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WAYFARER

One Planet. Endless Journeys.



The Great Migration: reading the Mara and the Serengeti as one landscape

- ASSAM IN THE WET: THE HARGILA STORK AND THE CLOSED SEASON AT KAZIRANGA
- INDIA'S TIGER FORESTS, AND WHY THEY CLOSE IN THE RAINS
- SABAH, BORNEO: ORANGUTANS, A RIVER AND A PLANTATION EDGE
- BEARS AT BROOKS FALLS; EUROPE'S LAST PRIMEVAL FOREST

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EDITOR'S DISPATCH

Wildlife and Wilderness

From Gitanjali Gautam, Editor-in-Chief

There is a particular kind of silence in a safari vehicle when a herd is about to cross a river and nobody knows if it will. It is a good silence. It is also a reminder that wildlife is not a performance, and that those of us who watch have a duty to behave like guests.

This month's issue is built around that idea. We have written about the best-known spectacle in Africa, the migration of wildebeest between the Serengeti and the Mara, and we have tried to say plainly what is uncertain about it: the herd size, the dates, the weather. We have also written about places that close in August, because the best advice some months is to wait.

The profiles this month are about people who protect wildlife by changing how their neighbours think: a biologist in Assam, rangers in Kenya, a scientist in Sabah. They are drawn from published reporting and marked as such. We have not met them.

Read slowly. Keep your distance. Ask your guide what the animals are doing, not just what they look like.

Read slowly. Keep your distance.

GITANJALI GAUTAM, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

- Gitanjali Gautam

Masthead

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August is when the savannah moves. Herds cross a river in the Mara, bears stand on a waterfall in Alaska, and in India the great national parks go quiet for the monsoon. This issue is about wild places and the people who keep them wild: a woman who organised thousands of neighbours around a stork, a team of young Maasai women on foot patrol, and the rules that make a good wildlife trip good for the animals.

DID YOU KNOW

Between 200,000 and 400,000 sockeye salmon jump Brooks Falls each year, the US National Park Service says.

DID YOU KNOW

The greater adjutant stork, or hargila, is the second-rarest stork in the world, according to UNEP.

DID YOU KNOW

India's 2022 tiger estimate averaged 3,682 animals, with Madhya Pradesh leading at 785.

DID YOU KNOW

Biaowiea Forest has been on the UNESCO World Heritage list since 1979.

DID YOU KNOW

The Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre in Sabah began work in 1964.

TRAVEL TIP

Book several safaris, not one. Tigers, like river crossings, cannot be scheduled.

Read slowly. Keep your distance.

GITANJALI GAUTAM, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

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RESEARCHED	Compiled from public sources; field verification pending.
PROPOSED	A commission, brief or concept - not a published story.
ILLUSTRATIVE	An example itinerary; check times and costs locally.
TEMPLATE	A format showing how offers appear; no real prices.

TRAVEL TIP

In India, many parks close in the monsoon. Check the reopening date before you book.

A trip designed around one crossing is a gamble.

FROM THE GREAT MIGRATION FEATURE

DID YOU KNOW

Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania is about 48 km long.

TRAVEL TIP

Binoculars are more useful than a long lens on safari.

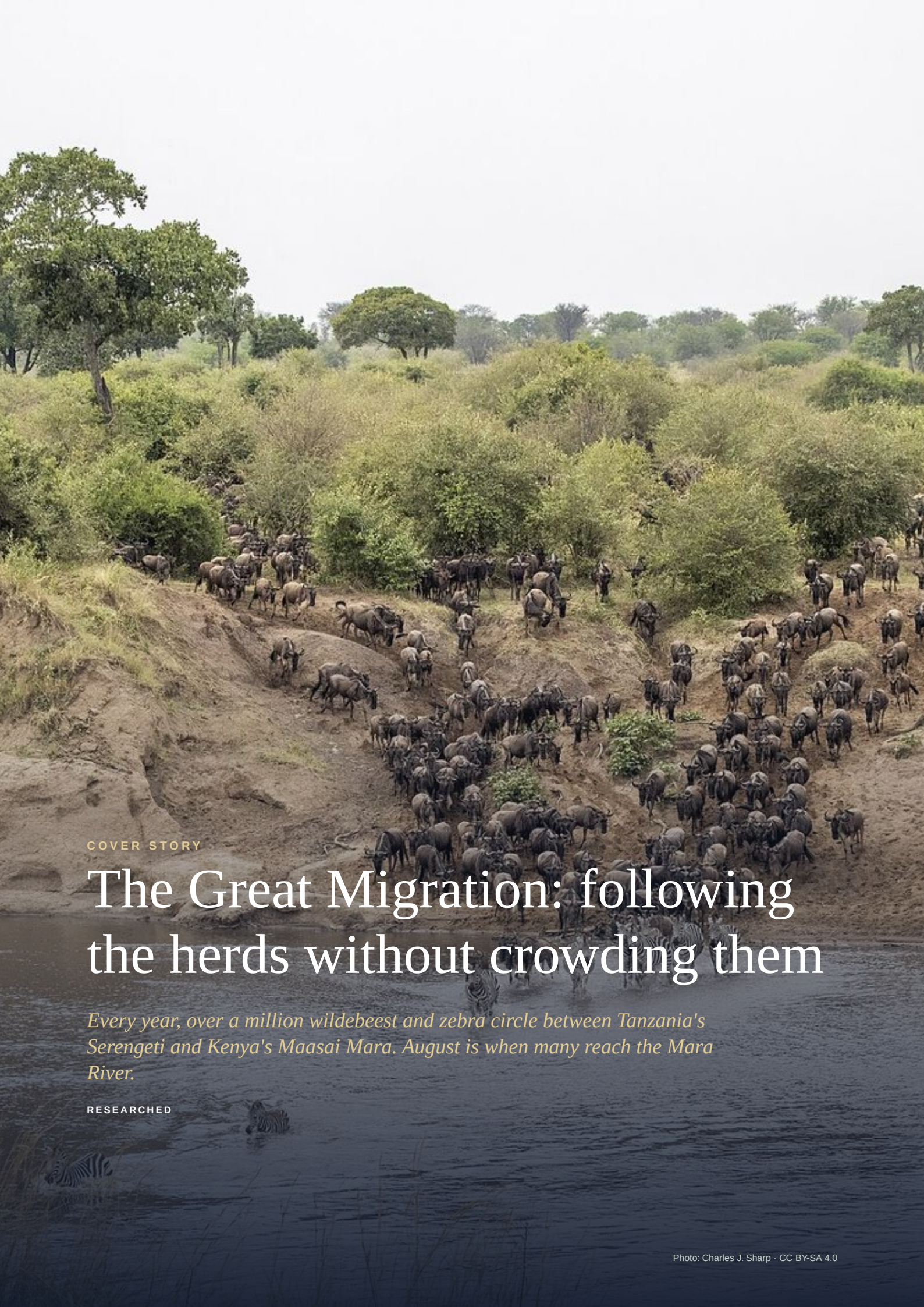
Do not ask for guarantees.

