

Join Mark Carwardine and Rachel Ashton on a fabulous holiday to snorkel with West Indian manatees *4-11 January 2026* *12-19 January 2026*



Snorkelling with manatees in the spring-fed waters of Florida's Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge is one of the world's great wildlife experiences. It's so safe and undemanding, all you need is an ability to snorkel and a penchant for big, friendly animals that want to hug you!

HIGHLIGHTS

- Close encounters with friendly and inquisitive manatees.
- The best place to snorkel with manatees anywhere in the world – excellent visibility in shallow, warm, spring-fed waters.
- Land-based tour from a delightful hotel overlooking Crystal River and surrounded by wildlife.
- Specially chartered boat for the exclusive use of our small group.
- Maximum time with the manatees during six mornings – twice as much as than any comparable tour
- Unforgettable two-hour drift-snorkels down the Rainbow River.
- Birdwatching cruises on King's Bay to see ospreys (which usually nest in the hotel garden), turkey vultures, bald eagles, anhingas, egrets, herons, ibises, pelicans, and many other birds.
- Visit a rehabilitation centre for injured and orphaned manatees.



This exclusive trip has been put together by Wildlife Worldwide

To book, please contact Rachel Ashton T: +44 (0) 7791-058-342 E: rachel@markcarwardine.com



DESCRIPTION

Crystal River is widely regarded as the best manatee encounter site anywhere, because it is home to so many of these gentle giants and the water clarity is superb. It is where most of the manatee photographs published in books and magazines are taken. It's also very safe – there are no currents and there are plenty of places where the water is no more than waist deep. On any one snorkel, we are likely to see from as few as 10 to as many as 50 animals – possibly some with newborn calves – and are likely to have them swimming right alongside or even attempting to nuzzle or hug us.

Sensitive to cold, many manatees migrate each winter from the Gulf of Mexico to warmer, spring-fed waters along the Florida coast. They spend the night around these underwater springs, such as the one at Crystal River, and then wander off in search of aquatic plants to eat in the early afternoon. To pack in as much time with them as possible, we start fairly early (around 7.00am) and then return to the hotel in time for a shower and a leisurely lunch.

In the afternoons, while the manatees are out and about feeding, we'll be enjoying a variety of other activities. These will include: two leisurely two-hour drift-snorkels down the nearby Rainbow River, where the superbly clear water carries us along at a gentle pace past freshwater turtles, diving cormorants and astonishing numbers

of fish species (eg alligator gar, *right*). The boat will follow close behind for any snorkellers who don't wish to snorkel the full two hours. We'll also visit the Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park (a rehabilitation centre for orphaned or injured manatees), with an underwater observatory and a wide variety of other local wildlife; and we'll enjoy a delightful birdwatch cruise on nearby King's Bay.



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SNORKELLING WITH MANATEES

All our encounters with the manatees will be conducted under strict federal guidelines to ensure as little disturbance as possible. We let the manatees decide how and when they will interact with us. There are volunteer wardens in kayaks and rangers from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to keep an official eye on things.

While manatees aren't necessarily the most beautiful animals in the world, they are certainly among the most friendly. They are also incredibly curious. A snorkeller lying on the water surface can hopefully enjoy the thrill of an individual coming over for an inspection. They enjoy body contact, often rubbing and bumping into each other, and seem to assume that snorkellers enjoy the same kind of rumbustious exchange.

ITINERARY *(this may vary according to conditions)*

DAY 1: Fly to Orlando and transfer by minibus (approximately 100 miles) to the very comfortable Plantation Inn, Crystal River *(right)*. Welcome meal with Mark and Rachel.

DAY 2: Walk to the Dive Centre in the hotel grounds and set off in our chartered boat to find the manatees. Each day come back for a mid-morning break around 10am, and then return for more snorkelling until lunchtime. This afternoon, go to Rainbow River for a drift-snorkel (35 minutes drive).

DAY 3: Morning with manatees; afternoon visit to Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park (15 minutes drive).

DAY 4: Morning with manatees; afternoon free (with an optional opportunity to kayak or canoe around King's Bay).

DAY 5: Morning with manatees; afternoon birdwatch by boat in King's Bay.

DAY 6: Morning with manatees; afternoon snorkel down Rainbow River.

DAY 7: Snorkel with manatees; afternoon free (with an optional opportunity to kayak or canoe around King's Bay); farewell meal.

