You never forget the first time that you clamber into a sea kayak, fasten the spraydeck over your lap and set off on your maiden voyage on the open water, sensing the implacable power beneath your narrow craft and working with it rather against it. The same is true for embarking on any new activity or adventure in the great outdoors, whether that’s clipping into a climbing harness for a first lesson on scaling rock walls, or packing some provisions and pedalling away on a bicycle towards a distant horizon.

There are numerous ways of exploring our awe-inspiring planet via land, sea or air, and the Atlas of Adventure aims to introduce as many of them as possible in more than 150 countries around the world. We tracked down our most adventure-loving experts, wherever they happened to be, and asked them to share their tips for the best places to try all the activities listed overleaf. This book is the result: an alphabetically ordered romp around the globe, highlighting the best outdoor pursuits you can enjoy in each country. We’ll take you climbing in Thailand, mountain biking in America and sailing along the south coast of Britain. We’ve included everywhere it’s currently feasible to set your intrepid foot, exploring the less trafficked corners of popular spots and venturing to far-flung places you may never have previously considered visiting. A few island regions – notably the Caribbean – have been tackled collectively.

The pursuits in the Atlas of Adventure range from hiking, biking and snorkelling to more adrenalin-charged experiences that will require some tuition before you try them – but our intention is to offer ideas for accessible activities for first-timers. However, we have also included profiles of iconic events and interviews with inspiring personalities from the outdoors sports world to show what might be possible with a bit of practice. It’s easy to be intimidated by seemingly extreme feats but even the boldest biker, kayaker or mountaineer began somewhere and often the first step is simply deciding to try a new experience, one that might lie slightly outside your comfort zone, and giving it a go. Although we would urge all fledgling adventurers to seek expert tuition and equipment advice from accredited operators!

A desire for adventure is present in every traveller. And research has shown that learning a new skill or technique – whether that’s how to make a clean paddle stroke in a kayak or clear a difficult descent on a mountain bike – is what helps keep our brains young and our bodies healthy. So pack your passport and your compass for a thrilling and rejuvenating journey around the world.
GLOSSARY OF ADVENTURE TERMS

Abseiling Descending a rope using a braking device.
Bikepacking Cycle touring but on a mountain bike.
Bouldering Tree solo rock climbing (without ropes or other equipment) on large boulders rather than a vertical rock face, usually with crash pads to protect the landing.
Cat skiing Skiing (or boarding) in remote areas made accessible with the use of a snowcat.
Coasteering Combination of scrambling, wild swimming and free solo climbing around the tidal zone of a coast.
Canyoneering Driving without scuba gear.
Glade skiing Off-piste alpine or backcountry skiing through trees.
Gliding Paragliding combined with falconry.
Kappelling See abseiling.
Singletrack Tight, twisty and often technical section of running, riding or walking trail.
Skyrunning Mountain running on peaks over 2000m in height.
Sport climbing Rock climbing using permanently fixed anchors.
SUP Stand up paddleboarding, where people use a paddle to propel a large surfboard.
Trad Climbing When rock climbers place their own protection (anchors) while ascending.
XC Cross-country mountain biking.

GUIDE TO SYMBOLS

[Image of symbols and their meanings]
TOP 10 ADVENTURE HIGHLIGHTS

1. Sea kayaking around British Columbia’s Haida Gwaii, Canada’s north of Alaska, is sensational.
2. Dive at dawn, then ascend into Canada’s Avenue of the Volcanoes for explosive adventure.
3. Trekking in South Africa’s incredible fynbos on Table Mountain near Cape Town.
4. Try kloofing in South Africa’s canyons, then bike or foot. Explore the incredible Drakensberg by bike or foot.
5. For an urban adventure, paddle or ice-skate around Stockholm’s Skansen’s archipelago, and range on the islands.
6. Beyond its busy cities, Japan’s brilliant backcountry offering ranges from hiking to bouldering.
7. Chile’s Parque Nacional Torres del Paine is an adventure playground for hikers, bikers, climbers and kayakers.
8. Way out west, head to Chile’s Atacama, one of the driest parts of the world, for some of the best alpine bouldering.
9. A fast-growing adventure hotspot, Sri Lanka has superb surfing and divine diving.
10. Australia’s hiking and running trails traverse a vast range of terrain, from alpine to desert.

