

YOUR JOURNEY BEGINS WITH US

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VIRTUOSO LIFE



THE ADVENTURE ISSUE

Into the Open

MOROCCO IN PICTURES • HIDDEN ITALY • LUXE TENTED ESCAPES

An aerial photograph of a dense, green forest with a winding, light-brown river cutting through it. The river meanders across the frame, creating a central loop. The text 'IN THE FIELD' is overlaid in white, spaced-out letters.

IN

THE

FIELD

Adventure in full
measure: The Amazon
River from above.



ADVENTURERS' INSIGHT

Hiking, biking, dogsledding, and guiding: From Zimbabwe's plains to Puglia's hills, lives lived out of doors make for great wisdom – and great stories. Eight adventurers share their thoughts on why it's important to get outside and what we can learn from nature.

BY KIM BROWN SEELY

PETER GAVA

Professional guide, Wilderness Safaris
Base: Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe



I GREW UP
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THE GROUND.
YOU MIGHT SAY.
NATURALLY
LIKING NATURE.

I WAS BORN TO A MIXED BUSHMAN-BANTU FAMILY IN GWERU, ZIMBABWE. SO I WAS well introduced to liking nature. My mother's mother was a San Bushwoman who taught me at a very young age about collecting berries, collecting melons, catching insects like termites for food. I grew up right from the ground, you might say, naturally liking nature. It was quite inspiring learning useful skills – like, if you're going for a walk, make sure you drink water before you start walking or else, if you start drinking again as you walk, it makes you tired. These were the real skills of becoming a resilient Bushman.

My first job was as a primary school teacher in my home village where my parents finally settled, in Gokwe, Zimbabwe, but my main interest was environmental science. Researchers from the Sengwa Wildlife Institute in Gokwe's Chirisa National Park came to my parents and said, "Why don't you let him come work with us?" I didn't want to. I liked being a teacher. I said to my father, "Dad, you really want me to get eaten by those lions?" But he was so persistent that I said I'd try it on school holiday. I went to the research station and there was a gentleman who gave me some uniforms. I felt very welcomed and was so impressed by the things I saw. So I said, OK, maybe I'll try it for a month. Thirty-eight years later, I'm still here. Wilderness Safaris is very keen to conserve these otherwise threatened areas of Africa. We're all mourning together because of the pandemic, but it's going to be so exciting for people to return to Africa. We've got to teach the younger generations how to protect all this and pass it on.

(ELEPHANTS) PAULA FRENCH/GETTY IMAGES



CÉLINE COUSTEAU

Filmmaker, explorer, environmental activist

Base: The Var, Provence, France

WHAT I LEARNED GROWING UP IN A FAMILY OF EXPLORERS AND TRAVELERS is how important it is to take kids on adventures outdoors. Obviously, travel came to a screeching halt in the past year of Covid, but you can still look for nature. I have a 9-year-old son, and we'll be like, "Let's go on a rosemary-finding adventure!" And we'll crawl through the hills around the house and create things from nature, like a stone tower, and make that a whole new world. If you give kids access to nature, it becomes part of them. It doesn't have to be a formal education, just whatever you're capable of doing. In my case, I feel like I had amazing access and great privilege in travel, getting to spend time on the *Calypso* with my grandfather and in a family of travelers who were not only traveling for exploration, but to bring back stories. And then, at some point, our family legacy became about protecting the environment, so I was imbued with all of that growing up.

My first trip to the Amazon was when I was 9 years old. It profoundly changed my relationship with the world and created a connection with that place. I kept going back. That journey was all about the experiences and the senses. I got to help scientists catch piranha and study them. I walked on a sandbar in the middle of the Amazon River with thousands and thousands of little frogs. Just walking into the jungle, I had a full awareness of what it was just to sense the earth. All of that stayed very much alive in me. As an adult, you intellectualize your experiences much more; as a child, it was all about the senses. I know that my access to the outdoors has profoundly defined who I am. It shapes how I see myself in the world, how I see other people, and the ability, even if I've never been to a place, to understand my connection to it.

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LUCHO VERDESOTO

Expedition leader, Lindblad Expeditions
Base: Villanúa, Spain

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AFTER 27 YEARS GUIDING TRIPS FOR LINDBLAD AND TRAVELING THE WORLD aboard several National Geographic ships, it's still a total thrill when I see something new. People will come up to me and say, "Come on, this probably happens all the time, right?" And I'm like, "No, I've never seen this in my life!"

