

## Stop 131 Kid's Tour – Stag Horn Fern / Fern House

When does a fern look like it might belong on an animal? When it's the *staghorn* fern. Unlike the feathery leaves on the other ferns in here, the long forked leaves of these tropical ferns seem to resemble the antlers on a deer or moose!

So why is this fern hanging from the wall? Staghorn ferns are a type of plant called an epiphyte, which comes from the Greek word "epi" (meaning "upon") and "phyton" (meaning "plant"). Epiphytes like the staghorn fern have adapted to live in many different places because they don't need soil for their roots! In the wild, you'll find them using the trunks and branches of trees for support. Staghorn ferns don't "eat" the trees; they just ride 'piggy-back' and hold on tight to them with their roots.

Staghorns grow *two* kinds of leaves. The "antler leaves" are the ones that bear spores so the plant can make new ferns. They also get all the 'ooh's' and 'ahh's' when people take a look at their unique shape. So what's the *other* kind of staghorn leaf? Do you see those brownish round leaves that are wrapping and even over-lapping around the base of the plant? They're called 'shield leaves.' It isn't very glamorous, but their job is to help collect falling leaves and other stuff from the air, which provide nutrients and water needed by the fern to grow. They also help the plant to hang on to the tree with all their might!