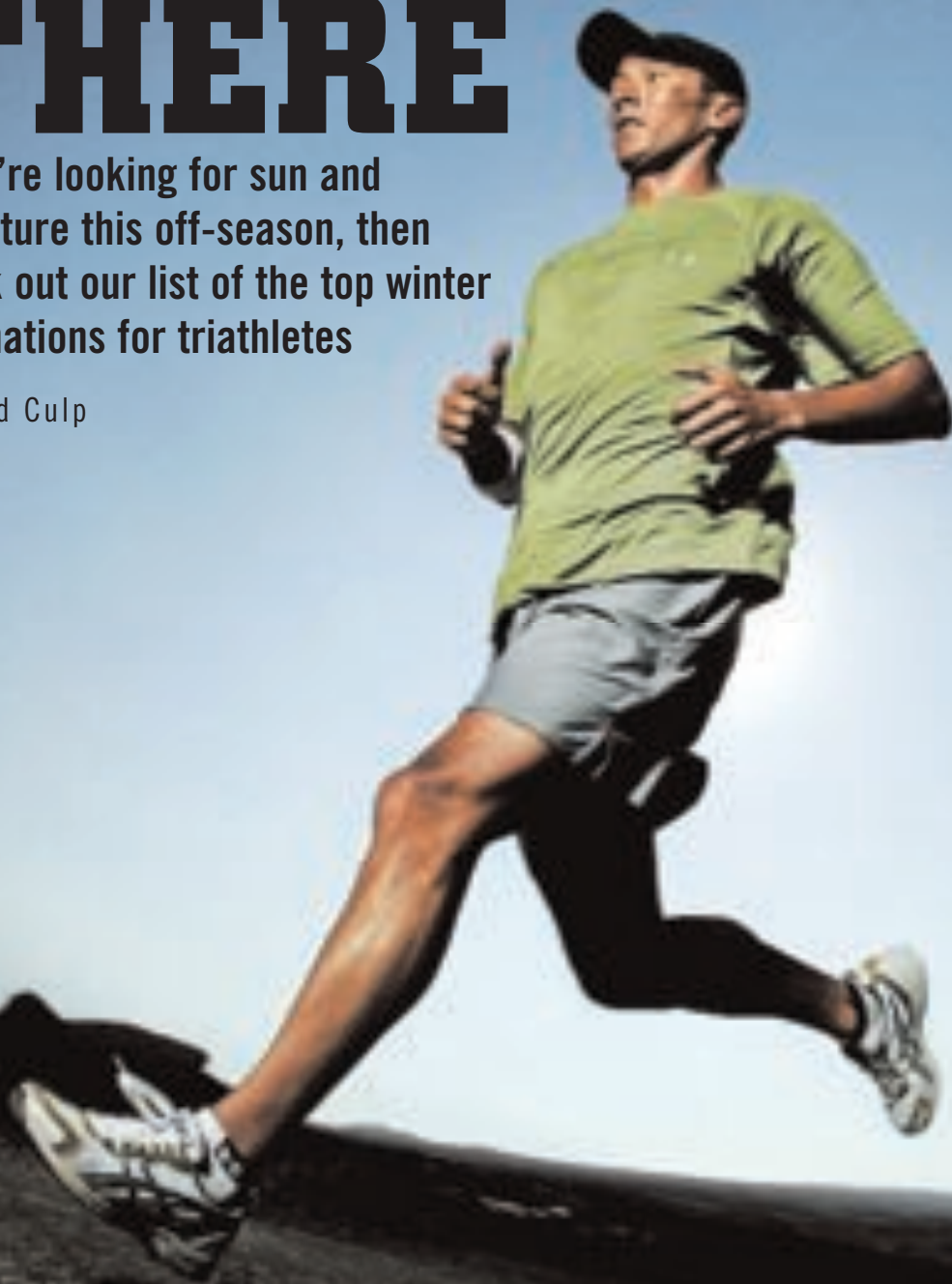


# GET OUT THERE

If you're looking for sun and adventure this off-season, then check out our list of the top winter destinations for triathletes

By Brad Culp



John Segesta/wahoomedia.com

**AT THIS POINT IN THE SEASON WINTER IS PROBABLY THE LAST THING ON YOUR MIND, BUT IT MAKES SENSE TO SPEND SOME TIME THINKING ABOUT YOUR OFF-SEASON PLANS NOW.** For many triathletes, a couple of weeks holidaying (and, of course, training) in the sun can help the winter months roll past more quickly and provide a boost to your early-season fitness. If you're just looking for warmth and relaxation, your options are pretty much endless. However, if you want to travel to a great tri-training town this winter, you better take a look at our list. The five cities we've chosen offer near-perfect weather, great climbs, top-notch trails and some of the best places to stay in the world.

