

There's just no way to downplay it, so I'm gonna say it ...My workplace, the San Diego Zoo Safari Park is the COOLEST. When national "Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day" arrives, my son and I both look forward to spending the day together. The event's popularity is growing every year with 62 kids registered this year. I am proud to say that my employer San Diego Zoo Global embraces its opportunity to be a role model and world leader in conservation, a place that daughters and sons can be proud to say their parents work, and where they can be inspired to work someday too. This year has been the best yet.

We started bright and early with a 7:30am breakfast and check in. Our human resources team put together goodie backpacks, snacks, and an employee I.D. on an animal printed lanyard for each child. Led by our director of human resources Laura Martella, and our three educator guides, Jill Van Kemp, Laura Hughes and Jennifer Hardell, parents and kids fluttered over to the Safari Park's Butterfly Jungle where they were delighted to be landing pads for delicate, colorful creatures who visit for just a month every year.

Then we rolled on down to the Africa Tram for a private safari around the plains of Africa. We learned about the animals, some of the ways animals help plant seeds, and how our employees with their various jobs help to plant the seed of conservation with visitors of our park every day.

After the tram, we were in for a treat! Our lion keepers hosted a viewing of our newest pride members, Ken and Dixie, two African Transvaal lions born in [December 2013](#). We were captivated as they explored, tumbled and played throughout their lion camp home.

Next we hiked through camp "Roar and Snore" and visited our herd of African elephants on our way to an interactive exercise in merchandising. Kids jumped right in and learned to serve beverages, decorate cookies, and even competed for bragging rights to "fastest shirt folder." (sorry parents, that skill expired once they left the park) Could things get ANY BETTER?

Our horticulture department fully embraced this year's event theme "Plant a Seed, Grow a Future". We arrived at the Horticulture Pavilion to find a wonderland. The entryway hosted helpful garden predators: mantids, ladybugs, and snails. Inside, kids learned about and identified types of seeds to win prizes like seed packets, snacks, and miniature plant pot kits. Each child decorated a clay pot that would cradle their very own small flowing plant to take home. There was also a sprinkler splash zone that doubled as a lesson in water conservation. With such a steady paced whirlwind of activities...we realized we were hungry.

Lunch was served back at the pavilion. Pizza, pasta, salad, and a side of face painting, please. Kids were treated to expert face painting while unknowingly waiting for yet another surprise.

A hush fell as our animal behavior team escorted star cheetah Jahari and her training pal puppy Hopper to front and center. Kids and parents alike marveled at the cheetah's rumbling purr, and learned about cheetahs and conservation. By the looks on their faces, many already germinating seeds of inspiration were now in full bloom, with awe and enthusiasm, thoughtful questions were plentiful. Alas the cheetah needed to return to her ambassador duties, but without missing a beat we were given yet another unbelievable opportunity. Thanks to our incredible mammal management team we were taken behind the scenes of the soon to be unveiled newest jewel of the park, Tiger Trail. Kids came within

a whiskers length of our tigers jungle. The cats strolled and crept with ease and confidence. We all marveled at the beautifully constructed trail scheduled to debut in just a few short weeks.

Our trail travels led us to the free flighted "Frequent Fliers" bird show where the kids were invited onstage to assist a bird ambassador in front of a crowded audience of spring break visitors. They also ducked in the stands as macaws, owls and hawks flew mere feet above their heads.

All this work made for some thirsty assistants! Lion camp slushies to the rescue. Each kids (and parents too) mixed and matched to make magical icee concoctions that were eagerly slurped while awaiting the finale of our day.

With tongues and lips now multicolored, the kids filed into the reserved viewing area of our Cheetah Run. Everyone glowed with anticipation. After her dog pal cleared the way, Amara our diva cheetah whip by at an amazing 60 miles per hour, not once, but twice! Wow, not only did that sprint tire out the cheetah, but our kids and their parents realized what a busy and adventure filled day we had as well. Kids and parents waved goodbye to friends old and new and on all the faces you could see a sense of pride, and a full appreciation for the seeds of conservation that were planted throughout the day.