

## WONDERS OF THE WORLD

## ARIZONA

Ribbons of colour,  
hidden deep  
in the desert

You literally have to be a lottery winner to see this secluded phenomenon

MARGIE GOLDSMITH  
PARIA CANYON, ARIZ.

I was smitten the moment I saw a photograph of the striated rocks of the Wave. Imagine sandstone rocks as smooth as marble in layers of butterscotch, cream, beige and burnt orange. This is what hikers find at Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs, 18 kilometres west of Page, Ariz., on the border of Utah. The area was nicknamed by photographers because of its swirling carved canyons which rise up like domes and recede like waves. Its real name is Coyote Buttes and the area is one of the most photographed in the West. It's also considered one of America's crown jewel hiking spots.

The Wave is little known, because if you look on most maps of Arizona you won't find it. Once you learn about the 11-kilometre, out-and-back canyon (or see the photographs) you'll want to experience it yourself.

The trailhead is in North Coyote Buttes midway between Page and Kanab, Utah. But first you'll need a permit, and they are as hard to come by as hot concert tickets.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management protects the fragile area by keeping a tight control on permits. It issues just 20 a day by lottery. If you're one of the lucky permit winners, you'll pretty much have the place to yourself. (April through October are in high demand but it's easier to land one in the winter months.)

I snagged a permit but I was warned that without an experienced guide, it would be almost impossible to find. I'm glad I took the advice.

I hiked with my guide, Robert, through five kilometres of desert



THE GLOBE AND MAIL

mountain terrain and a few steep hills of sand. There were no trees, no marked trail to follow, and only the occasional cairn to indicate the direction. After about 90 minutes, we arrived at the hidden rock slit known as the Secret Passage. It seemed to appear out of nowhere, and I'd never have found it on my own. We entered a sandstone wash of rounded hills polished by wind and water as smooth as marble. Some formations looked like pillars or cones, others like giant cauliflower and broccoli heads.

The landscape was surreal – sandstone hills swirled with stripes the colour of cinnamon, nutmeg and milk chocolate, it felt like I was standing in a bowl of cake batter. The rainbow of colours ran ribbon-like around the rock formations like giant waves petrified in motion.

While my guide went off to take photos, I sat down on a rock, mesmerized by the million-year-old formations. The only sound was the whispering wind. I ran my hands along the rock face, so smooth to the touch.

Special to The Globe and Mail



The Wave's layered sandstone is as smooth to the touch as marble, polished by wind and water over millions of years. WILDLIFEPHOTO

## IF YOU GO

**What it is:** The Wave is an area of surreal multicolored rock chutes cut into a sandstone mountain. The area is perfect for a day hike.

**Where it is:** Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs, 18 kilometres west of Page, Ariz.

**How to get there:** Fly to Phoenix or Denver and then change planes to fly directly to Page.

**How to see it:** The Wave is open all year but your chances of obtaining a permit to visit are much better November

through March. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management runs two lotteries. You can apply online four months in advance for one of 10 permits issued a day. For trips with less advance planning, try for one of the next 10 permits by applying in person the day before your hike at Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Visitor Center in nearby Kanab, Utah. For permits: [blm.gov/az/st/en/arolr-smain/paria.html](http://blm.gov/az/st/en/arolr-smain/paria.html)

**Where to stay:** Amangiri, a luxurious Aman resort in Canyon Point, Utah, is less than a

half-hour from the trailhead. The resort will schedule a guided, full-day hiking excursion. The guide will attend the in-person lottery on your behalf but there is no guarantee (there are often more than 100 applicants vying for 10 permits). If you don't get in, the guide will take you to other stunning locations in the Vermilion Cliffs area, including Thousand Pockets, Hodges's Hideaway or the Middle Route of Buckskin Gulch. Rooms from \$1,100 (U.S.) a night. [amanresorts.com](http://amanresorts.com)

Margie Goldsmith

A shimmering  
blanket of  
silence

Let me tell you  
what I heard

WE HAVE A LOT OF GROUND TO COVER.

Slow,  
subtle thunder

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Northwest Territories  
CANADA

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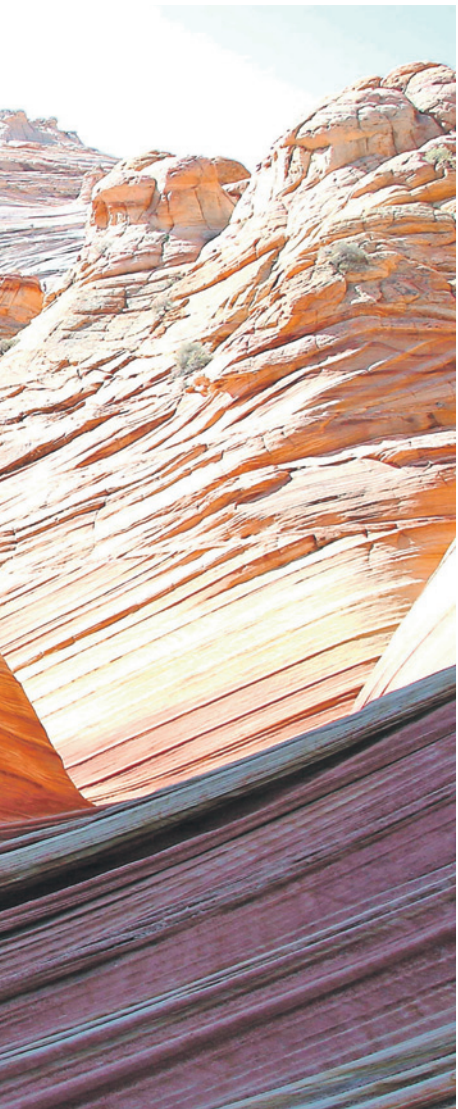
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**THE PHILIPPINES**

