

CALL OF THE WILD



From puffin-spotting in Wales to hanging out with giant guinea pigs in Brazil, the best family safaris don't have to involve lions and leopards. Gather your mini-explorers for one hell of an adventure, says Emma Gregg, who's tracked down 11 alternative safaris in spectacular destinations around the world

FROGS, FIREFLIES AND FLOWING WATERWAYS IN SARAWAK, BORNEO

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: April to August **AGE:** 4+

Your kids may struggle to point out Sarawak on the map (in case you're equally flummoxed, it's a Malaysian state on the north-west coast of the island of Borneo) but they'll easily recognise its most iconic primate, the orangutan. Visit the wildlife centre in Semenggoh Nature Reserve at feeding time and you'll see some rehabilitated orangs. But first, this trip takes you cycling in Kuching, frog-spotting in Kubah National Park and firefly-watching from a jungle boat. Following in the footsteps of great naturalists, you'll stay in unfussy accommodation, including a delightful treehouse. Like Argentina, the Galápagos and the Amazon, Sarawak helped inspire evolutionary theory in the 19th century and its biodiversity is still wonderfully rich: just the thing to fire young imaginations.

THE DETAIL Nine days from Kuching, including guided activities, accommodation and meals. From £968 (adult) / £648 (child). rickshawtravel.co.uk



Clockwise from top left: whale-watching in Canada; an orangutan hanging out in Borneo; an iguana takes in the Ecuadorian sun; a mess of iguanas pose for photos; kayak adventure in Borneo; caribou in Quebec





GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS ADVENTURE, ECUADOR

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: Year-round **AGE:** 5+

What young dinosaur devotee wouldn't love to meet some of the world's most majestic living reptiles – marine iguanas and giant tortoises? Budding Darwins and Durrells will be fascinated by the sheer variety and abundance of wildlife in the Galápagos archipelago, from blue-footed boobies to whales, dolphins and sharks. Isolated in the Pacific Ocean, it's a living laboratory for evolution and a conservation template for the rest of the world. This trip is designed specifically for families: each adult must be travelling with at least one child under 18. You'll stay in modest hotels, island-hopping between Santa Cruz, Floreana and Cristóbal by speedboat for activities with an educational element to them, such as visiting the Charles Darwin Research Station, hiking to outstanding viewpoints and snorkelling with sea lions.

THE DETAIL Eight days from Quito, including domestic flights, guided activities, hotel accommodation, breakfasts and some other meals. From £1,898 (adult) / £1,708 (child). intrepidtravel.com



IGUAZÚ FALLS AND THE PANTANAL FOR PIONEERS, BRAZIL

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: July to August **AGE:** 8+

Reckon the best place in Brazil for a wildlife adventure must be the Amazon rainforest? Insiders disagree. The Amazon may be exciting, but its animals are elusive – disappointing, perhaps, for anyone who imagines it to be an Eden-like jungle, dripping with parrots, snakes and frogs. So abandon your assumptions and head for the Pantanal instead. Well off the beaten track, this vast wetland is a paradise for toucans, monkeys, storks, alligators and giant guinea pigs. You may even see a jaguar. This private family trip also includes the Iguazú Falls. You won't just look, you'll approach by boat and on foot, close enough to get wet. Finally, there's a stay in Rio and the Emerald Coast, hanging out in hammocks, cycling on beaches, whizzing up the Sugar Loaf by cable car and climbing Corcovado in a Jeep.

THE DETAIL 15 days from Foz do Iguazú, including domestic flights, guided excursions, hotel and villa accommodation and some meals. From £4,469pp (based on a family of four sharing). journeylatinamerica.co.uk

Bottom row, from left: New Zealand's crested penguins; two intrepid explorers cool off



KIWIS, TUATARAS AND YELLOW-EYED PENGUINS, NEW ZEALAND

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: October to March **AGE:** 0+

Set aside three weeks and you can delve deep into a country's natural history. Green and easygoing, New Zealand is ripe for discovery. With a rental car, you can build your own adventure, staying in motels and lodges amid pristine rainforests and secluded beaches. By clocking up some mileage, you can search for rarities such as tuataras, the dragon-like survivors of an order of reptiles called *Rhynchocephalia*, reintroduced to Tiritiri Matangi Island in the north, and brown kiwis, found on Stewart Island in the far south. Then there are yellow-eyed penguins, which waddle along the coast near Dunedin, and keas, the world's only alpine parrots, best seen in Arthur's Pass National Park. Watch out: they're bundles of mischief.