FROM THE RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL PAGE



Photo: Tisha Mukherjee · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.



COVER STORY

The Great Migration: following the herds without crowding them

Every year, over a million wildebeest and zebra circle between Tanzania's Serengeti and Kenya's Maasai Mara. August is when many reach the Mara River.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Charles J. Sharp · CC BY-SA 4.0

THE GREAT MIGRATION IS not one dramatic event but a year-long circuit. Herds of wildebeest, together with zebra and gazelle, travel a loop of roughly 600 kilometres through the Serengeti in Tanzania and the Maasai Mara in Kenya, driven by rain and the grass that follows it. Safari operators commonly put the numbers at around 1.5 million wildebeest and zebra; other estimates range from about 1.3 to 2.5 million, so treat any single figure as approximate.

The calendar, as operators describe it, runs like this. Calving peaks around February in the southern Serengeti. By July, herds begin reaching the northern Serengeti, and between roughly July and October the herds cross the Mara River, with August and September often described as the peak. By October, most animals are heading back into Tanzania. All of this shifts with the rains. If the rains are late, herds may linger in the Mara until late in October; if they are early, the best crossings can come and go before a visitor has arrived.

That uncertainty is the first thing to plan for. A river crossing cannot be scheduled. Herds gather on the bank, wait, turn back, and sometimes cross at dawn when nobody is there. A trip designed around one crossing is a gamble; a trip designed around several days in a rich ecosystem is not. Plan at least three nights in the Mara, and ask operators how they handle days when the herds are on the other side.

Crossings are also where behaviour matters most. Vehicles that crowd a river bank can push the herd away from the crossing point and make it harder for the animals to cross, and the animals pay for that. Ask your operator, before you book, what their rules are: how many vehicles at one crossing, how close, whether engines are switched off, and whether drivers will give way. A good guide will describe these rules without being asked.

Who are the neighbours? The Mara is surrounded by community-owned conservancies, where Maasai landowners lease land for tourism and limit vehicle numbers. Staying in a conservancy, or at a camp that pays conservancy fees, puts money in local hands and tends to mean fewer vehicles at each sighting. Another Kenyan ecosystem, Amboseli, has a Maasai-owned ranch patrolled by a team of women rangers; their story is in this issue's People pages.

Entry rules to check: Kenya requires an Electronic Travel Authorisation for most foreign visitors, and the official fee schedule lists a standard authorisation at USD 30 from 1 January 2025; third-party sites charge more. Citizens of East African Community states are generally exempt. Tanzania has its own visa rules and park fees; check TANAPA and the Tanzanian immigration site.

How to go well: choose small, licensed operators; avoid anyone who promises a guaranteed crossing; stay in the vehicle at crossings and speak softly; and let the herd decide.

At a glance

BEST TIME	Mara River crossings are usually between July and October, with August–September often the peak; dates depend on rain (operators' accounts — verify)
GETTING THERE	Fly to Nairobi (NBO or Wilson WIL) and then by small plane or road to the Maasai Mara
ENTRY	Kenya eTA required for most foreign visitors; official schedule lists USD 30 from 1 January 2025; EAC citizens exempt
REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS	A crossing is not guaranteed on any single day; plan at least three nights.
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — herd numbers, dates and fees come from secondary sources; confirm with operators and official sites

HOW TO REACH

Maasai Mara National Reserve (Kenya) and Serengeti National Park (Tanzania)

AIRPORT	Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Nairobi (NBO) for international arrivals; Wilson Airport, Nairobi (WIL) for scheduled flights to Mara airstrips. For the Serengeti, Kilimanjaro (JRO) or Arusha.
RAILWAY	No railway reaches the Mara; Nairobi's rail terminus serves the Mombasa line.
BY ROAD	Nairobi to the Mara is a long road journey of roughly five to six hours or more, depending on the gate and the road; flights take under an hour.
GETTING AROUND	Safari vehicles with licensed guides; conservancy camps arrange transfers.

Distances and journey times approximate; confirm with your operator. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Kenya eTA (official portal) (etakenya.go.ke); Magical Kenya (official tourism) (magicalkenya.com); Tanzania National Parks

(TANAPA) (www.tanzaniaparks.go.tz)



Photo: Pinakpani · CC BY 4.0



NORTHEAST INDIA · ASSAM

Assam in the wet: a closed park, and the stork villages that stay open

August is monsoon, and Kaziranga is closed to visitors. Here is what to do with Assam's wildlife country instead of waiting.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Diganta Talukdar · CC BY-SA 4.0

MOST VISITORS KNOW KAZIRANGA National Park as the place to see the one-horned rhinoceros. It was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985 and was declared a tiger reserve in the mid-2000s; sources differ on the exact year. It holds the world's largest population of one-horned rhinos, with more than 2,000 animals by recent counts. But in August, you cannot go there as a safari visitor. The park closes to tourists for the monsoon and reopens in the autumn; the Assam Forest Department announces the date each year, and in recent years it has been around the start of October.

The closure matters because the floods are part of the park's ecology. During high floods, as much as 70 to 80 per cent of the park can be under water for days at a time, and animals move to higher ground, including the Karbi Anglong hills to the south. They have to cross National Highway 37 to get there, which is why highway speed limits and animal corridors are a recurring conservation issue. A closed season is also a time to give the animals peace.

So what to do in Assam in August? First, rethink the trip: the wet season is lush, the Brahmaputra is wide and the crowds are small, but travel takes longer, and some roads and ferries are disrupted. Second, choose other forms of wildlife watching. In Kamrup district, near Guwahati, there are villages where the greater adjutant stork, called hargila locally, nests in village trees. The stork is among the rarest in the world, and the villages that protect it have become a model for community conservation. The People pages tell the story of the woman who organised them, Dr Purnima Devi Barman.

Third, plan for the reopening. When the park opens, bookings for jeep safaris in the central Kohora range fill early; the Western and Eastern ranges often offer quieter morning drives. Book through the official Assam Forest Department channels, and avoid operators who claim to guarantee a rhino sighting.

