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Zoo Leipzig: on nature's trail Starting the year with the German sustainability award 2024

The zoo of the future is becoming a reality in Leipzig. This innovative concept that unites animal welfare with extraordinary animal encounters for visitors and an international commitment to species conservation in an unparalleled way, has been in place since the year 2000. Visions, which have become a reality at the zoo have set worldwide standards. Currently, two more projects are underway with the creation of Tierra del Fuego and the renovation of the terrarium.

The expedition starts at the crack of dawn. Visitors follow nature's trail through six impressive theme worlds in Zoo Leipzig: the historic Founder's Garden, the tropical discovery world *Gondwanaland*, the unique ape enclosure *Pongoland* as well as the theme worlds Asia, Africa and South America that promise thrilling animal encounters, gastronomic delicacies and interesting facts about endangered species and species conservation.

More than 1.9 million visitors, its award as the best zoo in Germany from zoo expert Anthony Sheridan and feedback from colleagues from all over the world highlight the continuous positive development that has been going on for more than two decades at Zoo Leipzig with the goal of becoming a *zoo of the future* that is in touch with nature with its natural enclosures and state-of-the-art animal husbandry. The renovated terrarium will be opened by the end of the year.

Visitors watch with amazement as our Asian pachyderms take a refreshing bath in the elephant temple *Ganesha Mandir* and the four juveniles provide a breath of fresh air in the herd. Thrilling encounters are guaranteed, when the snow leopards prowl through the high-mountain landscape of the Himalayas, while giraffes, oryx and ostriches roam the expanses of the Leipzig Kiwara Savannah and the young apes perform daredevil climbing feats. In South America you can spot maned wolves, giant anteaters, lesser rheas and peccaries from a meandering wooden platform through the Pampas, the Pantanal and Patagonia and in the lovingly designed bee garden, the little ones are in high demand.

A jungle expedition in Leipzig

The tropical discovery world *Gondwanaland* is one of the highlights of visiting the zoo: visitors experience a majestic rainforest with more than 24,000 tropical plants and hundreds of exotic animals. Instead of concrete, steel and tiles, it is spacious enclosures modelled on natural habitats, sheltered tree stands and extensive watercourses that characterise this tropical dome, enabling it to fit in with the zoo's natural image. In addition to numerous other endangered species, giant otters, Komodo dragons and tapirs fascinate the visitors.

Aufsichtsratsvorsitzende: Dr. Skadi Jennicke
Geschäftsführer: Prof. Dr. Jörg Junhold
Handelsregister B 10027
Amtsgericht Leipzig
Sparkasse Leipzig
BIC: WELA DE 8L XXX · IBAN: DE 26 8605 5592 110 0152 110

Pressestelle
Zoo Leipzig GmbH
Telefon:
+49 341 5933-305/-306
E-Mail:
presse@zoo-leipzig.de

Mitglied in:



Ark Discovery House: a multi-media center for nature and species conservation

In the newly opened, state-of-the-art education centre, visitors can look forward to a unique multimedia experience that makes species conservation and sustainability more clearly understandable than ever before. With impressive 360° projections visitors are taken on an exciting journey to Zoo Leipzig's species conservation projects in Vietnam, where highly endangered primates are being saved from extinction.

In the interactive part of the exhibition, visitors can learn all about Germany's endangered biodiversity and what they can do as an individual to protect it.

The responsible master plan concept *Zoo of the Future* developed by zoo director Prof. Jörg Junhold has the double effect of increasing the attractiveness of the zoo for both its animals and its visitors. On the one hand, the animals have ideal conditions in enclosures that resemble their natural habitats and on the other visitors experience nature with all of their senses on a walk round the zoo, often with barrier-free views into the enclosures. "Our goal is to achieve a largely cageless, near-natural *Zoo of the Future* by 2028", explains Prof. Junhold.

Beyond these modern zoo facilities, the innovative concept "*Zoo of the Future*" includes many offers around the fascinating plant and animal world. Visitors can leave their everyday life behind at the zoo and experience the world of animals with all of their senses. Asian, African and South American themed gastronomy is just as much a part of Zoo Leipzig as specific group offers for target groups with guided tours and catering.

A central pillar: species conservation

Nature and species conservation are some of the main goals of Zoo Leipzig. The zoo is involved in international breeding programmes, it is responsible for the international studbooks of certain species, supports species conservation projects all over the world and enables visitors to directly contribute to international species conservation with a voluntary 1 Euro donation. In 2024 an exhibition of larger than life-sized exhibits of insect species and their significance for biodiversity will be a main focus.

The hamster breeding station that was opened in 2022 has had a successful start and this year the first individuals will be released into the wild into their natural habitat near Leipzig.

Furthermore, Zoo Leipzig was the first zoo in Germany to win the German sustainability award 2024 for its environmental management system and international species conservation.