

# 6

of the best



## FUNKY ZOOS

Go wild for the new breed of close-up animal encounters in natural environments – with thrilling high-tech extras to lure the kids. By **Laura Ivill**

### 1 The urban one **Bronx Zoo**

**USP:** At 100 hectares, this is the largest urban zoo in the US, with a spectacular Wild Asia Monorail gliding along the river valley, over forests and pasture. Below you'll see herds of Asian deer and antelope, as well as tigers and elephants, and rhinos wallowing in the mud.

**Star turns:** Two sets of tiger triplets were born at the zoo last summer: three Amur (Siberian) and three Malayan cubs. You can catch them playing at Tiger Mountain.

**Unsung heroes:** The sealions' pool is a noisy arena of splashing and honking when it's feeding time; see also how adept the penguins are at catching their fish suppers. In World of Birds, the acrobatic bee-eaters swoop and dive for crickets.

**For kids:** At the Children's Zoo, littl'uns can shimmy up a spider's-web climbing frame and crawl along tunnels like burrowing prairie dogs. They'll also love *Dora & Diego's 4D Adventure*, which throws in sensory effects such as wind, mist and jungle aromas.

**Keeper's tip:** For the best chance of glimpsing the 20-odd lowland gorillas in the Congo Gorilla Forest get there asap – here, as in the wild, they rise early to forage.

**Details:** 2300 Southern Blvd, Bronx, New York (00 1 718 367 1010, www.bronxzoo.com). Catch the BxM11 bus direct to the zoo from Madison Ave (between 26th and 99th streets; every half an hour). Total Experience tickets give access to all exhibits: adult £18.60, child £12.40.

### 2 The tropical-jungle one **Singapore Zoo**

**USP:** The home of the Bornean orang-utans is the most spacious of its kind in the world, a 'free-range enclosure' you can get up close to. See the occupants swing, climb and play in the thick foliage. In the Night Safari park nearby, keep your eyes peeled for clouded leopards among the 1,000 heart-racing nocturnal encounters.

**Star turns:** The orang-utans are highly intelligent, and keen on swinging wildly from the thick branches of tall trees, grabbing hold of vines, foraging for insects and resting up in hammocks.

**Unsung hero:** The giant Aldabra tortoise, Astove, is thought to be the oldest resident at almost 80. Visit during the daily 1.15pm feeding session and see how surprisingly sprightly he is.

**For kids:** Splash Safari takes a look at how penguins, sea lions, manatees and pelicans move in the water, while there are pony rides and a wet-play area at Kidzworld. The great white tigers from Bengal draw crowds during feeding sessions – their awesome roars can resound for miles.

**Keeper's tip:** At 11.30am, keepers dangle food for the bats, sloths and lemurs at the Fragile Forest – suddenly, this biodome springs to life as the inhabitants break cover.

**Details:** 80 Mandai Lake Rd, Singapore (00 65 6269 3411, www.zoo.com.sg). It's a half-hour drive from the city, and express buses pick-up from nine key city hotels. Adult £10.20, child £6.60 (combination tickets for Jurong Bird Park and Night Safari also available).

### 3 The mammoth one **Zoo Berlin**

**USP:** With 17,000 animals and 1,500 species, this is the largest zoo-and-aquarium centre in the world. Which also makes it the most popular in Europe – more than three million visitors last year strolled around the zoological gardens.

**Star turns:** The hippo house permits a startling underwater view of these massive creatures swimming like ballerinas. Looking at the yellowed scimitar teeth in their yawning jaws gives you an indication of their scary power.

**Unsung heroes:** The giant anteater's unfeasibly long tongue never fails to delight an audience. Equally mesmerising are the mother anteaters with babies on their backs – they carry them until they're at least six months old.

**For kids:** The sheer number of baby animals will delight children and adults alike (Berlin has an especially good breeding record). Coo over young elephants swimming in their outdoor pool; well-displayed in open enclosures are lively smaller mammals, too – among them small-claw Asian otters, raccoons and monkeys.

**Keeper's tip:** The mongooses and meerkats are a sure-fire spectacle when kids are flagging. They're active for much of the day – and very curious, investigating every sight, sound and smell. **Details:** Hardenbergplatz 8, Berlin (00 49 030 254010, www.zoo-berlin.de/zoo). Take the train, underground or bus to the central Zoologischer Garten station. Adult £17.60, child £8.80. >

## 4 The naturalistic one Zoo Zürich

**USP:** It's more a nature reserve than a traditional zoo – landscape architects have meticulously recreated habitats found in different world regions. Amble through the Masoala Rainforest and it's as if you've landed in Madagascar – it's home to lemurs, fruit bats, chameleons, frogs and birds.

