

# SAN DIEGO ZOO®

## Accessibility Guide



Figure 1 African Elephant



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## **San Diego Zoo Global, an Access Friendly Organization**

San Diego Zoo Global (SDZG) is committed to ensuring that our campuses are welcoming to all! This is a pledge made by all of our employees. We strive to provide a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment where visitors of all ages and abilities can enjoy getting close to nature as only the San Diego Zoo and San Diego Zoo Safari Park can offer. We are committed to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and California Access Laws.

This guide addresses many of the accommodations San Diego Zoo Global provides for persons with disabilities. However, if you have needs or questions outside of the content found in this document, please contact us at the Zoo at (619) 231-1515, ext. 4526 or at the Safari Park at (760) 796-5621, based on the facility you are planning to visit. You will find that we are able to best serve you if you call at least one week prior to your visit. We always welcome calls, comments, and suggestions from our guests. On the day of your visit, please feel free to discuss any special needs you have at our Guest Services office, adjacent to the front entrance.

Access is a field that changes frequently as new information, technology, and laws evolve. We reserve the right to modify this guide and our accessibility policies as appropriate.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Wheelchairs**

**Q: Do you rent wheelchairs?**

A: Yes. Manual and electric wheelchairs are available to be rented for the day.

**Q: What is the cost for wheelchair rental?**

A: Prices are subject to change. Prices are posted on-site at the rental facility.

**Q: Can a wheelchair (manual or electric) be reserved ahead of time?**

A: No. Wheelchairs are rented on a first-come, first-served basis.

**Q: What is the minimum age to rent an electric wheelchair?**

A: 16 years old.

**Q: Does your guided bus tour accommodate wheelchairs?**

A: Yes. The guided bus tour accommodates one wheelchair per vehicle.

**Q: Do you have a map that suggests the best path of travel?**

A: Yes. Our Zoo map indicates best path of travel, look for blue dotted lines.

### **Attendants**

**Q: If a person with a disability requires an attendant, does the attendant get into the Zoo free of charge?**

A: Yes. A complimentary pass will be provided for attendants and may be obtained at any of the ticket windows at the entrance to the Zoo. This also applies for special programs and tours at the San Diego Zoo.

### **Mobility/Transportation**

**Q. How can I see the Zoo with limited mobility?**

A. The Zoo provides a guided bus tour that covers of approximately 50% of the grounds (which is approximately 35 minutes).

**Q: Is there shuttle service for guests with disabilities?**

A: Yes, on routes that are accessible by the shuttle service. If you need assistance, please contact an employee who can request a shuttle.

### **Communication**

**Q: Do you provide assistance for guests that need American Sign Language interpretation?**

A: Yes. We request that arrangements be made at least one week in advance of your visit. Please call (619) 231-1515, ext. 4526 to arrange for an interpreter.

**Q. Do you offer Assistant Listening Devices (ALD)?**

A. Yes. They are available at Wegeforth Bowl and 4D Theaters during our regularly scheduled shows.

### **Special Assistance**

**Q: Do you provide assistance for guests who are blind?**

A: Yes. We request that arrangements be made at least 72 hours in advance of your visit. Please call (619) 231-1515, ext. 4526 to make arrangements.

**Q: Do you allow service animals?**

A: Yes. We welcome guests with disabilities that choose to bring their **trained service animal** into the Zoo.

**Q: Can a staff member assist guests with disabilities in the restroom?**

A: No. Zoo employees are neither trained nor permitted to lift a guest or help them inside a restroom. Should it be required, guests needing this assistance should plan to visit the Zoo with someone who can physically help them.

**Q. Do you have an adult changing facility?**

A. Yes. Please visit Health Services, near the Reptile House.

## **SPECIFIC DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS**

### **Blind or Low Vision Guest Assistance**

If you are blind and you would like your personal assistant to guide you, that person is considered an attendant and he/she will be admitted to the Zoo for free.

If you would like a sighted staff person to accompany you, an Access Ambassador will be provided. We ask that you make a reservation 72 hours in advance of your visit. The Access Ambassador is a staff member who will accompany you on a walking tour, read informational signs or map information, read menus and pricing signs. These staff members are prepared to provide descriptions of animals and the exhibits. He/she will describe the current activity of the animals and provide you with visual descriptions of the areas you visit. If you have purchased premium tours or experiences, our Access Ambassador can accompany you if arrangements are made at the time of ticketing.

