

Santa Barbara Zoo Becomes Certified Autism Center *First Zoo on the West Coast to Earn This Designation*



Santa Barbara, CA, May 29, 2018 - Santa Barbara Zoo is the first zoo on the West Coast to become a Certified Autism Center (CAC), which is a designation that demonstrates the Zoo's commitment to ensuring guests and families with children who have autism have the best possible experience. Parents with children on the autism spectrum often find vacationing and visiting new places to be a challenge due to sensory needs, dietary restrictions and safety concerns. With this certification, guests can rest assured staff and the grounds are prepared to welcome everyone, regardless of their needs.

The zoo recently implemented this training and certification program in partnership with the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). For almost 20 years, IBCCES has been the industry leader in autism training for licensed healthcare professionals and educators around the globe. IBCCES recognized that many families with children with special needs have limited travel options and created programs specifically for the hospitality and travel industry.

"We are thrilled to be certified by IBCCES and are proud to be able to better meet the needs of individuals on the Autism Spectrum. Zoo Camp and other education programs, and many guest experiences, have long been accessible, but this integrates our commitment into the everyday visitor experience," said J.J. McLeod, Zoo School Director. "By dedicating quiet spaces, offering sensory backpacks, and offering specialized staff training, we hope the autism community feels even more safe, supported, and welcome here."

In recent years, the popularity of "autism-friendly" options has grown; however, parents and families often seek out organizations that have completed additional research-based training or become certified to ensure their needs can be met. While research shows that new experiences such as travel and interacting with animals are some of the most intellectually stimulating events for individuals on the spectrum, there are still few trained and certified options for families looking for organizations able to accommodate their specific needs and have an understanding of how to work with those families.



"Making sure that families and individuals on the spectrum or those with sensory needs have trained and certified options to visit is critical to those individuals not only having peace of mind, but also helps ensure they have an incredible experience," said Myron Pincomb, IBCCES Board Chairman. "Our Certified Autism Center

designation is awarded to premier organizations who have completed rigorous training and meet the highest industry standards, and we're excited to be working with the Santa Barbara Zoo."

IBCCES also created AutismTravel.com, a free online resource for parents that lists certified destinations and connects families to other resources and each other. Each destination listed on the site has met Certified Autism Center requirements, which include extensive staff training and an on-site audit conducted by leading autism experts. Santa Barbara Zoo will also be listed with other CACs on AutismMember.org, a partnership between IBCCES and Autism Society to connect families and individuals with businesses and resources committed to serving individuals on the spectrum.

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About Santa Barbara Zoo

Known as one of the world's most beautiful zoos, the Santa Barbara Zoo is located on 30 acres of botanic gardens and is home to nearly 500 individual animals in open, naturalistic habitats. It is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), representing the highest level of animal care, and participates in AZA cooperative programs for endangered species including Asian elephant, California condor, Channel Island fox, and Western lowland gorilla, among others. The Santa Barbara Zoo is the region's top visitor attraction, attracting nearly 500,000 guests yearly, and has more than 13,000 members. Visit www.sbzoo.org.



Santa Barbara Zoo Autism Certification Team (from left to right): Director of Guest Services David Velazquez, Director of Education Aaron Marshall, Zoo School Director J.J. McLeod, Marketing Director Dean Noble, and Zoo Director Nancy McToldridge.

About IBCCES

Delivering The Global Standard For Training and Certification in The Field of Cognitive Disorders - IBCCES provides a series of certifications that empower professionals to be leaders in their field and improve the outcomes for the individuals they serve. These programs are recognized around the world as the leading benchmark for training and certification in the areas of autism and other cognitive disorders. As part of our commitment to sharing the latest innovations and research, IBCCES also hosts the International Symposium on Cognitive Research and Disorders to create a forum for collaboration among industry stakeholders.

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