

5 DESTINATIONS FOR ADVENTUROUS SURFERS

Out of the ordinary. Away from the crowds. Heading to off-the-radar, adventurous surf destinations is nothing like rocking up to a fully-fledged surf camp where everything's on tap. Do your research before you go, and get the lowdown on the breaks, conditions, culture and getting around. Pack lightly – but don't forget to take a map and a phrasebook, because you can't rely on Wifi everywhere you wander. It's time for an adventure.

words HAYLEY LAWRENCE

CHILE

A goofy-footers haven stacked with miles-upon-miles of empty lefthand point breaks, despite being home to a World Surfing Reserve, Chile is still a low-key surfing destination. Perhaps because it's hard to stick a pin in its 2,400 miles of surf-lashed coastline and know where to start. If its vastness is appealing, it's time pack your adventurous spirit and hop on a flight to Santiago.

In a nutshell

Dubbed the 'land of the left', Chile's impressive coastline stretches from the Atacama desert to the islets of Patagonia. Littered with year-round waves for all levels, it's a veritable surf traveller's dream – whether you're a goofy-footer or simply keen to improve your backhand. Being such a long, narrow country, wherever you happen to be in Chile, you're never that far from the coast. So it's up to you if you want to watch the show-stealing big wave break of Punta de Lobos, pull into freight-train barrels down south or find your feet on a crumbly, black sand beach break.

The vibe

While Chile's surf hubs are spread along its vast length, the surf towns of the north exude a laid-back vibe, with a focus on beach life. Pichilemu and Maitencillo are both vibrant, hippy-chic ocean towns lined with cool beach hotels, restaurants, bars and surf set ups. While the main spots can get busy, it's never too hard to escape and find an empty peak.

The breaks

Kick off your adventure in the surf capital of Pichilemu, about three hours from Santiago. It's home of the famous Punta de Lobos (Point of the Wolves), where 30-foot-plus swells break in front of a huge cathedral-like rock. However, most mere mortals come for the barrels of Inferno and A-frame peaks that break onto black sand beaches. Beginners might prefer to find their feet further north on the forgiving waves of La Boca de Concón and Maitencillo – the latter being an ideal base not too far from Santiago, with a series of sheltered, mellow reef breaks. At Chile's extremes, right up on the border of Peru, the warmer Arica and Iquique resemble Baja-style set ups, while right down south, only hardy explorers with their own wheels seek out the cold,

freight-train barrels of Punta Pullay and Playa de Llagua.

Need to know

The water in Chile gets progressively colder the further south you head, so add another layer of neoprene for every bite you intend to take out of its bottomless coastline. You can find waves in every season, but there are prime surfing months for each region: December to March in the North, May to August in central Chile, and April to May for the spring/ winter swells down south.

NORTHWEST SPAIN

Southwest France gets all the cred and the crowds for the reliability of its waves and punchy autumn swells. And Portugal is the easy-to-get-to European hotspot with endless waves, sunshine and surfy vibes. But if you're doing a European roadie and in search of crystalline waters, crowd-free nooks and an untamed coastline for van camping and surfing adventures, then Spain's northwest is calling you and your quiver.

In a nutshell

Beyond the old-world charm of the Basque Country await the mountain-backed breaks of Asturias, luring surfers with the patience to pause here until the northerlies switch their course and groom incoming swells. Yet the wildest beauty lies at the end of the land in Galicia, where adventurous surfing souls can still find empty, coldwater breaks sheltered from the northerlies, while treading in the footsteps of pilgrims and trans-Atlantic smugglers.

The vibe

With its own language, a distinctive culture and capital city marking the end of the Camino de Santiago pilgrim trail, Galicia's vibe is unique and independent – in the water, and out. Pack up your van on self-sufficient adventures and you can step into dramatic landscapes and brave wild, bracing waves, where wildlife abounds. The view around every corner stops you in your tracks, and each adventure is rewarded empanadas filled with local seafood, hearty stews of turnip tops and chorizo, accompanied by crusty Pan Gallego.

The breaks

As you swing out of Asturias, one of the first breaks worth making camp at is Praia de Esteiro, where

Camino a puertecillo, Navidad, Chile



Galicia's vibe is a good one.



evergreen forests tumble onto the sand dunes, and a long left-hander reels across the bay in medium-sized swells. Heading west, check out the perfect crescent bay of Praia Sarridal, between two mountains at the tip of its own peninsula.

A little further on, Pantin has turned heads to the surfing delights of Galicia, with its annual WSL surf comp and huddle of surf schools on its truly stunning shores. Catching the brunt of the NW swells, there's pretty much always a wave, and it's a good place to slip into the region's surfing lifestyle and acclimatise yourself to the cooler waters, before heading onto the furthest reaches and deserted breaks.