Guwahati, the gateway, is worth a day on its own. The Kamakhya Temple stands on Nilachal hill about 8 km from the city, the Assam State Museum is next to the railway station, and Umananda Temple sits on an island in the Brahmaputra. The river looks slow but has strong undercurrents; do not swim.

A word on the table: an Assamese meal traditionally begins with khar, an alkaline dish made with a filtrate of banana-peel ash, and the sour fish curry masor tenga is a signature dish. Try both before you leave.

At a glance

BEST TIME	Wildlife safaris are generally possible from the autumn reopening to spring; August is monsoon and Kaziranga is closed to tourists
GETTING THERE	Fly to Guwahati (GAU) or Jorhat (JRH); Kaziranga is several hours by road from either
PERMITS	Indian citizens do not need an Inner Line Permit for Assam; foreign nationals need a valid Indian visa
CLOSED SEASON	Kaziranga closes for the monsoon; confirm the reopening date with the Assam Forest Department
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — closure and reopening dates change each year; confirm before you book

HOW TO REACH

Kaziranga National Park, Golaghat and Nagaon districts, Assam

AIRPORT	Jorhat Airport (JRH), roughly 95 km away, is the nearest; Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati (GAU), is roughly 215 km away.
RAILWAY	Furkating Junction is the nearest major railhead, roughly 75 km away; Guwahati Railway Station (GHY) is the main hub.
BY ROAD	Guwahati to Kaziranga is about 5–6 hours by road on NH-715 (the road along the park's southern edge, formerly NH-37).
GETTING AROUND	Hired cars from Guwahati or Jorhat; jeeps for safaris booked at the park; auto-rickshaws and taxis in Guwahati.

Distances approximate; the park is closed to tourists during the monsoon. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Assam Tourism (official) (tourism.assam.gov.in); Incredible India: Guwahati (www.incredibleindia.gov.in); UNESCO World Heritage: Kaziranga (whc.unesco.org)



Photo: Benh LIEU SONG · CC BY-SA 3.0



INDIA · MADHYA PRADESH

India's tiger forests, and why they close in the rains

Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pench and their neighbours shut their core zones in monsoon. How to plan an honest tiger trip.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Bernard Gagnon · CC BY 4.0

INDIA IS HOME TO most of the world's wild tigers. The government's 2022 estimate, published in 2023 as the report Status of Tigers: Co-predators and Prey in India 2022, put the average at 3,682 animals, with an upper estimate of 3,925. The earlier figure of 3,167 is a minimum count based on camera-trap photographs; the larger figure is an estimate built from all the data, including signs such as pugmarks and scat. Madhya Pradesh leads the states with 785 tigers, followed by Karnataka with 563, Uttarakhand with 560 and Maharashtra with 444.

Many visitors go to the tiger reserves of central India, in particular Kanha, Bandhavgarh and Pench in Madhya Pradesh. They are good places for the purpose: forest, grassland and water within a manageable area, with trained guides and a strict system of safari zones. But the core zones are closed in the monsoon. Reports for recent years say the core areas of six Madhya Pradesh tiger reserves, including Kanha, Bandhavgarh and Pench, remain shut from 1 July to 30 September, while buffer zones stay open for tourism; the reserves reopen their core zones on 1 October, though in some years the reopening has slipped to mid-October. The reasons are practical and ecological: roads wash out, and the forest is breeding season for many animals.

That makes August an off-season for tiger safaris in this region, and you should not book a core-zone drive. If you are in the area, ask whether buffer-zone safaris are running. A buffer drive is a different experience; it is more likely to show deer, birds and the forest itself than a tiger, and a good guide will say so.

An honest tiger trip has a few rules. Book several safaris, not one; tigers are elusive, even in the best parks. Choose your zone and your vehicle with care, because reserves limit how many jeeps may enter and how long they can stay. Do not pressure the guide or the driver to chase a sighting or to stay beyond the rules; the reserve staff and the animal are better served by patience.

How to go well: use the official booking system for each reserve, carry your photo ID, listen to the guide, and visit villages and craft cooperatives around the park, where tourism income is most useful. Check the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department for current dates; they change from year to year.

At a glance

BEST TIME	Core zones typically open from October; the cooler months to spring are popular. August is monsoon closure (verify each year)
GETTING THERE	Fly to Jabalpur (JLR) for Kanha, or Nagpur (NAG) for Pench; for Bandhavgarh, Jabalpur or Khajuraho
CLOSURE	Core zones of six MP tiger reserves closed 1 July–30 September in recent years; buffer zones open at the discretion of the forest department
REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS	A tiger sighting is never guaranteed; plan several safaris.
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — closure dates and booking rules change; confirm with the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department

HOW TO REACH

Kanha, Bandhavgarh and Pench Tiger Reserves, Madhya Pradesh

AIRPORT	Jabalpur Airport (JLR) serves Kanha and Bandhavgarh; Nagpur (NAG) is the usual gateway for Pench.
RAILWAY	Jabalpur Junction, Umaria (for Bandhavgarh) and Nagpur are the main rail heads.
BY ROAD	Jabalpur to Kanha is several hours by road; Umaria to Bandhavgarh is about an hour; Nagpur to Pench is about an hour and a half.
GETTING AROUND	Hired cars; jeep safaris booked through the reserve's official system.

Distances approximate; confirm with the reserve. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Madhya Pradesh Tourism (official) (www.mptourism.com); National Tiger Conservation Authority (ntca.gov.in)



Photo: Apocru · CC BY-SA 4.0



ASIA · MALAYSIA (SABAH, BORNEO)

Sabah, Borneo: orangutans at the plantation edge

Sepilok for a first look, the Kinabatangan river for the real picture of how orangutans live now.

RESEARCHED

Photo: CEphoto, Uwe Aranas · CC BY-SA 3.0

BORNEO IS THE WORLD'S third-largest island, shared between Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei, and Sabah, at its northern tip, is the Malaysian state most visited for wildlife. Two places show the arc of orangutan conservation. One is a rehabilitation centre, the other is a river.

The Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre, run by the Sabah Wildlife Department, began in 1964 as a place to rehabilitate baby orangutans, with the aim of returning orphaned, injured or displaced animals to the wild. It lies about 25 km north of Sandakan. Opening and feeding times differ between sources, from a morning session starting at 9 am to afternoon sessions at 2 or 3 pm, and one source says the counters close earlier on Fridays, so check the department's page or call before you go. One listing gives MYR 30 for adults and MYR 15 for children, with camera fees extra; verify at the gate.