JOURNEYS AROUND THE WORLD
despite tourism bodies and marketing people doing their utmost to recast this country as Middle Earth over the past decade or more, New Zealand isn’t in the middle of anything. Teetering on the outer edge of the Pacific Ring of Fire, isolated at the southern extremity of the planet, whipped by weather that is utterly unforgiving, bucked by the soaring Southern Alps and sitting pretty and unpredictable atop multiple fault lines in the Earth’s crust – this two-island nation is still physically fidgeting and shape shifting beneath the restless feet of its populace. And what people this elementally powered place has produced. There are only four and a half million of them, but you’ll always find a Kiwi at the very forefront of each new adventure pursuit and thrill-chasing trend, leading the way, surfing the wave and rolling the dice as they jump, run, ride, climb, spin, slide, plummet and paddle down, across or up whatever obstacle or opportunity they’ve decided to take on. The British did their utmost to claim him, but the first person to stand on the roof of Planet Earth, alongside Nepali Sherpa mountaineer Tenzing Norgay, was a dyed-in-the-wool New Zealander. And Edmund Hillary had learned his trade well in his own backyard, on the frozen and unforgiving slopes of Mt Cook.

Visitors to New Zealand are often overwhelmed by the extreme arena they’re suddenly flung among. You can barely go round a corner here without coming across something – a glacier, ford, volcano, waterfall, mountain, gorge, surf-stoked bay, vividly coloured lake, thermally heated beach or bubbling paddle of mud – that will literally take your breath away. It’s borderline ridiculous. And because of the country’s position on the globe – a long-haul flight from absolutely everywhere else – you often get to explore the more eccentric corners of this extraordinary environment in relative solitude.

New Zealand is the place where the wildest dreams of everyday adventurers become a reality. Whether you consider yourself a tramping-camping-trailblazer, someone who gets their kicks in the saddle or with a paddle, a climber, skier or aspiring expedition zorb pilot – this is the country to come to in order to push your ability and ambition to the outer limit.

The land of the long white cloud is also a country of endless trails, boundless beaches, charging rivers and epic horizons, punctuated by imposing peaks.
RUSSIA

The largest country on Earth offers almost unlimited adventure potential, much of which is still relatively unexplored.

Russia’s vast landmass holds everything from epic rolling plains, rugged mountains, colossal forests, endless tundra and active volcanoes. And, though years of communist rule made Russia a closed shop, international tourists, albeit in limited numbers, are slowly starting to gain access to its natural wonders. If you take the trouble to look, you can find extreme mountain bike rides, volcano hikes, challenging trail runs, unique dive locations and some of the biggest, least explored whitewater on the planet. Moscow and St Peterburg are the main entry points, but the 2014 Winter Olympics also put Sochi on the map. Siberia’s Lake Baikal and wild Kamchatka are accessible but harder to reach, while the far northern wilderness is one of the world’s most remote places. Crimea has huge potential, but it is currently a disputed region (see Ukraine p.291).

Hiking

Kamchatka’s remote fumarole fields and bubbling geysers are a challenging, exciting destination. Most of the region is impossible to access, but Gorely and Mutnovsky volcanoes can be reached on a bumpy two-hour drive from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, while Uzon volcano is reachable by helicopter. Lake Baikal, the world’s oldest and deepest, has a growing trail network, including a three-day route from Listvyanka to Bolshoye Goloumovoe on coastal bluffs, sandy beaches and deep forest. Further east, Altai has routes through glacial mountains, river canyons and pristine blue lakes, particularly around Mt Belukha, though serious wilderness and poor trails make a guide essential.