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Whale and Dolphin Viewings

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Visit great mammals of the sea in their summer getaways.



Breaching Humpback, the Sea of Cortez

Photograph by Michael Melford, National Geographic

From the National Geographic book *Four Seasons of Travel*

Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park, Quebec, Canada

www.quebecmaritime.ca

The meeting point of the St. Lawrence River and the Atlantic Ocean is a safe haven for large marine life. In addition to the world's largest mammal, the 100-foot (30-meter) blue whale, the St. Lawrence estuary is home to 1,000 belugas. For a closer look, take a sea excursion by boat or kayak.

Bay of Fundy, New Brunswick/Nova Scotia, Canada

www.bayoffundytourism.com

The Bay of Fundy attracts the largest population of North Atlantic right whales—one of the most endangered whale species. With some of the world's highest tides, the bay amasses large quantities of zooplankton, attracting up to 12 different kinds of whales. Each summer, the Grand Manan Basin becomes the right whale's primary nursery and feeding ground.

Baffin Bay–Davis Strait, Nunavut, Canada/Greenland

www.polarcruises.com

Every summer, the ice in the North Atlantic's Baffin Bay melts away to become a marine feeding ground, welcoming one of the longest-living animals on Earth—the bowhead whale. Reaching ages exceeding 100 years, bowheads follow a migration pattern in association with ice floes. Characterized by their large heads, bowheads are capable of breaking through sea ice at least eight inches (20 centimeters) thick.

Channel Islands National Park, California

www.nps.gov/chis/index.htm

Close to 30 species of cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) visit Channel Islands National Park, providing numerous opportunities to encounter these majestic creatures. Hike to a lookout, scale the visitor center tower, or—for a closer look—book a boat tour.

Gulf of Maine, New England

stellwagen.noaa.gov

After a long winter in the West Indies, humpbacks and newly born calves begin their journey to New England feeding grounds in the Gulf of Maine. By May, most have arrived and can be seen near the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary's various locations in eastern Massachusetts.

Indian River Lagoon, Palm Bay, Florida

www.marinediscoverycenter.org

North America's most diverse estuary system, the Indian River Lagoon is home to more than 2,000 species of plants and animals. The bottlenose dolphins found in the lagoon are smaller and have longer flippers than their ocean relatives. Encounter the fascinating behavior of these gentle and playful creatures on a daily Dolphin Discovery tour, guided by a certified Florida coastal naturalist.

Baja California, Mexico

www.bajawhales.com

Gray whales travel 12,000 miles (19,300 kilometers) in migration—the longest of any mammal on Earth—from the freezing feeding waters of Alaska's Bering Sea to the balmy breeding grounds of Mexico's lagoons, which provide a prime destination for whale-loving vacationers.

The Azores, Portugal

www.stepsdiscovery.co.uk

Aside from the Azores' magnificent mountain expanses and coastal scenery, this mid-Atlantic Portuguese archipelago is one of the world's best whale-watching destinations, attracting humpback, pilot, fin, minke, and blue whales. Pico Island ("the village of whales") offers an eight-day B&B package that includes several whale- and dolphin-watching boat excursions.

Rurutu, French Polynesia

www.tahiti-tourism.com

Surrounded by a barrier reef, Rurutu is known for being in a prime humpback whale migration pathway and plays host to much calving, nursing, and mating. Boats depart from Moerai for trips to whale-watch, witness mothers playing with their calves, and listen to the underwater opera amplified by the coral seabed.

Disco Bay, Greenland

www.greenland-travel.com

About 15 species of whales visit Greenland each year, but the narwhal—the unicorn of the sea—is among the stars. This elusive whale is known for its long, distinctive spiral tusk. At times, males can be seen surfacing the water mid-joust.