

Zoo Traveler

I really like to travel (NO FLYING THOUGH!), and we were fortunate enough to do lots of it – before we had so many little kids, of course. We still try to make a yearly trip to Florida, especially while we can still fit the entire family in one car – something that soon won't be easily accomplished as the kids grow older. At each travel destination, I have to admit that my favorite tourist attraction is always the local zoo. I made a list of all the zoos and/or wildlife parks I have visited, and I hope to add to it soon! Here is the list by state, country, or territory, followed by the city in which it's located. An asterisk following the zoo means it no longer exists. I put notes about some of the places in *italics* as sort of a guide in case you're interested in visiting one of those particular attractions and want some info straight from a tourist's mouth.

California:

Sea World San Diego

San Diego Zoo

Canada:

Bird Kingdom Niagara Falls Aviary, Niagara Falls, Ontario

Marineland, Niagara Falls, Ontario – *this place is very cool. You can hand-feed deer, Beluga Whales or even Orcas (Killer Whales). You can throw food down to bears who beg and do tricks. There are also a variety of amusement park rides for the whole family. Look at me petting the Orca!*



Washington, DC

National Zoo

Florida:

Wooten's Wildlife Park, Florida Everglades – a cool, family owned place where you can see animals on display; including alligators, crocodiles, and Florida panthers. You can also hold and feed baby alligators! I wonder if they still exist; their website hasn't been updated since '06!

Sea World, Orlando

Gatorland, Orlando

Animal Kingdom, Orlando

Idaho:

Zoo Boise, Boise

Illinois:

Brookfield Zoo, Brookfield – this is the zoo I grew up going

to. In the 80's when I was a frequent visitor, they had many 'celebrity' animals, with interesting stories to match.

Shedd Aquarium, Chicago

Peoria Wildlife Park, Peoria

Cosley Zoo, Wheaton

Glen Oak Zoo, Peoria

Henson Robinson Zoo, Springfield

Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington – *yuck, not one of my favorite places. Their tiger exhibits consisted of teeny tiny cages, and they had a really scrawny, terrible looking tiger, at least in the late '90's when we lived in the area. Hopefully they've cleaned the place up.*

Scovill Zoo, Decatur

Indiana:

Ft Wayne Children's Zoo – *a perfectly sized zoo to visit with kids. They have a wide variety of animals and some nice exhibits. They just recently built a chair-lift type ride that will take you over the lion exhibit once it's finished – cool and scary at the same time!*

Potawatomi Zoo, South Bend

Fun Spot, Angola

Michigan:

Binder Park, Battle Creek

Minnesota:

Minneapolis Zoo, Minneapolis

Missouri:

St Louis Zoo, St. Louis

Nebraska:

Henry Doorly Zoo, Omaha – *I know they've since rebuilt it, but when I visited back in 2001-2002, they had a teeny-tiny exhibit for the gorillas, which made them none too happy. I actually witnessed a huge male gorilla charge a kid and beat on the glass from his small exhibit – scary!*

Henry Doorly safari park, Omaha

Folsom Children's Zoo, Lincoln – *a very nice little zoo located in the heart of Lincoln. It's so well-laid out that you can forget you're in the middle of a capital city, and they have lots of animals in a variety of nice exhibits.*

Ohio:

African Safari Wildlife Park, Port Clinton – *I love this place! You can feed deer, elands, huge buffalo and a variety of hoofed mammals from the comfort of your own vehicle. In season, they have pig races, animals shows, and camel and pony rides for the little ones.*

Akron Zoo, Akron – *I was really impressed with the layout, exhibits, and the happiness of the animals – a very impressive little zoo!*

Cincinnati Zoo, Cincinnati

Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Cleveland

Columbus Zoo, Columbus – *a zoo no one had heard about until my favorite celebrity, Jack Hanna got ahold of it and made it a world-reknown facility. Huge zoo, and the only place to see my favorite animals, manatees in my home state of Ohio!*

**Sea World Ohio, Aurora – we actually lived in Illinois at the time we visited here, but I'm glad we got to see it before they sold it to Six Flags, who sold it to Cedar Fair. Any of the other Sea Worlds are quite a hike from IL or OH for that matter, especially for a non-flyer such as myself.*

Toledo Zoo, Toledo

Pennsylvania:

Pittsburgh Zoo – *very impressive zoo! Lots of kid-friendly playgrounds and interactive areas. The polar bear habitat looked really cool – people go through a tunnel that the bears can swim over – but we didn't see it since the bears weren't in the pool. I NEED a second look at this zoo and will definitely allow more time when I get back there!*

ZOOAMERICA North American Wildlife Park, Hershey – *We did not care for this zoo at all. We visited in the late '90's, so*

maybe they've added more to it by now. But at that time, they only had animals indigenous to North America, and let's face it, those are easy to spot in most areas of the U.S. And let's face it, the real star tourist destination in Hershey is the chocolate factory!

