

REBECCA RECOMMENDS

Inspirational destinations & properties of excellence



With expert guides, the tiger sightings in Ranthambore National Park are better than ever. Photo: Charlie Williams

Dear Friends,

There we were, deep in Ranthambore National Park with an expert [Ventours](#) guide at our side, when we encountered our first elusive tiger, a large and handsome male. It's a sight I will never forget.

Charlie and I had come to this famous park in northern India for our honeymoon. When asked if we thought we'd see a tiger, we tried to keep our expectations low. Yet it must have been honeymoon serendipity that showed us not one, but *four* tigers over the course of two days.

On our last day, there was a kill right in front of us. Witnessing such a raw wildlife moment was truly incredible. Needless to say, our Ventours guides certainly knew the right places to take us to maximize our chances of tiger sightings.

While tigers have long been my favorite animal, I've been fortunate enough to have other amazing encounters during my travels, including seeing the endangered one-horn rhino while riding an elephant in Chitwan National Park in Nepal, and washing elephants in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

I am a self-professed animal lover, yet I still haven't tackled Africa. (Perhaps I will for a big birthday coming up.) There was a time in my childhood when I was so enamored with animals that my pony was my best friend and I wanted to be a veterinarian when I grew up.

That's not quite the way things turned out, but I consider myself lucky to have landed in a life where I can combine my passion for travel with my love of the wild and innocent creatures that roam the far reaches of our planet.

Enjoy this roundup of wildlife encounters from our clients – and please share with us your own favorite animal memories.

Fondly,

Recommend

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Wild Coast Tented Lodge, Yala, will offer every comfort and a chance to see leopards, elephants and more.

Resplendent Ceylon Offers Sri Lankan Wildlife Experiences in Three Beautiful Locations

Imagine three luxe resorts set within the sublime beauty of Sri Lanka – and the opportunity to experience them all as part of one trip. [Resplendent Ceylon's](#) new safari resort, [Wild Coast Tented Lodge, Yala](#), will open its doors in October 2017, joining a luxury portfolio that includes [Tea Trails](#) and [Cape Weligama](#). These three properties will be connected by a scenic, half-hour seaplane ride, making it easier than ever to experience the art of Sri Lankan hospitality.

Wildlife lovers are in heaven thanks to the safari resort's plum location next to renowned Yala National Park, known for its dense leopard populations. Thirty-six luxury tents are crafted from carefully selected natural materials, and there's an enormous free-form swimming pool.

Dinner at the open-air bamboo-clad Ten Tuskers bar and Dining Pavilion will be a wondrous affair, featuring a rotisserie, barbecue, Indian breads and meat from a tandoori oven, all inspired by the Malay community in the local village of Kirinda.

of Yala National Park, where expert naturalist guides will be on hand to talk guests through the incredible diversity of flora and fauna, including wild elephants, sloth bears and leopards.

One of the best ways to unwind after a day traipsing about the wilderness is spa time. Fresh ocean breezes and a bush-side setting make for a serene ambience at The Sanctuary Spa, where Sri Lankan Ceylon tea and cinnamon are used in the oils, scrubs and poultices.

On the southeastern coast near historic Galle, [Cape Weligama's](#) luxury catamaran sets off into the Indian Ocean in search of blue whales, sperm whales and dolphins – an experience that shouldn't be missed. There have been 27 cetacean species recorded to date in these Sri Lankan waters!

Fin whales, orcas, Bryde's Whales, pilot whales, rare rough-toothed dolphins, bottlenose dolphins and spinner dolphins all cavort through these waters, which guests navigate in a 50-foot, twin-engine luxury catamaran, complete with dining facilities.

At [Tea Trails](#), early-morning wildlife walks open up fantastic photographic opportunities. At nearby Horton Plains National Park, one can search for the “big three” – elephants, leopards and peacocks – and keep an eye out for 87 birds species as well as migratory birds – perhaps the Asian Paradise Flycatcher or the Himalayan Kashmir Flycatcher.

