

In My Footsteps: THE WORLD GREATEST

• THE DOLOMITES, ITALY

WHILE MOST TRAVELERS KNOW Italy as a tourist spot with shopping in Milan and historical sights in Rome, this European country's soul rests in the peaks of the Dolomites. The journey begins in Corvara at the center of Alta Badia, which serves as the base to explore the mountain range. Gourmets with adventurous spirits trek up for the gastronomic trinity: La Sirlola in Hotel Ciasa Salares, La Stua de Michil in Hotel La Perla, and St. Hubertus in Relais & Châteaux Hotel Rosa Alpina.

These Michelin-starred restaurants have attracted food connoisseurs

from all over the world, making them hike through quaint Tyrolean villages, undulating meadows, and a breathtaking vista of mountain ranges. The walking is not strenuous nor is it lengthy; in the Dolomites, the stop points are of a different type. Instead of magnificent scenery, the rewards are hearty meals. We would walk by cliff-hugging hairpin bends and pass through rock formations but the food—homemade bratwurst, melt-in-your-mouth apple strudels, traditional Ladin cakes—is what makes this journey unrivaled.



• WHERE TO STAY •

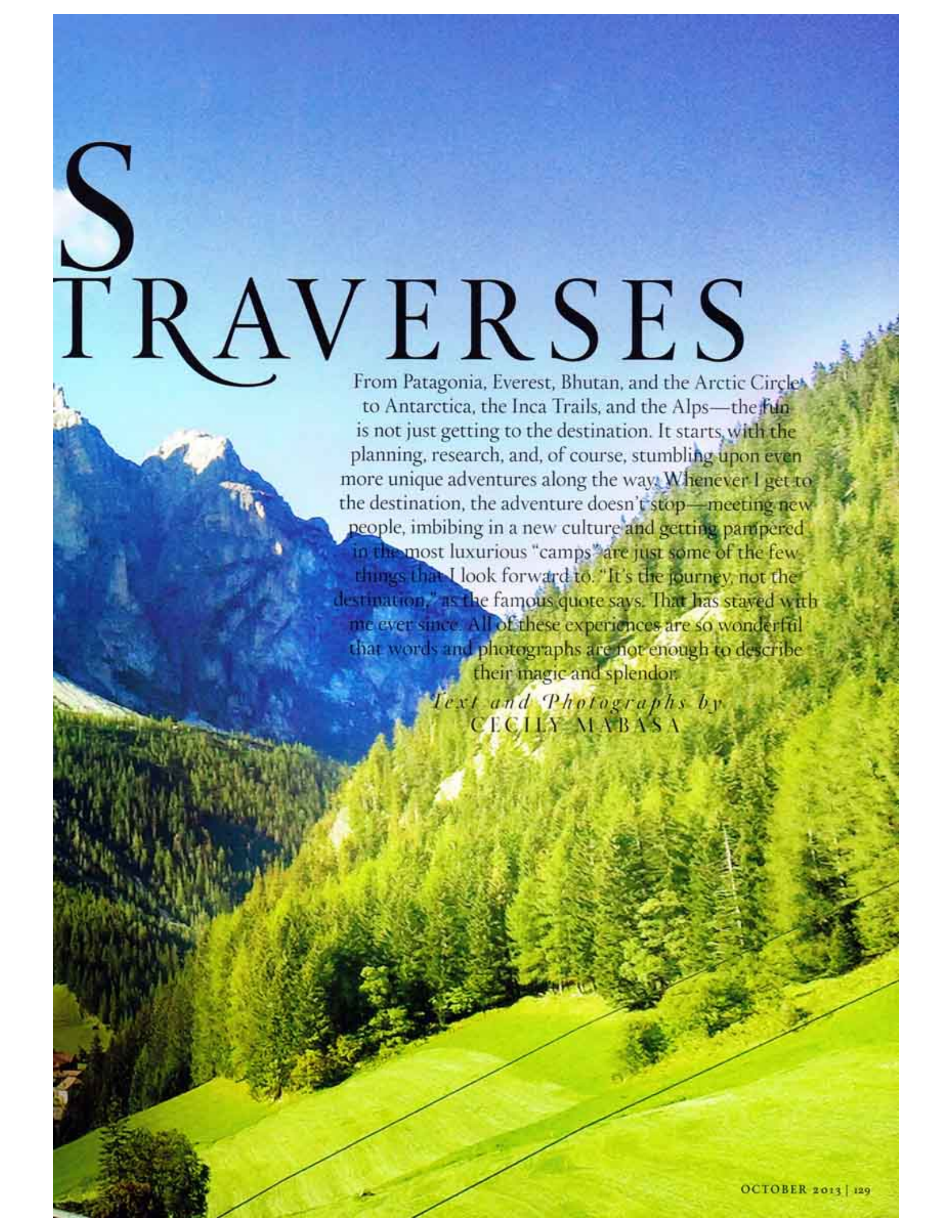
• Relais & Châteaux's Hotel Rosa Alpina, San Cassiano in Badia. Request its convertible MINI for those days you are not on foot. Strada Micura de Ru, 20, 39030 San Cassiano in Badia Bolzano, Italy; +39.0471.849500; info@rosalpina.it; rosalpina.it

