



## **Where the Wild Things Are**

### ***From Black Bears to Sea Turtles to Bald Eagles, Our Client Destinations Tell Us Where Wildlife Watching Is Currently at Its Best***

(June 4, 2020) – We’ve all heard it by now: This summer will mark the return of the **Great American Road Trip**. Families are going to hit the open roads to travel not-so-very-far from home, heading to favorite and familiar spots, most likely areas with wide open spaces and plenty of nature. You’ve probably also heard that while we’ve been in our homes, the animals have become a little bolder, venturing onto the empty streets of big cities or trying to reclaim the more rural spots that used to belong to them exclusively. **It means that the likelihood of catching a glimpse of local wildlife has increased dramatically, so [Mindy Bianca Public Relations](#) surveyed our clients to find out which species visitors might see on a trip to the destinations we work with.** You’ll find representatives with fur, feathers, scales and scutes (that’s what turtles have).

#### **American Black Bears**

*Where to See Them: The Smoky Mountains in East Tennessee*

In late March and early April, the black bears of the Smoky Mountains of east Tennessee were emerging from their dens just as humans were hunkering down in their own dens thanks to COVID-19. [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) is home to about 1,500 bears, which makes it a great place to look for them. (Fun fact: the park straddles two states – North Carolina and Tennessee – but we’re partial to the Tennessee side.) You can also spot them in plenty of other places throughout the Smokies, however. **Black bears are most active early in the morning and late in the evening during spring and summer, so this is a good time of year to keep your eyes peeled for them.** If you’re looking for a tamer interaction with black bears while you’re in the area, we recommend a ride on [Black Bear Trail](#), one of the attractions in Dollywood’s new “Wildwood Grove.” This section of the theme park opened last year and pays tribute to the natural beauty and wonder of the Smokies, which have been constant sources of inspiration for Dolly Parton herself. [Dollywood](#) will reopen to season pass guests on June 15 and to the general public on June 17.

#### **North American River Otters**

*Where to See Them: Louisiana Northshore – St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana*

These playful members of the weasel family can easily be spotted on [Cane Bayou](#) in Mandeville. You can take a lazy, slow-moving paddle along the bayou, which is bordered by Fountainebleau State Park and Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. As you move along, you’ll

wish you had more eyes ... because you'll want to keep one on the land so you can see the beautiful cypress trees that line the banks of the bayou; one in the air to watch the osprey and great blue herons; and another on the shores and in the water to watch the turtles, alligators and otters. **The otters are fully focused on their water aerobics and are somewhat shy, so spotting them is generally the greatest thrill of a tour of the bayou.** More and more visitors are bringing their own kayaks for these treks, but you can also rent one from [Bayou Adventure](#). A guide from that outfitter, which is based in the nearby town of Lacombe, can also lead a sunset tour that puts humans at a safe distance from each other but at a great vantage point to spot the wildlife.

### **Sea Turtles**

*Where to See Them: Gulf Shores and Orange Beach, Alabama*

Coastal Alabama is a haven for three species of sea turtle – Green, Kemp's Ridley and Loggerhead – all of which are protected by the Endangered Species Act. Alabama has a successful sea turtle conservation program thanks to a strong partnership between local and state agencies as well as hundreds of volunteers, all working to ensure that turtles can successfully nest along the coast from May through October. **Visitors may witness turtles making their way up the beach at night or early in the morning,** and they might also see small areas of the beach roped off to protect active nests. [Share the Beach](#) is the communities' commitment to educating visitors about protecting and preserving these sea creatures, reminding them to clear the beach of all trash, towels and chairs after a day's visit; fill any deep holes the kids may have dug in the sand while playing; not disturb turtle tracks or nests; and avoid light – flashlights, patio lights and even camera flashes – at night.

