



It isn't too much of an exaggeration to call the San Diego one of the best in the world. For the past 70 years it has been the model for zoos everywhere to encourage evolving from confining cages to roomy natural living areas for the animals.

Many seasoned citizens have visited city zoos since childhood, and they can easily remember those of not too many years ago, featuring listless, miserable animals behind bars and small fenced enclosures. Yesterday's zoos were prisons, where inmates endured life sentences of boredom.

One of the most heart-warming aspects of the San Diego Zoo is that it's designed to allow animals to live as naturally as possible, with plenty of space for roaming and interacting with other compatible animals. At the same time, the zoo encourages visitors of all ages to find interesting areas to stop and observe without disturbing the animals' lives. No longer does Dad have to say, "Let's go to the zoo and laugh at the monkeys in their cages."

The zoo and surrounding botanical gardens cover a vast 80 acres in downtown San Diego. Along with expansive animal compounds are species of plants and trees from around the world. All are combined for both aesthetic beauty and natural places for the animals to roam with considerable freedom.

Some plants, like the coconut palms and fruit trees, also provide foods for primates and other animals. Visitors can feel they're in completely natural surroundings at almost any place in the zoo. There are more than 4,000 zoo residents, including endangered animals such as the the current stars, a pair of giant pandas. There are also various wild cat species, exotic birds, dragonlike lizards, tiny deer and hundreds of other creatures.

The fun and wonder begin immediately after entering the zoo at Flamingo Lagoon. Returning your stares are a large flock of the tall, flaming pink birds. After walking around the lagoon, visitors enter one of several tropical forest areas, where exhibits include both harmless and poisonous snakes, birds and species of rare monkeys that inhabit the forest's trees.

There's a lot of walking required for those who want the full zoo experience. There are facilities

available for those who need wheelchairs and other assistance. Visitors can take the get-on-and-off shuttle that moves throughout the park. There are also two express lines that offer quick rides to certain areas, such as the very popular pandas, African lions and polar bears exhibits. A unique way to see the zoo is from above on the Skyfari Aerial Tram. It zooms along high above all the zoo exhibits, and also allows passengers some great photo ops and views of downtown San Diego and the ocean harbor.

The San Diego Zoo's address is 2920 Zoo Drive. In summer daylight saving time, it's open daily from 9 am to 8 pm; the rest of the year from 9 am to 4 pm. Admission for adults is \$34 and children \$24. Discount tickets are available in some local tourist magazines, hotel front desks and other sources. The phone number is 619-234-1515, and email address is www.sandiegozoo.org

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