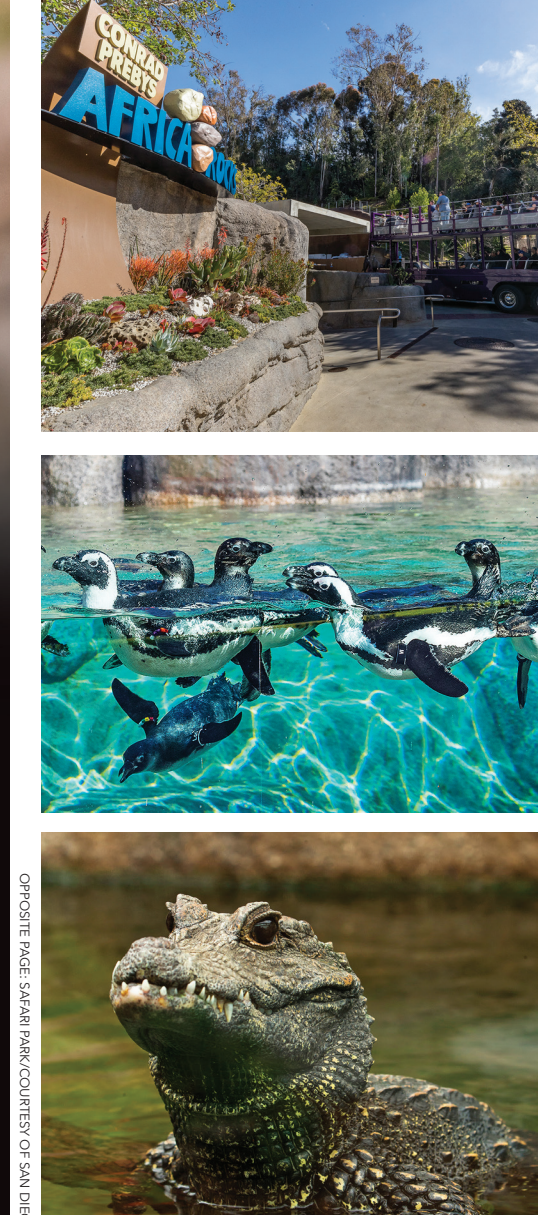


The San Diego Zoo started with a roar more than 100 years ago, when Harry M. Wegeforth heard a lion that had been part of the Panama-California Exposition, an event held in honor of the opening of the Panama Canal. The encounter inspired him to form the Zoological Society of San Diego, rescue the exotic animals that had been left behind after the exposition and realize his dream of opening a zoo. Ever since, the San Diego Zoo has offered rare glimpses into the lives of a wide variety of species, which has led to the growth of an organization known for inspiring a passion for wildlife.

Some of the early animals included a brown bear, black bear and polar bear,

as well as two lions and, later, elephants, koalas and a leopard. Today, the San Diego Zoo is home to more than 3,500 uncommon and endangered animals. Another 3,000 can be found in the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, the zoo's second menagerie, which opened in the 1970s. Over time, the focus shifted from displaying animals to helping protect and increase populations of endangered species from around the world.

With extensive conservation efforts, research initiatives and special events, there is always something new to see and learn at the zoo. Whether you've been once, twice or a hundred times, you're sure to spot something you never noticed before and expand your knowledge on



OPPOSITE PAGE: SAFARI PARK/COURTESY OF SAN DIEGO ZOO

The San Diego Zoo is home to more than 3,500 animals, including endangered and uncommon species. "Africa Rocks" includes six habitats with species like African penguins (center) and dwarf crocodiles (bottom).

each and every visit.

"The zoo has great entertainment, regardless of what age you are," says Sydney Hyde, sales manager for Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa. "Enjoy animal encounters up-close and personal with keeper talks where you can discover more about your favorite creatures."

The San Diego Zoo, located in Balboa Park about 10 miles from both Catamaran Resort and Bahia Resort Hotel (the safari park is about 40 miles away in Escondido), is in a prime spot for guests to get wild and discover fauna from around the world.

