

A HIKE IN THE CANADIAN ROCKIES SHOULD NOT BE MISSED WHILE STAYING AT MOUNTAIN TREK IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.



PARADISE FOUND

REJUVENATE YOURSELF WITH ONE OF THIS YEAR'S
MOST REWARDING VACATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA.

BY ALISON MILLER

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ver return from a vacation only to collapse on the couch with that familiar, exhausted declaration, “I need a vacation from my vacation!”? You’re doing it wrong.

A vacation should be healing, a departure that plucks you from real life and plops you down somewhere thrilling. But like many 21st-century pursuits, leisure travel has fallen victim to hyper-efficiency. Pack it in; keep it quick; make it easy. A truly gratifying vacation—one that leaves you refreshed and inspired rather than frustrated and tired—is something different for everyone, and pulling it off requires some thoughtful engineering.

Which is why you’ll find conflicting recommendations in our getaway guide: Take it easy; challenge yourself; stay home; get lost. The binding thread between these vastly varied endeavors is this: Each requires an open mind and complete commitment.

That squishy stress ball on your desk? That’s your vacation. Hold it close. Squeeze it. Make every last drop of restorative, unforgettable vacation your own. And then keep it with you.

A rewarding vacation doesn’t have an end. It sticks around, long after you’ve deplaned, unpacked and sifted back into your routine. The experience nudges you—in some cases, kicks you—pivoting your outlook on life.

Maybe you pick up a certain culture’s custom. Or make a restaurant’s dish a staple of your own kitchen. Maybe you simply start listening to a new band you heard. Or have a conversation with your child that would have been eternally elusive in your overscheduled day-to-day life. Maybe, by traveling alone, you get to know yourself.

A satisfying vacation spurs you to think differently. It leaves you feeling renewed, emboldened and inspired. Your family and colleagues will thank you. But most of all, you’ll thank yourself.

GO ON A PILGRIMAGE.

Step one: Pick a subject. Step two: Pinpoint a spot on the map. Step three: Go hog wild.

The reward? Day in and day out, you spend your vacation doing the thing you love most—like golf. With more golf-course terrain per square mile than anywhere else in the world (nine courses over 21 square miles), the island of Bermuda makes it easy to immerse yourself in the sport. Add coastal winds, undulating terrain, and lots and lots of Bermuda grass, and you've got a thrilling destination for even the most accomplished golfer. Hole up at the south shore's **Fairmont Southampton** (rooms from \$499; Fairmont.com), and fine-tune your short game at its challenging **Turtle Hill Golf Club** (greens fees \$89), consistently ranked among the top par-3 courses in the world for its difficulty and near-contiguous coastal views. A stay at the sumptuous resort, complete with a 31,000-square-foot spa and a coveted stretch of pink-sand beach, affords you access to the island's best public and private courses.

The storied, C.B. Macdonald-designed **Mid Ocean Club** (greens fees \$250; TheMidOceanClubBermuda.com), on the island's north end, sets a lofty benchmark when it opened in 1921. Nearly a century later, it's not to be missed. Its most famous hole is the par-4 fifth, a fine specimen of Macdonald's legendary Cape hole design (a hole that plays around a large, lateral hazard such as a bunker). Back on the south shore at Robert Trent Jones Sr.'s **Port Royal Golf Course** (greens fees \$180; PortRoyalGolf.bm), home of the PGA Grand Slam from 2009 to 2014, bank on a few extra minutes for the cliffside 16th. Ocean to your left, bunkers to your right, and serious bragging rights if you sink it in three.

Also consider: Two recommended itineraries for enthusiasts of homegrown food and drink: the **Vermont Cheese Trail** (VTcheese.com), with stops at some of the country's leading artisanal cheese-makers; and the **Great NC Beer Map** (\$10; EdiaMaps.com), a recently released, old-fashioned paper compendium of all of North Carolina's 180-plus craft breweries.



RUN.

