T: 1-800-985-4852
E: info@realgap.com
P: Real Gap Experience, 8 Essex Center Drive, Peabody, MA 01960

USA Wildlife Sanctuary in Florida

Adventure Relaxation Culture

Trip Name: USA Wildlife Sanctuary in Florida **Trip Code:** USWF **Duration:** From 4 weeks

Trip Highlights

- Get up close to a range of fascinating animals from leopards to native American wolves
- Help support the wildlife sanctuary provide injured, orphaned and abused animals with a safe and secure refuge
- Lend a much needed hand and carry out a variety of duties wherever needed at the centre
- Soak up the sunshine in North America's sunshine state!

Overview

On this worthwhile volunteer programme, you'll help care for exotic animals such as leopards, tigers, bears, cougars and wolves! These animals have been abused, neglected or orphaned. The Wildlife Sanctuary is dependent on volunteers to support the centre.

During your time at the sanctuary, you will be involved with a variety of activities from animal care (such as food preparation and feeding) to grounds maintenance. If you have a certain skill such as mechanics, landscaping, carpentry or maintenance you will have the opportunity to work using these skills during your time at the sanctuary. Whatever you do, you'll be helping to maintain a safe haven for these neglected animals, and in addition making a positive difference towards preserving Florida wildlife.

Destination Info

The wildlife sanctuary is situated in a rural area near Zolfo Springs, Florida (approx. 1.5 hrs from Orlando). Zolfo Springs is a small town found in Hardee County, Florida.

The sanctuary is in a very remote location and there is no public transportation in the area. The co-ordinators aim to organise time for volunteers to have an ‘outing’ (to the cinema, shopping, etc) every few weeks, but you should be aware that opportunities will be limited. If you wish to rent your own car, you will need a full drivers license and you must be 21 or 25 years of age, depending on the company. We recommend that you use either one of the car hire companies at Orlando airport or nearby Sebring offers car rental.

If you wish to travel around Florida it would be advisable to allow yourself some time before or after the programme for independent travel. There is so much to see and do in this sunshine state - scream at the top of your lungs at one of the top theme parks in Orlando, explore the lush wilderness of the Everglades or just chill out on one of Miami’s sandy beaches - the possibilities are endless.

Itinerary

There are a wide variety of volunteer duties that you may get involved with at the sanctuary.

Duties include but are not limited to:

- Feeding
- Food Preparation
- Cleaning enclosures
- Animal Enrichment
- Gardening/landscaping
- Performing maintenance tasks
- Sorting fresh produce and rotating food supplies
- Maintaining proper animal husbandry notes in the journal
- Assisting with veterinary care as needed
- Administrative duties

Animal enrichment is an important part of the daily schedule as lack of enrichment causes stereotypical and harmful behaviour in animals. Volunteering at the sanctuary is hard work but yields enormous rewards.

If you have a certain skill such as mechanics, landscaping, carpentry or maintenance you will have the opportunity to work using these skills during your time at the sanctuary.

Occasionally you may have the chance to assist with tour groups to help educate the public about why wild animals are not good pets, animal endangerment and extinction.

Accommodation

You will be staying in shared living quarters either in a small house or in a static caravan on the sanctuary grounds. The accommodation is basic but comfortable - private bathrooms with hot showers, electricity, air conditioning, TV, DVD and VCR. Linen will be provided. Laundry facilities and a full kitchen are available in the main house. There is an onsite phone that you can use with a prepaid phone card.

Female volunteers generally stay in the small house off site while male volunteers are accommodated in the static caravans on site. It is the responsibility of volunteers to keep accommodation clean and tidy.

Programme Services and Facilities

Internet

There is wireless Internet connection available at the sanctuary, so if you have a laptop (with a current operating system) you can bring it and use it for e-mail, etc. There may also be access available to the office computer but this is not guaranteed.

Telephone

There is a telephone available for you to make calls within the United States – however you will need to have a working mobile phone or a prepaid phone card to make international calls.

The international telephone access code for the United States is +1.

To place an outgoing call, direct dialled international call, dial +44 for the UK, +49 for Germany, followed by the telephone number. For example to call Real Gap Experience dial +44 1892 516164 / +49 69 222226 475.