THE DETAIL 22 days from Auckland, including car hire, ferries, excursions, accommodation and meals. From £4,369pp (based on a family of four sharing). discover-the-world.co.uk



Photos by y Marc Loisel; Sean Kennaway; Angela Dukes; Ngai Tahu Tourism; Shutterstock; Wildlife Worldwide

WOLF-TRACKING IN THE ALPS, FRANCE

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: December to April **AGE:** 11+

Who knew there were rare Italian (or Apennine) wolves on the prowl just 60km north of the busy boulevards of the Côte d'Azur? They're found in the uninhabited Alpine valleys of the Mercantour National Park on the Italian border. Created in 1979, the park is surprisingly little visited. Within 15 years of opening, some 50 wolves had made it their home and have since flourished. Your guide whisks you up to your *gîte* – a beautiful 200-year-old farmhouse where home-cooked French dinners are served – and to Parc Alpha, a sanctuary within the park, to see wolves at close quarters. On the following days you'll go walking, learning about wolves, looking for signs of their presence and maybe even spotting one.

THE DETAIL Three days from Gap, including guided activities, accommodation and meals. From £530pp (based on a family of four sharing). undiscoveredmountains.com

PUFFIN-WATCHING ON SKOMER ISLAND, WALES

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: June to July **AGE:** 4+

Hopping across to Skomer is always fun, particularly as the weather picks up, when razorbills, guillemots and gulls wheel across the sky and the headlands are carpeted in wildflowers. The short boat journey from Martin's Haven in Pembrokeshire is a mini-adventure – on the way, you might see your first puffin, skimming close to the sea's surface. Stay overnight, and the fun doubles. In the evenings, a magical peace settles. The local wildlife trust limits visitor numbers but has converted a farm building into a simple hostel, perfect for families. It's a steal, and often sells out. The busiest (but best) time is early summer, when Skomer's prime residences – its rabbit burrows – are occupied by breeding seabirds. Stroll to a puffin-watching spot and you'll see them at wonderfully close range.

THE DETAIL Self-catering accommodation and self-guided walks. From £45 (adult) / £22.50 (child) per night. Boat from Martin's Haven £11 (adult) / £7 (child) return. welshwildlife.org

MOOSE AND BEAVER SAFARI, SWEDEN

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: June to September **AGE:** 8+

Set in the heart of Sweden, a two-hour drive west from Stockholm, lies true Scandinavian wilderness. This adventure around Skinnskatteberg gives the whole family the opportunity to live out a genuine bushcraft experience in a magical, ethereal setting. By day, you'll pace the dense forest tracking the mighty moose and beavers with an expert guide, learning how to spot trails through the evergreen flora and picking out markings on trees. By night, you'll stay in traditional eco-friendly grass-roofed huts, draw water from the well and cook meals over an open fire (after chopping your own wood), before washing the dishes in the river. You couldn't be closer to nature if you tried. For explorers aged 15 and up, there's the chance of a wolf-howling tour. You'll head for an overnight excursion and learn how to call to the wolves as they hunt. Just keep a light on back at the ranch.

