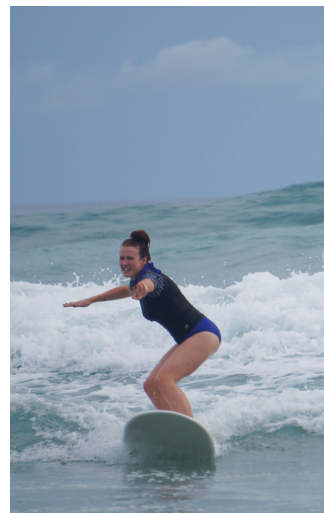


# SPORTING LIFE

Looking for an adventurous holiday? As writer *Andrea Karr* recently discovered, Costa Rica has something for everyone.

**UNLIKE THE FRIGID WATERS OF** most Canadian lakes where I've dipped my toes in recent memory, the Pacific Ocean off Santa Teresa felt like wading into a soothing milk bath – so warm that I was tempted to lie down, close my eyes and float in the shallows. But I wasn't here to relax. I was suited in a rash guard, my hair tied up in a messy bun, ready to attempt surfing for the very first time. My instructor stood at my side, and we waited for a suitable wave. When he gave me the cue, I launched, chest first, onto my board. He whipped me around as I paddled and gave me a push as the warm salt water crashed over my body. I shot upright with as much strength as I could muster – left foot forward and arms splayed out for balance – and flew, racing toward the shore. There was no slipping, toppling or jumping off the board in fear. I did it: I rode my first wave.



It may seem like nothing – single girl takes group trip to Costa Rica, surfs tiny waves with help of instructor and goes back to her regularly scheduled programming – but for me, it means so much more. Rewind just a year and I wouldn't have had the confidence to try surfing,

or basically any activity that requires strength, balance or athleticism of any kind. In high school, I was the girl who walked the entire one-mile run in gym class and was too self-conscious to join the volleyball or basketball team. It wasn't until I hit 30 and realized that I had low muscle mass (and shockingly high body fat, considering my weight) that I knew I had to make physical activity a priority in my life. As I slowly developed my muscles through running, boxing and weight training, I discovered a side effect that I never anticipated: confidence in my abilities.

It was this new-found belief in myself that inspired me to sign up for a group trip with G Adventures called Volcanoes & Surfing, a nine-day active adventure tour in Costa Rica. Because I had put so much effort into becoming more physically active, I wanted a vacation that would keep me moving, but I also found myself craving new challenges. These motivations are typical of G Adventures's active travel participants, says brand manager Simon Ma. "One of the main reasons why people take our multisport trips is to try things they've never had the opportunity to do in their own

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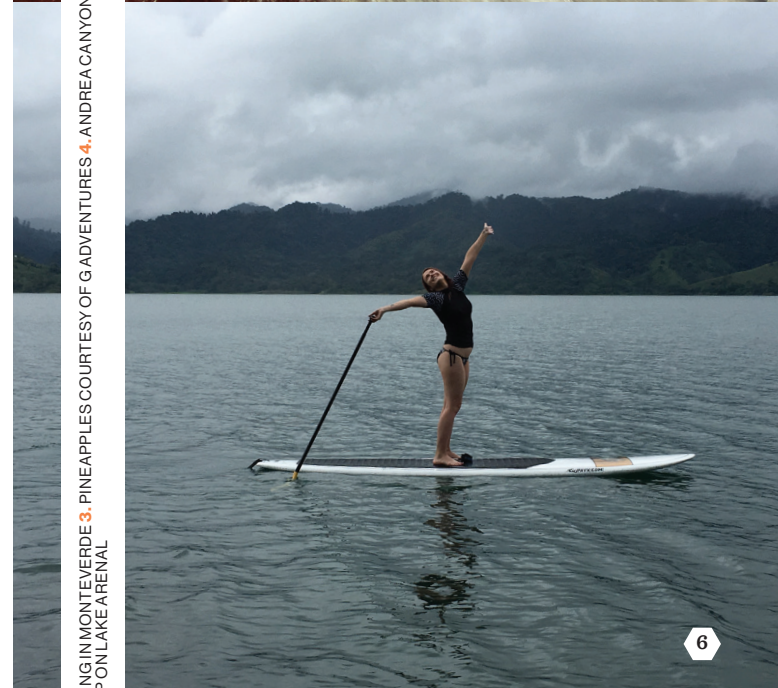
ANDREA SURFING OFF SANTA TERESA



