

ARK & TENT



Uniting people & animals...through travel

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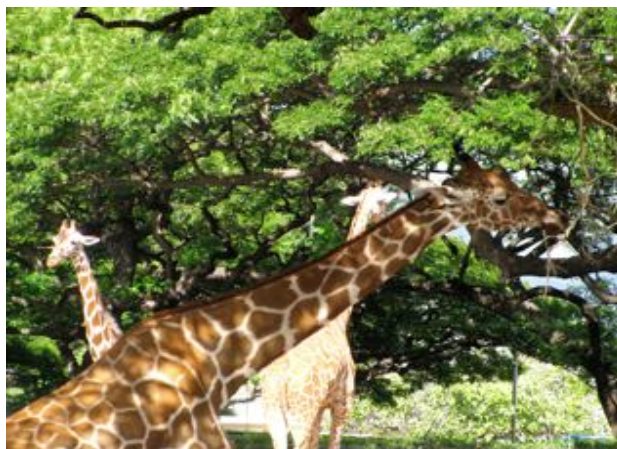
About Us

VIEW FROM A CAR

Drive-through Animal Parks Let Visitors Commune with Creatures Great and Small

By Jon Deinzer

Photos by Erin Caslavka



I spotted the giraffe before he spotted us. With his telltale elongated neck, he looked like a landlocked Loch Ness monster.

Gently tearing away a piece of the tree branch he'd been nibbling on, he slowly ambled over to our waiting vehicle. From inside the car, my girlfriend squealed in delight. "Oh, my God - he's coming our way!"

The sunroof (open since we'd entered the park in hopes of just this kind of moment) beckoned to me. I put the car in "Park," set the emergency brake, stood up on the driver's seat and extended my hand towards the sky. The gentle giant lumbered over towards my proffered palm, filled with a handful of park-approved food, and I watched as an enormous tongue unfurled with the gracefulness of a ballerina's arabesque and began to lick the food from my hand.

As wild places rapidly become housing developments and strip malls, the opportunity to observe animals in their natural environment becomes increasingly difficult. This is not, however, a problem unique to the North American continent; many countries all over the world have seen their natural habitats shrink to

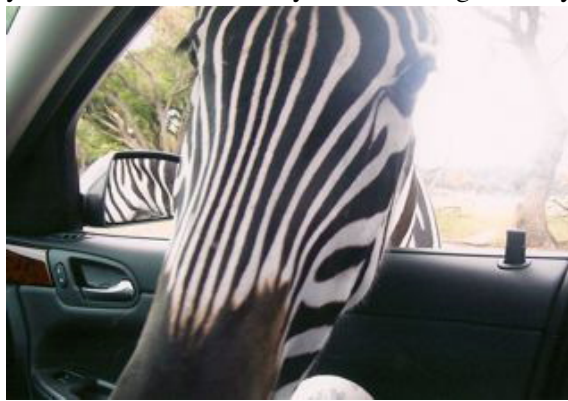


make way for increasing human population needs.

But fortunately for all of us, animal-encounter parks are attempting to give us a view of animals in the wild while simultaneously educating us on how to ensure these their survival. The three notable parks listed below offer an array of animals, tours and accommodations.

FOSSIL RIM WILDLIFE CENTER

Fossil Rim is located in an area of land that features forested hillsides and lush pasture lands. A 1500-acre, not-for-profit facility that was the first of its kind to be accredited by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, Fossil Rim (located in Glen Rose, Texas) is a driving experience for the entire family. Take a leisurely pace along this winding nine-mile scenic drive and you may see wildebeest, antelope, zebra and giraffe. Few things are as exhilarating as hand-feeding a giraffe from the sun-roof of your car, or as hilarious as feeding a zebra through your window - which you'll be able to do if they're near enough when you drive past. (You're not allowed



to get out of your vehicle, but they're welcome to meet you there.) Fossil Rim also offers behind-the-scenes tours, a conservation center and overnight programs in the rustic setting of safari field tents. For those who would rather not "rough it," The Lodge at Fossil Rim offers several guest rooms in the main lodge that open onto breathtaking views, a spring-fed swimming pond and

countless animals to view or photograph. (www.fossilrim.com; 888-775-6742)

OLYMPIC GAME FARM

Located on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State, co-founders Lloyd and Catherine Beebe have been very successful in pairing a vast array of wildlife and the general public to ensure an up-close personal experience. For more than 28 years, the Olympic Game Farm worked with Walt Disney Studios and other television and movie studios to provide animals for their needs. Most animals roam according to their "touch-ability," and those that are less friendly are housed in protective environments. From your car, you'll delight in viewing bison, elk, zebra, llamas and huge Kodiak bears, while endangered animals such as timber wolves, Bengal tigers, white rhinoceros and African lions can be seen in the protected areas. Driving tours are available 362 days a year, and walking tours are also available during the summer months. (www.olygamefarm.com; 306-683-4295)



SAFARI WEST

Located on 400 acres in the heart of California’s wine country, Safari West is a wildlife preserve that's home to hundreds of exotic animals and birds. Established in 1989 by Peter Lang, Safari West’s ongoing mission is wildlife preservation through education, breeding and public interaction. Safari tours are 2 1/2 - 3 hours in length, and are led by experienced guides in authentic (read: *bumpy*) vehicles. Giraffe,



gazelle, ostrich, zebra and other species of African antelopes can be observed as they graze. After your ride, you can hike through the grounds of Safari West where you might spot cheetah or other big cats at a distance.

Another way to interact with the animals of Safari West is via a private safari. Phone in advance of your arrival (regarding the size of your party and what day you plan to arrive) to start the plan in action. Several private safaris are offered depending on your needs and wishes, making them a great way to orchestrate a tailored photographic shoot, or to focus on viewing (and learning about) specific animals. (www.safariwest.com; 707-579-2551)

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