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Travel Q&A

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Q: My grandson, who turn 12, wants to visit a rainforest. He's not keen on flying over "big oceans." Any suggestions?

A: There's no need to cross an ocean to explore rainforests, those lush, humid ecosystems characterized by massive trees, a bogging array of plant and animal life and annual rainfall of 100 inches or more. If your grandson will tolerate a short hop over the Caribbean Sea or Gulf of Mexico, Central America has lots of options. One place to search for destinations is [www.eco-indextourism.org](http://www.eco-indextourism.org), a site run by the Rainforest Alliance.

It lists tourism operators that are approved by a sustainable tourism certification program or recommended by a credible conservation organization, and you can search by the activities your grandson is most interested in (bird-watching, fishing, etc.).

Costa Rica is the obvious place for a starter trip: The mountainous country tucked between the Pacific and the Caribbean is one of the most biodiverse places on Earth. One resort option: the Selva Verde Lodge (1-800-451-7111, [www.selvaverde.com](http://www.selvaverde.com)) in the north-central lowlands, set in 500 acres of rainforest with hiking and hands-on learning programs. River lodge and bungalow room rates for June and July are \$162 double and include meals.

For something less obvious, consider Belize or Panama, says Christine Halvorson, interim director of the nonprofit Rainforest Foundation in New York. In Panama, Gamboa Rainforest Resort (1-877-800-1690, [www.gamboaresort.com](http://www.gamboaresort.com)) in Soberania National Park offers ecological adventures for all ages, including an aerial tram tour. Rates start at \$200 per night double and include breakfast.

Belize is easy because English is the primary language. Half of the country is covered by rainforest, and a growing number of resorts offer jungle experiences. Chaa Creek (1-877-709-8708, [www.chaacreek.com](http://www.chaacreek.com)), set in a private nature reserve on the banks of the Macal River in the foothills of the Maya Mountains, has caving, horseback riding and hiking. Cottages start at \$270 per night double and include breakfast; packages are available.

Puerto Rico is another choice: It's home to Caribbean National Forest, aka El Yunque, the only tropical rain forest in the United States.