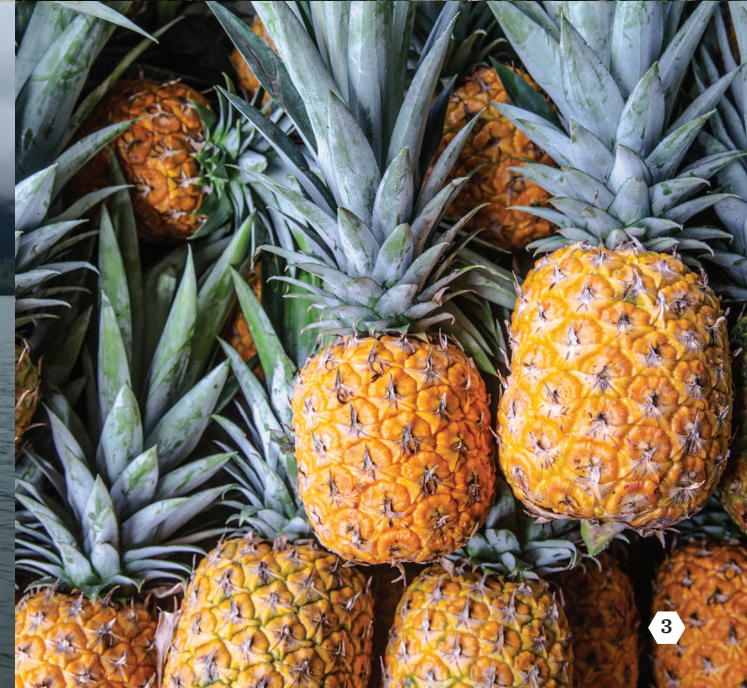
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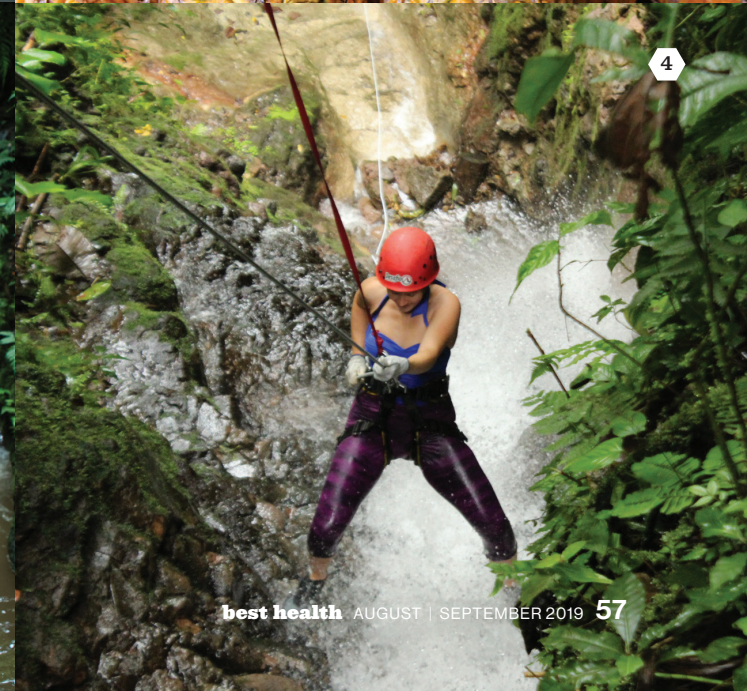
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CLOCKWISE: 1. CANYONING AT LA FORTUNA 2. ANDREA ZIPLINING IN MONTEVERDE 3. PINEAPPLES COURTESY OF GADVENTURES 4. ANDREA CANYONING AT LA FORTUNA 5. CANYONING TRAIL PAX, COURTESY OF GADVENTURES 6. SUP ON LAKE ARENAL

cities,” he says. “There’s also a sense of accomplishment that people are after. They want to put a challenge in front of themselves and be able to overcome it.”