### **American Alligators**

*Where to See Them: Jefferson Parish, Louisiana*

Just a few minutes' drive from downtown New Orleans you'll find a completely different world. In the swamps and wetlands, you'll run into critters that look positively prehistoric. **This is the time of year when alligators are out in full force,** drawn by the warmer temperatures, and you can easily see them by taking a swamp tour with a certified captain or simply taking a walk along the [boardwalk at Wetland Trace](#) in the town of Lafitte. At this time of year, gators like to sunbathe right beside the boardwalk, and it's almost a 100% guarantee you'll spot one. Or two or three. The Wetland Trace remained open during COVID-19, and the organized swamp tours have reopened to the public with new social-distancing and sanitation rules in place.

### **Bald Eagles**

*Where to See Them: Branson, Missouri*

It seems only fitting that in Branson, the Midwestern capital of live entertainment and family fun that offers an especially patriotic flair, visitors can find plenty of America's national symbol. Like so many human visitors, the **bald eagles are attracted by the natural beauty of the Ozark Mountains, the region's crystal-clear waters, and an abundance of good fishing.** What particularly draws their attention is the trout that live in the streams at [Dogwood Canyon](#) off Highway 86. The Canyon is part of the outdoor-centric empire that local legend Johnny Morris, the entrepreneur who founded Bass Pro Shops, established in the Ozarks. Johnny knows a thing or two about fishing, but the eagles might just be the best anglers in town. The birds are especially active in the winter months, but you have a good chance of seeing them year-round.

### **Brown Pelicans**

*Where to See Them: Louisiana's Bayou Country – Houma, Louisiana*

The brown pelican is Louisiana's state bird, and for good reason: It's hard to take a trip to Coastal Louisiana without spotting several of these big-beaked, feathered friends. (Their bills are big so they can hold all the fish they're after.) If you're among the visitors who decide to get out on the water and do a little fishing to release some of your quarantine stress, you'll be welcomed back to the pier by plenty of pelicans hoping for a fishy handout. But you don't even have to be out on the water to spot them; in Louisiana's Bayou Country, there's water all around you, even when you're in a car. Drive the [Wetlands Cultural Byway](#) and **the pelicans will appear to keep pace with you, mile for mile, occasionally dive-bombing head-first from 30 feet in the air to go after a fish.** These birds often ignore all thoughts of social distancing and congregate in large groups to impress locals and visitors alike.

### **Peregrine Falcons**

*Where to See Them: Lake Hartwell Country, South Carolina*

Here in South Carolina's part of the Appalachian Mountains, the elevation drops 2,000 feet in less than half a mile, creating a variety of natural phenomena. Along this "Blue Ridge Escarpment" and its "Blue Wall," there are fascinating weather patterns that create thermals and updrafts that are a peregrine falcon's dream. **The birds get unique upward lifts they can't experience anywhere else, giving them nature's equivalent of a roller coaster ride when they're in flight.** Peregrines can be found at many of the scenic overlooks throughout South Carolina's mountains, but it's a pretty sure bet you'll see them at [Sassafras Mountain](#), where humans haul out binoculars and folding chairs and set up viewing areas near the mountain's lookout tower to watch the falcons gracefully play in the air.

### **Eastern Screech Owls**

*Where to See Them: Greater Wilmington, Delaware, and the Brandywine Valley*

These tiny raptors – they're about the size of a soda can – are **one of the few species of owl you stand a chance of seeing during the day**, but you have to vision like ... well, an owl. Two of the best places to spot them in northern Delaware are [Brandywine Creek State Park](#) and [Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge](#), both of which have erected nesting boxes that the owls return to every year. Keep your eyes on those nesting boxes or in the cavities of trees near the water and you just may spot them. Though small, these birds of prey are fierce; they've been known to take down animals several times their size. Brandywine Creek State Park offers regular "Owl Prowls," on which guests head out into the night with a guide to "talk" to screech owls. The guide uses recordings and the owls answer back with their eerie calls.

For more information about all our client destinations, hotels and resorts, and attractions – which at this time are in various stages of reopening – please check out our website, [www.mindybiancapr.com](http://www.mindybiancapr.com), or contact us via phone or email. We're always happy to help you discover fun and fascinating stories and can give you the latest updates about the status of each client.

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