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Sumatran tigers are an endangered species from the Indonesian island of Sumatra, but they can be seen at the Los Angeles Zoo.



Zip lining at the San Diego Zoo's Safari Park; panda mother Bai Yun and cub Xiao Liwu at the San Diego Zoo; observing gorillas at Boston's Franklin Park Zoo

LIONS AND TIGERS AND BEARS,

Oh My!

Discover your wild side at world-class zoos across the country.

BY CHELSEA DAY

Adventurers and animal enthusiasts don't have to travel too far to rock out with a rhino or see sharks make a splash. Some of the world's most renowned zoos and animal-loving locales are closer than you think—and the whole family can romp and roam its way through them, all while contributing to global conservation efforts. Here, we explore some of the country's top wild experiences.

Zoo in Two

The San Diego Zoo is known the world over for its breathtaking exhibits and wide-reaching efforts to help endangered animal populations. A stroll through its grounds gives you an abundance of opportunities to observe creatures in their natural habitats as well as sneak peeks at rare species. In fact, the facility is one of very few zoos in the world that's home to giant

pandas, and each bear has become an international celebrity.

The zoo's exhibits, such as the recently added Conrad Prebys Australian Outback, are constantly growing and evolving, making every trip a new experience. For an especially educational and interactive trip, you can take additional tours: Purchase a Backstage Pass to get up close and personal with some of the animals, or experience the Inside Look Tour that assigns you an experienced guide to give you the inside scoop on how the zoo cares for all of its inhabitants.

The San Diego Zoo is so popular, visitors are often surprised to discover that it operates a second location called the San Diego Zoo Safari Park. Just a short drive north, the Safari Park features expansive open ranges and interactive activities like the Jungle Ropes Safari—which allows thrill-seekers to zip line across lofty rope bridges and soar over greenery (with assistance

from the zoo staff, if necessary). Back on terra firma, Lorikeet Landing provides a great photo opportunity; kids can get their pictures taken as the friendly birds enjoy snacks right out of their hands. Both the San Diego Zoo and Safari Park also host special events throughout the year, so be sure to check sandiegozoo.org for details when planning a trip.

Flora and Fauna

It may be known for celebrity sightings and glamorous shopping, but Los Angeles also has an untamed side—and you can find it at the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens. Located in gorgeous Griffith Park, the Los Angeles Zoo is a one-stop destination for an entire day of sightseeing, just a stone's throw from the buzz of Hollywood. Attracting 1.6 million visitors year-round, the renowned attraction is home to 250 different species on 133 acres. The

Below: Interacting with penguins at Audubon Aquarium of the Americas; right: a black bear at Stone Zoo; far right: a collared brown lemur in the Madagascar exhibit at the Bronx Zoo



More Animals Across America

Atlanta: Georgia Aquarium (georgiaaquarium.org)
 Miami: Zoo Miami (miamimetrozoo.com)
 Montreal: Space for Life (montrealspaceforlife.ca)
 Nashville: Nashville Zoo (nashvillezoo.org)
 Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian's National Zoo (nationalzoo.si.edu)



The New England Aquarium houses the Giant Ocean Tank, which is home to more than 2,000 different animals.

zoo has a particularly strong focus on preservation and research, participating in projects that help to save and restore populations of endangered species like the golden lion tamarin, Visayan warty pig and California condor.

Visitors also have the chance to do more than just gaze at the animals. "The LA Zoo offers interactive exhibits that get the whole family involved," says Connie Morgan, president of the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association (GLAZA), the nonprofit organization that funds the zoo. "The Indian Rhino Encounter offers a chance to feed and touch a live rhino. There's the Tom Mankiewicz Conservation Carousel and seasonal events such as Big Bunny's Spring Fling, Boo at the Zoo [and] the Reindeer Romp."

Programs created specifically for little ones, such as ZooCamp for children ages 4 to 9 and other educational classes, teach kids about nature through games, crafts, stories and live animal encounters. For kids and adults alike, the zoo's most popular sights are the LAIR (living amphibians, invertebrates and reptiles), Elephants of Asia

and Campo Gorilla Reserve. "Visitors enjoy the zoo as a wonderfully adventurous place to have a good time while learning the importance of saving and protecting wildlife," Morgan says. An eagerly anticipated Rainforest of the Americas habitat is also scheduled to open this year; the exhibit will be an immersive tropical environment.

