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MIKE DONOHUE WATCHES ICE CALVE FROM GREENLAND'S SERMEQ KUJALLEQ, ONE OF THE WORLD'S FASTEST-MOVING GLACIERS. IT SURGES MORE THAN 10 YARDS PER DAY, FEEDING THE WEST COAST'S 30-MILE ICEFJORD. HOW TO HIKE IT: PAGE 60.

The World's Best *(Unknown)* Treks

By Michael Lanza

We scoured the planet to find trails where real adventure rules. Hike them now, because they're sure to be classics later.

PHOTO BY BROUDY / DONOHUE PHOTOGRAPHY



Pyrenees Traverse, France

Hike locals-only trails in Europe's other Alps.



Europeans who want the quintessential Euro trek—without the crowds—head to France's Pyrenees and the GR 10. Like the best Alps trails, the 500-mile track combines rugged hiking by day with luxe living by night; unlike others, it's so far off the radar of most trekkers that it retains the feel of a peasant path.

The GR 10 traverses the north slope of the Pyrenees, crossing from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea. The route knits together pristine alpine terrain with postage-stamp villages where you can't buy so much as an overpriced T-shirt—in fact, there's often just one place to stay and eat. Most nights you'll sleep—and dine—in a dorm-style *gîte d'étape*, or trailside hut; for foodies, the rustic Basque soup and fresh trout dinners alone are worth the trip. Just don't choose the GR 10 for a pampered "walking vacation"; you'll often hoof more than 10 miles and climb 3,000 feet a day.

The best weeklong section is the 82 miles from Ste.-Engrâce, straddling the Basque provinces of Soule and Bearn, east to Cauterets. It includes signature alpine scenes like the pyramidal 8,215-foot Pic d'Anie above the Pas d'Azuns and a night in Lescun, a village perched at the foot of sharp-edged peaks and widely considered the prettiest town in the Pyrenees. **Life-list moment:** Combine beauty, history, and a glass of *vin rouge* on day 4, from Etsaut to Gabas. First you'll follow an 18th-century footpath chiseled by convicts directly into sheer cliffs. Called the *Chemin de la Mature* (the way of the masts), it was used to transport trees for ship builders in the French Navy. End the day at Refuge de Gabas, where the hostess is known as one of the route's best chefs. Near Gabas, in Parc National des Pyrenees, climbers can bag 9,462-foot Pic du Midi D'Ossau. Bonus: The GR 10's relatively low elevation (the highest point is 8,087 feet) means sea-level hikers don't need extra time for acclimatization.

Plan It

- » **Guidebook** *Trekking in the Pyrenees*, by Douglas Streatfeild-James (Trailblazer Guides, \$20)
- » **Maps** *Randonnée Pyrenees* topos (omnimap.com, \$17 per sheet)
- » **Season** Most years, snow melts from high passes by late June. Go before mid-July to catch the best wildflower show, or in September for the most solitude.
- » **Essential gear** Trekking poles
- » **Need to know** The route is easy to follow and there are no permits or fees required for trekking, but reserve lodging three months in advance. Camping is also allowed.
- » **Cost** DIY: \$/week
- » **Info** epyrenees.com; parc-pyrenees.com/index_english.htm



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ABOVE THE CIRQUE DE LESCUN, THE TRAIL PASSES UNDER 7,799-FOOT PIC D'ANSABERE; OFF-TRAIL IN THE VALLÉE DE ESPELUGIERE; FREE-RANGE DONKEYS; PACK TREKKING POLES FOR RIVER CROSSINGS, LIKE THIS ONE IN THE VALLÉE D'ASPE; LAY OVER A DAY IN PICTURESQUE LESCUN.

SLIOCH MOUNTAIN, ABOVE LOCH MAREE, GETS ITS NAME FROM THE GAELIC WORD FOR SPEAR—SLEAGH.



Cape Wrath Trail, Scotland

Brave the Old World's newest and wildest long-distance route.



