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THE REAL DEALS

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Nine affordable, feel-good ways to give back to the earth, from purifying streams and protecting sea-turtles to aiding local ecotourism efforts and repairing forest trails

by Kate Appleton | May 22, 2006

BELIZE: Monitor Coral Reefs

What: Examine a swath of the largest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere for signs of stress (often resulting from development). Collect data about water quality, coral reef inhabitants, and indicators of reef health; swim in delineated areas to record specific fish types; participate in evening research presentations.

Where: Blackbird Caye, Belize

Cost: \$1,500

Dates: Jul. 15 - 22, Aug. 26 - Sept. 2, Oct. 28 - Nov. 4, Nov. 11 - 18, Dec. 9 - 16, 2006

Accommodations: Beach cabanas with double occupancy and private bathrooms

Details: Expeditions limited to eight people. Only snorkeling and swimming skills are needed; training will be provided for other activities.

Contact: Oceanic Society, 800/326-7491, oceanic-society.org

BORNEO: Protect Orangutans

What: Strenuous construction work with a conservation aim: Clear paths, build posts to hinder logging and relief sites for rehabilitated orangutans. Participants visit rehabilitation centers for injured orangutans and those rescued from the pet trade and see some in the wild, but don't work directly with the animals.

Where: Tanjung Puting National Park, Indonesian Borneo

Cost: \$959

Dates: Jun. 17 - Jul. 29; Aug. 5 - Sept. 16; Sept. 23 - Nov. 4, 2006; Apr. - Nov 2007

Accommodations: Very primitive lodgings without electricity or bathrooms at the work site

Details: To participate, you must become a member of the London-based Orangutan Foundation International (£20/\$35 for a year-long membership), submit a cover letter, resume, passport photo, and a brief one-page application form. There will likely be a phone interview (the majority of applicants are accepted). Each team has 12 people and two volunteer coordinators. Food and work materials are included.

Contact: Orangutan Foundation International, orangutan.org, +44/20-7724-2912

COSTA RICA: Save the Sea Turtles

What: Comb the beach for turtle eggs, go on night patrols to measure the temperatures of nests and observe turtles, observe hatchlings, and excavate nests to determine why certain eggs never hatched.

Where: Punta Banco or San Miguel, Costa Rica

Cost: \$310 for one week; \$530 for two weeks;

\$1,730 for eight weeks; \$200 for additional weeks

Dates: Jul. 15 - Dec. 15, 2006

Accommodations: A choice of either a home stay

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or no-frills cabin; in Punta Banco there's the option to upgrade to a room at the (comparatively) luxurious [Tiskita Lodge](#), also in the rainforest, for an extra \$160 for one week

Details: Groups limited to 12 people; two onsite coordinators. July and August attract the greatest number of participants, but the best time to go is September or October during the peak of adult turtle nesting, or in November and December when the eggs hatch. Night patrols are conducted in groups of three-to-four people. Both San Miguel and Punta Banco are on the Pacific Coast. The former is a mangrove swamp area and estuary with a bit more turtle action; the latter is more of a rainforest environment with a stationhouse located in the heart of the community.

Contact: Programa Restauracion de Tortugas Marinas, +506/241-5227, tortugamarina.org

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CZECH REPUBLIC: Purify Streams

What: Help recovering streams and forests badly damaged by acid rain from coal-fired power plants. Collect water samples and measure pH levels, temperatures and oxygen readings from streams and reservoirs; catch and examine reintroduced fish; assess tree vitality and collect soil and vegetation samples; test samples in the lab.

Where: Jizera Mountains, northern Bohemia, Czech Republic

Cost: \$2,295

Dates: Jun. 3 - 17, Jun. 24 - Jul. 8, Jul. 15 - 29, 2006

Accommodations: A 200-year old farmhouse with a sauna and double rooms (two twin beds) in the village of Bedrichov village. The pension doubles as a field lab and briefing center. The first and final nights are spent in a hostel in Prague.

Details: All meals are included: breakfast at the pension, lunch in the field, and dinner at local restaurants. An optional one-year membership costs \$35 and grants a \$100 discount off any of Earthwatch's expeditions for that year. Trips are tax deductible.

Contact: Earthwatch, 800/776-0188, earthwatch.org

ECUADOR: Witness Globalization in Action

What: Take a hard, up-close look at the effects of globalization. Hike through a protected lowland cloud forest and stop at coffee cooperatives to learn about the fair trade movement and resistance to mining companies. Meet with indigenous leaders and healers in the Amazon, and visit local ecotourism projects. Visit Cotacachi, a township committed to sustainability and communal governance, and Andean communities working towards self-sustainability. Find out about the continuing court-battle against Chevron and their oil exploitation, and visit the oil pits. Discuss environmental, social, and economic rights with activists and leaders in Quito.

