

MJ INSIDER:

● Frozen morning snow can thwart traditional climbing skins. Use ski crampons, which provide ice-busting traction and keep your skis on your feet instead of your back.

● Tune your skis. That means sharp edges, fresh wax, and a careful inspection of all binding parts for cracked plastic and loose screws. This isn't like at your favorite resort where you can duck inside for a hot whiskey while the ski tech sorts you out.



8 SKI MOUNT SHASTA

PREP TIME: *Two weeks*
TIME OFF WORK: *Three days*
WHEN TO GO: *March-June*

▶ **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LONE VOLCANO OFFERS UP SOME OF THE BEST BACK-COUNTRY TURNS YOU'LL EVER MAKE.**

NEW AGE SPIRITUALISTS have gathered in the shadows of Mount Shasta's 14,162-foot peak since the Harmonic Convergence of '87, but the crystal-toting masses ain't got nothing on the legions of ski mountaineers who covet the lower 48's most authentic-yet-accessible big-mountain experience.

Summiting and schussing Shasta on your own demands evolved skiing and mountaineering skills; barring that, hire the capable folks at Shasta Mountain Guides, a group of local climbers and skiers who've been carving into Shasta's snowpack for nearly 30 years.

They will also guide you away from crowds and into the locals' favorite run, Hot Tune,



a 7,000-foot route that traces a sun-softened throat of forgiving corn snow between the Hotlum and Wintun Glaciers. "On Hot Tune, you can ski from within 20 yards of the summit," says Rich Meyer, who's spent the past

decade leading clients to the summit. "And the snow is probably the best on the mountain." For most, it's a weekend affair, with a predawn summit push after a day of uphill skiing.

Less ambitious ski mountaineers might want to hike the popular Avalanche Gulch route to Lake Helen, at about 10,000 feet, then take the skins off your skis for a rolling 3,500-foot descent over glacial moraines. It's about a four-hour round-trip on what Meyer describes as "a

9 PADDLE BRITISH COLUMBIA

PREP TIME: *Three months*
TIME OFF WORK: *Two weeks*
WHEN TO GO: *July-August*

**MJ INSIDER:**

● Checleset Bay is steeped in indigenous tradition. There are many ancient Native artifacts in this area, which are both fascinating and delicate. It's a good idea to check in at the Kyuquot/Checleset Band Office, in Kyuquot Village (250-332-5259, kyuquot.ca) for information on how best to see and respect them.

sweet cruising run that's not too sketchy for intermediates and not too tame for experts."

START TODAY:

LEARN CRAMPON AND ICE AX TECHNIQUE. Those with more time could add a skills course on Shasta to begin their trip.

WORK YOUR LEGS. Add low-weight, high-rep squats and lunges to your workout. The 7,000-foot descent of Hot Tune will turn even the strongest quads to jelly. For climbing fitness, set the stairclimber to fast-pace, small-step mode.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT:

ADVIL. "People think altitude won't be a problem in the lower 48," says Meyer. "But most of my clients deal with some acute mountain sickness. Advil will help with the headaches."

INFO & OUTFITTERS:

Shasta Mountain Guides' three-day ski and snowboard ascents are \$550 (shastaguides.com).

▶ **WRESTLE VANCOUVER ISLAND'S CHOPPY WATER WHILE TRYING TO SNAG YOUR FRESH FISH DINNER BEFORE THE BEARS DO.**

THE LUSH, NINE-MILE-LONG thumb of Vancouver Island known as Brooks Peninsula is so remote, the last ice age never quite found it. This temperate rain forest is part of the 3 percent of Canada that never ended up under ice 10,000 years ago, and it's like a lost world in which moss slowly devours fallen totem poles, eagles fly overhead with salmon locked in their talons, and sea otters hammer open shellfish on their bellies.

"It's the West Coast at its most wild," says Brent Blackmun, area supervisor with BC Parks. For a seriously up-close and exhilarating taste, slide into the cockpit of an expedition kayak for nine days, and 60 miles of coastline, exploring the wilds of B.C.'s Checleset Bay.

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Expect several days of committed paddling and a couple of exposed ocean crossings; you'll camp on small islands along the way and make frequent surf landings. Your reward: Attenborough-worthy wildlife gazing, empty beaches, and one of the most vivid night skies you've ever seen.

