



# ADVENTURES

## IN WONDERLANDS

**DON'T LET ALICE HAVE ALL  
THE FUN. GET MOVING AT  
THESE PLACES HIGH, LOW,  
FAR, OR PLAIN THRILLING**

BY KATE SIBER

A walk above the clouds starts off a day at Nepal's Annapurna base camp, 13,400 feet up in the Himalaya.



Whale sharks make a big impression in the Sea of Cortez, off Mexico's Baja California peninsula.

# GO DEEP

OUTSIZE ENCOUNTERS IN THE OCEANS AND UNDER THE EARTH

## DELVE INTO DATA

20  
TYPICAL WEIGHT, IN TONS,  
OF A WHALE SHARK

2,900  
THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL AND  
FRINGING REEFS THAT MAKE UP  
THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

400  
MILES OF MAPPED PASSAGEWAYS  
IN MAMMOTH CAVE

190  
AGE, IN MILLION YEARS, OF  
THE NAVAJO SANDSTONE IN  
THE ZION NARROWS

## Swim With Whale Sharks

**G**oosebumps. That's what snorkeling near a bus-size shark can get you. Floating on the surface of the Sea of Cortez off the coast of Baja California, in Mexico, you see nothing but shades of aquamarine water below. Then, a shadow emerges from the deep, and the outline of a huge whale shark looms into view: the unmistakable dorsal and pectoral fins, the square head, and the powerful crescent-shaped tail. Even though these ancient fish are plankton eaters, your heart still beats a little harder as these leviathans approach. Swim as fast as you can as the largest fish in the sea, graced with unique patterns of stripes and dots, glides by. In a matter of moments, it disappears back into the deep blue again.

### MORE GREAT DEPTHS

**Dive the Great Barrier Reef** The world's largest reef clings to the northeast coast of Australia like a 1,250-mile coral parenthesis, with arguably the greatest diversity of dive sites on the planet. Hover among dwarf minke whales, sharks, and manta rays, and browse wrecks haunted by sea turtles.

**Delve Into Mammoth Cave** In Kentucky, the longest known cave system in the world boasts chambers big enough to fit a symphony orchestra, waterfall-like flowstone formations, and giant pillars that look like ancient shrines.

**Hike the Zion Narrows** The Zion Narrows, in Utah, is often dubbed a natural cathedral, for its soaring red-sandstone cliffs and the almost spiritual reverence its voluptuous curves inspire. Most visitors walk up the canyon a couple of miles, experiencing sections as narrow as 30 feet, and then turn around, but for a more secluded experience, start at the top of the canyon and hike the whole 16-mile stretch in one or two days.

BRANDON COLE (WHALESHARK), PATTUCIPHOTO (MOUNTAINS, PREVIOUS PAGES)



## Go Wild on the Pacific Crest Trail

The PCT is reveling in the spotlight, thanks to the memoir of one devoted through-hiker, best-selling *Wild* author Cheryl Strayed. But there's only so much a book—or movie—can reveal about a 2,650-mile route that stretches from Mexico to Canada and beelines straight through some of the West's most bewitching landscapes. Passing rolling desert, granite peaks in the Sierra Nevada, glass-still lakes in Oregon, and Washington's rounded volcanoes, hikers gain a visceral sense of scale. "You go back to the simplest form of living, and you realize that everything you thought you needed to survive, you don't," says April Sylva, a long-distance hiker who completed the trail last year. "You start to see the world and humanity in a different way—with a whole new appreciation."

### MORE GREAT LENGTHS

**Bicycle Around Iceland** Along the 830-mile Ring Road that circumnavigates Iceland, cyclists encounter all of this country's spectacular extremes, from glaciers to geysers; immense black-rock moonscapes to booming waterfalls; and glacial pools bobbing with blue icebergs to wilderness hot springs just big enough for two.

**Horseback Ride Mongolia** On a trip through the Mongolian steppes, horseback riders meet nomadic herders, visit a 16th-century monastery, and listen to the sound of traditional Mongolian throat singing.

**Sea Kayak British Columbia** It's impressive to see the old-growth rain forests, ragged granite shorelines, and clear shallows of British Columbia's sparsely populated coast from the vantage point of a kayak. But nothing compares with locking eyes with a curious orca, which emerges within feet of your kayak and disappears into the water just as gracefully as it came.

JUSTIN BAILLE/AURORA PHOTOS

# RANGE FAR

LONG-DISTANCE CHALLENGES TO GET THE BLOOD PUMPING

Side trips off the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail can lead to bonus views, such as this water-filled vista in South Lake Tahoe, California.

