

# Nature Watch

**It's hard to believe, but California boasts the most unique species in the continental United States. There are also some of the most well-preserved fossils found in California, so you could say that this Golden State has the most interesting mix of animals past, present, and future. Here at Explore California, we've got some great packages to highlight the natural world of our great state. From coastal expeditions to view the largest creature to ever live, the blue whale, to forest hiking trips to see some of the most beautiful insects ever, Explore California has something for any Ranger Rick or Regina out there.**

In an effort to highlight some of the nature packages that we offer, there are three that stand out for us here as our most popular. The first takes you from the southwestern deserts of the Mohave to the busy downtown of Los Angeles — our Fossil Tour.

## The Fossil Tour

California is a hotbed of Paleozoic creatures, mostly due to the fact that the immense range of elevations and seismic activity has caused much of the state's ancient rock formations to be exposed. The Mohave Desert was once a large inland sea, and the creatures who lived, and died, here have been preserved in the rocks around the current sandy soil. Our Fossil tour starts here, with three days of geology lessons and

### TOUR INFO

**Duration:** 2 Weeks

**Cost per person:**  
\$5000 (based upon double occupancy)

**Departure Dates:** March 10, June 15, September 24.

**Included:** All meals and lodging.

**Not included:** Travel insurance, travel to and from departure city.

working on an actual dig. Any fossils found would be yours to keep, compliments of Explore California and the state of California's Long-Dead Creatures act. After that, its two days in Los Angeles, exploring the still-bubbling La Brea Tar Pits. Prehistoric creatures fell into the petroleum here in what is now downtown Los Angeles millennium ago, and historians and geologists are still pulling out new species everyday.

## Coastal Experience

For our coastal experience patrons, we not only show you the marvels of the deep, but the playfulness of our most popular denizens. For the first day, a San Francisco Bay tour, highlighted by a chance to kayak with some of the playful California Sea Lions that fill the docks at Pier 38. From here, its just down the coast to Monterrey, where our guests will visit the world-famous Aquarium, and see the wonderful sea otter in their natural habitat. Currently, the California population numbers around 2,000 and is found from Half Moon Bay to Morro Bay, so its important to visit them quickly. The last stop is the Channel Islands of Ventura County — a fascinating area where the coastal islands have been isolated for centuries and species have developed separated from the rest of the state. Here we'll visit the Santa Cruz fo, the smallest member of the fox family at less than 2lbs! And on the way to and from the islands,

Arial acrobatics — a pelican dives for fish.





a chance to see the migration of the blue and gray whales, the largest creatures to ever live on the planet. This is for sure a fantastic package.

### Endangered Species Expedition

California has some of the most amazing endangered species on the planet. From the California Condor to the grizzly bear, and from the Santa Cruz banana slug to the California Quail, most of this fine state is protected wildlife preserve. On this two-week tour, we take you on a trip to visit each protected area, and point out the creatures, both great and small, which caused the land to be set aside. Specific details of the tour vary based on season but all versions of this expedition have been nothing short of spectacular.

Taking a cue from the Nature Conservancy, we've selected 15 state parks and preserves that are shining examples of conservation in action. Just one example is the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Preserve, 18 miles of Earth's most biodiverse coastal dune-lagoon ecosystem. Activities include camping, hiking, horseback riding, boating and bird watching. This is a great package for families who want to pass down a great experience and an education to the next generation, while participating in preserving a part of their future.

#### FACT FILE

**Hiking** can aid in weight loss, decrease blood pressure and prevent osteoporosis. And it's a cost free way to improve your health!

**Fact:** California's state fossil is the *Smilodon californicus*, or Sabertooth Cat.

**The short-tailed albatross**, one of California's endangered species, has a wingspan of 7.5 feet and a lifespan anywhere from 12 to 45 years.

**www.nature.org** The Nature Conservancy's web site, which contains an excellent interactive California field guide

**Sea otters** are a classic example of a keystone species; their presence affects the ecosystem more profoundly than their size and numbers would suggest.

