Maryland Zoo Reveals $20M Elephant, Giraffe, Lion Home Makeover
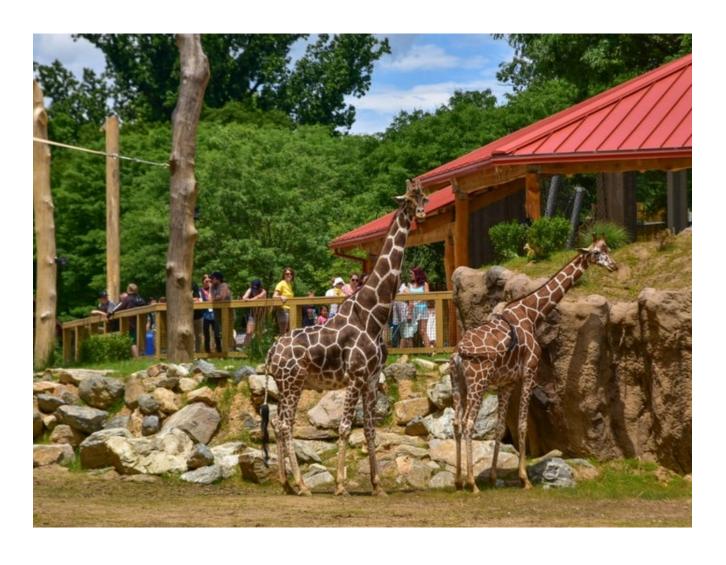
patch.com/maryland/baltimore/maryland-zoo-reveals-elephant-giraffe-lion-home-makeover

The lions are visible on one side of a newly created visitor path, while the giraffe are on the other side. (The Maryland Zoo)

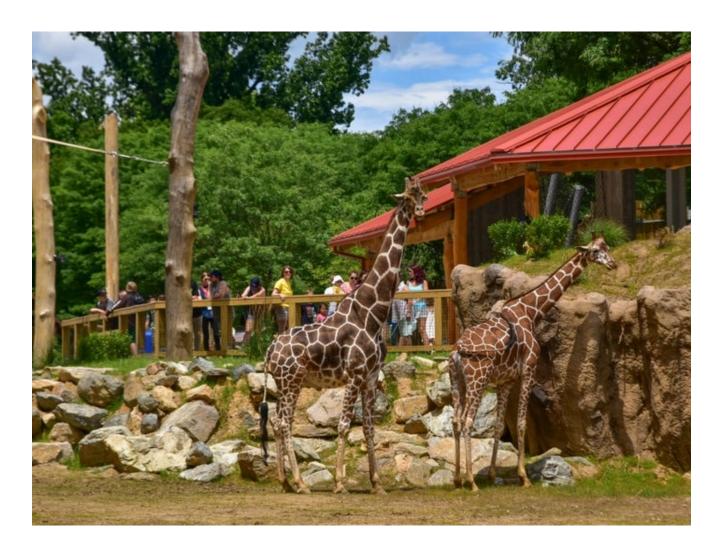The giraffe house now connects to the elephant savanna. (The Maryland Zoo)

Baltimore Mayor Jack Young, Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford, MD Zoo President Don Hutchinson and others cut the ribbon June 21. (The Maryland Zoo)

The elephant yard nearly tripled and is designed to be like a savanna. (The Maryland Zoo)

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The giraffe house now connects to the elephant savanna. (The Maryland Zoo)

BALTIMORE, MD — A herd of dignitaries and zoo personnel celebrated the completion of The Maryland Zoo's largest renovation project in history. The lieutenant governor and Baltimore mayor were among those helping to cut the ribbon on the new elephant, giraffe and lion habitats that were part of a $20 million project to improve the African Journey section of the zoo.

"Beautiful to see, practical to use, these new outdoor habitats for the elephants, lions and giraffe that reside here have been almost five years in the making," Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford said in a statement Friday, June 21. "The Hogan Administration is proud to have been a vital part of the next phase of the work of saving animals from extinction."

Funding for the project came from the state of Maryland as well as private donations and grants.

There will be an African Journey Celebration in honor of the grand opening from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 22, and Sunday, June 23. Zookeeper chats, training demos, face painting and more activities are planned at The Maryland Zoo, One Safari Place, Baltimore MD 21217.

Here is a recap of the updates in the areas housing each of these animals.

Size Of Elephant Habitat Nearly Tripled

There is an enrichment zone now for the elephants, where they can wallow in the mud, bathe or dust.

The Maryland Zoo

Their habitat has nearly tripled in size and consists of a savanna-like open space, after the zoo converted area previously used for penguins and camel rides to create more elephant habitat.

The Maryland Zoo

The elephant habitat totals more than 91,000 square feet now: The outdoor habitat grew from 30,000 to 77,330 square feet. Indoor holding space expanded from 9,900 to 14,300 square feet.

Giraffe Passageway Installed

The giraffe area also grew, going from 23,900 to 36,200 square feet, according to The Maryland Zoo.

Renovations in the giraffe area called for re-grading so the yard was level throughout rather than sloping. Officials said the change was made for animal health and safety reasons.

There's also a viewing wall that allows visitors to watch the giraffe as they move around.

In addition, a newly installed trail leads from the Giraffe House to the Upper Savanna part of the elephant habitat, according to zoo officials.

"This will not only give the giraffe additional room to roam, but to eventually share the Upper Savanna with elephants as they would in the wild," President/CEO of The Maryland Zoo Don Hutchinson said in a statement.

Officials say the giraffe have been getting acclimated to their new digs since May.

The Maryland Zoo

Lion Habitat Opens Up

The lion habitat, parts of which opened earlier in the spring, now has a more fluid feel. Stainless steel mesh and glass replaced poles to create a barrier along the African Overlook path, a newly created walkway for visitors, with lions on one side and giraffe on the other.

The Maryland Zoo

There's also a raised area in the center where lions can lounge.

Visitors can watch lions in the midst of positive reinforcement training sessions via a window that was made possible by the Committee for Kamenetz and Jill Kamenetz in honor of her children, Karson and Dylan Kamenetz.

The Maryland Zoo