Animal Attractions

THE LIVING DESERT

While the word “desert”may conjure up images of starkly beautiful landscapes, in truth the desert is a diverse ecosystem, filled with unique plant and animal life. For nearly 40 years, The Living Desert has been celebrating and conserving the beauty of the California desert, and teaching visitors about desert environments around the world. Covering more than 1,000 acres in Palm Desert and Indian Wells, the park is home to more than 50 animals and 1,200 varieties of plants, all of which are native to desert environments.

WILDLIFE AND PLANT EXHIBITS

Open-air wildlife exhibits feature both North American and African animals. Giraffes, cheetah, zebras, warthogs, gazelles, and camels are among the wildlife in the African exhibit. The North American habitat includes bighorn sheep, coyotes, foxes and wolves, plus an After Sundown exhibit featuring a darkened hall that houses nocturnal animals.

The Living Desert is particularly proud of its growing family of reticulated giraffes, most recently welcoming a calf in May 2008. The park’s contest to name the calf was won by two Eisenhower Medical Center employees, who chose the name “Maliki,” Swahili for “king.” To see the giraffes up close, be sure to participate in feeding them! Giraffe feeding occurs daily at 10 a.m. (September 1 to June 15).

Visitors will find one of the most complete collections of plants that flourish in harsh desert environments featured in The Living Desert’s many botanical gardens, including specialized gardens like the Hummingbird Garden, with its collection of plants that attract hummingbirds, and the McDonald Butterfly and Wildflower Garden.

SEASONAL ATTRACTIONS

In October, look for the opening of the Marian Miner Cook Hummingbird & Butterfly Pavilion, featuring more than 30 species of butterflies and several types of hummingbirds. Entry to the exhibit costs $2 for visitors who do not have a park membership. October also brings the park’s unique Howl-o-Ween Harvest Happening, which includes interactive displays and a scavenger hunt for children. In late November, the holiday season begins with the Wildlights Holiday Festival, featuring more than 350,000 lights that transform the park into a holiday wonderland.

TAKING A BREAK

Interested in buying some desert plants for your home? Visit the Palo Verde Garden Center to select from a complete collection of native plants. Or head to the Plaza Gift Shop, or to the Kumbu Kumbu Market, which offers African-themed souvenirs and clothing. Dining options in the park include the Thorn Tree Grill and the casual Meerkat Café.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Dedicated to educating visitors about the unique desert ecosystem, The Living Desert University teaches adult students how to preserve and protect the fragile beauty of the desert through a series of classes. Consider a docent-led tour of the Tennity Wildlife Hospital & Conservation Center to observe veterinary care of animals. Interested in experiencing other desert environments? Sign up for an exciting trip sponsored by The Living Desert. Fascinating destinations include the Grand Canyon, Death Valley and Mexico’s Copper Canyon.

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

The Living Desert is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. from September 1 through June 15, with limited hours during the summer months. The park is closed on December 25. Gates close at 4 p.m., and park officials recommend that visitors allow three to four hours for a visit. To ensure a safe and comfortable experience, be mindful of the desert environment. Consider visiting in the morning, when it is cooler and the animals are more active. Comfortable clothing, walking shoes, sunscreen and a hat are essential, and winter temperatures may warrant a sweater or jacket. Remember to drink plenty of water. A shuttle is available for $6 to transport visitors throughout the park.

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