



WALRUS FAREWELL

Our female walrus Basilla and Kulu are leaving for San Diego, and we're giving their fans two weekends of farewell.

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TACOMA, Wash. – Kulu loves playing with a hose waterfall. Basa gives a deep sigh if she's not in the mood for something. Cumulatively, they've lived at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium for 16 years. Our lady walruses Kulusiq and Basilla are leaving for SeaWorld San Diego, and we're giving them two weekends of farewell: Oct. 5-6 and 12-13.



Basilla (left) and Kulusiq

Why are they going? Well, let's just say there's a pretty hunky male walrus called Dozer down there...

"We'll definitely miss them," said Malia Somerville, curator of marine mammals and birds. "But as a zoo, we collaborate with other zoos to best manage the animals in our care and connect guests to their species in the wild. Breeding is an important part of that."

Dozer, seen underwater by a zoo guest.

Dozer, of course, has come to Point Defiance Zoo on two breeding visits already, but neither was successful. So members of the Walrus Consortium – zoos and aquariums interested in caring for walrus – are trying something different. In the wild, walrus breed in huge colonies of hundreds of animals. So accredited U.S. zoos with big walrus habitats (like SeaWorld) are creating “leks” (breeding colonies) for breeding males, while smaller zoos like Tacoma’s will provide homes to non-breeding animals.



“With only 14 walrus in human care in the United States, this kind of collaboration is critical to sustaining the population,” Somerville explained. “In San Diego, Basa and Kulu will join two other younger females as well as Dozer.”

And, after a month or so, two younger males – not yet at breeding age – will come to live in Point Defiance Zoo’s Rocky Shores habitat.



Basilla in the pool.

In the interim, the zoo’s seals and sea lions will enjoy exploring the massive walrus pools, says Somerville. Zoo operations staff will also use the walrus-free period to make repairs and renovations in preparation for the new males, who (unlike Basilla and Kulusiq) have long, sharp tusks.

Basa and Kulu, as keepers affectionately call them, have been firm favorites of zoo

guests for years, swimming, rolling and splashing. They’ve helped keepers demonstrate health care like teeth cleaning and flipper inspection, and made eye contact with enthralled children at the underwater window.

Basilla, whose name means loud or deep voice in Russian, was born in 1983 and arrived at Point Defiance Zoo in 2006. As a blind walrus, she’s become very good at learning new situations using her whiskers or hearing, say keepers. But she can also make a big sigh if she’s not in the mood to do what they’re asking!

Kulusiq the walrus shows off her "hide" behavior, one of many trained by keepers to better care for her.

Kulusiq (an Inuit word for sea ice) arrived in 2016. Born in 1994, she's smaller – and more strong-willed, say keepers.

“She’s like a cat,” says Senior Staff Biologist Amanda Shaffer. “If she doesn’t want to do something, she won’t!”

But she does love to play with a hose in summer, when keepers use it to create a waterfall into the pool.



Both walruses will fly on a chartered plane down to San Diego, Somerville says. They’ll be accompanied by two SeaWorld staff members, and met at their new home by Shaffer, who’ll stay for a few days to help them settle in. Keep your fingers crossed for a baby walrus...

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest’s only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world’s resources. A member of the [Metro Parks Tacoma](#) family, the zoo creates a legacy of sustainability for future generations through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities; it also embodies Metro Parks’ mission of creating healthy opportunities to play, learn and grow. The zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA). [The Zoo Society](#), a 501(c)(3) organization, is an instrumental partner in the conservation, animal-welfare and education initiatives.

Contact

Whitney DalBalcon: 253-278-6343 or whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org