

Cultural Daily

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Unexpectedly Dazzled by L.A. Zoo Lights

R. Daniel Foster · Saturday, December 21st, 2024

There's no shortage of venues blazing with holiday lights in Southern California—botanical gardens, shopping centers, the Capistrano Mission, Dana Point Harbor, and King Gillette Ranch in Calabasas, among others. I've seen more than a few, so when I visited the L.A. Zoo for its “[Animals Aglow](#)” display, I was jaded. “Impress me,” I thought. The L.A. Zoo did just that.



Flocks of Flamingos at L.A. Zoo Lights. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

Nearly 3,500 animal sculptures cover about one-third of the zoo grounds along one mile of pathways. The animal lanterns are made of steel (angle iron, square tubes, round steel, and wires) with satin fabric covering the designs, all lit by LED lights.



Color is everywhere at L.A. Zoo Lights. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

There are animations—tails wag and heads nod, but what's most impressive is the scope of the displays. A meandering path takes you from habitat to habitat, diving undersea (you won't get wet), across the African savanna, up into trees covered with fluttering butterflies, through rainforests, and into the mouth of a crocodile.

But wait, there's more.

Flocks of flamingos, owls, and parrots as well as bears, monkeys, scorpions, and snakes line paths, many bordered by fields of lantern flowers. I can't think of an animal or habitat that was not covered. There's a dance floor, interactive displays, and some nods to Christmas decor.



A rainforest tunnel at L.A. Zoo Lights. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

There are plenty of eats, from full-course meals to churros and hot chocolate. Also: beer, cocktails, and of course, merch. This is the zoo's third year presenting the installation, which is largely a celebration of wildlife.

The Event Producer is the Largest in North America

[Tianyu Arts & Culture, Inc.](#), the largest Chinese lantern festival producer in North America, mounts the exhibit. Tianyu has partnered with zoos, botanical gardens, and natural science institutions for a decade to create lantern festivals.

It takes approximately a month to install the exhibit with an additional week or two to make adjustments and fine-tune everything before opening day. Breakdown usually takes up to three weeks. Set up and break down are done before and after zoo operating hours.



Flocks of birds cover the L.A. Zoo grounds. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

[Tickets](#) start at \$18 for children and \$29 for adults (13+), with free parking included. [Zoo members](#) receive up to a 28 percent discount on nightly tickets. A Family New Year's Eve event includes a buffet dinner, priced at \$79. There are also community and theme nights, including Pride Night, Corporate Nights, and private event locations on the grounds for groups.

Guests with 6 p.m. tickets enter anytime between 6 p.m. and 8:45 p.m. Those with 7:30 p.m. tickets enter from 7:30 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. Admission gates close at 8:45 p.m.

[L.A. Zoo Lights: Animals Aglow](#) runs through January 5, 2025.



Various tunnels and interactive displays are featured. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

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