

The great outdoors

Get back to nature with a family-friendly break, says Aby Dunsby

@AbraDunsby

Standing on top of a cliff at sunset, marvelling at a star-filled sky, swimming in the ocean as dolphins arch above your head – there's nothing like getting closer to nature to make you appreciate the world's beauty.

Whether families want to come face to face with a lion, gawp at gushing waterfalls or wander through thick, flora-rich rainforest, Mother Nature's got plenty up her sleeve to wow nature lovers.

Clients with kids can enjoy the fun of a memorable family-friendly nature holiday together, with more escorted tour operators laying on dedicated family departures, and options that range from the tranquil to the adrenaline pumping.

▶ BEST OF BRITISH

Getting close to nature doesn't

have to take clients to remote, far-flung locations (unless they want it to), so for those who are strapped for time or cash, suggest a UK break.

Natural wonders range from glass-like lakes in the Scottish highlands and the plunging cliffs of Dorset, to verdant woodland in Kent and the lavender-strewn fields of Norfolk. There are also heaps of outdoor activities on clients' doorsteps, from nature trail walks to water sports, cycling and zip-lining.

Families can incorporate fun activities with back-to-nature relaxation on a Hoseasons escape. The holiday company has recently introduced Wanderwood breaks, where clients stay in woodland nature lodges whose locations have been chosen because of their vicinity to trails, walks and open spaces.

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The pet-friendly lodges include complimentary binoculars for birdwatching, and each comes with an outdoor hot tub perfect for evening star-gazing.

Its Fritton Lake retreats on the border between Norfolk and Suffolk offer a mix of woodland, lakeside and meadow views. Active types can head to its outdoor centre for canoe treks, paddleboarding or open-water

swimming, while those who prefer keeping their feet dry can follow lakeside trails, sign up for bushcraft sessions or get their knees grubby with some tree climbing.

For kids who love the beach, nothing says British seaside like a family caravan stay. Clients can choose camping or a caravan at one of Haven's 36 seaside holiday parks, which lay on a variety of family-focused activities including outdoor education programme Nature Rockz.

Kids can work with park rangers to build a bug hotel while learning some fascinating insect facts, then go on a bug hunt safari, or even help make a bird box. Haven has added activities to the programme this year including nature bracelet-making and habitat creations, where kids are taken on a guided tour to

Hoseasons' Woodland Park Lodges, Shropshire



LEFT: Dixie Dude Ranch, Texas

RIGHT: Ruckomechi Camp, Zimbabwe

FAR RIGHT: Thailand



Funway Holidays offers five nights at the Dixie Dude Ranch in Texas from £1,225 including flights with Virgin Atlantic from Heathrow to Dallas Fort Worth. Price based on two adults and two children departing September 14. funwayagents.co.uk

GAdventures offers an eight-day Family Land Galapagos holiday from £1,299 per adult and £1,169 per child including internal flights and all transport between destinations. International flights extra. gadventures.co.uk

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learn more about where animals make their homes.

GOING WILD

For clients who are happy to venture farther afield, Prestige Holidays recommends Canada for its wide range of activities and its appeal to children of all ages.

"From the excitement of seeing Niagara Falls up-close on a Hornblower cruise, to a float trip on the Athabasca River in Jasper to whale watching in British Columbia, there's plenty of variety to keep everyone happy," says Denise Hunn, Prestige Holidays' Canada and USA manager.

Hunn recommends adding activities to a self-drive package

to allow families more freedom. Options include a couple of nights at a lakeside property for a cabin in the woods-style adventure, plus most lodges also offer on-site activities such as horse riding, hiking and water sports.

Parents who are keen for their teens to unglue their iPhone from their hands or tear themselves away from their Xbox will find that a US ranch holiday keeps them happily occupied. Funway Holidays suggests the Dixie Dude Ranch in Texas as a place for kids to make new friends. There's a playground and ranch games to encourage interaction and allow parents some time to relax, while in the evenings



Interacting with the Asian elephants is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and children love it

entertainment comes in the form of rope shows, storytelling and toasting marshmallows on the fire. Aside from signing up to the weekly rodeos, kids who are keen to explore further can fish in the pond or go for walks around the wider ranch lands.

Australia is another obvious long-haul choice for nature lovers, with a rich, showstopping landscape that easily lends itself to outdoor exploration. Wildlife can be found at every turn, but for a really immersive experience, visit the Healesville Sanctuary in Victoria, home to kangaroos, wombats, emus and dingoes, or Cleland National Park, where clients can learn about the koala and even give one a cuddle.

Alternatively, head south to experience another side of Australia amid the lush scenery

of quieter island Tasmania, where the calm, pristine waters of the Derwent River make for a fun, family kayaking excursion. Tassie Bound Adventure Tours offers the knowledge of an expert local guide who will take clients out on the water for the day, and tailor kayaking tours to ability.