### 1. Kona and Maui, Hawaii

If you're going to make the trip all the way to Hawaii (and pay the airfare), you might as well squeeze in two islands to maximize your ROI. Kona is a must. It's triathlon's Mecca, and there's nothing quite like riding on the windswept Queen K Highway (and dodging the Kona Coast's outrageous traffic) to get you motivated.

The village of Kailua-Kona is the Ironman epicenter each October, but it's definitely not the only place to stay on the west side of the Big Island. Just north along the Queen K (about 30 miles north of Kailua), you'll find the Kohala Coast and three of the largest resorts on the island. You can choose between the Hilton Waikoloa Village, the famed Mauna Kea Resort or the Fairmont Orchid. Like everything else in Hawaii, these resorts are expensive but well worth the price.

Staying in Kohala also offers myriad training options, from open-water swimming in Anaehoomalu Bay, a state park adjacent to the Waikoloa resort, to running through the resort's well-kept grounds, and from there you'll have easy access to the northern half of the Ironman bike course, which is the most challenging and scenic part. From Kohala to the IM turnaround point at Hawi it's a rolling 25-mile ascent.

Those looking for an even bigger challenge can tackle the climb up to the town of Waimea, which lies at the base of the Mauna Kea Volcano. Waimea sits at 3,000 feet and offers a few quaint coffee shops (plus a Starbucks) for a quick recovery drink before you make the screaming descent back to the Queen K. The road up to Waimea gets very narrow, so riders need to be extremely careful. Traffic is typically lightest on Sunday mornings.

If you have the time (and money), a trip to Maui will complete your island experience. Maui locals refer to their training as Maui Miles, since there's no other place in the world quite like it. The crown gem of a Maui training trip is the Haleakala Volcano ascent. It is one of the longest and most grueling climbs in the world: 37 miles from Paia to the summit with a total vertical gain of 10,023 feet.

Ross Schmelzer, an age-grouper from Sturgeon Bay, Wis., tackled the climb this spring. His reaction reflects that of just about anyone who reaches to top. "It's by far the toughest ride I'll ever do," said Schmelzer. "I rode a bike with a triple ring, and I was still standing up the whole time." You better tackle Haleakala early on in your trip, because doing the climb on tired legs can be torture.

Daytime weather on all the islands rarely dips below 80 degrees, even during winter months, so long sleeves definitely aren't necessary. That said, if you do tackle any of the climbs on either island (or even the ascent to Waimea) it can get surprisingly chilly at altitude, so pack a vest and arm warmers. If you're looking for a group to train with, check out Lance Watson's Lava Camp (lifesport.ca), which takes place in early April.

### 2. Tucson, Arizona

Tucson has something for everyone. The super-dry weather makes it an ideal retirement destination. One of the largest universities in the country keeps things hip, and the Santa Catalina Mountains make it a training paradise.

Tucson is booming and there are plenty of places to stay, but from a training standpoint, the east side of town is the place to be. From here, you'll have easy access to the facilities at the University of Arizona, which include a 50-meter outdoor pool. A number of group rides start at or near the university, including the Saturday morning shootout, endorsed by Ironman 70.3 world champion Sam McGlone.

## Racing Arizona

**Boost your off-season training with a run-focus phase**

By Cameron Elford

**A FEW YEARS AGO I WAS TRAINING FOR AN EARLY-SEASON IRONMAN BUT FOUND MYSELF WOEFULLY UNDERPREPARED AS THE EVENT LOOMED EVER CLOSER.** Scrambling for advice, I e-mailed triathlon great and 1988 Hawaii Ironman winner Scott Molina. "Just run lots," was Molina's advice.

Indeed, many triathletes follow just such an off-season program, finding the winter months a good time to insert a single-sport focus and train for a marathon before the structure of three-sport training shackles dreams of big weekly run mileage. To that end, there's no shortage of great winter marathons, from Las Vegas to Honolulu, in December, to P.F. Chang's Arizona Rock 'n' Roll Marathon, which next year takes place on Jan. 13.

