Great scenic journeys

Looking for an extraordinary holiday in a jawdropping location? Gabi Mocatta shows you where to have a life-changing adventure without risking life and limb

Mountain biking in Lake Garda, Italy

The forested peaks of Italy's largest lake provide the backdrop for the mountain biking capital of the world. The terrain of the Northern lakes is varied, making it ideal for both novice and advanced mountain bikers.

Lake Garda is home to international competitions like Bike Xtreme (bikex-treme.com), and thanks to the numbers of visiting mountain bikers there are plenty of bike shops and hire outfits in the town of Riva del Garda to buy or hire kit.

Beginners can soak up the alpine sun as they wander along the trails that fringe the lake, taking it easy between cups of coffee and tiramisu. More adventurous mountain bikers can ascend the rugged peaks, which rise up to more than 2000m, for more challenging trails.

Perhaps the most famous ride is Monte Casale: an exhilarating narrow track that climbs through the trees to the 1632m summit. At one point, the ride anxiously grips a hair-raising cliff-face track with a vertical drop into the Adige Valley below.

The infamous Strada della Galleria, →

BUZZ PICTURES/GEOFF WAUGH



Mountain biking in Lake Garda can be as easy or difficult as you want it to be

a mule track cut into the cliffs of Pasubio mountain, and formerly one of the best mountain-bike rides in Europe, is now closed to bikes, but the trail can still be visited on foot. Mussolini's short-lived republic of Salo had its headquarters on the edge of Lake Garda during world War II and eerie reminders of the conflict still remain along the trail – you can visit no less than 52 military tunnels hewn from the rock. Even off the bike the route can be a nerve-jangling experience, narrowing to one metre path cut into a 1500m high cliff. Awe-inspiring, with or without two wheels.

