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TRAVEL

# Tours and Parks News: Wildlife Events in Saba, Diving in Bonaire

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In Transit

By **ELAINE GLUSAC**

## **SABA GOES WILD IN OCTOBER**

On the rugged Dutch Caribbean island of Saba, visitors can eavesdrop on the echolocation of bats in new nocturnal “Batman Hikes” during October, deemed Environmental Awareness Month. Sponsored by a nonprofit environmental foundation, the campaign stages a series of Sea & Learn events featuring hands-on involvement with research biologists. New opportunities this year include collecting moth specimens, listening to whale “singing” with a marine biologist, searching for the island’s endangered racer snake and going on a geology tour by boat, taxi or hike.

In addition to guiding field expeditions, scientists offer evening presentations on their findings, often during happy hour events at local bars and restaurants. With the exception of school field trips, all activities are free and open to the public throughout October.

## **EXPLORING A NEW PARK IN PATAGONIA**

Patagonia Park, a large-scale conservation area in Chilean Patagonia covering almost 200,000 acres in the Chacabuco Valley, will reopen Oct. 1 for the South American summer season, and will add a new campground in November. The American conservationists Kristine and Douglas Tompkins have been buying land, restoring habitats and building public access to the park in the southern Aysen region bordering Argentina since 2000 with the goal of donating it to the government as a national park in the next few years. The new Stone House Campground, where the Aviles and Chacabuco Rivers meet, features seven covered cooking areas to shelter campers from the famed Patagonian winds and is open, like the rest of the park, through April.

Getting there is no small feat, usually involving a flight from Santiago to Balmaceda, followed by a six- to eight-hour car or bus ride. For those who would rather not camp, the Britain-based Latin-American-specialist tour operator Pura Aventura aims to take on the planning, if not the driving, in a 13-day self-guided trip called Chile's Southern Highway. The trip includes internal flights, airport transfers, rental car and overnights in Santiago and in eco-lodges in the Chacabuco Valley and other wilderness areas from £2,344 (about \$3,480) per person, double occupancy.

### **UNDERWATER STREAMING IN BONAIRE**

Last year, the Harbour Village Beach Club on Bonaire partnered with Coral Restoration Foundation Bonaire to plant new coral in an underwater garden in front of the property, and now the curious can get a glimpse of their progress without donning scuba tanks. Two new underwater cameras including one in the coral nursery and another on the nearby reef where the budding coral will eventually be transplanted have been installed and are providing live streaming during daylight hours. While the feeds could replace your office aquarium with virtual fish images, the cameras are intended for students studying marine life through educational groups including Teens 4 Oceans and View Into the Blue to provide the submarine view of coral growth.

Any scuba diver interested in the resort's conservation efforts can sign up for a guided dive of the coral restoration project (\$45) with the resort's on-site dive operation Great Adventures Bonaire, or take the Coral Restoration Specialty certification course (\$220) to learn more about sustaining coral reefs.

## **THE CULINARY SIDE OF THE CASTRO**

In San Francisco, Cruisin' the Castro Walking Tours has focused on the history of the Castro neighborhood's L.G.B.T. community since 1989. This month it has expanded its focus to the area's culinary highlights in a food and wine itinerary. Kathy Amendola, owner of the company, covers the city's Spanish and Italian immigrant story that influenced its culinary heritage throughout the three-hour progressive feast. Walking tours stop at four wine bars and restaurants, and includes food served family-style and three glasses of wine. Tours cost \$115 per person, \$95 for teetotalers, and take place Thursdays and Fridays starting at 4 p.m.

## **FREE NATIONAL PARK ADMISSION SATURDAY**

Tomorrow, Saturday, Sept. 26, the National Park Service will celebrate National Public Lands Day by offering free admission at every site and park in its system. Sponsored by the National Environmental Education g Foundation, National Public Lands Day is designed to encourage volunteering in national and state parks, national forests and other public lands. Last year roughly 175,000 volunteers worked at over 2,100 sites, including over 100 national parks. Opportunities this year range from cleaning debris from the Cumberland Island National Seashore in Georgia to restoring native vegetation at Grand Canyon National Park.

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