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TRAVEL

Posted on: Sunday, February 8, 2009

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If you want to watch whales, now is a very good time

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Tour boats may be the best way to see the giant ocean-going mammals put on aerial displays in Hawaiian waters.

Photo courtesy of Bill Crane

Advertiser Staff

"Just now, it's the greatest show on Earth," said Chris Turner. "Instead of the usual eight or nine whales, we're as many as 25." Turner, the captain of the Napali Riders whale-watching tours that sail Kaua'i's Na Pali coast, last week reported extensive whale activity on morning and afternoon tours. As peak whale-watching season gets under way, last week's passengers on the 30-foot inflatable were far from disappointed.

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Breaching, sparring, fin-slapping by mature whales and "ballerina spins" by newborn calves had passengers on the tours enthralled, Turner said.

Turner believes that as well as mating and giving birth, humpbacks also feed in Hawai'i waters. "We see the greatest number of whales and interesting behaviors in places we know are the best fishing grounds," Turner said.

But it was the proximity of the whales that thrilled passengers most. Though Turner keeps the tours at the legally required distance from the ocean giants, humpbacks have on occasion approached within 30 feet and dived beneath the boat. "Making eye contact with one of the biggest creatures on Earth is an unforgettable experience," he said.

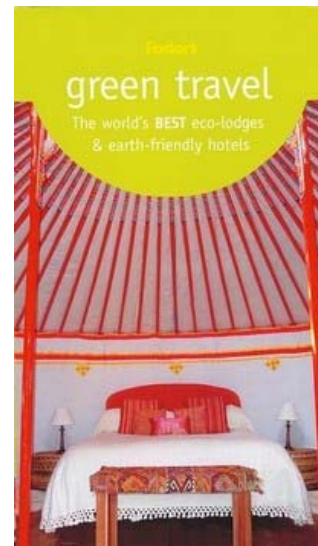
Tours continue through April with peak season now through March. 808-742-6331; \$108 for the morning tour, \$86 for afternoon. (kama'aina discount of 10 percent with valid ID). www.napaliriders.com.

— *Chris Oliver*

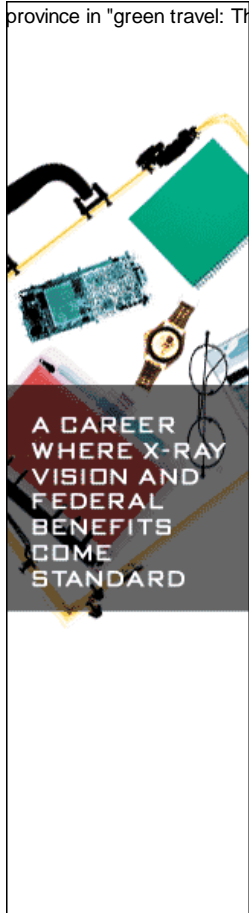
WORLDWIDE

TOP 'GREEN' HOTELS BOTH RESPONSIBLE AND COMFORTABLE

"The long canopied tunnel of swaying bamboo that brings you to Gecko Villa is like a green throat, swallowing you into nature." So begins the description of this eco-friendly bolthole in Thailand's Isaan



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province in "green travel: The world's BEST eco-lodges & earth-friendly hotels."

Even in lean economic times, not everyone wants to stay in a yurt or a tree house or sleep beneath February's chilly night sky, so to promote responsible and comfortable travel, the guide features 120 "green hotels" around the world.

Lucky travel writers have vetted the lodgings and their stand on composting, recycling, use of biodegradeable cleaning products, community employment and overall impact on the environment. Each lodging's Eco-File rates a "responsibility score" on environmental and social awareness. "green travel: The world's BEST eco-lodges & earth-friendly hotels," \$21.95, at bookstores and www.fodors.com.

— *Chris Oliver*

WASHINGTON, D.C.

SEE ORCHIDS AS CHARLES DARWIN SAW THEM AT THE SMITHSONIAN

Orchids have managed to adapt to almost every type of environment around the world, so it is no wonder that Charles Darwin used them to test his theories of natural selection and evolution.

"Orchids Through Darwin's Eyes: 15th Annual Orchid Show" uses live orchids to illustrate how Darwin, whose 200th birthday is next month, used them in his work. The exhibit, which includes the only orchid fossil ever discovered, runs through April 26.

Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, 10th Street and Constitution Avenue NW, Washington. 202-633-1000 or www.mnh.si.edu.

— *Washington Post*



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