

A YEAR OF SPORT TRAVEL

EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST SPORTING EVENTS IN THE WORLD

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Matthew Hayden (facing) celebrates with teammate Justin Langer after hitting the winning runs of the Fifth Test in the 2006-07 Ashes series.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

Sport sits alongside our capacity to imagine, our ability to speak and our nimble thumbs in the things that make us human. And often in under an hour, sport allows us to exercise all those faculties: screaming our support, imagining a win and using those nimble digits to give an emphatic thumbs-up – or perhaps to hold a beer.

As well as being ‘the great leveller’ – bringing together a bunch of disparate characters for a common cause – sport is also a window into the histories and societies of its players and spectators. It’s a unique set of circumstances that gives rise to the sport of kabaddi (see p18), for example, India’s national game of chasey in which the ‘raider’ can only attack on a single out-breath, all the while chanting. Similarly, where else but America could successfully fuse elements of feminism, kitsch and rockabilly to create the high-energy entertainment-on-wheels that is roller derby (see p180).

A Year of Sport Travel profiles more than 200 sports from around 50 countries. It explains the rules, rituals, clothing and equipment integral to each activity. It tells of the struggles and the glory, the hierarchies and the prizes of sports. It tells what it takes to be a professional in any given field: from social and physical conditioning to actual competition. And it provides tips on what it takes to be a fan, with insights ranging from when it’s OK to throw your seat-cushion into the sumo ring, to whether to take a tent or sleeping bag to Wimbledon’s overnight ticket queue. The book also profiles games (as distinct from sports), because you’d kick yourself if you left town without seeing the Great Fruitcake Toss or Pooh Sticks



Championship, and features essays on historical sports – before big-wave surfing, there was big volcano surfing.

A Year of Sport Travel redefines the calendar year. Every week of every month profiles four events. One of them could be the inspiration for your next trip. Instead of finding Christmas in the fourth week of December, for example, you could find yourself among 200 or so participants running the streets of Kirkwall, Scotland, in a frenzied mass-football match (see p200). It also nails pegs into the ground by which to navigate, so you can coordinate your next trip to coincide with the Olympics (see p134) or the Camel Cup (see p113). You can either plan your next adventure using the world's sporting calendar as a compass, or travel the world without leaving the couch: *A Year of Sport Travel* makes both possible.

However you use this book, you'll find sport travel transforming. It traverses continents, cultures and time. It adds to our knowledge, our self-awareness and tantalises our taste for adventure – all elements that make us human. And the opportunities are there all year, every year.

THE ASHES



WHERE England or Australia **WHEN** Biennially, in the host country's summer **GETTING INVOLVED** Generally, tickets are readily available, particularly on days two to four. If it's a close match, tickets may be harder to come by.

It was outrageous. Beaten by a colony. On English soil. Australia's win over England in 1882 was the genesis of what would become one of the world's greatest sporting rivalries.

England's shock loss prompted a local newspaper to run a satirical obituary that read: 'An affectionate remembrance of English cricket, which died at the Oval on 29th August 1882. Deeply lamented by a large circle of sorrowing friends and acquaintances. RIP. NB: The body will be cremated and the ashes taken to Australia.' And so the series became known as the Ashes.

Ever since, England and Australia have been playing every two years, during alternating summers – bar the war years. They're playing for the lofty qualities of honour and respect. And they're playing for a weeny cup – a crystal replica fashioned from a terracotta urn that was gifted to the English captain Ivo Bligh in the 19th century, and said to contain the ashes of a cricket bail. (There have also been reports of it containing the singed remains of a lady's veil.)

Nearly 130 years on, and 65 series later, Australia and England are still wrangling over that little replica trophy (the original of which is displayed at the Marylebone Cricket Museum, at Lord's). And thank goodness. In what other sport can you say you're just going to watch the game, and come home five days later. That's almost a week of sitting under the summer sun, glaring white uniforms, red balls and sightscreens being trundled around the perimeter. That's a working-week's worth of a game of strategy, elegance and grace. A game that mirrors the times.

The 1980s was all moustaches and paunches; cricketers celebrated a win with a ciggy and a drink. That was before the days of media-training, dieticians and zinc cream. These days it seems we're all too time poor and results driven to appreciate the stately (some would say soporific) pace of Test cricket. (That, and the fact that the Aussies just wouldn't lose for 15 years.)

Watching Test cricket is the perfect excuse to slow down. And, for many, a quintessential element of summer: like beach holidays, sunburn, melting ice creams, and those other charred remains – barbecued sausages.

MORE INFO Cricket Australia (www.cricket.com.au), England and Wales Cricket Board (www.ecb.co.uk)

'Watching Test cricket is the perfect excuse to slow down and, for many, is a quintessential element of summer'



02.

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JANUARY WEEK.01

FOR THE RECORD

➤ In 1948, needing just four runs to take his career batting average to 100, Bradman made a duck, going into retirement with an average of 99.94.

➤ To date, Australian batsmen have made 264 centuries in Ashes Tests and English batsmen 212.



FOR THE RECORD

- Only two countries south of the equator have ever won medals at Winter Olympics: Australia and New Zealand.
- In 2002, Georg Hackl won his fifth consecutive medal in the same event (luge singles), a feat never before achieved by any Olympian.

WINTER OLYMPICS



WHERE Location changes each games **WHEN** Every four years
GETTING INVOLVED Each country has its own official ticketing agent handling ticket sales. Obviously, the earlier you book, the better your chances of securing the events you want.

