

24-day Mexico Backpacking and Canyoneering Leadership and Guide Training Course

Course Location

This course starts and ends in Chihuahua, Mexico. The Copper Canyon region in the state of Chihuahua is home to the Tarahumara Indians, renowned for their long-distance running prowess. The system of canyons that make up the Copper Canyon country comprise some of the deepest canyons in North America. The beauty, ruggedness, displacement, and square mileage of these canyons rival any in the world.

Course Goals

- Students will gain a strong technical backpacking and canyoneering skill set and appropriate traveling techniques.
- Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to professionally deal with emergency scenarios while in the field.
- Students will be able to use and teach state-of-the-art minimum-impact camping and travel techniques to move a group through various types of terrain without harming the environment.
- They will learn to exercise good quality judgment and decision-making skills within a leadership position to help avoid potential accident and survival situations, and develop a comprehensive understanding of safety considerations in the desert environment.
- They will be able to recognize their own leadership abilities and limitations within the context of a group. Students will learn to make decisions pertinent to leading small groups in the canyon environment.

Course Itinerary

This is a flexible trip itinerary that shows the general progression of the trip. Our exact schedule will depend highly on the weather, strength of the group, and time of year.

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Day 0: Arrival in Chihuahua, Mexico.

Day 1: We'll spend the first day preparing, planning, having a pre-trip meeting, and packing food and equipment for our expedition into the Copper Canyon. We talk about expectations for the course from the students and from the instructors. We will travel to Creel to spend the night.

Day 2: Head into the Copper Canyon from Cusarare.

Day 3 – 12: Skill intensive backpacking/canyoneering instruction





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This portion of the course focuses on the technical skills associated with backpacking and canyoneering. We will make our way south and west towards Divisadero, crossing the Copper Canyon and traveling through remote villages such as Pamachi.

Day 13: mid-course evaluation and re-supply at Divisadero

Lead instructors will assess participants' level of involvement and assessment rubrics associated with the WEA and IWLS curriculums. These, in conjunction with peer evaluations, allow participants to receive positive feedback and develop an awareness in regards to fulfilling the requirements to receive certification as an outdoor leader.

A Typical Day

A typical day starts around 7am with breakfast and hot drinks. If a summit attempt is planned, you may find yourself awake just before sunrise. While water is heating you will most likely be preparing for the days' adventures.

You will play an integral part of the expedition team by setting up camp, cooking meals, or carrying a portion of the group gear. You may be leader of the day, responsible for planning the day, accomplishing objectives, or facilitating a lesson plan.

The day's activities will vary depending on weather, location, and progression of the course. We may work on developing your technical skills set, learn about different leadership styles, or get an alpine start and climb a large peak in the area. Regardless of the day's activities, it will be full of learning and adventure.

Dinner could be anything from thanksgiving to pasta, to backcountry pizza. Students often walk away from our courses with a newfound love for cooking good and original food.

The day will finish with a debrief session where we'll discuss the days events, what you learned, and how you'll be able to use your newfound skills in the near future.

Course Curriculum

The International Wilderness Leadership Schools' educational model nurtures leadership development and creates an awareness of the guiding mentality that is essential for leading safe, fun adventures in the mountains. The combination of technical skills training, practical leadership experience and a true wilderness expedition make the IWLS curriculum world class.

We believe that experiences drive our learning and therefore we use formal and informal classes taught by both instructors and students. Instructors are eager to help facilitate the learning process but ultimately, how much you learn will be dependent on the amount of effort you put into the course.

A detailed curriculum will be provided at the beginning of the course. Below is a partial list of curriculum points that will be covered throughout your course.





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IWLS General Curriculum outlines essential components for effective outdoor leadership. Below are a few points that will be covered in this course.

Decision Making and Problem Solving: Over the course of 12 or 24 days, we'll discover ways to assess problems, explore solutions and evaluate options in order to make effective and safe decisions in the field.