South Dakota:

Great Plains Zoo and Museum, Sioux Falls – I visited here with my family when I was 15. This place was amusing to us because attached to the zoo is the museum, which has many taxidermied specimens. We joked that this zoo had more dead animals than live ones!

**Marineland, Rapid City – note the asterisk, this place doesn't exist anymore, thank goodness. When we visited in the summer of '93, they had dolphins and sea lions held in such tiny cages and pools, it was sickening. I haven't been able to find much info on this place, but I'm sure they were shut down because of poor treatment of their animals. I can only hope the animals found a better home.*

Bear Country USA, Rapid City – a cool drive-thru bear habitat experience – keep those windows rolled up!!! And check out the baby bear nursery – so adorable!

Wisconsin:

Henry Vilas Zoo, Madison

**Serpent Safari, Wisconsin Dells*

GRAND TOTAL AS OF 2009:

41 animal-themed places in 2 countries, 13 states, 1 district... and counting!

Helicopters and other flights of fancy

I still like toys, especially the radio control type. I have a small helicopter but the rechargeable battery will no longer hold a charge. It was a nice little toy that I could fly around the house. Kind of miss being able to fly it around.

I've had larger flying toys, but they generally required a lot of room to be able to run. Some needed very good weather to fly. Very calm winds were essential, or you could not control the aircraft. Some like kites required a decent breeze to fly. Powered or un-powered, these were a little escapes from gravity. Fun toys

At one time I knew someone who flew a plane. I went up in a small plane a couple of times. It was a great experience. I was also able to fly a few times in commercial aircraft. This was not as fun as the small plane, you just couldn't see the as much out the windows.

I would like to try hang-gliding, a balloon or even a blimp, but these are things that can wait.

Doing a very good job on something, be it job or hobby related. Those are flying to me.

I have other flights of fancy that I can think of. Things that have nothing to do with flying. Watching my girls grow up. Just as much of a high. Helping friends and even people I don't know can also be a flight of fancy.

The stage, computers, my daughters, family all fuel my flights of fancy. This is where my flying takes me.

The Fourth, Fireworks, and a False Alarm

We had a wonderful Independence Day – happy birthday USA! Went to the local airport where they have a fly-in breakfast every year. There are lots of planes to look at; some grounded, some taking off and landing... and they even have a few that give rides. My middle daughter, the daredevil, was the only one who wanted to try an airplane ride, and she went up by herself! My husband doesn't like to fly, our older daughter is scared of everything including her own shadow, and I've developed a fear of flying over the years that left me frightened for my daughter on her airplane ride. But it turned out ok, she had a blast, and the pilot and other people there were very surprised that she was so unfazed for a 4-year-old going up in an airplane for the first time by herself. I'm really glad she got the opportunity to do so because I really don't want to pass down my fears to the kids. Seems our oldest somehow got the fear of flying, but its hard to tell from where since she is afraid of EVERYTHING. Maybe I can convince her to go up in our friends' plane next time he comes to visit... though that won't be any time soon because he was actually on his way here a few weeks ago and had engine trouble. Had to set down in South Bend and the airplane has been out of commission ever since... oops. At least nothing catastrophic occurred.

At night on July 4th, we spend the evening at the country home of some friends for a barbecue and fireworks. It was really nice chatting under the stars between the cracks and pops of the fireworks. I'm so glad we were able to have fireworks on the 4th because one of the things I just cannot get used to about rural life is their affinity around here to celebrate

Independence Day with fireworks in late June. It drives me crazy because my birthday is on the 3rd of July, so my whole life it's been birthday and fireworks together, and that's the way I like it! And speaking of birthdays, they turned the barbecue into a birthday celebration for me... it was SO nice! It was supposed to be a chance for us to get together, and I kind of invited ourselves over because my husband has had fireworks sitting in our garage that he's been waiting to use for years, but we couldn't find a place. So when they mentioned last week that their son likes to blow off fireworks on the 4th at their house... opportunity knocks. But then they got me a birthday cake and presents (including such CUTE little boy outfits for the baby and also some things just for me), and it was all very nice. So thanks so much to everyone who reads this blog who was there – it was lots of fun!

Saturday we took the kids swimming at a local hotel's pool since my husband has a business acquaintance staying there and had a meeting. I love being in a pool while pregnant – all the extra weight just melts off and I can't describe how wonderful it feels to actually be able to move my legs again... though I'm still paying for it today with soreness... but oh well, I think this is what I can look forward to from here on out – and it won't be long, at least that's what I keep telling myself. I really thought it wouldn't be long Saturday after I went swimming because I started having contractions. We were about ready to go to the hospital when I got up and walked around and they stopped. I think after being in the pool all day, I was so hungry and thirsty at dinner that I ate and drank a lot and just filled myself up too much... my body wasn't ready to sit down I guess and when I did, muscles began to protest. Such fun. But I did learn something... after I finish this blog I better go and finish packing my hospital bag... just in case!