Please call our Access Coordinator, Monday through Friday at (619) 231-1515, ext. 4526 to make arrangements for an Access Ambassador. This service is available for guests who are blind or who have low vision. Please remember that we appreciate as much advance notice as possible, 72 hour minimum helps us to schedule the best experiences for you.

Many exhibits have tactile elements to enhance the experience including: Northern Frontier, Elephant Odyssey, Koala Exhibit, River Hippo Exhibit, Gorilla Exhibit, Centennial Plaza, and Galapagos Tortoise Exhibit.

### **Deaf or Hard of Hearing Guest Assistance**

If you are Deaf or hard of hearing we have a number of accommodations available to you.

If you would like us to provide you with scripted information for our shows or tours, these are available. They can be picked up at Guest Services or at the Bus Loading area. Each tour presentation may vary depending on the route and/or the animals that are most visible so the script order may vary from the presentation.

If you would like an ASL Interpreter, we request a minimum of one-week notice in advance of your visit. Please call (619) 231-1515, ext. 4526.

If you are hard of hearing we have Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) available at the Wegeforth Bowl show and the 4D Theaters.

### **Developmental Disabilities Guest Assistance**

If a guest with a developmental disability requires an attendant, the attendant will be admitted at no charge.

### **Autism Spectrum Sensory Processing Disabilities Guest Assistance**

The Zoo is unlike many recreation sites because our treasured collection of plants and animals are living. As such, the Zoo is a place that includes many smells and sounds. These occur intermittently and without notice.

Here are some of the tools and suggestions we have to assist with your visit. Be aware of the changing environment at the Zoo. We suggest bringing items to reduce stress. These could include stress balls, fidgets, sound-limiting head-phones or ear plugs, weighted shoulder or lap pads. If you

don't have these with you, we have a limited number of these items available for check-out during your visit. Visit Guest Services and we will assist you. Please have a driver's license available to check items, first come, first served.

If you are looking for a quiet area, please ask our staff at the Guest Services office to provide suggestions.

Health Services is located adjacent to the Reptile House.

Summer, holidays, and weekends are busiest at our facility. We suggest coming earlier in the day, on weekdays and during the off-season to avoid larger crowds. Note the Easy Access Pass section for more information.

### **Limited Mobility Guest Assistance**

The San Diego Zoo has many natural hills and valleys, which are inherent barriers to easy mobility access. The Zoo has many accommodations to make our hills and valleys more access friendly. Please pick up a map for the most accessible routes. Additionally, we have a shuttle service and elevators. Please note that the Zoo has many changes in surfaces and guests are advised to use caution when traveling throughout the Zoo.

When attending the Wegeforth Bowl Show look for the accessible seating designated by the wheelchair access symbol, or ask an employee for assistance.

**Please keep in mind that Zoo employees are neither trained nor permitted to lift guests. A guest requiring such physical assistance should plan to visit the Zoo with an attendant.**

## **SPECIAL ACCESS RESOURCES**

### **Bashor Bridge and Elevators**

The Bashor Bridge provide accessible pedestrian access between the TreeTops Complex and Elephant Odyssey, crossing over the lower canyon, and offering outstanding views overlooking Asian Passage and Africa Rocks. At the Tree Tops side of the Bridge, there are three elevators providing access between the lower level of Panda Canyon/Asian Passage and the upper level at TreeTops complex with food stands, Albert's Restaurant, the TreeTops Meeting Center, and other facilities, along with an accessible path to the front of the Zoo and the Exit.

### **Easy Access Pass**

Guests who have difficulty standing in line or have limited mobility may request an "Easy Access Pass" at the Guest Services office located next to the turnstiles at the entrance to the Zoo. This pass may be utilized at the Guided Bus Tour and Skyfari. The attendant on duty will direct the guests to a designated boarding area. Up to three additional members of the guest's party may accompany the guest with a disability. Some waiting may still be required.

### **Parking**

Accessible parking is available in our parking lot on a first-come, first-served basis. Please note that the San Diego Police Department enforces the San Diego Zoo's disabled parking spaces. Be sure to properly display your placard issued by an appropriate government Motor Vehicle agency.

