



ULET IFANSASTI/GETTY IMAGES

Creatures of all stripes — but some are hard to spot

SUMATRA FROM FI

station, offering the thought as a sort of consolation prize. Removing leeches from our clothes, hats and shoes as the machete man grills fresh fish on an open fire, we're inclined to agree.

After lunch, we try a different route into the park. The five of us set off in a small boat that cruises slowly along the Way Kambas River, on glassy water the color of milky tea. Our wake barely rouses a mostly submerged freshwater crocodile. There are no muddy tiger footprints along the bank, but gibbons and long-tailed macaques spot us and move higher up into the trees.

With the help of a small laser pointer, Hari points out a gray python tucked into the hollow of a tree branch. Farther along, he spots two black-and-yellow mangrove snakes well hidden in dark undergrowth. The machete man, who's manning the motor, maneuvers the boat so close that the branches whack us in the face.

"Very bad, very poisonous," Hari says of the snakes, while again highlighting them with the laser pointer. We don't need much convincing. Wishing that we had machetes of our own, we head back to the lodge, agreeing that it's best to let sleeping snakes lie.

Among the rhinos

In the morning, Hari picks us up and promises that we'll have better luck seeing Sumatran rhinos and elephants today. We follow a bumpy dirt road into the park, driving past more muntjacs, monkeys and crested fireback pheasants on our way to the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary.

The sanctuary aids Sumatra's endangered rhinos, which are considered one of the most threatened large mammals in the world. They are the smallest rhinoceros species — and considered the most vocal — and are also known as hairy rhinos because of the hair on their

bodies. Less fortunately, Sumatra's rhinos are the only species in Asia with two horns, making them particularly attractive to poachers. They're hunted for their horns, which are ground into a powder that's used in traditional medicines and that some believe to be an aphrodisiac. Once found across Southeast Asia, Sumatran rhinos today number about 100, with only 25 to 35 at Way Kambas.

We're fortunate enough to see one of them, a young 1,500-pound female that has come to the sanctuary for breakfast. Like other rhinos here, she's being reintroduced into the wild following a period in captivity. Mostly solitary creatures, the sanctuary's rhinos each receive a large wedge of rain forest to roam in, with the wedges radiating from a large circle, at the center of which is the sanctuary itself. This rhino is particularly prized as a young female that can produce offspring. Efforts to breed Sumatran rhinos in captivity have failed.

The rhino has returned from a night in the forest to eat mounds of leafy branches. She chews her food slowly while a sanctuary staff member tells a German documentary film crew and us that rhinos eat 10 percent of their weight each day, which is certainly food for thought. Curious about the gathered crowd, the rhino ambles over closer to us. Up close, her leathery skin is indeed marked by patches of dark hair. Her eyes are lively, and she's surprisingly light on her feet. She cautiously investigates our small group and, fortunately for us, decides not to mark her territory with excrement (another Sumatran rhino characteristic). Instead, a sanctuary staffer briefly mists her with water; then, her curiosity satisfied, she lies down for a nap.

In the sweltering heat, the misting looks inviting, but we have elephants to see, and still hold out hope for tigers.

Elephant ride

A teeth-rattling ride in the SUV lands us at the Elephant Conservation Center.



ASSOCIATED PRESS



HUGH BIGGAR

Welcome to the jungle: The Indonesian island of Sumatra is one of two places in the world where elephants, rhinos and tigers still coexist. At Way Kambas National Park, Satwa Elephant Eco-lodge (occasionally visited by Sumatra hens, above) puts guests in prime viewing position.

Along the way we encounter a few motor scooters that are nearly obscured by piles of branches, presumably used to feed the rhinos, heaped behind the drivers. We also pass lush forest and small patches of land cleared for farming, some marked by tall wooden platforms.

Hari informs us that the farmers use these platforms to keep watch over the fields at night to make sure that the elephants don't trample their crops. Like the rhinos and the tigers, Sumatra's elephants have had their troubles. They are critically endangered, with fewer than 3,000 Sumatran elephants remain-



LARIS KARKLIS/THE WASHINGTON POST

DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Multiple airlines offer one-stop flights from Washington Dulles to Jakarta, Indonesia. From Jakarta, Lion Air offers flights to Bandar Lampung, Sumatra, for \$70 round-trip. At Bandar Lampung, Satwa Elephant Eco-lodge will pick you up.

WHERE TO STAY AND EAT

Satwa Elephant Eco-lodge
 Way Kambas National Park
 011-62-361-74-74-205
satwaecolodge.com

Basic but comfortable rooms. No air conditioning. Rates are negotiable depending on the type of tour you want to arrange. For a two-night stay, plus airport pickup and a guide, we paid about \$300 apiece.

Breakfast, dinner and beverages are provided in an open-air dining room. There are several small kiosks within walking distance in the neighboring village where you can purchase snacks and drinks.

WHAT TO DO

Way Kambas National Park offers numerous options for hiking, bird-watching and wildlife viewing. Some wildlife, such as tigers, is especially hard to see. Be sure to visit the Sumatra Rhino Sanctuary and the Elephant Conservation Center.

INFORMATION

www.indonesia.travel

—H.B.

ing, about 200 of them in the Way Kambas park.

The clearing of forests for palm oil, illegal coffee cultivation and timber has dramatically shrunk the amount of open space available to the elephants, making them more likely to run into people who see them as a threat, particularly to crops. Poachers in search of elephant tusks, which are valued in the ivory trade, also use the crude roads cut into the forest to support the illicit farming and logging.

The elephant center aims to mitigate some of these issues and help elephants that have been injured by run-ins with humans. This year, it expects to open Indonesia's first elephant hospital. Heather and I tour the center's low-slung bungalows and let a baby elephant reach into our backpacks and pockets with its long trunk to consume our stash of bananas.