Laundry

There are laundry facilities onsite. There is no charge for this service, however you may need to supply your own washing powder.

Electricity

There will be outlets available for you to charge up your camera and so on.

Meals

Food and groceries are provided for the volunteers. You will have to prepare your own meals in the fully equipped kitchen in the main house or in the volunteers' quarters. Volunteers are required to clean up after themselves.

What's Included

- Volunteer Project
- Meals
- Airport transfers
- Accommodation
- Full support from the co-ordinator
- Buddy list
- Telephone and Internet facilities onsite
- 24 hour support number

What's Not Included

- Flights
- Travel insurance
- E-mail or phone charges

Is This Trip For You?

Reality Check

Animals at the sanctuary are often rescued from conditions that do not make them accustomed to human interaction and therefore require special handling by experienced individuals. Interaction with animals is in a safe manner; feeding or enrichment and does not necessarily involve physical contact with the animals.

What to Pack

Please note that this kit list is intended to help you plan what you may need to take with you and therefore, you may not need all of the listed items on your travels nor is it exhaustive.

Personal Admin

- Travel Documents
- Medical Documentation - this is usually in the form of a Health Vaccination card given to you by your travel nurse which will document your negative TB test and tetanus vaccination (see Medical section for more details)
- Passport
- Driving Licence
- NHS card or a National Insurance card or proof of entitlement to your National Health Service
- Insurance Policy document or card
- Credit Card, for emergencies and booking internal flights

General

- Journal or diary
- Towel
- Toiletries
- Water bottle
- Alarm Clock
- Torch
- Books/games for entertainment
- Camera
- iPod/CD walkman/speakers/headphones
- Sunglasses

Clothing

- Rain gear
- Swim wear
- Closed-toed shoes and socks to protect your feet from biting ants or mosquitoes- ankle high hiking boots are the best but trainers will work
- Clothes that you don't mind getting dirty or even ruined
- Lightweight jacket/jumper for cool evenings
- Long trousers
- Clothes for your time off (shorts are good!)

Medical Kit

- Medication
- High factor sun cream
- First Aid Kit
- Insect Repellent

Minimum Age

Minimum 21 years, maximum decided on potential participants' health.

Flights

Your flight to Florida should arrive at Orlando Airport on your programme start date (before 9pm), and your return flight should be arranged for your programme end date (between 10am and 8pm). The start and end date must always be on a Sunday as the included airport transfers will not be made on any other day.

To book your flights, please contact your travel advisor who will do their best to get you the best deal on the day. Please provide them with your full name as it is stated in your passport. Before you make the call please make sure you have your required departure dates, return dates and other details you may require.

It is important that once you have booked your flights you add these details to your Online account, or alternatively you can contact us with your departure date, the flight number and arrival time at your destination.

FAQs

1. **Do I need to have worked with animals before?**
   No. As long as you are enthusiastic, fit and happy to get work hard and get involved, you will really enjoy the experience!

2. **What is the accommodation like?**
   The accommodation is basic but comfortable with private bathrooms with hot showers, electricity, air conditioning, TV, DVD and VCR.

3. **How hard is the work?**
   You do need to be fit & healthy as you will be working 9-10 hours per day.

4. **What animals will I be working with?**
   The resident animals range from big cats, such as cougars, leopards and tigers to wolves, primates, bears and native American animals.

5. **Do I have to have the vaccinations you suggest?**
   To be accepted onto the programme, you will require proof of a TB vaccine or a current negative TB test within the past 12 months. If you wish to work with bats you will also require rabies vaccinations.

Support & Advice

Your safety is paramount which is why all our programs have been visited and assessments have been conducted to ensure any major risks have been minimized.

In addition, you will have access to a 24 hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to. In addition our overseas partners and coordinators are on hand in-country to assist you.

Financial Security

We know that the last thing you want to worry about when you're planning your trip of a lifetime is whether your money is in safe hands. As a leading global gap year provider it's our job to make sure your finances are secure, so when you book with us you can be confident that we do just that.

Real Gap Experience is part of TUI Travel Plc, one of the largest travel organisations in the world, and these days in the travel industry, large means secure.

