



FEBRUARY 2019

1 CITY 5 WAYS: **CHARLESTON**
AUTHOR **ANGIE THOMAS** IN MISSISSIPPI
ANDREW ZIMMERN ON **LISBON'S** BEST EATS
TOKYO'S **GINZA DISTRICT** IS TRENDING
THE GRAND CANYON'S BIG MILESTONE

DRIVEN TO SUCCEED



Michael Strahan has gone from NFL defensive end to news anchor, sports analyst and lifestyle guru. Who knows what he'll conquer next? **P. 52**



THE NEXT BIG THING?
THINK **WALES,**
GREAT BRITAIN'S
WILD SIDE.

MIA

LEARNING TO SWIM WITH THE FISHES

Introducing a new generation to a magical, underwater world in the Florida Keys. **BY SUSAN B. BARNES**

FOR AS LONG as I can remember, I've been passionate about marine life—a passion I'm certain stems from living in Hawaii as a little girl. It was during the three years that my Army dad was stationed on Oahu, when I was in kindergarten through the second grade, that I learned to bodysurf and boogie board in the island waters and snorkel among enthralling sea life in Hanauma Bay.

When my nephew, Charlie, was born 10 years ago, I made it my mission to share my passion with him. We started in the calm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, and as he grew, he became a water baby himself, splashing in the waves

of the Atlantic Ocean and learning to boogie board with his “bapa,” my dad, just as I had been taught in Hawaii.

Once Charlie reached first grade, I figured it was time for him to learn to snorkel, so my sister and I planned a trip to the Florida Keys for the three of us. Making Cheeca Lodge & Spa on Islamorada our home base, we decided to practice swimming with our masks and snorkels in the hotel's pool before attempting a day on the open water. Not only would this help Charlie get used to the equipment, but—most importantly—I could make sure that his mask fit snugly so that water wouldn't leak in and sting his eyes, a sure path to uneasiness for an inexperienced snorkeler.

On the morning of our first planned excursion, the sky was cloudy, the water dark and choppy—not necessarily ideal conditions for a newbie snorkeler. Understandably, Charlie was hesitant to jump in, so our initial attempt was a scratch.

The following day, however, the clouds cleared, the warm Florida sun shone down and the water calmed, creating perfect snorkeling conditions. Spirits high, we hopped into the car and drove 30 minutes north to John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park in Key Largo, the first undersea park in the United States.

Our excitement grew as we boarded a pontoon boat and our captain steered us to the shallow reefs just offshore. But when it was time to lower ourselves into the water, Charlie was overcome with nerves and unsure about taking the plunge. It was then that I understood his fears: I was asking him to jump into waters deeper than he had ever been in, teeming with marine life that he had never seen. In my eagerness to share my passion with him, I had forgotten what it was like to be a 6-year-old learning to snorkel.

We backed up and restarted with small steps—literally the steps of the boat's ladder. I asked him to sit on the last one and simply put his masked face in the water so that he could see its clarity and even some of the small fish

swimming past. Once he was comfortable, Charlie eased into the sea, clinging to the ladder while at the same time putting his face back into the water, breathing through the snorkel and testing out his fins.

From there, I asked if he was up for swimming about 20 yards to where the line from the bow was tied to a mooring buoy, another spot that he could hold onto while continuing to steady his nerves. Charlie agreed. After about five minutes on the line, he announced that he was ready to go farther—and off we went, snorkeling hand in hand.

Through his snorkel, Charlie exclaimed in awe at the multitude of crea-

tures he spotted, oftentimes freeing his hand to point to what he saw. We swam over swaying sea fans and soft corals, through schools of vibrant tropical fish—which seemed to be playing endless games of hide and seek among the coral—and past stealthy, glinting barracuda that gave us sidelong glances. I was filled with joy.

Now that he's comfortable snorkeling, Charlie has his sights set on going deeper and wants to learn to scuba dive. As he prepares himself to discover even more wonders of the undersea world, he knows that I'm there if needed, ready to give advice, lend encouragement and, of course, reach out a helping hand. ▾



ZOONAR GMBH / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

© PHOTO BY JOEL SARTORE/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO ARK (GRAY WOLF)

SPOTLIGHT



A Mexican gray wolf photographed at the Endangered Wolf Center in Eureka, Missouri.

In Danger: Mexican Gray Wolf

Dogs have been man's best friend for at least 10,000 years—so you'd think that humankind would return the favor to save Fido's great ancestor. Domestic dogs are direct descendants of gray wolves, and the Mexican gray wolf is among the rarest and most endangered land mammals in the world. This highly social animal once roamed the southwest U.S. in the thousands. Today, fewer than 150 survive in the wild. "Saving the Mexican gray wolf is a difficult challenge, but not because of some unique biological reason," says Mike Phillips, director of the Turner Endangered Species Fund, which has been actively working to protect the wolf for more than 20 years. "Rather, all it needs is for people to stop killing them needlessly." In short, it's time for humans to give this beautiful animal a chance. — **COSTAS CHRIST**

For more information on the endangered species included in National Geographic's Photo Ark project, led by photographer Joel Sartore, visit natgeophotoark.org.