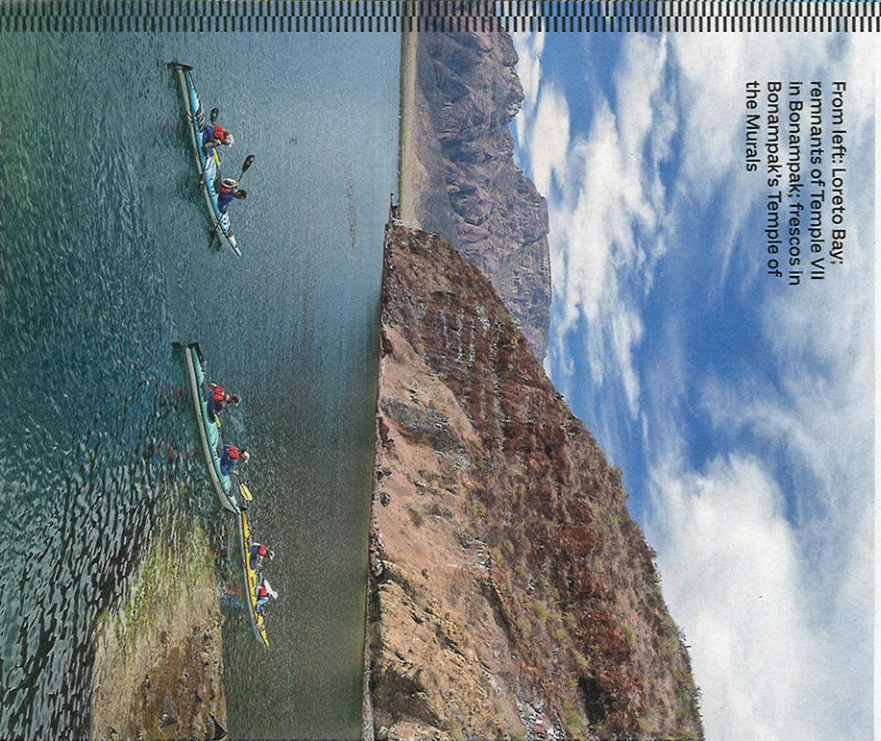


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From left: Loreto Bay, remnants of Temple VII in Bonampak; frescos in Bonampak's Temple of the Murals



## THE EXPEDITION

## LORETO BAY NATIONAL MARINE PARK

You don't visit Loreto for hip hotels, name-chef restaurants, or throngs of beachgoers. You go for the very fact that they haven't arrived yet. At this sleepy Pueblo Mágico town in northern Baja California Sur, a calming contrast to the peninsula's popular southern destinations, you'll find empty stretches of sand on the Sea of Cortez, the Sierra de la Giganta looming to the west, and a vibe reminiscent of the Cabo San Lucas that captivated Hemingway in the 1930s. There is one all-inclusive resort with amenities, Villa del Palmar (from \$236), but otherwise plan on staying at affordable campsites, like Rivera, and relying on low-

frills beach shacks selling lobster in mezcal sauce and meaty chocolate clams, both local delicacies. The town also serves as the gateway to Loreto Bay National Marine Park, just as dazzling as the biodiverse waters off the coast of La Paz. The park's nickname, the Galápagos of Mexico, is a nod to its 800-plus aquatic species, including blue whales, Humboldt squid, and sea lions. Rent a boat from Sea Kayak Baja Mexico—or, better yet, book one of the outfitter's guided overnight expeditions and camp under the stars on virgin *playas*, snorkel pristine reefs, and paddle past blue-footed booby rookeries (three-night trips from \$1,192). Another local resource, Blue Nation, runs diving and freediving trips as well as snorkeling tours to the dramatic lava cliffs and sea lion colony of Isla Coronado and the remote Isla Monserrate, known for its schools of mobula rays (from \$75). With direct flights from Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Dallas, Loreto is easier than ever to get to. Go now, before the secret gets out. —J.M.



