

Hope of greatness leads to surge in adventure travel

By Tom Stienstra | August 20, 2017



Photo: Tom Stienstra, Courtesy Yancey Forrest-Knowles



Yancey Forrest-Knowles, left, ventured from the Bay Area to Sitka, Alaska for a chance of what is not typically available in California — like this 72-pound lingcod, which he released unharmed back into the ocean after this photograph. Josh Birch, also from the Bay Area, helps him hoist the giant fish.

All anybody wants each morning is something to look forward to, the hope that something good is ahead.

In the outdoors, you can — literally — take it the extra mile to experience an unrepeatable moment.

That is why so many are willing to spend so much and go so far on their summer adventure vacations. This summer that hope has fed the exotic travel market for fishing, wildlife watching, scuba diving, hunting and other specialty adventures in far-off places.

Bookings are the best they've been in about 10 years, according to lodge owners and outfitters. They say the surge is coming from the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Dallas, Chicago and some of the big cities in Florida and the Northeast.



In the Bay Area, a testament to this was a trip last week to Sitka, Alaska, for a chance to catch giant lingcod and halibut by local field scouts **Yancey Forest-Knowles** and **Josh Birch**. Forest-Knowles caught the biggest lingcod I've ever seen, a 5-footer that weighed 72 pounds. The moment ended wonderfully when the giant fish was released unharmed. All aboard shared in the exhilaration of watching it swim off in the clear, blue sea and then disappear into the depths.

"To let that big lingcod go was real important to me," said Forest-Knowles of the defining moment of the trip. "We admired it and let it go."

He also said he released a big halibut he described as looking like a spacecraft hovering from side to side.

Near the end of the trip, Forest-Knowles announced he was getting a bite.

"I feel something nibbling," he said, and then he set the hook. He said he leaned back with the rod, and then, with a grin, said, "It's just a little one." But after retrieving about 100 feet of line, that little fish suddenly acted as though it had become the Kraken.

Forest-Knowles, a collegial fellow with a career in education, battled with rod and reel and when the fish emerged from the clear water, a gasp went through the boat. It was another giant lingcod, estimated at 55 pounds, and its mouth was locked on the back and tail of a small fish that was on the hook — a "hitchhiker." The moment the hitchhiker's nose breaks the surface, they normally let go of the fish they've chomped onto.

"It's the Kraken," shouted Forest-Knowles. "The denizen of the deep."

Well, sure enough, the big fish eventually let go of the little fish and swam back to Davy Jones' locker to a big cheer on the boat.



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Over the years, on many trips to far-off places, I've had encounters so spectacular that no matter how much I've spent, how far I've had to travel, and all the hassles I had to put up with to get there, it didn't matter. That's what drives the market.

Here are just a few of the thousands of travel companies, outfitters and guides that put together world-class packages and adventures. Even if you don't book, you can dream a little.

Adventure: REI Adventures, www.rei.com/adventures; National Geographic Expeditions, www.nationalgeographicexpeditions.com; Kulik Lodge, Alaska, www.katmailand.com; Mountain Travel Sobek, www.mtsobek.com; Backroads, <https://my.backroads.com>.

Flyfishing: Yobi Adventures, <https://yobiadventures.com>; Jack Trout Flyfishing, www.jacktrout.com; The Fly Shop, www.theflyshop.com; Orvis, www.orvis.com/fly-fishing-trips.

Wildlife Safaris (Africa and others): Zicasso Handcrafted Travel, www.zicasso.com; Destination Africa, www.destinationafrica.com.au; Brush Buck Tours, <https://brushbucktours.com/africa>; Natural Focus/African Wildlife Safaris, www.africanwildlifesafaris.com.au.

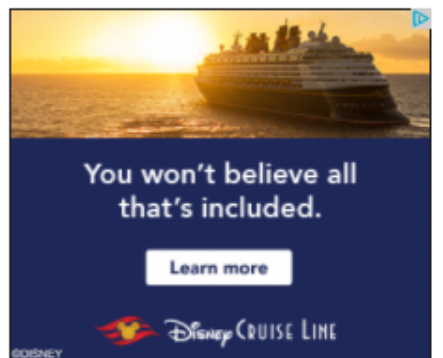
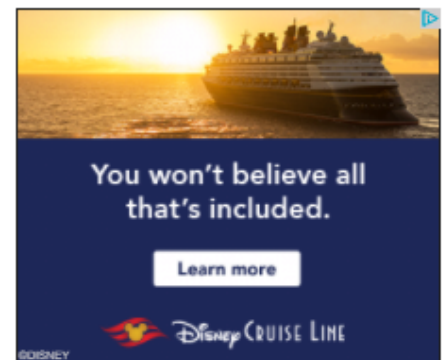
State Park reservations

A new era: A new California Department of Parks reservation system for camping is transitioning into place this month at <https://reservecalifornia.com>. One of the new features is what State Parks calls a “rolling window,” which allows users to make a reservation up to six months from the current date (and then extend the reservation beyond that six-month window). The premise is this will provide a better chance for people to book highly desired locations, such as the Steep Ravine Cabins (listed under Mount Tamalpais State Park).

Big improvements: The mapping and location of campgrounds and sites — as well as being able to figure out which dates are sold out and which are available — is much improved.

Jury still out: It remains unclear how the site will perform on the mornings of crunch dates (when popular days and weekends at marquee sites become available). In the past, many have complained that they were at a disadvantage when trying to make reservations against people who game the system with multiple devices on auto-dial.

Website: The restyled website — www.parks.ca.gov — still needs some work. It can be a struggle to find specific campgrounds you're looking for unless you know the exact way the park name is entered in the system (for instance, “Mt. Tamalpais” doesn't work — it's “Mount Tamalpais” — but “Mt. San Jacinto” does). In addition, several parts of the site are filled with old material.



Q & A, rules for dogs

Q: “My heart is broken again. What a wonderful hike (to Bass Lake, Pelican Lake, in the Aug. 13 Chronicle) that I’d love to take with my husband and dog. But, nope, can’t even do it on leash (for the dog, not the husband). Any chance of parks in the North Bay or South Bay changing their tunes? The Marin Municipal Water District is the one option I’m aware of, but would like more options.” — **Carolyn Thomas**

A: The rules for hundreds of parks in the greater Bay Area are detailed in the story, “Dog-friendly parks throw pet owners a bone,” which appeared in The Chronicle and www.SFChronicle.com on April 21, 2016, and is archived on the site.

New poacher fines

Throw key away: In response to the new law that fines poachers who take trophy deer (with antlers 3x3 or better) and other trophy wildlife \$40,000 per animal, many readers want even more punishment.

“Surrender of all property, including real estate, autos, and all SSI retirement benefits irrevocably would be more appropriate,” wrote **Kyoshi Williamson**. Others suggested harsher treatment, and several suggested their local county district attorneys be provided with a copy of the story.

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