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Let Wildlife Migrations Plan Your Next Trip

Are you planning your next vacation but don't know where to start? Why not try following the herd? Every year, animals all over the world hit the road, sky, or sea for impressive migrations, and you can get a front row seat to nature's big show. From massive groups of wildebeests crossing the Serengeti to flocks of flamingos turning the Tanzania sky pink, these seasonal journeys are one-of-a-kind experiences for your bucket list.

Nature's Grand Processions

If you want to go big, the Great Migration across the Serengeti is one of the largest annual animal voyages on the planet. Thundering groups of wildebeests, zebras, and gazelles can be spotted from July to August as they search for water and food. Travel to Sri Lanka's Minneriya and Kaudulla National Parks if you want to snap a photo of a pachyderm. Between July and October, hundreds of Asian elephants meet up there for an ancient tradition called "The Gathering."

Great Journeys Overhead

An adventure that's for the birds, the flamingo flight in Tanzania is a colorful sky show unlike anything else. The flocks take to the air from June to September and January to March, following mighty rains. Go nocturnal in November as millions of fruit bats hang from trees and flutter in the dark searching for snacks. These night flyers put on an eerie display at dusk in Zambia every year and may change your mind about the critters.

Voyages at Sea

Set a course for the high seas to witness the longest migration of any mammals as thousands of giant humpback whales swim across the planet. They cruise from the coasts of South Africa and South America to the warm waters of the Pacific and make stops in the icy seas of Antarctica. Though they come in much smaller packages, the trek of sea turtles to their nesting beaches has been an epic sight for over 100 million years. You can see them swim from the Indian Ocean to the shores of Sodwana Bay in South Africa before they lay their eggs.

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Spring-Cleaning Your Rental Inventory

The Hidden Costs of Idle Gear

Every spring, my wife and I look around our house and garage and realize how much stuff has piled up. I pull a box off a shelf and think, "Man, I haven't touched this for months, so why am I still hanging on to it?" The same thing happens in a rental company, except the issue causes more problems. When you let old tents and other inventory sit on the shelf, you aren't just storing memories. You're tying up money, space, and time.

Spring-cleaning in the tent rental industry isn't just a way to keep the shop tidy. It helps ensure that everything on the shelf works for you. Back when I owned my rental company, I tried to look at every piece of inventory in terms of earns and turns. How much does that item earn every time it goes out, and how many times does it turn in a year? If a tent goes out regularly and earns a decent amount every time, that's good inventory. An item that sits on a shelf month after month isn't.

A big piece that people often miss with this issue is how many hidden costs are tied up with it. First of all, you're paying for the building space whether that piece goes out or not. Then you have material wear. Vinyl and other materials start to wear out just sitting there. And you also have to think about changing style preferences. Something that people loved a couple of years ago might not be in style today. On top of that, there are management costs. If your crew has to climb around or move inventory to get to the items that actually get used, you're creating extra steps that burn up more time and money.

Once you start paying attention to those hidden costs, spring-cleaning seems a lot more important. Instead of just being a way to stay organized, it becomes part of how you keep your company healthy. My advice is to look at every item on your shelves at least once a year and ask yourself a question: Is this thing still earning its keep, or is it just taking up space?

Of course, this doesn't mean you should toss everything away. There's still money in old inventory. You just have to find somebody who wants it. One smart idea is to hold a sale. I know a big company on the East Coast that does this every year. In January, they have a huge sale when their rental business is slow. They promote the heck out of it and invite the public, caterers, and other rental companies. They sell everything that's no longer worth the space it's using, including tents, linens, and silverware.

For me, I made moving inventory a regular part of my rental business. Because we had a tent washing machine, I didn't need to buy the highest-grade tents. I would buy ones that were around medium grade and keep them spotless. Then, whenever a church, Boy Scout troop, or someone else came through our doors looking for a tent, I'd sell it to them and buy a new one. The numbers worked out great for me, and I was never stuck storing piles of old tent tops that never went out.

There's really no one right way to keep on top of your inventory. You can do it once a year or every couple of months, or you can just have a system in place where you go through things on a regular basis and sell them to recoup costs. And with technology like RFID tags and software programs like Forcey available, it's easier than ever to track what's moving and what's not. No matter how you do it, building that habit into your year will give you a cleaner warehouse and a business that's ready for the next busy season.

-Steve Arendt

110,000 Spiders, 1 Giant Web

RECORD-BREAKING CAVE DISCOVERY STUNS SCIENTISTS

Imagine rounding a corner while exploring a cave and encountering a spider web the size of a two-bedroom apartment!

That is what happened to a group of Czech spelunkers in 2022, who came upon what is likely the largest spider web in the world. The giant colony spans a 1,076-square-foot area along the wall of Sulfur Cave, an underground cavern with its entrance in Greece, and its subterranean section stretching into Albania. This remarkable spider colony is home to an estimated 110,000 spiders.