Beginning in Phoenix, the point-to-point Arizona Rock 'n' Roll Marathon course winds through Phoenix and surrounding Scottsdale before finishing in Tempe, 12 miles away (buses are available to shuttle athletes to the start line in the morning). Temperatures at the starting line usually hover in the chilly 40s but top out in the mid-60s later in the day. In addition, live bands are located every mile of the way.

The marathon and half-marathon courses are both flat and fast. The marathon course features a very gradual elevation gain from 1095 to 1230 feet over the first half before flattening out then tilting downward to 1140 feet over the last 10 miles.

For more information on this spectacular event, check out [rnr.com](http://rnr.com).



“It’s a great hard ride,” McGlone said. “There can sometimes be over 150 people. The ride covers the same three-hour loop every weekend and the pace can get pretty tough.”

If you have any legs left after the Saturday morning shootout, then head over to Mt. Lemmon for an epic climb. It’s one of the longest climbs you’ll find in the Continental U.S. and there’s great homemade pie and coffee at the top. It’s a 26-mile climb to the summit, although snow can often close off the final few miles during the winter months. That’s right, the summit of Mt. Lemmon is so high (over 14,000 feet) that they open up ski lifts for three months each year.

If you don’t want to spend all day climbing you can get in a great workout at the Tucson Mountain Park on the west side of town. Gates Pass is a favorite climb of the locals, but it can be brutal for a first-timer. It’s a gradual half-mile climb with grades reaching over 20 percent at the top.

Tucson has typical desert weather, but the temperature can vary quite a bit in the winter months. “Your best bet is to go in March or April,” said McGlone. “It can be cold, especially in the mornings, in February. After April, it gets really hot.”

Perhaps the best part about Tucson is that the locals want you to come. If you don’t believe us, log on to [visittucson.org](http://visittucson.org). The Metro Tucson Convention and Visitors Bureau will be at your service to ensure that you have the ultimate training experience. They specialize in planning for large groups (more than 10 people) and even have their own sports-development program.

### **3. San Diego, California**

There’s a reason triathlon began in San Diego: The city is built for multisport. There are great hills, mountains, flats, smooth roads, huge group rides and plenty of trails. December through March are known as the rainy months in San Diego, but there’s no need to worry. During the winter, this triathlon-mecca still only receives about two inches of rain per month. So, needless to say, fenders and rain jackets won’t be necessary if you decide to spend a few weeks in Southern California this winter.

The average winter high in San Diego varies between 60 and 65 degrees, which is a bit of a drop from the steady 75-degree summer

temperatures. However, according to Ironman world champion Michellie Jones, who spends most of the year in San Diego, you can hardly feel the change. “There’s basically no change in the weather during the winter,” said Jones. “People say it rains a bit more, but you can’t really tell.”

There’s no shortage of great group rides in the San Diego area either. If you’re looking for a fast-paced group workout, Northern San Diego County is the place to be. Every Wednesday morning a large group of triathletes sets out from the Starbucks in Carlsbad Village for a 55-mile tour of nearby Camp Pendleton. Be sure to bring your ID, as the Marine gate sentry won’t let you in without it.

If you’d rather ride with the roadies, then the Saturday morning Swami’s ride is a must. The ride used to begin at Swami’s Surf Beach, in Encinitas just north of San Diego, but has since moved south to B & L Bikes in Solana Beach. If you make it out for this ride, be prepared for 42 heart-pounding miles and a super-fast field sprint at the end. According to Jones, it can get a little scary. “Swami’s is a serious ride,” Jones said. “I don’t really do it anymore, because it can get really, really dangerous.”

If the solitude of a good, long climb is more your thing, then a climb of nearby Palomar Mountain is a must-do. Just off I-15 in Pauma Valley you’ll find this 4,500-foot climb, which is one of the longest in Southern California. It is often compared to the fabled Alpe d’Huez in France, since they both have 21 switchbacks, which makes things interesting on the way down.

After a workout like that, some serious refueling will be required. We recommend any of the local Mexican food. There are too many places to recommend, but finding an authentic dive couldn’t be any easier.

### **4. Auckland & Christchurch, New Zealand**

As with Hawaii, if you’re going to travel all this way you might as well see two islands. While the harsh winter weather at home is taking its toll on your training and spirit, the sun is shining and the temperature is rising in the Southern Hemisphere, which makes it a training haven.