### RUNNING THE NUMBERS

5  
NUMBER OF MONTHS  
IT TAKES TO WALK THE ENTIRE  
PACIFIC CREST TRAIL

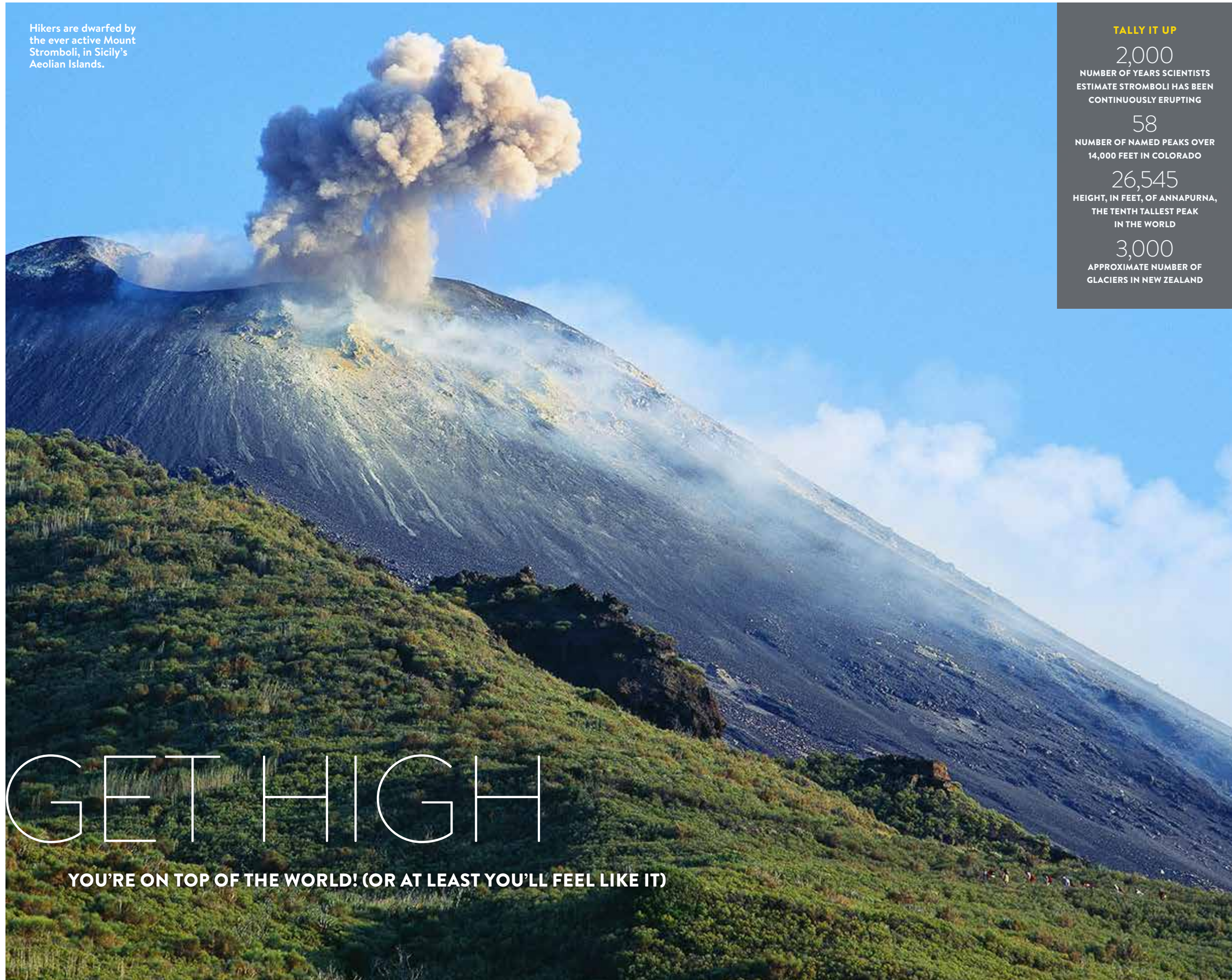
323,000  
POPULATION OF ICELAND,  
AN ALMOST EMPTY COUNTRY

603,909  
MONGOLIA'S TOTAL AREA, IN  
SQUARE MILES, MOST OF WHICH  
IS GRASSLAND AND DESERT

14  
PERCENTAGE OF PROTECTED  
LAND IN BRITISH COLUMBIA



Hikers are dwarfed by the ever active Mount Stromboli, in Sicily's Aeolian Islands.