• WHERE TO EAT •

• Gourmants travel forth to the Dolomites for the Michelin starred gastronomic trifecta, St. Hubertus at Hotel Rosa Alpina. Dinner for two \$150; 20 Strada Micura de Rue, San Cassiano

• La Stua de Michil at Hotel La Perla. Dinner for two \$100 to \$200; Strada Col Ale, 105, 39033 Corvara Bolzano, Italy; +39.0471.831000; info@hotel-laperla.it; hotel-laperla.it/en/hotel-la-perla/1-0.html

• La Sirlola at Hotel Ciasa Salares, 127 Armentarola in Pre de Vi, San Cassiano. Dinner for two \$100 to \$200; Strada Pre de Vi, 31, 39030 San Cassiano Bolzano, Italy; +39.0471.849445; info@sirlolagroup.it; sirlolagroup.it/en/la-sirlola-restaurant-la-sirlola



S TRAVERSES

From Patagonia, Everest, Bhutan, and the Arctic Circle to Antarctica, the Inca Trails, and the Alps—the fun is not just getting to the destination. It starts with the planning, research, and, of course, stumbling upon even more unique adventures along the way. Whenever I get to the destination, the adventure doesn't stop—meeting new people, imbibing in a new culture and getting pampered in the most luxurious “camps” are just some of the few things that I look forward to. “It's the journey, not the destination,” as the famous quote says. That has stayed with me ever since. All of these experiences are so wonderful that words and photographs are not enough to describe their magic and splendor.

Text and Photographs by
CECILY MABASA

THE FITZ ROY MASSIF, EL CHALTEN, ARGENTINA

I HAD ALREADY MADE SEVERAL journeys to El Chalten and only on my third attempt did Mount Fitz Roy finally greet me. The small town is a magical place where nature captivates with its colors and scenery. The sunsets here are on a different level, dazzling us with their orange hues against the Fitz Roy massif, one of the most challenging mountains to climb. There are so many things to do in this remote Argentinian town that I can never figure out how many days to stay—there seems to be unlimited activities with different levels of difficulty. Enjoy different treks, walk on glaciers, go on sightseeing tours on boat, and hikes to the base camp of Mount Fitz Roy.

Known by most as the Hikers Paradise, Fitz Roy's reputation for being a technically difficult mountain to trek rests on its hazardous weather conditions including high winds and strong storms. Just catching a glimpse of this South American peak with its sharp granite faces is a feat already—but if nature doesn't give you that chance, there are still a lot of options. The Torre Lagoon and Pliegue Tumbado walk, orchestrated by Los Cerros the lodge where I stayed, took me along the Rio Fitz Roy valley. I climbed from the base and walked through forests before reaching Laguna Torre, where a magnificent front row view of the mystical Cerro Torre peeked out.



