# The Worldwide Joy Ride

BY **LUKE GARTSIDE**

When viewed from outer space, our earth famously appears as a predominantly blue planet, thanks to the vast oceans that cover most of its surface. But if you look closely, you'll find great swathes of that blue frequently obscured by swirls of white—marauding columns of cloud and wind that whip the ocean beneath into a state of kaleidoscopic frenzy. From that chaos, swells emerge, rolling purposefully away from the source, slowly stacking into orderly lines that take on the appearance of fresh corduroy. Eventually, they arrive at one of the land's jagged edges, where the specific geography forces them into breaking waves of all shapes and sizes. Often you'll find a huddle of surfers there. Dark figures against the blue, undulating in restless devotion, eager for a chance to be carried by a parcel of well-traveled storm energy as it spills onto the shore. It's an act so simple in its essence—shared with ancient man, seabirds, dolphins, and even the odd mollusk—but it's one that has come to thoroughly enthrall terrestrial beings over the last century or so. Recent estimates suggest there are now over 20 million surfers worldwide, fanned out across more than 150 countries.

The tales of how surfing spread, took root, and evolved in so many coastal enclaves are as varied as the places themselves. Accounts and artifacts from West Africa, South America, China, and the Pacific suggest wave riding was practiced for many hundreds of years prior to the arrival of modern surfboards. Indeed, it's easy to imagine why a child might have been compelled to grab a bit of floating wood and bounce in on the shore break, or why a canoe-bound fisherman might have sought a ride on the white water for safe and speedy passage to the shore.

As far as we know, however, it was only in ancient Polynesia that surfing gathered enough fervor to transform it from a casual pastime into a cultural powerhouse. In Hawaii in particular, it became a central tenet of community recreation and ritual. Islanders rode standing tall, on a multitude of specially made crafts, incorporating everything from courtship to gambling and status displays into their watery dance.

Modern surfing's march around the globe began in the early twentieth century, led by a pair of Hawaiians; waterman George Freeth and Olympic medal-winning swimmer Duke Kahanamoku. Over the course of a single decade, they introduced the sport to Australia and both coasts of the U.S. mainland with a series of demonstrations attended by hundreds.

New strongholds sprouted in their wake and many years later, it would be from them that surfers emanated to continue the Hawaiians' legacy, seeding the culture in every corner of the map. Propelled by a desire to discover new frontiers and uncrowded lineups—or simply to break from the humdrum of their far-flung military bases—from the 1940s onwards sailors, smugglers, servicepeople, and hippies fleeing the draft formed an unlikely alliance of global surfing ambassadors. Wherever they paddled out, their exploits drew intrigue and whenever boards were left behind, locals were quick to pick them up.

Despite an ability—and indeed a common preference in modern times—to practice the pastime in solitude, early fanatics from these emerging scenes rarely sought isolation. In almost every case, from Rapa Nui to India to Senegal, the first generation of modern surfers were powerfully motivated to welcome others into the fray, usually driven by nothing more than a desire to share the joy of it all. As the surfing bug bit, individual lives were changed overnight, altered by shifting perspectives and new aspirations. Eventually, so too were entire communities. Fresh geographies were laid over the coastline. Rocky outcrops, bits of reef, and sandy shore were suddenly ascribed new names and personalities, transformed from anonymous crags to storied surf breaks. Each attracted a pack of disciples, obsessively dedicated to deciphering their every mood under the various vagaries of tide, wind, and swell. In time, these surfers would become the custodians of their ocean spaces, ready to lead campaigns against any threat, from sewage spill to destructive coastal development.

Usually, at some point in this evolution, surf tourists would flood in, fundamentally altering the place purely with their presence, as on Bali's Bukit Peninsula, or Siargao Island in the Philippines, where once-blighted coastal plots were fast transformed into the region's hottest property thanks to their proximity to coveted waves. For some settlements, the transition to "surf destination" came with great benefits, for others with serious drawbacks and damage, and for most, a liberal helping of each.

Over a century on from the start of the sport's grand expansion, the surfing world has become one of dizzying diversity. From the teeming metropolis to the remote jungle village, the snow-covered beach to the baking equatorial shore, it seems that now almost wherever there are waves, there are surfers. Some are dedicated to pushing their limits in watery mountains the size of five-story buildings. Others are focused on the most effortless traverse of a perfect waist-high peeler. Many consider it a sport, others an art, and some even a means of healing, empowerment, and community cohesion. But wherever you go, all remain united by its universal draw; the simple but supreme pleasure of the ride.

