

PANDA-MONIUM

Meet the two newest additions to the Toronto Zoo

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Nestling comfortably in what they will call home for the next five years, two 5-year-old giant pandas named Da Mao and Er Shun were joyfully welcomed at the Toronto Zoo. As part of a long-term conservation partnership between Hu Jintao, President of China, and Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, Da Mao and Er Shun will reside in two Canadian zoos, Toronto Zoo and Calgary Zoo, over the next ten years. The giant panda has become one of the most adored animals in the world and is perhaps the most powerful symbol of wildlife conservation. And with only around 1,600 left in the wild, it is also one of the most endangered species in the world. The giant panda is unique to China, and in Chinese culture they are only sent abroad as a sign of friendly diplomatic relations. "It is a tremendous honour for Canada to be entrusted with two of China's national treasures," said Harper. "The pandas, which will delight Canadian children and adults alike, and boom tourism in Toronto and Calgary, will be an enduring reminder of the deep friendship and goodwill that exists between our countries."

This isn't the first time Canada has been host to the giant panda. In 1985, China lent two of their unofficial mascots to the Toronto Zoo for the summer months. During this time, the zoo experienced their largest attendance rates with over 1.9 million visitors. Since the giant panda last arrived in Canada, the exhibit has been renovated and zoo officials are hoping to set in motion a breeding process to

continue the growth of the giant panda population. "We are honoured to host the pandas at the Toronto Zoo and contribute to the survival of the species for generations to come," said Mr. Tracogna, CEO of the Toronto Zoo. "The Toronto Zoo is thrilled to join the small group of countries and highly respected zoo organizations outside of China that have the conservation and research programs, professional expertise, and facilities to provide excellent care for a breeding pair of pandas." Of course, this international friendship comes with a cost.

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Canada will be paying \$1 million each year for all ten years to host this endangered species. In addition, millions of dollars will be spent preparing the zoos, training Canadian panda handlers, and caring for the animals (including an estimated \$200,000 a year in bamboo costs to feed the bears). Zoo officials are hoping that high volume ticket and merchandising sales will surpass these costs.

The pandas will be relocated to the Calgary Zoo in 2018, but in the event that reproduction is successful over the next five years, the pandas and their offspring will remain in Toronto until an appropriate time for them to be moved. Today, the only other North American zoos that exhibit the giant panda are: the Smithsonian's National Zoo (Washington, DC), San Diego Zoo (California), Zoo Atlanta (Georgia), Memphis Zoo (Tennessee), and Chapultepec Zoo (Mexico City). 🐼

