

Wellington Zoo Close Encounter Frequently Asked Questions

The table below outlines availability times, minimum and maximum numbers, age limits, duration and cost per person for each Close Encounter.

Please note Close Encounters not available on Wednesdays unless otherwise stated.

Availability	Time	Number of people	Age	Duration	Cost per person
Big Cat Daily	10.30am	Min 2 Max 4	14 yrs, under 18s accompanied by paying adult	45 minutes	\$120
Cheetah Daily <i>Available Wed am</i>	11.30am and 2.30pm	Min 2 Max 4	14 years old and min. 1.4m tall. Under 18s must be accompanied by paying adult	30 minutes	\$150
Red Panda Daily	11.30am	Min 2 Max 4	6 yrs, under 14s accompanied by paying adult	30 minutes	\$75
Giraffe Daily	3.30pm	2 people only	6 yrs, under 14s accompanied by paying adult	30 minutes	\$100

Will I be able to touch the animals during my Close Encounter?

For the cheetah, red panda and giraffe Close Encounters there is an opportunity to have contact with the animals. Physical contact with the animals is not guaranteed. The big cat Close Encounter is not a hands-on Encounter – however you may have the opportunity to feed our tigers and lions.

Will I be able to feed the animals?

For the red panda and giraffe Close Encounters you will feed the animals. You may also have the opportunity to feed the lions and tigers with the big cat Close Encounter.

Can I take part in a Close Encounter if I use a wheelchair?

Unfortunately the only two encounters that are suitable for wheelchairs are the cheetah and giraffe Close Encounters. However, if participating in a cheetah Close Encounter, customers must be able to walk once at the encounter space. The cheetahs cannot be approached by wheelchair nor can the wheelchair be wheeled while the cheetahs are in the encounter space. Giraffe Close Encounters can be conducted in a wheelchair.

Can I do a Close Encounter if I have a disability?

It is best to contact us to discuss any disabilities so we can assess them on a case by case basis. Participants must be relatively mobile and able to walk on uneven surfaces.

Can children do Close Encounters?

There is a minimum age for each Close Encounter and children must be accompanied by an adult. Please refer to the table above for specific details.

What happens if the weather is bad?

Close Encounters may be postponed when the weather is bad. In most circumstances the Close Encounters will go ahead. Please don't assume the Close Encounter is cancelled, if you are not sure please call us on (04) 381 6755 to confirm.

Can I bring a camera?

We recommend you bring a camera. Where possible our staff are happy to take photos for you also. Please note photos must be used for personal use only.

Do I need to wear any special clothing or footwear?

For all Close Encounters please make sure that you wear comfortable clothing and covered walking footwear. You may also require a raincoat if we have unfavourable weather.

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How do I pay for a Close Encounter?

You can pay by credit card, cheque, direct credit, or by coming to the Zoo. Your Close Encounter must be paid in full to confirm your booking. No refunds are given for cancellations. A Close Encounter may be postponed where we are given more than three working days notice. All Close Encounters can also be purchased as vouchers, and the recipient then can book a date which suits them.

Do I need to pay Zoo admission if I am doing a Close Encounter?

The Close Encounter cost includes entry for participants so feel free to explore the Zoo before and after your Close Encounter.

Please note 10% of all proceeds from Close Encounters go towards conservation projects supported by the Wellington Zoo Conservation Fund.

What happens on an encounter?

Big Cat Close Encounter

Go behind the scenes with the big cat keeper and learn how the lions and tigers are trained. Learn about why we do medical conditioning and what we use it for.

The tigers are trained with a tennis ball on the end of a stick, as the ball moves, the tiger moves so we can check over different parts of its body. The male lions stand on their hind feet so we can check over their legs and stomachs, and we may also do station training with the lions where we train them to step onto a platform where they can be weighed.

For medical training we get the cats used to a pinch near the base of their tail, so if we ever need to take blood from them, we can do it easily and there is less stress for both cat and staff.

Cheetah Close Encounter

Experience the thrill of an interactive Cheetah Encounter at Wellington Zoo. Find out what a cheetah smells like, how their fur feels and what they sound like when they purr. Go into our special intimate encounter space and meet the cheetahs. Our zoo keepers will tell you why these animals are endangered and what you can do to help them.

Learn all about our cheetahs Charlie and Delta and the role they play as ambassadors for their species. This is a hands-on encounter under strict supervision from our expert staff.

Giraffe Close Encounter

Go behind the scenes of the African Savannah and learn all about our three giraffes from the zoo keepers who know them best. Climb up a ladder and get face to face with the tallest animal in the Zoo. Feel how powerful a giraffe's tongue is and enjoy the unique smell of giraffes. As you're feeding them from a bucket, feel how soft their fur is – this is an important part of their training as we desensitize them to different handlers.

As the giraffe is being fed, the zoo keeper will continue the conditioning, checking the giraffe over for any injuries, while the giraffe is stationary. The keeper will explain why training and conditioning is important, the physical adaptations to the giraffe's natural environment and information about the unique characters of our three giraffes.

Red Panda Close Encounter

Hand feed a red panda and get up close to the cutest animals in the Zoo and their keepers. Sit inside their enclosure as the pandas approach you, put their paws on your knees and delicately take a grape or some pear from your hand. Interact with the red pandas and their keepers - learn why there are only 2,500 red pandas left in the world, and what makes them so special.