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**HOTELS  
WITH A  
WILD SIDE**

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AROUND THE  
MIDDLE EAST

**TREKKING  
WITH KIDS**

Giraffe Manor  
in Kenya

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INCLUSIVE OF VAT



# WHERE TO STAY

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW | UNIVERSITY TOWNS | LENA HEADEY



Bright design  
at Cuixmala.  
Opposite: Visitors at  
Giraffe Manor

WORDS: SWATI MURLI GANESHANI; PHOTO: DAVIS GERBER



## ANIMAL HOUSE

Safaris aren't your only option. These hotels allow you to – respectfully – get up close and personal with native wildlife





InterContinental Danang Sun Peninsula hotel. **Opposite:** Elephants at Anantara Golden Triangle in Thailand

**BEST FOR BIRD-WATCHING**

Nestled in Mexico's Chamela-Cuixmala, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, lies luxury eco-hotel **Cuixmala**, whose lush surrounds are home to over 270 species of migratory birds including colourful macaws, storks and great brown pelicans, many of whom can be glimpsed right from the hotel's bungalows or *casitas*. Ride the silent lagoon boat to get closer to the exotic roseate spoonbill species, or take a boat ride from Playa Caleta Blanca – one of the hotel's three private beaches – to the neighbouring island of Isla Cocinas, which is inhabited by the exotic bobo bird. The hotel is involved in several wildlife projects, and as part of their 15-year-long avian programme have tagged around 3,000 birds from 92 different species. *Price on request; 0052-31-5351 6050, cuixmala.com*

**BEST FOR ELEPHANTS**

In Chiang Mai, northern Thailand, **Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp and Resort** offers a chance to spend time with the native gentle giants. Guests can opt for a special hour-and-a-half long VIP arrival experience during which the local elephants welcome them to the resort, but even just relaxing on the private

balcony of the rooms allows for sightings with elephants grazing in the fields below, backed by views of the Golden Triangle and the Mekong River. Interact with the animals at the elephant camp, learning all about them and accompanying them on a walk in the surrounding jungle. Book a private dining experience on a secluded, terraced rice paddy and it's possible the elephants might even pass by to greet you. *Doubles from AED 4,815; 0066-5-378 4084, anantara.com*

**“IN THE MORNING, THEY’LL POKE THEIR HEADS THROUGH THE RESTAURANT’S WINDOW TO TRY TO SNEAK A BITE OF YOUR BLUEBERRY PANCAKES”**

**BEST FOR GIRAFFES**

A tower of Rothschild's giraffes roams freely around the 12 acres of Nairobi's historic **Giraffe Manor** boutique hotel. In the morning, they'll poke their heads through the restaurant's window to try to sneak a bite of your blueberry pancakes. But you can also offer to feed them something more appropriate at the African Fund for Endangered Wildlife (AFEW) Giraffe Centre, located just a few metres away from the hotel. Embark on a guided tour through the neighbouring woods to catch sight of them grazing, then return to a massage at the potting shed in the manor. At night, before

they retreat into the forests, your tall friends may stop by the courtyard to say goodnight. *Doubles from AED 2,275; 00254-72-567 5830, thesafaricollection.com*

**BEST FOR HORSES**

The **Mustang Monument** eco-hotel in Wells, Nevada is a sanctuary for these wild-roaming horses, and its Save America's Mustangs project aims to protect and keep them free. The mustangs here wander – and gallop – around their natural habitat while you relax in your Safari Cottage or are off learning how to lasso ropes like a pro. Wake up early to watch the horses being fed at sunrise, heading out after breakfast for a (more domesticated) horse ride or a mustang safari enjoyed from a horse-drawn wagon that will get you back in time for supper. It's a luxurious version of the Wild West, with décor inspired by the area's culture, sprawling mountain views and wild mustangs running in the fields beyond. *Doubles from AED 6,060; 001-888-979 1422, mustangmonument.com*