## **Shuttle Service**

The Zoo offers a shuttle system, which can accommodate most mobility devices. If you would like to use this service, please contact a staff member at the entrance turnstiles or during your visit. The shuttle travels on the main roads throughout the Zoo; however, it does not operate on the narrower walking-only pathways. During peak times, the shuttle may be busy, so please plan accordingly.

## **Kangaroo Bus Service**

Guided Bus Tour tickets include the Kangaroo Bus Service. The Kangaroo Bus is not a tour, but a mode of transportation with limited loading and unloading points throughout the Zoo. Kangaroo Buses are not equipped with wheelchair lifts. The Kangaroo Bus can accommodate folded walkers. Guest must be able to ascend several stairs to enter the Kangaroo Bus.

## **Wheelchairs and Electric Scooter Rentals**

Manual wheelchairs and electric scooters are available for rent just inside the main entrance to the Zoo. Weight restrictions apply. Rentals require a picture ID. You must be 16 years of age to operate a rented scooter. Electric Scooters may be used by one person at a time. Rental Prices are subject to change; please call for pricing.

## **Non-Powered Mobility Devices**

We also accommodate the use of certain nontraditional wheelchairs (e.g. steerable knee walkers). We reserve the right to inspect devices to determine whether they are safe enough to use in our facility. We advise guests using mobility devices to consult the Zoo's map and follow signs to determine which areas are accessible.

If your child is using his/her stroller as an accessibility device and is unable to transfer out of it, please visit the Guest Services Office and request a "wheelchair tag." Please note, all personal property is the responsibility of the owner. Albert's Restaurant does not routinely allow strollers, but will make exceptions for strollers that are serving as wheelchairs.

## **Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices (OPDMDs)**

The Zoo accommodates the use of some Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices (OPDMDs), which are vehicles that are not wheelchairs, but rather are electric devices designed primarily for use by individuals with mobility limitations.

- In the interest of maintaining a safe and pedestrian friendly environment while at the same time ensuring that everyone has a positive experience at the Zoo, it is prohibited to operate a mobility device at a speed significantly greater than the flow of the surrounding pedestrian traffic.

## **Acceptable OPDMDs**

Permitted mobility devices include the following:

- Electric OPDMDs and other single-seat electric scooters with three or more wheels that cannot exceed more than 6 miles per hour. OPDMDs may be used by one person at a time.
- Segways® with a steering handle are permitted but must operate only in "turtle" mode.

## **Prohibited OPDMDs**

Prohibited OPDMDs include the following:

- Any device that has or should have a registered license plate
- Any device that has only one wheel
- Any device that has two tandem wheels (e.g. two-wheeled electric or motorized scooters)

- Any device that has been structurally or mechanically altered
- Any gas powered vehicle
- All Hoverboards or any Segways without a steering handle
- Any golf carts or similar type vehicle

Notwithstanding the above list, for safety reasons we reserve the right to inspect any mobility device to determine if it is safe to operate at the Zoo. We consider various factors, included but not limited to the following: The type, size, weight, dimensions, stability, and speed of the device. Bicycles, trikes and razor scooters are not permitted.

### **The Operation of Manual Wheelchairs, Electric Scooters and OPDMDs**

There are restricted areas inside the Zoo with steep terrain. Please consult the Zoo's map and follow signs to determine which areas are accessible.

### **Guided Bus Tour**

The Zoo offers a guided bus tour of approximately 50% of the Zoo grounds (tours are approximately 35 minutes). Bus access is included in one-day pass and some levels of membership. Access for guests using a wheelchair is only available on the lower deck. Each tour bus accommodates one wheelchair or OPDMD (Other Power Driven Mobility Device). Before boarding, please ask the employee loading the bus to reserve seats in the wheelchair area of the bus for other party members. Those guests using wheelchairs that can transfer from the wheelchair and access a bus seat without assistance or with the help of those in their party may leave their wheelchairs at the loading facility to be picked up at the end of the tour at the same location.