WHERE TO STAY AND EAT

- Los Cerros, El Chalten, Argentina. San Martín 260—El Chalten, Santa Cruz, Argentina; +54 2962 493182; info@loscerrosdelchalten.com; loscerrosdelchalten.com
- Los Notros, El Calafate, Argentina. A truly unique luxury lodge across the spectacular Perito Moreno Glacier, Moreno B Gdor. Moyano 1284, El Calafate, Santa Cruz Province, Argentina; +54 2902 493510; info@losnotros.com; losnotros.com/en

• WHERE TO STAY •

• The key here is the quality and reputation of the outfitter. Do not scrimp as here you get what you pay for. Only a few outfitters have the logistics to offer a luxurious experience to the summit—experienced guides, the best quality tents, sleeping bags and sleeping cots, personal flushing toilets, hot showers, fresh gourmet meals. Summit Africa together with Sea to Summit Explorations made it happen for us. 0917 868 7971, info@seatosummitafrica.co.za, seatosummitafrica.co.za

• MOUNT KILIMANJARO, TANZANIA, AFRICA



THE HOLY GRAIL on any adventurer's bucket list. This was my ultimate challenge. When it comes to trekking Mount Kilimanjaro, it doesn't matter if you've trained for months or years—a lot of experienced hikers don't make it to the summit and it's because of one thing: altitude acclimatization. It usually takes five days to get to the top, but we allotted eight days just to make sure we got used to the altitude. We also took a private trek, instead of going with others, so we would not be pressured to keep up with anyone. Altitude sickness can hit anybody anytime, regardless of fitness levels or length of training.

Failure was not an option for me; if I was going to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, I had better make it to the top. So I made the necessary arrangements. With 20 porters, a toilet tent, and a rare hot shower tent along with the necessary equipment, and more than a week's worth of our favorite food, we set out to climb at an altitude of 7,500 feet. Our guide Gabriel would constantly remind us to "pole pole" (which means "slowly, slowly"), and this became my mental mantra all the way to the summit. Our pace was slow—to help us with the altitude—but it was not by any means dull. The scenery was wonderful as it changed from lush greens to rocky grounds. When we got to the top on the seventh day, there was nothing else to do but tear up. It was a big accomplishment, one that I never thought I could achieve.

EASTER ISLAND, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PACIFIC

THERE ARE SO MANY MYSTERIES surrounding the Moais, the famous rock formations on Easter Island, and most people go there to form their own theories or to investigate some more. I, on the other hand, just wanted to satisfy a childhood curiosity. The stone faces, most of which are above 30 feet in height and 20 tons in weight, are overwhelming; my imagination and history book photos didn't do these statues justice.

At Explora Rapa Nui Lodge, I experienced Easter Island with over a dozen explorations and journeys on foot or bicycle. Each day, accompanied by our

experienced guide, I got to appreciate the culture and history of Rapa Nui.

The first time I saw these gigantic stone faces was in the quarries along the Rano Raraku volcano, and it suddenly became clear to me why controversies involving extra-terrestrial and supernatural races are brought up. There seems to be no possible way for the ancient Polynesians, believed to be the island's first settlers, to construct these stone heads without advanced or modern equipment.

Despite traveling to different places and seeing the other Wonders of the World, it was on Easter Island that I felt

like I was lost back in time. The most interesting thing about these stone faces is not even their size, but the fact that they are remnants of an ancient civilization, powerful artifacts of a culture lost. Since it was a small island, three days were enough to walk among the Moais. There was basically nothing else that will steer away the attention from the rock statues, the monument stone icons placed in the world's vastest open museum. Leaving Easter Island meant more questions than answers, but that didn't mean I was not fulfilled. With or without the right explanation, the beauty and power of this island stays.





» WHERE TO STAY AND EAT ◀

• Explora Rapa Nui Lodge offer the ultimate island lodge-based journeys. The lodge is perched on a hill at the center of the island. *Je Miro Cline y/n*, Easter Island 2770000, Chile; +56 2 2395 2800; reserve@explora.com; explora.com/explora-ropa-nui

» WHERE TO STAY »

In England, most of the lodges and hotels I stayed at had restaurants that preceded their reputations as mere just places to sleep.

