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Bhutan

YEAR OF
THE DRAGON

Big cats

WITNESS THEM
IN THE WILD

The allure of travel

CULTURES, CUISINES
& CONTINENTS

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SEE WHAT LIES BEYOND

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India's king of the jungle,
the tiger is the largest of
the big cats.



IMAGE: SUJAN SHER BACH



On the trail **OF THE TIGER**

Hoping for a glimpse of India's majestic national animal?
Head into the wild at these six national parks.

BY SARAH KHAN

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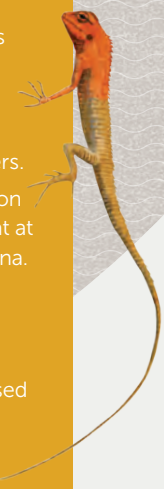
The first time I saw her, my skin immediately broke out in goosebumps. There went the regal tigress Arrowhead, sashaying alongside my jeep with an alluring insouciance that can only come from an unwavering confidence in your position in the animal kingdom. I was in Rajasthan's Ranthambhore National Park, one of India's most iconic wildlife sanctuaries, and just the very fact that I was able to witness a sight that left me speechless is not something I take for granted.

In the 19th century, India's thriving tiger population likely numbered more than 100 000. By 1973, that number had spiralled to less than 1 800—an alarming decline that led the Indian government to enact *Project Tiger*, an effort to preserve and grow the country's endangered tiger population. Now, on the 50th anniversary of this ambitious conservation endeavour, that number has risen above 3 150, and is steadily growing. So where should you go if you're keen to behold India's majestic national animal in the wild? Here are some of the nation's finest wildlife experiences, along with where you might consider laying your head between game drives.





India



6 JUNGLE SAFARIS

And what sets them apart

- 1** | In and amongst the jungles of Ranthambhore are ancient forts, temples and tombs.
- 2** | Corbett is home to the world's highest density of tigers.
- 3** | Meet renowned conservation biologist Dr. Raghu Chundawat at his intimate lodge outside Panna.
- 4** | Bandhavgarh boasts over 250 bird species, including the black ibis.
- 5** | Rudyard Kipling immortalised Kanha's enchanting forests and bursts of bamboo in *The Jungle Book*.
- 6** | The Kaziranga landscape is home to more than 2 600 one-horned rhino.

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This lush terrain is also where the ambitious Project Tiger was launched in 1973. ”

01

Ranthambhore National Park

RAJASTHAN

A three-hour drive from the Pink City of Jaipur, Ranthambhore National Park might be one of India's most atmospheric swaths of wilderness: scattered throughout the 515 square miles are ruins of an old fort, temples, mosques and tombs with weathered domes, arches, and ornately carved walls peeking out from amid the lush vegetation. If you're lucky, you might even spy a tiger ambling along one of these timeworn structures, making for the ultimate photographic souvenir. Ranthambhore was historically a royal hunting ground, but today, thanks to conservation efforts, the park is home to about 80 tigers. The area is best explored with expert guides like the ones employed by SUJÁN Sher Bagh, a classic tented safari camp with 12 plush canvas tents set within striking distance of tiger territory.

02

Corbett National Park

UTTARAKHAND

India's oldest national park—it was originally founded by the British in 1936 as Hailey National Park—Corbett has another important distinction to its name: this lush terrain is also where the ambitious *Project Tiger* was launched in 1973. Today, the park boasts the world's highest density of tigers with more than 250 found across its grasslands, riverine valleys and Himalayan foothills. Its abundance of birdlife makes Corbett a beloved location for bird enthusiasts—the park is home to 586 species. Flanking the park's southern boundary, the family-owned Jim's Jungle Retreat is a firm favourite among repeat visitors to the region. The resort's 18 villas may hark back to the time of the Raj, but they also have contemporary local touches in the form of vibrant textiles and traditional handicrafts.

03

Panna Tiger Reserve

MADHYA PRADESH

Conservation biologist Dr. Raghu Chundawat certainly knows a thing or two about Indian cats: for nearly four decades he's conducted pioneering research on snow leopards and tigers. After studying the tiger population in Central India's Panna National Park for 10 years, he and his wife, Joanna Van Gruisen, a wildlife photographer, opened Sarai at Toria, an intimate, environmentally-friendly lodge on the banks of the Ken River, with eight cottages built to resemble a local village. It's a charming base to explore the nearby park, where more than 42 adult tigers roam through the tropical forest, alongside leopard, sloth bear, sambar deer, and more. Head out for thrilling game drives amid the pristine wilderness during the day, then come back and share stories around convivial meals at the inviting lodge.



Clockwise from top:
The magnificent tiger
is the national animal
of India; two chital, or
spotted deer, jostle in
an open clearing; at
Ranthambhore, you might
spot a tiger ambling past
an ancient fort or temple.



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Clockwise from top left:
Scanning the horizon for
a glimpse of the striped cat;
like a human fingerprint, each
tiger's stripe pattern is unique;
peaceful boat rides on the
Ken River provide a different
vantage point.



**BOOK YOUR
JUNGLE SAFARI**
Visit andBeyond.com or contact
your preferred travel specialist

You'll still be able to spy modern-day Shere Khans, Bagheeras, and Baloos. 🐾



04 Bandhavgarh National Park MADHYA PRADESH

There's a reason many call the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh "the Tiger State": with more than 500 of the big cats spread across its six tiger reserves and 10 national parks, it's home to the country's most abundant tiger population. Set in Madhya Pradesh's rolling Vindhya Hills, Bandhavgarh is one of India's most-visited national parks, largely due to its claim to one of the largest densities of tigers in the world. While leopard, chital deer, dhole and jackal abound, Bandhavgarh is also a birdwatcher's delight, with more than 250 species including the jungle bush quail, black ibis, Indian robin, and rose-ringed parakeet. A quick drive from Bandhavgarh's Magdhi Gate, Samode Safari Lodge has 12 cottages nestled amid the verdant terrain, each with an al fresco bathtub perfect for late-night stargazing.

05 Kanha National Park MADHYA PRADESH

If you've ever imagined living out a page from *The Jungle Book*, head to Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh. This dense forest was celebrated by Rudyard Kipling as the backdrop for Mowgli's adventures. You'll still be able to spy modern-day Shere Khans (tigers), Bagheeras (black leopards), and Baloos (sloth bears), alongside gaur, dholes, Bengal foxes, and jackals. In addition, Kanha entices birdwatchers with glimpses of crested serpent eagles, Malabar pied hornbills, Indian paradise flycatchers, king vultures, and more, flitting around the sal trees and shoots of bamboo. Explore it all from a base at one of the 12 stone cottages bedecked in cheery local textiles at Singinawa Jungle Lodge, where a thrilling game drive is followed by an atmospheric forest barbecue featuring delectable traditional Indian fare.

06 Kaziranga National Park ASSAM

Few tourists venture into Assam, in India's northeast reaches, but the state's sprawling Kaziranga National Park offers about 2 600 good reasons to visit: that's the number of Indian one-horned rhinoceroses that roam its forests, meadows, and wetlands, representing more than two-thirds of the world's population. And that's just the beginning: you're also likely to come across elephants, tigers, leopards, and wild water buffalo. You'll be in good company in the hotel guestbook at Diphlu River Lodge: the Prince and Princess of Wales, Prince William and Princess Kate, checked in for a spell in 2016. For a unique experience meandering across the state, Beyond's 10-day cruise along the Brahmaputra River aboard *ABN Charaidew II* includes visits to remote villages, ancient temples, and game drives in Kaziranga. 🐾