

# The Sunday Telegraph

SUNDAY NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

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# Travel

## Meet the animals – and make a difference

Wildlife holidays are back, with a renewed focus on supporting communities and conservation. Richard Madden picks 20 trips for a clearer conscience

The Africa bush has long been a big draw for wildlife lovers, and in a world emerging from the pandemic, it seems we are reaching out in even greater numbers for the ultimate holiday experience. Africa bookings have increased 50 per cent since January 2020, according to Simon Lynch of travel operator Scott Dunn, underlining the strong desire to reconnect with nature.

Nonetheless, the way we interact with the bush is changing. “Seeing the Big Five is no longer enough,” says Lady Houston, chief strategist for Sunda, the African luxury lodge operator noted for its sustainability and conservation

practices. “Modern travellers value a safari destination which supports the long-term protection of pristine ecosystems, and safari operators who work benefits local communities in terms of job opportunities, health and education. Sustainability and regenerative travel are an absolute must.”

Phillipa Healey, senior Africa specialist at Audley Travel, has also noted this trend. “We are seeing increasing numbers of visitors getting involved in the day-to-day management activities of conservation areas, from meeting and training with anti-poaching dog units in Kenya, to participating in big game counts, looking for snare traps in

South Africa and helping to rehabilitate chimps in Tanzania.”

On the flip side of the coin, the desire for stress-free travel in recent times – avoiding all the form-filling and Covid testing required – has led to a boom in wildlife holidays on home shores. Dan Free of the Travelling Natarhat says the company has added more than 50 trips to its UK portfolio to meet demand, and notes that clients are also looking for a more relaxed experience. “People don’t want to spend a weekend running around frantically packing things off. They want it to be restorative as well, with a nice place to stay and good food.”

“People are also looking for destinations where they have a higher chance of seeing specific iconic species such as eagles, meerkats or pangolins.”

Audley Travel of Natarhat has also noted the demand for stress-free local wildlife experiences – but the company is also responding to two years of pent-up demand from those who have had to postpone once-in-a-lifetime trips celebrating significant birthdays or recent retirement. “People are now fulfilling dreams they put on the back burner. Finally, our clients can go on that whale-watching cruise to Pals, California, a birding tour to Indonesia or a polar adventure to the Arctic or Antarctica.”

“Much of Latin America has been closed for two years.” Tucker continues, “so we are experiencing a big rebound of traffic to Peru, Colombia and Ecuador. Other popular options are seeing the jaguars of Brazil’s Pantanal wetland, or bird-watching in the Andes. Clients want to spend as much time overseas as possible, to make the most of their flight and its carbon footprint – so they are often extending their holiday by combining city breaks with a wildlife trip.”

Another growing trend is in photography and video tours led by well-

known snappers and videographers. With such charismatic subjects in stunning locations, even those with little experience can quickly improve their skills and pick up the tricks of the trade both from the tour leader and fellow enthusiasts. Fieldwork during the day is usually followed by debriefs reviewing the day’s work and tutorials covering everything from the basics of lens choice to creative use of ambient lighting and digital editing.

With these trends and the new consciousness in mind, here are 20 wildlife trips that will really make a difference.

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### HELP PROTECT ICONIC SPECIES

#### GET IN STEP WITH BENGAL TIGERS India

Give yourself the best possible chance of seeing the critically endangered Royal Bengal tiger in Ranthambore, Rajasthan – the best place in the world to observe tigers in the wild. Your guide will be Jaisal Singh, one of India’s top conservationists, who has a family connection to Ranthambore spanning three generations and has dedicated his life to protecting these majestic big cats. His knowledge of the region, along with his team of expert drivers and trackers, make this a unique conservation safari. *Book through the Suján Life (01295 758150): full-board prices at Suján Sher Bagh start at £685 per night, based on two people sharing; rates for Jaisal as a private guide are available on request*