Then we climb aboard two resident elephants to explore farther afield. Our elephant drivers, or mahouts, guide us along a red dirt track, across swampy water and onto a grassy plain. In the distance, we can see pockets of grazing wild elephants.

"Any tigers here?" I ask the elephant driver, our elephants' ears flapping as we push through high bushes.

"Maybe in the past you see droppings," he says, pointing to the ground, "but now not too much."

After an hour, somewhat saddle-sore from the ride, we head back to the elephant center, where the call to prayer from the mosque fills the air.

That night at the eco-lodge, my sister and I drink warm beer and toast our good fortune at seeing the elephants, rhino and other rare wildlife. A small cat wanders from table to table hustling scraps, and we agree that it will have to do for our tiger of Sumatra.

I head to the kitchen for more beer and stop in front of two white boards in the dining room. A long list of local wildlife covers one. On the other is a rough map of the area on which visitors have written in the animals they spotted. Some I wished I had seen, such as the colorful sun bear; others, like the spitting cobra, I'm glad to have avoided. And then I see it.

Near the eco-lodge, someone had written: "At 6 p.m., a tiger crossed the road 3m in front of motor bike."

Finally, there it was. A Sumatran tiger sighting, one small sign of an all-but-gone ghost cat, tellingly written in not-so-permanent marker.

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WHAT'S THE DEAL?

This week's best travel bargains around the globe.

LAND

● Rosalie Bay Resort, on the Caribbean island of **Dominica**, is offering **33 percent off** its rates during **turtle-nesting season**. Rate starts at \$168 per night (a savings of \$99) for stays through Sept. 15, and \$150 per night (a savings of \$90) for stays Sept. 16-Oct. 31. Add 20 percent tax and resort fee. Deal includes continental breakfast, yoga classes, WiFi, nature hikes and visits to beaches where sea turtles nest and hatch. Based on availability. Info: 877-732-2864, www.rosaliebay.com.

● Book five consecutive nights in July and **save up to 40 percent** at any of three **Nantucket** properties. A five-night island vacation starts at \$1,180 for the Jared Coffin House and from \$2,500 for White Elephant Village or the Wauwinet. Valid on stays July 6-24. Add about 12 percent taxes. Light breakfast is included. Typically, nightly rates start at \$850 for the Wauwinet, \$300 for Jared Coffin and \$650 for the White Elephant. Info: 800-475-2637, www.nantucketisland.com

resorts.com.

● With AndBeyond, a luxury travel company that owns African safari lodges, **save more than \$400** on its **Black Spots and Beach Balls** package in **South Africa**. The deal starts at \$3,202 per person double (a savings of \$427) and includes four nights at the private Phinda Mountain Lodge, plus twice-a-day game drives; four nights at the Oyster Box in Umhlanga, with curry buffet; ground transport and transfers; flight from Johannesburg to the game reserve; and taxes. In addition, children younger than age 6 stay for free at all AndBeyond lodges, and kids ages 6 to 16 pay half price. For lowest rate, travel May 1-July 14. Info: 888-882-3742, www.andbeyond.com.

SEA

● **Save up to 43 percent** on several Hurtigruten voyages to **Greenland**. The 12-night **Glaciers and Ice: Southern Fjords and Disko Bay** itinerary starts at \$5,925 per person double for June departures from Reykjavik, a savings of \$3,989. The cruise includes 11 nights aboard the 256-passenger MS Fram expedition ship; shore excursions;

chartered flight from the cruise's termination in Kangerlussuaq, Greenland, to Copenhagen; one night at the Radisson Blu Scandinavia Hotel in Copenhagen; and port charges. Use promo code GTY10. Info: 866-552-0371, www.hurtigruten.us.



BIGSTOCK

Czech out the Charles Bridge: Great Value Vacations is offering a discount on a tour that includes Prague.

AIR

● Air Tahiti Nui is offering a sale on nonstop flights from **Los Angeles to Papeete, Tahiti**. Round-trip flight is **\$998**, including taxes, for travel **June 1-July 17** and **Aug. 17-31**. Fare is typically about \$1,300. Air from Washington to Los Angeles, purchased separately, starts at about \$380. Book by April 21. Info: 877-824-4846, www.airtahitiniui-usa.com/paradisefound.

PACKAGE

● Great Value Vacations is offering **savings of 15 percent** on its **Prague, Vienna and Budapest** tour. The discounted price starts at \$2,408 per person double for Saturday and Sunday departures Aug. 24 through Sept. 28, a savings of about \$361. Package includes round-trip airfare from Washington Dulles to Munich; eight nights' lodging in Munich, Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Salzburg, Austria; daily breakfast and two dinners; land transportation via motorcoach; several sightseeing tours; airport transfers; and taxes. Info: 800-896-4600,

www.greatvaluevacations.com.

● **Save \$500** in airfare on Overseas Adventure Travel's **13-day Patagonia package**. The Wilderness Beyond: Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego and the Chilean Fjords trip starts at \$5,795 per person double or single (original price: \$6,295) and includes round-trip air from Dulles to Buenos Aires; three nights' lodging in Buenos Aires, two nights in El Calafate (Argentina), one night in Torres del Paine (Chile), one night in Puerto Natales (Chile) and one night in Ushuaia (Argentina); four nights aboard the Via Australis or Stella Australis cruise ship; 30 meals, including one home-hosted dinner; 11 small group activities and shore excursions; all land transportation; two internal flights; and taxes (add \$30 port fee). Several departures September through December. Info: 800-955-1925, www.oattravel.com.

—Carol Sottili, Andrea Sachs

Submit travel deals to whatsthedeal@washpost.com. Prices were verified at press time Thursday, but deals sell out and availability is not guaranteed. Some restrictions may apply.