Aficionados of bad weather and wild country have called the Cape Wrath Trail the hardest backpacking route in Britain—no small statement on this island of hardened hikers. But the reward, as they say, is commensurate with the effort. The CWT meanders for 202 miles across the Western and Northern Highlands from Fort William north to Cape Wrath at Scotland's northwest tip. The route varies from established trail to rural lanes to cross-country rambles, traversing a Tolkienesque landscape of rugged peaks, boggy moors, and ancient forests. You'll also be able to bag plenty of Munros, as Scots call peaks higher than 3,000 feet, and Corbetts—peaks with elevations between 2,500 and 3,000 feet.

The entire trek takes about three weeks (if doing it all, skip only the first three urban miles out of Fort William; take a taxi to the start of Neptune's Staircase in Banavie). If you only have a week, hike the 50 miles from Achnashellach rail station to Oykel Bridge, resupplying in towns every three days or less and "wild camping" (as they call tent camping here) in between. You'll cross the Torridon Mountains, where glacial erosion has carved out the signature corries (cirques) and U-shaped glens

of the Highlands. Hike through remnants of Scotland's ancient Caledonian Forest in the Beinn Eithe National Nature Reserve (Britain's first), and encounter the castle-like rock formation of Slioch towering over the long, narrow glacial valley filled by Loch Maree. En

Plan It

- » **Guidebook** *North to the Cape*, by Denis Brook and Phil Hinchliffe (Cicerone, \$22)
- » **Maps** Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 429, 435, 436, 439, and 440 (ordnancesurvey.co.uk, \$14 each)
- » **Season** May, June, and September. Biting midges ruin July and August.
- » **Essential gear** Bomber raingear
- » **Need to know** Compass skills!
- » **Cost** DIY: \$/week
- » **Info** capewrathtrail.co.uk

route, you'll traverse moorlands rarely seen even by intrepid Scots. **Life-list moment:** Scramble An Teallach's legendary knife-edge ridge. The all-day climb includes two Munros and eight subsidiary "tops" over 3,000 feet high (beginners can avoid the most exposed sections). Save lunch for the top-of-the-world perch known as Lord Berkeley's Seat. Extend the trip with extra nights in Ullapool, a picturesque fishing town with lodges, pubs, and plenty of great dayhikes.

PHOTOS BY (FROM LEFT) KEITH FALCOWITZ (5); DAVID NOTON/AUROREA PHOTOS



PHOTOS BY (FROM LEFT) CHRISTOPHER THOMAS / GETTY, LUDWIG HAU / PHOTOSHOT, ANDREAS STRAUSS / GETTY, IMAGEBROKER.NET / PHOTOSHOT.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: GRAZING SEASON IN THE ZILLERTAL ALPS ENDS IN SEPTEMBER AND IS CELEBRATED WITH FESTIVALS IN LOCAL VILLAGES; SCULPTURE-LIKE CAIRNS ON THE SUMMIT OF PETERSKOEPL; THE ICONIC VIEW FROM LAKE SCHWARZSEE'S NORTH SHORE; THE TREK STARTS NEAR THE CLASSIC CHALETS OF MAYRHOFEN.



Zillertal Alps, Austria

Score classic Alps scenery, adventure, and hut culture without the classic crowds.



Catholics have the Vatican. Muslims have Mecca. And hikers have the Alps. Make your pilgrimage on the Zillertal Rucksack Route. This 50-mile, nine-day loop has it all: glaciated 11,000-foot mountains, high alpine passes, deep valleys, waterfalls, gemsbok mountain antelopes, alpine roses, and martignon lilies. The well-marked route requires no technical expertise, but expect long, strenuous days (despite the relatively short mileage) and adrenaline-fueled climbing with fixed ropes and ladders. **Life-list moment:** Catch your breath—and savor it all—on the small terrace at the Olperer Hut, perched hundreds of feet above the Schlegeisspeicher reservoir, with a view of the serrated ridge of Grosser Moseler in front and a cold Austrian lager in hand.

Hike the loop clockwise, starting in Mayrhofen—the views get better every day, and this way you'll start with an easy two-mile hike to Edel Hut, so you can sleep in the mountains the same day you arrive in Austria. From Edel, get your bearings by hiking the three-hour round-trip to 9,754-foot Ahornspitze, a rocky summit high above the Zillertal Valley. You'll know you're in the heart of the Alps on day 4, en route from Greizer Hut to Berliner Hut, when in one short section you cross a picturesque—if rickety—footbridge over a glacial stream, scramble through a field of avalanche debris, and climb fixed ropes and a 16-foot ladder bolted to sheer rock. Be sure to stop on Lake Schwarzsee's north shore and snap a photo of the reflected peaks—visual proof of your epic trek. Tip: On day 8, from Friesenberg Haus to Gams Hut, allow 10-12 hours for the deceptively hard eight-mile section. End at Ginzling and catch a bus back to Mayrhofen. And pack light: In the best Alps tradition, meals are included with hut stays (no reservations needed for small groups).