It has often been said that surfing transcends all politics. However, as wave riding reaches ever more distant shores and distinct cultural settings, it has become clear that it isn't always a total escape from the messy business that governs life on land. Lack of equipment, the privatization of the coast, and cultural barriers all play a part in preventing surfers from accessing their waves. It's only by acknowledging these obstacles that we can harness our collective power to help break them down. Fostering connections across cultures is one thing our otherwise beautifully frivolous pastime has always excelled in. Modern surf culture shines in the moments individuals are inspired to stand with their fellow frothers; to donate, campaign, and rally to preserve all the things that really matter to them. Because when you're a surfer—even one from a world away—they're probably the same things that really matter to you too.

# Oceania and the Pacific

**1** *North Shore of Oahu, Hawaii, United States*
**2** *Jaws, Hawaii, United States*
**3** *Waikiki, Hawaii, United States*
**4** *Teahupoo, Tahiti, French Polynesia*
**5** *Papua New Guinea*
**6** *Coromandel Peninsula, New Zealand*
**7** *Margaret River, Australia*
**8** *Shipstern Bluff, Australia*

NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN

HAWAII (UNITED STATES)

Philippine Sea

PHILIPPINES

MALAYSIA

INDONESIA

SINGAPORE

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Arafura Sea

Coral Sea

TAHITI (FRENCH POLYNESIA)

AUSTRALIA

INDIAN OCEAN

SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN

Great Australian Bight

Tasman Sea

NEW ZEALAND

# Nature's Nastiest Staircase

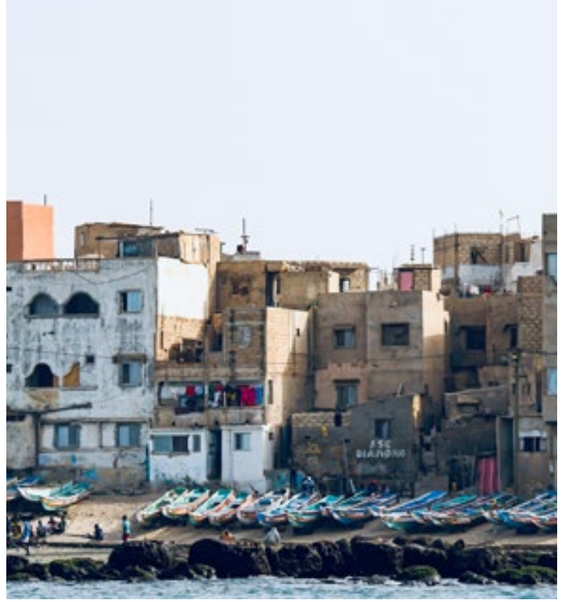
*Shipstern Bluff, Australia*

In the far southeast corner of the Tasman Peninsula, beneath a towering stern-shaped bluff, a series of boulder-strewn plateaus descend like a staircase into the seething ocean below. Just a few meters out from the base, you'll find a wave so malformed that most wouldn't deign to call it a surf spot at all.

It's exactly because of its many mutations that Shipstern Bluff—known locally as Shippies—has become one of the most iconic big waves on earth. Its "steps" as they're known, are a sequence of ledges that emerge sporadically throughout a ride, frequently sending surfers airborne and cartwheeling into the trough.

Despite conflicting tales of who exactly saw and surfed the wave first, most agree it was pioneered by a Tassie guru named Andy Campbell in the late 1990s. For years, he'd make the long two-hour hike through the dense bush and spend an afternoon packing lonely tubes purely for the thrill of it, with no cameras or jet skis in sight. Around the turn of the millennium, Campbell invited a few Aussie pros to join him, and in 2001, the wave was unveiled to the world via a photo splash in Tracks magazine. Among the crew on that trip was Hawaiian charger Kieren Perrow, whose baptism of fire began by splitting his lip while jumping in off the rocks. "Not ideal," he recalled, "given how sharky the place is." However, things improved quickly from there, and the photos of the session sent heads spinning across the surfing world.