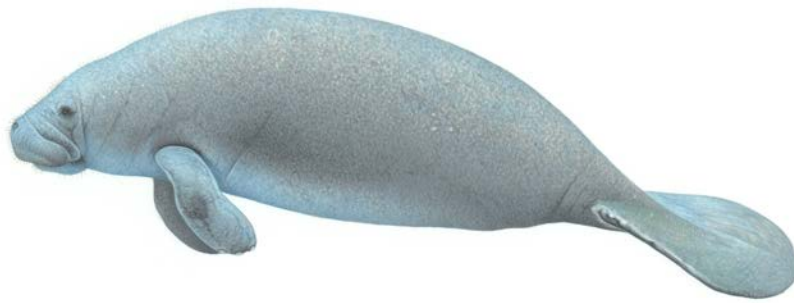
DAY 8: Morning birdwatch by boat in King's Bay; check out and transfer to Orlando for late afternoon flight home.

DAY 9: Arrive back in UK.



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LEADERS

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, an outspoken conservationist, an award-winning and bestselling author, a TV and radio presenter, a widely published photographer, a wildlife tour operator and leader, a lecturer, and a BBC Wildlife magazine columnist. He co-presented the BBC-TV series Last Chance to See, with the comedian and actor Stephen Fry, and the BBC-TV series Museum of Life. He also presented the weekly half-hour radio programme Nature on BBC Radio 4 for many years. He has written more than 60 books, including Field Guide to Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises, The Shark Watcher's Handbook and The Guinness Book of Animal Records. His latest is How to Photograph Garden Birds. He was Chairman of the Judging Panel of the prestigious Wildlife Photographer of

the Year Competition for seven years (2005-2011) and was selected as one of the world's 40 most influential nature photographers in Outdoor Photography magazine.

Rachel Ashton has worked with Mark since 2004, and assisted him on many of his wildlife adventures, such as whale-watching in Baja California and snorkelling with sperm whales in Dominica. She produces the slideshows for the trips. A keen diver, she is, like Mark, passionate about marine wildlife. She started out in advertising and marketing in Australia, before a happy career switch to BBC Wildlife magazine in Bristol, where she ultimately became Features Editor. She also wrote the captions for the prestigious Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition for 15 years (1999-2015).



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GROUP SIZE

12 guests plus 2 leaders.

WEATHER

Daytime air temperatures are likely to be peak at around 70-74°F (21-23°C), although early mornings and evenings tend to be cool. Water temperature at the manatee encounter site averages 65-71°F (18-22°C). The weather is usually good and sunny at this time of year, although overcast skies and rain are not impossible.

ACCOMMODATION

We stay in the comfortable and wonderfully peaceful Plantation Inn overlooking Crystal River (the gardens literally run down to the water's edge). All our rooms face the water and have air-conditioning and private facilities. The hotel is set in 200 beautiful acres and facilities include a large heated swimming pool, sun deck, and it also has its own dock, where we board our charter boat each morning for the short trip to the main spring-head. The Plantation Inn lies on a lovely backwater packed with wildlife.

PRICES PER PERSON

£5,995 excluding flights; £6,495 including economy return flights from London to Orlando; £650 single supplement.

Price includes: accommodation at Plantation Inn for seven nights in a water-view patio room; welcome meal on



day one and farewell meal on day eight; breakfast from day two to day eight; six hours daily snorkelling with manatees on an exclusive boat; two afternoons drift-snorkelling in Rainbow River; entrance fee to Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park; two exclusive birdwatching excursions on boats; return transfers from and to Orlando airport (if your flight times fit with the group's flight); return transfers to Rainbow River and Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park; loan of wetsuit, snorkel and mask, fins; guide services of Mark and Rachel; presentations by Mark; slideshow produced by Rachel to take home.

Price does not include: transport to airport in UK; upgrade from economy if buying the flight package; single supplement in hotel; passport and ESTA/visa expenses; excess baggage

charges; cancellation, baggage and travel insurance (compulsory); lunch and supper (other than welcome and farewell meals); drinks; hire of kayak or canoe; items of a personal nature such as laundry and telecommunications charges; medical expenses; gratuities.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE PER PERSON:

- Non-refundable 20% deposit due on booking.
- Final balance due two months prior to departure.



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