

An Adventurer's Dream in Mexico's Copper Canyon

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Mexico's Copper Canyon, in the heart of the Sierra Madre Mountains, is one of North America's most impressive natural wonders. What is called the "Copper Canyon" is actually a group of six massive canyons that is four times the size of, and, in some places, twice as deep as the Grand Canyon in the United States. Though named for the color of its rock walls, Copper Canyon is actually quite verdant. Oak and fir forests cover the highest altitudes, brushwood and scrub push out of dry canyon slopes, and huge fig and palm trees grow in lower reaches, where the climate is tropical and wet.

The most popular mode of transportation for visitors is the Chihuahua-Pacific (or "Chepe") railroad, which runs between the cities of Chihuahua and Los Mochis and traverses the Urique Canyon, the deepest in North America. The ride treats passengers to breathtaking vistas of towering cliffs, colorful flora and fauna, and remote mountain villages. Popular stops include the picturesque colonial town of El Fuerte, the relatively large town of Creel with its convenient budget hotels and many restaurants, the peaceful mountain village of Cerocahui, and the old mining town of Batopilas, in the depths of the Batopilas River gorge. Visitors can get off at any stop to explore the canyons and towns by bike, on horseback, or on foot.



This destination is remote and rugged-perfect for adventure travelers and a far cry indeed from the chic beach resorts of Mexico's Riviera Maya region. The Copper Canyon is home to the Rarámuri (or Tarahumara) indigenous people, whose name approximately means "The Fast Runners." Tales of their running prowess abound; they have a tradition of ultra-marathon competitions of up to 200 miles over rough terrain, and they historically hunted deer by chasing them on foot until the animal collapsed from exhaustion. Many Rarámuri are still semi-nomadic, living in log cabins during the summer and moving into caves at lower altitudes during the winter.

Some Rarámuri communities are happy to welcome travelers, offering guided tours along the ancient mountain paths and sharing cultural customs, food, and handcrafts. The Rarámuri are known for their intricate hand woven baskets, which they sell directly to tourists to help support their families. If you patronize a traditional craft store in one of the region's town centers, be sure that the proceeds will benefit the community. Some stores, like the Jesuit-run Artesanías Misión in Creel, donate all proceeds to cultural development and the local hospital. That said, **be aware and respectful** of the fact that some Rarámuri communities have chosen to remain closed to the outside world, protecting a traditional way of life that is many centuries old.



Hundreds of bird species make Copper Canyon a fantastic **birding** destination as well. A cruise along the El Fuerte River offers bird watchers opportunities to spot many colorful species including the military macaw, vermillion flycatcher, black hawk, squirrel cuckoo, crested caracara, black-throated magpie jay, and white-winged dove.

The Copper Canyon is a must-see for any adventure traveler. The majestic cliffs and ridges, lush forests, beautiful rivers, and unique cultural experiences will make for the perfect sustainable trip.

