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## Make Any Vacation Exotic: Head to a Zoo

(Branford, CT) Zoos attract more visitors annually than all U.S. spectator sports combined. Yet relatively few animal-lovers visit zoos when they travel. Some surveys suggest that less than 10% of tourists visit zoos on vacation.

Zoo aficionados Allen W. Nyhuis and Jon Wassner are out to change that.

“It’s a common misconception that all zoos are alike,” say Nyhuis and Wassner, authors of *America’s Best Zoos: A Travel Guide for Fans and Families* (©2008, The Intrepid Traveler, \$15.95). Actually, they say, “each zoo is different and some are unique.”



Visitors experience a rain forest in Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo’s Lied Jungle. Photo by Jon Wassner.

“If you like your hometown zoo,” adds Wassner, “there may be a dozen or more zoos across the country that you’ll absolutely love!”

Nyhuis and Wassner prove their point by taking readers on a tour of the top 60 U.S. zoos. In each, they call out not-to-be-missed exhibits and point out the animals you’ll find in few (or no) other American zoos — like the small shaggy Andean mountain tapirs found in only three zoos: Los Angeles Zoo, San Francisco Zoo, and Colorado Springs’ Cheyenne Mountain Zoological Park.

Not only do each of America’s best zoos exhibit both rare and popular animals, they also place them in highly creative, animal-friendly exhibits. American zoos have spent more than \$1 billion on upgrades and improvements in the last ten years, Nyhuis and Wassner note. As a result, visitors will experience the animals in their natural environments, without intervening bars and, thanks to modern technology such as tiny cameras, they’ll be able to see them even when they are immersed in thick foliage or sleeping in their dens. Strategically placed acrylic tubes and bubbles in some zoo exhibits even let children pop up in the midst of a meerkat or prairie dog exhibit for an extra close-up view.

Of course, you’re not limited to watching the animals in most zoos these days. Nyhuis and Wassner note opportunities to interact with them at each zoo, ranging from walking among them to feeding to petting and grooming — with a special emphasis on children’s activities of all kinds.

Nyhuis, a father of four, offers tips for having more fun when touring a zoo with children, and both authors share their animal photography and viewing tips. For example, if the zoo has underwater viewing

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of semi-aquatic animals, such as polar bears or hippos, “try to visit them early in the day,” the authors advise; “they often begin their day with a morning swim.”

Another overlooked benefit for vacationing families is the cost. Most of the zoos in *America's Best Zoos* have adult admission prices well under \$20; some are under \$10 and three zoos charge no admission at all.

Nyhuis, who's been writing about zoos for over 10 years, and Wassner, a zoo buff and former zookeeper, include profiles of 29 lesser-known animals and where to see them, a glossary of zoo terminology, and brief write-ups of the 37 zoos they consider the “best of the rest.” They also list the “Top 10 U.S. Zoo Exhibits in 20 Categories” — among them, the 10 best children's zoos (based on size, quality, and uniqueness). An Animal Index points to the whereabouts of every animal in the book — an especially handy tool if you want to know which zoo to visit to see a rare animal or a personal favorite.

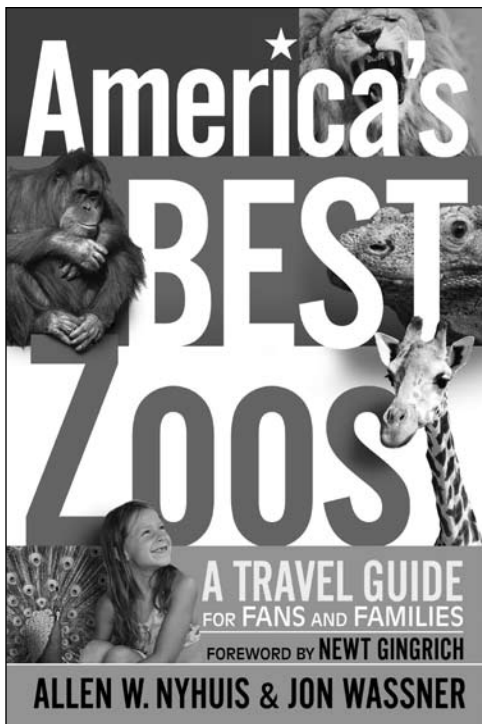
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**About the Authors:** Allen W. Nyhuis is the father of four zoo-loving grown children and a member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). His first zoo guide, *The Zoo Book*, was published in 1994. Jon Wassner is a former zookeeper and avid animal photographer who got hooked on *The Zoo Book* years ago and helped persuade Nyhuis that it was time for a twenty-first century version.

Foreword by zoo buff Newt Gingrich, co-author with Dr. Terry L. Maple of *A Contract with the Earth*.

To request a review copy of *America's Best Zoos*, to arrange an interview with one of the authors, or for any additional information, please contact Alexis Elder at The Intrepid Traveler at 203-469-0214 • alexis@intrepidtraveler.com • fax 203-469-0430

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A Travel Guide for Fans and Families**

by Allen W. Nyhuis and Jon Wassner

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