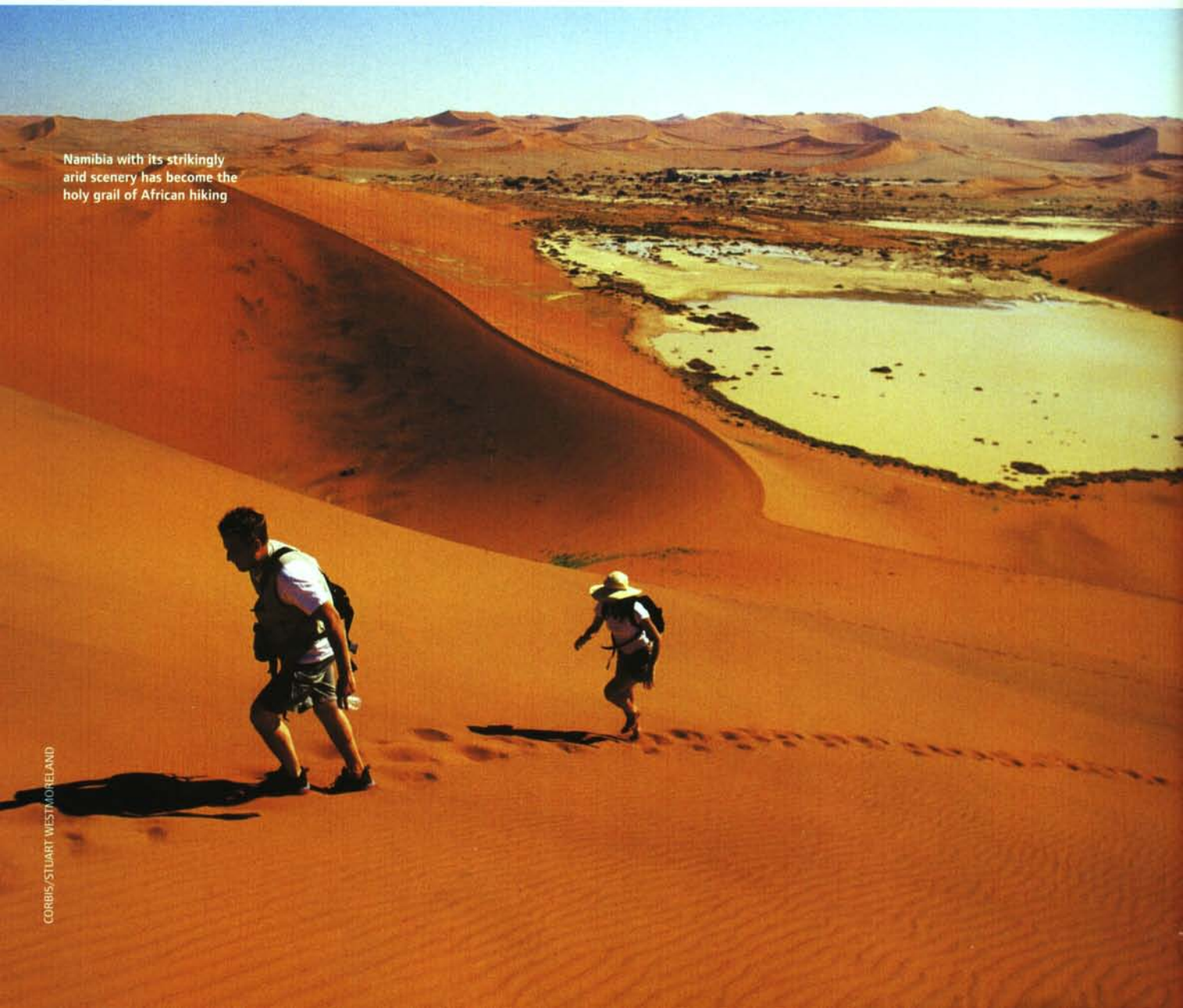
Hiking in
Fish River Canyon, Namibia

Think of Namibia and you may think of the endless sands of the Namib desert, diamonds, the Skeleton Coast and wildlife refuges such as Etosha Pan. The country, with its dry, desert environment may not spring to mind immediately as a hiking destination, but Namibia has some of the most scenic, arid hiking in Africa.

The six-day hike in Fish River Canyon, Southern Namibia, is the holy grail of African hiking. The Canyon is the second largest in the world, surpassed only by Colorado's Grand Canyon. The trail follows it for 56 miles of its total 112 miles length, starting from Hobas and finishing at the hot-spring resort town of Ais-Ais. The walk begins with a rugged descent to the Canyon floor, where you'll hop between boulders and skirt reflective pools of water. The sun is scorching in all seasons and winter is the only time of year when it's actually possible to walk the trail. There's always water to cool off in, though, and camping out at night under a desert sky provides a cool contrast to the heat of the day. Two days into the trek lies Palm Springs, an oasis of naturally hot water fringed by date palms, and laden with minerals that ease weary muscles. From here the Canyon becomes wide and sandy, with fabulous formations in the rose-tinted rock. This remote hiking is not for the fainthearted, but it is the hike of a lifetime.

Sailing in
South West Coast, Turkey

Millennia of culture combined with clear blue waters under a warm sun, small welcoming villages and tiny isolated coves make Turkey the perfect cruising ground for



Namibia with its strikingly arid scenery has become the holy grail of African hiking

CORBIS/STUART WESTMORELAND



On a Turkish gulet, enjoy the scenery while someone else does the hard work

GETTY

yachts. The stretch of water from Izmir via Kusadai, Bodrum, Marmaris, Fethiye and Ka to Antalya, is Turkey's Riviera, blessed with a gentle summer climate, numerous safe anchorages and intimate marinas.

Bodrum is the thriving centre of sailing in Turkey, and this is the spot to charter a bare boat if you have some sailing experience, or book a berth on a crewed yacht so you can laze your way around the Turkish coastline. The gulet, a traditional Turkish yacht, is a spacious, high-prowed craft that is ideal for luxury cruising. Embark on a gulet trip and you'll be pampered by a chef and hostess, while the captain takes care of all the sailing details. Sailing is also the perfect way to get close to Turkish village life. You'll sample freshly caught fish, stroll through olive groves, or enjoy raki, the national drink of Turkey, with locals at a beachside restaurant – the perfect getaway on water.