For instance, just a couple of years ago we encountered a seal that was all alone on an ice floe. It was a glorious afternoon; we'd been heading south toward the Antarctic Circle, when suddenly this pod of killer whales comes along. They were clearly hunting and targeted this seal on the ice floe. They started doing the kind of wave-washing you see on National Geographic, trying to wash the seal right off the ice in front of our eyes. The captain managed to put the bow of the ship maybe less than 50 meters away from the ice floe, very carefully and slowly, and all 150 of us, plus the crew, were leaning over the bow. No one was inside the ship. The whales were teaching their young how to do the washing. And then, the unexpected happened: The seal got away. There was no massacre. That's something that doesn't usually happen in nature.

Leading expeditions in the Arctic is different from Antarctica. The polar bears present a different kind of challenge, because we're getting off the ship and walking with a group and armed naturalists and guides as guards – let's just say that, as an expedition leader, I probably have a few gray hairs from those bears. Mostly, though, it's incredibly moving being in an area that's on the front line of climate change. Everyone wants to see the predator, the iconic polar bear, but it's the whole environment that's threatened. And it's a magical thing to see: The ice, it embraces so much diversity; all the seabirds, the whales – the belugas and narwhals – it's something special.

(ARCTIC) RALPH LEE HOPKINS

OUR OWN
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SURROUNDED BY
DIVERSITY.



ROMINA DA PIEVE

Chief of exploration experience, Explora
Base: Santiago, Chile



PEOPLE WILL SAY, "I CAME TO TORRES DEL PAINE OR ATACAMA BECAUSE I need to disconnect." But what they mean is, they need to connect! You need to connect with yourself and disconnect the things between you and your thoughts, between you and nature. We see that all the time. People arrive at our lodges the first day, exhausted from the journey, with *that face* – you know, the traveler's face. And then they go outside and, well, they completely change. They start to become real people.

I recommend that everybody do at least one full-day adventure when they visit the Explora properties, because when you spend the full day outside, you really get to connect with yourself. That's what I enjoy the most: seeing the transformation in people after they go out on an exploration. It doesn't matter if it's sunny, if it's raining, if it's snowing. As soon as guests step outside, they change.

One of the things I've learned from nature that I appreciate more and more is diversity. In Torres del Paine, for instance, there's a wonderful diversity of bird species. Even the ground there is diverse. It might look barren, but it's rich with microorganisms, and in the springtime the flowers are amazing. The healthiest ecosystems are the ones that are diverse, and if you think of our own lives, they're richer when we're surrounded by diversity. Diversity in nature. Diversity in people. That's why, when we form our guiding teams, we try to look for diversity. It's good not only for our guests, but for our teams.

ALEJANDRA VILLALOBOS

Hiking guide, Journey Mexico on-site tour connection
Base: Chihuahua City, Mexico



MY LOVE
OF NATURE
LED ME
TO BECOME
A GUIDE.

I'VE BEEN HIKING IN MEXICO AND THE U.S. FOR 20 YEARS AND HAVE BEEN CLOSE TO nature since I was a girl. My father was a cattleman. He had ranches on the plains of Chihuahua and, working there, I spent a lot of time hiking in the Sierra Norte. My love of nature led me to become a NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School) instructor. Now I lead hiking trips to Copper Canyon and Oaxaca. Everyone who comes to Copper Canyon is surprised: The landscape is huge, just amazingly huge. People are pretty much speechless when they learn it's four times the volume of the Grand Canyon and is actually made up of eight separate canyons. The deepest is more than 6,000 feet deep. At the top it's forest – pine and oak – and at the bottom it's subtropical.

I'll guide three-, four-, or seven-day hiking trips, and on all of them there's a lot of up and down. It's rugged terrain with different altitudes. But it's fine: We walk slowly and have mules carrying our gear. Anyone in moderately good shape can do this. The camps are very nice; we're not there to suffer. In the bottom of the canyons you'll find mango and avocado trees and papaya; you'll have these bright-green military macaws flying right over your head – it's fantastic.

The other thing I love about leading trips in Copper Canyon is the culture. There are four different ethnic groups, but the major one is the Rarámuri. They're known worldwide because they're really good barefoot runners. My favorite time to hike is September or October, since the rainy season has just passed, it's not too hot, and there's still a lot of water in the streams and little waterfalls. The fields are full of flowers – purple, yellow, white – and everything is super green.