## ZIPPING THROUGH THE ZOO

In March of 2022, the San Diego Zoo launched its largest undertaking yet: the Denny Sanford Wildlife Explorers Basecamp. The space, which was created atop the land that once belonged to the Children's Zoo, was designed with all ages in mind, resulting in a spot that encourages learning while still offering fun for the kids.

The state-of-the-art basecamp clocks in at 3.2 acres, aimed at "the future caretakers of the planet" in an effort to foster love and appreciation for not only wildlife, but the natural world as well. This innovative area combines play spaces with high-tech, interactive experiences in a variety of different ecosystems.

In Desert Dunes, there are rocks to climb and caves to explore, but visitors can also learn about burrowing animals that aim to beat the heat, like prairie dogs, tortoises, fennec foxes and more. The waterfall grotto in Wild Woods offers a chance to cool down with splashing water along with rope bridges and spiral staircases to wander while learning about squirrel monkeys and coatis. Two other habitats—Marsh Meadows and Rainforest—delve into rising waterlines and damp, tropical environments. Also at the Wildlife Explorers Basecamp are the Cool Critters Reptile House, with an underwater theme and microscope stations, and the Spineless Marvels Invertebrate House, filled with bees, butterflies, ant colonies and more.

Also in March, the zoo introduced the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance Adventures, a sustainable travel program that is led by conservation experts. Sign up for future programs heading to Yellowstone National Park, Patagonia, Botswana, Galápagos Islands, the Amazon River and more, where you'll wander while learning about wildlife local to the region.

In 2021, two new habitats were established as well: the Kenneth C. Griffin Komodo Kingdom and the William E. Cole Family Hummingbird Habitat. The Komodo dragon habitat, a 2,700-square-foot indoor/outdoor space, is located next to the zoo's reptile house, and features lizards from the beach, woodland and mountain highland areas of Indonesia.



The zoo offers engaging and educational experiences for visitors, while also helping to protect and increase populations of endangered species from around the world.

The latter is housed in a building shaped like an infinity loop that educates guests on hummingbirds and other rare birds from the Americas alongside flowing streams and native plant life.

Elsewhere at the zoo, guests can visit "Africa Rocks" to see leopards, meerkats, hamadryas baboons and West African dwarf crocodiles in addition to the African penguins and Coquerel's sifaka lemurs; pass through "Asian Passage" to spot snow leopards and endangered sun bears; visit the Urban Jungle to see rhinos and giraffes; and journey to "Elephant Odyssey" for views of camels, jaguars, lions and California condors as well as, of course, elephants. Another exhibit, "Northern Frontier," showcases indigenous North American creatures like reindeer, polar bears, mountain lions and arctic foxes.

Seasonal events offer even more unique experiences. When the weather warms up, guests are treated to an annual summer spectacular called Nighttime Zoo that includes extended hours, special festivities centering on the animals and other live entertainment. In the fall, the zoo participates in Kids Free San Diego, a citywide tourism initiative that promotes San Diego as a family-friendly destination; as part of this program, the San Diego Zoo offers free admission for children throughout the month of October. The holidays feature special events as well,



with the light-up HalGloween experience (also in October) and Jungle Bells taking place around Christmastime. Both of these events include holiday-specific activities and decorations.

## SETTING OUT ON A SAFARI

Known for its popular free-range exhibits and safari rides, the San Diego Zoo Safari Park offers a whole different experience than that of the San Diego Zoo. At the wildlife park, the enclosures are much larger and more spread out, giving animals plenty of room to roam. While this means guests may not see their behavior up close, they can view them in a more natural habitat.

One of the newest exhibits, "Walkabout Australia," opened back in May 2018 and offers a special look at some of the most unique animals from Oceania. "Australia is an extraordinary place, and we are thrilled to provide a snapshot of some of the wonders from Down Under," says Lisa Peterson, director of the San Diego Zoo Safari Park.