Expert guides know just when and where to look for the best wildlife-viewing opportunities and are eager to share their knowledge of the land and its creatures. Don't miss the famous World's End, a 3,700-foot sheer drop that offers fabulous views of the tea estates below and the distant southern coastline.



Tiger numbers are growing in India due to strict enforcement of conservation policies. Photo: Charlie Williams.

Ventours Reports Increased Tiger Sightings in India

Sanctuary, but in Central India in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Ventours recently hosted a TED Expeditions National Geographic group in which all 52 guests confirmed a tiger sighting! The government has been strictly enforcing its conservation program and tracking down poachers, allowing the population of these majestic cats to increase.

Ventours makes it their goal to keep tabs on lesser-known wildlife habitats and therefore able to give travelers those one-of-kind connections with tigers, elephants, rhinos and leopards throughout India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Range Rover-style jeeps that seat six guests can be arranged, along with a ranger who is permitted to drive down off-the-beaten-path tracks in search of tigers. Along the way, one can see deer, monkeys, leopards, crocodiles, foxes and several varieties of birds.

Rhinos are another wonder, including the rare one-horned rhinoceros in India and Nepal. Rhinos may also be found in Kaziranga in Assam on India's east coast, next to Nepal's Chitwan National Park. Asian elephants make their home here and guests may even ride through the tall grasses of the reserves on elephant-back.



Celestún Biosphere Reserve is the best place to view pink flamingos in the winter season.

Wildlife Adventures in the Yucatán with Catherwood Travels & Private Haciendas

Far from Cancún's crowded beaches and ruins, Celestún Biosphere Reserve is a relatively undiscovered luxury wildlife retreat, with fantastic bird watching opportunities, according to our friends at [Catherwood Travels](#). It's the best place to view pink flamingos during the winter season, but even in summer these pastel pretties nest near the fishing village of El Cuyo. All the better, [Private Haciendas](#) offers a beautiful three-bedroom villa there called [Casa El Cuyo](#).

Whale sharks are a highlight in Holbox or Isla Mujeres (the season is typically May to September) and one may also dive with sailfish. Catherwood will make sure your clients find the very best lodging on the tiny island of Holbox; its recommendations include a home rich with a private art collection, and an eco-chic boutique hotel with a white-sand beach and Mayan-inspired spa.

Further afield, in the state of Campeche, Catherwood Travels recommends the incredible Biosphere Reserve of Calakmul, where monkeys, butterflies, birds, two million bats and even jaguars reside. In a truly spectacular sight, those bats come pouring out of their cave to search for food at sunset.

elegant dining and traditional hacienda architecture. Catherwood can arrange for a day trip to the Biosphere by helicopter or small plane from Hacienda Uayamon.



The wild ponies of Dartmoor live on the moors in small herds with one adult stallion, mares and young ponies.

Original Travel UK Uncovers the Wildest Corners of England, Scotland and Ireland

The United Kingdom is home to an amazing variety of flora and fauna. Whether it's in the rolling hills of the Cotswolds, the rugged moors in the south or the ever-changing scenery of the Highlands of Scotland, [Original Travel UK](#) can put together a wildlife-rich trip that brings the traveler ever closer to some of our planet's richest treasures.

In England, head out to the rolling countryside with an expert guide to fish on pristine rivers and lakes. If you are looking for something more adrenalin-pumping, they will arrange rides across the rocky crops of Dartmoor, an area famous for its wild ponies.

Scotland is a wildlife-lover's dream. With breathtaking scenery and landscapes, especially the Highlands and islands, there is something for everyone. The Isle of Skye is a favorite destination for wildlife watching, with the white-tailed sea eagle at the top of birdwatchers' lists. Otters, seals, whales, dolphins and red deer are just a few of the impressive creatures that can be seen on and around the island.

For something more off the beaten track, head to the island of Colonsay. Its craggy, heather-backed hills support a bewildering array of plant and birdlife, wild goats and rabbits, and one of the finest quasi-tropical gardens in Scotland. Original Travel UK can even organize trips for your clients to dive with basking sharks and seals.

