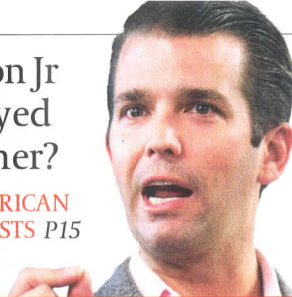


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ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS

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This week's dream: hands-on in the Amazon

For those concerned about the environment, any kind of international travel presents a dilemma, says Andrew Purvis in *The Sunday Telegraph*. It is hard to keep your footprint light. But in the Peruvian Amazon, an area ravaged by deforestation, there are ways for visitors to ease their consciences. The Inkaterra Guides Field Station, in Madre de Dios, began its life as a training centre for research scientists, but recently opened its doors to anyone eager to "experience the Amazon rainforest in an intense and scholarly way", and to give something back to this fragile part of the world.

The first time your fingers lock "around the delicate, downy throat" of a rare bird, such as the black-faced ant-thrush – "no bigger than a starling" – is just one of many "David Attenborough moments" on this trip. It feels "wrong", yet it's the approved handling method for weighing, measuring and tagging birdlife. For visitors, the mornings begin at about 5am, and are spent combing forest trails in the early light,



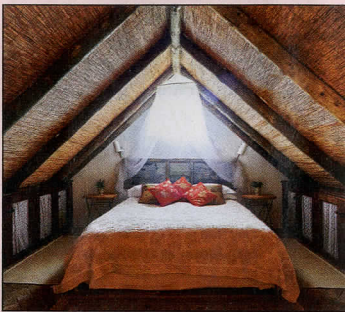
If it's wildlife expertise you're after, "this is the real deal"

before the rising sun heats the humid air to unbearable degrees. With the assistance of scientists, visitors record in notebooks "the plumage, song and scientific names" of all the birds they observe, as well as their sightings of everything from tarantulas "the size of a large crab" and jaguars to butterflies and armies of ants "with fearsome mandibles" capable of carrying a bat.

This is not a "five-star" luxury trip: accommodation is basic and electricity is rationed to a few hours a day. But if it's wildlife expertise you're after, "this is the real deal". The project also works with the human inhabitants of the Madre de Dios River basin. By

"helping communities relearn traditional forest ways", and devising new systems of sustainable agriculture, it has already protected some 37,065 acres of forest. A people who once "destroyed the forest" are now defending it. *Inkaterra* (www.inkaterra.com) can arrange customised stays at its field station. Prices start at £250 per night for four nights.

Hotel of the week



Hacienda De San Rafael, Seville, Spain

Halfway between Seville and Jerez, "but seemingly in the middle of nowhere", this "wonderfully playful" hacienda is a "beloved bolthole" for those in the know, says Tara Stevens in *Condé Nast Traveller*. Owned by Kuky Mora-Figueroa, the "former wild child" of a prominent Andalusian family, the house is a "whimsy of cobbled courtyards", fragrant gardens and "curious artworks". The best rooms are in three *chozas* – thatched cottages – with "kitchens for fixing drinks", double-height living rooms and a shared pool. Food is good: you will want to eat in. Doubles from about £220. +34 954 227 116; www.haciendadesanrafael.com.

Getting the flavour of...

Underwater art in Cancún

The Cancún Underwater Museum, in Mexico, is still growing – "organically and structurally", says Annie Ross in the *London Evening Standard*. Co-founded by the British artist Jason deCaires Taylor, it is home to nearly 500 sculptures made from a "synthetic material advantageous to coral growth": the idea is that, over time, marine life will colonise it. Visitors can see the exhibits, which lie up to 33ft under the sea, from a glass-bottomed boat, or can snorkel or scuba-dive down. The largest and most famous is *The Silent Evolution* – an "eerie" collection of life-size statues, some 470 in all, modelled on local people. The only sadness is that it is a bit like visiting Lenin's Mausoleum: you wait for ages in a creeping queue, only to be rushed past the main attraction with "barely time to appreciate the moment". *Aquaworld* (www.aquaworld.com.mx/en) can arrange private dives.

Holiday like an A-lister on Vamizi

"In 1891, the British did something right," says Helena de Bertodano in *The Times*. Having taken control of northern Mozambique, they decided its islands were of no strategic interest, so for the next 100 or so years, Vamizi, in the Quirimbas Archipelago, was left alone, its wildlife untouched. Today, its "remoteness and privacy" are its main attraction. With "sea traffic limited to only

the occasional billowing white sail of a dhow", it has a population of about 1,500 – and "luxury villas that attract a steady stream of high-profile guests". For those lucky enough to visit, days "unspool into a pattern of fabulous meals", snorkelling over pristine reefs and long walks. As to its status as a true island paradise, here's the clincher: Vamizi has no mosquitoes. *AndBeyond* (www.andbeyond.com) has a seven-night, full board stay from £7,285pp, including flights, based on four travelling.

Into the wilds... of Hertfordshire

Londoners wanting to get back to nature – but not for long – should head to the Almost Wild Campsite in the Lee Valley, near Broxbourne, says Richard Nelsson in *The Guardian*. It's less than 40 minutes by train from Liverpool Street, and yet feels properly rural (and camping facilities are basic, with a cold-water tap and composting toilets). Here, you can take part in crash courses in survival skills, foraging and bushcraft, using techniques that date back to prehistoric times. Classes include canoeing, building different types of shelter, and learning how to make an open fire – without matches – and then cook or bake on it. It's a great de-stressor – survival without the long-term commitment. For more information on the Almost Wild Campsite and surrounding area, see www.visitlee valley.org.uk.

Last-minute offers from top travel companies

Heart of London

The Park Plaza London Riverbank, overlooking the Houses of Parliament, has a 2-night stay from £187pp b&cb (2 sharing). 0800-083 4000, www.lastminute.com. Arrive 8 September.

Beachfront Dubrovnik

Enjoy a week-long stay at the Sheraton Dubrovnik Riviera Hotel, from £940pp b&cb (2 sharing), incl. Manchester flights. 020-3897 1185, www.loveholidays.com. Depart 23 August.

Guided tour of China

Take in the sights in Beijing, Suzhou, Shanghai and beyond on an 8-night tour. From £699pp b&cb, incl. guided tours and London flights. 0121-666 6338, www.travelzoo.com. Depart 3 November.

Fun in Florida

Explore Florida during a 7-night stay at the Regal Oaks Resort in Kissimmee. From £1,139pp b&cb, incl. London flights. 01858-897949, www.travelsphere.co.uk. Depart 20 November.