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Ancestral Cycling! Indigenous communities in Chile are paving the way ahead

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Equipo Chile Travel

In Icalma, a remote mountain village in Chile's **Araucanía region**, the **Mapuche-Pehuenche community**, a indigenous communities of Chile, is transforming ancestral trails into mountain biking routes, a unique ancestral cycling experience offered by local tour operators in partnership with Indigenous communities, blending adventure with the preservation of their sacred land.

Beneath a towering canopy of ancient Araucanía trees, **Victor Abarzua and Aldo Torres** snap on their helmets and mount their bikes.

As they glide down the age-old trail, sunlight filters through the forest, casting their silhouettes in a golden ray of light. Every twist and turn of the ride feels like magic. For this forest is not just a path to be ridden; it's a living history, its roots entwined with the stories of the Mapuche people and the sacred wisdom of the past.

As their tires carve into the earth, a plume of dust rises like smoke, drifting toward the treetops. Adrenaline surges through them, but so does a deep sense of reverence. Here, mountain biking becomes more than a sport—it's a ritual, a celebration that bridges past and

future, and **builds connection between man and nature.**

By **Nicole Melancon**, **GLP Films**

Icalma: A remote, sacred backdrop

Less than **135 kilometers east of Temuco**, **Icalma** is a place where the land remains wild, raw, and seemingly untouched by time. Here, in Chile's remote Araucanía region, near the Argentine border, the Indigenous Mapuche-Pehuenche community is reimagining sustainable tourism. In Icalma—a sacred, mountainous land rich with Araucaria (“Monkey Puzzle”) trees and ancient glacial landscapes—locals are transforming ancestral footpaths into mountain biking trails, blending adventure with cultural preservation.

Building Trust: A unique partnership evolves



For the past ten years, Victor Abarzua has been working with the Indigenous Mapuche community to transform Icalma, a relatively remote and unknown region of Chile, into a sustainable tourism destination offering mountain biking as the primary driver. Disenchanted with city life, Victor went to Icalma to build a life rooted in nature. **In 2014, he established Icalma Lodge** and slowly began exploring the region on bike. During his rides, he befriended Don Julio, a Mapuche elder whose trust allowed Victor to map out trails along ancestral routes that were traditionally used for farming. Victor also befriended Aldo Torres, a local Mapuche environmental law student and avid mountain biker, who has now joined the initiative to responsibly develop sustainable tourism in Icalma, ensuring it aligns with the needs of worldview of the

Mapuche communities.

Riding the ancestral trails

“We immediately saw that Icalma had incredible potential for mountain biking—the landscape felt like it was made for it,” Victor said. The existing trails, many of them ancient and woven through dense Aracauria forests, open meadows, and along pristine lakeshores, offered a ready-made network that required no new environmental disruption. The terrain is naturally suited to biking: **the forests are easy to navigate**, the trails are abundant, and the unique, fast-draining soil provides excellent grip without turning to mud. This combination of diverse scenery and ideal conditions transforms each ride into a deeper experience of exploration and connection with nature.

“I love to feel the earth, listen to the sounds, and feel the tranquility of the wind as I reach the top of the mountain and marvel at the sensational views. There is an instant calmness and peace, until you go down, passing **through ancient sacred forests and views of Lake Icalma**. Then I am filled with a magical rush of adrenaline” Aldo says.

Developing sustainable tourism responsibility



The effort is more than sport—it's a movement. Tourism, if done responsibly, can bring economic opportunity, empower youth and women, and support cultural and ecological preservation. Locals like Matilde Domihual and her daughter, owners of a small Mapuche eatery called **Ruka-Mahuida** contribute by offering traditional meals made **from piñones (pine nuts from the Araucanía trees)** to riders. The initiative also benefits local children, introducing them to biking and sustainability.”

As Icalma opens to travelers, the Mapuche-Pehuenche envision a future where sustainable tourism honors and protects their sacred land. “We want visitors who come not just to ride,” says Victor, “but to connect—deeply—with the spirit of this place and the people

who've protected it for generations.”

Get inspired to go

In partnership with local communities, tour operators are offering multi-day trips/itineraries to Icalma to experience mountain biking along these sacred ancestral trails. Follow Victor and Aldo as they ride their bikes along the ancient trails and witness the magic with “**Chile Journeys**”, a **new documental of Chile Travel**.



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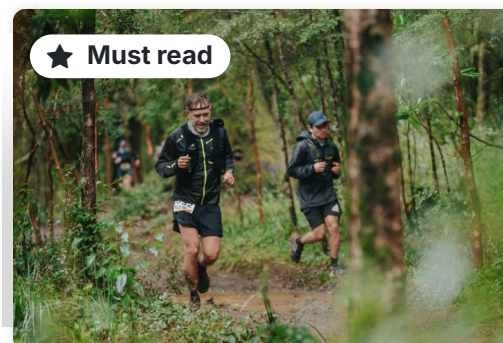


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