

CHILDREN'S
ZOO



Alpacas

ADOPTION FACT PACK



+ Alpacas have been around for around 6,000 years and can be found high up at 4,000 metres in the South American Andes Mountains.

+ There's no such thing as a wild alpaca. Alpacas are a domesticated version of the vicuña, a wild South American Camelid. It's thought that llamas were bred with vicuñas (pictured right) some 6,000 years ago.

+ The ancient Inca civilisation treasured alpaca and their beautiful fleeces were reserved for Inca royalty. In fact, alpacas were so crucial to the Incas that remains were often buried in the floors of houses as offerings to the Gods.

+ The alpaca's ability to tolerate extraordinary harsh weather guaranteed their survival following the Spanish Conquest of Peru in 1527. Despite the conquest wiping out 90% of the indigenous Inca people and animals, the surviving Incas and their alpacas fled high up into the Andes.

+ Alpacas have been in Europe since the 19th Century, mostly in zoos. However, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert owned two — one black and one white.

DID YOU
KNOW?



Vicuña in the Arequipa region on the way
to the Colca Canyon in Peru





ALPACA AT OUR ZOO...

We have three alpacas at the Children's Zoo. These fantastic creatures have been with us since 2015, and they're very different from any other animal in our zoo.

Don't be fooled by their appearance, though. Alpacas aren't very cuddly animals and have quite high opinions of themselves. They'll let you stroke them but only on their own terms!

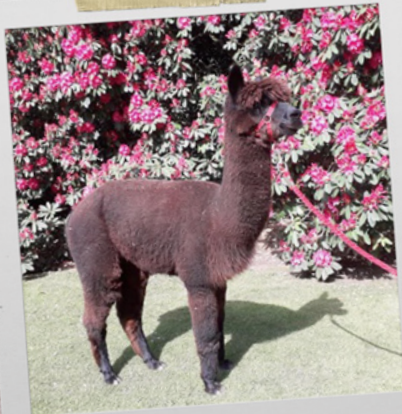
Over the last few years, we've taken our alpacas for walks around the estate. They really enjoy these walks as they're inquisitive animals and like to stroll around munching on different grasses and plants.



Topaz

Who doesn't like cabbage?

Topaz is the leader of the group and the most confident of the three amigos. He's also our prettiest alpaca, sporting beautiful long eyelashes. On our alpaca walks, Topaz likes to take the lead, but he can also be very cheeky and will push in and steal the other alpaca's treats. His favourite treat is cabbage — what a strange chap! He's the most likely of the three to show his displeasure and is the only one who'll spit when we give him treatments such as injections or vitamins.



Mally

Mally is the loner of the group and tends to be slightly nervous. He's a fussy alpaca and so far will not take treats.

Because he doesn't like treats, it makes him harder to train to become used to human contact. While Topaz and Jim will come and accept gifts, Mally just hangs around at the back watching. However, once he's on a lead rope, he's a very laid back alpaca. Mally seems to enjoy being walked by our more nervous students or those with additional needs — our rangers trust him to chill out at the back of the group and take his time.

We think he's a dude!

Don't tell the other alpacas but Jim is our favourite. He started out quite grumpy and was the most likely to have a quick kick. However, after spending a lot of time with him, Jim's now the most sociable out of the three and just loves attention. Like Topaz, Jim loves a treat. Rather than cabbage Jim prefers carrots!



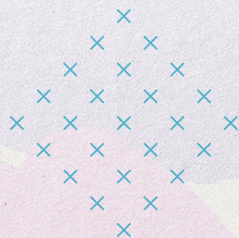
Jim

While Topaz is the prettiest alpaca, Jim is definitely the scruffiest. He's always mucky and muddy, and his fringe always looks flat. Show alpacas are meant to be a solid colour, but Jim has a ginger stripe on his neck. He also has chunky legs!

Poor old Jim has had various health problems including a skin condition which, despite lots of tests being done by our vets, we've yet to find the cause. Our rangers suspect that he's just sensitive to lots of things such as parasites and heat. This has resulted in dry, itchy skin on his ears and chest and can make his eyes swell. We've now found a regular treatment that seems to be working, and we moisturise his ears with E45 cream to repair the dry skin. He seems to enjoy having his ears moisturised but won't let us do his chest yet! To top it all, he also has regular eye drops to help with irritation.

After all that, he's still a jolly soul, all things considered.

ALPACA FACTS...



- + Alpacas like to live in huge herds and do not feel safe by themselves.

- + Many dangers can be lurking among the rocks of a mountain slope. With their long neck, alpacas have a much better view of what is around them.

- + In their native Peru, foxes will take the alpacas weak or unguarded young. Therefore they are very aggressive to all foxes and will chase them away. If an unlucky fox gets cornered by alpaca, they will trample it to death.

- + Alpacas will spit at each other to show who is the boss or if they're arguing over food. They usually are too well-mannered to spit at people but would do if they felt threatened.

- + Alpacas and llamas can successfully cross-breed. The offspring they create are known as huarizo, which are valued for their longer fleece.

- + Alpacas use a common dung pile, but luckily it's away from where they graze.

- + For people who look after alpaca, it's not unusual to take some of this pile with them when taking the alpacas away from the herd. Otherwise, they won't go to the toilet until they return home.



+ It's very common to hear an alpaca hum. In fact, it's the most common sound that alpacas make. They'll hum when they're curious, content, worried, bored, fearful, distressed or cautious. When startled or in danger, a staccato braying is started by one animal and then followed by the rest of the herd. During breeding, the male alpaca roams emits a unique throaty vocalisation called 'orgling'.

+ Alpacas are regal animals (picture a hippogriff from Harry Potter). They're certainly not cuddly creatures — they enjoy human company, but only on their own terms. They dislike their heads being touched, and care must be taken when fitting head collars as they have soft, boneless noses. If adequate care isn't taken, their airways can be easily blocked.

+ Alpacas come in two types: Suri (pictured below) and the huacaya. Our alpacas are the most common type — huacaya. The suri has a fleece that forms silky dreadlocks. The huacaya is woollier with a dense, crimped coat — a bit like a teddy bear! About 90% of all alpacas in North America are huacayas.

Suri in Puno, Peru



SHEARING

Every year we hire a professional shearer to come and remove our alpaca fleece. Like a sheep, this is done to prevent the animal from overheating in the summer. Alpaca fleece is considered one of the most luxurious in the world — it's soft, yet strong and produces lovely soft silky wool that's naturally hypoallergenic as it doesn't contain lanolin (a wax sheep produce to help waterproof their fleece).



Jim, Mally & Topaz ready for a walk



Shearing an alpaca is a highly skilled job — as you can imagine alpacas don't like to be sheared and great care has to be taken. If they panic, they could get a serious injury from the shears or hurt the shearer, so the alpaca have to be restrained when being sheared. We do this by tying their legs together and stretching out the alpaca so they can't move. It's all over very quickly, it takes less than 15 minutes to shear all three of our alpacas, and they feel much better without their thick fleeces — although they do look a little odd.





WALTON

HALL AND GARDENS



Key

- Formal Gardens
- The Hall
- The Conservatory Range
- The Stables
- Adventure golf and Pitch 'N' Putt
- Children's Zoo
- Bowls
- Children's Playground
- Toilets
- Heritage Café
- Parking
- Bicycle Museum

- Walton Hall Golf Club
- Ice Cream
- Land Train

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