CASE STUDY

# How SSA Turned Record-Breaking Attendance into Growth at the Oklahoma City Zoo

## MEETING GUESTS WHERE THEY ARE

Live data, flexible operations and guest-centered hospitality helped onsite teams shift capacity to meet demand, while capturing more revenue opportunities and keeping service moving.

## Challenge

**FY 2025–26 brought a record 1,225,688 guests to the Oklahoma City Zoo**

10% above the yearly average and the Zoo's third consecutive year of record-breaking attendance. Across a 130-acre property, fixed staffing, menus, and service locations risked leaving capacity in the wrong places.

## SSA Response

- Use live attendance updates, flexible labor, mobile POS, adaptable menus and digital ordering to continually shift capacity toward real demand.

## Outcome

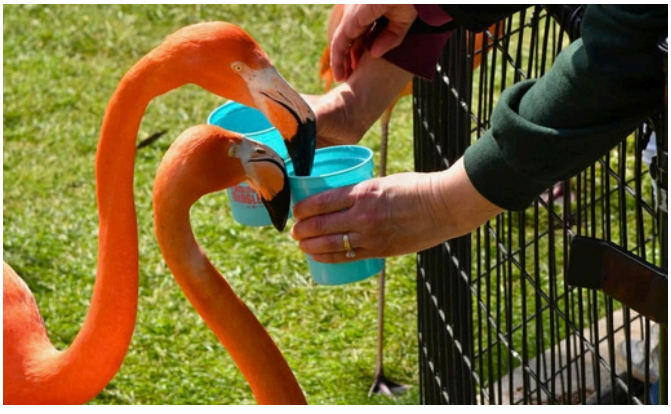
- More transactions and stronger revenue across channels, with a Spring Break peak showing higher demand could be monetized while a key wait-time metric stayed under 1.5 minutes.

## Attendance does not arrive in neat, predictable patterns.

As attendance climbed beyond expectations, SSA's opportunity was not simply to serve more guests. It was to stay flexible enough to place people, menus and points of service where demand was happening in real time.

The result was a year defined by fast operational pivots, stronger digital adoption, expanded event experiences and a team culture built around one guiding idea:

→ *Meet People Where They Are*



## The Strategy: Follow Demand

The operating model was simple: follow demand, then make it easy for the team to act.

### 01

#### Use Live Guest Counts to Run the Day

The Zoo shares total daily attendance and current in-park estimates by radio and Teams. SSA managers use those updates to adjust operating hours, move employees, and activate service where traffic is actually building. That flexibility adds coverage where it matters without treating every location as a fixed operating model.

### 02

#### Move Services to Match Guest Flow

Handheld POS units turned areas without permanent outlets into beverage service points, while peak-day pop-ups added capacity. Team members could move from morning coffee to snow cones or Dippin' Dots as temperatures and exit flow shifted.

### 03

#### Adapt the Offer

Construction and weekday closures changed traffic around Canopy Café. A modified menu better matched traffic and expense levels, helping the location increase sales 41% year-over-year.

**FY 2025-26 AT A GLANCE**

*1,225,688*
zoo guests

*341,647*
total transactions

*+10.3%*
transaction growth year-over-year

*+142%*
mobile ordering sales year over year

*269*
private events catered

*Source: SSA OKC Zoo operational data, FY 2025-26*

PROOF POINTS

## Spring Break: More Demand, Even Stronger Sales, Fast Service

With Dinosaur Expedition open for the week, SSA planned for a known peak by keeping experienced team members in familiar positions. The Zoo's cashless model helped speed transactions and free labor for guest service.

| +16% | +24% | +2.50 | <1.5 min |
|---|---|---|---|
| Zoo attendance vs. Spring Break 2025 | SSA sales vs. Spring Break 2025 | increase in average ticket | average wait on peak days at Lotus Café |

✳ **Across the property, SSA served 5,290 individual guests on its busiest day, with an average guest spend of $29.**

## Beyond the Day Visit

SSA used the Zoo's programming to create distinct revenue occasions that extended spending beyond the traditional day visit.

SAFARI LIGHTS

### Extended Seasonal Spend

North Pole Gifts bundled cocoa, snacks and retail, while Santa's Workshop added a holiday menu, music and family photo opportunities at Canopy.

SIP & STROLL

### Distributed F&B Demand

Six bars featured specialty cocktails, while five restaurants offered a $6 small-plate food passport.

ZOOBREW PREBREW

### Created a Premium Upsell

Roughly 1,000 guests moved through multiple small-plate stations and a dessert-bar finale before the main event.

BAOBAB LODGE

### Opened a New Hospitality Occasion

Opened a new hospitality occasion SSA added breakfast, dinner and snacks for glamping guests and catered daytime corporate retreats in Expedition Africa.

REVENUE & ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

| +13.6% | +12.8% | +4.3% | +3.4% |
|---|---|---|---|
| catering revenue growth | retail revenue growth | food & beverage revenue growth | average guest spend |

**Mobile ordering sales grew 142% year over year, supported by better signage and direct ordering links in the Zoo's interactive map that gave guests an easier path to purchase.**

PARTNERSHIP

# Your Mission. Together.

*Bi-weekly planning, shared forecasts, and transparent communication helped SSA Group operate as an extension of the Zoo team.*

SSA leaders participated in bi-weekly meetings with the Zoo to review upcoming events, public programming, and anticipated group traffic. Access to the Zoo's master calendar and group-sales forecasts gives the onsite team a clearer view of heavy corporate and school-group days before they arrive.

That collaboration helps both teams stay aligned behind the scenes, creating a more consistent experience for guests.

**SMARTER DECISIONS**
Live information and updates help teams make faster decisions and put resources where guests need them most.

**FLEXIBLE OPERATIONS**
Labor, service points, and menus can shift with demand rather than staying tied to a fixed model.

**EVENT CREATIVITY**
Seasonal and premium concepts can create new revenue opportunities around programming that already drives visitation.

**PEOPLE-FIRST HOSPITALITY**
Supporting employees helps them stay focused on guests and deliver the personal service that makes a visit memorable.

## The Results

*341,647*
transactions

*+10.3%*
transaction growth

*+142%*
mobile ordering

*+13.6%*
catering revenue

*+41%*
Canopy Café sales

*"Our operations have to be seamless and the dividing line has to be invisible to the average guest."*

**TRAVIS BYRD, SSA GENERAL MANAGER, OKLAHOMA CITY ZOO**

## The Takeaway

**Record attendance creates opportunity.**

By staying flexible and adapting operations to guest demand, SSA Group helped Oklahoma City Zoo turn increased traffic into stronger revenue performance while keeping the guest experience at the center.