In Ireland, birdwatchers flock to The Cliffs of Moher, where one may take a boat tour to see the majestic cliffs where birds nest. Nearby Burren is a completely unique landscape made up of limestone chunks called "clints." The distinctive landscape is home to limestone-loving flora that are both native to Ireland and not normally found elsewhere in the world.



The quokka, found on an island near Perth, is a smaller cousin to the kangaroo. Photo: Tourism Australia

Southern Crossings' Favorite Places to Find the Weird and Wonderful Wildlife of Australia

Blink in Australia and you're apt to miss yet another chance to see [some of the most intriguing creatures on the planet](#). But don't worry ... open your eyes and it's all still there, at every turn, set against a technicolor backdrop of aquamarine sea and redstone Outback. More than 50 million years of geographic isolation has resulted in a number of unique species found nowhere else in the world, and more than 85 percent of the species that call Australia home are endemic to the country.

[Southern Crossings](#) has made it their mission to create wildlife experiences that introduce visitors to these "locals" through personalized and authentic interactions, whether it's the cute and cuddly natives, the koala and kangaroo, or the crocs of the Sampan river.

Topping most "must-see" lists, koalas reside in the eucalyptus forests of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Southern Australia. They are notoriously tricky to spot in the wild since they nap for most of the day high up in the trees, but Southern Crossings' guides are adept at knowing just where and when to find them in the wild.

Also recommended is the Koala Conservation Centre on Philip Island, with an easily strolled boardwalk that guides visitors into the treetops for a glimpse of these cuddly creatures. And if you would like to hold one, there's always Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Brisbane, with more than 130 koalas, as well as kangaroos, platypus, dingos, wombats, echidnas and Tasmanian devils.

Kangaroos are always popular, but there is nothing better than glimpsing a joey emerging from its mother's pouch in the springtime. Southern Crossings has cultivated a list of the best places to see them in the wild, including a wildlife conservancy where a guided sunset tour (when kangaroos are most active) concludes with canapés and sparkling wine.

Australia offers countless other bucket-list worthy wildlife encounters, including:

- Walking with wombats on Tasmania's Maria Island.
- Swimming with whalesharks and humpback whales on Ningaloo Reef.
- Cruising with crocodiles on the Sampan River.
- Playing with the elusive platypus in the Healesville Sanctuary on the edge of the Yarra Valley.
- Snapping a selfie with a quokka, found on tiny Rottenest Island – just off the coast of Perth.
- Swimming with dolphins.

- Helping save the Tassie Devil at a lodge on Tasmania's Freycinet Peninsula through the Saffire Tasmanian Devil Experience.
- Diving with Great White sharks via an underwater cage in the deep waters off the southern tip of South Australia.

Each one of these amazing experiences comes dramatically to life with the help of Southern Crossings. The only difficulty will be your clients deciding which "must-haves" will be included in their dream trip itineraries.



There are five distinct species of kiwi. A favorite moment for many travelers is seeing one in the wild.

Kiwis, Alpine Parrots, Penguins, Seals and Sperm Whales Top the List of Wildlife Sightings in New Zealand

Birding is a highlight for those who make the journey to New Zealand – and tops many a birdwatchers' bucket list. The country's national bird, the kiwi, is a favorite find – this flightless, semi-nocturnal bird lays the largest egg in relation to its body size of any species of bird in the world.

[Southern Crossings New Zealand](#) can arrange for an expedition to see kiwis in the wild, something few locals have even done. Guests follow a transmitter, held by their guide, deep into the New Zealand forest to locate kiwis in their natural habitat, where they are weighed, measured and can even be held by your clients – a true treat.

The Alpine Parrot

The common kea, the world's only alpine parrot, is found in the forested and alpine regions of the South Island. This "clown of the mountain," as they're known, can solve logical puzzles to get food and will work together to achieve a common objective – many a traveler has had their backpack investigated and pulled apart when left aside, so take care where you leave your belongings!

