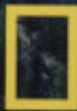


Whaling Wars at the Bottom of the World



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Got Big Game

South Africa's Phinda Private Game Reserve takes the classic safari to new sites **BY COSTAS CHRIST**

THE BASE CAMP



WHY GO?

Think "safari" and one landscape springs to mind: savanna. But at the 49,420-acre Phinda Private Game Reserve, in South Africa's eastern Maputaland region, there are six other distinct habitats in which to seek out big game—marsh, salt pan, woodland, mountain, river, and rare sand forest. The reserve features four topflight luxury lodges stationed among these environments. For a week-long trip, pick two. At the Rock Lodge, six private stone villas stand atop a 900-foot cliff face; you can watch elephants stroll along the path below. Tucked away in the northern part of the reserve among groves of Lebombo wattle trees, Vlei Lodge neighbors a large cheetah range. Both lodges feature chef-prepared meals and bottles of Pinotage wine, crafted from a grape that, like so much else, is found only here.

NEED TO KNOW

The marine diversity on the reefs of the Maputaland coast rivals that of Australia's Great Barrier Reef. A 15-minute bush flight from Phinda will take you to the top diving spots.

DAYS: Six **OUTFITTER:** www.ccafrica.com **COST:** \$3,196

THE ECOTRIP

Trekking the Amazon Rain Forest

The 4.4-million-acre Manu Biosphere Reserve, in eastern Peru's Amazon territory, has the highest concentration of bird species on the planet. It is also home to tapirs, a dozen varieties of monkeys, and the playful giant otter—an animal hunted nearly to extinction elsewhere but still thriving within the reserve. But Manu's most charismatic wildlife attraction is a garish little bird called the Andean cock-of-the-rock (below); males

famously congregate for a bizarre mating ritual—a sing-off that may be the animal kingdom's closest approximation of *American Idol*. Outfitter Adventure Life has been leading guests to this spectacle for five years and doing it in a way that gives back to the surrounding human and animal communities. "We use local guides and transportation and family-run hotels so that our Peruvian hosts can share the benefits of tourism," says the company's founder, Brian Morgan.

NEED TO KNOW

Expect high altitude (13,000 feet) in the cloud-forest portion of the reserve. Accommodations at Manu are comfortable and simple—you'll have your own bed and bath, but the electricity is on for only eight hours a day.

DAYS: Nine **OUTFITTER:** www.adventurelife.com **COST:** \$1,820



THE GUIDED TOUR

Making the Old World New Again

After two decades of pioneering itineraries in destinations such as Thailand, Nepal, and India, Australian outfitter Intrepid Travel brings its well-honed intuition for exploration to the Old World. "We wanted travelers to experience the cultural richness and natural beauty of France—but to do it with a kick," says company vice president Jacquie Burnside. The new, jam-packed nine-day excursion begins in Paris, then travels to the Loire Valley, where guests cycle between countryside châteaux. The trip includes a visit to the Grotte de Lascaux (a Cro-Magnon Sistine Chapel) and a 25-mile hike along the Chemin de Saint-Jacques pilgrim route—just as summer flowers bloom. It finishes in Provence, where the partaking of sumptuous cheeses and local wines is actively encouraged.

NEED TO KNOW

Don't expect private coaches to shuttle you around. When traveling between towns, Intrepid relies on local trains and buses. "We want guests to have as close to a real-life experience as possible; you get that by traveling with local people and doing what they do," Burnside says.

DAYS: Nine **OUTFITTER:** www.intrepidtravel.com **COST:** \$1,270