The Kinabatangan river, in eastern Sabah, tells a different story. Scientist Marc Ancrenaz, scientific director of the NGO HUTAN and co-director of the Kinabatangan Orangutan Conservation Project, has worked there for years. In a 2014 interview with Mongabay, he described the Kinabatangan floodplain as the last major river in Sabah that retains significant forest cover. A study he led, published in the journal Oryx in 2014, found that orangutans there nest in oil-palm plantations as they travel from one forest patch to another. The lesson he draws is that forest fragmentation is the main threat, and that the palm-oil industry has a role in the animals' survival.

For a visitor, that means the Kinabatangan is not a pristine jungle but a working landscape. A river cruise at dawn can show orangutans, proboscis monkeys and hornbills, and also the plantation edge. Choose lodges that employ local guides, use quiet electric or paddle boats if available, and ask what the operator does to support the forest.

Practical notes: Malaysia's immigration rules for foreign nationals, including any visa-free arrangement, are set by the Immigration Department of Malaysia; Sabah has its own checks at the state border, so carry your passport for domestic flights. We could not verify current visa rules for Indian citizens from the sources we read, so check the official site before travelling.

At a glance

BEST TIME	Wildlife is visible year-round; the drier months are generally easier for travel (verify with operators)
GETTING THERE	Fly to Kota Kinabalu (BKI) or Sandakan (SDK); Sepilok is 25 km north of Sandakan
ENTRY	Visa rules vary by nationality; check the Immigration Department of Malaysia. Sabah has its own immigration checks.
RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL	Choose locally owned lodges; keep distance from animals; no feeding
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — hours, fees and visa rules change; confirm on official sites

HOW TO REACH

Sepilok (near Sandakan) and the Kinabatangan river, Sabah, Malaysia

AIRPORT	Sandakan Airport (SDK), roughly 10–15 km from the city; Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI) is the main gateway, with domestic connections to Sandakan.
RAILWAY	Sabah has a limited rail line on the west coast; there is no train to Sandakan or the Kinabatangan.
BY ROAD	Sepilok is about 25 km north of Sandakan; Kinabatangan lodges are a few hours by road and then by boat.
GETTING AROUND	Hire car, taxis and shared vans; river lodges arrange boat transfers.

Distances approximate; check with operators. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Sabah Wildlife Department: Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre (wildlife.sabah.gov.my); Mongabay: Sabah wildlife corridors (2014) (news.mongabay.com); Sabah Tourism (official) (www.sabahtourism.com)



Photo: Charles J. Sharp · CC BY-SA 4.0



AROUND THE WORLD

Alaska: Brooks Falls and the bears that eat the river

In July and September, brown bears gather at a waterfall in Katmai National Park to catch jumping salmon. The rules for watching them are strict, and for good reason.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Christoph Strässler from Oberdorf BL, Schweiz · CC BY-SA 2.0

KATMAI NATIONAL PARK AND Preserve, in southern Alaska, was established in 1918 to protect the land around the Novarupta volcano and the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. Today it is better known for its bears. The National Park Service says Katmai has thousands of brown bears, and that between 200,000 and 400,000 sockeye salmon jump Brooks Falls each year. In July, bears often stand on the lip of the falls to catch salmon in mid-air.

Brooks Camp, near the falls, is the park's most popular destination, according to the Park Service. It is reached by air; most visitors fly by floatplane from King Salmon, which itself is reached by plane from Anchorage. Visitors should check the Park Service website for current access arrangements, any reservation or viewing-platform rules and bear-safety guidelines, which are enforced.

Timing matters. July is the classic month, when the salmon run is at its peak. Bears return to the falls in September, when they are fattening for winter. Fat Bear Week, an online contest in which the public votes for the biggest bear, is run each year by the Park Service with the media organisation Explore.org, in early autumn; its dates are announced annually.

The rules are simple and firm. Stay on the walkways and platforms, keep the distance the rangers tell you, never run, never approach and never leave food unattended. Bears at Brooks are used to people, but they are wild animals, and rangers will close paths when bears are close.

Entry: most foreign visitors need a US visa or an ESTA, depending on nationality; check the US government's official sites. Prices for flights and lodging at Brooks Camp are high, and reservations are often made many months ahead; confirm details with the Park Service before planning.



Photo: Paxson Woelber · CC BY 3.0

At a glance

BEST TIME	July for bears at the falls; September for a second gathering (NPS: bears often stand on the lip in July)
GETTING THERE	Fly to Anchorage (ANC), then to King Salmon, then floatplane to Brooks Camp
ENTRY	US visa or ESTA depending on nationality
BOOK AHEAD	Brooks Camp lodging and permits fill many months in advance (provisional advice)
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — access, fees and bear-safety rules must be confirmed with the National Park Service

HOW TO REACH

Brooks Camp, Katmai National Park, Alaska, USA

AIRPORT	Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport (ANC); King Salmon Airport (AKN) is the gateway to the park, with floatplanes to Brooks Camp.
RAILWAY	No railway reaches the park; Anchorage has a rail station on the Alaska Railroad, but the route to Katmai is by air.
BY ROAD	There is no road to Brooks Camp.
GETTING AROUND	Floatplanes and boats; walkways and viewing platforms at the falls.

Access arrangements change; confirm with the Park Service. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: National Park Service: Katmai (www.nps.gov)



Photo: Rohit Sharma · CC BY-SA 4.0



AROUND THE WORLD

Biaowiea: Europe's bison forest

A primeval forest on the Poland–Belarus border, with a guide-only strict reserve and a herd of free-roaming bison.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Charles J. Sharp · CC BY-SA 4.0

BIAOWIEA FOREST STRADDLES THE border between Poland and Belarus and has been on the UNESCO World Heritage list since 1979. It is described as Europe's last true primeval lowland forest, and is a Biosphere Reserve as well. Its best-known resident is the European bison, which survives in the wild here and in other parts of Europe because of long conservation breeding programmes.

On the Polish side, you can visit the village of Biaowiea, the Palace Park, the museum and the Bison Show Reserve, which is about 3 km west of the village and shows bison year-round. The strictly protected core of the national park can only be entered with a certified national park guide, with limited tickets each day and walks of roughly three hours. Prices, group sizes and closing days vary between sources, and we could not confirm them from the park's own site, so check before you go. Most guides suggest visiting between May and September.

The forest's population of free-roaming bison is large, with one source putting it at roughly a thousand animals; estimates differ. Seeing a wild bison on a guided walk is possible but is never guaranteed, and the bison reserve is the reliable choice.

One important caution: the forest lies along the border with Belarus, where Poland has imposed restrictions in the border area in recent years. Before you plan a visit, check the Polish government's current rules on access to the border zone and the state of the border crossing; do not rely on older guides.