## LACANDÓN RAINFOREST

When the conquistadors arrived in the 1500s, the Lacandon people escaped into the deep jungle near what is now the Guatemala border and stayed there, isolated, for centuries. A paved road from the city of Palenque changed that in 1998, and shortly thereafter the federal government poured money into the region to support ecotourism projects. Starting in 2010, Lacandon families built more than 20 guest-

## THE JUNGLE BASE CAMP

houses that now host adventurers looking to explore the area's biodiversity and history, accompanied by white-robed, long-haired guides who know all its secrets (from \$15). Expect basic rooms in thatch houses and trails that lead to amazing lagoons, waterfalls, and archaeological sites like Bonampak, a late-classic Maya ruin famous for its vivid murals. —Tim Leffel

## LOCAL EXPERT

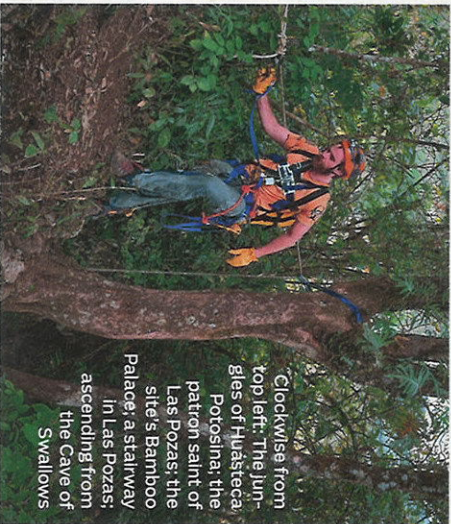
Kiteboarder ANTHAR RACCA on the Best Riding

Less than 20 miles from Cancún, on the peninsula of Isla Blanca, you'll find Chacmucuch, a shallow saltwater lagoon perfect for learning or improving your riding at any level. My parents own a kite center there called Ikarus that offers rentals, an eco-hotel, camping, and private lessons (from \$195). There is also a small restaurant that serves really good quesadillas. The kiteboarding season typically starts in November, when it can be a bit cold, and ends in April or May, which in my opinion are the best months because the sun is always shining and the water is flat. The wind tends to be on three days, off three days. On a down day, go to Flamingsos, a beachfront seafood restaurant with its own fish market, 15 minutes away in Punta Sam. I live in Cancún, but three times a year I travel to Mérida to kite in nearby Progreso, a port city blessed with consistent thermal winds nearly every afternoon from April through August. Head to Yukite, a kite school that also has rooms and glamping (from \$60 for a private lesson). It's located on El Playón, a wide beach with shallow water and onshore winds. Mérida has a lot more options for dining, but if I stay in Progreso, I'm a regular at Crabster Seafood and Grill. They do everything well, from shrimp fritattas for breakfast to surf and turf for dinner. —As told to Jen Murphy

FROM LEFT: LEON WERDINGER; JON G. FULLER/VWPICS/REDUX (2)



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## HUASTECA POTOSINA

Where can you go whitewater rafting, rappel into a refreshing swimming hole, and cliff-dive off small waterfalls, all in the same day? In the Huasteca region of San Luis Potosí state, where the stunning blue rivers and lakes feel like a natural version of a water park.

Nearly every activity is an hour or less away from Ciudad Valles, which makes this city of 180,000 a great base. Book everything with operator Huasteca, whose guides speak English. And plan a visit during the dry season (November through May), when the waters are clearest. From the 100-room Hotel Valles

(from \$90), a property surrounded by lush gardens in the city center, it's an hour's drive to the town of Tanchachin for a morning of rafting. The beginner-friendly Class III Tampo River cuts through a narrow canyon filled with parrots and blue morpho butterflies.

Next, head back to the city for a unique swimming experience that's a favorite among locals: don a life vest and helmet to float along a 6.2-mile stretch of the Class II Micos River. It has a series of seven shallow waterfalls that get progressively bigger; the largest of which is 40 feet. Finish your adventure with a dip in a clear blue swimming hole.

The following day, visit one of the most bizarre spots in Mexico: Las Pozas. English surrealist Edward James moved to the area in the late

1940s and spent the next 39 years building fanciful concrete structures in the jungle near the town of Xilitla, 55 miles south of Ciudad Valles. A friend of Salvador Dalí and René Magritte, James transformed 20 acres into a collection of 36 massive stairways, portals, and columns that add whimsy to the surrounding flora. The result is a haunting sculpture garden.

On the way back to Ciudad Valles, detour to the Cave of Swallows, a 1,679-foot abyss that's a favorite of BASE jumpers and rappellers. Or farther along the route, hike a half-mile trail to the less crowded Cave of the Parakeet. Around sunset you'll often see swifts and tropical birds returning home for the night, diving into the giant cave by the thousands. —T.L.

