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Up close with apes, cats



Cheetahs relaxing atop a Kopje in Namiri Plains. (Asilia Africa)

By Phil Marty, Special to Tribune Newspapers

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When it comes to bucket lists, viewing mountain gorillas in their native habitat scores high for a lot of people. Add cheetahs, and you get an even cooler experience. Extraordinary Journeys lives up to its name with a package that holds out the promise of checking off both species on your list. The trip starts in Arusha, Tanzania, and quickly gets to it with three days in a part of the legendary Serengeti National Park that's a private concession and considered among East Africa's best cheetah viewing. Next stop is a luxury island camp in Lake Victoria that has wild-roaming elephants and chimps. Then it's on to Rwanda for the ultimate experience. In Volcanoes National Park, you'll undertake a strenuous trek to the gorillas, though sightings aren't guaranteed. Visitors are allowed to spend just an hour with the gorillas, but the trek may take one to six hours. Pricing is from \$9,000 per person double occupancy, and the gorilla permit is another \$750 each. Info: 212-226-7331, tinyurl.com/ndzmyvu

Budget business class

La Compagnie is a new boutique airline flying between Newark, N.J., and Paris and offering solely business-class seating at very competitive rates. To sweeten the deal, it has a special round-trip inaugural fare as low as \$1,378 per person or \$2,014 for two. But to get that you need to book by Aug. 15 for travel through Sept. 15. We also checked fares after the special disappears and found, for example, that you could fly from Newark on Oct. 11 and return on Oct. 18 for just \$1,860. By comparison, a search for those same dates on Orbitz turned up a best business-class fare of \$2,820 on Icelandair and required a stop in Reykjavik. The cheapest nonstop was \$6,125 on Delta. La Compagnie has just one Boeing 757-200 for starters, configured with 74 lie-flat seats. During August there are just four flights weekly, expanding to six in September and daily in November. Entertainment is via Samsung Galaxy tablets, and meal options aren't what you might generally expect in business class, but that price is hard to beat. The cheapest fares have higher fees for changes or cancellations. Unless the website has been updated, be aware that when choosing return flights, you need to scroll the page to see your options. 800-218-8187, tinyurl.com/obwcfdv

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Family reunion help

Family reunions are a terrific way to reconnect and vacation at the same time. But setting up one can be a major undertaking. The American Resort Development Association, which represents the time-share industry, has put together a useful online brochure titled Time for Togetherness, which has some worthwhile information without pushing time shares as your destination. For instance, it suggests using a tool like surveymonkey.com to create a survey that will gauge family members' interests, location preferences, etc. You can find the brochure at tinyurl.com/oeu3gvk.

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