This walk-through trail showcases the homes of the animals while also teaching guests about how the park cares for them and appropriate behavior for encountering these creatures in the wild. With a lot of space to wander and no fences or plexiglass to hinder views of the animals, it's a unique, interactive experience. In addition to kangaroos and wallabies, visitors have the chance to spot vibrant cassowary birds,





Above: The entrance to the San Diego Zoo; Right: the Skyfari Aerial Tram, which features views of the zoo's wide variety of plants and animals as well as the surrounding Balboa Park area.

sugar gliders and magpie geese.

In fall of 2019, the exhibit gained a new area called the Nelson M. Millsberg Platypus Habitat. The two platypuses housed here are the only ones currently living outside of Australia, offering a rare chance to view these semiaquatic creatures up close. Other unique creatures—such as a kookaburra, a blue-tongued skink or an echidna—may also be found here depending on the day.

“I think what is amazing about ‘Walkabout Australia’ is the thematic approach to provide our guests with the ability to see animals in an authentic and immersive environment. They can walk around and see the kangaroo, wallaby and birds in a way they might be able to see them if they could join them in nature,” Peterson says, noting that the exhibit allows people to connect with Australia’s fascinating wildlife while giving the park a chance to help animals that are endangered as well.

Saving endangered species is a major part of San Diego Zoo Global’s efforts, with conservation and research initiatives taking place at both the zoo properties and around the world. Two of the safari park’s southern white rhinos were artificially inseminated in 2018 in a research project aiming to enhance scientists’ knowledge of the rhino reproduction process. This is part of a larger effort to save the northern white rhino, a relative of the southern subspecies of which there were only two living entities—both female. The pregnant rhinos, named Victoria and Amani, gave birth in 2019 following a lengthy gestation period.

Though the safari park has fewer events

than the zoo does, there are still plenty of annual celebrations to keep visitors entertained. In the summertime, Summer Safari offers extended hours during a cultural celebration filled with music, dancing, acrobatics and more. In the fall, the park also offers free admission for children throughout October, along with an Autumn Festival featuring country music, fall foods and educational experiences along with animal encounters. Then, at the end of the year, Wild Holidays takes over, bringing holiday cheer to the park by way of festive decor, a parade and visits with Santa.

### EXCITING EXPLORATION

One of the most unique ways to view the San Diego Zoo is from the Skyfari Aerial Tram, where large buckets in the sky transport guests from one end of the zoo to the other while providing bird’s-eye views of the animal exhibits, plant life and surrounding Balboa Park.

Those who are interested in keeping their feet on the ground can take advantage of two types of buses: a guided tour bus or the Kangaroo Bus. The former is a docent-led experience that lasts for 35 minutes, showcasing the majority of the zoo while offering exciting details about the animals within, while the Kangaroo option gives guests the chance to hop on and hop off at four different stops around the property.

A variety of behind-the-scenes tours are available as well, including the Crazy About Cats tour, where visitors enjoy private viewings of some of the zoo’s most famous cat species, and the Inside Look tour, which is a small-group experience

focused on how the staff cares for the animals. For an even more immersive day, opt for the Exclusive VIP Experience, which can last five or seven hours and is tailored to visitors’ interests, ensuring they are able to view and interact with the creatures they’d like to see most.

Over at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, the offerings are a little different. In addition to self-guided and walking tours, the property offers an endless array of safaris for guests to enjoy. Traditional options include the Wildlife Safari and the Cart Safari, both of which provide covered, narrated travel near the African or Asian animal enclosures (mimosa or twilight options may also be available). Or opt to view the animals from above on the Flightline Safari, a series of two zip lines set up to 130 feet in the air.

For a more unique experience, consider the Behind-the-Scenes Safari, where visitors can get closer to some of the animals and view their enclosures from private backstage areas. Choose to focus on elephants, rhinos, cheetahs and more. Another option, the Ultimate Safari, lasts between five and seven hours, and offers a customized escapade filled with animal interaction and visits to private areas of the zoo.

But the fun doesn’t end with animal adventures. Those of all ages can enjoy an overnight stay within the safari park gates during a Roar & Snore Safari, which includes everything from guided walks and after-hours views of the wildlife to special activities, a campfire program and dinner. While some of these events are aimed at children or families, others are geared toward at those who are 21 and over. ■