Where: Ecuador

Cost: \$1,400

Dates: Jul. 14 - Jul. 27, 2006

Accommodations: Double occupancy hotel rooms

Details: Two meals (breakfast and dinner) daily, transportation within Ecuador, guides, translators and reading materials are all included.

Contact: Global Exchange, 800/497-1994, globalexchange.org

IDAHO: Repair Forest Trails

What: Trail maintenance work to restore areas burnt by forest fires. Clear burned down trees; shore up existing trails by placing structures along their edges.

Where: Salmon Challis National Forest, Idaho

Cost: \$130

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REAL DEALS Argentina for Thanksgiving for \$1,629

Make Thanksgiving anything but traditional this year by celebrating in cosmopolitan Buenos Aires, followed by an excursion to Argentina's wine region.

▶ Grand Bahama Island Air/Hotel, \$248

▶ Yukon & Alaska Air/Hotel, From \$1,820

▶ Orlando Air/Hotel, 5 Nights, From \$697

▶ Western Mediterranean Cruise, \$1,529

▶ 8 Fall Follage Deals, From \$125

▶ Spain & Portugal, Air/5 Nights, \$1,529

▶ Curaçao, 7 Nights and Credits, \$435



Dates: Jun. 25 - Jul. 2, 2006

Accommodations: Primitive tent site

Details: The \$130 rate includes a one-year Society membership (for those who are already members, the trip cost is \$100). All meals are included. Participants must supply their own tents, sleeping bags, pads, and all personal gear including eating utensils. The group is limited to 12 people, and the trip is classified as "moderate to difficult."

Contact: American Hiking Society, 800/972-8608, americanhiking.org

MAINE: Spot Rare Birds

What: Early morning bird walks on the lookout for bald eagles, terns, osprey, northern gannets, warblers with their fall colors, and guillemots; boat trips to other islands such as Eastern Egg Rock, home to the southernmost colony of Atlantic puffins, and Wreck Island, known for its great blue herons; lectures and slide presentations by guest speakers.

Where: Hog Island, Maine

Cost: \$985

Dates: Sept. 10 - 16, 2006

Accommodations: Wood-frame cabins with double occupancy rooms (choice of king or two twin beds)

Details: The rate includes meals, lodgings, boat transportation to/from Hog Island, and all activities. The group is limited to 30 people with guest lecturers and six instructors.

Contact: Audubon Camp, 207/781-2330, maineaudubon.org

PUERTO RICO: Save the Rainforests

What: Hike through the mountains of an ancient tropical rainforest to measure and record the progress of mahogany and mahoe trees; monitor the impact of recently planted sites on the coqui (tiny tree frogs); participate in a new method of harvesting trees by cutting long slots through the forest and planting seedlings in the lines.

Where: Las Casas de la Selva, Patillas, Puerto Rico

Cost: \$1,095

Dates: Jun. 8 - 17, Dec. 14 - 23, Dec. 28, 2006 - Jan. 6, 2007

Accommodations: Platform tents with air mattresses; some have electricity, but power outages are common. The nearby main house has hot and cold running water, toilets, and showers.

Details: Meals are included. An optional one-year membership costs \$35 and grants a \$100 discount off any of Earthwatch's expeditions for that year. Trips are tax deductible.

Contact: Earthwatch, 800/776-0188, earthwatch.org

THAILAND: Promote Ecotourism in National Parks

What: Teach English to staff at visitors' center; create English brochures and visitor information as well as materials highlighting the importance of protecting wildlife/environment for local schools and residents; improve national park databases; survey elephants, tigers, turtles, crocodiles, and other wildlife.

Where: Various locations in Thailand: Koh Chang Marine National Park on an untouched island near Cambodia with waterfalls and dense tropical forests; Kui Buri, a park on the border of Myanmar with wild elephants, gaurs, tapirs, and tigers; Bang Sida, a park between Bangkok and the Cambodian border with a project focused on saving the Siamese crocodiles; and Phu Wua Wildlife Reserve in the northeast near the Mekong River, where there are elephant treks and home stays for participants and tourists alike.

Cost: \$470 for two weeks; \$595 for three weeks; \$710 for four weeks; \$885 for five weeks

Dates: Program is offered twice every month, beginning on the first and third weekends

Accommodations: Park cabins with electricity and private bathrooms; at the Phu Wua Reserve and other select locations there's the option to stay in the home of a Thai family. Knowledge of English and living conditions vary (western-style bathrooms and bedrooms or more modest homes of rice farmers with mattresses on the floor in lieu of beds).

Details: The trip includes a three-day orientation in Nongkai, Thailand, lodging, and all meals.

Contact: Open Mind Projects, + 66/42 413 578, openmindprojects.org

Note: *This story was accurate when it was published. Please be sure to confirm all rates and details directly with the companies in question before planning your trip.*

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