Horse riding in

Atlas Mountains to the Sahara, Morocco

Morocco is a country of horsemen. It is home to the Arabian horse and its people are proud to travel on horseback, and equally proud to show horse-savvy visitors around. The best outfitters provide top horses, comfortable saddles and provisions in ornate leather saddlebags.

A horse trek through the Atlas Mountains, or a ride across the shifting sands of the Sahara are undoubtedly the most poetic of Moroccan horseback journeys. In the Atlas, you'll traverse the peaks of Saghro and the Draa river valley, which are equally unforgettable in their beauty. Meanwhile, galloping through the Sahara Lawrence of Arabia style between the desert oases that are home to the Berbers, feels like an adventure in cultural time-travel. At night, travellers can rest in the tented camps and spend the evening swapping horse tales around the campfire.

It's best to ride in Morocco in the temperate months of winter, when the desert air is cooler and settled, and the nights are cloud free and bright with stars. Along the route there will be plenty of stops at cities, complete with walled Kasbahs, where riders can rest and ➜



Don't look now but there's an underwater safari off the coast of the Sinai peninsula

SCUBAVISION.DE, THOMAS REICH

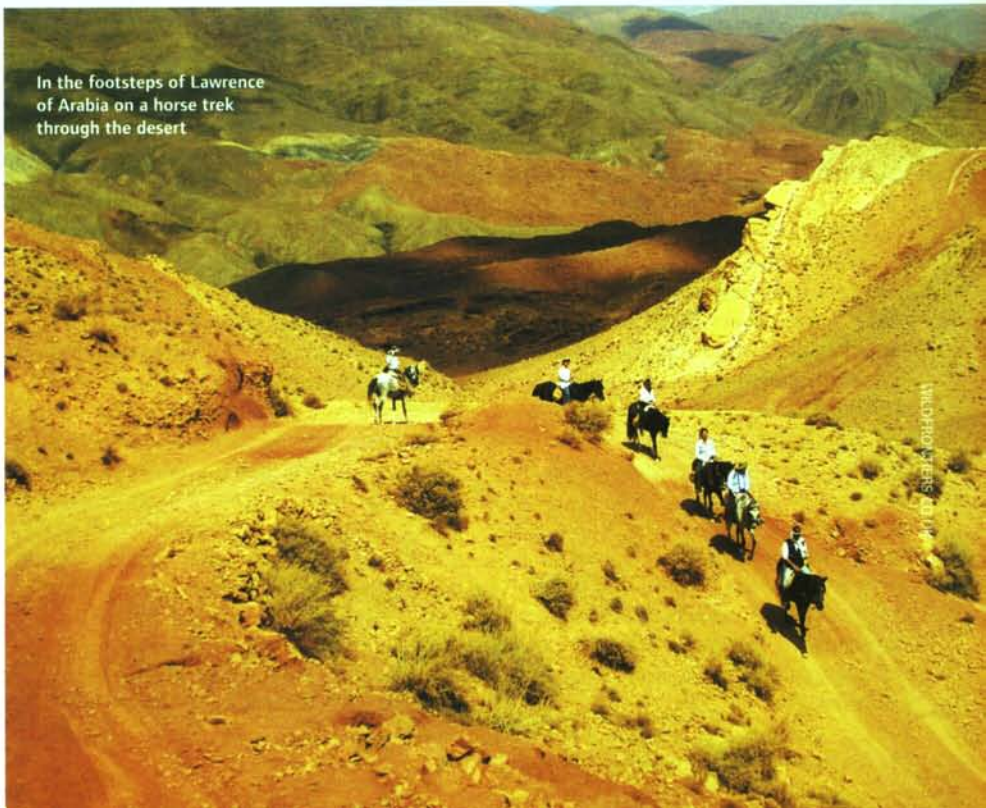
experience legendary Moroccan hospitality. By the end, you might even take on the turban and flowing robes of the Berbers, and you'll undoubtedly be in love with your elegant Arab horse.

