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**EASY ANIMAL
BREAKS**

Six of the best

Getting a first-rate wildlife sighting needn't mean giving up lazy holiday time. Stay at the right place and the creatures will practically come to you...



1 For dolphins and whales Santa Barbara Eco-Beach Resort, Azores

Why it's animal heaven: Sure, you can see them blow from a freezing coastline somewhere north — or you could combine whale-watching with winter sun. The Azores archipelago is really good for both — in the Atlantic, in the middle of a whale highway, with more than 20 types of cetacean passing through. And this hotel, right on the beach, gives you a front-row ticket to the show.

Eyes peeled! Pleasingly, Santa Barbara Eco-Beach Resort, one of the loveliest places to stay in the archipelago, is just a 30-minute drive from the airport. A sleek, *Grand Designs* fantasy, it has a fabulous sushi restaurant and an inviting infinity pool, where you can lie back with a cocktail while still keeping your eye on the sea — watching for whales to breach

the waves. You'll find cetaceans here year-round, although you're more likely to see sperm and bearded whales in the summer, and humpback and blue whales between February and April as they migrate northwards.

Don't miss: Terra Azul whale-watching (azoreswhalewatch.com; three-hour tours from £50). A half-hour drive from the hotel, it's run by enthusiastic naturalists and marine biologists, who will take you onto the water in motorised RIB boats to get nose-to-nose with these gentle giants, or to a calm spot where you can snorkel with friendly dolphins.

Book: Regent Holidays (regent-holidays.co.uk) has a four-night stay at Santa Barbara Eco-Beach Resort, from £930pp, B&B with flights and car hire.



4 For rainbows of fish

Lizard Island, Australia

Why it's animal heaven: Four words: the Great Barrier Reef. Lizard Island, a pillow of green in north Queensland's impossibly clear waters, is right amid the world's largest and most vibrant coral reef (saving you daily boat schleps). To see marine life, such as geriatric green sea turtles, anemone-dwelling clownfish or fat-lipped potato cod, you need only snap on a snorkel and walk down to the shallows.

Eyes peeled! With sea as warm and luminously inviting as it is here, you'll be swimming all day. Borrow one of the resort's complimentary motorised dinghies to take you beyond the surf, to where you can plop in and drift over alien landscapes: forests of neon-bright coral, giant clams the size of a mermaid's futon, the

sandy crop circles made by pufferfish. Scuba-diving trips will take you to deeper reefs, where white-tipped coral sharks scythe through the shadows. And if you fancy a day on dry land, take a stroll around the palm-and-bamboo-dappled grounds, where the island's namesake monitor lizards will come scampering across your path.

Don't miss: The free glass-bottomed kayak trips in Anchor Bay. Paddle out (or, if you're feeling really lazy, ask one of the staff to take you) for views of the sun-rippled sea bed — sea fans waft and tiny fish glint like coins.

Book: Austravel (austravel.com) has a 16-night holiday with seven nights, full-board, at Lizard Island, from £7,095pp, including flights, some meals and car hire.



5 For rare birds

Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica, Peru

Why it's animal heaven: Jaguars prowl through the jungle; sharp-toothed caimans float in rivers; anacondas slither in swamps. Few places capture the imagination like the Amazon rainforest. But if you don't want to rough it, check in to riverside Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica, two hours away from Cuzco. Its grounds, sprinkled with plush cabanas, are home to countless creatures, including hundreds of tropical birds.

Eyes peeled! From dawn 'til dusk, you only need hang by your water-facing cabana to hear a chorus of russet-backed oropendola and yellow-rumped cacique calls. Come late afternoon, furry agoutis (giant rodents) hop by; after dark, tarantulas creep out from tree trunks. Stray further to the on-site rainforest garden and

you'll see giant bullet ants, frogs and termites, while a climb up the canopy walkway, slung high above the ground, introduces darting howler monkeys, sleeping sloths and soaring toucans. Join a sunrise boat-ride — a 10-minute putter along the river — and you'll get the best spectacle of all: dozens of flapping parakeets congregating on nearby cliffs.

Don't miss: A visit to its sister lodge, Inkaterra Hacienda Concepción, 30 minutes along the river. You'll see red-eyed, pheasant-like hoatzins, one of the Amazon's most bizarre birds.

Book: Abercrombie & Kent (abercrombiekent.co.uk) has a nine-night Classic Peru trip, with two nights at Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica, from £3,295pp, B&B, with flights and transfers.