in Mississippi, it's hard to achieve a vista." *On the Mississippi*, it's no problem. Two cantilevered observation decks look out over the Memphis skyline, the barge-laden river, and the relatively undeveloped expanses of Arkansas. Unsurprisingly, the best views are at sunset. Inside, the Lookout bar has a decent bourbon list and a smattering of outdoorsy appetizers, such as venison sliders with blackberry jelly.

Waterfowl Artifacts

Set back on the second floor, the Ducks Unlimited Waterfowling Heritage Center contains relics from the history of duck hunting — vintage duck calls, watercolors, and display cases full of handmade 19th-century decoys. A more morose artifact from that time period is the eight-foot long punt gun. Quickly outlawed, the gun was mounted onto the prow of the boat and used to blast as many birds as possible. Any ducks not shredded beyond recognition were packed in barrels and sent to market.

Fishing

Connecting the Pyramid to the Big Muddy is the Mississippi River Boat Launch, which allows Bass Pro to host fishing contests big and small. Also, the Big Cypress Lodge will soon unveil an all-inclusive kayak package down the river. The price of the equipment, training and guide will be bundled into the cost of a room.

Underwater Bowling

A geographic outlier is Uncle Buck's Fishbowl and Grill, the corporate-Florida themed bowling alley and restaurant on the first floor. The 13 underwater-themed lanes (the ball-return unit looks like shark and gator heads) are a bit campy, but reveal their appeal after a few locally brewed pints of Wiseacre's Tiny Bomb pilsner.



The Shop itself

The complex represents the largest Bass Pro on the planet. Beyond the standard fare — fishing gear, snake boots, tents and mobile fish-fry units — they've got a Tracker boat store with a fleet of climb-aboard pontoon boats docked in the indoor ponds, a sunglass section run by Apex (Sunglass Hut's sports performance brand), and a general store with moon pies and homemade fudge.