How to go well: take a guided walk, stay on paths, buy from local guesthouses and craftspeople, and keep your distance from the animals.

At a glance

BEST TIME	May to September are the months most guides suggest (verify)
GETTING THERE	Warsaw is the usual gateway; Biaowiea is several hours by road from Warsaw
STRICT RESERVE	Guided walks only, with a certified national park guide; tickets are limited
BORDER	Check current Polish rules for the Belarus border zone
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — prices and schedules vary between sources; confirm on the official park site

HOW TO REACH

Biaowiea, Podlaskie, Poland

AIRPORT	Warsaw Chopin Airport (WAW) is the main gateway, roughly 3.5 to 4 hours by road; Biaystok-area connections by road or rail.
RAILWAY	Rail service to Biaowiea is limited; the nearest larger rail stations are in Biaystok and Hajnówka.
BY ROAD	From Hajnówka the road to Biaowiea is about 20 km; Warsaw is several hours away by road.
GETTING AROUND	Walking and cycling within the village; licensed guides for the strict reserve.

Distances and times approximate; check border-zone rules. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: UNESCO World Heritage: Biaowiea Forest (whc.unesco.org); Biaowiea National Park (official) (bpn.gov.pl)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

The Hargila Army: how a biologist in Assam turned neighbours into stork guardians

A wildlife biologist and thousands of village women are protecting the world's rarest stork nests.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Apotnis · CC BY-SA 4.0

The greater adjutant stork, known in Assamese as hargila, is the second-rarest stork species in the world. Fewer than 1,200 mature birds were estimated to remain in 2022, according to the United Nations Environment Programme, which is less than one per cent of what existed a century ago.

In Assam's Kamrup district, the birds nest in village trees. Wildlife biologist Dr Purnima Devi Barman began working with villagers there, and in 2007 she established the Hargila Army, an all-women conservation team. UNEP reports that it now includes more than 10,000 women, who protect nesting sites, rehabilitate injured storks that have fallen

from their nests and hold baby showers to celebrate the arrival of chicks.

In 2022, Barman received the UN's Champions of the Earth award in the Entrepreneurial Vision category, announced in Nairobi in November that year. UNEP's executive director Inger Andersen praised her work for empowering thousands of women, creating entrepreneurs and bringing the bird back from the brink. Barman has also received India's Nari Shakti Puraskar in 2017. Reporting says that since her programme began, Kamrup has become home to the largest breeding colony of greater adjutant storks in the world.

The lesson is the method: instead of treating villagers as a threat to the bird, the programme made them its guardians and gave them income and recognition. If you visit, go with a local guide, keep your distance from nesting trees, and buy from the women's cooperative if one is offered.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	UNEP Champions of the Earth story, November 2022; The Print and other Indian outlets, November 2022
PEOPLE NAMED	Dr Purnima Devi Barman; Inger Andersen (UNEP)
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting. We have not spoken to the people named.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Approach through the Hargila Army or Aaranyak, the organisation she works with; seek written consent for names, quotes and photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Kamrup district (near Guwahati), Assam

AIRPORT	Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati (GAU).
RAILWAY	Guwahati Railway Station (GHY).
BY ROAD	Villages in Kamrup are within a few hours' drive of Guwahati.
GETTING AROUND	Hire a local guide and taxi; ask the Hargila Army or the local forest office about visiting rules.

Distances approximate; confirm access with local conservation groups. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: UNEP: Champions of the Earth story (www.unep.org); ThePrint report (2022) (theprint.in)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

On foot and unarmed: the women rangers of Amboseli

Team Lioness, an all-women unit of Maasai community rangers, patrols the land around Kenya's Amboseli National Park.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Lafleursauvage · CC BY-SA 4.0

In Kenya's Amboseli region, at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, a group of Maasai women is changing what it means to be a wildlife ranger. Team Lioness, an all-women ranger unit, was described in an Associated Press report in August 2020 as eight Maasai women among 76 community-based rangers who patrol a 363,000-acre area around Amboseli National Park.

The women work on foot and unarmed, with armed government park rangers as backup. Their tasks include watching for poachers, collecting data and gathering intelligence. Patrick Papatiti, head of the community rangers for the Olgulului-Ololarashi group ranch, told the AP they were the best data-collection unit because all had high-school educations, and that the team had exceeded expectations. One ranger, Purity Amleset, then 24, described how the community initially doubted that women could do the work.

The AP report places the story in a hard period. The pandemic had halted tourism, which many local Maasai rely on for income, and some people turned to bushmeat poaching. Fourteen giraffes had been killed that year, according to the report. The rangers were also confined to camp for months.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare, which supports the programme, states that the team has since grown to 17 and was founded in 2019; as IFAW is a partner, its materials are not independent. For visitors the point is the link between tourism and conservation: when people stop travelling, local protection can collapse. If you go to

Amboseli, stay at conservancy-linked camps and ask how your fees reach the community.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	Associated Press (Tom Odula), 14 August 2020, as carried by AFAR; IFAW project pages
PEOPLE NAMED	Purity Amleset; Patrick Papatiti
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting; team size and dates differ between the AP report and IFAW.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Approach through the Olgulului-Ololarashi group ranch and IFAW; seek written consent before using names, quotes or photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Amboseli National Park and Olgulului-Ololarashi group ranch, Kajiado County, Kenya

AIRPORT	Amboseli Airstrip (ASV) for light aircraft; Nairobi's Wilson Airport (WIL) and Jomo Kenyatta (NBO) are the gateways.
RAILWAY	No railway reaches Amboseli; Nairobi and Emali are the nearest stations on the Mombasa line.
BY ROAD	Nairobi to Amboseli is roughly 4 to 5 hours by road.
GETTING AROUND	Safari vehicles with licensed guides; conservancy camps arrange transfers.

Distances approximate; check with your operator. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: AFAR / AP report (2020) (www.afar.com); IFAW: Team Lioness (www.ifaw.org)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

The scientist who counts orangutans in the plantation

Marc Ancrenaz has spent years on Sabah's Kinabatangan river, working out how orangutans live in a fragmented landscape.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Prof. Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0



Photo: CEphoto, Uwe Aranas · CC BY-SA 3.0

Marc Ancrenaz is a French scientist who leads orangutan and elephant work on the Kinabatangan river in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo. He is scientific director of the French NGO HUTAN and co-director of the Kinabatangan Orangutan Conservation Project, and an adviser to the Sabah Wildlife Department. His programme covers research, conflict mitigation, law enforcement through wildlife wardens, education and community development.