START TODAY:

BUILD CORE STRENGTH. Add activities like swimming and yoga to your routine. Kayak touring is less cardio-intensive than other activities, but endurance and power are key as you'll be traveling between five and 11 nautical miles each day.

BRUSH UP ON YOUR PADDLING.

A second-nature understanding of the basics, particularly bracing, which you'll need for balance in rough seas, and assisted- and self-rescues, are absolutely necessary. So is the ability to land your kayak on a beach with breakers behind you. Pick up these skills on a weekend kayaking course.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT:

A GREAT PAIR OF BINOCULARS. Bushnell's new waterproof H2O 7x50 scopes are O-ring-sealed and nitrogen-purged to completely lock out moisture (\$120; bushnell.com).

INFO & OUTFITTERS:

Seasoned paddlers can plan their own trips into the Checleset, but services are sparse and logistics are daunting. West Coast Expeditions offers guided trips to the Brooks in late July and early August (\$2,500; westcoastexpeditions.com). Most U.S. airlines serve Vancouver Airport. From there book a flight on Pacific Coastal Airlines (pacificcoastal.com) to Campbell River, then hire a cab for about \$150 for the 90-minute ride to Gold River.

MJ INSIDER:

There was a time when only elite mountaineers could prepare for a climb with the help of a hypoxia altitude chamber, a \$6,000 tent that surrounds your bed and pumps in nitrogen to simulate an oxygen-starved summit. But now that Ontario-based Altitudetech rents them out, climbers can take advantage of the technology without having to buy one (from \$499 per month for rentals, plus \$100 for shipping; 613-547-0720, altitudetech.ca).



10 CLIMB ACONCAGUA

PREP TIME: *Six months*

TIME OFF WORK: *Three weeks*

WHEN TO GO: *December-January*

SOUTH AMERICA'S HIGHEST PEAK IS THE REAL DARLING OF THE SEVEN SUMMITS.

IT'S EASIER TO GET TO THAN the Himalayas, and nearly as high. It's tougher than Kilimanjaro but easier than McKinley. Simply put, Aconcagua is the best all-around mountaineering experience of the seven continents' highest peaks. "It's also more accessible than any of the other seven summits," says Willie Benegas, who was raised in Patagonia and has summited Aconcagua 50 times. "You arrive at Mendoza, take a car to the trailhead, and that's it. You start hiking."

Most will opt for nontechnical, glacier-free routes like the relatively gradual (and uncrowded) Polish Traverse. The climb begins at 8,000 feet in the Vacas River Valley, then continues to base camp at Plaza de Argentina, which, at 13,800 feet, sits on a rocky glacial moraine. From there you'll trek to high camp, where you'll join the Normal Route at 20,600 feet.

Make no mistake: This is a long, grueling climb at serious altitude, and a true expedition in every sense. But at the



22,835-foot summit, your reward is South America's best panorama: sharp snowy ridges of the surrounding Andean peaks, the Argentine pampa, Chile, and all in one eyeful.

START TODAY:

GET USED TO WEARING A HEAVY

PACK. Porters in Argentina are far pricier than in the Himalayas, so it's likely you'll be carrying your own 50-pound backpack. Do a combination of hour-long strength, cardiovascular, and hill workouts, four to five days a week, minimum. "Strength training is especially important because of the load you'll be carrying," says Doug

Schurman, co-founder of Body Results, which specializes in training mountaineers. He recommends training with a heavy pack on, working up from 15 to 60 pounds over time.

ADDRESS THE ALTITUDE ISSUE.

"The better shape you're in, the less likely you are to be affected," says Garrett Madison, expedition manager for U.S. outfitter Alpine Ascents International. To be safe bring the drug Diamox. "We recommend people use it when they start to feel sick," Madison says. "It really helps speed up acclimation."

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT:

EARPLUGS. Shut out the screaming wind that blows through camp at night with HearTech's SilentEar earplugs, which can handle 110-plus decibels and come in a bright-orange that's easy to find in your pack on the snow (\$22; heartech.co.il).

INFO & OUTFITTERS:

Climbing permits cost up to \$300 in late December and January, and can only be obtained in Mendoza (aconcagua.com). Alpine Ascents charges \$4,300 for its three-week trip (alpineascents.com); local outfitter Aymara's package is \$2,475 (aymara.com.ar).

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