

CHOOSE YOUR OWN



A large whale breaching the water surface, with a scuba diver in the foreground. The whale's head and back are visible above the water, while the diver is fully submerged in the blue water below. The word 'ADVENTURE' is written in large, white, bold letters across the top of the image, with the word 'ADVENTURE' repeated in a smaller, semi-transparent font above it.

ADVENTURE ADVENTURE

From cruising **Route 66** to scuba diving in **Cabo**, these **12 trips** are led by Chicago experts who will help you get the most out of your excursion.

By NATHAN ANSELL, WEB BEHRENS, CATE HUGUELET, and DAVID McMILLIN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY QUICKHONEY

Strike a Triangle Pose on the Amalfi Coast

When
April 15–23, 2024

Your guide
Masin Ouksel
Ahimsa yoga studio
co-owner



Cost
\$3,900 to \$6,700, depending on room selection and occupancy; includes breakfasts and most dinners

Sign up
ahimsayogastudios.com/italy-2024-yoga-retreat



It's hard to think of a more picturesque setting for yoga (or anything, really) than Italy's Amalfi Coast. You'll spend five nights at the Hotel Santa Caterina, a five-star seaside resort in Amalfi, then three on Ischia, an island off the coast of Naples. Ouksel and another teacher

at Ahimsa, Christine Cipra, will lead yoga and meditation twice daily, usually an active class in the morning and a relaxing one in the evening. "Everything's optional—it's your vacation!" Ouksel says. "If you want to sleep in, no problem. We're not strict on diet or anything like that." In Italy, that's for the best.

About the guide: Ouksel started practicing yoga in 2008 while recovering from injuries sustained from rowing crew at Oak Park and River Forest High School and at college. In 2014, he began teaching the discipline, often while playing acoustic guitar or singing bowls. As co-owner of Ahimsa, a yoga studio with four

NOTE: Costs include accommodations and exclude airfare unless otherwise stated.

The Hotel Santa Caterina in Amalfi



PREVIOUS SPREAD (ROUTE 66 SUSAN VINEYARD/ISTOCKPHOTO; (CUBA) WILDEST ANIMAL/GETTY IMAGES)

locations across the suburbs, he's led retreats to Greece and Panama.

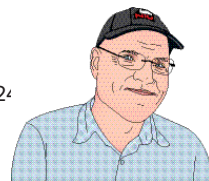
Bring: Hiking shoes. Yoga might not require footwear, but you'll want more than flip-flops to explore the hilly Amalfi Coast—not to mention Pompeii and Vesuvius, less than a hour's drive away.

Watch for: Ischia's hot springs. The island is known for its natural thermal spas.

Explore Maya Ruins in the Yucatán Peninsula

When
January 20–28, 2024

Your guide
Jeff Karl Kowalski
Northern Illinois University
professor emeritus



Cost
From \$5,545 to \$6,345, depending on number of bookings (all double occupancy); additional \$595 for solo travelers

Sign up
archaeological.org/tour

The ancient city of Chichén Itzá



Kowalski will lead the Archaeological Institute of America's walking-heavy tour through Maya civilization. He'll take you to the requisite stops, like the ornate structures in the Puuc city of Uxmal and the pyramids at Chichén Itzá. But he'll also show you less heralded sites, like a millennium-old ball court and a tomb with a doorway shaped like a monster's mouth. "The people who take the tour will have fun," says Kowalski, "but also learn as much as they can about who was building these buildings and what they represented for the people who used them."

About the guide: As a graduate student at Yale, Kowalski studied under legendary archaeologist Michael D. Coe, whose research was instrumental in deciphering

Mayan writing. Now he's a renowned Mayanist himself. Kowalski taught pre-Columbian and Mesoamerican art history for more than three decades at Northern Illinois and has given 20-plus tours of the Yucatán Peninsula.

Bring: A swimsuit. Near Chichén Itzá, you can swim in a cenote, a water-filled limestone sinkhole, surrounded by lush vegetation. Cenotes were "used as sources of water, and also seen by pre-conquest Maya as abodes of the rain gods," says Kowalski.