Reporting by Mongabay in 2014 quotes him describing the Kinabatangan floodplain as the last major river in Sabah that retains significant forest cover, and warning that key wildlife populations were eroding quickly. A study he led, published in Oryx in 2014, found that orangutans in the lower Kinabatangan nest in oil-palm estates as they move between forest patches. He argued that forest fragmentation is the biggest threat, and that the industry has a major role in their survival.

An earlier news report, from 2011, said the lower Kinabatangan had lost about 300 orangutans in seven years because of forest isolation and the loss of corridors. Surveys from 2004 that he cited estimated about 11,000 orangutans in Sabah, with 62 per cent living outside protected areas.

These figures are old, and no current Kinabatangan population number was available from the sources we read. For visitors the practical lesson is to treat the river as a recovering landscape. Take a guided boat trip, keep quiet, and ask your lodge how it supports forest corridors.



Photo: Udit Kapoor · CC BY-SA 4.0

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	Mongabay, June 2014; Bernama (2011) and Borneo Post (2014), as summarised; The Orangutan Project profile
PEOPLE NAMED	Marc Ancrenaz
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting; figures are historical.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Approach HUTAN and the Kinabatangan Orangutan Conservation Project for an interview, current figures and photographs, with consent.

HOW TO REACH

Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah, Malaysia

AIRPORT	Sandakan Airport (SDK) is the nearest, with connections from Kota Kinabalu (BKI).
RAILWAY	No railway serves the Kinabatangan.
BY ROAD	Lodges near Sukau are a few hours by road from Sandakan, then by boat.
GETTING AROUND	Lodge transfers and river boats.

Distances approximate; confirm with your lodge. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: The Orangutan Project: Marc Ancrenaz (theorangutanproject.org); Mongabay (2014) (news.mongabay.com)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

Sepilok, where orangutans learn to be wild again

A government-run centre in Sabah has rehabilitated orphaned orangutans since 1964. A place profile.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: CEphoto, Uwe Aranas · CC BY-SA 3.0

The Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre was started in 1964 by what is now the Sabah Wildlife Department, according to the department's own page. Its purpose is to rehabilitate orphaned, injured or displaced orangutans and return them to the wild. One conservation charity describes it as the first centre in the world dedicated to the rehabilitation of orangutans.

Today the centre also receives visitors, who watch from platforms and walkways as animals are fed in the forest. It sits about 25 km north of Sandakan. Visiting times differ across sources: a morning session from 9 am and an afternoon session from 2 pm are commonly reported, and one source says the centre closes earlier on Fridays. The department's page and its phone number are the places to confirm.

The Bornean orangutan is listed as critically endangered, so every visit is also a lesson in the species' status. Do not take food into the area, keep your voice down, and follow the rangers' instructions. Money from tickets supports the work, but the best contribution is to behave.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	Sabah Wildlife Department (official page); Orangutan Appeal UK; visitor guides — dates not stated
PEOPLE NAMED	None; this is a place and institution profile.
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases official and charity pages.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Contact the Sabah Wildlife Department for an interview, current hours and photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Sepilok, near Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia

AIRPORT	Sandakan Airport (SDK), a short drive away.
RAILWAY	No railway serves Sandakan.
BY ROAD	About 25 km north of Sandakan; a bus from Kota Kinabalu to Sandakan can drop you at the Jalan Sepilok junction, about 2.5 km from the centre.
GETTING AROUND	Taxis and shared vans from Sandakan.

Distances approximate; confirm hours. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Sabah Wildlife Department: Sepilok (wildlife.sabah.gov.my)

READER AND CONTRIBUTOR BRIEFS

Proposed commission: “My first safari, and what I learnt about distance”

A brief for a real reader or contributor. Not a published story.

PROPOSED COMMISSION · NOT A REAL STORY

What we want: a first-person account (800–1,200 words) of a wildlife encounter in India or abroad, and what you learnt about behaving around animals. One setting, one moment, one change of mind.

What we need: a true story; photographs you took, with permission to publish; a short trip recap (destination, dates, operator type, budget range with currency and date, one thing you wish you had known).

Rights: you keep your copyright; we ask for permission to publish and archive with credit. Please do not send invented or composite stories.

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

The Taste of Travel: an Assamese meal, in order

Khar first, tamul last, and a sour fish curry in between.

RESEARCHED

A traditional Assamese meal has an order. It begins with khar, a class of dishes named for the alkaline ingredient that flavours them, traditionally a filtrate of water through banana-peel ash. Next come the sour dishes, called tenga, of which masor tenga, a light sour fish curry, is a signature. The souring can come from tomato, lemon or dried mangosteen. Mashes called pitika, such as aloo pitika with mustard oil, onion and green chilli, are common, and fermented bamboo shoot gives some fish dishes their sharpness.

Rice is central. Rice cakes called pitha, made from glutinous rice, are made for occasions like Bihu. Duck, often cooked with white gourd, is a favourite. The meal does not end with a sweet course; it traditionally ends with tamul-paan, betel nut with betel leaf.

Where to try it: Guwahati's restaurants, village homestays in Assam, and Bihu festival kitchens. Tell your host if you do not eat fish or meat; many dishes can be made vegetarian with notice.

At a glance

SAY IT	Ask for khar and masor tenga by name; your host will be pleased.
ETIQUETTE	Accept what is offered; ask before photographing a meal in someone's home.
VEG-FRIENDLY?	Possible with notice; confirm in advance.

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

Heritage Without Borders: Olduvai Gorge

A 48-km ravine in the Tanzanian plains where early human ancestors were found.

RESEARCHED



Photo: Kufundisha · CC BY-SA 4.0

Olduvai Gorge, in northern Tanzania, lies in the eastern Serengeti plains within the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. It is about 48 km long. In July 1959, Mary Leakey found the skull of an early hominin at the FLK site, then named Zinjanthropus and now commonly placed in Paranthropus boisei; in May 1960, Jonathan Leakey found a jaw that became the type specimen for Homo habilis. The gorge preserves layers dated to nearly 1.9 million years ago, and the Olduvai Gorge Museum on the rim is described as one of the largest on-site museums in Africa.

Visiting it is a good complement to a Serengeti safari. Read the displays and, if you can, hire a local guide. Like any heritage site, it is not a backdrop: stay on paths, leave stones and fossils where they are, and treat the interpretations as living science, which changes with new finds.

At a glance

ETIQUETTE	Stay on marked paths; never remove stones or fossils.
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — opening hours and fees must be confirmed with the Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority.

