



# The World's Most Incredible Wildlife Encounters

See big animals in big places.

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(Photo: Eric Kilby/Flickr)

**N**ot everyone needs to kill a rhino, drink to excess, and write *The Green Hills of Africa* like Ernest Hemingway in order to tap into his primal connection with charismatic megafauna. Here are 10 spots around the world where the mystery, romance, and awe of wildlife is still alive and at large. We recommend keeping a friendly distance and investing in a quality camera lens.

# Black Rhino

Namibia



Black rhino (Mike Meyers)

They may have been nearly decimated by poachers back in the '80s and '90s, but Namibia's black rhino population is now thriving—the result of a heroic joint effort between the national government, locally run communal conservancies, Save the Rhino Trust, and privately owned enterprises like [Wilderness Safaris](#).

Desert Rhino Camp, which sits in the million-acre Palmwag Concession, is a vacation oasis for the likes of Paul Allen, who track the rhino on foot or via 4×4 through Kunene region's arid, wide-open spaces. The rhino isn't the only animal to thrive here. There are also healthy populations of desert-adapted elephant, Hartmann's mountain zebra, giraffe, gemsbok, springbok, kudu and big cats like lion, cheetah, and leopard. The camp itself is simple and elegant with eight Meru-style canvas tents, en-suite bathrooms, and verandas with giant views. Rates from \$488 per person, per night.

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# Brown Bear

Kodiak Island, Alaska



Kodiak Brown Bear (Kodiak Brown Bear Center)

Some people might not consider depositing themselves in the epicenter of 1.9 million-acre Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge—home to one of the highest-density brown bear populations in Alaska—a vacation. But brand-new [Kodiak Island Bear Center](#), which opens July 30 on 50-acre Camp Island in Karluk Lake on Kodiak Island, has six cabins and access to 30 miles of shoreline and countless tributaries, meaning it's a hot spot for hungry brown bears in search of salmon. From your own private deck, watch the wild kingdom unfold. World-class fishing, guided hikes and kayaking, and likely sightings of fox and bald eagle are also included. Four days, three nights; from \$2,695 per person.

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## White Whiskered Spider Monkey

Amazon, Brazil



White-whiskered spider monkey (Cristalino Jungle Lodge)

The endangered white whiskered spider monkey may be the original allure to this private 28,167-acre forest reserve bordering the Cristalino River in the southern Amazon. But the abundance of other wild things is the true seduction. The list includes, but isn't limited to, Brazilian tapir, jaguar, giant otter, white-nosed-saki monkey, red-handed howler monkey, dusky-titi monkey, and the Snethlage's marmoset. For twitchers there's also the harpy eagle, cryptic falcon, crimson-bellied parakeet, black-girdled barbet, paradise tanager, crested owl, spangled cotinga, pavonine quetzal, purple honeycreeper, curl-crested aracari, and great potoo.

At the end of the day, cool off on the 1,500-square-foot floating deck or in a private special bungalow with a hot-and-cold water plunging tub in the garden out back. Standard room, double, from \$315 per night; special bungalow, doubles, from \$420 per night.

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## Tasmanian Devil

Tasmania, Australia



Tasmanian devil (Tourism Tasmania)

Americans' collective intrigue with the Tasmanian devil may have originated from a cartoon, but the world's largest carnivorous marsupial is still a thrill to see in the wild. [King's Run](#), an 800-acre sanctuary in the northwest corner of Tasmania, has been in Geoff King's family since 1880. Now instead of holding cattle, King offers nocturnal wildlife tours that include watching the Tasmanian devil feed from the comfort of a fisherman's shack on the edge of the Southern Ocean. The lucky ones might also see an orange-bellied parrot, wallaby, wombat, or bandicoot. A personalized four-hour tour costs \$128.

Stay in nearby @ [VDL Stanley](#), a gorgeous 1843 renovated bluestone cottage that's just steps from the ocean. Splurge and reserve the King Loft Apartment, from \$260 per night.

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## Giant Panda

Wanglang Nature Reserve, China



Giant panda (Wild China Travel)

There are roughly 1,600 pandas left in the wild. Most of them live in Sichuan Province's Wanglang Nature Reserve, also home to golden monkeys and red pandas. Trek through bamboo forests tracking the pandas' routes and monitoring infrared cameras that record evidence of their existence on this nine-day [Wild China](#) adventure that uses World Wildlife Fund-trained local guides and staff.

If the wild pandas remain elusive, there's always a visit to a nearby sanctuary that breeds and studies the animal—and lets visitors take trophy snapshots. Added bonus: A tai chi lesson is thrown into the cost of the trip. \$3,930 per person.