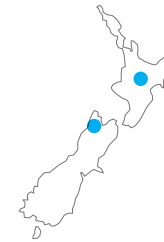
Plan It

- » **Guidebook** *Trekking in the Zillertal Alps*, by Allan Hartley (Cicerone, \$19)
- » **Season** July through September
- » **Essential gear** Sticky-soled mid-weight boots like the Five Ten Exum Guide (\$135, fiveten.com)
- » **Need to know** Join the Austrian Alpine Club's U.K. section (aacuk.org.uk) for its huts discount and info in English.
- » **Cost DIY:** \$\$
- » **Info** naturpark-zillertal.at



Tongariro Northern Circuit and Heaphy Track, New Zealand

Discover the best of Kiwi wilderness—north and south—with these two hikes.



New Zealand's reputation as a trekker's paradise is well-deserved: The hut system is unmatched, the scenery stunning, and the terrain wildly diverse. The only problem is choosing where to hike. Our solution: Trek the North Island's Tongariro Northern Circuit and the South Island's Heaphy Track for a one-two punch that delivers the full range of Kiwi highlights in nine perfect days—and without the conga-line crowds you'll find on the more famous paths.

Start with the 31-mile, four-day Tongariro loop; it circles the symmetrical cone of 7,516-foot Mt.

Ngauruhoe while traversing a dynamic volcanic wilderness of bubbling mud pots, fumaroles, and steaming craters. Emerald crater lakes dot the moonscape, and white foxgloves and yellow buttercups bloom improbably from hardened, sculpture-like lava flows. **Life-list moment:** Pause and contemplate what lies deep underfoot as you cross the steamy rim of Red Crater, in the shadow of 9,177-foot Ruapehu—

which last erupted in September 2007. While the loop traditionally begins in Whakapapa Village, start instead at Mangatepopo Road—with a clear forecast—to ensure views on the spectacular first day from Mangatepopo Hut to Ketetahi Hut.

Next up: the South Island's Heaphy Track, which makes a 51-mile, five-day crossing of Kahurangi National Park amid scenery with more personalities than Sybil. The trail dives into dense forests of beech, pygmy pine, and 200-foot-high evergreen kahikatea. In summer, it tunnels through brilliant red flowers of gnarled rata trees. Rainforest gives way to limestone caves and arches, open tussock hills, and swinging-bridge river crossings. The Kiwi highlights tour concludes with secluded beaches shaded by nikau palms and a swim in the Heaphy River lagoon. **Life-list moment #2:** a nap.

Plan It

- » **Guidebook** *Tramping in New Zealand*, by Jim Dufresne (Lonely Planet, \$22)
- » **Map** *Tongariro Park and Kahurangi National Park* (omnimap.com, \$18 each)
- » **Season** December to March for Tongariro; Heaphy can be walked year-round (March is best).
- » **Essential gear** SPF 50+ sunblock
- » **Need to know** Get a Tongariro hut pass upon arrival (in any Department of Conservation office). Make hut reservations for the Heaphy Track four months in advance: Stay at Perry Saddle, Saxon, James Mackay, and Heaphy Huts.
- » **Cost** DIY: \$ // Guided: \$\$\$
- » **Info** doc.govt.nz



PHOTOS BY (FROM LEFT) MAM VALLEDOR / AGE FOTOSTOCK; NICK GROVES / MINDEN PICTURES; RAMEY NEWELL; SERGIO BALLIVIANI (2)



Cordillera Apolobamba, Bolivia

See the Andes the way Cortez did—totally wild.



