

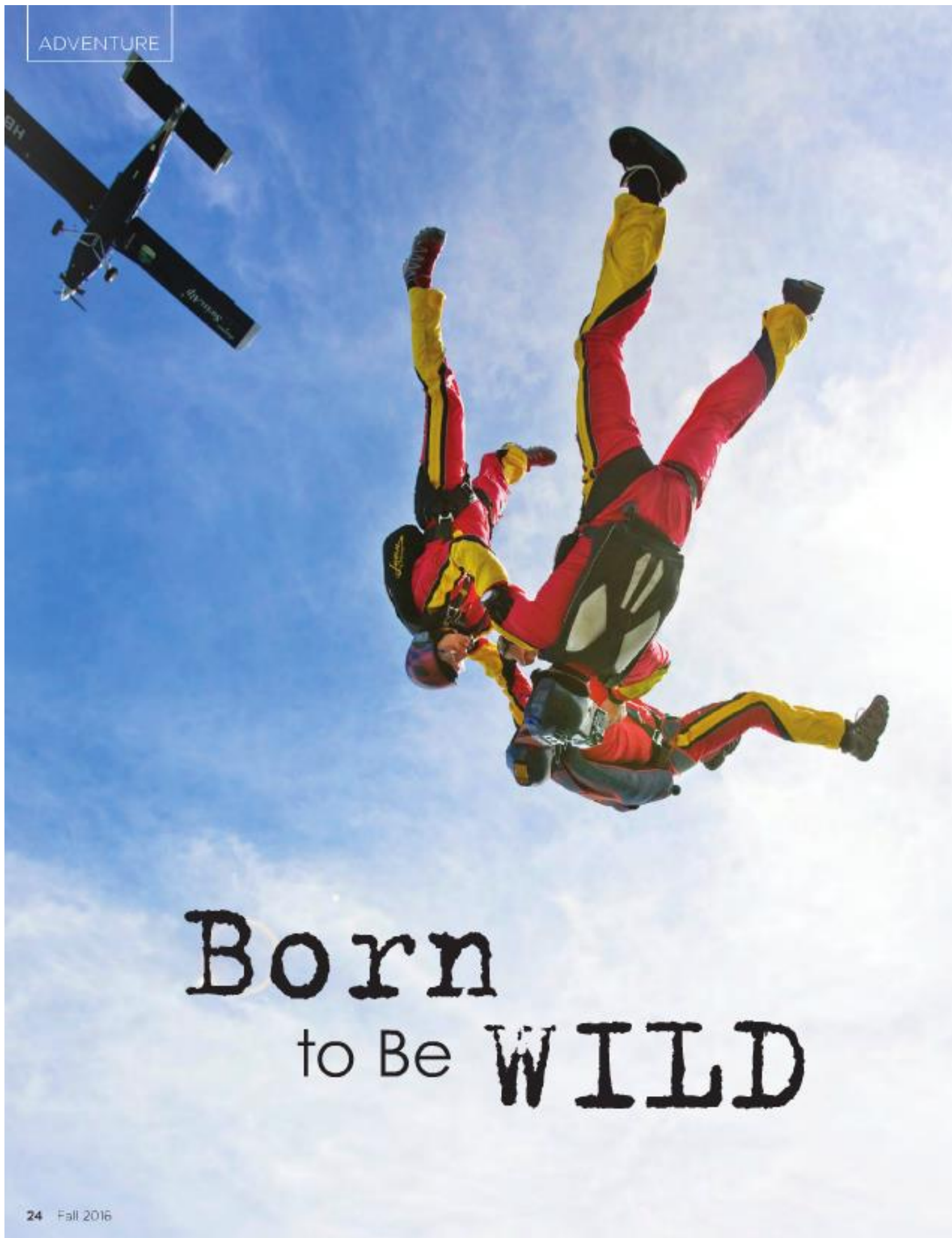
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ADVENTURE



Born to Be **WILD**



Clockwise from opposite left: Skydiving over the Alps in Switzerland; cenote scuba diving in the Riviera Maya, Mexico; bungee jumping from the world's highest bungee jump in South Africa; rock climbing in Peru.

