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Jaguar Jungle Expansion Featuring Nocturnal "Bat House" Opens Friday

Vampire bats and alpaca are among the new additions to the Central America-themed exhibit

(New Orleans, La.) - Things are going just plain batty at Audubon Zoo.

As a result, a head-spinning experience awaits visitors to the Zoo's new nocturnal house - the premier attraction in the expanded, Central America-themed Jaguar Jungle exhibit making its debut on Friday, March 23.

Inside the "Criaturas de la Noche" (Creatures of the Night) Bat House, guests will get a glimpse of a jungle teeming with life after nightfall as they gaze into a 42-foot, transparent flyway filled with more than 200 Seba's short-tailed bats and get a close-up look at other animals that thrive in the dark.

The nocturnal house roster also includes vampire bats, ringtail cats, red-eyed tree frogs, giant cave roaches, Anthony's poison arrow frogs, Costa Rican zebra tarantulas and engaging douroucoulis – also known as Nancy Ma's night owl monkeys.

Outside the Bat House, a herd of five female Alpaca, a domesticated South American species similar to llamas, will roam inside another new exhibit next to a spacious Maya Village plaza where guests can relax.

When Jaguar Jungle opened in 1998, the exhibit set new standards for authenticity and cultural interpretation for zoos, offering visitors the feel of discovering the mysterious world of the Maya, from altars and temples to gigantic bamboo and shroud-like mist.

The goal of the \$3.23 million Jaguar Jungle expansion remains unchanged from the first phase – to immerse visitors in historical and ceremonial aspects of ancient Maya culture, including the highly advanced civilization's contributions to art and agriculture. Guests learned about Maya cities such as Tikal, Copan and Chichen Itza.

"A driving force behind the project was the late archeologist and anthropologist Doris Zemurray Stone, a former Audubon board member," said Audubon Nature Institute President and CEO Ron Forman. "Mrs. Stone's passion for the Maya people is clear in the design details and the access she provided to experts in Mesoamerican studies."

The expanded Jaguar Jungle builds on Mrs. Stone's dream, said Stephanie Feoli, Doris Stone's granddaughter and a former Audubon board member, and her husband Ludovico Feoli, a current Audubon board member.

"Doris envisioned an exhibit that highlights iconic animals and artifacts while depicting the modern Maya who inhabit Latin America today. She felt their survival and cultural vitality should be a central Jaguar Jungle theme," the Feolis said.

“This next phase reflects Doris’ vision but expands upon it to incorporate additional elements of the indigenous culture and ecology of Latin America. It aims to highlight the importance of cultural and biological diversity for the enrichment of our lives and the preservation of our environment.”

The new nocturnal house is themed along the lines of a large base site supporting biologists and archaeologists conducting archaeological digs nearby. The interior is outfitted with barrels, rakes, shovels and crated artifacts.

Other new features include the addition of Maya artifacts, a new children’s play area featuring a climbing structure, space for education and cultural presentations and new restrooms.

The ancient Maya were skilled farmers and developed the science of astronomy, calendar systems and hieroglyphic writing. Mayans also were known for their elaborate ceremonial architecture, including pyramids, temples and palaces - all built without metal tools.

Maya symbols, including those for jaguars, fish and bats, are found everywhere in the expanded exhibit.

An original feature, a dig site where young archaeologists can unearth treasures, remains along with Jaguar Jungle favorites: the giant anteaters, spider monkeys, macaws, Brazilian ocelots and of course, endangered jaguars.

BAT FACTS

- Bats are flying mammals. And while others can glide, bats are the only mammals capable of continued flight.
- Bats can live for over 30 years. A single bat can eat more than 600 bugs in one hour, which is like a person eating 20 pizzas a night.
- Approximately 70% of bats eat insects. The rest are *frugivores*, or fruit eaters.
- Bats are not blind and, in fact, many can see quite well.
- Bats “see” in the dark using a special skill called echolocation. Bats make noises and wait for the sound waves to bounce back off objects (an echo), if it doesn’t bounce back then they can safely fly forward. They can tell the distance of objects by how quickly the sound waves bounce back to them.
- Many bats open their mouth to call out their ultrasound echolocation signals, but others can shout through their nostrils. A few other animals use echolocation, including dolphins and some cave-dwelling birds.
- Most bats rest, sleep, mate, and give birth upside down.
- The story of Dracula originated in Eastern Europe; however, real vampire bats are found only in Central and South America.
- During the Civil War, bat droppings were used to make gunpowder.
- In ancient Maya beliefs, “Camazotz” was a vampire bat god. “Camazotz” means “death bat” in the Quiché Maya language.
- Associated with night, death, and sacrifice, Camazotz was often depicted holding victim with a knife.
- Bats in pre-Columbian cultures were not associated with evil. They were believed to be powerful creatures, spirits and even gods.
- Mayans of Central America believed the bat was the guardian of the Underworld and a powerful force against enemies.

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