• **Victoria Hotel**, Robin Hood's Bay, Station Road, Robin Hood's Bay, Whitby, North Yorkshire YO22 4RL, United Kingdom; +44 1947 880205; stay@victoriahby.com; victoriahby.com

• **Burgoyne Hotel**, South On The Green, South Richmond, Swaledale, North Yorkshire DL11 6SN, United Kingdom; +44 1748 884292; enquiries@theburgoyne.co.uk; theburgoyne.co.uk

• **The Black Swan**, Kirkby Stephen, Black Swan, Ravensworthdale, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria CA17 1NG; 01539622520; enquiries@blackswanhotel.com; blackswanhotel.com

• **The Inn on the Lake**, Pottersdale, Lake District, Ullswater, Glenridding CA10 6PE, England; 0800 840 1245; innonthe lake@lakedistricthotels.net; lakedistricthotels.net; innonthe lake/ulswater.php

• **Wordsworth Hotel**, Grasmere, Lake District, Stock Ln, Grasmere, Cumbria LA22 9SW, United Kingdom; +44 15394 35592; enquiry@thewordsworthhotel.co.uk; thewordsworthhotel.co.uk

» WHERE TO EAT »

Finding the most noteworthy pubs that served the best sticky toffee pudding was a challenge I could not resist. I actually found them in my recommended places to stay.

• THE COAST TO COAST TRAVERSE, ENGLAND

THIS WORLD-FAMOUS ENGLISH trail, a 308-kilometer hike starting from the Irish Sea on the west toward the North Sea across England, has inspired so many artists. The Coast-to-Coast trail took me to through National Park, the rolling hills and valleys of Yorkshire Dales, along the Lake District with England's picturesque mountains and the storybook Yorkshire Moors landscapes. It was a one-for-the-books kind of trail—literally and figuratively. Nobody mentioned how complicated the trail was, and how easy it was to get lost. I've been on the most

difficult of treks, but it was the first time that I actually needed a compass and guidebooks. The trails are not well-marked; plus rough terrain and tricky navigation were involved, so most first-timers may just become bewildered over it.

Yet, it was all part of the trail's appeal. The different people you meet along the way—those who get lost and you help them out, or the people who help you when you get lost—are

what make the whole journey special. The journey was long and it allowed us to experience different things, from crossing streams to trekking under the pouring rain, from having picnic lunches and hanging out in pubs (sometimes dubbed

as the Pub to Pub Trail) to having to battle the strongest of winds. It was a lifetime's worth of new faces and bouts with nature, but it was also an experience worth remembering for a lifetime.



INCA TRAIL TO MACHU PICCHU, PERU

THE ROAD TO MACHU PICCHU BEST encapsulates the saying that the journey is just as important as the destination. There are different gates to the great castle-in-the-sky—you can even take a train toward it, but the Salkantay Inca Trail is one of the most popular routes to get to the majestic Machu Picchu. The trail begins at Marcacay, standing at an altitude of 3,300 meters. The first two days were spent in acclimatization with a variety of activities, hand led by our guide Antomo. It was good for us to start acclimatizing since the altitude was higher than the usual. Standing at 6,270 meters, the Salkantay is the highest peak in the region.

It took us four days to get to the bus station for the trip to Machu Picchu. We hiked up the Rio Blanco Valley then to the Salkantay Pass, standing at an altitude

of 4,600 meters. Feeling adventurous, our group also climbed the highest point in our trail: a 4,638-meter-high view of the snow-capped Vilcabamba mountain range before going down to our luxury lodge. The following days were a breeze. We trekked uphill toward the Llactapata Pass, where we were welcome with an extraordinary view of the Machu Picchu and where we also had the chance to see the Llactapata Ruins up close. The day we got to Machu Picchu, it felt like we had already seen so much, but with the Incan ruins up close, I realized there was still so much to see and so much to do.

WHERE TO STAY AND EAT

No need to rough it when Mountain Lodges of Peru and Sea to Summit Adventures can offer you mountain lodges fitted out with cozy fire place, gourmet meals, steaming Jacuzzi tubs at the end of each day.