#### TALLY IT UP

2,000

NUMBER OF YEARS SCIENTISTS ESTIMATE STROMBOLI HAS BEEN CONTINUOUSLY ERUPTING

58

NUMBER OF NAMED PEAKS OVER 14,000 FEET IN COLORADO

26,545

HEIGHT, IN FEET, OF ANNAPURNA, THE TENTH TALLEST PEAK IN THE WORLD

3,000

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF GLACIERS IN NEW ZEALAND

## Climb Stromboli

Only rarely does the fiery inner soul of the planet reveal itself—except on Stromboli, one of Sicily's Aeolian Islands that spews lava almost constantly. Just before sunset, hikers pant up over 3,000 vertical feet of heather, fragrant herbs, and black ash to a perch right above the crater. There, amid the swirling green gases, the volcano bursts into action every two minutes to two hours with an explosion of hot glowing lava that, at times, arcs over 1,200 feet into the air. "You cannot believe what you are seeing," says Lorenzo Russo, a guide for Magmatrek, a hiking outfitter. "It is one of the most incredible natural spectacles. People are speechless, then they all say 'wooooooowowow.' After the fireworks, skid down soft black ash as the light fades over the Mediterranean.

#### MORE GREAT HEIGHTS

**Summit Longs Peak** At no later than 3 a.m., start ascending the 4,885-vertical-foot, 7.5-mile Keyhole Route to the top of Colorado's Longs Peak. After negotiating giant boulders and steep granite faces, climbers arrive at the 14,259-foot apex before afternoon thunderstorms tend to roll in—the only window of time to take in Rocky Mountain National Park's sun-drenched glory.

**Trek the Annapurna Circuit** Don't think of the crowds on Nepal's beloved 128-mile U-shaped trek around Annapurna as a hindrance but part of the appeal. Pilgrims from all over share their awe of 20,000-foot peaks and chat over *dal bhat* in stone-and-thatch teahouses.

**Tread on a Glacier** On a three-day Ball Pass Crossing trek in New Zealand's Southern Alps, hikers maneuver scree and meadows to see Tasman Glacier up close. An easy shortcut: Take a helicopter or ski-plane.

# GET HIGH

YOU'RE ON TOP OF THE WORLD! (OR AT LEAST YOU'LL FEEL LIKE IT)

SAFFO ALESSANDRO/SIME/ESTOCK PHOTO



Rafters take on the Zambezi River in Zambia, where nearly half of the white-water rapids are categorized Class 5.

## Raft the Zambezi

There's at least one thing more exciting than feeling the rumble of 355-foot Victoria Falls: riding all of that water as it funnels into a gorge studded with boulders and menaced by drops. This stretch of the Zambezi River, on the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia, is considered some of the best white water in the world. "It's an amazing journey and for some a life-changing event to be in wilderness like this," says Matt Gontram, a raft guide and owner of outfitter Global Descents. Over six days, catapult into wave trains that top 30 feet and rush churning pools of white and green. Watch as wildlife—hippos, crocs, baboons, and vervet monkeys—parade by in the water and on the shores and giant basalt cliffs tower into the sky.

### MORE GREAT BUZZES

#### Bobsled/Skeleton Lake Placid

Wedge between a professional driver and a brakeman, novice bobsledders careen around ten turns at the Olympic Sliding Center, in Lake Placid, New York, reaching speeds of 60 miles per hour and g-forces in excess of two. Too tame? Pilot your own skeleton with your chin mere inches from the ice.

**Paraglide the Tetons** Visitors can rock climb up, ski down, or hike around Wyoming's piercing Tetons, but nothing compares with the view from the air. Access your inner falcon on a tandem paraglider ride that rises to over 10,000 feet.

**Witness the Northern Lights** In the wilds beyond Tromsø, Norway, cross-country ski or ride in a reindeer-pulled sled to watch arcs, curtains, and bands of greenish light tango across the sky.

UP FOR MORE?

Visit [adventure.nationalgeographic.com](http://adventure.nationalgeographic.com) or pick up the *Adventures of a Lifetime* bookazine on newsstands in June.

IGNACIO ARONOVICH/LOST ART

# BE THRILLED

THAT ROARING SOUND? THAT'S THE ADRENALINE RUSH

#### THE WOW INDEX

12,800

HIGHEST VICTORIA FALLS FLOW EVER RECORDED, IN CUBIC METERS OF WATER PER SECOND

85

TOP SPEED, IN MILES PER HOUR, OF A FOUR-PERSON BOBSLED AT LAKE PLACID

50

TOP SPEED, IN MILES PER HOUR, OF A PARAGLIDER WHEN TRAVELING WITH THE WIND

62

COMMON ALTITUDE, IN MILES, OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS