

Panda boost for Edinburgh Zoo

The giant pandas gave Edinburgh Zoo a boost in visitor numbers in their final year in Scotland, it can be revealed.

Yang Guang and Tian Tian – also known as Sunshine and Sweetie – returned to China in December after 12 years in the Scottish capital.

Zoo bosses staged a full year of farewell events to give fans the opportunity to see the black and white bears before they departed on 4 December.

The Association of Leading Visitor Attractions' (ALVA) latest figures show that visits to the Zoo increased by 3% in 2023 (618,719) compared with 2022 (601,285).

And the Zoo even exceeded pre pandemic numbers, with 2023 visits 2% higher than 2019 as panda lovers flocked to say goodbye.

The pandas have been hailed for their “incredible impact” in transforming millions of people into lovers of nature.

A range of special “events and experiences” to give the pandas a “giant farewell” sold out in just 90 minutes after they went on sale in January, while overall visitor numbers in the first 11 months of the year exceeded the prediction for the whole of 2023.

The pandas' final month in Scotland was among the busiest Novembers on record at the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) attraction.

Bernard Donoghue OBE, Director of ALVA, said: “The long goodbye of last year – right up to their departure in December – saw a fantastic spike in visitor numbers wanting to come back and to say goodbye to the pandas, alongside all the other things the Zoo offers.

“The panda years are going to be really significant when we look back at visitor numbers at Edinburgh Zoo.”

Yang Guang and Tian Tian flew back to China on December 4, to spend their “twilight years” in their homeland.

The RZSS has promised an exciting new species, yet to be announced, will eventually arrive in the capital.

Lisa Robshaw, RZSS Head of Marketing and Sales, said: “It’s great that so many visitors are coming for an unforgettable day out at Edinburgh Zoo.

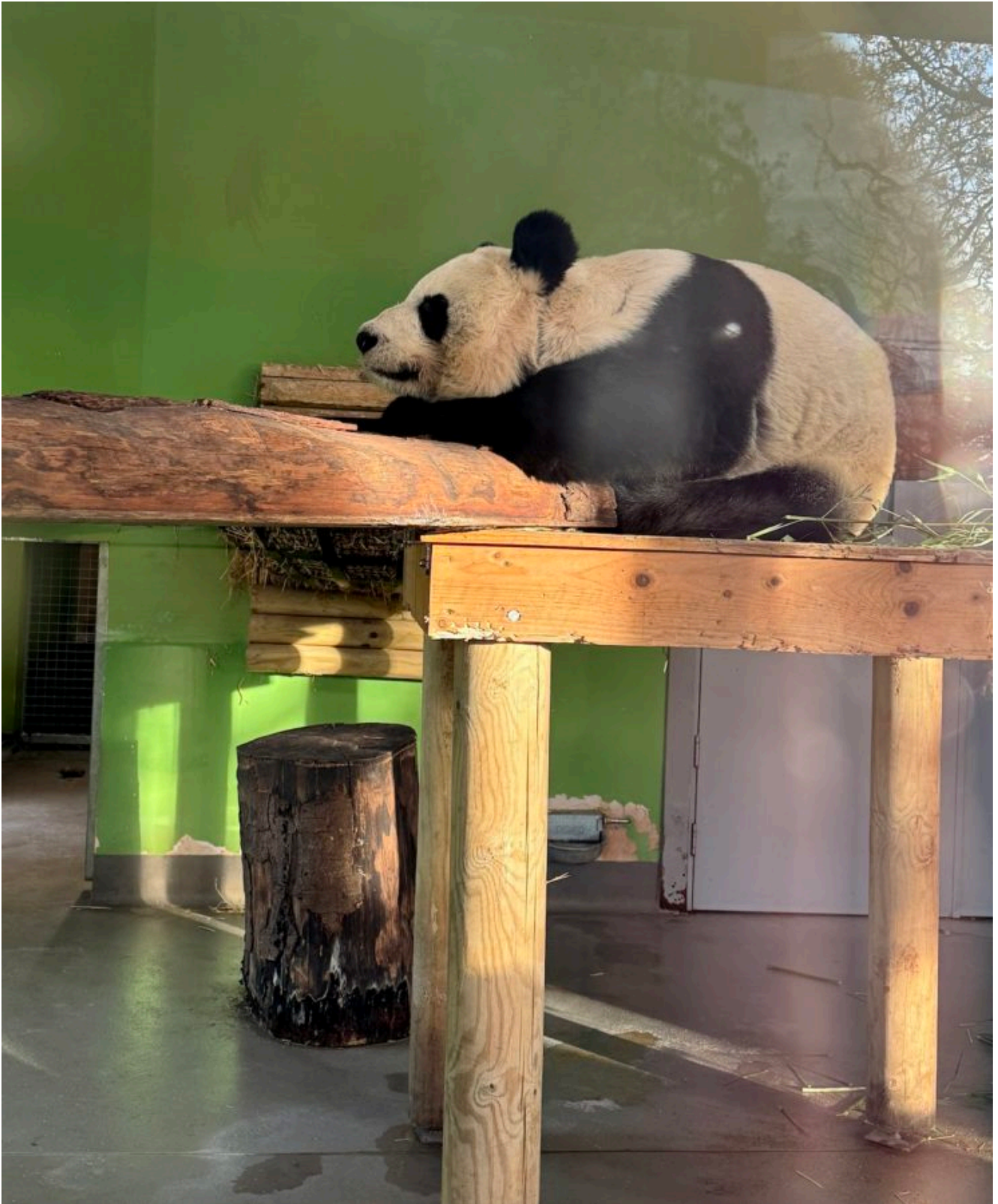
“We think that last year’s increase is at least partly due to the success of our ‘Giant Farewell’ campaign, which saw visitors turn up in droves to get one last look at our giant pandas before they returned to China.

“The same period also saw a significant spike in membership numbers, as families experiencing the cost-of-living crisis look for best value ways to enjoy a great day out.

“It is testament to the amazing animals and our fantastic team in creating an experience which keeps members – new and old – coming back time and again.”

ALVA’s members are the UK’s most popular, iconic and important museums, galleries, palaces, castles, cathedrals, zoos, historic houses, heritage sites, gardens and leisure attractions.

The latest annual visitor figures showed that visits to Scotland’s most popular sites increased by 21% in 2023 compared with 2022, ahead of the UK average (19%).



25/11/2023 Picture Alan Simpson Yang Guang The pandas' diplomatic mission is over.



Tian Tian the giant panda