Auckland is the cultural and athletic capital of New Zealand and



John Segesta/wahoomeia.com

provides all the training amenities you need for a memorable trip. After one visit to the North Shore, you'll quickly notice why so many of the world's top triathletes call this place home. According to Wildflower course-record holder and Kiwi Terenzo Bozzone, Auckland's topography makes it the ultimate training ground. "Auckland is the place to be," Bozzone said. "The Waitakeres Mountain range has plenty of long, hard climbs. Once you come here, you'll realize why Kieran Doe is so fast on the bike. He does these climbs all the time."

While you're in Auckland, you can also work on your stroke with one of New Zealand's most renowned swim coaches, Mark Bone. He's helped athletes like Bozzone, Olympic gold-medalist Hamish Carter and Ironman champion Cameron Brown, and he can probably show you a tip or two ([swimtastic.co.nz](http://swimtastic.co.nz)).

If you make your way to the South Island, a visit to Christchurch is in order. It's an eclectic town that appeals to both athletes and tourists alike. Among the unique features of this town is their local orator, who shouts the day's news and schedule from the city center each morning.

After you hear what's on tap for the day, a ride over to the adjacent Banks Peninsula is a must. This circular peninsula has terrain that resembles that of Catalina Island, off the coast of Los Angeles in Southern California, so be prepared for endless climbing.

If you'd rather get off-road, you'll find plenty of trails around Christchurch. Laura Esch, an age-grouper and college student from Wisconsin, spent a year studying on the South Island and feels that mountain biking is a must. "There are some amazing trails on the outskirts of Christchurch," Esch said. "The whole country really cares about the outdoors and their national parks, so everything is really well maintained."

No matter where you decide to go in New Zealand, you won't be disappointed. "I've trained all over the place," Bozzone said, "but there's no place like New Zealand."

If you're going to head to a place like Christchurch, it may be worthwhile to go with a few people who know the ropes. When it comes to training on the South Island, few know more than triathlon champions Gordo Byrn and Scott Molina or coaching guru John Newsom. These three men have come together to put on the New Zealand Epic Camp from January 27 to February 4, 2008 ([epiccamp.com](http://epiccamp.com)). Note, however,

those looking for an easy tour of New Zealand should stay away from this camp. The camp is designed for top Ironman athletes (nine- to 11-hour finishers) whose goals include Kona or Clearwater. They're currently taking applications to fill their 20-athlete roster. At \$2,450, it's not cheap, but the price includes "everything but mercy."

Campers will begin in Christchurch before making their way across the island to Queenstown. The focus of the camp is on building a strong early-season cycling base, and athletes should be prepared to ride over 600 miles during the camp.

## 5. Clermont, Florida

The gem of the hills. That's Clermont's claim-to-fame. Yes, there are hills in Florida. If you don't believe it, then perhaps a trip to Clermont, located smack in the middle of Florida, is in order. Scores of Floridians make weekend trips to Clermont to get away from the endless flat roads on both coasts.

Collegiate national champion and University of Florida student Kevin Collington uses the Clermont's hills as his secret weapon. "Clermont is my winter training destination," said Collington. "The weather is temperate throughout winter, and there are tons of hills to strengthen your legs."

The most notorious climb in this town of 20,000 people is Mt. Sugar Loaf. It's not exactly a mountain, but don't expect to spin your way up in your big ring. Sugar Loaf is a short and steep 300-foot climb with grades reaching well into double digits. At 310 feet above sea level, Sugar Loaf is actually the highest point in Florida, and the view from the top proves it.

Like many triathletes who come to train in Clermont, Nathan Truex, a pro from West Lafayette, Ind., was surprised by the topography. "My friends told me about Mt. Sugar Loaf before I saw it," Truex said. "I laughed then, but I have to admit, I was dead after trying to climb it with a 21-tooth cog."

While Sugar Loaf and the surrounding hills will give you a great workout, the highlight of Clermont is USAT's National Training Center ([usat-ntc.com](http://usat-ntc.com)). The NTC boasts an incredible swim complex, complete workout facility, a brand-new track and a state-of-the-art athletic-testing center. Kim Couch, a specialist at the NTC, feels that the center can offer triathletes a truly unique training experience.