ANIMAL ATTRACTION

For many clients, getting closer to nature also entails meeting some of its weird and wonderful creatures, and a safari is a great opportunity to tick off some of the world's most majestic animals in one epic holiday. For an archetypal experience, suggest staying in tent suites to get up-close to the action and benefit from a spot of luxury.

Wilderness Safaris' Ruckomechi Camp in Zimbabwe is due to open two more family suites this month, as well as a sister camp, Little Ruckomechi, for a smaller, more intimate experience. Both come with epic, wide-angled views of the Zambezi River, and the area boasts large concentrations of buffalo and elephant, while lion, leopard and cheetah are often sighted and the grunting of the hippo can be heard all day.



LEFT: Derwent River, Australia



Bourne Leisure
SUPER EXPERT 2016

SUSAN HALL

Cluster Manager Thomas Cook, ABTA: D8329

Tell us about being a Bourne Super Expert - what does it mean and how are you supported by Bourne Leisure?

We love being a Bourne Super Expert and the support we receive is excellent! Being recognised for the level of business we do is really appreciated by all the team. We receive weekly updates on how we are tracking towards our yearly performance which means we can react accordingly and we also receive regular offers and exclusive deals. This year we were given a tablet which helps us bring the products to life with the customers and also gives us another tool to be able to book. The tablet is also useful for clients to look at the Butlin's digital family breaks guide as this has moved online. The training we receive is interactive and fun which is something Bourne is all about. And then there's other perks like invites to The Travel Brit Awards!

How important do you feel it is to promote UK Breaks?

UK breaks are incredibly popular and can be more profitable than overseas breaks. Many of our overseas clients also book a UK break as an additional holiday therefore it is really important to advertise UK breaks as some customers are unaware agents can book UK too.

What's your top 10 Bourne Leisure selling tips?

1. Always include a UK deal in your windows.
2. Contact your overseas clients to let them know you book UK - include flyers in with tickets.
3. Keep in touch with your UK database - call with offers & email works great too.
4. Hold a promotional weekend for families or a cheese & wine night for Warner.
5. Sounds daft but make sure you have brochures displayed or at least in stock.
6. Contact agency support for help if you need anything in particular.
7. Use a store Facebook page to share offers.
8. Contact local clubs/organisations you'd be surprised what groups you can attract!
9. Establish your market and promote that product - Haven is our most popular.
10. Ensure you know the product - Bourne have online training available.

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FAMILY HOLIDAYS BACK TO NATURE DESTINATIONS



LEFT:
Sea lion, Galapagos



RIGHT:
Coral spawning

BELOW:
Hideaway Beach Resort & Spa, Maldives

➔ lazing and a trip to Arenal National Park to take snaps of the active volcano and bathe in its geothermal springs. Trafalgar offers an eight-day family itinerary from £1,550.

Adventurous nature lovers will also find the Galapagos Islands hard to beat, and a guided trip will allow kids and their parents to learn about the endemic species of plants and animals that Charles Darwin discovered here. On G Adventures' Family Land Galapagos trip, clients can snorkel around Isla Lobos to

search for marine life including sea turtles and manta rays, visit Charles Darwin's research centre, and keep active with a spot of hiking or kayaking.

▶ TAKE TO THE WATER

With 71% of the world's surface covered by water, there are myriad opportunities for clients to feel at one with the powerful force of the oceans and the life that teems within them. Experiences range from the tranquil to the adventurous, whether it's snorkelling in the calm waters of Fiji or white-water rafting in Chile. Those with little ones who

are keen to kick back and enjoy the beauty of their surroundings should consider the Indian Ocean. Though the journey might be a long one, once clients have arrived



In Saint Lucia, witness coral spawning, a natural wonder that takes place right off the resort's beaches

they'll have plenty of opportunity to relax on idyllic beaches or swim in turquoise waters.

At Hideaway Beach Resort & Spa in the Maldives, guests can hop aboard the Penguin, a small semi-submarine which allows parents and their kids to explore the resort's reef system on the water, then climb the steps down to the submerged underbelly of the boat to gawp at dolphins, stingrays and sea turtles as they swim past the window.

At Per Aquum Niyama in the Maldives, families can plunge into

the ocean at sunset, when the busy diurnal fish are rushing to find shelter from the night and the nocturnal fish - including lionfish, lobster and octopus - come out to frolic. The hotel also lets families snorkel in the coral nursery to choose a 'baby' to adopt and help cultivate it as part of a coral regeneration programme.

For a rare coral experience, clients can also head to Saint Lucia where a handful of guests at luxury property Anse Chastanet will be able to witness coral spawning, an annual natural wonder that takes place right off the resort's beaches. The event, which is predicted to take place between August 24-26 this year, allows clients to snorkel or dive to view one of nature's most spectacular performances as coral release millions of packets of egg and sperm cells that appear as massive underwater clouds, turning the sea shades of white, pink and yellow. **tw**



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