Beasts of Boston

Over on the East Coast, Zoo New England is made up of two separate facilities on opposite ends of town: the 72-acre Franklin Park Zoo in Boston's historic Franklin Park, and the 26-acre Stone Zoo in Stoneham (9 miles north of downtown Boston). A highlight at Franklin is Breakfast with the Animals, which allows families early entry to the zoo and a continental breakfast, accompanied by a staff member who can chat with guests and answer even the wildest questions about the animals. At Stone, you can see a diverse variety of animals ranging from the lynx and arctic foxes of the Canadian woods to the Sierra Madre's Gila monsters and even friendly barnyard critters that you can interact with.

Boston's wild streak doesn't end there. For sea life encounters, take a trip to the New England Aquarium, situated on the Central Wharf. Say hello to the colony of penguins that lives on the first level of the aquarium—you'll recognize the African penguins by their loud call that sounds like a donkey's bray, rock-hopper penguins by their fierce "hairdos" and blue penguins by their tiny stature. Kids will get a kick out of the open-air New Balance Foundation Marine Mammal Center, where they can watch seals, sea lions and northern fur seals at play. Marvel at the Yawkey Coral Reef Center, a seven-tank wonder that gives close-up views of eels, sea urchins and other water-dwelling

creatures. Feel your way through the Trust Family Foundation Shark and Ray Touch Tank, the largest tank of its kind on the East Coast. "You can touch a variety of species of rays and small sharks as they swim by in a beautiful lagoon setting," says Tony LaCasse, media relations director for the New England Aquarium. "Most importantly, you will learn about the urgent need for shark conservation around the world."

The aquarium's activities extend beyond its walls with the New England Aquarium Whale Watch, a program formed in partnership with Boston Harbor Cruises that takes people out on the water with an aquarium expert to witness whales and dolphins feeding and playing in the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. The catamarans depart from the wharf from late March through October, and tickets are available online or at the aquarium.

Dive Into New Orleans

A trip to the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas in New Orleans is not only a fun family outing but also an informative look into the region's crucial fishing industry. The new Geaux Fish exhibit is an interactive display that teaches guests about the area's seafood and its importance to Louisiana's economy. You can cast a virtual reel, visit a seafood market or even hop on a fishing boat, all inside this educational presentation.

The aquarium also offers Backstage Penguin Passes for those who want to meet, touch and learn about African penguins. Go from sea to air at Parakeet Pointe, an 800-square-foot outdoor environment where guests can feed birds and observe them in flight. The aquarium also features a Stingray Touchpool, Mississippi River Gallery and Hurricane Simulator.

The Audubon Aquarium belongs to a family of museums ideal for animal enthusiasts, collectively called the Audubon Nature Institute. The institute also features an insectarium, zoo and Imax theater.

Urban Jungle

City and nature collide at the Central Park Zoo, where you can meet creatures from the tropical rainforest against the backdrop of the Manhattan skyline. More than 150 species from around the world reside here, including red pandas, snow monkeys and poison dart frogs. The zoo's 4-D Theater offers another way for kids to connect with creatures, with sensory stimuli like water mist, bubbles, leg tickles and seat vibrations that play to imaginations as 3-D images dance onscreen.

Head north and you'll find the largest metropolitan zoo in the world: the Bronx Zoo. Among its 6,000-plus animals are lemurs and crocodiles in the Madagascar exhibit, gibbons and tapirs in JungleWorld, and gorillas in the Congo Gorilla Forest. Kids can bug out on the creepy crawly Bug Carousel or explore the Butterfly Garden. The Animal Activity Trail lets families find their inner animal with a workout that'll have kids tuckered out just in time for an afternoon nap.

Over on Coney Island, the New York Aquarium offers a glimpse of the world's oceans, with cownose rays and moray eels peeking out from a coral reef while pretty piranhas circle the underwater greenery. Here you'll also get a peek into Brazil's flooded forest and even learn about sustainability in your own home.