My challenge? Surfing. But also canyoning, stand-up paddleboarding, mountain biking and ziplining – all activities that were included on my itinerary or were optional additions. (They were interspersed with more relaxed pastimes, like sipping beverages in a hot spring, exploring the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, touring a coffee and cocoa plantation and shopping at local boutiques – in case you mistakenly thought I was out there Lara Croft-ing it all day.)

The first new accomplishment I checked off my list was canyoning in La Fortuna, which involved hiking and rappelling down a series of waterfalls. My tour group of 11 men and women, including three solo female travellers like me, was pretty sporty, so I wanted to keep up and threw myself into this first test of my mettle. I leapt (shrieking) into deep pools of water, waded through streams and pushed against rock faces as I lowered myself by rope toward the ground.

My next test was stand-up paddleboarding on Lake Arenal, another water sport that I’d long assumed was beyond my capabilities. But as it turns out, I’m a natural, and I easily climbed onto my board, stayed standing through balance and jumping exercises and paddled faster than most of my new friends.

Mountain biking up and down steep hills and over loose rocks in the pouring – albeit warm – rain was much harder for me. I lagged far behind, fearing that I’d fall and scrape my knees or break a bone, like I did when I was eight years old. Some of the others who spent the previous day cycling an even more strenuous route scoffed at the “easy” level of our rainy excursion. At one time, I think I would have felt embarrassed for struggling. But now I understand that I don’t have to compete with anyone but myself – and certainly not people who mountain bike as a hobby – and I hope to try it again soon to improve my comfort level and increase my speed.

Later in Monteverde, a mountainous region known for its Cloud Forest Reserve and coffee plantations, I rode several ziplines, including a 1.5-kilometre Superman line where your harness attaches at the back and you go hurtling above the treetops on your stomach, arms thrown wide. I also tried the Tarzan swing, which was an exercise in bravery more than fitness. It involves jumping off a 45-metre-high platform and free-falling until your harness catches, jolting you into a seated position and causing you to swing back and forth like Tarzan. Looking back at the fear I felt while standing on that ledge, I still can’t believe I jumped.

Surfing – my most anticipated challenge – actually

took place on the last two days of the trip when we reached the small surfing town of Santa Teresa. My muscles were already sore from all of my new activities (and even a little bruised on my inner thighs from the Tarzan swing), but it was the perfect way to complete my adventure, which, though easy for some people, was a real test of my courage and strength. By the time my surfing lessons were over, every part of my body ached from lifting myself onto the surfboard again and again, but I was also filled with an immense sense of pride. As I nibbled pineapple and watched dogs lope along the beach, the sun turning the sky into a deep blue canvas slashed with glowing pink, I realized that I’d accomplished every single thing I’d set out to do on this trip – activities that scared me, embarrassed me and tested my endurance – and that what I’ve achieved so far brushes only the tip of my body’s capabilities. *hr*

## KEEP MOVING

Whether you want to practise mindfulness, retain muscle mass or enjoy some physical activity with a shot of adventure, these travel companies will keep your healthy habits going.

### ACTIVE ESCAPES

Fitness is a way of life. If that phrase rings true for you, you’ll love Active Escapes retreats in beach destinations like Hawaii, Bali and the Maldives. Each trip includes daily workouts and activities like boating, yoga, surfing and socializing.

[activeescapes.com](http://activeescapes.com)

### G ADVENTURES

Separate from G Adventures’s active tours, the company’s latest wellness itineraries focus on mindfulness, movement and nourishment. Each trip starts off with an intention-setting ceremony and includes meditation, yoga and healthy meals.

[gadventures.com](http://gadventures.com)

### WILD WOMEN EXPEDITIONS

Seeking a group tour for women only? Wild Women Expeditions welcomes ladies of all ages, sexual orientations and skill levels to explore the great outdoors, with activities ranging from kayaking in Newfoundland to horseback riding in Mongolia.

[wildwomenexpeditions.com](http://wildwomenexpeditions.com)



CLOCKWISE: 1. BEACH SAND AT SANTA TERESA 2. EL TRAPICH COCOA PLANT IN MONTEVERDE 3. TYPICAL HOUSE IN COSTA RICA 4. WATERFALLS ARE EVERYWHERE! 5. ZIPLINING BRIDGE TRAVELLERS COURTESY OF G ADVENTURES 6. BEACH VIEWS AT SANTA TERESA