Travelers seeking excitement and thrills will flip over these five dramatic destinations. Whether it's for a mountain summit or a death-defying freefall, the search for greater highs and lows on vacation ends here.

by KATHRYN ROMEYN

Not everyone can enjoy a vacation with Evian mist in one hand and a frozen cocktail in the other. Thrill-seekers and explorers need something more from their time off. Jumping off of a 70-story bridge, boating alongside pink dolphins, or hot air ballooning over the Big Five are but a starting point for some. Adventure can be found almost anywhere, but there are a few countries especially well outfitted to breed excitement. Here are some suggestions to push boundaries. ▷



SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND

Bungee Jumping, Glacier Hiking, Heli-Skiing, Jet Boating, Snowboarding

The natural extremes on New Zealand's South Island attract a certain kind of thrill-seeker. Skiers and mountain climbers flock to peaks as high as 7,608 feet in The Remarkables mountain range. Lakes Wakatipu and Wanaka at the base of the mountains sparkle an inviting blue and jet boaters cut through the nearby rivers at remarkable speeds. Adrenaline junkies come down from the mountains to spend their days off in Queenstown, a lakeside resort town and jumping-off point for more than 200 adventure tourism activities.

For one, Queenstown was home to the very first commercial bungee jumping site. In 1987 Kiwi A.J. Hackett kicked off his new invention with a guerrilla-style leap off the Eiffel Tower. A year later he founded AJ Hackett Bungy New Zealand (bungy.co.nz), currently operating bungee jumps up to 439 feet, a swing 1,300 feet above Queenstown, and 37 mph zip line rides.

For many visitors, snowboarding takes precedent during North America's summer months. The Lake Wanaka region (lakewanaka.co.nz) has the largest skiable terrain outside North America and three distinct ski areas: Cardrona Alpine Resort (family friendly), Treble Cone (the South Island's largest vertical drop), and Snow Farm (Nordic skiing). A 20-minute drive outside Queenstown, Coronet Peak (nzski.com) boasts two terrain parks and a 1,578-foot vertical drop. Its sister resort The Remarkables (nzski.com), 35 minutes by car from Queenstown, is great for families with three conveyer-belt lifts for children.

However, the region's best snow cannot be reached via chairlift. Harris Mountains Heli-Ski (heliski.co.nz) has been operating on the South Island since the 1970s and accesses 11 New Zealand mountain ranges. As impressive as the untouched powder and gnarly terrain are, prized aerial views over incredibly vast landscapes are the real highlight of a heli-ski day.

Year-round and only a 10-minute drive from Queenstown, Shotover Jet (shotoverjet.com) screams at 52 mph on the Shotover River through narrow passages and past sheer rock faces, making thrilling 360-degree spins. For a more exclusive experience, tour operator Black ZQN (blackzqn.com) can take you jet boating as well as wakeboarding, jet-sprinting, extreme golfing, target shooting, and knife throwing on a private property near Wanaka.

Throughout Queenstown are information centers to book day tours or request information for self-guided adventures. Kayaking on or parasailing above sapphire-blue lakes, fly-fishing, cycling, and hiking (which Kiwis call "tramping") to the iconic Franz Josef and Fox glaciers are all possible. Hotels can also set up activities. The best views in Queenstown are found at the opulent and romantic boutique-style Matakauri Lodge (from \$1,000; matakaurilodge.com), where expert staff tailor the area's best experiences for guests. The four-star Mercure Oakridge Resort Lake Wanaka (from \$95; oakridge.co.nz) gets you closer to Central Otago's celebrated wineries. Try Hapuku Lodge & Tree Houses (from \$676; hapukulodge.com) in Kaikoura for whale-watching. >

Matakauri Lodge



Clockwise from top left: Mike Wisniewski, Jeff Clapp, Trevis Stock, Michael Russell, Howard Seelye / Getty Images; Andrew Farnock; Sportscaster.org; Adam Szabo, Sergio Balaban / Anzenberger