While Campbell moved away, eventually trading his board and backpack for a camera and bullet-proof vest in Syria, other locals were ruling the spot by the end of the decade, most, like their predecessor, working day jobs and charging for the love of it. According to photographer Stu Gibson, hospital orderly Mikey Brennan has been a perennial standout—not only for his incredible tube riding but his playful mastery of the wave's scariest feature, busting rail grabs and 360° spins during periods of forced mid-wave flight. ~



Just south of Les Almadies is Ouakam, arguably the region's best reef break. Backed by a towering and ornate city mosque, it offers world-class barrels on its day, breaking both left and right (top, left). A local surfer checks the waves at Secret Spot (top, right). Fishing boats line the shoreline in front of N'Gor village (bottom, right). Karim Diouf and Demba Gueye share a wave at Vivier Left (opposite).

A few doors down, the scene's most influential figure, Oumar Seye, runs a surf shop and restaurant, complete with a pool cut into the rocky shoreline where he played as a child. At a time when surfing was still considered a distraction from real work, Seye broke ground, becoming the country's first professional and standing as an inarguable demonstration of how the sport could pave a pathway to success. He's spent the last few decades mentoring the next generation, including Cherif Fall, who has developed into one of the continent's finest surfers, with international sponsorships and a place on the World Qualifying Series. He too has become a prominent local trendsetter, with shades of his unmistakably explosive and elastic style visible in the country's many promising up-and-comers.

Another local surfer representing Senegal on the global stage is Khadjou Sambe. When she first paddled out, aged 14, women were still a very rare sight in the lineup, but now her profile has ensured that's a thing of the past. In 2018, she seized an offer to fly to Santa Cruz to train with the organization Black Girls Surf. It was her first time leaving the country, and despite having no money and little English, she threw herself in with full determination. When she returned to Dakar, she co-founded a surf school with the organization on her local beach. Its goal is not only to teach Senegalese girls to surf but to "inspire them to be whatever they want"—a byproduct that is perhaps surf culture's finest legacy of all. ~

# Treasure and Treachery in the Fortunate Isles

*Canary Islands, Spain*

Located just over 62 miles (100 kilometers) off the west coast of Africa, the Canary Islands are ideally placed to receive powerful swells from the North Atlantic, which lurch out of deep water and land with a punch on the archipelago's abundance of reefs and beaches.

The most famous spots are in the village of La Santa, on the northeast coast of the island of Lanzarote. The crowning glory, a shallow slab called El Quemao, delivers some of the best left-hand barrels in the whole of Europe, while Morro Negro throws up freight-train rights just a stone's throw away. On the island of Fuerteventura, a dirt road known as the North Track carves a course through the barren lunar landscape, linking many of the island's best spots, from El Cotillo on the west coast to Corralejo on the east. Just offshore, the island of Lobos produces long right-handers at the base of an extinct volcano. On the south coast of Tenerife, the bustling resort of Playa de las Américas plays host to numerous fun reef breaks, while over on Gran Canaria, the capital city of Las Palmas offers a variety of peaks along a sandy stretch called Las Canteras.

Dozens of other less well-known spots dot the islands, from the hard-to-reach slabs of Gran Canaria's north coast to the secluded reefs of La Palma, the best of which was recently destroyed by lava spewing from the Cumbre Vieja volcano.

Often compared to Hawaii thanks to its climate and topography, the Canaries' fledgling surf community was deeply inspired by the waterman spirit of their brothers in the Pacific. As a result, many of the island's earliest trailblazers in the 1970s were not only fearless big-wave specialists but also expert fishermen and seafarers too. Among the most legendary was Sergio "El Halcón" ("the Falcon") who returned from a stint sailing in the Pacific to pioneer El Quemao, while living in a cave just beyond the tideline. Their legacy remains, with the Canaries continuing to serve as a stomping ground for Europe's most dynamic watermen and women. ~

Surfing is unique among action sports in that you spend far more time searching, preparing, and paddling than you do actually riding waves. The key to a happy surfing life is in learning to relish these in-between moments just as much.

→ the internet. Few real secrets remain, but ask surfers about their favorite spots, and you might be met with a look like you've spat in their lunch. "Loose lips sink ships," as one photographer noted when we requested the locations of his submissions for this book.

## The Kingdom's All Inside

If there's a misconception about surfing, it's that the act of riding a wave is in some way useful, enlightening, even. Really it's about the most frivolous thing you can do. Sure, there are health benefits to being in the ocean. And there's no doubt something to be gained from a communion with the natural world and the love of nature it brings. But for many surfers, the real value has nothing to do with any of this. Over the course of a life, the time you'll spend actually riding waves borders on negligible.