The Olympics' humble *raison d'être* is to promote a peaceful and better world through sport, practised without discrimination. But until 1924, the year of the first Winter Olympics (28 years after the first modern Olympics), countries with colder climates were mostly discriminated against via their exclusion.

The first separate 'International Winter Sports Week' (which would later become known as the Winter Olympics) was held in 1924, in France. It was a roaring success, with 200 athletes from 16 nations competing in 16 separate events. The Winter Olympics have run quadrennially since – except for the few years interrupted by world wars.

Fewer countries participate in the Winter Olympics than the Summer Olympics, due to the fact that there are simply fewer countries with the kind of winter



FOR THE RECORD

- Lance Armstrong is a legend of the tour, winning seven consecutive races (from 1999 to 2005), after surgery and chemotherapy treatment for cancer in 1996.
- In 1990, Greg Le Mond won the overall tour without once wearing the yellow jersey.
- The prize money for the winner is around US\$750,000.

TOUR DE FRANCE



WHERE France **WHEN** July **GETTING INVOLVED** Entry to compete is by invitation. For spectators, primo roadside positions are hard-won, with people camping out to claim them up to a week before – especially in the mountain stages. It goes without saying that you should book accommodation in any of the host towns early.

Its purpose was simple: to make supermen. The harder the race and the longer the course, the more public interest that it would generate. The more sensational, the better. That, after all, is what sells newspapers. And that was the intention behind *L'Auto* newspaper instituting the world's most famous bicycle race in 1903.

L'Auto editor, Desgrange, burst the boundaries of bicycle racing when he determined the first race's course, around the perimeter of France, which would endure for five weeks. When only 16 riders entered, he halved the distance and waved a cash-carrot as incentive to attract more entrants – increasing the number of competitors to 60.

These days, there's close to 200 cyclists, each competing in teams of nine



Germany's Andreas Stoldt (R) and David "Double D" Depto of USA partake in a bout of chess boxing during the 2008 world championships in Berlin, Germany.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP CHESS BOXING



WHERE Location changes each championship **WHEN** Mid- to late in July **GETTING INVOLVED** Competitors must be under 35 years and proficient in both chess and boxing.

In the chess-boxing arena, life imitates art in a comic-book clash that combines brains and brawn in one larger-than-life contest. It begins with a four-minute session of speed chess, followed by a three-minute bout of boxing, followed by four minutes of speed chess, and so on, until 11 rounds have been played. There's also a one-minute break between disciplines to allow the players to get in and out of their gloves and gowns.

A relative newcomer to the sporting scene, chess boxing was originally a performance piece by Dutch artist Iepe Rubingh to promote a healthy spirit in a healthy body and aggression management, which would later inform the sport's motto: 'Fighting is done in the ring and wars are waged on the board'. Rubingh cites his inspiration as graphic novelist Enki Bilal's *Froid Equateur (Cold Equator)*, the third in the Nikopol trilogy. Rubingh won the first world championship match (as Iepe the Joker) in 2003.

Competition champions are decided either by checkmate (chess), exceeding the time limit (players have a total of 12 minutes for each game of speed chess), retirement of an opponent (chess or boxing), knockout (boxing) or the referee's decision (boxing). Competitors are proficient at both disciplines, having an amateur boxing career and a minimum Elo rating (relative skill rating) in chess of 1800.

The chess-boxing world is seeking new recruits. If your chess skills have never been rated, the WCBO website has an online test, which will help determine your eligibility for the sport. Although matches to date have been for male competitors only, the call is out for women to join the competition. The WCBO is currently scouting in the Ukraine and Russia where there's said to be great potential for competitors to join the growing number of chess boxers.

MORE INFO World Chess Boxing Organisation (www.wcbo.org)



Peter Besenyei of Team Red Bull (L) and Mike Goulian of Dragon Racing take part in a fly-over of Budapest ahead of the Hungarian leg of the Red Bull Air Race.

BIRDSVILLE RACES



WHERE Middle of nowhere, Queensland, Australia **WHEN** First Saturday in September

GETTING INVOLVED See the website for ticketing and further information. Accommodation is limited; bring a swag.

Some years there are a few hundred light aeroplanes parked in the dust outside Birdsville's only pub. For the majority of horse-race enthusiasts, flying is the most practical means of getting to Birdsville – a remote town, with a population of 100, perched on the edge of the Simpson Desert.

This is cattle-station country, with some stations equal in area to a small European country and equally populated by beef cattle. European settlers first ventured into Queensland's outback in 1870, looking for a living in minerals and cattle-grazing land. A few set up tents, and by 1882 there was a fully fledged town and the first of the now famous Birdsville Races.

Race day at the dusty Birdsville track, which runs anti-clockwise, is on Saturday with the running of 12 races. There's no mobile-phone coverage and it's at least 400km from anywhere, but you can still bet with one of the dozen or so bookies. All money raised from entry fees goes to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. (Out here, it's got to be pretty serious before you call for the doctor, who comes by plane.) The main race is 1600m long and the total prize money is more than A\$100,000. Fashions on the field here still include a range of hats, only they're the wide-brimmed Akubra style. And the only heels will be boot heels – the outback is no place for stilettos.

Don't think for a second that the 6000 revellers who travel for hours to get here come just for the day. There's a week's worth of entertainment and adjunct activities. Nights at Birdsville, especially the Friday before the races, host a range of musicians, comedians and entertainers, not to mention the world's last boxing tent show. Integral to early 20th century outback life, boxing tents are like a travelling circus troupe, only the entertainers are boxers who fight challengers from the towns they visit.

MORE INFO Birdsville Races (www.birdsvillerraces.com)