



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Santa Barbara Zoo Renews Certified Autism Center™ Designation, Continuing Commitment To Welcoming All Visitors**

***Zoo welcomes back Autism Safari Nights beginning May 26***

(May 12, 2022) Santa Barbara, CA – [The Santa Barbara Zoo](https://www.santabarbarazoo.org/) recently renewed its commitment to welcoming autistic visitors and those with sensory needs by completing the renewal process for its Certified Autism Center™ (CAC) designation. The Zoo has held the designation, awarded by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES), since 2018, and has worked to continuously meet renewal requirements as well as enhance its accessibility options.

“The Santa Barbara Zoo prioritizes the welfare of our animals and the welfare of every guest and member of our community. We strive to create spaces where guests, staff, and volunteers have access to safe and inclusive experiences. Maintaining our Certified Autism Center status creates a continued commitment to best practices surrounding neurodiversity. We are thankful that IBCCES continues to be a part of our inclusion and access work,” says JJ McLeod, Director of Education at the Santa Barbara Zoo.

Since becoming the first zoo on the West Coast to earn the certification, the Santa Barbara Zoo has made new connections and partnerships with organizations that support the autism community. The Zoo also provides sensory backpacks and offers designated quiet spaces for guests with special sensory needs. They also have a social narrative and other resources to help autistic guests and parents on their [website](https://www.santabarbarazoo.org/). The Zoo strives to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all individuals to engage and participate fully. To request an accommodation or for inquiries about accessibility, please email [welcome@sbzoo.org](mailto:welcome@sbzoo.org).

In addition, the Zoo announces the return of [Autism Safari Nights](https://www.santabarbarazoo.org/autism-safari-nights), beginning on May 26, a social gathering for individuals with sensory sensitivities and their families. Parents have the opportunity to connect with other parents of kids with Autism Spectrum Disorder, while children can choose from a variety of activities including a movie, reading corner, bounce house, and sensory activities. Food and drinks, including beer and wine, are available for purchase. These events are free, but [advance registration is required](https://www.santabarbarazoo.org/autism-safari-nights). Free childcare on site for children 18 & under (including siblings) is available thanks to the UCSB Koegel Autism Center.

Parents are also sharing their experiences about the benefits and need for these types of programs. One mother shared, “I am the mom who burst into tears when you told me that the Santa Barbara Zoo was now autism certified and would be more than happy to allow my son to join Zoo Camp. I must have seemed crazy at the time, but I had just spent the two weeks prior tirelessly calling every summer camp in town and getting shut down by all of them. But when I called, you were not only willing to take him but you were excited about having him. Before Zoo Camp my son used to have severe social anxiety, not the average shyness you see in a preschooler but legit anxiety. In the four short weeks he attended Zoo Camp, I got to see him be a 'normal' kid for the first time. He says hi to strangers when we ask without shutting down, he let us leave him at camp even without his support there, he responded to his counselors when they talked to him, and even joined in group time for the first time in his life. With that small window of opportunity to practice his social skills, he is now thriving! There are just not enough words to express my gratitude.”

“Working with the dedicated and passionate team at Santa Barbara Zoo has been a pleasure, and we’re thrilled to continue our long-lasting partnership to ensure all families have options,” says Myron Pincomb, IBCCES Board Chairman.

For more than 20 years, IBCCES has been the leader in cognitive disorder training and certification for healthcare, education, and corporate professionals around the globe. IBCCES created programs specifically for the hospitality and recreational organizations such as hotels, theme parks, and other attractions so staff would be more knowledgeable and other accommodations could be offered to this growing, but underserved, part of the community. IBCCES is the only credentialing board offering these types of programs, which include training from subject matter experts and autistic self-advocates, as well as long-term support and continuous learning, onsite reviews, and more.

IBCCES also created AutismTravel.com, as a free online resource for parents that lists certified locations and professionals. Each organization listed on the site has met Certified Autism Center™ (CAC) requirements.

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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 Masai giraffe, California condor, 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](http://www.sbzoo.org).

### **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.