HOW TO REACH

Olduvai Gorge, Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania

AIRPORT	Kilimanjaro International Airport (JRO) or Arusha; Seronera and Ngorongoro have airstrips.
RAILWAY	No railway; Arusha is reached by road.
BY ROAD	The gorge lies on the road between Ngorongoro Crater and the Serengeti; several hours from Arusha.
GETTING AROUND	Safari vehicles with licensed guides.

Distances approximate; confirm with your operator. Distances approximate - verify.

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

The Natural Calendar: August

What to look for, where, and how sure we are.

RESEARCHED

Mara River crossings: usually between July and October, with August and September often the peak. *Predictable window, unpredictable days.*

Perseid meteors and a total solar eclipse: the Perseids peak around 12 to 13 August, and on 12 August a total solar eclipse crosses Greenland, Iceland and northern Spain. An eclipse happens at new moon, so the Perseids are best seen that year under moonless skies. *Dates certain; clouds are not.*

Bears at Brooks Falls: July is the classic month; bears return to the falls in September. *Predictable season; numbers vary with the salmon run.*

Indian tiger and rhino parks: core zones of Madhya Pradesh's tiger reserves are closed from 1 July to 30 September; Kaziranga is closed for the monsoon. *Predictable closures; confirm each year's dates.*

Official sources: Instituto Geográfico Nacional (Spain): total solar eclipse of 12 August 2026 (astronomia.ign.es)



Photo: Extreminatethejuice · CC BY-SA 4.0

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

Responsible Travel: how to be a good guest on safari

Five habits that matter more than the vehicle you choose.

RESEARCHED

Choose operators who explain their rules. Ask how many vehicles share a sighting, how close they go and whether they will leave when animals are stressed. A river crossing is where crowding does the most harm.

Stay in the vehicle where rules require it, keep voices low, and do not stand, shout or throw food.

Spend where it counts. Community conservancies, local guides and cooperatives return more money to people who live with wildlife than a large operator does. The Amboseli rangers profiled in this issue were hit hard when tourism stopped.

Do not ask for guarantees. A good guide will tell you honestly when a sighting is unlikely.

Respect closures. In India, Kaziranga and Madhya Pradesh's tiger reserves close their core zones in the monsoon; that is part of how the animals are protected.

These are Wayfarer's own editorial guidelines, drawn from the reporting in this issue; specific park rules should be checked on official sites.

At a glance

CHECKED	10 November 2026

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

The Safari Packing and Health Checklist

A one-page list for dust, dawn drives and the long road to a camp.

PRACTICAL · EVERGREEN

1. **Documents:** passport validity, visas or electronic authorisations, printed bookings. Check each country's rules on official sites.

2. **Health:** see a doctor or travel clinic well before departure about vaccinations and malaria prevention for your route; the advice depends on where you are going.

3. **Insurance:** cover for medical care and emergency evacuation, which can be expensive in remote areas.

4. **Clothes:** neutral, layered colours; a warm layer for dawn drives; a hat; closed shoes.

5. **Sun and insects:** sun protection and an insect repellent recommended by your doctor.

6. **Optics:** binoculars are more useful than a long lens; carry a dust-proof bag.

7. **Power:** a power bank and a plug adaptor; camps often have limited charging hours.

8. **Cash:** carry small notes for tips and local purchases.

9. **Medication:** in original packaging, with a doctor's letter if needed.

10. **Etiquette:** ask before photographing people; follow your guide's instructions.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

The 24-Hour Destination: Guwahati

One illustrative day. Hours, traffic and your own pace will change it.

ILLUSTRATIVE ITINERARY · VERIFY LOCALLY

Morning: Kamakhya Temple on Nilachal hill, about 8 km from the city; go early to avoid queues, and check the temple's current rules.

Late morning: the Assam State Museum, next to the railway station, for tribal-village reconstructions and sculpture.

Lunch: an Assamese thali; ask for masor tenga.

Afternoon: a boat to Umananda Temple on Peacock Island in the Brahmaputra; do not swim, as the river has strong undercurrents.

Evening: the riverfront, then dinner.

What to skip if short on time: extra temples; do the river and one museum.

Costs and timings are illustrative and must be verified on production day.



Photo: Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

HOW TO REACH

Guwahati, Kamrup Metropolitan, Assam

AIRPORT	Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (GAU), roughly 20 km from the city centre.
RAILWAY	Guwahati Railway Station (GHY), a major junction in Northeast India.
BY ROAD	Well connected by national highways to the rest of the Northeast.
GETTING AROUND	Taxis, ride-hailing, auto-rickshaws and ferries on the Brahmaputra.

Distances approximate. Distances approximate - verify.

COMMUNITY

The Traveller's Lexicon: safari

A Swahili word that travelled.

LEXICON

Safari is a Swahili word for a journey, and it is the root of the English word for a wildlife trip. In Swahili it has the broader sense of any travel, and it is a reminder that the original meaning is about the road, not the animals.

It is the kind of word that is easy to use as a brand; it is better to use it as an invitation to travel with attention.

COMMUNITY

Travel Quiz — August

Five questions. Answers appear in next month's issue.

QUIZ

1. Which river do wildebeest cross on their journey between the Serengeti and the Maasai Mara?

2. What is the local Assamese name for the greater adjutant stork?

3. In which Indian state are Kanha, Bandhavgarh and Pench?

4. Which Alaskan park is home to Brooks Falls?

5. In which country is the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre?

Answers (for the editor's copy): Mara River · Hargila · Madhya Pradesh · Katmai National Park · Malaysia (Sabah).

COMMUNITY

Your turn: a wildlife encounter, and what you learnt

Reader engagement idea for the next issue.

READER INVITATION

Tell us about a wildlife encounter, from a bird in a city park to a tiger in a forest, and one thing you learnt. 150 words and one photograph you took. A selection will appear in a future Readers' Pages with your name and photo credit — only with your permission.

COMMUNITY

The Traveller's Bookshelf

Three books for the wild.

RECOMMENDED READING

Man-Eaters of Kumaon by Jim Corbett (1944) — a classic of Indian hunting-turned-conservation writing. Read it for the forest and the voice.

Born Free by Joy Adamson (1960) — the story of a lioness raised in Kenya and returned to the wild. Read it for the history of how people thought about wildlife.

The Tiger: A True Story of Vengeance and Survival by John Vaillant (2010) — a reported account of a tiger in the Russian Far East. Read it for the reporting.