THE DETAIL Five days from Skinnskatteberg, including accommodation, guided tracking, use of a canoe and ingredients for most meals. £567 (adult) / £284 (child). naturetravels.co.uk



Clockwise from top left: a Parc Alpha wolf; a beaver takes a dip; getting to grips with mountain climbing; kangaroos crossing; spot moose in Finland; a kangaroo stops for a snack; sleeping close to nature in Sweden; making brilliant



WILD ADVENTURE, AUSTRALIA

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: October to July **AGE:** 10+

If you're flying your family all the way to Australia to discover its native wildlife, you might as well treat yourselves to some first-rate experiences. This 12-day holiday ticks off Bamurru Plains, the Blue Mountains, Lord Howe Island, Phillip Island and Kangaroo Island, and sees you staying in luxury hotels and lodges that feel thoroughly grown-up, but welcome older kids with a great range of facilities. On some mornings you'll go on exploration drives, boat trips and hikes, looking for wild horses, crocodiles, wallabies and dingoes. On others, you'll just relax at your villa or bush camp and watch while kangaroos bounce through the grounds. A stay at the sleek and airy Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island is a highlight.

THE DETAIL 12 days from Sydney, including domestic flights, private transfers, full-board luxury accommodation and guided activities. From £9,807pp (based on a family of four sharing). jacadatravel.com

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SWIMMING WITH DOLPHINS, THE AZORES

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: June to September **AGE:** 8+

Many an animal-lover, whatever their age, would do a triple backflip for the chance to swim with wild dolphins. But dolphin trips can be controversial, with some operators ignoring local welfare guidelines and crowding the animals, causing them stress while they're hunting or resting. It's wise, then, to choose carefully. On this holiday – just a 3.5-hour flight from the UK – you'll partake in whale watching, kayaking, canyoning and snorkelling with dolphins, as well as visiting volcanic Lake Furnas and the Terra Nostra Botanical Garden, relax in hot springs and explore a lava tunnel. Snorkelling around Vila Franca, a beautiful natural crater lagoon, on day three of the trip will be a highlight. It's a natural reserve with some fascinating native fish species such as rainbow wrasses, guinea-fowl puffers, and small red scorpionfish. They'll be talking about it for years to come.

THE DETAIL Eight days, including guided activities, accommodation, most meals, and flights from the UK. From £1,395 (adult) / £995 (child). activitiesabroad.com



WILDERNESS QUÉBEC, CANADA

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: June to September **AGE:** 9+

With surprisingly few British travellers venturing to Francophone Canada for its wildlife, this trip has cachet. Setting your own pace, you'll drive along the St Lawrence River, exploring protected areas that deserve to be better known. First, there's Le Bic, a maze of mountains, islands and coves, home to seabirds and seals, and the Matane Wildlife Reserve, deep in black bear country. Later, you'll watch caribou in Gaspésie National Park and go whale-watching by kayak near Tadoussac. During the trip, you'll hike with expert guides and stay in cosy, close-to-nature safari tents or woodland cabins where younger ones can let off steam. You'll also visit Quebec City, with plenty of time to sample its famous speciality that kids are sure to love: *poutine* (chips, cheese curds and thick-as-you-like gravy).

THE DETAIL 15 days self-drive, including guided activities, accommodation and flights from the UK. From £3,145 (adult) / £1,695 (child). wildlifeworldwide.com



FINDING BROWN BEARS, FINLAND

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL: June to September **AGE:** 9+

Summer in the Finnish hinterlands, close to the Arctic Circle, brings extra-long days and dusky nights. It can be tricky getting youngsters to sleep, so why not give in to nature and spend the night bear-watching? This tour takes you to Martinselkonen Wilds Centre, deep in an ancient *taiga* (boreal forest). Its hides are cosy, secure cabins, with eco-friendly loos, bunk beds and seats overlooking a feeding area that's visited by up to 20 different brown bears each night, including mothers with cubs. You may also see moose, roe deer and red squirrels. Guesthouse rooms are provided for those not booked on an all-nighter and the dining room offers modern local cuisine such as salmon, reindeer and forest berries.

THE DETAIL Four days including guided wildlife-watching, accommodation, meals and flights from the UK. From £1,195pp (based on a family of four sharing). naturetrek.co.uk



memories
From left:
feeding
young ones'
imagination;
dolphins put on
a show; a brown
bear in the
Finnish forest