Leadership: Opportunities to lead the group will be abundant, and you'll have the time to learn and practice multiple styles of leadership in varied situations.

Expedition Behavior and Group Dynamics: Because this course is a true wilderness expedition, interactions between group members need to be supportive and contribute to the efficacy of the group. The daily dynamics of the group, combined with instruction, will teach participants not only how to be a member of a team, but how to influence and lead an expedition.

Environmental Ethics: As adventurers in some of the most pristine environments on the planet, it is our duty to respect the natural world. All of our courses practice and teach Leave No Trace® principles.

Basic Camping Skills: Mastering these essential skills will prove valuable whether you are pitching a tent in gale force winds or melting snow for drinking water.

Equipment/Clothing Selection and Use: You'll learn to choose the right gear for the correct application, whether enjoying a sunny afternoon on a snow slope or trekking through a tropical rainforest.

Weather: Will the storm arrive in the next 12 hours or the next 48? Understanding weather patterns and trends will help you plan successful trips in a wilderness setting.

Health and Sanitation: You'll learn water treatment techniques and waste management skills for healthy backcountry living.

Travel Techniques: Course instruction will help you discover ways to safely maximize your efficiency, whether hiking down a well-beaten path or traversing an exposed ridge.

Navigation: Learn how to take a bearing, read a topographical map, triangulate your position, or navigate in a whiteout.

Safety and Risk Management: Safety is always the #1 consideration. As the course progresses, you'll develop an awareness to appropriately assess risk and make safe decisions.

Wilderness Emergency Procedures and Treatment: Learn how to effectively manage safe, efficient and timely backcountry rescues.

Natural and Cultural History: Having a strong understanding of cultural history, flora, and fauna is an integral part of leading people in an outdoor environment. You'll learn some of the botany, ecology, and geology that apply to these remarkable areas.

Communication Skills: Speaking in public, managing a personal conflict, or leading a group in the wilderness, all of these situations require effective communication. You'll gain confidence in your communication abilities as you develop your personal leadership style over the length of this course.

Trip Planning: The first day of the 24-day course is devoted to planning, packing, and organizing the logistics, food, and equipment for the expedition.

Teaching: You'll have the opportunity to develop lesson plans, teach in front of the group, and learn the importance of progressions for teaching technical skills and leadership.





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IWLS Backpacking Curriculum prepares students for exploration into remote, backcountry settings.

Pre-trip Activities: Learn how to plan and prepare for an extended wilderness expedition. We'll cover everything from technical camping equipment to group and personal expectations.

Backpacks: Proper packing and fitting of backpacks improves efficiency and helps avoid injury.

Tents: Staying dry in the wilderness is an essential survival skill. You'll learn how to repair a damaged tent, how to set up camp in high winds, and techniques to secure your dry space for the night.

Stoves and Campfires: The ability to repair a broken stove, make an emergency fire after being submerged in an icy river, and melt snow efficiently for water are key components for leading a group in the wilderness.

Cooking: Sometimes in the backcountry, the meal makes the day. Whether cooking oatmeal or Thanksgiving dinner, you'll develop your skills at making tasty treats.

Lightning Hazards: Learn how to read weather patterns and avoid exposure, and how to manage a group in an emergency situation.

River and Stream Crossings: In river crossings, attention to detail and safety are #1. You'll learn and practice safe techniques for wading across a small stream or doing a Tyrolean traverse across a raging river.

Travel on Scree and Talus: The term 'talus' originated from a Greek name for a giant who throws rocks. Learn how to safely travel on this potentially dangerous terrain.

Geology: From plate tectonics to granitic batholiths, you'll learn the history of the land you are exploring and how these forces create and influence the environment around you.

Objective Hazards: River crossings, bear encounters and "widow makers" are examples of objective hazards. We'll learn how to effectively deal with or avoid these hazards.

Subjective Hazards: Among other things, dehydration, fatigue and personal pride can be detrimental to group safety. Learn how to implement measures to mitigate these potential hazards.

