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## Into the Wild

Experience eight great outdoor adventures in Latin America. | *By Bret Love* |

Filled with luxury resorts willing to cater to your every whim, it's easy to vacation in Latin America and have the time of your life without ever leaving your hotel. But as eco-tourism and adventure travel become increasingly popular, the area is emerging as a premier destination. Best of all, because of their gradual transformation into world-class havens for outdoor adventurers, most of these countries haven't fallen victim to overdevelopment or overcrowding, offering a relatively pristine cultural experience. Travelers seeking a bit more of an adrenaline rush than one tends to get from applying copious amounts of sunscreen and hailing the waitress for yet another margarita will find plenty of adventurous opportunities.

### Kite Surf in Brazil

With hundreds of miles of nearly empty beaches, a tropical climate and an average of nine months of wind every year, Brazil's Ceara coast has emerged as a haven for kite surfers looking to catch major ocean air. Cumbuco Beach is the hottest spot in the area, offering a variety of flatwater lagoons with slight swells and numerous sand bars off the point that produce great waves less than a quarter of a mile from the shore. With help from an instructor, even novice surfers can learn to execute moves in no time flat, while the village at the center of the beach allows you to immerse yourself in the area's colorful culture. *STAY Windtown Beach Resort and Spa Brazil, [brazil.windtown.nl](http://brazil.windtown.nl)*

## Climb Rocks in Patagonia

Discovered by Ferdinand Magellan in 1520, Patagonia is an expanse of dry, desolate land occupying 260,000 square miles in southern Argentina and Chile. The region is known for its abundant wildlife and dramatic mountain peaks, which attract trekkers from all around the world. The area around the city of Bariloche offers a variety of rock-climbing routes to challenge enthusiasts of all levels, with favorite spots such as Virgen de las Nieves and Piedras Blancas rated from 5.6 to 5.14 for their degree of difficulty. Whichever route you choose, you're assured stunning vistas of the land that *National Geographic* has called an "Eden at the end of the world." STAY *Llao Llao Hotel and Resort*, 800.666.5555, [llaollao.com/ing](http://llaollao.com/ing)



Routes around Bariloche in Patagonia challenge

## Get In Touch with Nature in Panama

Referred to by some as the "new Galapagos," Panama's Coiba Island National Park remains largely unspoiled, thanks to the fact that the island was home to a penal colony from 1919 to 2004 and requires permission from the National Environment Authority to visit. The largest island in all of Central America, about 75 percent of Coiba is virgin tropical forest, while 80 percent of the park is oceanic, filled with an array of marine life. Located 50 minutes by plane or 10 hours by car from Panama City, this eco-tourist haven is definitely a bit off the beaten path, but well worth the visit. STAY *Bristol Hotel*, 507.264.0000, [thebristol.com](http://thebristol.com)

## Sandboard in Chile's "Death Valley"

Covering 966 kilometers of Chile's Pacific Coast, the Atacama Desert is one of the world's driest regions and has been used as a backdrop in films like *Quantum of Solace* for its otherworldly appearance. The area known as the Valley of the Moon (or "Death Valley") has become a haven for enthusiasts of sandboarding, a relatively new extreme sport that combines elements of snowboarding and surfing. With the help of experienced guides, you'll learn how to hurl yourself down the dunes, hopefully avoiding a mouthful of sand in the process. For those craving pure adrenaline, it's one heck of a rush. STAY *Tierra Atacama Hotel and Spa*, 800.829.5325, [tierraatacama.com](http://tierraatacama.com)



Machu Picchu was built by the Incas around

## Hike the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu

Peru's most popular tourist attraction, built by the Incas around A.D. 1440, draws more than 500,000 visitors each year. It's easy to see why, as the glorious architecture of the ancient city perched high above the clouds remains largely intact, overlooking a canyon on the Urubamba River and the surrounding Andes mountains. Various tour companies offer guided expeditions to this UNESCO World Heritage site, hiking 25 to 33 miles (depending on your starting point) through semi-arid desert, verdant tropical rainforest and breathtaking mountain passes to the stunning pre-Columbian ruins. At altitudes of up to 13,700 feet, it's no easy trek, but the jaw-dropping views are certain to provide a lifetime of memories. STAY *Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel*, 800.442.5042, [inkaterra.com/en/machu-picchu](http://inkaterra.com/en/machu-picchu)

## Venture Deep into the Costa Rican Rainforest

Feel like taking a wild jungle adventure, but don't want to go all the way to the Amazon to do so? Head to San Jose, Costa Rica, where guides from the Pacuare Lodge will take you on a heartpounding ride down the picturesque Pacuare River. Winding through rock canyon walls and past cascading waterfalls, the raging rapids (which range from Class II to IV in difficulty) take you on an hour-long journey deep into the rainforest to an eco-friendly lodge, which is situated on a 740-acre private nature reserve and features luxurious accommodations. While there you can soak up the serene beauty of your surroundings, visit the neighboring Cabecar Indian village and zipline through the rainforest canopy. *STAY Pacuare Lodge, 800.963.1195, junglelodgcostarica.com*



Guides take guests on a



Copper Canyon is one of the continent's largest canyon

## Explore Mexico's Copper Canyon

Located in northern Mexico just a few hundred miles south of El Paso, Texas, in the heart of the Sierra Madre Mountains, Copper Canyon is one of the continent's largest canyon systems. REI's Hike and Bike Tour offers a unique way for hardy travelers to experience the area's natural wonders, boarding the Chihuahua al Pacifico train for the 180-mile jaunt from El Fuerte to Divisadero, soaking in desert scenery and towering canyon walls that seem like they're straight out of a John Wayne western. From there, it's a short trek before you begin mountain biking past waterfalls, pueblos and cave dwellings, journeying from the historic mining village of Batopilas to the Lost Cathedral of Satevo and walking the ancient trails of the Tarahumara Indians. *STAY The Mirador Hotel, 888.528.8401, hotelmirador.hotelesbalderrama.com* ■

## Mountain Bike on the World's Most Dangerous Road in Bolivia

North from the capital city of La Paz, El Camino de la Muerte is considered the world's most dangerous road. Carved into the sides of a canyon with steep vertical drops of up to 1,600 feet and no guardrails, "Death Road" claims more than 100 lives a year. Most Bolivians stop and pray before beginning their drive down, so it takes a special breed of daredevil to make the journey on a mountain bike, passing frigid mountaintops, misty cloud forests and waterfalls in the midst of heavy road traffic. After the six-hour ride down, there's a 1.8-mile climb to Coroico, so only the hardest and most fearless cyclists need apply. *STAY Hotel Europa, 591.2.2315656, hoteleuropa.com.bo*

### Choose Your Own Adventure

Whether you're looking to bike, hike or rappel your way across Latin America, these six tour companies will get you moving in the right direction.

Atacama Expeditions [atacamaexpeditions.cl](http://atacamaexpeditions.cl)

Nexus Brazil Surf Experience [nexusurf.com/kitesurfing.html](http://nexusurf.com/kitesurfing.html)

Pacuare Jungle Lodge [junglelodgcostarica.com](http://junglelodgcostarica.com)

G.A.P. Adventures [gapadventures.com](http://gapadventures.com)

Trek Patagonia [trekpatagonia.com](http://trekpatagonia.com)

REI Adventures [rei.com/adventures](http://rei.com/adventures)