



take a walk on the Wild Side

These unique, life-changing experiences stay with travelers long after returning home.

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**INTERNATIONAL
WILDLIFE ADVENTURES,
LOOP ADVENTURES,
NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE**

FFor many of us, our lives are filled with stressful work, hectic responsibilities, and little contact with pristine natural environments. It often takes a conscious effort to remember that life is about experiences and our days should be savored. Wildlife adventures offer an opportunity to reconnect with our inner selves, with nature, and with the animals with which we share our planet. The following trips are examples of these transforming experiences.

International Wildlife Adventures

Founded more than a decade ago and based on Vashon Island, Washington, this company specializes in photography and nature tours. Its most popular tours include the Polar Bears of Churchill; African Safaris and Wildlife of India; cruises to Antarctica, Galapagos Island, and the Amazon; and Bears and Orcas of Knight Inlet, northern British Columbia. Susan Green, co-owner of the company, is particularly enthusiastic about the Knight Inlet adventure.

Located in a remote area of glacial fjords, within one of the largest rainforests in the world, Knight Inlet Lodge is a floating lodge, accessible only by float plane. Guests can choose to see the waterfalls and glaciers of Glendale Cove and kayak into the estuary to see grizzlies and black bears picking salmon out of the stream.



They can photograph the orcas and dolphins on Johnstone Strait, hike into the rainforest to the bear stands, or fish for saltwater or freshwater fish.

The Lodge holds only 24 to 30 people, and river otters scamper around behind it. “It’s amazing to see the whole ecosystem, with the salmon coming in to spawn, and how it involves the eagles, the orcas, and everything living there,” Green says. “If the salmon weren’t there, the bears and the eagles wouldn’t be there. There aren’t many places that you see this abundance of wildlife without lots of people around.”

Loop Adventures

If your dream adventure involves fly fishing in remote territory, then the experts at Loop Adventures may be your ticket to paradise, as they were for attorney Denny Davis from Idaho. Organized by Joe Roop, proprietor of Coeur d’Alene’s Castaway Fly Shop and Loop representative, the trip to Patagonia, Argentina, included nine people. Loop is a renowned Swedish tackle company focused on developing gear and exploring fly fishing in areas previously inaccessible.

Loop Lodge is located on 300,000 acres of open, windswept plains. “When you go to rural Patagonia, you go back in time,” Davis says. “There’s no development out there.”

The sea-run brown trout they were after are large fish that spawn in fresh water, go out to sea for a few years, and then come back to the river to spawn. “It’s strenuous fishing,” Davis reports. “They’re big enough that it’s fairly common for them to break off the line.”

Davis says that he hasn’t stopped thinking about his trip. “Fishing is a calming activity,” he says. “It allows you to empty your mind of all your problems, whether it’s work related or the problems of the world. You’re down in southern Argentina, and the weight of the things you

get lambasted with on a daily basis in the news just doesn’t seem that important while you’re there.”

Norwegian Cruise Line

The Norwegian Dawn offers luxury, an intensely relaxing environment, and wildlife shore excursions in every port. In November, I went on an 11-day cruise. I hiked into the rain forest in Belize to see Mayan ruins and listen to the howler monkeys in the trees, went swimming with dolphins in Mexico, snorkeled in the Bahamas, saw huge iguanas and parrots on Grand Cayman Island, and explored a wildlife park in Honduras. The landscape, the colorful houses, and the contrast in the way life is lived far away from the urban streets I call home was astonishing, but it was the contact with dolphins, monkeys, and parrots that was most remarkable.

Roatan is a small island located 30 miles off the Caribbean coast of Honduras. From the port we took a bus to Gumbalimba Park. Crossing a long, swinging suspension bridge constructed of wooden slats and rope, my husband and I passed under trees filled with hundreds of parrots screeching in the trees.

A spider monkey dropped down from a tree and wrapped himself around my head like a hat! The white-faced capuchin monkeys live in small wooden houses on poles, while the howler monkeys roam through the trees. I got to hold a baby monkey, which was a lifelong dream.

We chose Chankanaab National Park, an ecological refuge in Cozumel, Mexico, for our dolphin encounter. The dolphins live in Chankanaab Lagoon, and, in deep water, a dolphin landed in my arms, and I held onto his fins as he swam. Being able to be so close to these intelligent, beautiful creatures was an unforgettable, joyful experience. ■