Timing: This is a key component of group management. You'll develop this awareness and how it affects all aspects of a day on an expedition.

IWLS Canyoneering Curriculum

Environmental Ethics: The desert is home to a dynamic, yet fragile ecosystem. As responsible users, we'll focus on teaching ways to minimize our impact on the environment.

Meteorology and Flash Floods: The topography and geology of canyon country contribute to dangerous flash floods. You'll learn how to interpret meteorological events, make safe decisions, and avoid being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Rappelling: Learn the principles of safe rappelling in a canyon environment for dropping into slot canyons or over big sandstone cliffs.

Ascending: The ability to escape canyons by ascending a rope is an important canyoneering skill. You'll learn different ascending techniques and how to do them safely.





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Pothole Escapes: Shoulder stands, backpack toss and body belays are some of the techniques that we'll teach and learn as means to escape canyon potholes.

Anchors: Anchor building is a fun, yet intricate subject. We'll examine single, double, triple and complex anchors, and their different applications. Learn how to place anchors, assess quality, and rig for rappelling.

Rivers and Streams: Creeks at canyon bottoms can be hazardous if not given the proper respect. You'll learn to identify water features and navigate through these waters safely and efficiently.

Canyoneering Equipment: The hot, dry landscape of Chihuahua, abrasive canyon walls, and turbulent canyon creeks demand the right equipment. You'll get hands on experience with the equipment necessary for adventuring in canyon country.

Routefinding: Picking a canyon to descend, a spot to ford the river, or a cliff to rappel requires good routefinding skills. Through experience and learning, you'll develop the awareness and decision making skills to navigate in canyon country.

Desert Flora and Fauna: Mountain lions, coyotes, yucca, prickly pear cactus and eagles are among the multitude of species that make their home in this environment. We'll spend time observing and learning about the balance of this pristine ecosystem.

IWLS International Curriculum is designed to provide students with a fundamental understanding of planning and leading expeditions in foreign countries. Here are just a few topics that will be covered:

Cultural History: As visitors to this remarkable place, we place a premium on being respectful and learning about the local culture and history.

Language Skills: The ability to ask directions, purchase items, and communicate on any level is an essential element of leading an expedition to a foreign country. Throughout the course, we'll develop our Spanish language skills through dialog and lesson plans.

Trip Preparation: Logistics in a foreign country have the potential to be complex and tenuous. You'll take part in shopping at the local market, arranging transportation, and securing permits in preparation for your expedition.

The Wilderness Education Association

The WEA has been training and certifying outdoor leaders around the world for nearly 25 years, and teaching students to safely and effectively lead groups in the outdoors without harming the environment.

Legendary mountaineer Paul K. Petzoldt, Chuck Gregory, Robert Christie, and Dr. Frank Lupton, founded the WEA in 1977. The organization's mission includes "...promoting the professionalism of outdoor leadership and to thereby improve the safety of outdoor trips and to enhance the conservation of the wild outdoors..."





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Journal Writing

Keeping a wilderness journal can help students to record, reflect, and gain from experiences throughout the expedition. The following are examples of topics that may be assigned throughout the course: First-Aid SOAP notes, incident management forms, leadership analyses, trip reports, lesson plans and decision making analyses.

Evaluation and Grading

Students who take this course for credit will receive a letter grade. Grading is a measurement of one's knowledge of material, participation, written and oral communication, and one's judgment and awareness. Students will be evaluated on their skills, level of participation, their knowledge and awareness of their own abilities as outdoor leaders, their level of judgment as applied to decisions, and written projects assigned during the trip. Students that don't take the course for credit will receive an evaluation in place of a grade.

Additionally, the grading will be a reflection of student's peer and instructor evaluations as per the WEA and IWLS assessment rubrics.

Certifications

Upon completion of the 24 day-Mexico backpacking and canyoneering leadership and guide training course, students may be eligible for the following certifications.

- WEA certificate of completion
- WEA certified outdoor leader
- IWLS certificate of completion