Ravaged by Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the aquarium saw many of its exhibits destroyed. Fortunately, the community banded together on the path to recovery and helped to reopen the aquarium just seven months later as part of an ongoing transformation toward an interactive gathering space. The aquarium recently broke ground on a new 57,000-square-foot shark exhibit slated to open in 2016.

America's First Zoo

The Philadelphia Zoo opened in 1874, giving it the distinction of being the first zoo in the country. Since its



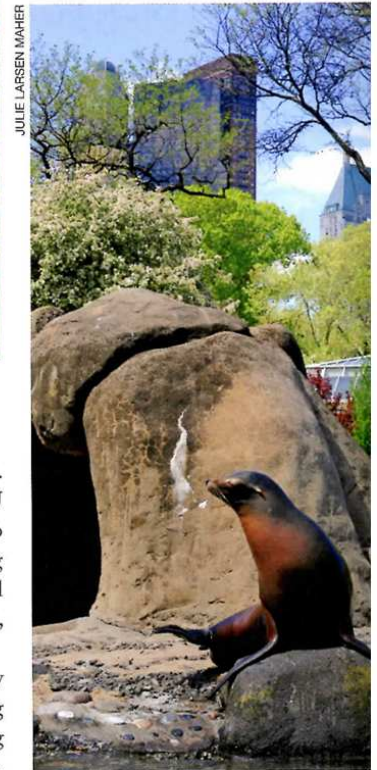
The Philadelphia Zoo's reptile and amphibian house has 47 naturalistic exhibits where families can view snakes, frogs, turtles, crocodiles and more.

opening, it's grown to house more than 1,300 animals and features an array of exhibits and special encounters like balloon rides, camel safaris, swan boats, a carousel, a lorikeet experience and a miniature railroad. See numerous endangered species including rare orangutans, spider monkeys, fruit bats, gorillas, birds and leopards.

Perhaps the most engaging animal experience available is the one-of-a-kind trail system, a campus-wide series of elevated passageways that allows monkeys, lemurs and apes to traverse outside of their normal exhibits. The Philadelphia Zoo also has architectural and landscape features that pay homage to the rich history of the area, making this a destination

for education in multiple curriculums. In addition, a facility called KidZooU was built especially with kids ages 2 to 13 in mind. The area engages young visitors by teaching them about animal care, and houses goats, sheep, ducks, butterflies, fish and more.

Whichever wild destinations they choose to explore, visitors both young and old are bound to learn something new. In the words of Jennifer Fields, a spokesperson for the Association of Zoos and Aquariums: "Hometown residents and families from out of town will meet amazing animals and discover fascinating habitats, enabling them to take away experiences and conservation messages they will remember for many years to come." **L**



Guests of the Central Park Zoo are immersed in wild environments without having to leave the urban environment of New York City.

Book It

Fortunately for those who fancy themselves amateur zoologists, there are Loews Hotels & Resorts located conveniently close to the country's top zoos.

Just a short trip across the San Diego-Coronado Bridge from the San Diego Zoo, **Loews Coronado Bay Resort** offers a breath of fresh air with a stunning waterfront location, convenient access to nearby attractions and plentiful on-site amenities.

When visiting the Los Angeles Zoo, travelers can choose from two Loews destinations: **Loews Hollywood Hotel** puts you right in the middle of star-studded sights, complete with picture-perfect views and a rooftop pool. Across town, laid-back luxury beckons at **Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel**. Savor the sensational ocean-themed restaurant and spa at this beachfront resort nestled between Malibu and Venice.

Historic charm and contemporary comfort mingle at **Loews Boston Hotel**, housed in the former Boston Police Headquarters. Just a few miles from the Franklin Park Zoo, the hotel features state-of-the-art amenities to put travelers at ease along the famous cobblestone promenades.

Let the good times roll at **Loews New Orleans Hotel** in the heart of the city, an easy and scenic walk from the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas. World-class cuisine and impeccable service await those who seek an authentic Big Easy experience.

New York's recently renovated **Loews Regency Hotel** puts midtown Manhattan at your fingertips, and is located just a short distance from the Central Park Zoo.

You'll feel the love at the **Loews Philadelphia Hotel**—a short car, train or bus ride from the Philadelphia Zoo—and home to gracious hospitality, adventurous cuisine and a full-service spa. Don't forget to take a dip in the heated, two-lane lap pool.