(ALEJANDRA VILLALOBOS) BRUNO REZZA,
(COPPER CANYON) AL ARGUETA /ALAMY



CARL DIXON

Dog musher, adventurer, and co-owner,
Within the Wild lodge company
Base: Mile 198, Iditarod Trail, Southcentral Alaska

YOU LEARN
THE MAIN
RULE:
IF YOU
TIP OVER ON
THE SLED,
HANG ON!

OUR LODGE IS LOCATED AN HOUR'S FLIGHT NORTH OF ANCHORAGE. AT MILE 198 along the Iditarod Trail. If you're really interested, you can come for our four-day dog-mushing school at Winterlake Lodge, but most guests just want to try running the dogs for a day. First we hook up the dogs, then I'll drive the team, starting out with guests riding in front in the basket. You know how it is just out of the gate – the huskies are all barking and rarin' to go. There's a lot of power in even a six-dog team when they're ready to roll, and we start out *flying*. Then, after a bit of instruction, if our guests feel comfortable, they can drive the dogs, with me in the basket. It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience for folks. We have 16 sled dogs here at Winterlake, and each one has its own personality. You get to learn who the lead dogs are, the team dogs, the swing dogs. You learn how to harness the dogs. And you learn the main rule: If you tip over on the sled, hang on!

Winter is beautiful here. Once you're flying along with a team, the dogs quiet down and all you hear is snow-hushed silence and the rush of the runners. We might see moose tracks, marten tracks, lynx tracks, all kinds of birds, but of course no bears that time of year. It's interesting to learn about all the winter life here, to realize how remote we are. There are no roads. Sometimes people are a little shocked at how remote we are, but that's Alaska.



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CRISTINA MITTERMEIER

Photographer, conservationist, founder of International League of Conservation Photographers, cofounder of SeaLegacy, president of Only One Collective
Base: Qualicum Beach, British Columbia

WHEN I'M IN NATURE, I TRY TO PUT DOWN MY CAMERA EVERY ONCE IN A while so I can absorb what's happening in that moment and remember it. It's a matter of being present. As a photographer, I create photographs that capture a sliver of the reality of what's happening in a small, ephemeral moment. And then the moment changes. I feel like my photographs are a permeable membrane enabling a larger conversation between me as a photographer and the people who are looking at the images. It's a back and forth. I consider my social media account a daily dose of planetary understanding. I try to share beautiful images every day that make people feel invited into the conversation, along with inspirational text sharing a little bit of wisdom on how to be better citizens of our planet.

People often want to know what they can do to contribute. I tell them it doesn't matter what profession you have if every single day you make a commitment to being a better citizen of planet Earth. It's not just about recycling lightbulbs, it's about adopting an attitude. It's about rethinking the type of capitalism we live under in order to make it more conscious and more future oriented. In the end, it requires reestablishing a relationship with nature that recognizes the right of wildlife to exist just because. And because it's the foundation of all life on earth.

ARIEN COPPOCK

Biking guide and former pro cyclist, DuVine cycling and adventure company
Base: Arezzo, Tuscany, Italy



THERE'S AN
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CYCLING BY
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LOVE GUIDING BIKE TOURS IN PUGLIA, ITALY, IN SPRING. YOU'RE RIDING THROUGH fields full of bright-red poppies, and there are these little whitewashed *trulli* houses. But what's most impressive are the olive trees; they're hundreds of years old, and there's just this aura when you're cycling by. It's a feeling of peacefulness, and also like you could be going back in time a hundred years. You look around as you're pedaling through that landscape and think to yourself, 100 years ago this would've looked exactly the same!

In fall, my favorite place to ride is the Piemonte, or Piedmont. It's not only famous for white truffles, but produces two of the most renowned red wines in Italy, Barbaresco and Barolo. There, you're riding along the hilltops through these ancient villages without a lot of people, and the valleys sit below shrouded in fog. It's like a fairy-tale world up there. I grew up on a chicken farm in South Africa, a stone's throw from a major informal settlement, where poverty is a fact of life. Growing up in a place like that really gives you an appreciation for life and for being able to enjoy the natural world, because you know what real poverty looks like. I'm a very positive person when I'm guiding; I know how fortunate I am. VI.