

Wildlife adventures in warmer climes

The African safari cure

We have a tendency these days to think that we're "at the centre of things", and that there's "an explanation for everything". It's an attitude that can make for unhappiness, says Jeremy Paxman in the FT, but luckily there's an antidote. For a truly visceral reminder of "our relative lack of significance" and "the unimportance of our troubles", go on safari in Africa. Set on the northern bank of the Zambezi River in Zambia, with views across it to Zimbabwe, the fantastic camp at Chiawa is made up of just nine luxurious "tents", with en-suite bathrooms and "shady" wooden verandas. You're likely to see lions, leopards and elephant on game drives here. But still more revelatory are the early morning walks, when the air is "fragrant with the scent of mahogany flowers", and anything – "a twig, a white flower, iridescent butterflies settling on a piece of hippo dung" – might trigger "an extraordinary story from a knowledgeable ranger". There's something about it that makes you "gasp" – a sense of wonder, and of perspective, that's good for the soul. *Cazenove + Loyd* (020-7384 2332, www.cazloyd.com) has a six-night trip to Zambia from £3,600pp, excluding international flights.



Mashpi Lodge: all the options a modern ecotourist could want

more than a mile through the forest canopy, 655ft above the ground. Guests start with a ride on its predecessor, the Sky Bike, a two-person pedalo that traverses 650ft of forested gorge along a cable. Then there's the "main act", an effortless, silent journey through "one of the world's most wildlife-rich landscapes". Some of the species you'll have pointed out to you are new to science – the Dragonfly has been a boon for researchers too. And, of course, there is plenty more wildlife to see during walks on the forest floor, including birds, butterflies, frogs, and the odd snake. *Journey Latin America* (020-8600 1881, www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk) has a nine-day Ecuador trip from £3,055 per person, including flights.

Australia's island of wonders

An isolated speck of basalt in the middle of the Tasman Sea, Lord Howe Island is a natural marvel, says Steve King in *Vanity Fair* – a repository of endemic flora and fauna with a striking mountainous profile, "at once severe and serene". Its first known sighting was by Henry Lidgbird Ball, commander of HMS Supply, who claimed it for Britain in 1788 and named it after the First Lord of the Admiralty. Settlers came later, but today the island is home to only 382 people, and its birds are generally as unafraid as they were then (you may find they land on your head). Its lagoon is home to the most southerly coral reef in the world, teeming with tropical and temperate species, including "beagle-like" Galapagos sharks. And its tallest peak, Mount Gower (2,871ft), is worth climbing to see the ecosystem at its summit, the Gnarled Mossy Cloud Forest. *Capella Lodge* (www.lordhowe.com) has great views and a "superb" restaurant.

The flight of a lifetime in Ecuador

Set in the middle of a private cloud-forest reserve in Ecuador, Mashpi Lodge is an "airy, cavernous steel-and-glass building" like a Bond villain's lair, with all the Jacuzzis, spa treatments and "fine-dining" options a "top-end" modern ecotourist could want (and a room rate to match). But last year it acquired something more unusual too, says James Lowen in *The Daily Telegraph* – the Dragonfly, an aerial gondola that cost £1.5m and cruises for

Feasting in a Cornish farmhouse

A five-bedroom Georgian guesthouse set in 66 acres of Cornish countryside, Coombeshead Farm is "no bog-standard b&cb", says Tom Parker Bowles in *Condé Nast Traveller*, rather a collaboration between two remarkable chefs – Tom Adams (behind "meat-centric" London restaurant Pitt Cue) and April Bloomfield (the Birmingham-born chef-proprietor of *The Spotted Pig* and *The Breslin* in New York). Inspired by the American field-to-fork movement, they're aiming to be as self-sufficient as possible (and only the coffee is imported). Such food trends are often "hijacked" by pretentious halfwits. But with its "crackling fires and record player, and comfy sofas", Coombeshead is resolutely down-to-earth – "a proper home, albeit with an honesty bar and a great chef as your host".



Guest rooms are "small but handsome", with good linen, deep mattresses and lots of delightful details, including carafes of rhubarb gin and portions of delicious buttery fudge. And while the communal dining arrangements might provoke anxiety in some guests, the staff are so charming and the food so good you soon relax. Highlights on our menu included "blissfully chewy" sourdough bread, plump Porthilly oysters served on elderflower granita, "gloriously rustic" venison sausages and great loins from the farm's rare-breed Mangalitsa pigs. All in all, "a hands-in-the-air revelation". *Coombeshead* is open Thursday to Sunday inclusive, doubles from £175 b&cb. Five-course set dinner from £65 per person. On Sundays, there is also a three-course set lunch for £28 (01566-782009, www.coombesheadfarm.co.uk).

Skating on Sweden's lakes

Long-distance ice skating first came into fashion across northern Europe in the late 18th century, when industrially produced steel skates superseded wooden or bone ones. The German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock called it "the poetry of motion"; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said hours on the ice "awakened noble thoughts". Today, British and German waters rarely freeze solid enough, but in Scandinavia, you can still skate long distances in the wild, says Seán M. Williams in *The Guardian*. On one of *Nature Travels'* guided tours, you'll cover roughly 75 miles across vast lakes in Swedish countryside southwest of Stockholm. The forested shores seem "eerily similar" as they fly past, and you really have to concentrate. Accommodation is plain (one stop is an adult education college), and guests cook together and make their own packed lunches. But none of that detracts from the essential nature of an activity that is silent, "lonesome" and occasionally sublime. A four-day trip costs from £584pp excluding flights (01929-503080, www.naturetravels.co.uk).