South America's highest nation is known as the "Tibet of the Andes" for its altiplano, a plateau where valley bottoms sit at 13,000 feet. Above that, mountains are so big and buried in snow and glaciers that you really could mistake them for the Himalayas. And the best place to see it all is western Bolivia's pristine and barely known Cordillera Apolobamba. Hard against the Peruvian border, the region is home to Andean

condors, herds of vicuñas (related to alpacas), endangered speckled bears, and the 65-mile Apolobamba trek, which runs from Curva north across Apolobamba National Park to Pelechuco. The weeklong high route crosses five passes between 15,400 and 16,728 feet.

Spend at least one night pre-trek in the small town of Charazani (Curva has no lodging). It's the capital of the Kallawayas medicine men, who travel village to village dispensing herbs and magic to heal the sick (and sore; they'll treat hikers for a small fee). If the medicine men are away, find rejuvenating hot springs a 10-minute walk from Charazani's main square. From Curva, hike north in the shadow of 18,589-foot Akamani, sacred to the native Quechua and Aymara. Cross the mountains on ancient Inca-built trails and pass through quiet villages where burros are still the main form of transportation. **Life-list moment:** Pitch your tent near mysterious Inca ruins at Incachani and take a bone-chilling shower in a nearby waterfall—where the ruins' occupants probably bathed centuries ago. Next, in Sunchuli Valley, explore an abandoned gold mine worked by both the Spanish and the Inca. Inspired? Go exploring for the legendary city of El Dorado, which is purported to be near here.

Plan It

- » **Guidebook** *Trekking in Bolivia: A Traveler's Guide*, by Yossi Brain (The Mountaineers Books, \$17)
- » **Map** None available; makes a guide or Spanish competency a must.
- » **Season** The dry season is May through September.
- » **Essential gear** Days are warm, but nights frigid; pack a 0°F bag.
- » **Need to know** Navigation is straightforward on the altiplano, but a profusion of paths can be confusing. Locals who know the way are readily available in Charazani. Bus service is slow; hire a driver in La Paz.
- » **Cost** DIY: \$ // Guided: \$\$\$
- » **Outfitter** Explore Bolivia, explorebolivia.com

WATER-FILLED VOLCANIC CRATERS TURN THE COLOR OF GEMS IN TONGARIRO—NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST NATIONAL PARK, ESTABLISHED IN 1887. OPPOSITE (CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM): NIKAU PALMS; 19,000-FOOT PEAKS IN THE CORDILLERA APOLOBAMBA; A BOG-LIKE MEADOW AT 14,500 FEET; VICUÑAS ON THE ALTIPLANO.

Overland Track, Australia

Explore a hiker's fantasy island on Tasmania's rough-and-wild long trail.



The Overland Track is no secret, but its remote location off the southern tip of Australia, together with its famously fickle weather, put it in a class by itself: a classic trek that always feels undiscovered. Tasmania's lost world surprises even the most jaded globetrotters with its surreal plants and animals on a weeklong, 50-mile crossing of Cradle Mountain-Lake St. Clair National Park. Look for native marsupials like Bennett's wallabies around Waterfall Valley and New Pelion Huts, pademelon (a smaller cousin of kangaroos) in the thick bush around Windy Ridge Hut, and, after dark everywhere, ringtail and brushtail possums, wombats, and quolls (rat-size marsupials). **Life-list moment:** Snapping a photo of a Tasmanian devil in the spooky forest of pencil pine and eucalyptus. The dog-size mammals—Australia's infamous, yet elusive, carnivorous marsupials—have large heads, powerful jaws, and sharp teeth. And their disposition can be just as vicious as cartoon legend (though they pose no danger to humans). Look for Tasmanian devils after dusk, when the nocturnal predators hunt small prey like wombats.

Plan It

» **Guidebook** *Walking in Australia*, by Sandra Bardwell (Lonely Planet, \$25)

» **Map** *Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair Map and Notes* (ausmaps.com/prod-cradle_mountain_map.php or tasmap.tas.gov.au/do/product/NPCRAD, \$7)

» **Season** December to April for warm temps and longer days. Early May is colder, but doesn't require reservations—and features beech trees turning gold.

» **Essential gear** Pack layers for wild swings in weather—hot, cold, wet—and bring a tent for camping outside of huts.

» **Need to know** From November 1 to April 30, officials limit the number of hikers who start each day, but you can hike at your own pace (hut space is first come, first served).