Watch for: The Governor's Palace in Uxmal. Kowalski calls it "the single most impressive, imposing, and monumental palace building constructed by the ancient Maya." At four stories tall and longer than a football field, the palace was likely built for a king or divine ruler.

Taste and Toast Tradition in Oaxaca

When
November 7–13, 2024

Your guide
Diana Dávila
Executive chef and owner of Mi Tocaya Antojería



Cost
\$5,500 (double occupancy);
\$6,900 (single)

Sign up
modernadventure.com

From tasting Oaxaca's celebrated seven moles and its chocolate to visiting a tortilla press workshop, expect a close-range exploration of culinary traditions of this state in south Mexico. "Oaxaca does a lot of work to safeguard its indigenous culture and its cuisine," Dávila says. She's a dedicated mezcal enthusiast too, so behind-the-scenes palenque (distillery) tasting tours will be on the docket.

About the guide: The Mi Tocaya Antojería chef-owner's first taste of Oaxaca came at age 20, when she persuaded her mom she'd rather travel there than to Paris. The experience awakened in Dávila an interest in Mexico's people and culinary history that would later inform her cooking. Looking back now, she says, "It was my first chef trip."

Bring: Your emotional baggage. It will be purified during a cleansing ritual with a shaman.

Watch for: Showstopping Zapotec crafts, like woven rugs and pottery. "There's so many beautiful arts made by hand there," says Dávila. "Skills have been handed down from generation to generation."



Clockwise from top left: Agave hearts; Oaxaca's city market; tortilla making; the town square; handwoven textiles



A TASTE OF MEXICO IN CHICAGO

Can't make it to Oaxaca? Try one of Diana Dávila's favorite local spots.

Kie-Gol-Lanee

"They're from Oaxaca, and they're cooking beautiful food from their memories of home. Their Oaxacan tamales are amazing." 5004 N. Sheridan Rd., Uptown

5 Rabanitos

"Alfonso Sotelo is one of those chefs who makes good food because he loves what he does. His puerco al rancho and cecina estilo guerrero showcase his natural talent for cooking like a Mexican mother." 1758 W. 18th St., Pilsen

Baha

"We go here for mariscos and cocktails. They do a great job on seafood classics, like fried whole red snapper." 4842 W. Diversey Ave., Crágin

Follow Lewis and Clark Across the Pacific Northwest

When
October 22–29, 2023

Your guide
Stephen Pruett-Jones
University of
Chicago professor



Cost
\$7,050 to \$7,950, depending on room selection (all double occupancy); includes meals and drinks

Sign up
expeditions.com/expeditions/columbia-and-snake-rivers-journey



Sunrise over the Columbia River Gorge, just east of Portland

This river tour, hosted by Lindblad Expeditions, focuses on the region's nature and history. You'll head east, following the return journey of Lewis and Clark's famed 1805 expedition, from Portland, Oregon, to Clarkston, Washington (one guess who the town's name after). Your vessel: the *National Geographic Sea Bird*, a small ship with 31 guest cabins. Pruett-Jones will lecture about the region's wildlife, including another kind of travel by waterway: "The

Columbia River is the starting point for the annual migration of spawning salmon."

About the guide: Pruett-Jones, a U. of C. professor since 1988, flies almost as much as the birds he studies. An evolutionary biologist specializing in avian behavior, he's been a guest lecturer on trips to destinations ranging from Iceland to New Zealand. Pruett-Jones is also quite familiar with the Pacific Northwest—he and his wife will soon move to Washington State, where he'll continue to research for the university

even in his retirement from teaching. "It's a magical place," he says.

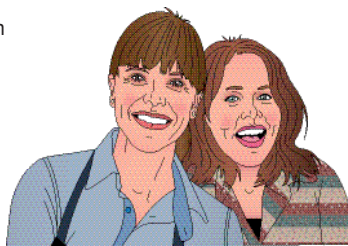
Bring: Binoculars. Pruett-Jones invites travelers to join him in birding; he expects to see at least 50 species on this trip.