Diving in

Sinai Peninsula, Egypt

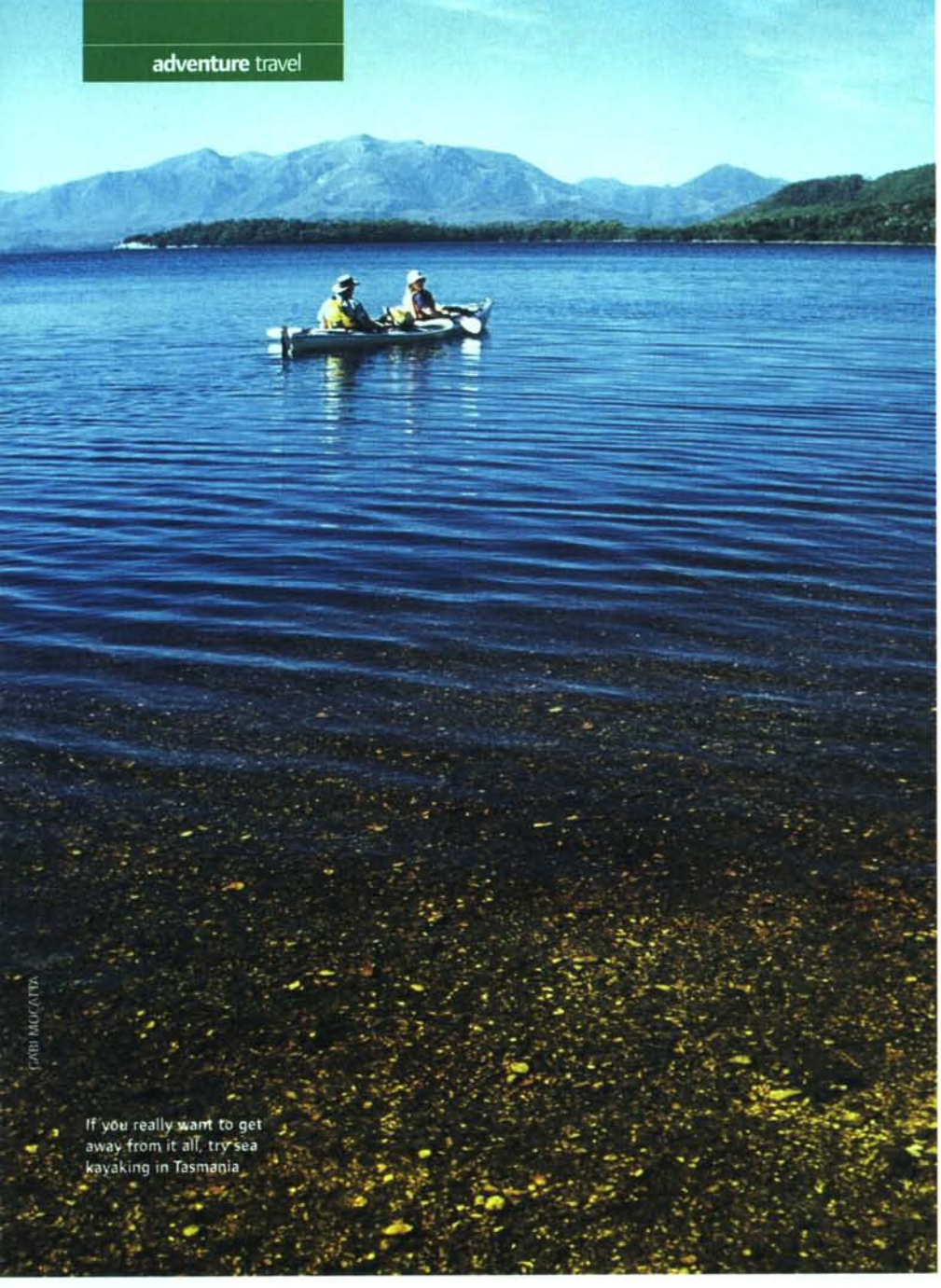
At the southern end of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, a serendipitous confluence of currents and sub-sea geography has created some of the best diving waters in the world. There are coral reefs vibrant with life and colour, and a density and diversity of fish species found nowhere else. Despite its name, the water of the Red Sea is azure, and so deep and clear in parts that just looking down can give a swimmer vertigo.