**Star turn:** Maxi, the 41-year-old bull elephant, is father to 10 youngsters and grandfather to six babies. With such an amorous dude in its midst, the zoo has started building a new elephant park – six times the size of the existing one. Well you wouldn't want to cramp his style, would you?

**Unsung hero:** The free-ranging chameleon spends the day hunting flies alongside the path in the Masoala Rainforest, and visitors can spend hours on the lookout for him.

**For kids:** In winter, the king penguins go on their daily march, waddling through the zoo – invariably with a bunch of children in tow. Zoolino is both a 'petting' zoo and an adventure playground for little kids; older children, meanwhile, can lead a llama or alpaca on a hike. Early arrivals are treated most mornings to the spectacle of elephantine ablutions, as the keepers hose them down one by one.

**Keeper's tip:** Winter is a splendid time to visit – carpeted in fresh snow, enclosures are suddenly magical new arenas to occupants.

**Details:** Zürichbergstrasse 221, Zürich (00 41 0848 966983, [www.zoo.ch](http://www.zoo.ch)). Parking is very limited, but tram 6 from the city stops outside the entrance. Adult £16.60, child £8.30. >





## 5 The close encounters one **Chester Zoo**

**USP:** Modern enclosures make clever use of glazing so that you feel closer to the animals; and an expansion programme to the tune of £30 million is planned. Rare plants and gardens also help make this the UK's most popular zoo.

**Star turns:** Jaguars – the golden, spotted variety and a single sleek-black-coated one – have indoor and outdoor space to roam. And Realm of the Red Ape is where the orang-utans and gibbons hang out. Under threat in the wild, these creatures have bred well here – orang-utans Iznee and Kirana, born in 2009, have grown up fast.

**Unsung heroes:** The Roti Island snake-necked turtles in the aquarium captivate visitors with their peculiar, yet utterly charming, long necks.

**For kids:** The waterbus is an absorbing way to see the zoo from the canals. This summer, the interactive exhibition 'Zoo Vets' gives a behind-the-scenes look at diagnosing and caring for the 7,000 residents. Listen to heartbeats and learn how to tell if an elephant is pregnant.

**Keeper's tip:** Animals tend to be most active first thing, and again in the evening, so these are the best times to witness the antics of the zoo's lions, giant otters and African wild dogs.

**Details:** Upton-by-Chester, Chester (01244 380280, [www.chesterzoo.org](http://www.chesterzoo.org)). Coming by bike gets you a 15 per cent discount. Otherwise, buses drop you at the entrance, or you can park your car for free. Adult £15.40, child £11.50.

## 6 The kangas and pandas one **Adelaide Zoo**

**USP:** This is the only zoo in the Southern Hemisphere with giant pandas; there are plenty of native Australian birds and animals, too. Despite the urban location, it feels large, lush and tropical – but it's not too vast to cover with small kids.

**Star turns:** The zoo prides itself on its giant panda pair and, with fewer than 2,000 specimens in the wild, it is hoped love will blossom. Five-year-old female Funi is playful, curious and at ease in the spotlight; while Wang Wang, a year older, is a typically laid-back male.

**Unsung hero:** The male lyrebird, Chook, is a YouTube sensation. He can mimic construction noises – including sawing, hammering and drilling – as well as bird calls.

**For kids:** The kangaroos are a big draw, as are the super-cute native

marsupials known as quokkas: young ones clamour to pet and feed them in the Children's Zoo. It's possible to book a camping sleepover, with a barbecue supper and night walks – make a reservation to see the pandas being fed breakfast before the zoo opens. Then take in the whole zoo while it's quiet (£87pp).

**Keeper's tip:** If you love hippos, visit on a Thursday – while their pond is drained they're fed pumpkins and there's a keeper talk at 1.30pm.

**Details:** Frome Rd, Adelaide (00 61 8 8267 3255, [www.zoossa.com.au/adelaide-zoo](http://www.zoossa.com.au/adelaide-zoo)). In the city's north, parking is limited, but there are plenty of cycle paths. Or take a small ferry on the river from Elder Park. Adult £21, child £12. ■

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