Or swim. Or bike. Or, in the case of the **Ironman Vineman** (\$800; Ironman.com), on July 30 in California's verdant Sonoma Valley, do all three in a glorious setting unmatched in the Ironman circuit. Completing this kind of physical feat—2.4 miles of swimming, 112 miles on a bike, and a full 26.2-mile marathon on your feet—would be rewarding in any location, but in serene Sonoma County, the pain mingles with a certain heart-thumping pleasure. You'll cruise past dozens of wineries and vineyards, and swim beneath towering redwoods in the Russian River. Prefer to toe in? The 70.3-mile course—half the distance of the full Ironman—is on July 10. The running portion loops around La Crema's vast estate vineyards, where scores of chardonnay and pinot noir grapes bask in the California sun. Russ Pugh, who established the event 26 years ago, says one unforeseen advantage of the race's setting is the deluge of friends and family who join athletes for wine-country downtime before and after the race.



MY BEST GETAWAY



RICH PLEETH

FOUNDER OF THE APP SUP

Christmas 2014. It was the year I created Sup (SupMeNow.com), and I had a hectic year of traveling—74 flights in all. On my own, I went kite-surfing for a week at Blue Dream Resort, in a remote part of Costa Rica. There was very limited cell service, no air conditioning and no power after 10 p.m. I met some amazing people from all over the world—an investor, people who worked for the World Bank, a cattle farmer—who were also escaping. We got up at 6 a.m. every morning and were on the water by 7. I was outside all day, and I didn't turn on my laptop for a week; nothing could be further from my usual routine.

"It's more than just the opportunity to race," he says. "It makes your trip so much more enjoyable because you can bring along the people who care about you."

Also consider: An excruciating test of strength and endurance goes best with an unforgettable view. **Active.com** is a treasure trove of organized athletic endeavors, and you can search by event type, date and location. Two with particularly breathtaking scenery: the **Honolulu Marathon** (Dec. 11; \$165 until May 27; \$205 thereafter; HonoluluMarathon.org), which skirts Oahu's southern coastline, and the **Crater Lake Century** (Aug. 20; \$75; CraterLakeCentury.com), a 100-mile bike ride around the rim of the deepest—and arguably bluest—lake in the country.

GO ALONE.

The benefits of flying solo are many, says Kristin Addis, a professional lone traveler who recounts her exploits and tips on the blog *Be My Travel Muse* and in her book *Conquering Mountains: How to Solo Travel the World Fearlessly*.

"Solo travel allows you to make your own opinions and craft your own unique experience without anyone else swaying your decisions or impacting your feelings," she says. "It also forces you to be captain of the ship, so to speak, and cultivates fearlessness and problem-solving skills. It's the perfect path to freedom."

If you're not ready for a stag trip to Malaysia or the Maldives, consider a cruise. Planning is a cinch, and cruise lines recently have been rolling out the red carpet for individuals. Norwegian Cruise Line outfitted five of its ships with studio cabins designed with singles in mind. There's even a shared living room-style space, the Studio Lounge, complete with a daily pre-dinner happy hour and a dedicated concierge for booking shore excursions. Opt for a Caribbean jaunt on the new *Norwegian Escape* (studio state-rooms from \$899 for a seven-night Caribbean cruise; NCL.com). There are two full-size basketball courts ripe for pickup games, an

VOLUNTEERS WORKING TO MAINTAIN MOUNTAIN TRAILS WITH THE AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY; OPPOSITE: THE GRAND HOTEL ON MACKINAC ISLAND

adults-only waterfall grotto, and a three-story ropes course where you can literally walk the plank: an 8-foot steel beam cantilevered over the water. How's that for self-reliance?

Also consider: **Royal Caribbean** (super studios from \$821 for a seven-night Eastern Caribbean cruise; RoyalCaribbean.com) ups the ante with “super studios” on the *Anthem of the Seas*, each with an ocean-facing, open-air balcony. For a small-ship experience, **Windstar** (from \$1,499 for a seven-night Caribbean cruise; WindstarCruises.com) and **Lindblad Expeditions** (from \$12,590 for a seven-night Caribbean cruise; Expeditions.com) cruise the Caribbean and offer discounted rates for single travelers.

GIVE BACK.

