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# DENVER ZOO'S TOYOTA ELEPHANT PASSAGE

OFFERS UNPARALLELED  
VIEWS OF ASIAN SPECIES  
WITH A FOCUS ON  
CONSERVATION  
& ANIMAL CARE



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By Tiffany Barnhart

Denver Zoo's new \$50 million state-of-the-art exhibit for Asian elephants, Malayan tapirs and greater one-horned rhinos offers an unparalleled experience for guests and animals alike. Guests can enjoy watching elephants and rhinos swim, gibbons swinging overhead and fishing cats "reeling in" their next meal at this engaging new exhibit. Featuring six different interconnected habitats, three public animal crossings and more than 1.1 million gallons of water for animals to enjoy, this exhibit also offers an enriching environment for its animal residents.

"I'm thrilled to watch both our guests and animals enjoying the ever changing experience in *Toyota Elephant Passage*," says Denver Zoo President/CEO Craig Piper. "Our guests seem to connect to the storyline that outlines the rich history of elephants in Asian culture, their complicated relationship with humans and the efforts Denver Zoo and our colleagues take to secure a future for both elephants and people."

### AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE FOR GUESTS

Winding pathways lead guests into the center of the exhibit where they are completely surrounded by animal habitats. Guests can experience elephants, rhinos and tapirs crossing public pathways or overhead as animals rotate among six varied habitats throughout the day. In addition to elephants, rhinos and tapirs, the exhibit also is home to numerous other species including fishing cat, Asian small-clawed otter, ruddy shelducks, sarus cranes and two species of flying foxes. Beautiful clouded leopards also made their return to Denver Zoo and indoor habitats showcase Solomon island eyelash frogs, Javan hump-headed lizards, prehensile tailed skinks, green tree pythons and blood pythons.

In an area of the exhibit called the *Village Outpost* that depicts a rural village struggling to co-exist with elephants, damaged huts and crops impart a profound message about how elephant destruction can affect local residents' livelihoods. In this particular area, the villagers have fled after elephants have knocked down walls and ravaged their crops. Strategies employed by Denver Zoo and colleagues to reduce conflicts to help both people and animals are also explained, offering hope and encouragement to zoo guests.

The *Schoelzel Family Village* is a lively hub, with opportunities to explore a local market and discover Hindu and Buddhist traditions that connect people with animals. These cultural connections are important in understanding how animals in Asian culture are revered as well as reviled. "Take Action Stations," in the Village provide a window into the Zoo's conservation efforts, both here and in the field, and provide ways guests can help.

On the west end of *Toyota Elephant Passage*, guests can view animals free of visible barriers in the *Chang Pa Wildlife Preserve*. Here, white-cheeked gibbons swing directly over a public pathway as they move among three island habitats. This area demonstrates the importance of protecting places for wildlife as well as how animals are managed in protected areas of Southeast Asia.

Eye-catching graphics call out places for children to use their animal observation skills, while interactive features where kids can "try on" an animal's world, like a leopard's log and a gibbon brachiation station, offer children active outlets for pretend play.

The exhibit species serve as ambassadors for their wild cousins and aid in showing ways Denver Zoo is working to help people and

animals peacefully coexist. With these three distinctly defined regions, *Toyota Elephant Passage* brings the stories of the varied animals, people and cultures vividly to life and inspires all who visit to further appreciate and support wildlife from these areas.

### AN EXHIBIT DESIGNED FOR OUTSTANDING ANIMAL CARE

More than two miles of trail exist throughout the flexible ten-acre facility to encourage exercise for the Zoo's elephants, rhinos and tapirs. Mud wallows, scratching trees, shade structures, full immersion pools and elephant sized hot tubs have been incorporated to ensure active and healthy animals.

In the *Clayton F. Freiheit Elephant House*, a natural sand/soil mix substrate is used in elephant bedrooms and the communal *Koelbel Family Elephant Parlor*. The facility has also been designed to facilitate removal and replacement of substrates either for cleanliness or to experiment with different substrate types. The barn also features a self-activated shower in the parlor where elephants can choose to have a rinse by pushing a button with their trunks. In the rhino/tapir building, indoor pools are another swimming option and both the rhino/tapir indoor night quarters and the elephant house have veterinary care systems that are used to stabilize animals for veterinary procedures. The elephant house has two of these devices, one that fully articulates.

The exhibit supports the efforts of accredited zoos to create sustainable populations of endangered Asian species. Up to eight adult bull elephants can be housed in *Toyota Elephant Passage*, providing much needed space for males reaching maturity as well as family groups. The facility also enables us to fully participate in AZA breeding programs, either through semen collection or natural breeding.

### MOST SUSTAINABLE ZOO EXHIBIT IN THE WORLD

*Toyota Elephant Passage* was built with the highest environmental standards and recently received LEED® Platinum certification from the U.S. Green Building Council for the entire ten-acre site and all of its buildings. LEED® is the nation's preeminent program for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings. In addition to utilizing environmental-building techniques, Denver Zoo will utilize an innovative, Denver Zoo-patented waste to energy system that will convert 90 percent of the Zoo's total waste stream into clean energy. Converting animal waste, guest trash, and other operational refuse will reduce the Zoo's landfill contributions by 1.5 million pounds annually, while providing the power and heat for the new exhibit.

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