Walking With Fiordland Crested Penguins

Penguins are a big draw and New Zealand is home to three species: the little blue penguin is the smallest in the world; the yellow-eyed penguin is the country's rarest; and the Fiordland crested penguin is arguably the planet's most beautiful, with its distinct yellow crests like giant busy eyebrows. Southern Crossings arranges for treks into the rain forested areas of Haast, Lake Moeraki, Stewart Island and Fiordland. Another stellar outing is helicoptering from

Caves and Caverns Illuminated by Glowworms

Another unique wild resident of New Zealand is the glowworm which creates bioluminescence that produce the cold blue light that blankets the ceilings of caves in New Zealand. Waitomo Caves contain some of the brightest concentrations of glowworms in the country as well as some of the most dramatic subterranean caverns and cave formations in the Southern Hemisphere. The caves and their resident glowworms can be viewed by foot or aboard a boat, while the more adventurous can black water raft through the subterranean rivers.

Sperm Whales Year-round

New Zealand waters are teeming with aquatic life and the coastal town of Kaikoura on the east coast of New Zealand's South Island is a great place to experience it. This is the only place on earth that you can see sperm whales year around, as they are semi-resident in the deep ocean trench a short boat ride from the town. From June to August migratory humpbacks can be seen and on occasion the mysterious giant of the deep, the Blue Whale. Whales can be viewed by boat, or for a bird's eye view by plane or helicopter, and the operators report a 95% success rate of sighting whales.

Frolicking With Fur Seals

Kaikoura is a great place to experience swimming with playful fur seals, as are the remote west coast beaches of the South Island – peppered with rookeries where young seal pups are reared. A mother seal leaves her young for foraging trips of up to twenty days before returning to suckle her pups.

At certain times of year a helicopter day excursion from Queenstown over the high mountain passes to the West Coast has guests surrounded by curious seal pups as all the adults are out hunting for food. A stop on a glacier on the return flight to toast absent friends or enjoy a picnic lunch is a great way to round off the experience.

Dolphin Spotting

Swimming with dolphins is another wonderful wildlife experience that can be enjoyed both in Kaikoura and in the Bay of Islands in the far north. Bottlenose, Common and Dusky dolphins are the most common, forming pods of over 1000 individuals. There are regular sightings of the rarer, endemic Hector Dolphin in the Able Tasman National Park and the Banks Peninsula.

Pilot whales and orcas are also members of the dolphin family and common in these waters. New Zealand's orcas, thought to number around 200, never leave the coastal waters of the North and South Island. They can often be seen herding large stingrays into the shallows to feed upon, even in the harbours of Auckland and Wellington, as they both support healthy population of rays.



The waters of Tonga teem with humpback whales from July through September, and it's one of the few places you can swim with them.

Swimming with Humpback Whales in the South Pacific

Southern Crossings is widely considered Oceania's region's premiere destination management company, and it's the only one that offers [travel services to the South Pacific](#) along with Australia and New Zealand.

Fringed with coral reefs, the tropical islands of the South Pacific provide an oasis of life in the vast Pacific Ocean. The waters off the island of Vavau in Tonga are teeming with humpback whales between July and September, the breeding season. During these months, Southern Crossings can arrange swimming with the whales, truly an experience of a lifetime.

Fiji's Great Astrolabe Reef is one of the world's largest ribbon barrier reefs and is the world's best scuba diving site to see soft coral. Imagine diving in 80 degree crystal blue waters, with great visibility right down to 82 feet where you can see coral bommies on the ocean floor. Multitudes of butterfly fish and angelfish dart around you along with many other species of fish and sea creatures too numerous to count.

Between May and October, when plankton is abundant, manta rays are common in Fiji waters. Swimmers enjoy lengthy encounters as the largest of the ray family is comfortable around people and sweeps back and moves slowly when feeding. For the more adventurous, Fiji offers some of the best shark diving in the world.

Green sea turtles range across the South Pacific and are regularly encountered by snorkelers and divers. French Polynesia has two species of turtle – the hawksbill and green sea turtle – and has some excellent turtle rescue and rehabilitation centers which are open to visitors.

Whether the destination is Australia, New Zealand or the South Pacific (or any combination thereof), Southern Crossings can design a one-of-a-kind wildlife experience to please the distinct tastes of your clients.

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