# Where seeing is still not believing

Rising out of rice paddies, the Chocolate Hills look almost too perfect to be real

**GREG QUINION**  
BOHOL, THE PHILIPPINES

Looking out upon the Chocolate Hills of Bohol, I knew that I was seeing a true wonder. The enormity of the dimensions, the extraordinary remoteness, the fantastical oddness – it all did not seem real.

Fresh off a trip to the Banaue Rice Terraces, I saw a photo of the hills in the window of a Manila tourism office.

Making a spur of the moment decision, I booked a plane ticket to Tagbilaran, the capital of Bohol province, on an island about a little more than an hour flight away.

From there it was a matter of finding a bus to Carmen, a town of about 45,000 located almost exactly in the centre of the island.

As the road climbed upward, I found myself deep in the heart of a broad plateau, where rolling limestone hills competed with flat rice paddies for my attention.

Then, rather suddenly, there they were: huge conical hills rising up from the edge of a wet, green landscape.

I had first viewed the hills from the window of my airplane. From above, it appeared the Earth had broken out in tiny goosebumps. It was impressive, but nothing compared with seeing them up close.

My first thought was how unbelievably alien the hills looked. They were both massive and compact; towering, yet perfectly round. Their near-vertical sides rise up into the sky only to taper into perfect cones and domes.

Each was different, but they all seemed to share the same charming proportions and uncanny symmetry. They looked almost artificial, too perfect to be the product of erosion and time.

The bus let me off near the government-run Chocolate Hills



The Chocolate Hills of Bohol take on a brown tinge when the sun-burnt cogon grass changes colour in summer. GREG QUINION



Complex. Perched atop one of the larger hills, it housed a restaurant and a well-placed observation deck.

I spent the next few hours in silent awe, watching as the tropical sun and rolling white clouds conspired to bathe the gumdrop hills in waves of light and shadow. (The name Chocolate Hills comes from the brown colour the sun-burnt cogon grass takes in summer.) Below me, a village of thatched Nipa huts clustered by the feet of one colossal mound, the houses looking cheerful and oblivious in its massive shadow.

In my opinion, a wonder is a place so unique that a traveller can search for the rest of his life and never find another like it.

It is a place that makes you doubt that what you are seeing is real: Never in my wildest imaginations had I thought it geologically possible for a landscape to look so strange as this one. As I stood there, looking out upon that impossible panorama of stark and beautiful contrasts, I found myself pondering whether these might be the only such hills in all the universe – and contemplating what other wonders lay unknown to us still.

Special to The Globe and Mail

**IF YOU GO**

**What it is:** The Chocolate Hills are thought to have been formed as uplifted marine limestone was cracked by tectonic movements and then weathered away by water and wind. More than 1,300 individual hills cover more than 50 square kilometres and range from 30 to 90 metres in height.

**Where it is:** In the centre of Bohol province in the Philippines, on one of the major islands of the Visayas.

**How to get there:** From Manila, fly to Tagbilaran Airport. Philippine Airlines or Cebu Pacific Airlines offer direct flights (around 70 minutes). If you are travelling through the Visayas, ferries running between Cebu City and Tagbilaran are frequent. Once in

Tagbilaran, buses or taxis can take you to the interior of the island in a few hours depending on the route.

**Where to stay:** For a resort-style hotel, try the Chocolate Hills Adventure Park or the Sagbayan Peak mountaintop resort.

**Note:** The 7.2 magnitude earthquake that struck the central Visayas in October, centred on the island of Bohol, caused widespread casualties and damages in an area where the economy is largely dependent on tourism. Though the Philippine Department of Tourism has declared the Chocolate Hills open for visitors, it is advisable to research and book ahead.

Greg Quinion

**BE PART OF THE SERIES**

This is the second part of a five-week look at lesser-known wonders of the world.

On [globeandmail.com](http://globeandmail.com)

For the first two picks – and to see more of the Chocolate Hills and the Wave – visit [tgam.ca/wonders](http://tgam.ca/wonders).

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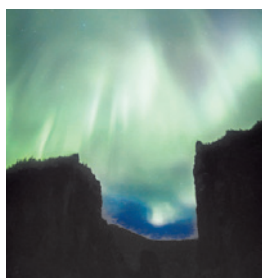
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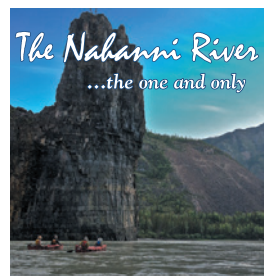
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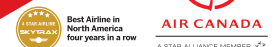
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