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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium debuts scuba-diving Santa at Zoolights

TACOMA, WASH. – Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is bringing even more magic and fun to this year's Zoolights with a scuba-diving Santa Claus.

Flying around the world in one night is impressive, but the Zoolights' Santa will up the ante on adventure by swimming with sharks. The jolly old elf will break from his holiday preparations two days each week for a 30-minute dive in the zoo's South Pacific Aquarium.

"Zoolights has become a wonderful holiday tradition for thousands of Washington families," said deputy director John Houck. "We work hard to bring the wow factor each year with new light displays or fun additions such as scuba-diving Santa."

The scuba-diving Santa's underwater antics will certainly add to the wonder of Zoolights, which kicks off Nov. 25 and runs through Jan. 1. More than half a million lights will illuminate the zoo each evening. The zoo now uses nearly all LED lights, which save on electricity, shine brighter and last longer.

The brightly lit displays will delight kids and kids at heart. There will be animal creations, including ice-skating puffins, preying eagles and baby tigers as well as Northwest icons from Mount Rainier to the Tacoma Narrows Bridges.

But the lights aren't all there is to do. Visitors will be able to ride a camel, feed the goats or take a spin on the holiday carousel. Most of the zoo animals will be sleeping out of sight during Zoolights' hours, but visitors will be able to see meerkats and other small animals in the Animal Avenue exhibit.

The North and South Pacific aquariums also will be open. They offer a great place to warm up, gaze at tropical and northwest sea life, and even give a wave to a swimming St. Nick.

Scuba-diving Santa will swim with the sharks on the following dates:

- Opening night: Fri. Nov. 25 at 6:30 p.m.
- Every Wednesday during Zoolights: Nov. 30, Dec. 7, Dec. 14, Dec. 21 and Dec. 28 at 6:30 p.m.
- Selected Sundays: Nov. 27, Dec. 4, Dec. 11 and Dec. 18 at 2:30 p.m.

The zoo is offering a discounted ticket package for people who want to enjoy a day at the zoo and then stay for Zoolights that same night. The zoo cafe will be open for dinner and warm drinks throughout the evening.

Presented by Fred Meyer, Zoolights runs every night from 5 to 9 p.m. from Nov. 25 through Jan. 1, including Christmas and New Year's Day. It will be closed Dec. 24.

Zoolights tickets cost \$8.25 at the zoo's front gate and \$7 at Fred Meyer stores and online at pdza.org. Zoolights Value Passes, which offer same day admission to the zoo and Zoolights, range from \$12.50 to \$15.50. Children ages 2 and younger are free.

Fun Facts about Zoolights

- Set up for Zoolights begins in early October and ends at Thanksgiving.
- The famous Flame Tree uses 30,000 lights alone – 20,000 purple lights and 10,000 green lights.
- The LED lights save a significant amount of power. For example, when the zoo switched from traditional incandescent lights to LED lights, the iconic Flame Tree went from drawing 90 amps of power to ten and from nine extension cords to two.
- It takes eight people and 125 switches to turn Zoolights on each evening.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).