## LOCAL EXPERT

Mountaineer **YRIDIANA ALVAREZ** on the Best Summit

Travelers come to Mexico City for the culture. But two hours southwest by car, you'll find incredible hiking, nature, and archaeological sites in Nevado de Toluca National Park. This ancient, dormant volcano has several trails that reach the 14,977-foot summit. My favorite is the northern route, the three-mile Cañada del Oso. From this side of the crater, there's an amazing view of the surrounding valley. You can hike there year-round, but the best season is winter, because you'll often see snow in the crater. Or you can head to two emerald-hued lakes in the park, Laguna del Sol and Laguna de la Luna, accessed via the 6.5-mile Circuito Lagos hiking loop or a bumpy drive. If you want a guide to help you summit, I suggest going through the operator Outside Mexico (no connection to this magazine). Some people camp in the park, especially if they're going to rise early to set off. There's also a modest first-come, first-served hut at the crater gate that some like to stay in to acclimatize. I prefer to stay in Mexico City. You can easily day-trip to the park. As you get close to the city of Toluca, keep an eye out for locals along the roadside selling handmade tortillas and the region's signature mushroom soup. —As told to Jen Murphy

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MADDY MINNIS; XPACIFICA/REDUX; ANN SUMMA; AMANDA HOLMES/COURTESY OF EL JARDÍN ESCULTÓRICO DE EDWARD JAMES; JOSHUA HYDEMAN

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF TA NÁAYTA; PABLO LEÓN; JULES SLUTSKY/CAVAN; COURTESY OF TA NÁAYTA





## THE ECO-WARRIOR

Clockwise: A guide at Copper Canyon, Baja desert; transport; Toh birds; a cenote outside Yalcóba



## TA NÁAYTA

A hundred miles southwest of Cancún, deep in the interior of the Yucatán Peninsula, is the Maya village of Yalcóba, a community of about 3,000 largely Indigenous inhabitants, many of whom have returned to their families after going to work and live at all-inclusive resorts along the coastline. To slow the outflow, the French nonprofit Ta Náayta is educating the youth of Yalcóba on forms of sustainable tourism. To that end, it has built a beautifully rustic eco-lodge with open-air rooms in the community's forest, complete with private cenote. A two-night stay at the lodge (from \$230) includes touring a traditional Maya farm, or *milpa*, where residents grow staples like beans and squash; visiting beehives that have been cultivated the same way for centuries; and exploring secret cenotes and caves. The goal of the project is to provide economic diversification for locals, so they no longer have to leave their homes to support themselves and their families, and to offer an authentic Yucatecan Maya experience for travelers, giving a glimpse of the rich culture that has thrived here for 3,000 years. —S.P.

## THE CLIMB

## CHIHUAHUA'S COPPER CANYONS

When climber Abraham Martínez moved to the town of Divisadero in the vast Copper Canyons region, 135 miles south of Chihuahua City, he got a job with a view: working as a guide on the via ferrata at Copper Canyons National Park. As a certified rope-access technician, he saw a ton of potential in the massive cliffs that form some of the deepest gorges in the Americas, particularly those at 6,136-foot-deep Urique, one of six canyons in the system. Martínez started exploring on his own and connected with the region's Indigenous communities, teaching kids how to climb. That led to a project, in partnership with Mexico City's Fundación Mexico Vertical, a nonprofit rock-climbing development and conservation organization, that aims to grow the sport locally, with permission from those communi-



ties. The rock-climbing scene is still in its infancy, but it's full of possibility. "We have one route that's almost 6,600 feet high," Martínez says. The two established climbing areas are near the village of Mogotabo and range in grade from 5.8 to 5.13. In a region that spans more than 25,000 square miles, there are numerous virgin walls to explore—it's getting to them that's the challenge. But the partners are working on infrastructure. For now, stay at locally owned Cabañas Darely (from \$39) or Cabañas Margarto (from \$42) near Divisadero, a three-hour drive southwest of Mogotabo. —T.L.

## THE VAQUERO RIDE

## MARCELO OSUNA

There's no shortage of ways to immerse yourself in the vaquero tradition of cattle herders and horsemen who have inhabited these lands for centuries. But for a singular experience, call Marcelo Osuna, owner of Paseos a Caballo de Mulegé. The third-generation vaquero, based in the town of Heroica Mulegé, is the sole operator on the Baja peninsula who offers a three-hour trip that starts in the mountains, follows the banks of the Rosalia River, traverses sand dunes, and then crosses the sea to a tiny island and back. Just think: one moment you're dodging rows of giant cacti, and the next you're floating bareback atop a horse that's paddling through gentle waves (\$60). After your excursion, return to town and overnight at the eight-room Histórico Las Castilas (from \$40). —K.G.