

GREAT

EXPERIENCE THE WORLD AT ITS BREATHTAKING BEST

ADVENTURES









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by Ben Fogle

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WATER

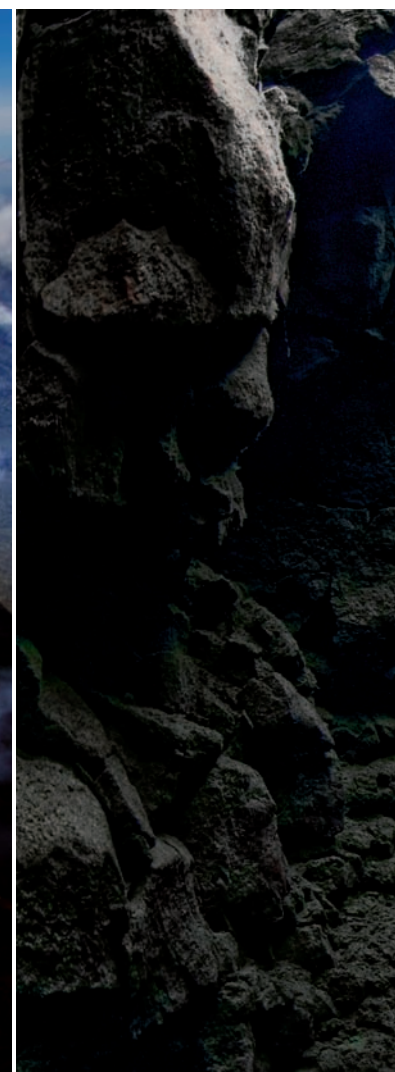
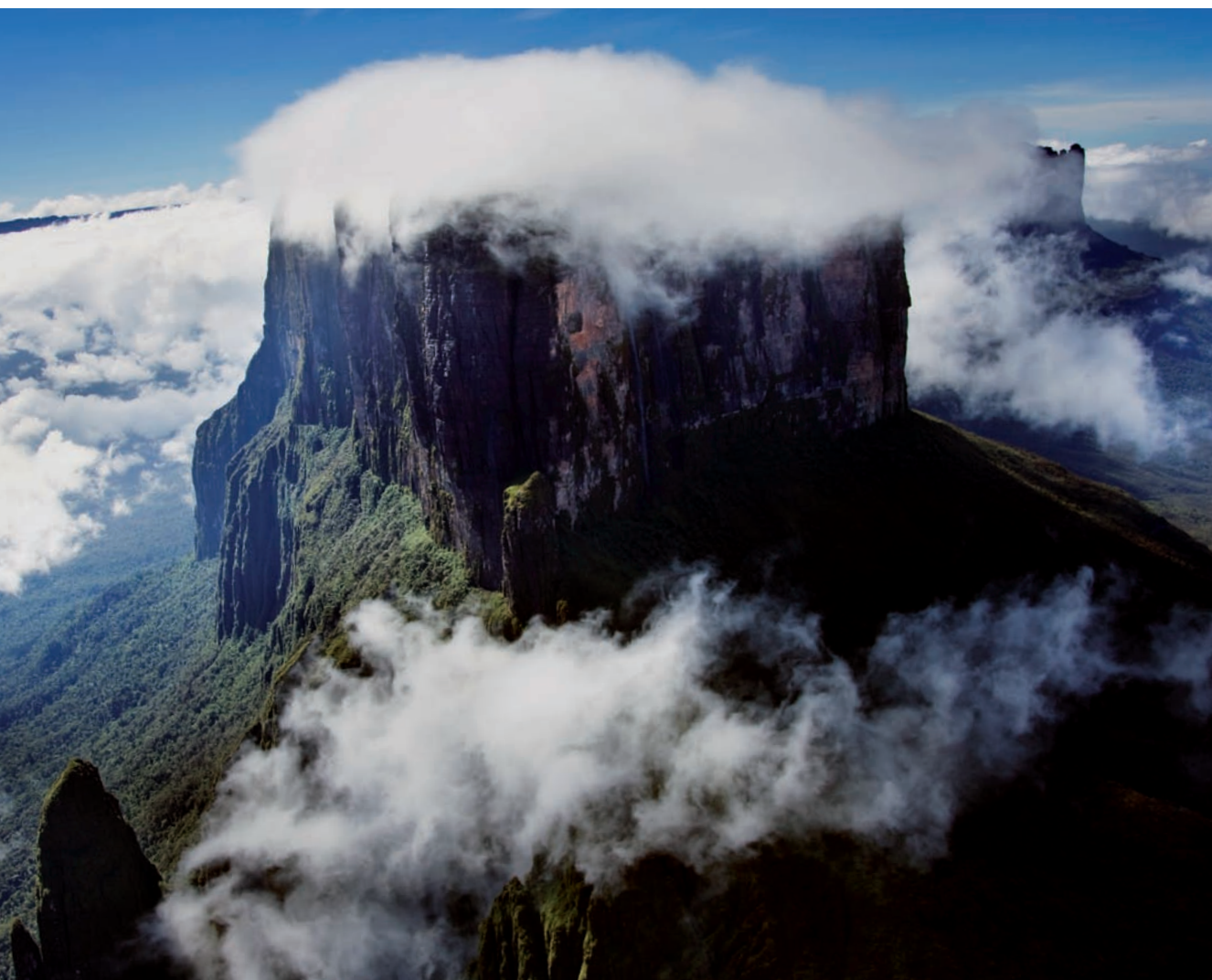
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ADVENTURES OF A LIFETIME