Photo: Arunachal2007 · CC BY-SA 4.0

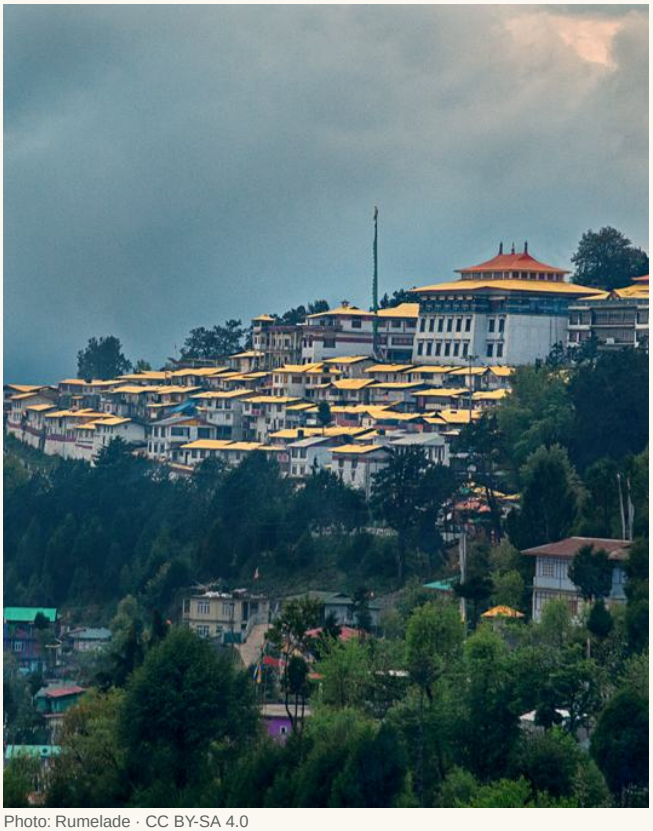


Photo: Rumelade · CC BY-SA 4.0

THE WORLD CELEBRATES

Festivals & events radar

Dates come from our festival guide and are approximate. Confirm with the official organiser before booking; lunar-calendar and annually announced events are provisional until confirmed.

NORTHEAST INDIA & INDIA

EVENT	WHERE
Onam (Thiruvonam)	Kerala
Janmashtami	Across India
Ganesh Chaturthi	Mumbai, Pune and across India
Ziro Festival of Music	Ziro Valley, Arunachal Pradesh
Mysuru Dasara	Mysuru, Karnataka
Durga Puja	Kolkata, West Bengal

ASIA

EVENT	WHERE
Mid-Autumn Festival	China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam

EUROPE

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Total solar eclipse	Greenland, Iceland and northern Spain	12 August 2026	A rare total eclipse crossing Europe, visible in Spain shortly before sunset..
Edinburgh Festival Fringe	Edinburgh, Scotland	7–31 August 2026	The world's largest open-access arts festival, with thousands of shows..
La Tomatina	Buñol, Valencia, Spain	26 August 2026	A tomato-throwing street fight held on the last Wednesday of August, with ticketed entry..
Oktoberfest	Munich, Germany	19 September–4 October 2026	The world's largest beer festival, held on the Theresienwiese..

AFRICA & THE AMERICAS

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Mara River crossings (Great Migration)	Maasai Mara, Kenya	Usually July to October; peak often August–September	Wildebeest and zebra cross the Mara River on their circuit; timing depends on rain..
Burning Man	Black Rock City, Nevada, USA	30 August–7 September 2026	A temporary desert city of art and community; the Man burns on 5 September..

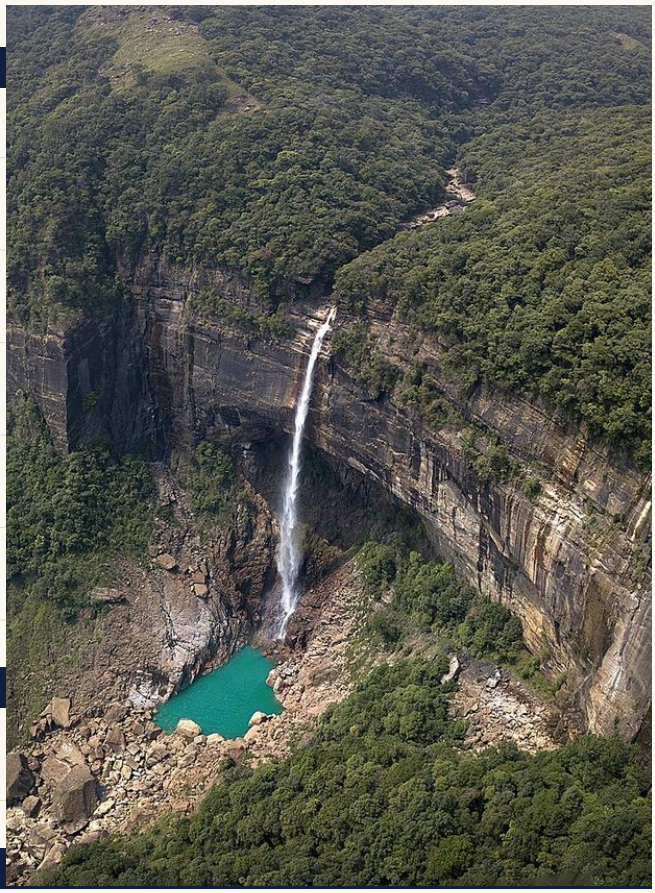


Photo: Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

OCEANIA & INTERNATIONAL

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Tasmanian Whisky Week	Tasmania, Australia	1–9 August 2026	More than 40 distilleries take part with tours and tastings..
Beaker Street Festival	Hobart, Tasmania	6–17 August 2026	A science and arts festival over two weekends, with stargazing dinners..

THE TRAVEL BRIEFING

Format example

Real developments up to 31 July 2026, each with a source. Check each one before you travel.

IndiGo flew the first commercial flights from Noida International Airport on 15 June 2026, with domestic expansion continuing into July. Source: India Aviation Newsletter, 1 July 2026 (www.acumen.aero).

Kenya's Electronic Travel Authorisation: the official fee schedule lists a standard authorisation at USD 30 from 1 January 2025. Source: Kenya State Department for Immigration (borders.etakenya.go.ke).

Core zones of six Madhya Pradesh tiger reserves (Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pench, Satpura, Panna and Sanjay-Dubri) are closed 1 July to 30 September in recent years, with buffer zones open. Source: Free Press Journal and Outlook reports (www.outlookindia.com).

Europe's Entry/Exit System has been fully operational since 10 April 2026; ETIAS is scheduled for the last quarter of 2026. Source: European Commission (home-affairs.ec.europa.eu).

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CALL	+91 70022 09781
PLAN	travaah.com/planner
CONTRIBUTE	Send a story or photograph via the contact page



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Photo: ANKAN · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

WAYFARER

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