

# Top 4 Destinations for Wild Animal Encounters

11 July 2012



From camping with gators in Georgia to swimming with sharks in Costa Rica, Karen Catchpole and Eric Mohl have had face-to-face encounters with some of the most exciting wild animals on the planet. Here's where you can do the same.



STORY BY:  
**KAREN CATCHPOLE AND ERIC MOHL OF THE TRANS-AMERICAS JOURNEY**

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We've had lots of exciting encounters with some of the wildest animals on the planet during our travels through the Americas. Here's where you can do the same. Part 2.

For Part 1, read [Where to Have Heart-Pounding Wild Animal Encounters](#).

## 1. San Ignacio Lagoon, Baja, Mexico: In the wake of whales

Each year from January to March hundreds of female grey whales congregate in a handful of lagoons on the west coast of northern **Baja** to calve and feed in the warm, predator-free water. A limited number of tourists are allowed into these bays with a guide. Regulations limit the size of boats allowed in the bay to around eight metres long and prohibit guides from approaching the whales. But there's nothing to stop the curious giants from approaching the boats. A young whale nudged our boat and peeked at the strange occupants from just a couple of feet away. Its mother, easily five times the size of our boat, swam beneath us, blowing bubbles just hard enough to remind us who was boss.



## 2. Okefenokee National Wildlife Preserve, Georgia: Camping with gators

A day of canoeing through miles of serene waterways past regal cypress trees and nesting birds in the enormous [Okefenokee National Wildlife Preserve](#) brings you to one of the refuge's nine wooden camping platforms. Built mere centimetres above the alligator-filled swamp, each roomy platform is reserved for just one camping group so you'll have the place to yourself along with those gators, of course. Dozens of them bobbed all around us, their domed eyes just breaking the surface of the water, as we set up camp.

## 3. Haines, Alaska: Where the bears are

Most people head to Katmai National Park in Alaska to watch grizzlies gorge on salmon in the middle of a raging river. However, you can enjoy easier, cheaper and crowd-free bear viewing at [Chilkoot Lake State Recreation Site](#). Located just 16 kilometres northeast of the town of Haines, this stretch of the Chilkook River fills with spawning salmon, which attract grizzlies. All summer and into fall (as late as November), bears can be seen scooping up fish in the Chilkook River every evening like clockwork. We joined a half dozen locals on the bank of the river and watched bears claim a spot in the water and then get down to business, oblivious to us as long as we didn't get in the way of their pre-hibernation feeding.



## 4. Cocos Island National Park, Costa Rica: They don't call it "Shark Island" for nothing

We're almost 30 metres underwater and we're surrounded by sharks. Welcome to a typical day of diving

near [Cocos Island](#) where the water has some of the densest concentrations of sharks in the world including endangered scalloped hammerhead sharks, tiger sharks and enormous Galapagos sharks, as well as reef sharks and many types of rays.

Look for [Karen Catchpole's Adrenaline Adventures series](#) every Wednesday and Friday on Travel and Escape!

## KAREN CATCHPOLE AND ERIC MOHL OF THE TRANS-AMERICAS JOURNEY



In April of 2006, journalist Karen Catchpole and photographer Eric Mohl left their jobs and apartment in New York City and embarked on the [Trans-Americas Journey](#), a 200,000-mile working road trip through all 23 countries in North, Central and South America. After many years on the road they are still nowhere near their goal of Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America where the road literally ends. Until then, their slow and steady overland exploration of The Americas continues.

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