The sheer rock face soared out of the rainforest, its summit cloaked in cloud. I scrambled up a muddy slope, across one of the few vegetated parts of the mountainside, and under the plume of a waterfall. This was my portal to another world. Trudging along the narrow trail, I zigzagged up the final path, through the cloud and emerged onto the plateau.

Here I entered a place unlike anywhere I had ever seen or dreamed. The top of the mountain was like the backdrop of a sci-fi B-movie: blackened rocks of all sizes were interspersed with tiny, colourful gardens. The anarchic landscape – scattered with white crystals and pink beaches – was fissured with gorges and babbling red rivers. Rolling mist, funneled up the cliff like smoke, added to the eerie scene. Pterodactyls wouldn't have looked out of place swooping above me.

I was 20 years old and I had just completed my first great adventure, a journey through the jungles of Venezuela to Mt Roraima (see page 142), one of the Tepuis of the Lost World. Local lore insists that dinosaurs still inhabit these high-altitude 'islands'; it was clear how Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had been

inspired by them to write his famous novel *The Lost World*. I spent the night in a cave and felt like a pioneer in a new land.

My experience on Mt Roraima was life changing. From being a hopelessly non-academic and helplessly unsporty child, I immersed myself in new cultures, customs and environments around the planet. Such adventures helped me understand more about the world and enriched my life; the astonishing growth in adventure travel doesn't come as a surprise.

Suddenly, we want more from our downtime than a beach lounge and a book: we want something to talk about, an experience that turns a week-long holiday into the trip of a lifetime. This book is an inspiring collection of the greatest adventures in the world, each satisfying our thirst for challenge and discovery. And whether you're interested in trying a new activity, exploring little-known places, or encountering wildlife face-to-face, the 'Making it Happen' section of each adventure is the starting point for planning your own.

There are physical journeys, geographical journeys and mental journeys, and over the years I have taken on plenty



that combine all three. One country where those three factors often merge is Iceland. It's associated with fire and ice, but dip beneath Iceland's surface and you'll discover an unimaginable sub-aquatic world (see page 66).

From a mossy knoll next to a tiny pool of water I tumbled into a liquid wonderland between the tectonic plates of Europe and North America. In the Silfra Rift in Þingvellir National Park, where the water is just 2" above zero, you can see further than 100 metres. It is some of the clearest water on the planet, giving the impression that you are suspended in deep space – or a giant glass of vodka. The chasm disappeared hundreds of metres into the black horizon. I swam from Silfra Hall into the celestial Silfra Cathedral. Even the cold water couldn't chill my spirits. Long shafts of sunlight pierced the water, creating an underwater light display to rival the Northern Lights. It remains the most beautiful place I have ever seen. And challenges that test our resilience, such as diving in icy water, teach us about ourselves – to be resourceful, to be patient – as well as reminding us to care for the wilder regions of our world.

I have pushed myself to my physical limits rowing across the Atlantic Ocean and hauling a sledge to the South Pole, but adventures don't have to be scary, hard, or adrenalin-charged. Some of the most enjoyable haven't even involved sweating.

Shortly after getting married, I booked our first holiday as husband and wife, a ten-day rafting trip in Varnland, Sweden.

My wife and I drove for three days with our dogs and a couple of fishing rods through Europe to Scandinavia, where we lashed vast timbers together to form a raft that weighed more than a car. It was backbreaking work, but the sense of reward when we finally set sail with our tent and a small cooker, gliding with the gentle current of the river as the sun slipped into the horizon, was immense... Right up until the moment we realised neither of us knew how to stop the thing. I resorted to jumping in the river and looping a rope around the biggest tree I could find.

It isn't an adventure unless something goes awry. It poured with rain, we got stuck in eddies, and it coincided with the coldest Scandinavian summer on record. Eventually, the raft began to break up thanks to my poor rope-work. We abandoned it, paying the rafting company to salvage it. It may be surprising that it remains one of my adventuring highlights, as meaningful as my climb up Mt Roraima. We still laugh about the famous rafting holiday and it has become part of Fogle family folklore: I learned a lot about my wife, and she me, during that holiday.

Whether you're an armchair traveller or you use this book as a bucket list, it could change your life. Even for a seasoned adventurer like me, there are still experiences to chase. I've got my eye on rowing across Lake Baikal. Who wants to join me?

BEN FOGLE
Oslo, Norway, March 2012

