

OUT THERE

The latest travel destinations are all about the great outdoors whether you're after adventure, action or a little peace and quiet

By Andy Friedlander and Patrick Jephson



Adventure

MOUNTAIN BIKING ON MADEIRA

Six hundred miles off the coast of Portugal, the volcanic island of Madeira enjoys a subtropical climate that for years has drawn windsurfers, paragliders and big-game fishermen for sunny, sea-bound adventures. And inland, away from the crowds, the island's mountainous slopes are perfect for serious mountain bikers. The dense forests, rocky paths and long, fast tracks that sweep through the valleys offer car-free terrain, cute villages, traditional vineyards and stunning cliff-top picnic spots. For slick, Asian-inspired luxury, check in to the Choupana Hills (www.choupanahills.com) – a small, immaculate resort set in lush hillside gardens. After an exhilarating day in the saddle, the world-class spa's grounding massages will bring you down to earth faster than your bike ever could.

DUNE BUGGIES IN DUBAI

If you yearn to zoom up and down spectacular red sand drifts in a 4x4 or a customised dune buggy, it makes sense to visit a country that is made up of 90% desert. Far from the high-rises that dominate Dubai's coastline, the emirate's expansive sandbox is a playground for speed demons who like to charge up shape-changing peaks at full throttle before sliding back down the other side. Choose well-worn paths that lead past camel farms and oases, or explore off-piste (don't forget your compass), stopping to sandboard down the dunes. Beyond the thrill of suspension-busting jumps, the desert scenery is an attraction in itself, changing dramatically as the sun sets. To truly maximise your experience of the landscape, book an overnight stay at a Bedouin-style tented camp and watch night fall over the sands.

ICE CLIMBING IN CHAMONIX

For sensible people, a towering frozen waterfall is just another winter wonder to be admired from afar. Not so in Chamonix, where away from the busy pistes and buzzing après-ski, extreme adventurers can scale these slippery monoliths using nothing but spiky shoes, sharp picks and a cool head. The quality and variety of ice climbing in this corner of the French Alps – there are over 20 sites – has made it a mecca for beginners and experienced mountaineers alike. For a place to relax and warm up back on terra firma, look no further than the 100-year-old farmhouse-style five-star Hameau Albert Hotel (www.hameaualbert.fr). Shopping and lifestyle experts at Harrods By Appointment can then arrange everything else, from your travel and equipment to tailor-made experiences, routes and guides.

ALPINE IN AUSTRIA

A recent multi-million-Euro investment to update the lift system has made Lech, in Austria's Vorarlberg region, the most hi-tech of the old-school European ski towns – plus it enjoys copious snowfall. Light on the reckless snowboarders who plague some ski areas, the Lech-Zürs region boasts a huge amount of untrammelled powder fields, heli-skiing and double blacks to challenge even veteran adrenaline fiends. Got an appetite for *real* adventure? Sign up for the White Ring ski race (www.derweissering.at), which each year sees over 3,000 super-fit participants whiz down 22km of pistes before crossing the finish in under an hour. After a day at high altitude, lay low at Hotel Goldener Berg (www.hospiz.com), a traditional family-run five-star property featuring one of the largest collections of wine in the Alps.