**BEST FOR MONKEYS**

A funicular train ascends into the coastal rainforests of Vietnam's Son Tra Peninsula Nature Reserve, connecting the four levels – namely →

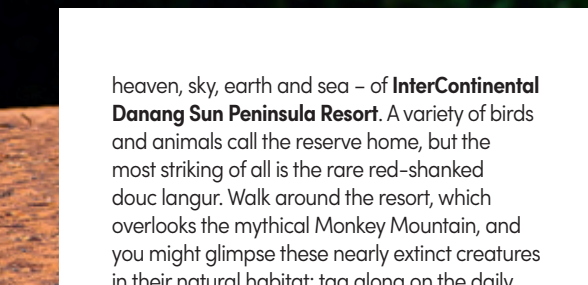




Clockwise from top left: Wildlife at Al Maha; Birkenhead House is on a cliff; a room at InterContinental Danang; kids interact with giant tortoises at Maritim Resort & Spa



## WHERE TO STAY



heaven, sky, earth and sea – of **InterContinental Danang Sun Peninsula Resort**. A variety of birds and animals call the reserve home, but the most striking of all is the rare red-shanked douc langur. Walk around the resort, which overlooks the mythical Monkey Mountain, and you might glimpse these nearly extinct creatures in their natural habitat; tag along on the daily trekking excursion to catch sight of them jumping from tree to tree. With an abundance of animal life, you might see other species of monkey loitering around the grounds, too. At the end of the day, sip on one of the specially concocted “monkey” cocktails at The L\_O\_N\_G Bar to get a different taste of the jungle.

*Doubles from AED 1,540; 0084-23-6393 8888, danang.intercontinental.com*

### BEST FOR ORYX

Away from the city and surrounded by tranquil dunes, around 300 Arabian oryx roam the sandy plains of **Al Maha, a Luxury Collection Desert Resort and Spa** (*maha* in Arabic means oryx). The Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, where the resort is located, has carried out numerous projects that help protect and grow the population of the UAE’s national animal. It’s likely you’ll spot them roaming around as you enjoy your Bedouin-inspired suite (which includes a private pool and butler service) or while dining at Al Diwaan. But you can also ask the hotel’s trained wildlife expert for tips on the ideal time and place to spot the



oryx, or take a guided tour of the desert – by foot, in a 4x4 or on camel back – to peacefully observe the animals in their natural habitat.

*Doubles from AED 2,850; 00971-4-832 9900, marriott.com*

### BEST FOR TURTLES & TORTOISES

Along the coast of Turtle Bay, Mauritius’ first Marine National Park, is the 62-acre **Maritim Resort & Spa**. The area was once a breeding ground for turtles, and it’s still home to a wide range of marine life including turtles – you can jump into the water with snorkelling gear to observe and swim alongside them. Maritim estate’s Giant Tortoise Park houses creatures of all ages, with a baby-tortoise nursery as well as an old-age home for century-old tortoises that weigh up to 250kg. As they’re more active in the early part of the day, wake up to see them strolling the park looking for their breakfast. Once they disappear into their burrows, you’re free to indulge in gourmet fare at the resort’s colonial-style Château Mon Désir, with views of the Historical Ruins of Balaclava and the Citron River.

*Doubles from AED 1,855; 0023-0204 1000, maritimresortandspa.mu*

### BEST FOR WHALES

Perched on a cliff in the coastal South African town of Hermanus, the petite 11-room **Birkenhead House** hotel has clear views of Walker Bay, home to southern right and humpback whales. Imagine enjoying a treatment in their open-air spa overlooking the bay and catching a glimpse of these ocean giants. Head out to learn more about whale conservation and their habitat from professionals; the hotel can arrange air and sea excursions dedicated to whale-watching. But for those less actively inclined, even observing them from the ocean-facing restaurant, as the chef prepares a meal using fresh local produce, makes for a lasting memory.

*Doubles from AED 1,650; 0027-28-317 0000, theroyalportfolio.com*