At the tip of the peninsula lies the town of Sharm El Sheikh, the exotic result of the fusion of the Sinai desert and Red Sea, which manages to successfully combine traditional bedouin culture and glamorous resort life. ➜



In the footsteps of Lawrence of Arabia on a horse trek through the desert

WINDROSE/GETTY



If you really want to get away from it all, try sea kayaking in Tasmania

GABI MOCATTA

Just offshore lies "The Locals", a group of 28 dive sites; just a 10 minute boat ride to fabulous coral reefs in shallow waters, perfect for beginners. Close by is Naama Bay, where just 50 metres from shore divers can swim around in sea-grass gardens that are home to rays, moray eels, sweetlips, colourful nudibranchs and the elusive ghost-pipe fish. Slightly further from Sharm, at the desert peninsula's extreme southern end are the famous sites such as the wrecks at Ras Mohammed, which provide adventure diving for the most experienced. There's a plethora of dive schools in the area, and for the novice, this is also one of the most economical places in the world to become a certified diver.

Sea kayaking in
Tasmania, Australia

It's been called walking on water. Sea kayaking is about as close you can get to being self sufficient and self propelled. You pack up all you need in your sleek, sturdy craft, and you glide – arm powered – over the water, heading for territories unknown. To pick a perfect spot on the globe to do this, you need to carefully study a map and know what you're looking for. You'll need to choose somewhere with islands or fjords: protected waterways where your passage will be smooth. The coast of Tasmania is arguably the ultimate destination for it. The intricate conjoinment of land and sea has gorgeous natural scenery, and a remote, edge-of-the-world feel. Australia's southern island state is quite simply a sea kayaker's nirvana.

Think powder-white beaches fringed by ice-blue seas, hundreds of islands, channels and inlets, and sea cliffs that soar to 300m. Tasmania's geography is a gift of the last ice age: when glaciers melted and water levels rose, mountain tops became islands and river valleys turned into vast inland harbours, cradled by mountains and protected from the fierce swells of the southern seas. The watery expanse of Bathurst Harbour and Port Davey lies in the state's South West: a drowned river system that's the jewel of the island's South West National Park and a UNESCO World Heritage Area.

A kayaking adventure here is deep wilderness immersion. No roads lead to this edge-of-the-world domain: this is a fly-in or boat-in adventure, and kayaking here means being totally self-sufficient as well as wind and water savvy. Bathurst Harbour lies within the latitude of the Roaring Forties, where seas can morph from glassy to wind-whipped in moments. Be prepared to camp for a day or two to wait out a gale – but be equally prepared for blisteringly hot days under the fierce Tasmanian sun, and water that's spookily calm.

Whatever the weather, the landscape here is a dream. On calm early mornings, you'll set out from your beach or forest camp, and glide past rainforested islands and rarely explored river inlets populated by black swans. If you're inclined to pull up your boat and scamper up a mountain, you'll spot wombats and wallabies, and have the opportunity to take in panoramic views of the wilderness. When the weather god smiles, you may make a dash out into the open ocean at Port Davey, where the swell comes all the way from South America, and dolphins and seals will be your paddling partners.

Take a few days or a week here, and it'll feel like a month. Kayaking here is an unforgettable adventure in wilderness that's about as remote as it gets.

Getting there

For more information about organising a holiday to Italy, Namibia, Morocco, Egypt, or Australia, contact the following:

Airtours, tel. +44 (0)870 900 8639 quoting 'Recline' or visitairtours.co.uk

MyTravel, mytravel.com