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# Polar Bear

Nunavut, Canada



Polar bears (Alexander Kutskiy)

As the ice melts, polar bear populations are moving north, which is why Arctic Kingdom Polar Bear Expeditions built three small cabins in this area on the east coast of Hudson Bay north of Churchill, Manitoba, known as "Polar Bear Alley." In fact, the changing climate has caused a bit of a polar-bear jam: Last year, one Inuit guide saw 300 bears in the area over the course of the October-November season.

From a cozy bear-proof cabin, watch the animals mock fight, forage for food, or laze around and wait for the sea ice to freeze. Added highlights: An aerial flight in search of the 400,000 strong Quamirjuaq caribou herd and, hopefully, a glance at the shimmering green pulse of the northern lights. \$7,600 per person.

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## Snow Leopard

Ladakh, India



Snow leopard (Rinchen Wangchuk)

We're not going to guarantee a snow leopard sighting on this 15-day trek into Hemis High Altitude National Park north of the Himalayas, but it may be the last best opportunity you've got to see one of the

estimated 6,000 to 7,000 cats left on the planet. Whether or not a snow leopard is spotted, the trip is still worth it: The price tag partially goes toward the animals' conservation. Plus, you'll be trekking alongside Jigmet Dadul, one of the best snow leopard trackers in the world, camping in view of spectacular snow-capped peaks, staying in villagers' homes along the way, watching golden eagles soar, and there's still time to visit 400-year-old Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Don't expect luxury—this is remote India. And don't wait to sign up. The trip is offered only in February 2013; \$3,539.

## The Swedish Big Five

### Koster Islands, Sweden



The Swedish Big Five (Stephano Pearson)

In 2009, the Koster Islands, which sit near the border of Norway in the Skagerrak Sea, became the headquarters of Kosterhavet, Sweden's first-ever Marine National Park. Together with a conjoining Norwegian marine park, the protected area covers almost 500 square miles and is one of the last swaths of true wilderness left in Europe.

The marine life may not be massive, but the park still supports more than 6,000 species, including jellyfish, nudibranchs, sponges, oysters, countless fish, and brilliant corals. Additionally, there's Sweden's Big Five—lobster, oyster, mussel, prawns, and crayfish—all of which will likely end up on your plate during your stay.

On South Koster, the only way to explore the nearly 20-square-mile island is to hike, cycle, or swim. As for exploring underwater, the sprawling [Sydkoster Hotel Ekenas](#) can help to arrange dive tours and offers lobster and crayfish safaris that involves catching and eating your prey. Two-day lobster safari; \$530 per person.

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## Bighorn Sheep

**Yellowstone National Park, Montana**



Bighorn sheep (Tenley Thompson)

Jackson, Wyoming's [Four Seasons Resort](#) has an in-house biologist, Tenley Thompson, and naturalist, Andy Palzkill, who know where to find the most awe-inspiring wildlife in [Yellowstone National Park](#) and will lead you right to them. A perfect excursion for families, Thompson and Palzkill's half- to one-day tour in search of bighorn sheep includes their collective encyclopedic knowledge and is a subtle way to get kids psyched about the wild animals' anatomy and the area's ecology. And they do it style: The "safari" includes use of a Mercedes SUV, Swarovski spotting scopes, a National Park pass, and a gourmet picnic. Customizable through the resort's concierge; must be booked 30 days in advance; from \$300 per person.

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# Giant River Otter

Guyana



Giant river otter (John Canning)

English-speaking, with only one road in the entire country, and an unspoiled rainforest that is home to 225 mammal species and 810 bird species, Guyana is a good place for wildlife-loving Gringos to get lost for a while. Plus, it has unsung attractions, like the world's largest single-drop waterfall—Kaieteur—which plunges 741 feet, five times the height of Niagara. While it's not an easy place to travel—the jungle is hot and steamy and the most interesting places are remote—it is worth the effort.

At [Karanambu Lodge](#), owner Diane McTurk rehabilitates [orphaned giant river otters](#), brought to her by individuals from local communities, at her oasis along the Rupununi River.

Bird lovers will want to book a few days at Atta Rainforest Camp, part of Iwokrama River Lodge and Research Center. With a 505-foot-long suspension bridge that rises nearly 98 feet above the jungle floor, it's almost easy to spot green aracari, scarlet macaw, guiana toucanette and channel-bill toucan. The walkway ends at Atta Rainforest Camp, surrounded by a forest with one of the healthiest jaguar populations left on the planet. Guides also offer nighttime caiman tours. [Gray & Co](#) can customize an itinerary with these and other lodges starting from \$1,500 per person, per day.



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