Watch for: The Columbia River basin, which you'll cruise into on the third day. "It's kind of like the Grand Canyon of the Pacific Northwest," Pruett-Jones says. Its impressive sights are made by both Mother Nature (Multnomah Falls) and humans (Bonneville Lock and Dam).

Feast on Rustic Luxe Fare in Northern Michigan

When
Weekends from late May through October

Your guides
Iliana and Anna Regan
Former chef and sommelier at Elizabeth



Cost
\$2,000 (tent); \$3,500 (cabin room); prices are for two guests and include meals.

Sign up
milkweedinn.com. Reservations open a year in advance but fill up quickly. Subscribe to the newsletter for early notification, and keep an eye on the Instagram page (@milkweedinn) for cancellations.

Think of Milkweed Inn on Michigan's Upper Peninsula as foodie summer camp. You can avail yourself

of bucolic hiking trails, archery, and a sauna, but the main event is the food, which ranges from grab-and-go breakfast pastries to a Saturday night tasting menu of 10 to 15 courses. "It's a big weekend of eating and having drinks," says co-owner Iliana Regan, who's usually found in the inn's kitchen, preparing bites like burdock leaf ramen with smoked Lake Superior whitefish. After dinner, sip nightcaps beside the firepit before retiring to the cabin, canvas-wall tents, or a vintage Airstream.

About the guides: When burnout threatened Iliana, she and wife Anna traded the chef's Michelin-starred restaurant Elizabeth for this 12-guest inn, where the surrounding Hiawatha National Forest supplies the fervent foragers with a bounty of wild greens, mushrooms, and berries.

Bring: Your extrovert pants, since you'll be sharing the table (and the bathrooms) with fellow guests. But trust your hosts and don't sweat it: "Anna and I are here talking you through it from the moment we meet you," Iliana assures.

Watch for: Critters. Sightings of the occasional deer, otter, or coyote aren't guaranteed, but Iliana can promise a sense of place: "I hope guests find a little connection with nature, because we're immersing them in it."



Clockwise from top left: Potato and herb dumplings with Lake Superior whitefish roe; Iliana Regan cooking; imbibing in the Deer Room



Caravan to the West Coast on Route 66

When
Six 13-day tours from May through October 2024

Your guide
Austin Coop
Founder of Two Lane America



Cost
\$2,650 (double occupancy); \$3,250 (single)

Sign up
Email Coop at austin@2laneamerica.com.

Route 66's Local Pit Stops
Can't commit to hitting the highway for two weeks? Here are Coop's favorite places along the Mother Road, all within four hours of Chicago.

Paul Bunyan's New Friends
Atlanta, Illinois, has long had just one big (literally) tourist draw: a 19-foot-tall statue of Paul Bunyan holding an oversize hot dog that used to tower over Bunyan's, a now-shuttered Cicero drive-in. "A couple of guys had the bright idea that everybody loves these giant statues," Coop says. "They said, 'What if we tried to get more of them?'" The one-block town is now home to the American Giants Museum, which preserves the few remaining Muffler Men – giant fiberglass statues that once lined Route 66 to attract attention to roadside restaurants and stores. *Arch and Vine Streets, Atlanta*

Cozy Dog Drive In
You don't even need to get out of your car. Just pull right up for a Cozy Dog, the original corn dog on a stick, first served at the Illinois State Fair in 1946. **Tip:** Order cheese on a stick for your side. 2935 S. Sixth St., Springfield

Old-School Gas Stations
For a true old-school at-the-pump experience, you can find what Coop calls "three of the very best" old gas stations: Ambler's Texaco in Dwight (417 W. Waupansie St.), Soulsby's in Mount Olive (710 W. First St.), and the Standard in Odell (400 S. West St.).

