

# Animal Adventures

When deciding on your next big-ticket vacation, why not go all out and book into somewhere utterly wild?

*Kate Farr reports*

*Head to Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park*

**F**ew places are now so remote that they cannot be reached on a wildlife holiday, meaning there are endless exciting vacation options for those in search of a little animal magic. All the trips listed here give you the unbeatable opportunity to watch animals feeding, playing and interacting in their natural habitat. Importantly too, they are all run responsibly and respectfully, dedicated to taking as good care of the animals as they do of you.

## **Bird watching in Ecuador**

The Chocó Rainforest of north-

western Ecuador is found around three hours outside of the capital city, Quito. Recognised by the World Wildlife Fund as one of the most bio-diverse areas on the planet, the forest is home to over 900 bird species and 350 different varieties of reptile, many of which are indigenous only to this region.

In the heart of Chocó, tucked away on a 3,200-acre private cloud-forest reserve, is contemporary-chic Mashpi Lodge. This architect-designed eco-retreat offers an unparalleled perspective on the surrounding rainforest, with floor-to-ceiling glass walls transforming

each of its 22 comfortable and stylish rooms into a natural gallery. Ride the lodge's innovative sky-bikes through the forest canopy, 200 metres above the ground, for an authentic bird's-eye view of the teeming wildlife that calls this corner of the world home.

## **Gorilla tracking in Rwanda**

High in the misty mountains of Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park, you find endangered mountain gorillas in their natural habitat. Under the guidance of experienced trackers, it's possible to observe these fascinating creatures – the



*Get up close with gorillas in Rwanda*



*Track grizzly bears in Alaska*



*Spot over 900 species of bird in Ecuador*



*Sky-bike through Ecuador's Chocó Rainforest*



*Swim with stingless jellyfish in Palau*

world's largest primate – going about their daily lives, undisturbed. And there's so much more to your trek than just gorillas. Volcanoes National Park is also home to golden monkeys, hyenas, buffalos and a wide range of colourful bird species.

On the banks of picturesque Lake Kivu, in the Rwandan resort town of Gisenyi, lies Lake Kivu Serena Hotel. Cloaked in tropical gardens, this comfortable resort offers a range of options, including spacious family rooms and a spectacular pool. There's also private beach access and a water sports centre

for making the most of the lake by windsurfing, kayaking and sailing.

### **Ocean exploring in Palau**

Once in a lifetime, you might uncover one of Mother Nature's true mysteries, and a trip to the Micronesian archipelago of Palau, and its 12,000-year-old Jellyfish Lake, is certainly a bucket-list experience. Located on Eil Malk Island, this sheltered marine lake has provided the perfect conditions for a remarkable evolutionary quirk to occur. The lake's millions of golden and moon jellyfish have no natural predators, which

means they have evolved without their characteristic sting. This is a huge draw for swimmers and snorkelers wanting to get up close and personal with these mysterious creatures. Away from the jellyfish, Palau is renowned for its crystal-clear waters and fascinating World War Two shipwrecks, offering unparalleled diving.

Palau Pacific Resort is set in 64 acres of tropical garden, with a range of rooms from which to choose. However, the best of the bunch has to be the traditional over-water bungalows, which come complete with glass floors, ensuring



you don't miss a moment of tropical reef life below your feet.

## Whale watching in Alaska

A land of ice and snow, but also one of clear blue lakes and lush green mountains – for a whole new perspective on the US, pack your hiking boots and your camera and make your way to rugged Alaska. Head to the hills for a wilderness camping trip under starry skies, track grizzly bears with an expert guide, spot migrating whales from a kayak, and hike the Wolverine Ridge for exhilarating views just 20 minutes outside of the city of Anchorage.

Tutka Bay Lodge has a breathtaking location, nestled between the mountains and fjords in Kachemak Bay. Kayak the bay and you'll spot orcas, humpback whales and sea otters, entirely undisturbed by human contact. Ease your aches after a long day on the water with a visit to the lodge's on-site sauna and hot tub, before watching a jaw-dropping sunset from the boardwalk. Aside from the natural wonders, Tutka Bay is home to an acclaimed cooking school that's uniquely situated on a reclaimed World War Two troop carrier-turned crabbing boat.

## South African safari

It would be remiss to discuss wildlife holidays without including at least one safari option, and Madikwe, South Africa's fifth largest game reserve, is ideal for those hoping to see The Big Five without the Kruger crowds. Situated just south of the border with Botswana, Madikwe is teeming with all the wildlife you could hope for. There are some 66 species that include elephant, lion, leopard, rhino, zebra and kudu,



*Spot migrating whales in Alaska*



*See The Big Five in South Africa*



*South African game reserve, Madikwe*

plus over 300 varieties of bird. Aside from the spectacular animal attractions, one added benefit is the reserve's malaria-free status, making it an ideal destination for families.

Family-run Madikwe Safari Lodge brings luxury living right to the bush, with its all-suite accommodation,

private plunge pools and outdoor showers. Its Lelapa (literally translated as 'family') Lodge offers a full menu of kid-friendly activities, including children's safaris, a dedicated junior activity centre and even the opportunity to wash the 4X4s after a hard day of animal-tracking. **B**

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- Alaska – Blueflower, 3975 8193, [www.blueflower.la](http://www.blueflower.la)
- Ecuador – SPS Travel, 9830 6834
- Palau – Flight Centre Hong Kong, 2830 2899, [www.flightcentre.com.hk](http://www.flightcentre.com.hk)
- Rwanda – Lightfoot Travel, 2815 0068, [www.lightfoottravel.com](http://www.lightfoottravel.com)
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