One of Georgia's majestic Golden Isles, Wassaw Island was named a National Wildlife Refuge in 1969. And for just as long, this 10,500-acre island (actually made up of three islands) marked by dunes, marshes and maritime forest has been a safe haven for loggerhead sea turtles. **The Caretta Research Project** (CarettaResearchProject.org), operating on the island since 1973, relies on volunteers who come for weeklong stints (\$750 per person) throughout the summer. Overnight accommodations are rustic—you'll bunk up with other volunteers in a frill-less, shingle-style cottage, but the reward is sweet. From sundown to sunrise during nesting season (mid-May through early August), you'll tag and measure female turtles as they arrive on the island, and then cover their nests with predator-proof screens.

MY BEST GETAWAY

MARISSA BOUCHER/THE BOVOIR DIVAS



BECK BAMBERGER

FOUNDER OF BAM COMMUNICATIONS AND BITE SAN DIEGO

One of the most magical destinations I had the honor of traveling to was Sumba, an island amid the thousands in Indonesia. Like most compelling and untouched places, Sumba is fairly difficult to get to and so is Nihiwatu, a luxury resort on the very fringe of the island with views so pristine they seem like holograms. Nihiwatu's saying “on the edge of wildness” is resoundingly fitting. Just beyond the resort, nearby villages subsist as they have for centuries in intricate thatched huts with barely any contact with the modern world. Exploring the villages with native guides was compelling—far more intriguing than many other treks I've taken into distant societies. Mostly I was struck by the profound contentment the people displayed. My guide translated one man's statement as, “You come to visit because where you're from is not this magical.” And it was true.



MIKE PITTSKY



AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY

“As soon as they start laying eggs, they fall into a trance,” says project director Kristina Williams. “That's when we go to work. Each volunteer has an important job—count eggs, check tags, measure the turtle's shell.” Hatching season runs late July through September. Volunteers check nests at dusk and again at dawn, and a lucky few glimpse a parade of tiny turtles making their way to sea. Data shows the project's efforts are working. Since 1973, the Caretta Project has kept watch on more than 3,698 nests and successfully ushered more than 263,045 hatchlings to sea.

Also consider: The **American Hiking Society** offers weeklong volunteer vacations in 26 states (\$325 per person for nonmembers; AmericanHiking.org). Trips range from easy (low-impact day hiking with overnights in a cabin) to strenuous (backpacking with all your own gear). All involve trail creation or maintenance on public lands. “It's a great excuse to go to a part of the country you wouldn't have thought of visiting before,” says Libby Wile, senior director of volunteer stewardship. “The most rewarding part of the trip happens at the end of the week, when you look back and see the work you've done and know that it's going to be enjoyed by others for years to come.”

REUNITE.

There's a reason families return to Mackinac Island's **Grand Hotel** (from \$304 per person per night, including meals; GrandHotel.com) year after year, generation after generation. For one, the welcoming staff, who are known to greet repeat guests with an earnest “Welcome



home.” Many, like vice president of hospitality and maître d’ Ken Salmon, have been there for decades. Then there are the rocking chairs lining a porch nearly the length of two football fields. (Bonus: It looks out on the waterway connecting Lake Michigan and Lake Huron.) The hotel’s location, on an idyllic island where fudge shops proliferate and cars aren’t allowed, adds to the paradisiacal effect. If the elusive, all-American vacation—you know, “the way it used to be”—is a recurring theme of your dreams, this is your spot. Many of the leisurely pursuits haven’t changed since the hotel’s opening in 1887 (what better way to lure your teenager from his smartphone than with an old-fashioned game of croquet?), and an air of refinement abounds. Afternoon tea is still served in the parlor, complete with finger sandwiches, scones and chamber music. In the evenings, a concert pianist tickles the ivories as guests convene for cocktails. With three new fourth-floor suites and a lengthened season (last year the summer-only hotel remained open through Halloween weekend for the first time in its history), there’s no better time to go.

Also consider: Prefer a more cloistered retreat? The **Ranch at Emerald Valley** (doubles from \$800, all-inclusive; Broadmoor.com) is a new addition to the expansive Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, but situated eight miles into Pike National Forest, it feels worlds away. This fully staffed retreat of one-, two- and three-bedroom cabins offers privacy and luxury, with the added benefit of being a short ride from one of Colorado’s most famous historic hotels and its swanky spa and golf course. Reserve one cabin or rent them all.