» **Cost** DIY: \$ // Guided: \$\$\$

» **Info** overlandtrack.com.au



Sarek National Park, Sweden

Lose yourself in Europe's last great wilderness.



Sarek, in northern Sweden's Lapland province, is to Europe what Denali National Park is to the United States—the place to go for remote, untamed adventure. Sprawling across 1,200 square miles of pristine Arctic wilderness, the park contains 100 glaciers, a sea of 200 alpine peaks more than 5,000 feet high, and broad valleys cut by fast-flowing rivers. Just 2,000 people backpack here a year; don't take the challenges lightly should you decide to join them. You'll ford icy rivers daily, face severe weather, and have to find your way in a place with no trails, signs, or shelters (and just two bridges). The payoff is adventure in its rawest form.

The best plan: Trek roughly 10 days and 60 miles from Sitoalvsbron to Kvikkjokk via the wide Rapa Valley. Thirty glaciers feed the silt-green, braided Rapaatno River, and elk, eagles, lynx, wolverine, moose, and brown bear inhabit the valley. From Sitoalvsbron, hike six miles to the east shore of Laitaure Lake, then catch a boat ride (arranged upon arrival) to the historic homestead of Aktse, where cabins are available. Ease in to things with a nine-mile round-trip dayhike to Skierfe—a prominent peak that rises 2,500 feet above the delta—and score a wall-worthy photo of the Rapa Valley parting a sea of mountains. The next day, travel by boat to the park boundary east of Nammatj and start walking across tundra where wildflowers bloom in the brief summer; camp nightly in a broad valley flanked by cliffs and snowy peaks. **Life-list moment:** Midway through the journey, arrive at Rovdjurstorget, aka Predator Square, and find yourself closer than you'd like to an eight-foot-tall, 1,500-pound moose. Several days later, after crossing the vast Påræk plain, finish at Kvikkjokk, which has basic lodging and, of course, a sauna.

Plan It

» **Map** *Sarek National Park BD 10* (mapsworldwide.com/sku_15009.htm, \$20)

» **Season** August to early October; snow can fall in any month.

» **Essential gear** A lightweight four-season tent

» **Need to know** Expert navigation and foul-weather experience required. No permit or fee.

» **Cost** DIY: \$ // Guided: \$\$

» **Outfitter** Nature Travels, naturetravels.co.uk

» **Info** naturvardsverket.se/en/In-English; visitSweden.com

PHOTOS BY (FROM LEFT) DARRYL LENIUK / MASTERRILE; WORLD PICTURES / PHOTOSHOT; HANIS STRAND / GETTY



CLOCKWISE FROM FROM TOP LEFT: SKIERFE'S SUMMIT AFFORDS A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE RAPA RIVER; MT. PIERIKPAKTE RISES ABOVE SAREK'S VALLEYS; TASMANIA'S OVERLAND TRACK CROSSES FIELDS OF BUTTON GRASS.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CONRAD ANKER
CROSSES A RIDGE NEAR 22,467-FOOT AMA
DABLAM, ABOVE THE KHUMBU VALLEY;
ROLWALING RIVER; DAWN ON TRASHI LABSTA;
SHERPA CHILDREN AT NAMCHE BAZAAR.

PHOTOS BY (FROM LEFT) JIMMY CHIN / AULI, DRA PHOTOS, BROUDY / DONOHUE PHOTOGRAPHY (2), JIMMY CHIN



Rolwaling and Khumbu Valleys, Nepal

Experience the magic of the remote Himalaya.



Discover hidden Nepal *and* trek the justifiably popular Everest region on this challenging 20-day route from Rolwaling to Khumbu. One of the eight *beyul*, or hidden valleys, of the Himalaya according to Sherpa legend, the Rolwaling gets just a tiny fraction of the trekkers of the world-

famous Khumbu. Consequently, the Sherpa culture has been largely unaffected by the droves of Westerners heading for nearby Everest Base Camp. To connect the two valleys, you have to cross—and camp atop—the glaciated Trashi Labsta Pass at 18,882 feet; it's no stroll, but fit non-climbers can do it with guides. Bonus option: Experienced mountaineers can tack on the snow-and-ice climb of 20,300-foot Pharchamo Peak, which rises immediately south of Trashi Labsta.

