



GOING GREEN

EcoAdventure

ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/ DIANE LABOMBARBE

BY LAURA TURNER SEYDEL



COURTESY OF DANNY ACRES PHOTOGRAPHY

This past summer my family and I had the opportunity to experience amazing eco-adventures, including traveling through the Arctic on the National Geographic Explorer, observing melting glaciers and seeing polar bears up-close-and-personal. These trips have reminded us why it is so important to lead an environmentally responsible lifestyle and work to preserve the future of our planet for ourselves and wildlife. But you don't have to hop a plane to the other side of the world to have an eco-adventure; there are many affordable and convenient green destinations right here in our own backyard.

Just like we saw the polar bears in their natural habitat, the Georgia Aquarium (georgiaaquarium.org) gives patrons the opportunity to experience the largest aggregation of whale sharks, the largest fish species in the world, as they visit the tropical waters of Isla Holbox off the coast of Yucatan Mexico for annual feedings. For the past seven years, Georgia Aquarium researchers have chosen the destination to conduct population surveys and study the diets of whale sharks. Through visual and satellite tagging systems, researchers hope

to expand their scientific understanding of the migratory patterns, particularly where they give birth, of the sharks to better protect this endangered species.

Each August for three years running, the Georgia Aquarium leads an expedition of 14 adventurers to the pristine waters of the Gulf of Mexico to experience these gentle giants first hand. After learning about and swimming with the sharks at the Georgia Aquarium, travelers are whisked away to the pristine 20-mile shoreline of unspoiled Holbox, where they are given the unique opportunity to be in the company of the scientists as they conduct their important research. The intimate trip concludes with a once-in-a-lifetime swim with the whale sharks to further experience these magnificent creatures.

If you're looking for an eco-weekend getaway, only a short drive from Atlanta is Tybee Island, which according to a recent national health magazine study is America's Healthiest Beach. The tiny island, totaling 2.6 square miles, is an ecologically haven boasting miles of Atlantic Ocean shoreline, tidal salt marshlands and protected wetland areas on its undeveloped barrier island, Little Tybee. Because of its small size, visitors



MY CHILDREN AND I IN FRONT OF THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER ON OUR ROBERT SWAN LED EXPEDITION THROUGH THE ARCTIC.



THE ORGANIC FARM AT SERENBE IS AFFILIATED WITH THE CSA PROGRAM AND FEATURES SATURDAY MORNING MARKETS, AS WELL AS THE FOUNDATION FOR THE FARM-TO-TABLE CONCEPT PRACTICED BY ITS THREE RESTAURANTS, BLUE EYED DAISY BAKESHOP, FARMHOUSE, AND THE HILL.



IN 2008, THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE AWARDED SERENBE ITS INAUGURAL SUSTAINABILITY AWARD AND EARTHCRAFT NAMED IT THE "EARTHCRAFT DEVELOPMENT OF THE YEAR" FOR ITS DEDICATION TO GREEN LIVING AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS. FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT SERENBE.COM.

are encouraged to trade in their gas guzzling autos for bikes, fuel efficient mopeds or kayaks to experience the island's thriving wildlife and breathe-easy environment.

Protecting the island's natural beauty and rich cultural history is the welcoming and passionate Tybee Island community whose environmental ethic is contagious. Having worked so hard to preserve its historical buildings from the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, the residents now look to maintaining the island's future through mandatory recycling initiatives, beach preservation efforts and encouragement to the many visitors to minimize their carbon footprint while on "Tybee time."

"One of the wonderful things about Tybee Island is that it's like your home away from home," says Stayce Jarrell, owner of Ocean Front Cottage Rentals. "Tybee has so many great vacation rental homes, which allows our guests to continue with their day-to-day environmental practices instead of being confined by the limitations of hotel living."

On a different coast, the Gulf Coast to be exact, Alys Beach sets the sustainable benchmark for its neighboring Florida beachside communities and shares in the allure of any Caribbean Island destination. To compliment and maintain the 1,500 feet of picturesque white sand beaches, the development sacrificed no detail when going green. Unlike most American communities, the 158-acre resort town, designed to be a Traditional Neighborhood Development, caters to people rather than cars, encouraging walking and bicycling. This responsible form of land development is convenient for its residents and allows ample room for parks, like Alys Beach's 21-acre preserve home to wetlands and a longleaf pine forest, which provides a vibrant habitat for birds, small mammals and other native wildlife.

But the careful planning for the planet doesn't stop there. As the first fortified community in the country, the buildings of Alys Beach are designed to withstand the inevitable Florida hurricanes, allowing them to last centuries versus decades and greatly reduce the amount of waste and negative environmental impact that stems from a "repair, replace and rebuild" construction mentality. Not only are they strong, but they are healthy for the people and the planet as all buildings on Alys Beach are required to be built to Green Home Design Standards set forth by the Florida Green Building Coalition. The all-white façades and the strategic placement of the homes allow the sunlight to reflect and the steady gulf breezes to passively heat and cool the community, ultimately reducing energy costs.

Just outside of Atlanta is Serenbe, a 1,000-acre community that presents a different sort of eco-adventure, one based on balanced growth, sustainability, organic farming, and smart environmental practices. Perfect for a day trip or an extended



KNOWN LOVINGLY AS "ATLANTA'S BEACH," TYBEE ISLAND OFFERS OUTDOOR ADVENTURES, DELECTABLE LOCAL CUISINE (CHECK OUT CAFELOCOTYBEEISLAND.COM) AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACCOMMODATIONS AS SEEN HERE (OCEANFRONTCOTTAGE.COM).

stay at the green-built Inn at Serenbe, the community is a casual retreat to inspire low impact living through its acclaimed farm-to-table restaurants, featuring locally grown food from its CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) organic farm, preserved green space and community-wide environmental commitment.

No matter where your travels lead, you can recreate your own eco-adventure by incorporating your environmental ethic into your green life on the road. First, choose accommodations with impactful environmental initiatives (try greenhotels.com or greenvacationhub.com). If your hotel doesn't have these initiatives, request that housekeeping not replace your towels and sheets each day to save water and electricity. While you're at it, pack your own toiletries as to not create unnecessary waste by using the products offered by the hotel. And just like at home, don't forget to turn off all the lights (and even the air conditioning units) when you leave for the day.

Once there, immerse yourself in your new environment by engaging in activities that embrace culture or celebrate the outdoors. See the sites by bike or a walking tour or if you need to travel a long distance, choose alternative transportation like boat or train or rent a responsible hybrid from



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Greener Giving

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