

the TRAVELLER'S GUIDE to
planet earth



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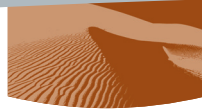
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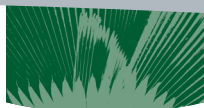
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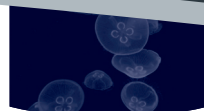
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Tony Wheeler's planet earth

Co-Founder, Lonely Planet

01. GREAT PLAINS

Life on the Highest Plateau (Tibetan Plateau) p194

One lap of Mt Kailash and all the sins of my lifetime are washed away. Well, this lifetime; it would take another 107 circuits to clean up all my lifetimes.

Those sin-cleansing capabilities are just a sample of the magic of western Tibet. It's a place of endless vistas, forgotten cities and people whose beliefs seem to merge with the landscape. The final magic is revealed when my travels end and I turn east for the drive to Lhasa. How many places in the world can you end up a solid week's drive from the nearest airport?

02. ICE WORLDS

The Ice Continent (Antarctica) p162

It's the sheer simplicity of Antarctica that is so amazing. There is no rainbow spectrum of colours; everything is either blue (the sky and sea), white (the snow, the ice and half of every penguin) or black (the rocks, the whales and the other half of those penguins). The wildlife is equally simple, equally dramatic – you don't get hundreds of different animals or birds, but the lack of variety is made up for by sheer numbers. One penguin is a delight; 10,000 are mind blowing. It's hardly surprising that far from being a one-off experience of a lifetime, a visit to Antarctica seems to inspire return trips.

03. DESERTS

The Outback (Australia) p124

The cities are beautiful, the Great Barrier Reef is a wonder, but it's the outback – the desert – that really brings Australia home. I've never done an Australian outback trip that wasn't a great experience – whether it's roller-coasting in a 4WD up and down the thousand sand dunes across the Simpson Desert, or trekking along the rocky spine of the Larapinta Trail. Yet, that Australian love affair always carries a hint of danger: the outback can also be that edgily dangerous lover who has a knife hidden under the bed.

Mark Brownlow's planet earth

Episode Producer, Planet Earth

01.

FRESH WATER

Angel Falls (Venezuela) p30

If you suffer from vertigo this is not the place for you. With no safety rail to steady you, peering over the near-1000m drop of the world's tallest waterfall is a heart-in-the-mouth experience. Such is the height of these falls, that long before the water can reach Devil's Canyon below, it is blown away as a fine mist. Away in the distance lies the inspiration for Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*: a prehistoric land of impenetrable jungle and isolated mountain plateaus. Is that a pterodactyl I can see in the distance?

02.

FRESH WATER

Lake Baikal (Russia) p60

The booms of fracturing ice echo all around you as the planet's largest freshwater lake begins to melt. The harsh Siberian winter is finally retreating under the radiant spring sunshine and the lake's metre-thick icy crust is breaking up. This is not exactly what you want to hear when crossing the world's deepest lake by camper van. But it's only during this three-week window in March, when conditions are just right, that you can squeeze through an ice hole into the freshwater wonderland below. Dramatic ice sculptures and green forests of living sponge provide the backdrop for the lake's unique population of bizarre creatures – from giant amphipods to the comical Baikal seal.

03.

SHALLOW SEAS

Great White in Flight (off the coast of South Africa) p258

Few things prepare you for such a display of raw brutality, a sobering reminder that for many animals life is a battle for survival. The war zone is Seal Island, 19km off Simon's Town, a sleepy coastal resort in the Eastern Cape. The victim, a doe-eyed Cape fur seal pup, is on its daily trek out to its fishing grounds. The enemy is every swimmer's worst nightmare: a one-tonne great white shark. At dawn it is possible to take a ring-side view on board a charter boat and witness jaw-dropping attacks as these terrifyingly huge sharks torpedoed out of the water. It's voyeuristic and bloody, but mesmerising. On returning to shore you may think twice about jumping on that surf board. Ignorance is bliss.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE BLUE TOWERS

Torres del Paine, Chile



Everything about this place is truly wild – the weather, the cruelly jagged granite peaks, the habitats and, especially, the animals. In addition to herds of guanacos and stealthy pumas, you'll probably spot flocks of flightless rheas and flamingos, as well as soaring condors. And with some 250km of marked hiking trails, it's a trekker's paradise.

On Screen

The environment of Parque Nacional Torres del Paine is as dangerous and ever-changing as it is beautiful – especially for guanacos, who must contend with vicious climatic variations as well as the attentions of the park's number one predator: the puma. *Planet Earth* tracks a group of pumas through the peaks and valleys of the southern Andes as the mother struggles to provide food for four young – showing us a unique family portrait of the region's prime land hunter.

When

The austral summer (December to March) offers the best chance of warmer, drier weather – though storms can blow up at any time. The park gets busy in high summer, so shoulder seasons (early December and March) offer a good compromise for trekkers.

Torres del Paine, Chile

Spectacular granite pillars jutting up some 2800m, the Torres del Paine dominate the landscape of Parque Nacional Torres del Paine.



“The Andes have the most unstable mountain weather on the planet – truly, all seasons in one day.”

BIRDS OF PARADISE

New Guinea



In the dripping highlands of New Guinea, the hirsute mess of forest provides a stage for one of the most colourful and striking wildlife courtship rituals. The males from almost 40 kinds of birds of paradise dance, sing, strut, flare and flounce to impress potential mates. Just as impressive is the rainforest itself – a single hectare of forest here contains up to 250 different plant and tree species.

On Screen

On *Planet Earth* you watch birds of paradise perform their ritual rhythmic mating dances, and see rainforest plants race to make use of a brief intrusion of sunlight in the wake of a fallen giant.

When

The one guarantee in a highland rainforest is rain – in extreme rainfall areas, such as West New Britain province or the northern areas of the Gulf and Western provinces of Papua New Guinea (PNG), the annual rainfall can average more than 8m a year. New Guinea's driest season is from May to October. The birds of paradise are best seen between July and October when their plumage is at its zenith.

Sepik River

There are no major urban settlements or mining and forestry activities in the Sepik River catchment area, allowing the river to remain largely unpolluted. The river is a source of food and transport, and part of the culture of local villagers.



DRAGON CHIMNEYS

Okinawa Trough, Western Pacific,
Off the Coast of Japan



Here be dragons... Navigating the thick plumes of these ocean dragons' smoking nostrils is a rather extraordinary experience. Surprising though it may be, there is life that thrives in this deep, dark, watery world – one of the least explored environments on the planet.

On Screen

Deep, deep down in the western Pacific, the *Planet Earth* crew's submarine navigates the smoky plumes of the aptly named Dragon Chimneys. Along the Okinawa Trough off the coast of Japan, in places where the ocean floor has wrenched itself apart, underwater vents erupt in the darkness, emitting clouds of superheated water laden with dissolved minerals.

When

The success of any deep-sea expedition is dependent on a slew of factors, including weather patterns, ocean currents and seasonal variants. Indeed, there is no perfect time to take the plunge, and even if the conditions are favourable, there is still a hefty amount of risk to contend with as extreme pressures can quickly turn sophisticated technology to compressed scrap metal.

Chinese Trumpetfish

The trumpetfish swims only slowly, so it relies on camouflage and stealth to ambush its prey, and also to hide from predators.