- Orient Express Monasterio Lodge in Cusco. Hotel Monasterio by Orient Express, Calle Palacios 136, Cusco, Peru. +51 84 241777; peru@orient-express.com; monasteriohotel.com/web/ocus/hotel_monasterio.jsp

- Palacio Nazarenas, Cusco. Píezoleña Nazarenas 144, Calle Páezoleña, Cusco, Peru. +51 76 108 340; peru@orient-express.com; palacionazarenas.com/web/onaz/palacio_nazarenas.jsp

- Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge, Carretera Huan Bingham s/n, Machu Picchu 5184, Peru. +51 84 21 1038; peru@orient-express.com



» WHERE TO STAY «

■ I discovered the best way to make it through a long, challenging day on foot is knowing I had a warm, cozy haven waiting for me. Everest Summit Lodges can provide this for adventurers wanting utmost comfort in the trail.

• EVEREST PANORAMA, NEPAL

TO GET TO THE BASE POINT OF Mount Everest, we had to fly into one of the world's most dangerous airports—and that alone will stir an adventurer's soul. The death-defying landing happened in Lukla, a village situated on a ledge right between mountains, where our guide waited for us. After much confusion with our accommodations, we finally arrived at our lodge where morning tea awaited us. Minutes later, we were passing through Sherpa settlements with our porters, who carried 20 kilo bags with no signs of discomfort. With the snow-capped mountain ranges of Dudh Kosi valley serving as the backdrop for our first taste of Himalayan adventure, I realized that this was neither Route 40 nor is it the road less traveled. On the contrary, there were different groups of all nationalities trekking up and down the Everest.

The way to the top was long with very challenging steep navigations and it was definitely eventful. We passed by picturesque villages with their brightly painted houses standing in the midst of majestic scenery, crossed suspension bridges to get to the heart of Khumbu, a busy Sherpa market place called Namche Bazar—and this was just the second day. Leaving Namche Bazar, psyched me up; this is the real thing, I thought, as I had my first full glimpse of the Everest range. The next few days were a blissful blur—at a monastery sitting at 3,870 meters, we made a pilgrimage stop. Tengboche Monastery is still active and would still trek here to make offerings. Making our way to Everest would have been such a difficult ordeal if not for the heated blankets and sumptuous meals prepared by our lodges. Nothing could prepare me for the experience, but those little luxuries definitely helped.

TORRES DEL PAINE, PATAGONIA, CHILE

THIS HAS GOT TO BE MY FAVORITE playground. No matter how many times I have visited this paradise on earth, its incomparable landscape and breathtaking views never fail to astound me.

Staying at the remote and luxurious Explora lodge in the middle of the park, I woke up to the most beautiful sunrise each day and a day of adventure. And at the end of the day the lodge becomes a place for us to recharge by pampering ourselves with gourmet dinners and soaks in the jacuzzis under the night sky.

Hikers have two main options for hiking in the park—the ever popular “W” trek and the full circuit. If you enjoy hiking and are willing to go on a multi-day trek,

then the “W” trek is probably good for you. If you are a serious hiker who is ready to tackle the backcountry for up to 10 days, then go for the full circuit (the “W” is part of the full circuit).

At Explora, we chose from a range of half-day or full-day explorations—on foot, on horseback. The fact that we happened to be the only guests at the lodge for a few days meant we could pretty much decide whatever we wanted. And at the end of each exploration, the lodge awaited us—a place to regain our energy, pamper ourselves, and enjoy gourmet cocktails and sumptuous meals.

The series of explorations enabled me to enjoy the Paine Massif from different

angles, and discover the landscapes and wildlife of this singular place.

My personal favorites are the French Valley and the Paine Tower Base Arms of the W Circuit. These walks gave me the best vantage points to view the spectacular Pehoe and Skottsberg lakes, of the Grand Paine Mountain and the Paine Horns. The traverse up to the Base Torre gave me the rare opportunity to see the Paine Towers up close. Gourmet picnics across glaciers and lakes made these the ultimate day walks. •



› WHERE TO STAY + WHERE TO EAT ‹

To have the best experience, Explora is the place to stay in this paradise. Sector Salto Chico S/N, Torres del Paine National Park, Chile; +56 2 2395 2800; reserve@explora.com; explora.com/explora-patagonia/hotel-salto-chico