

VACATIONS WITH A VISION

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BRITISH-BASED Biosphere Expeditions' itineraries appear to have been conjured from a traveller's dream of the unusual and exotic. This non-profit research and conservation organisation offers hands-on wildlife and adventure itineraries uniting science and environmental protection with travel to remarkable destinations; no scientific experience is necessary.

Biosphere projects run worldwide all year round and range from two weeks to several months. Tour numbers are limited to about 12 people, who take part in what are described as "genuine wildlife expeditions that place ordinary people alongside scientists who are at the forefront of conservation work". Expedition costs vary but at least two-thirds of guest contributions benefit the project directly.

Expeditions include a visit to Namibia to monitor cheetahs, leopards and the brown hyenas of the African savanna or to Oman, the so-called "Norway of Arabia", to assist with a program designed to study the Arabian leopard. Other tours include elephant surveys in Wasgamuwa National Park in Sri Lanka and a study tour of monkeys and macaws in Peru.

One of the next departures, which still has vacancies, is to the Tatra Mountains of Slovakia to monitor critically endangered chamois goats. The tour, from August 14 to 26, also highlights predators native to the region, such as wolves and bears.

A tour in March 2006 will highlight the coral reef systems of Cayos Cochinos, a protected area of the Bay Island Archipelago in the Caribbean Sea. In April 2006, Biosphere Expeditions is offering the opportunity to study whales, dolphins and loggerhead turtles in the Azores Archipelago. More: www.biosphere-expeditions.com.