Beyond Pantin awaits the sugar-white sands, cold, empty waters and oh, so wild and dramatic landscapes of the Costa del Morte. A surf explorer's dream, it's rare that you find two neighbouring spots facing in the same direction along a higgledy-piggledy coastline. Playa de Traba offers plenty of peaks on the north-west tip, and you can hunker from the the northerlies at the next little surfing enclave of Nemiña.

Need to know

Pack your phrasebook and brush up on your Spanish. It's a friendlier place when you can speak a little of the language. The swell season is year-round and there are beaches for all conditions – however it's much more difficult to find shelter from the big NW winter swells. Get up early and you'll find empty waves if that's what you're looking for; just steer clear of the busier breaks around Ferrol and Foz if you don't want to battle the locals for waves or worry about pretty thieves.

THE AZORES

Midway between North America awaits an archipelago of nature-hewn islands, so often omitted from surfers' travel lists. But why? We ask. Despite its remoteness, the Azores isn't difficult to get to (there are low-cost flights from London, Europe and North America), and once there, thanks to 360-degree swells from the northern and southern hemispheres, the surfing opportunities are endless – and uncrowded. And no matter what you've heard, the adventure isn't solely for experienced surfers.

In a nutshell

When you've crossed 840 miles of ocean to get here, you're going to get some waves to yourself. Poles

apart from mainland Portugal (except for the lingo and the delicious post-surf custard tarts), the Azores isn't a land of surf camps and spoon-fed surfaris. However, away from the slabs and points that fire up in huge winter swells, there are a few much mellower black-sand beach breaks, with a handful of up and coming surf schools, to go with them.

The vibe

Imagine one of the most wild and rugged territories you've ever stepped foot on. Where the peaks of ancient volcanoes have burst into the open ocean, hundreds of miles from anywhere. Rainforest-topped craters, monumental waterfalls and geo thermal pools, cradled by rocky shorelines inhabited by sperm whales, dolphins and eagle rays. Swells hurtle across the Atlantic, lighting up the nooks and crannies of the coastline, and the people are hardy, salt-stained and self-sufficient.

The breaks

I'd always dissed the Azores as being a zone reserved for the hardcore. In fact, back in 2022 the WSL cancelled their qualifying series here because it was too dangerous for the world's elite. But don't let this put you off. Beyond the heavy slabs and behemoth reef breaks, you'll find there are waves for all levels of surfers.

Being this far from anywhere, it's not a destination for the fainthearted. But with nine islands to choose from, you don't have to follow the chargers to the sucky tubes of Terceira. We'd suggest getting to know Sao Jorge, where you can watch the barrelling action from sheer-cut cliffs, and catch long lefts on the cobblestone break of Ermida de Santo Cristo.

Most newbies stick to the main island of São Miguel, which not only has the greatest variety of surf spots for everyone from loggers to shortboard riders, but also has the most sand-bottomed breaks (which isn't actually that many in these parts). Mosteiros, Santa Bárbara and Monte Verde are some of the most inviting breaks, all of which can deliver the goods on a summer well.

Need to know

You don't have to visit the Azores to catch the biggest bombs of winter. Although the northwestern Atlantic swells are a sight to behold here. However, you can score waves here in all seasons, and summer at the beach breaks is recommended if you're a beginner.

You'll need to rent a car, and the reason many of

The Azores, wild rugged and wave rich.



"Beyond the heavy slabs and behemoth reef breaks, you'll find there are waves for all levels of surfers."

DANNI POLLOCK

the breaks aren't busy is because it really is quite an adventure to access them. Oh, and pack your waterproofs; it's a rainy destination, too. That said, if you're looking for an adventurous surf destination, you've truly hit the jackpot.

Make sure you get out and explore the underwater world – there's an amazing array of sea life and wreck dives. And don't forget to explore the caves and waterfalls. Out of the water, join in a tribal sing-sing.

THE PHILIPPINES

When you wrap over 7,000 islands and 22,500 miles of coastline in the Pacific Ocean, there's bound to be a few places to surf, right? Whether you emerge through a thicket of palm trees on the dreamy island of Siargao, or step out of a tropical forest onto sugar-white sands at the northern tip of the archipelago, there are waves for all levels of surfers in the Philippines.

In a nutshell

If you're looking to unwind, disconnect from the rat race and discover world-class waves in paradise, the Philippines should be on your bucket-list. From the country's birthplace of surfing (and setting of 70's war movie *Apocalypse Now*), Baler in Luzon, to the longboarding Mecca of Siargao, and the still-to-be-discovered breaks of Eastern Samar, offshore winds light up a myriad of breaks from the tip the toe of this dreamy archipelago.