Starting in Barabise (five hours by bus from Kathmandu), you'll spend roughly two weeks ascending the Rolwaling Valley, staying in simple teahouses and camping on the outskirts of villages and in the high-mountain wilderness. **Life-list moment:** On day 3, climb through rhododendron forests that echo with the screams of langur monkeys and reach 10,890-foot Tinsang La, a pass where you'll get your first glimpse of the awesome Himalayan giants that lie ahead. Finish the day at Bigu Gomba, a Buddhist nunnery where the walls are lined with statues of the 11-headed deity Avalokiteshwara. Drink yak-butter tea with the nuns and camp nearby, overlooking terraced fields of wheat and barley that cascade down the valley.

From here, the gorge gets steeper and narrower with every mile, culminating in the thrill-a-step crossing of Trashi Labsta. Descend to bustling Namche Bazaar and awesome views of Ama Dablam and Makalu. Finish in Lukla and catch a flight back to Kathmandu.

Plan It

- » **Guidebook** *Trekking in Nepal*, by Stephen Bezuchka (The Mountaineers Books, \$17)
- » **Season** Fall for the best weather; spring for rhododendron blooms
- » **Essential gear** Big-mountain boots like the Kayland Contact (\$230, kayland.com)
- » **Need to know** Allow three extra days for acclimatizing en route.
- » **Cost** DIY: \$ // Guided: \$\$\$\$
- » **Outfitter** Cultural Treks & Expedition, culturaltreks.com
- » **Info** nepaltourism.info



Polar Route, Greenland

See sheer-sided fjords, calving glaciers, and the northern hemisphere's largest ice sheet.



You don't need to be a mathematician to understand these numbers: The world's largest island is three times the size of Texas, yet it has fewer residents than Waco. Which means backcountry hikers will feel the way Greenland explorers have always felt: like they're the first ones here. Deeply carved fjords bite into the coastline; mile-thick glaciers calve 10-story icebergs into the ocean; and reindeer and prehistoric-looking musk oxen graze on sedges. And with global warming melting the permafrost and radically—and rapidly—changing this Arctic landscape, the time to see it is now. Follow this plan for a complete Greenland adventure—starting with this unknown trek, which until recently was used chiefly as a winter route for snowmobilers.

The 100-mile Polar Route links Kangerlussuaq, a former U.S. military base, with Sisimiut, the world's northernmost port that remains ice-free year-round. (And no, you don't need a dog sled or down suit to hike the Polar Route in summer.) Start trekking from baggage claim in Kangerlussuaq, or get a ride (hitch or taxi) 10 miles up the road to Kellyville, population 8. From there, the Polar Route crosses fields of cotton grass and fragrant porcini mushrooms, soggy permafrost, and a hummocky prairie landscape broken by sheer granite cliffs. In some streams, the Arctic char are so fat and plentiful you'll be tempted to fish with your hands. The route, which DIY trekkers can easily follow, is marked with cairns and takes about 10 days to hike. It traces chains of glacial lakes (about 10 miles in, paddle Amitsorsuaq Lake with the complementary canoes left there). At the end of summer, you'll walk through an ankle-high mat of brilliant red and yellow foliage as the leaves of tundra-loving berry plants turn color. The trek's hut network ranges from small wooden cabins to large, heated dwellings; amazingly, hikers are so few and far between that the huts cost nothing and require no reservations.

A trip to Greenland would be incomplete without a glimpse of the thick polar ice sheet that covers most of the island. Explore it from Ilulissat, where you can access the Icefjord, a 30-mile swath of ice-choked water at the head of a calving glacier. Dayhike along the rocky coast of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, where you'll see icebergs bobbing in the sea and a giant glacial tongue crumbling into the water. En route, you'll come across sod homes and burial sites with visible human skulls; hire a local guide in Ilulissat and you might find that his ancestors are among them. To complete the icecap adventure, get a boat ride from Ilulissat north 37 miles to Eqip Sermia Glacier (boats run every few days in the summer; book space and cabins at Icecamp Eqi through Ilulissat Travel, ilulissattravel.gl). Look for whales and seals along the way, and ask the captain to drop you at the weathered wooden hut of 1940s French explorer Paul Emile Victor. Follow Victor's abandoned sledge road, now a gravel path, on a dayhike across a moraine to the gently undulating Greenlandic Icecap (get a local map at the Icecamp Eqi tourist cabins). **Life-list moment:** Hike around the Caribbean-blue bay and follow an unmarked path along the edge of the glacier, through fields of blueberries in late summer, and listen to what global warming sounds like: the thunderous crack of ice chunks falling into the sea. —*Berne Broudy*