Insurance

Whether you're traveling for two weeks or two years, trekking the Amazon in Ecuador or on safari in Africa, insurance is an essential part of your adventure and will help you enjoy your travels, secure in the knowledge that you have the protection you need. In fact, everyone traveling with us must have adequate cover before their trip begins.

Of course you are free to buy insurance from any provider, however at Real Gap Experience, we have partnered with World Nomads to offer policies that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of global travel. If you think you're already covered by an existing policy, such as those offered by credit card providers, check the policy wording very carefully to ensure it covers you for your Real Gap Experience.

For more information on travel insurance please contact us to speak to one of our travel advisors.

Money Matters

The currency in the US is the US Dollar (USD, symbol; $), which is divided into 100 Cents. Coins come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 Cents (¢) and the 1 Dollar coin. Notes come in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 Dollars, though the $2 note is rarely used.

No other currency is accepted but most major credit cards are universally accepted, especially Visa or MasterCard, and may even be required for larger purchases. ATMs are available almost everywhere and will charge a small fee for withdrawing cash using a credit card or international card, unless your card belongs to a worldwide network such as Cirrus or Exchange.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant 11.16 $

Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) 3.21 $
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) 1.48 $
Water (0.33 litre bottle) 1.27 $

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Passports and Visas

You should ensure that you have a full passport that is valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information provided below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

For stays of up to 90 days citizens of Australia, New Zealand and most European countries will need to apply for an ESTA visa before they go. The ESTA visa can be applied for online for a small fee and must be used within two years of issue.

For working holidays applicants will usually need to hold an ESTA visa and a working visa, the type of visa required will depend on the nature of your work, your nationality and the length of your stay; you will also usually need some form of sponsorship from an employer in the USA.

For the most up to date information on passports, visa requirements and working in the USA, please visit http://www.visabureau.com/america/default.aspx

Cultural Considerations

A global culture and tradition is virtually non-existent in the USA because of the vast mixture of backgrounds that its

original immigrant education came from. This is particularly reflected in the number of China Towns, Irish Districts, Jewish districts and so on that are in virtually every city across North America, as well as the fact that several states have Spanish and French as official state languages alongside English.

The American people are similar to Europeans in terms of what does and doesn't offend them. Although sometimes seen as loud and crass when outside their native country, you may find that Americans in America are less overpowering than you might expect. Here are a few ways to avoid offending your hosts:

- It is best to avoid talking about religion – faith is seen as being entirely personal to many Americans, although you are likely to come across people belonging to religions that have the intention of trying to convert you. Whichever of these you come across, they will not be used to having their beliefs challenged and may become offended easily.
- Smoking in public is becoming restricted more and more – keep an eye out for signs.
- Americans tend to have a relaxed social attitude and you may find that people (even shop assistants and waiters) are really interested in talking to you, especially about your country of origin. This is seen to be polite so engage them in casual conversation.
- In such conversation you may find that the person you are talking to has little knowledge of life outside the US (this is by no means the majority of people) and may refer to stereotypes – if you feel that you need to correct their views, do it politely and they will be gracious.
- US residents feel a strong connection to their 'land of origin' even if their family has lived in America for 200 odd years and once had an Irish relative!
- Terrorism is still very much a topic that must be approached with utmost respect. Talking about war should also be approached with caution - the American public are very patriotic about their troops.

Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in the USA. The legal age of alcohol consumption in the US is 21. However, please respect other participants. Drinking is only permissible in moderation and must not impact on your volunteer work during the week. While we want you to have fun in your free time, antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated.

It is absolutely forbidden to bring drugs into the USA. Always keep an eye on your luggage while travelling. Never bring anyone else's luggage through customs. If you get caught there is little chance that you will walk away without punishment. As in most countries, the USA has very strict rules when it comes to the possession of drugs. All drugs, including "soft" drugs like marijuana, are ILLEGAL. Please do NOT use any illegal substances whilst travelling – it is not worth the risk and is not acceptable at the project.

Tipping

In a restaurant or taxi you should tip 15- 20% of the bill total, as no service charge will be added on. Tipping is widely practiced due to the low wages that the workers in such professions receive.

