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Vacation Planning & Budgeting

10 Best Zoos for Kids

By Karen Cicero

When Parents set out to find the top zoos in the country, we identified 50 where kids can pet and often feed the wildlife. Then we narrowed it down to these leaders of the pack that your little tyke will love.



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Photo Courtesy of Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo

1. Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo

It's unbelievable how close kids can get to the animals here. In Wallaroo Station, the zoo's four-and-a-half-acre Australian-themed children's area, kids can brush a goat's fur, feed birdseed lollipops to parakeets, and walk down a path as kangaroos and wallabies hop in front of them. They can ride on a llama or, in another part of the zoo, a camel -- which makes the pony treks seem almost trite. In Lowry's expanded Safari Africa exhibit, your family can climb up on a platform to offer one of the giraffes a snack. "Kids squeal in delight when the giraffe sticks out its 18-inch-long tongue to snatch a cracker," says Craig Pugh, acting director. Other cool animals that your children can feed: a white rhino, stingrays, and lorikeets.

Since Lowry Park is the only zoo in the country with an accredited preschool and kindergarten on-site, the staff is especially comfortable fielding questions from families. When your little kids need a break from the animal action, head to the playground or one of five rides including a kiddie coaster. And if you need to relax or nurse, there's even a "mommy stop," a shaded area with benches and child-size picnic tables.