Plan It

- » **Guidebook** *Greenland and the Arctic*, by Etain O'Carroll and Mark Elliott (Lonely Planet, \$27)
- » **Map** *Greenland Tourism Hiking Map and West Greenland Kangerlussuaq, Pingu, Sisimiut, Qeqertarsuaq topos* (harveymaps.co.uk, \$18 each)
- » **Season** July and August
- » **Essential gear** High gaiters
- » **Need to know** Fuel, food, and basic camping supplies are available in Kangerlussuaq.
- » **Cost** DIY: \$\$
- » **Info** greenland-guide.dk, greenland.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: EDGE OF THE ICEFJORD; A FISHING BOAT DOCKED AT SISIMIUT; YOUNG ICEBERGS BECOME JAGGED AS THEY MELT, AND EVENTUALLY THEY ROLL, EXPOSING A SMOOTHER BOTTOM—AND THE MELTING PROCESS RESUMES; THE POLAR ROUTE CROSSES SOGGY PERMAFROST.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: HIKERS APPROACH THE VILLAGE OF GEECH; TEFF, A LOCAL GRAIN, GROWS COMMONLY BELOW THE SIMIEN HIGHLANDS; RANGERS WALK PAST GIANT LOBELIAS; GELADA BABOONS CAN WEIGH MORE THAN 40 POUNDS; THE AMHARA HAVE LIVED IN ETHIOPIA FOR 1,000 YEARS.



Simien Mountains National Park, Ethiopia

Explore secret Africa on an alpine wildlife safari.



Talk about off the map: This chain of 14,000-foot mountains might as well be off the planet. And this 83-mile, eight-day trek hits the trifecta of adventure travel: Mind-boggling scenery, exotic wildlife, and fascinating culture. The Simiens, sculpted by 40 million years of eruptions and erosion, are a haunting mix of sheer escarpments, deep gorges, and *ambas*—stone columns that are remnants of prehistoric volcano vents. Gelada baboons protected within this UNESCO World Heritage Site are so comfortable around humans that you can sit on the ground near them (just don't get closer than 20 feet). And John James Audubon himself would have dropped his binoculars at the array of bird life, which includes waddled ibis and enormous vultures called lammergeysers. Trekking through villages of mud-and-grass huts, you'll meet Amhara locals whose ancestors became the first Africans to repel a full-scale European colonization at the end of the 19th century.

The trek starts in Buyit Ras, but first visit park headquarters in Debarq, where you'll meet your mandatory ranger escort (who isn't

a guide, officially, and usually speaks only Amharic). Local guides with packhorses are available here as well; both are recommended. The elevation and infrequent water sources make this a challenging hike, and much of the route crosses true wilderness in largely trailless terrain. Buyit Ras—as well as designated camps the next two nights at Geech and Chenek—put you in prime baboon habitat with big-mountain views. En route, you'll cross a series of 14,000-foot peaks with edge-of-the-Earth views across the vast, desolate plains of east Africa. **Life-list moment:** Dayhike to Bwhait Peak from Chenek and see elk-size wallia ibex—a species that exists only in the Simien Mountains—on crags just 20 minutes from camp.

Plan It

- » **Guidebook** *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, by Matt Phillips (Lonely Planet, \$26)
- » **Map** *Simen Mountains World Heritage Site* (omnimap.com, \$20)
- » **Season** December to March for dry weather; November for wildflowers
- » **Essential gear** Sun hat
- » **Need to know** Buy camp food before Debarq; it has little variety.
- » **Cost** DIY: \$ // Guided: \$\$\$\$\$
- » **Outfitter** Steppes Travel, steppestravel.co.uk

PHOTOS BY (OPPOSITE PAGE) BROUDY / DONOHUE PHOTOGRAPHY; (THIS PAGE) CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT) KURT WERBY (2); WORLD PICTURES / PHOTOSHOT; LISA DENSMORE