《世上“最悲伤北极熊”广州商场引热议》

导读:北极熊本该在北极自由自在地生活，然而近日，广州一家商场内被关的北极熊引发媒体热议，被称为“世界最悲伤北极熊”。亚洲动物基金会已介入，希望对方进行改进。

More than 285,000 people have signed a petition calling for the closure of an aquarium in southern China that is home to an animal dubbed “the world’s saddest polar bear”.

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The lethargic bear, whose name is Pizza, is on show at an “ocean theme park” located inside the Grandview shopping centre in the city of Guangzhou.

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The aquarium made international headlines after its opening in early January with one Hong Kong-based animal rights charity denouncing it as a “horrifying” animal prison.

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The park’s management initially rejected claims that Pizza was being mistreated. “The polar bear in the aquarium is very happy,” Li Chengtang, its deputy manager, told the Guangzhou Daily newspaper.

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However, amid outrage over the dismal conditions in which the animals were being forced to live, as tourists posed for selfies beside them, members of the Hong Kong-based charity Animals Asia were invited to visit the aquarium in April.

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The activist group said the theme park’s management had been “genuinely shocked” by the international outcry and had sought advice on how to improve conditions.

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Animals Asia said there was no indication the aquarium would be closed or its animals, which also include arctic wolves, beluga whales and walrus calves, rehoused.

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However, writing last week, Dave Neale, the group’s animal welfare director, said the park’s directors had promised “a better life for its animals” as a result of pressure.

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Neale said engagement had previously led to positive changes at a zoo in Hanoi where the charity convinced zoo keepers to unchain elephants, end animal “circuses” and provide better living conditions for bears and tigers.

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“Threatening frequently changes little – while walking away changes nothing. Staying and talking and working together means there’s an on-going chance for positive change,” Neale argued.

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While China’s economic boom is fading, the country’s amusement park industry is booming as an increasingly affluent middle-class seeks new forms of entertainment. According to one campaigning group, China is currently home to at least 39 ocean theme parks. More than a dozen more are scheduled to open over the next two years.

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Calls for the aquarium's closure continued this week on Chinese social media. "It is torture! Please boycott it!" read one comment on Weibo, China's Twitter.

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Animal Asia said it would continue to fight to improve conditions in such attractions.

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"The sad truth is, in this instance, we can't immediately shut down Grandview. And they are unlikely to free this bear, or any of the other animals they house, at least not in the short-term," Neale admitted, adding: "If our experience has taught us anything – first you open doors, then you open cages."

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