

# The New York Times

## Walking Tours That Help Hotel Guests Discover Nearby Nature

By CHARU SURI    JULY 11, 2015



Spring Creek Ranch in Wyoming offers nature hikes around its property and all-day tours at Grand Teton National Park, 14 miles away. Spring Creek Ranch

To help guests better appreciate local wildlife, a number of hotels have naturalists to give guided walks and eco-tours, many of them free.

Raleigh Nyenhuis, the head naturalist at [Sea Island](#), Ga., takes guests on several types of walks, including discovering sea turtles at night and bird and marsh walks. “To be a naturalist is to be personable, ready and willing,” she said in a phone interview, adding that each year she changes her programs based on demand and on ecological changes. She added a junior naturalist program in March for children 7 to 14 (\$55 a person).

At [Mohonk Mountain House](#) in upstate New York, which hired its first naturalist 20 years ago, Michael Ridolfo takes guests on guided nature and trail hikes to learn about forest plants and to identify trees; and on bird walks and early morning canoe tours to spot wildlife (tours are free; room rates from \$310 a person).

→ Mark Bullinger, who has been with [Weekapaug Inn](#) in Rhode Island since 2012, says that because the property is on a salt water lagoon, he often takes guests on guided beach walks to show them crabs, fish and types of vegetation through high-powered binoculars. “It’s hard for people to slow down, but I want to draw them out and appreciate nature,” he said in an email. One-off events like “Supermoon” tours or harvest moon paddles are also offered (motorboat tours are \$40 a person; beach walks are included in room rates).

Phoebe Stoner, the naturalist program director at [Spring Creek Ranch](#) in Jackson, Wyo., takes guests regularly to Grand Teton National Park 14 miles from the property (“Dawn to Dusk” tours are \$135 from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily). Conservation stories and wildlife education are the highlights; there are also nature hikes around the ranch (\$50 for two hours).

Ms. Stoner said that participants love learning about geology and hearing about conservation. “The tours add an extra level of depth to paint that narrative,” she said.