The definition of perfection is surely something that remains just out of reach, and nowhere is that more apparent than in surfing. There are endless variables that might make a "perfect" wave, both physical and metaphysical. The true beauty of waves lie not in their perfection but their imperfection. That's what keeps us going. Because you know that whether you're seven or seventy, the greatest wave could still be ahead. And you'll always want more. The true joy of surfing is not the discovery of perfect waves, or even the search for them, but just the hope they might exist. So here's to the perfect wave—let's hope you never find it. 〜

# A Shangri-La for the Easy-Going Glider

*Nayarit, Mexico*

Occupying a small chunk of Mexico's Pacific coast, the state of Nayarit is host to a bonanza of mellow setups, including point breaks, river mouths, and offshore island peaks.

Surfers have been visiting since the 1960s, historically fixated on the long rights of Matanchen Bay and Punta Mita, known as the Mexican Malibu. More recently, the region's heart has moved to Sayulita, where cobblestone streets lined with colorful houses lead down to a playful beach-reef setup. Most days you'll find local luminary Lola Mignot there, dancing elegantly down the line on her log.

Raised on a sailboat traversing the globe, her family settled in the town in 2002 and opened one of its first boutique hotels soon after. Since then, the mix of easy rollers and laid-back living has seen Sayulita become a favorite with traveling longboarders, who flock throughout the dry season, but especially during the annual Mexi Log Fest.

The event is the brainchild of Israel Preciado, a surfer from Mexico City. As a teenager, he aspired to compete internationally but, after being denied a U. S. visa, he resolved instead to bring the longboarding world to him. In 2015, he auctioned off his quiver of surfboards to raise the funds needed to hold his first Log Fest in Sayulita. The goal was to share the unique surf culture of his homeland with the global community while providing inspiration for the next generation of local surfers. The rootsy feel resonated, and the event has grown steadily over the years, routinely attracting the globe's best male and female loggers, who compete for equal prize money alongside the talented local crop. After a few years down the coast at La Saladita, the event is back in its birthplace for 2022, where it's plain to see Preciado's founding vision has come thoroughly to fruition. Once the heats are wrapped, attendees can be found throughout the town sharing beers, exchanging ideas, and reveling in the sky-high vibes long into the night. 〜

# The Muddy Brothers of the River Severn

*The Severn Bore, England*

It's hard to imagine a surf experience further from the sunbaked beaches of California or Hawaii than riding waves on a cold, muddy river through the heart of the English countryside. It turns out, however, that the Severn Bore's army of devotees is as stoked as any other surf community on earth.

The bore is a single wave that forms just upriver from the city of Bristol in the southwest of England. Its creation owes to a chance convergence of tide and terrain. When the moon and sun align every few weeks, their combined gravitational pull creates a large tidal swing (known as a spring tide). As the incoming flow is forced between the Severn Estuary's narrow channel, the head of the tide forms into a wave. From there, it trundles upriver for about 21 miles (34 kilometers), breaking and reforming as it winds its way past pubs, churches, and grazing sheep.

The bore was first surfed by Colonel "Mad Jack" Churchill in the summer of 1955. A decorated military man, Churchill is best known for taking a sword and longbow into battle during the Second World War. Or he was, until the day he towed his homemade wooden surfboard behind his motorcycle to the banks of the Severn and paddled out into the history books. The wave continues to attract a similarly eccentric crew, who call themselves "The Muddy Brothers." They share a deep sense of camaraderie, born largely of the fact that, unlike in the ocean, the single wave must be shared by all. They ride shoulder to shoulder, shouting tips and encouragement to one another as they go. Following a wipeout, surfers rush back to their vehicles to race the wave upstream to the next access point. Any sort of tricks or maneuvers are generally eschewed, with a leg-achingly long ride being the ultimate goal for the seasoned bore surfer. The world record belongs to Steve King, a local railway engineer who managed to cover 7.5 miles (12 kilometers) during a single, unbroken ride that lasted over an hour. ~

Polish surfers Kuba Kuzia and Krzysztof Sikora enjoy a breathtakingly beautiful trek to the surf (previous spread). Unstad's waves were first unveiled to the world through a series of surf magazine articles and movies throughout the 1990s. Since then, the bay's snowy backdrops have become the poster child for the global cold-water surfing movement (opposite).