Vaccinations & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad. The risks to your health whilst travelling will vary depending on your general health and the type of activities you are going to be partaking in and the length of your stay.

Since we are not medically qualified, it is recommended that you consult with your Doctor or a recognised Travel Medical Advisory Service who will assess your particular health risks before recommending vaccines and/or anti-malarial tablets and advising you on what precautions you should take.

Safety

As in most countries there are people who try to take advantage of tourists. The following advice is intended to help you stay safe:

- Always keep your personal items such as passport, money and camera with you and in a safe place. You can buy mini padlocks to prevent people from going into your bag without your permission.
- Don't carry excess amounts of cash
- Wherever possible, walk around in groups, especially after dark, and avoid taking short cuts
- Do not pick up hitch hikers if you are driving and do not hitch hike yourself
- When you are out do not leave your drinks unattended, as there have been reports of drinks being spiked

We advise that you check your government's advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

UK: www.fco.gov.uk
USA: www.travel.state.gov
Australia: www.smartraveller.gov.au

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if you card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief.

If your card is confiscated or you are concerned that your card has been tampered with, please report immediately to the bank or cancel your card.

Language Guide

Here are some choice American phrases to get you started!

Pants - *Trousers*

Restroom/washroom - *Toilets*
Sidewalk - *Pavement*
Subway - *Underground*
Laundromat - *Laundrette*
Band-aid - *Plaster*
Soccer - *Football*
Football - *American Football*
Fanny Pack - *Bum bag*
Philly Cheese Steak - *A long sandwich made with thin slices of steak and melted cheese*
Twinkie - *A little golden sponge cake with a cream filling*
Candy - *Chocolate/sweets*

Americans tend to call certain things by their brand names, for example tissues are ‘Kleenex’ and so on.

Food & Drink

Currently the USA is famed for its love of the quick and easy fast food- burgers, pizza, fries and so on. However, there is so much choice out there, budget and otherwise- get out and sample it! You will be able to get any ethnicity food you could possibly imagine but if you want something properly American try out some steak, ribs, seafood in the coastal areas (especially Florida and California). Try some Cajun food (spot the European influence!) or something Mexican both options are delicious.

It is really important that you let us know before you depart if you are a vegetarian or have any other dietary requirements.

Public Holidays

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country.

To view a list of the public holidays for the USA, please see the link below:
www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/

Weather

The climate in the USA is relatively temperate though specific weather conditions can vary greatly depending on where you are; this country is pretty huge! As a general rule the further south you go, the hotter it gets, while the north and areas far from the coast experience the most extreme weather. California and the east coast are warm and balmy for most of the year while northern areas such as New York experience 4 definable seasons.

Hurricanes and tornadoes are more common in south-eastern areas and occur during excessive warm weather on a sporadic basis. The USA is the only country in the world to cover all of the six climactic zones, ranging from tropical to polar, which means that a trip here will be an adventure in more ways than one!

Time

The USA has four time zones (not including Hawaii and Alaska) all of which are behind the Greenwich Mean Time. They are:

- Eastern time; five hours behind GMT (New York)
- Central time; six hours behind GMT (Chicago, Texas)
- Mountain time; seven hours behind GMT(Rocky Mountains, Southwest)
- Pacific time; eight hours behind GMT(California, Nevada)

Don’t forget to take Daylight Saving Time into account from mid-March to early November

Electricity

In the USA the electric system is 120 Volts and frequency 60 Hertz. If your device does not accept power at this voltage you will need an adapter. Outlets in United States of America / USA generally accept 1 type of plug:

Flat blade plug

Trip Note Disclaimer

The information contained in this trip note has been compiled with great care and is provided in good faith. Any itinerary featured is correct at time of release. However, our itineraries may change as make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of reommended travel advice.

You can rest assured that it is always our goal to provide you with the most rewarding trip and experience ever!

Our Details

If you have any questions about this trip please do not hesitate to contact us and we'll be happy to answer them.

Phone: 1-800-985-4852
Email: info@realgap.com
Post: Real Gap Experience, 8 Essex Center Drive, Peabody, MA 01960
Web: www.realgap.com