A curiosity shop along Route 66 in Oklahoma



Having driven America's most iconic road some 75 times, Coop has mastered a westward itinerary on Route 66 that features everything you'd expect—the mom-and-pop places, the old gas stations, the old motels—but also hidden gems, such as lunch on the stage of a historic theater in Miami, Oklahoma, and a St. Louis glass mosaic that's the largest outside of Russia. You'll hear from your guide at planned stops on the 2,400-mile journey from

Chicago to the Santa Monica Pier, as well as on a walkie-talkie he provides to all 15 vehicles in the caravan. As for lodging, don't worry—you won't be sleeping in your car. Think Holiday Inn Express. **About the guide:** After working soul-draining corporate jobs in his mid-20s, Coop stumbled on a Craigslist employment ad that posed a simple question: "Do you like road trips?" It was a listing from Roadtrippers, which hired Coop as a guide focused on Route 66. But the Ukrainian Village resident soon noticed

that while loads of companies offered bus excursions of the Mother Road, no guided tour allowed you to drive your own car. That inspired Coop to found his own tour company, Two Lane America, in 2015. **Bring:** Your voice for car karaoke. Coop shares a Spotify playlist of jams for each day's drive. **Watch for:** A pitch-black sky. As you cross into California, you'll pass the Mojave Trails National Monument, home to some of the darkest nights in the United States. It's a two-and-a-half-hour round-trip detour, but worth it.

Travel the Silk Road in Central Asia

When
Early June 2024

Your guide
Gil Stein
Archaeologist and University of Chicago professor



Cost
The price hasn't been set yet, but the last time this trip was offered, in 2018, it was \$7,695.

Sign up
Email Matt Welton at isac-communications@uchicago.edu.



To the untrained eye, Stein admits, a significant archaeological site may look like “a mound with some brick mud walls on it.” That’s where he comes in. Sure, there will be some dirt on this 14-day, three- or four-country (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and possibly Kazakhstan) tour, but it’s going to be some really cool dirt, like the ruins of Merv, once

the world’s biggest city before Genghis Khan’s armies destroyed it in 1221. You’ll join a group of around 18 people and travel by minibus along the Silk Road, including Uzbekistan’s Fergana Valley, where residents still focus on woodworking, weaving, and other timeless crafts that fueled trade along the ancient route.

About the guide: Look at the stamps on Stein’s passports, and you might not

be inclined to follow his lead: He’s been to Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, where he recently helped restore Buddhist sculptures. “Every country I go to just falls apart,” jokes the U. of C. professor of Near Eastern archaeology. Stein, who also directs the school’s Chicago Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation, has spent time in all the post-Soviet Central Asian republics.

The site of the ancient city of Merv, in present-day Turkmenistan



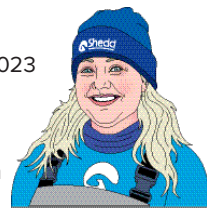
Bring: A towel for the meat sweats. Stein says the area's nomadic heritage inspires its meat-heavy cuisine, including dishes you may be loath to try. Like horse meat. "Many Americans find it alien and disgusting," says Stein. "In fact, it's delicious."

Watch for: Ikat. It's a form of ancient silk weaving you will come across in Margilan, Uzbekistan, and it's one of the most beautiful textiles you'll ever see.

Cruise the Biodiverse Great Lakes

When
October 9–16, 2023

Your guide
Karen Murchie
Shedd Aquarium
director of
freshwater research



Cost
\$6,270 to \$22,400, depending on room selection and occupancy; excludes onshore meals

Sign up
Email Shannon Fuller at
sfuller@sheddaquarium.org.

Ontario's Killbear Provincial Park, along Georgian Bay near Lake Huron



If your idea of a cruise involves drinking bottomless margaritas while shirtless, reset your expectations. On this voyage, you'll sail from Toronto to Milwaukee aboard *Le Dumont-d'Urville*, a small-capacity ship operated by Ponant, a luxury French cruise line, in conjunction with Smithsonian Journeys. Along the way, Murchie will explain why the Great Lakes are so, well, great—and not just ecologically. You'll stand a few feet from the spray of Niagara Falls, join the M'Chigeeng First Nation community for a traditional powwow ceremony on Manitoulin Island, and hike along the rocky shoreline of Killbear Provincial Park in Ontario.

