



San Diego Zoo

Botanical Tours



Figs (*Ficus*)



The tour begins at Galápagos tortoises, continuing along Front Street through Australian Outback, and ending in Africa Rocks at the Cape Fynbos penguin habitat.



1. Socotran Fig

Ficus vasta

Once thought to only be found on the islands of Socotra, this spectacular tree is native to many parts of the Horn of Africa as well. It requires very little care and minimal water, making it a perfect tree for San Diego!

Fun Fact

Socotra, off the coast of Yemen, is often called the “Galápagos of the Indian Ocean” because of the incredible biodiversity found there.



2. Malagasy Rock Fig

Ficus menabeensis

This fig from Madagascar can be a shrub, tree, or small rock fig, depending on its habitat. This is one of many *Ficus* that are lithophytic.

Fun Fact

A lithophyte is a type of plant that grows on rocks. *Ficus* species that grow on rocks are commonly called rock figs.



3. Lava Fig

Ficus petiolaris

This species from Mexico is one of the most spectacular-looking fig trees on Earth. When growing in rocky habitats, the roots look like flowing lava as they hug the rocks.

Fun Fact

The genus *Ficus* represents over 850 species of trees, shrubs, vines, epiphytes, and lithophytes around the world, mostly in tropical and subtropical regions.



4. Highland Breadfruit Tree

Ficus dammaropsis

From the highlands of New Guinea, this spectacular tree produces giant leaves and softball-sized figs reminiscent of breadfruit. The tree is hard to propagate, so it is uncommon in cultivation.

Fun Fact

In Papua New Guinea, people cook the young leaves of this tree as a vegetable and serve the dish with meat.



5. Sweet Sandpaper Fig

Ficus opposita

Found throughout Malesia and in eastern Australia, this small, resilient plant grows in many environments and even survives occasional wildfires. Its common name comes from the sweet figs it produces and the sandpaper-like texture of its leaves.

Fun Fact

Malesia, a region encompassing islands from Indonesia to Papua New Guinea, is an area of incredible biodiversity.



6. Riverine Fig

Ficus adenosperma

This unusual rheophyte is found growing along creeks and riverbanks from New Guinea to Australia. These trees look delicate, but they are very strong and are able to survive yearly floods and strong currents.

Fun Fact

A rheophyte is a type of plant that grows in fast-moving water. Its widespread, strong roots keep it anchored.



7. Red-leaf Fig

Ficus congesta

The figs of this small tree dangle from the trunk, not the branches. Native to forest edges and clearings throughout New Guinea and tropical Australia, this small tree's new leaf growth is an eye-catching red.

Fun Fact

In Australia, fig trees provide many animals with a food source. Cassowaries, in particular, favor red-leaf fig fruit.



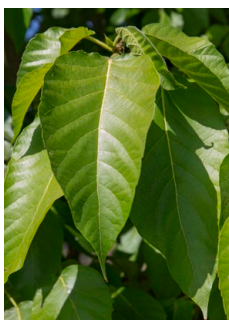
8. Figwood

Ficus virgata

Spanning Asia, Malesia, and tropical northern Australia, this medium-sized tree is useful to humans and animals alike. The bright-orange figs are eaten by metallic starlings, a bird from New Guinea and Australia.

Fun Fact

The sap has been used to protect against insect bites.



9. Bee Fig

Ficus albipila

Albipila, which translates to “white hair,” refers to the small white hairs that grow on the fig. The common name bee fig comes from the fact that that migrant giant honeybees, *Apis dorsata*, often hung their nests from this tree's branches in Thailand.

Fun Fact

Historically, the large buttress roots of this fig were used to make war shields.



10. Red-leaved Fig

Ficus ingens

A sprawling rock fig from Africa, this tree grows on rocks or cliff faces in drier regions, becoming a forest tree in higher-rainfall areas. It goes through a brief deciduous period, followed by a flush of bright-red foliage.

Fun Fact

Many species of *Ficus* are good for bonsai—including *Ficus ingens*, due to its attractive form and ease of growing.



11. Fig Tree

Ficus umbellata

The native range of this fig spans Angola, Nigeria, Senegal, and other west African nations. The striking heart-shaped leaves are very distinctive and can grow quite large.

Fun Fact

This species is commonly cultivated around the world as a popular houseplant, similar to fiddle-leaf fig.



12. Lowveld Fig

Ficus stuhlmannii

Being a strangler fig, it starts its life growing on the branches of a host tree. As it matures, it sends aerial roots down to the ground. They mature into stems that suffocate their host until the strangler fig eventually stands on its own.

Fun Fact

This species grows among termite mounds and rocky outcrops called *kopjes* (pronounced “koppie”).



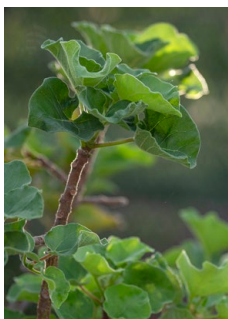
13. Hippo Fig

Ficus trichopoda

This tree is found throughout central Africa and Madagascar. The specific epithet *trichopoda* means “hairy foot,” referring to its massive aerial roots. Figs are actually inside-out inflorescences—the flower blooms inside the syconium (fruit-like structure). It is pollinated by a minute wasp.

Fun Fact

The common name comes from the fact that hippos live in the same region as this tree in KwaZulu-Natal.



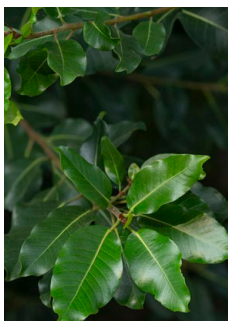
14. Small-leaved Rock Fig

Ficus tettensis

This small, deciduous fig grows in Botswana, Mozambique, and northern South Africa. Its ability to grow on cliffsides limits its exposure to herbivores and other animal threats.

Fun Fact

This fig belongs to a group of plants known as “rock splitters.” As their roots find purchase in small crevices, they grow and widen, exerting pressure and ultimately breaking the rock.



15. Common Wild Fig

Ficus thonningii

Despite being native to the tropics of West Africa, this fig can grow in relatively dry conditions throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Common wild fig is valuable as dry season livestock fodder because of the nutritious foliage it produces year round.

Fun Fact

Ficus is a core genus in our browse program. We harvest and deliver about 150 tons of *Ficus* each year, primarily for our elephants and primates at the San Diego Zoo and Safari Park.

