

Calendar

Grazer Gifts

At the Zoo, Every Day Is Christmas

Dreaming of a white Christmas? Or a watery one?

An opportunity to do some Christmas caroling by kayak is offered by the Aqua Adventures Kayaking School in Mission Beach this weekend. Co-owner Greg Knight will play his acoustic guitar and is practicing Christmas songs for the occasion. Eggnog, hot chocolate, and cookies will be served. You'll paddle around the bay and sing, and if you don't have your own kayak, Knight will lend you one. It's something he's heard of other people doing — "having

Christmas parties on their boats." He knows of kayakers who dressed up and

LOCAL EVENTS

went trick-or-treating "boat-to-boat" for Halloween.

In Escondido, there's a beach theme at the annual holiday open house, sponsored by the city's recreation department and Friends of the Library. They're calling it a Sizzlin' Santa's Workshop.

You're instructed to wear "your favorite beach attire" and come prepared to enjoy "a beachcomber buffet." (Actually, it will be "a continental breakfast" — donuts, bagels, muffins, juice, and coffee, donated by local businesses.) Kids will make crafts — banners, candy Santas, Christmas palm-tree magnets — and have a chance to visit with Santa. St. Nick will sport a Hawaiian shirt, the better to keep cool in California, says Escondido Recreation supervisor Amy Shipley. "Usually Santa would get so warm, but this year, dressed aloha-style, he thinks he's going to be just fine."

If you're more traditional and crave a glimpse of snow, head for Balboa Park. Instead of "going to the snow," the snow comes to the polar bears this weekend and next. It's part of the zoo's "Jungle Bells" activities for the animals and for



Greg Knight and Jennifer Kleck

the humans who come to see them.

"Before the bears go on exhibit, very early in the morning, we blow 12 tons of manmade snow in there," says Stacy Ellis of the zoo's public-relations office. "We use huge, huge, huge blocks of ice. That's put into a machine, and we blow it into giant mounds. So a portion of the exhibit will be completely blanketed in snow. The keepers will hide food treats and toys in the snow, so the bears will come out and immediately start digging. They love to crawl up to the top of the mounds and slide down. The snow really does inspire in them a kind of behavior that you don't normally see."

At other times, says Ellis, the bears are content in their arctic-tundra habitat — the Polar Bear Plunge — that simulates a place where the snow has thawed, with sparse vegetation and water that's chilly: about 55 degrees.



Polar bears

of nibbling leafy things" — are the materials. These will be given to the browsers among the zoo population — "leaf-eaters that pull stuff off trees and bushes." A giraffe is one, distinct from grazers, like caribou.

"We worry about maintaining animals in captivity and keeping them happy and healthy," says Ellis. "Enrichment keeps them stimulated, gives them mental challenges, and opportunities for physical exercise."

Zoologists believe enrichment contributes to successful in-captivity breeding.

"The zoo employs a whole staff to do nothing but work with keepers to find interesting ways to help the animals exhibit natural behaviors." The Santas and the wreaths are only seasonal examples of what the enrichment team does daily at the zoo, where, apparently, every day is Christmas.

— Jeanne Schinto

"Christmas Caroling by Kayak"

Friday, December 15

6:00-9:00 p.m.

Aqua Adventures Kayak School

1540 Quivira Way

(near Hospitality Point)

Mission Bay

Free

619-523-9577

Sizzlin' Santa's Workshop Open House

Saturday, December 16

8:30-11:30 a.m.

East Valley Community Center

2245 East Valley Parkway

Escondido

Cost: \$6 for children over 2; free

for children under 2;

\$3 for adults

Includes food, crafts,

and visit with Santa

Advance tickets recommended

760-839-4382

"Jungle Bells"

Saturday December 16,

Sunday December 24

9:00-4:00 p.m.

Polar bears' snow romp:

Saturday and Sunday,

December 16 and 17 and

December 23 and 24,

10:00 a.m.

San Diego Zoo, Balboa Park

\$18 for ages 12 and up;

\$8 for ages 3-11

(waived with a new,

unwrapped toy);

free for ages 2 and under

619-234-3153