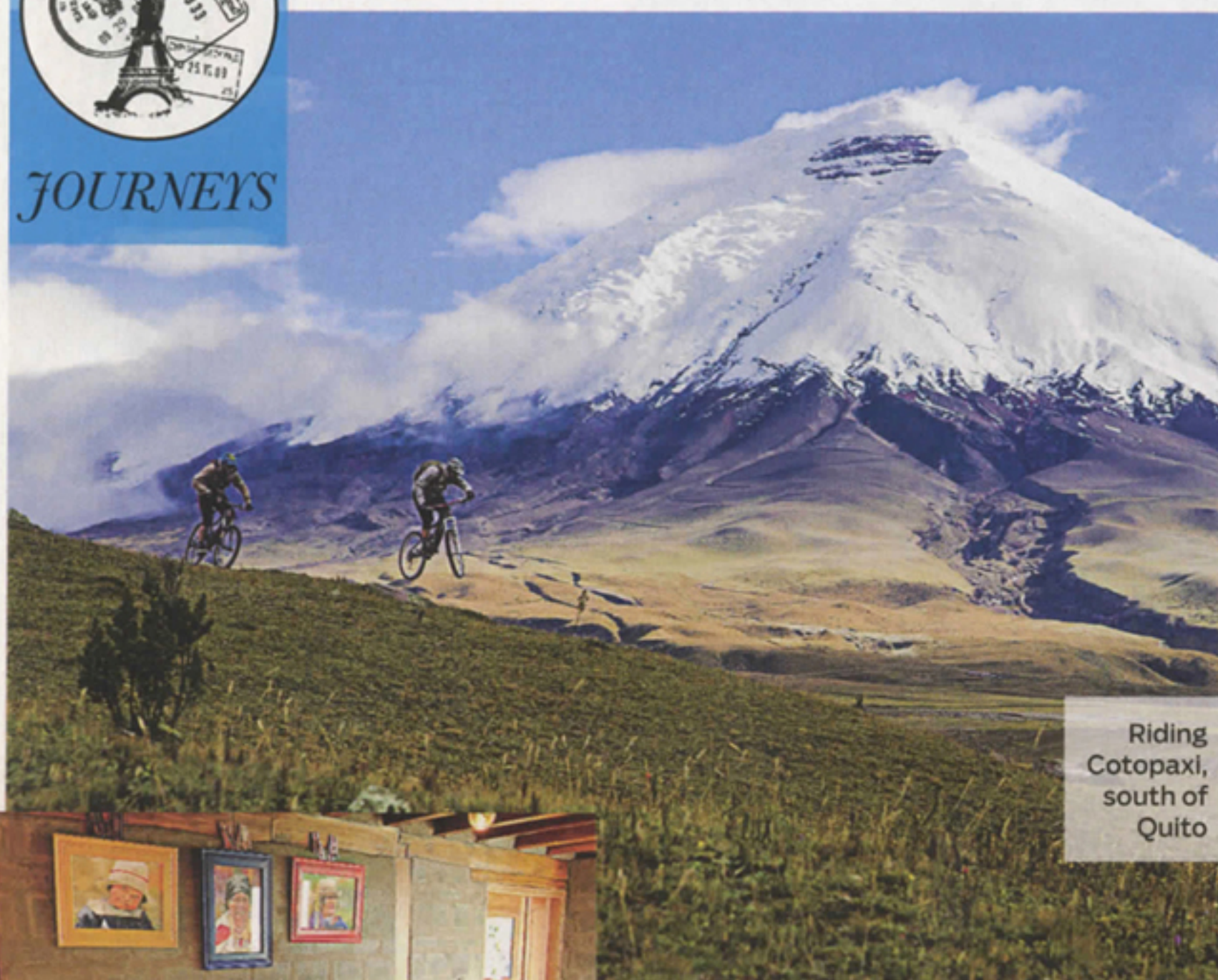




JOURNEYS



Riding
Cotopaxi,
south of
Quito



Home base,
volcano-side

Volcanic Flow

ECUADOR, LONG KNOWN FOR ITS WILDLIFE, BECOMES A MOUNTAIN-BIKING HUB

by Stephanie Pearson

THE CAPITAL city of Quito is no longer just a stop-off point for travelers headed to Ecuador's biodiversity hot spots. In the past decade, riders have discovered hundreds of miles of world-class singletrack, much of it on centuries-old footpaths crossing high desert, cloudforest, and some of the world's tallest volcanoes. It's a four-hour flight from Miami; here's how to get in on the action.

CRUISE

World Bike Adventures cracked open Ecuador's scene with singletrack trips in 2009. Its ten-day Downhill Safari explores the best rides in Quito and Cuenca. Guests warm up on trails through Incan ruins, then head to Cuenca to ride clay rollers. While in Quito, feast on ceviche at El Ventanal and stay on

the flanks of Pichincha volcano at Hacienda Rumiloma, a boutique hotel with killer views. August 20–29, \$2,800 per person (includes domestic flight); worldbikeadventures.com

GO BIG

For a bucket-list epic, it's hard to beat a ten-day trip that climbs 6,000 feet and drops 36,000 along the spine of the Andes. H&I Adventures' Taming the Dragon itinerary starts with a 4,265-foot singletrack descent from the mouth of Pululagua volcano. Next up: a ride around 19,347-foot Cotopaxi, one of the world's highest active volcanoes. The trip culminates in a 7,545-foot descent on the Mamarumi trail, an old bootlegging path. June 29–July 8 or November 30–December 9; \$2,736 per person all-inclusive; mountainbikeworldwide.com

FLY SOLO

Not ready for 6,000-foot climbs? Explore Quito's volcanoes and valleys from dozens of lodges, boutique hotels, or hostels. Base yourself at historic La Casona de la Ronda (doubles from \$140; lacasonadelaronda.com), and rent a front-suspension Trek 3500 from Biking Dutchman (from \$15 per day; bikingdutchman.com). Jan, the owner, can put you on trails suited to your skill, whether you want to tour the old city or find your own singletrack. After the ride, catch a bus south to Baños, where you can splash under waterfalls and soak in hot springs in Ecuador's famed gateway to the Amazon.



Chena Hot
Springs
comfort

SKY LIGHT

FACE THE ELEMENTS HEAD-ON BY STEERING TO THE FAR NORTH THIS WINTER —KATE SIBER

February temperatures in Fairbanks, Alaska, top out around 8 degrees Fahrenheit, and nights last, oh, 15 hours. But this year, there's reason to consider a Gore-Tex-equipped trip north: because of cyclical solar activity, the aurora borealis should be the strongest it's been in a decade. And the clear, dark sky is the perfect place to watch the most spectacular light show on earth. Make for Chena Hot Springs Resort (from \$189; chenahotsprings.com), 60 miles northeast of the city, where natural mineral pools reach a steamy 106 degrees. By day, cross-county ski along the resort's ten miles of birch-and-spruce-lined trails.



First
tracks in
Kyrgyz-
stan



TRIP OF THE MONTH

Back in 2008, Colorado-based skier Ryan Koupal stopped in Kyrgyzstan and found some of the best untouched skiing he'd ever seen. This year he takes up to seven skiers there on four-day trips with 40 Tribes Backcountry Adventures. Guided by Canadian-Latvian ski mountaineer Ptor Spricenieks, guests skin up a wolf-tracking trail to a handmade, wood-heated yurt that offers access to everything from mellow tree skiing to descents from 12,000-foot peaks. From \$1,500 per person; 40tribesbackcountry.com —MEGAN MICHELSON