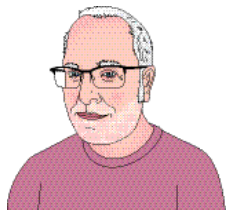
About the guide: The Shedd Aquarium freshwater expert has studied ecosystems from

the Arctic to the Amazon, but she's especially passionate about the Great Lakes: "A lot of times, we look at the lake as the source of our drinking water or somewhere we go boating or swimming. But there are some really cool animals with awesome life histories and a number of fish that make incredible migrations."

Bring: Dramamine. Don't let the "lake" label fool you—waves on Lake Michigan can top out at 23 feet during October storms.

Watch for: Suckers. Those are the bottom-feeding fish that Murchie calls "the wildebeest of the Great Lakes," a nod to their impressive migration patterns. Murchie is your best bet for finding them: Part of her research has involved planting in suckers the same microchip that's in your I-Pass transponder.

Feed Your Inner Survivalist at Central Illinois's Land of Odd



When

The first weekend of the month during foraging season (usually from April through October)

Your guide

Dave Odd

Expert forager

Cost

\$150 per person;
\$250 per couple

Sign up

oddproduce.com

You'll get a crash course in foraging on the Saturday of your weekend trip to the Land of Odd, your host's compound in Beaverville, Illinois, about 80 miles south of Chicago. Odd will teach you what to look for while you gather ingredients for that evening's communal dinner, prepared by him and accented with locally sourced proteins. Don't worry about going to bed hungry: "It's surprising how much food we get," he says. Sunday's itinerary is looser, and might include activities like fishing or exploring a waterfall. Guests sleep in tents, which Odd can provide (along with air mattresses) at no extra charge; bathroom facilities are indoors.

About the guide: When the pandemic put a halt on Odd's trade—supplying locally foraged ingredients to top Chicago kitchens like the Publican and Boka—the lifelong nature enthusiast found a new outlet for his skills: leading foraging retreats.

Bring: An adventurous palate. Meals can include dishes like burgers made from beaver supplied by a local hunter, topped with a sauce Odd has cooked up from peaches and foraged milkweed.

Watch for: Therapeutic finds. The prairie around Odd's land is packed with plants he taps as medicine, and he's happy to share his know-how with guests. "Mullein leaves are a really powerful expectorant that help with any kind of lung issues. Yarrow can be used as a tea to quell swelling."

How to Forage in Your Own Backyard

Who needs the grocery store when dinner's right under your nose? Dave Odd offers these tips.

There's an App for That

"ID'ing things isn't terribly hard to do these days, especially if the plant is distinctive-looking. You've got so many apps, like PictureThis, PlantSnap, and Seek."

Family Matters

"There are entire families of plants that have no toxic members. Like with something that looks like a blackberry or a raspberry—all compound berries are edible. It doesn't mean everything is gonna taste delicious, but it's not gonna kill you."

Think Outside the Yard

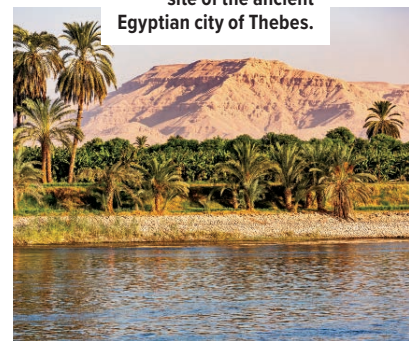
"I did a tour downtown the other day, right off Michigan Avenue, and we found 54 things just on the block, right in the concrete jungle of Chicago. Get out into empty lots, or the little margins between everything. Sometimes you can even find things in the landscaping."



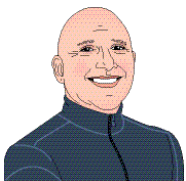
A chicken of the woods mushroom flanked by sassafras and black raspberry



Above: A market in Cairo. Below: The Nile River near Luxor, the site of the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes.