The colony survived and thrived in part because of abundant food inside the cave, including a large population of flies swarming around the cave entrance, according to a study published in the scientific journal Subterranean Biology. Researchers also found the cave spiders were genetically distinct from their relatives on the land's surface, suggesting that generations of spiders had never left the cave.

Called Sulfur Cave for its sulfurous-smelling waters, the cave is a subterranean network of large rooms, passages, and smaller caverns, with the giant spider web in a low-ceilinged, permanently dark area of the cave.

The Sulfur Cave colony is also believed to be the first known stable, cooperative underground spider colony that includes more than one species that normally don't live together, including an estimated 69,000 Tegenaria domestica spiders, a common house spider found all over the world, and about 42,000 members of a smaller species called Prinerigoni vagan. The larger domestic spiders may have refrained from dining on their smaller webmates, P. vagans, because the lack of light inside the cave made it hard to see them, according to the study. Additionally, P. vagans tend to remain relatively still when hunting for food, making them less conspicuous.

The spiders built the colonial web by joining together many individual funnel-shaped webs.

Its inhabitants are described as "cosmopolitan spiders" by scientists for their willingness to cohabit with other species. Cosmopolitan or not, Sulfur Cave is clearly no place for an arachnophobe!

THE SMART WAY TO BUY A TENT WASHER

WASH CAPACITY THAT MATCHES REALITY

When someone calls me and says, "I think it is time to buy a washer," they usually aren't really sure what they need yet. They know they are tired of dirty tents and a dirty pile, but that's about as far as the thought has gone. For us at Teeco Solutions, the work starts long before we talk about model names or price tags. It starts with figuring out what you are trying to get done regularly.

The first thing I always ask is, "What kind of production do you need per day?" In our world, that is square feet of tents. Some of my smaller customers need to wash around 2,000 square feet in a week during their busy season. Medium-size companies might need 10,000 or 15,000 square feet of tents washed a week. And some of the bigger companies are doing 20,000 or 30,000 square feet per day.

Knowing your numbers matters, but you need to be thinking about peak numbers. Most people forget to look at their busiest weeks. All year long, you have tents sitting on the shelf waiting for graduation and wedding season and other heavy stretches. That is where you make your money. If the washer is sized and set up to handle that peak load in a few fast cycles, tops can be washed, back on the shelf, and ready to rent out again the next day.

After that, we talk about people. If washing tents is a job everyone avoids or you are always training new staff, your controls need to help you. Steady, skilled crews may be fine with a basic setup. For companies that fight employee turnover or uneven quality, a semi-automatic or fully automatic system with soap injection can give you cleaner, more consistent results with less fuss.

Once we understand your peak volume and labor, then we talk about money. We've done a lot to expand our offerings over the years. We now have new and rebuilt machines in several sizes and 16 different washer setups with basic, semi-automatic, and fully automatic controls, so we can usually meet the business's needs and still respect your budget. This spring, bring us your peak week square footage, your labor headaches, and a rough budget, and we can really dial in a washer that fits your business.

Before & After

Promise Less, Deliver a Lot More

SETTING EXPECTATIONS CLIENTS CAN COUNT ON

When I think about customer expectations, I always come back to one simple idea: Promise less and deliver more.

If you tell someone that everything will be ready by Friday and then work with them to set it up on Thursday so they have extra time, they remember that. If you promise Friday and don't arrive until Monday, they remember that even more, and not in a good way. You only make people happy when what you do matches or beats what you said you would do. That sounds simple, but it takes discipline. You have to be honest with yourself before you ever say yes to a job.

So, when I talk with tent companies today, the first thing I tell them is to slow down before they say yes. Slowing down gives you time to ask yourself better questions. Can we really do this when the client wants it done? Is this the type of work we are set up to do, or are we just saying yes because it's a big number on paper? A big job that doesn't make a profit isn't a win. It just wears people out and drags your mood and your company down.

You also have to look at fit. Some clients aren't a match for your culture or your ethics, even if the check would clear. If they are already pushing you to cut corners or bend your rules, you're going to feel that pressure all the way through the job. Your team will feel it, too. In my experience, that strain shows up in the quality of work. Part of setting expectations is knowing your boundaries and refusing to cross them.

The good news is that a clear "no" doesn't have to be the end of the conversation. You can explore options. Maybe you're busy and can't set up the tent on the day they asked, but you can do it the afternoon before so they have a full day to decorate. Maybe you're out of one possible size, but you can offer another layout that gives them the same or more square footage at the same price.

If you build the habit of checking profit, fit, and schedule before you say yes, your word will stay solid and your customers will start to trust that when you take a job, you are all in.