"We have certified triathlon, swimming, cycling and running coaches on hand for personal or group training sessions," Couch said. "We also have staff who will take people out on rides to show them some of the best routes, and we have plenty of options when it comes to sports-science testing."

Among those options is the NTC's triathlon package, with nine specific tests including lactate threshold, VO<sub>2</sub> max, spin-scan, professional bike fit and swim-stroke analysis.

Perhaps the best thing about Clermont is that Orlando, and Disney World, are a mere 20 minutes away, which means you won't have to feel guilty about leaving the kids for a few hours.



Courtesy USAT NTC



Jason Davis

# AUSTRALIA DAY-BY-DAY

While it may not have made our top-5 list, Australia is one of the world's top places to train and race

By Katya Meyers

**LAST JANUARY, WHEN I RECEIVED THE OFFER TO RACE IRONMAN AUSTRALIA IN PORT MACQUARIE, NEW SOUTH WALES, I JUMPED AT THE OPPORTUNITY.** Not only had I heard great things about the race—in particular, the unparalleled spectator support from the boisterous Aussie crowd—but the land Down Under was also at the top of my wish list of places to visit. While triathlon has taken me all over the U.S., the chance to travel to an international destination race was more than enough incentive to motivate me to bust out the gloves and cycling booties to begin the big-volume Ironman prep in the midst of winter.

The weeks whizzed by, and before I knew it, I was boarding the 15-hour flight to Sydney. I was slightly apprehensive about the long flight; however, the ability to sleep on planes is unquestionably one of my greatest talents. The 39-hour nap (okay, that includes the day lost by crossing the International Date Line) I logged before reluctantly waking, just as the plane touched down in Sydney, only provided further testimony to my aptitude.

## **Day 1: Sydney, Darling Harbor**

It was still quite early, so the streets were relatively quiet when I headed out for my run. This was definitely a good thing, as traffic

on the “wrong” side of the road added an element of danger. As I wound along the harbor, I soon found myself in the Royal Botanical Garden, an expansive park with a sampling of indigenous Australian flora and fauna as well as a beautiful view of the famous Opera House—the backdrop for the 2000 Olympic triathlon.

## **Day 2: Sydney**

Another great run along the harbor. I'd planned to do the bridge climb, a walk known for its beautiful vistas of Sydney and some shopping, but the dreary weather kept me pretty sedentary, instead. Weather-wise, this turned out to be the only non-perfect day of the entire trip.

## **Day 3: Sydney to Port Macquarie**

After a bit of morning training, I hopped on a short Qantas commuter flight from Sydney north to Port Macquarie, the race venue. Quite possibly the most relaxed airport experience of my life, or at least in recent, post-9/11 memory. No charge for the bike, and as it turns out even the airport security personnel in Australia are unfailingly patient and friendly. I decide I'm ready to move to Australia.



Jason Davis

I am met in Port Macquarie by Shane Smith, assistant race director and owner of TriTravel—a company designed to eliminate the travel headaches and handle all the messy pre-race logistics.

### ***Days 4-7: Pre-race Port Macquarie***

In every way, Port Macquarie provided the perfect venue for an Ironman. It was big enough to have everything I needed: expert bike shops, great restaurants (check out Tommy's Restaurant for fine dining) and plenty of activities, but small enough so I felt as though the entire town was rallying behind the race. The gorgeous coastal scenery, with white, sandy beaches and blue water, made every training run, ride and swim an unforgettable experience.

In addition, there was plenty of opportunity for non-training-related activities. At the koala hospital, the world's first hospital dedicated solely to the care and preservation of koalas, I had the opportunity to spend some quality time with some of the cutest creatures on earth. Next up, a surfing lesson from a former Australian national surfing champion, followed by a camel ride along the beach (apparently, camels were imported to improve transportation in the Outback in the 1840s). In between, I was able to take advantage of the local coffee shops and walk along some of the world's most beautiful beaches.

### ***Race day***

After a two-loop swim, participants head out onto a bike course that includes rolling hills, flats and short but steep climbs. The three-loop course lends itself to plenty of spectator involvement, and the Aussies did not disappoint in this respect. Once out on the run, the terrain is equally varied with half pancake flat along the water and the other half hilly, making the last part of the run exceptionally challenging.

True to form, the post-race Panthers awards party was quite a celebration. I realized that the Australians have earned their reputation as good partiers. The final two days of my trip were spent packing, souvenir shopping—and planning my next trip to Oz. ▲

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