Journey Through Egyptian History Along the Nile



When
March 2–15, 2024

Your guide
H. Rafael Chacón
University of Montana professor

Cost
\$7,194 (double occupancy);
\$8,592 (single); includes airfare

Sign up
smithsonianjourneys.org

Never been to Egypt? Neither has your expert guide, who is looking forward to shedding a sense of impostor syndrome. “I’ve been a fan of Egypt since I was 9,” Chacón says. “It has that impact on so many people. It’s part of our cultural landscape. When I finally get there, it’ll feel like I’ve arrived at a place I’ve known and appreciated for a long time.” Working with Smithsonian Journeys, he developed an itinerary that includes the ancient Egypt you’ve read about—think the Pyramids and the Sphinx—along with lesser-known yet still-stunning sites, such as the fifth-century St. Sergius Church in Coptic Cairo and Deir el-Medina, the village that workers who built the Valley of the Kings

tombs called home. Your own accommodations will be far nicer: You’ll stay in five-star hotels and take a three-day luxury cruise along the Nile River from Aswan to Luxor.

About the guide: If you ever wonder about the design of a particular flag, don’t bother Googling. Just ask Chacón, who spent nearly a decade at the University of Chicago earning his doctorate in art history while doing a two-year stint as the Art Institute of Chicago’s Hispanic studies coordinator. He is one of the world’s leading vexillologists—that is, people who study flags. But it isn’t his only expertise. During his nearly 20 years as a professor of art history and criticism at the University of Montana, Chacón, now director of the Montana Museum of Art and

Culture, taught a curriculum rich in ancient Egypt.

Bring: Comfortable shoes. Buses aren’t allowed in old city centers, and you’ll have some uphill climbs to ruins.

Watch for: The Grand Egyptian Museum just outside Cairo. It will be the largest archaeological complex in the world when it opens this fall after 18 years of construction. With a collection including the Khufu ship and more than 5,000 treasures from King Tut’s tomb, it’ll be worth the wait.

Wine and Dine Beneath the Argentine Skies

When
November 6–12, 2023

Your guide
John Manion
Executive chef and partner at El Che Steakhouse & Bar



Cost
\$9,000 (double occupancy);
\$12,000 (single)

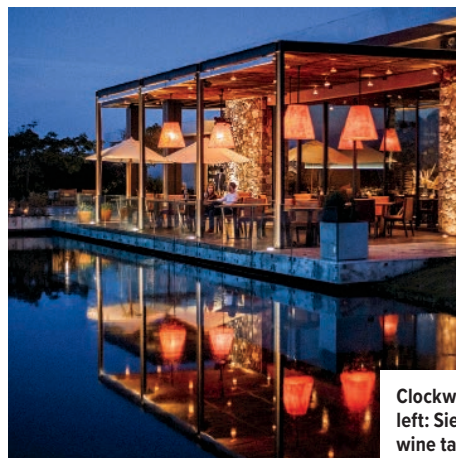
Sign up
modernadventure.com

Manion worked with luxury travel operator Modern Adventure to curate a stacked seven-day itinerary, from dinner at Francis Mallmann’s Siete Fuegos and horseback rides through the vineyard-rich Uco Valley to intimate walking tours of Buenos Aires’s atmospheric barrios. While the accommodations have VIP vibes, Manion’s priority is giving travelers a local’s view: “The Michelin Guide’s gonna tell you where to eat if you’re a millionaire, but not where the people who actually make shit run eat.”

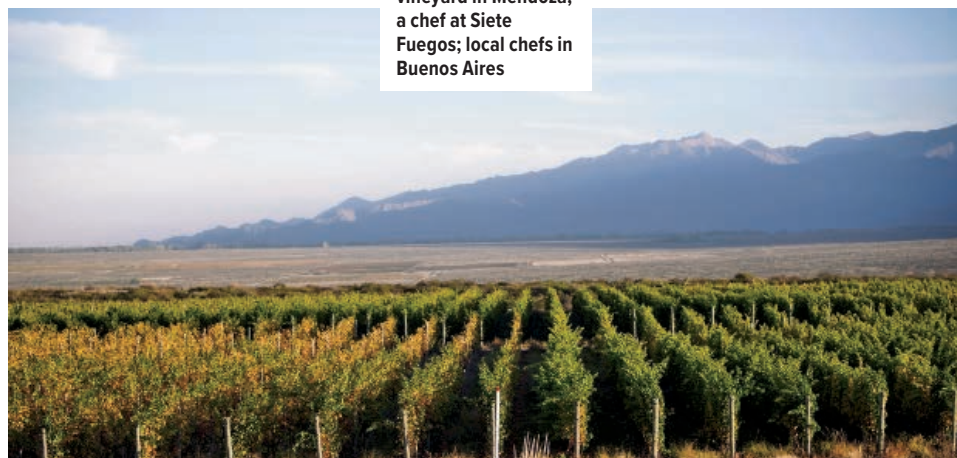
About the guide: Though the man behind El Che and the forthcoming Brasero lived in South America as a kid, he says it was during a return visit, as a young chef, that Argentina made a serious impression: “It was like, This is my place, these are my people, this is my method of cooking—the live fire.”