The vibe

Think Indo before Bali went ballistic. A little more fickle. A little more laid-back. A little more rugged. For all its beauty, the Philippines just doesn't have the consistent swell pulses behind the likes of Uluwatu and G-Land. But that means it's a land of possibility with breaks yet to be discovered. Here you can putter offshore in an outrigger, dance along impossibly turquoise ripples, and catch a huge snapper to throw on the coals when you get back to the beach. Sound like bliss? Read on.

The breaks

Despite thousands of islands to choose from, the number of places you can feasibly visit for a surf trip are relatively few. La Union, a couple of hours from Manila, is known as the surfing capital of the north, the all-level beach breaks of Pujada Bay in Dahican are pretty consistent, and little fishing village of Lanuza is home to incredible reefs and a couple of surf camps. But really, the place to go – for the vibes, the waves, the consistency, and the gob-smacking beauty – is Siargao, on the very edge of the Philippine archipelago.

Siargao's Cloud 9 is as close to Indo as you'll find – hailed as one of Slater's favourite waves and the reason that this tiny, tear-drop island hit the radar of surfers across the globe. It's a heavy break and world-class on its day, but rest assured that you don't have to surf Slater-style to make the most of this palm-fringed paradise.

The longboarding scene is huge here, with locals Josie Pendergast and Ikit Agudo styling in the line-up. A lot of the action happens on the outskirts of the main town, General Luna, namely at Guiwan – or Secret Beach – where gin-clear waves peel across a trio of peaks. It's far from the secret spot its name suggests, but strap your board to your scooter and roam north, and you might just find some empty waves if you keep searching beyond those thickets of palm trees.

Need to know

July to October marks the typhoon season in the southwest, when Siargao's Cloud 9 light up with regular barrelling days. Then the winter northwest swells push in from the Pacific between December to April. That said, it's not an exact science, and it's not the sort of place that delivers like clockwork. Our advice – just go and see what it delivers. Also, be aware of petty thieves. We've seen plenty of iPhones and cameras disappear from the shoreline.

The laid back vibes of Siargao.



"What with an other-worldly landscape backed by stunning, snow-capped peaks, an array of breaks and an intriguing culture, Japan's got some very alluring credentials."

JAPAN

So, Japan isn't exactly 'off the beaten track', having made its Olympic debut in 2020. However, it's not on many people's surf radar. Its disputes with Russia and an active whaling industry are off-putting, but it's worth considering that there's a vast 30,000km of coastline, around half of which is bordered by the Pacific. Add to that an annual storm season that brings with it a couple of months of glassy waves, and it becomes clearer why it's on our list.

In a nutshell

What with an other-worldly landscape backed by stunning, snow-capped peaks, an array of breaks and an intriguing culture, Japan's got some very alluring credentials. The surf here is a fickle beast, and it can often be a waiting game for those epic days. But when typhoon season hits – from August to November – many of its breaks go off like clockwork. And when it goes off, there are waves for all board sizes and abilities. You'll need a decent winter suit for the cooler water temps up north, but it warms up as you drift south.

The vibe

With a tentative approach to tourism, Japan's surf scene is still blooming. While it's a joy to mix urban life and wave riding, the breaks close to the cities attract the crowds and localism, so get adventurous and explore the quieter locations. Even outside of typhoon season, there are waves to be found.

The breaks

Chiba (home of the Olympics) is the go-to surf spot in the Land of the Rising Sun. And close to the metropolis of Tokyo, the well known Fukushima area picks up the swells – as well as surfing masses and some heavy localism. However, just far enough from the cities of southern Honshu to deter the crowds, you'll find anything from ankle slappers to powerful wedges at the more laidback Sendai.

If you want that classic shot of surfing with Mount Fuji in the backdrop, head to Chigasaki. It's not

exactly a swell magnet, but the jetties provide some long rights and even on smaller days there are few little A-frames beckoning beginners. If you're looking for Japan's Waikiki, the white-sand bays of Shirahama are made for logging. Or, if mechanical righthand barrels are more your style, head south to Shikoku Island – home to some of the best rivermouth waves in the world, and a region mostly untapped by tourism.

If it's the combo of snowboarding and surfing that's brought you here, it's the northernmost of the four main islands you want to head for – Hokkaido. Between mountain runs you'll find a few wave-riding gems on the west coast, but be prepared for bitter temperatures and watch out for icebergs.

Need to know

The best time to surf in Japan is during typhoon season – from August to October/ November. However, if you're prepared to put the miles in, you can often find surf at any time of the year. Despite its unsettled relations with Russia, Japan is generally considered a safe country to visit, and much of it is untapped by tourism.



Fujiyoshida, Japan.

Mount Fuji, and the colours of Japan.



Fun waves roll into Chiba.