### **Skyfari AerialTram**

The Skyfari Aerial Tram offers transportation in 4-passenger gondolas over the treetops from one end of the Zoo to the other. Guests riding the Skyfari will experience spectacular views of the Zoo and surrounding Balboa Park. A guest using a folding manual wheelchair who can transfer to a gondola seat without assistance or with the help of those in his or her party may have the wheelchair transported ahead by gondola. The wheelchair will be available upon arrival at the opposite terminal. Staff are not able to lift guests. If your device cannot fold, a round-trip ride may be requested prior to loading. Please note the Zoo is not responsible for personal property.

## **SERVICES**

### **Admission**

All guest with disabilities must have a valid form of admission to the Zoo. If a person with a disability requires an attendant, a complimentary pass will be provided for the attendant and it may be obtained at any of the ticket windows at the entrance to the Zoo. This also applies for special programs and tours at the San Diego Zoo.

### **Drinking Fountains**

Drinking fountains are located throughout the facility. Please check the Zoo map. Complimentary cups of water may also be requested at any food stand or restaurant.



## **Health Services/First Aid – Refrigeration for Medicine**

The Health Services office is located next to the Reptile House. If at any time you need immediate assistance, please ask any Zoo employee. If you have special needs (such as a larger changing station, feeding tube, etc.), please consult with our health service personnel at this location. Refrigeration for medication is available at this location.

## **Restrooms**

All the public restrooms in the Zoo are accessible. All gender/family restrooms are located at the Discovery Playground Picnic Area, Urban Jungle, Elephant Odyssey by Sabertooth Grill, and by Hua Mei Café in Panda Trek. Zoo employees are neither trained nor permitted to lift a guest or help them inside a restroom. Should it be required, guests needing this assistance should plan to visit the Zoo with someone who can physically help them.

## **Service Animals**

We welcome guests with disabilities who choose to bring their trained service animal into the Zoo. Emotional support animals as well as companion, comfort or pets are not allowed entry into the Zoo. Service animal trainers may not bring their in-training animals into the Zoo.

- Service animals are defined as only dogs and miniature horses.
- Service animals must remain on a leash or a harness, be under control of its handler at all times. Leash cannot exceed 6 feet in length. Animals must be house broken.
- If, at any time your service animal's behavior is inappropriate, you will be asked to remove your service animal from the premises.
- You may temporarily house service animals in the kennel while visiting the Zoo. Please see the Guest Service office for assistance. Space available is first come, first served for trained service animals.
- A drinker for service animals is located next to the restrooms in the Discovery Playground Picnic Area.
- Service animals are restricted where there is direct contact with Zoo animals or limited in certain areas due to the sensitivity of the Zoo's animal collection. Please visit the Guests with Disabilities section of the website.
- Please visit an attendant at the Guest Services office at the entrance to the Zoo to check-in your service animal, and receive a service dog bandana. Service animals must be kept back 6 feet from animal presentations in public spaces.

## **Dining and Shopping**

Most menus are available on the Zoo's website. All merchandise locations are accessible. Our staff can read the menu to you if you are unable to do so yourself.

## **Best Times to Visit**

To avoid large crowds, visit San Diego Zoo during non-peak times. Typically, fall and winter tend to be less congested and summer and holidays bring the greatest crowds. Weekdays, and non-holidays and early morning times are generally less crowded.

### **Guest Services Office**

Upon arrival, feel free to stop in and visit the Zoo's Guest Services office, located at the Zoo's entry turnstiles. The staff will advise you of accommodation tools the Zoo has in place that might be beneficial. The Zoo is a living organization with the task of caring for a variety of animals and plants and as such changes in exhibits may occur. The Zoo can provide tips and updates on its daily calendar of events that might help you plan your day. The Zoo staff is here to help. The San Diego Zoo is a full inclusion organization welcoming ALL guests.

### **Premium Experiences: Animals in Action, Discovery Tour, Inside Look and Exclusive VIP Experiences**

Guests must purchase a separate ticket for these experiences. Please contact the call center at 619-718-3000 to make a reservation and discuss accommodations.

## Contact Us

Zoo Accessibility Questions  
(619) 231-1515, ext. 4526

General Customer Service  
Comments, suggestions, and questions about the Zoo  
(619) 231-1515

Website: [www.sandiegozoo.org](http://www.sandiegozoo.org)