Bring: A Bluetooth speaker. Tango was born in the streets and dancehalls of Buenos Aires. Load up classic Argentine musicians like Juan D’Arienzo and Astor Piazzolla to set the mood before heading out in the city.

Watch for: Blue skies. “If people have never been to the Southern Hemisphere, the sky is different,” Manion says. “Especially when you see it in the mountains, in this beautiful high-desert wine-growing region, the sky in Argentina is impossibly blue, and then the stars are breathtaking.”



Clockwise from top left: Siete Fuegos; a wine tasting in the Uco Valley; a Malbec vineyard in Mendoza; a chef at Siete Fuegos; local chefs in Buenos Aires





A pair of sea lions off the coast of the Baja California peninsula

Scuba-Dive in Baja California Sur



When
July 27–August 2, 2024

Your guide
Amy Anderson
Learn Scuba Chicago dive master

Cost
\$2,075 (\$1,690 if booked before February); excludes most meals

Sign up
learnsclubachicago.org/blogs/news

For this weeklong adventure on the Gulf of California, you'll stay in Cabo San Lucas, one of Anderson's favorite scuba destinations. At the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula, it is the perfect base for spectacular diving. Anderson hopes to catch the Mobula migration ("basically, huge schools of little manta rays"). Another outing: Gordo Banks, a seamount about 30 miles away, where hammerhead sharks school. "There's never a guarantee you're going to see a specific type of wildlife," Anderson says. "But you're going to see something cool regardless." By night? Cabo's a resort town, which means tequila tastings up and down the boardwalk.

About the guide: A veterinary technician by day, the Albany

Park resident has a passion for deep dives in her free time. She was first drawn to the depths on a trip to Puerto Rico more than a decade ago: "We were snorkeling, and I could see farther down. 'I want to go down there!'" Now cochair of Learn Scuba Chicago's travel committee, she's led diving trips abroad, including to Aruba and Bali.

Bring: Extra batteries for your underwater camera and diving torch, a flashlight that lets you peer into dark crevices for critters. But Anderson warns: "Just don't stick your hand in."

Watch for: Cabo Pulmo National Park. The UNESCO World Heritage site is home to 11 species of coral, forming a reef that's 20,000 years old. Once imperiled from overfishing, it rebounded in the mid-'90s after the Mexican government embraced conservation.

Drive and Dive
The Midwest isn't exactly a scuba paradise, but if you want to take a cold-water plunge without leaving the region, Anderson recommends these three spots.

Haigh Quarry
"Its nickname is the Caribbean of the Midwest. It used to be a rock quarry, and there's still some machinery down there, plus random things like a school bus. There's bluegill, catfish, and a lungfish from the Shedd Aquarium." 2738 E. 2000N Rd., Kankakee

Mermet Springs
"It's about a six-hour drive south. There's a scavenger hunt course to see all these random objects, with plenty of underwater photo opportunities—lie in a bathtub, ride a bike." 6724 N. U.S. Hwy. 45, Belknap

Devil's Lake State Park
"Great spot for scuba camping, as we at Learn Scuba Chicago call it, since there's more to do than just diving: canoeing, kayaking, fishing, hiking." \$5975 Park Rd., Baraboo, Wisconsin

MICHAEL ZEIGLER/ISTOCKPHOTO