

THE ZOO & BOTANICAL GARDENS

The ZOO & Botanical Gardens in Gulf Breeze, Florida, offers tourists an intimate, inviting atmosphere in which they can really connect with wildlife. For starters, the petting zoo is a favorite among all children. But, what's equally a hit for parents is the giraffes – Gabby and Sammy. This is because at the ZOO, visitors don't just stand by and watch the giraffes; they feed them straight out of their hands. That's right, tourists get a sneak peek – and sometimes feel – of an 18- to 22-inch, leathery tongue. If that's not enough to get their juices flowing then maybe one of the other 700 animals will do the trick.

Watch playful primates. Catch a glimpse of a baby Pygmy Hippopotamus, which is the size of a small watermelon at birth. Check out the Komodo Dragon weighing in at 110 pounds and measuring six and a half feet long. Snap a photo of the ZOO's latest addition: African wild dogs (only 18 zoos in the country have them). Or, take a ride on the Safari Line Limited – a train ride through more than 30-acres of free-roaming wildlife.

Finally, tourists won't want to miss Chimp and Gorilla Islands, which caught the attention of Hollywood last year. As a result, the ZOO will be featured on Animal Planet's new series, "The Ultimate Zoo," this spring. The show will feature the islands as man-made exhibits that resemble the wild. Its producers were impressed by the naturalistic Chimp and Gorilla Islands, as well as by the interaction between the apes and the hoofstock.

These islands are representative of the ZOO's bigger commitment to animals, nature, and education. The ZOO hosts a variety of educational programs ranging from a Science, Conservation, and Adventure Series to Zoo Tots, which is a hands-on, learning experience for small children. The ZOO has also sponsored more than 50 trips to Africa in the past 14 years, taking more than 300 people on wildlife safaris.

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