You’ll be whisked to the plush hideaway via a Cadillac Escalade and spend your days horseback riding, fly fishing and hiking. Meals are served in the handsome communal lodge, and cocktail hour happens every afternoon around the outdoor fire pit—perfect for meeting new people.

SLEEP.

Imagine being exposed to absolutely no artificial light for a week. That’s exactly the decree eight participants of a 2013 University of Colorado at Boulder study were given. After it was all said and done, the subjects had synchronized their internal clocks to the solar day and were sleeping more soundly and waking with more energy. So how does one restore a circadian rhythm confused by a constant barrage of lightbulbs and screen glow? Camp—and limit your light to natural sources (that’s sun, moon and fire to nature neophytes). Use **Recreation.gov** to find a campground—the farther away from a city the better. For extra-dark skies, the **International Dark Sky Association’s** website (DarkSky.org) will steer you to especially dark nighttime locales. In the absence of artificial light for a couple of days, you’ll find yourself retiring earlier and waking up well-rested—a result of normalized melatonin levels. And if the thought of sleeping in a tent is enough to keep you up all night, bunk up in a cabin, but commit to candlelight only.

Also consider: Put yourself up in a luxe hotel and schedule a spa treatment for the evening hours. Some hotels have even created



treatments geared toward getting restful sleep. The elegant **Scarlet Huntington** in San Francisco (from \$479; TheScarletHotels.com) offers evening in-room massages (from \$212) with calming aromatherapy oils, and Colorado's **Allegría Spa at the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek** (from \$199; BeaverCreek.Hyatt.com) offers a Slumber Massage (from \$225): Sidle up to the table and allow your therapist to send you to repose with Swedish massage, warm lavender compresses, hot stones and a ZZZs-inducing sound track.

STAY HOME.

Ever been to a baseball game at your home field? Spent an afternoon in a faraway corner of the city? Playing tourist in your own town can be eye-opening, restorative and affordable—even if you opt to spend the night in a hotel (which we recommend, for maximum reward).

“No place is ever fully explored, discovered or understood,” says Matt Kepnes, creator of the travel blog *Nomadic Matt* and author of *How to Travel the World on \$50 a Day*. “There are always cultural quirks to understand and new dirt to set foot on.” Kepnes, who has visited more than 80 countries in the past 10 years, has several tips for getting the most out of your staycation. Start by adopting a tourist’s mentality. “Coming back home after traveling isn’t easy,” he says. “The excitement of traveling fades and you go

back to normal life. Thus, making a conscious effort to continue exploring will make that stay at home much more fun, just like it is on the road.” Another trick? Take a class. “Learning something new immediately takes you into a different and excited state of mind. It also gives you the opportunity to meet people you probably wouldn’t otherwise meet, and gain a different perspective.” An additional benefit for locals in their own hometown? “When you live in a place, you aren’t restricted to doing fun things only on the weekends,” explains Kepnes, whose quasi-home bases are in Austin, Texas, and New York City. “Depending on the activity, you may be able to join in during off-peak times and get discounted rates.”

Also consider: Sites such as Airbnb.com and HomeExchange.com make living like a local possible all over the map. Without time-sucking household distractions—laundry, cleaning, lawn-mowing, and the like—you’ll be able to experience a relaxing weekend in the comforts of (someone else’s) home.

GET LOST.

It’s bigger than the state of Rhode Island, and the nearest airport is 235 miles away. Cellphone signals are sparse—Wi-Fi nearly nil. Visitors to West Texas’ **Big Bend National Park** (\$25 for a seven-day pass; NPS.gov/Bibe) are few—314,000 annually compared to

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CANOEING THROUGH BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK, CONGAREE NATIONAL PARK, GUESTS ENJOYING THE VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES AT RANCHO LA PUERTA



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LYNN HARTY PHOTOGRAPHY



RANCHO LA PUERTA

the Great Smoky Mountains' 10 million. These facts promise a boon for any, maxed-out, talked-out, searcher of solitude. Here you can disappear, unplug and hear the sounds of silence. For most of the year, the desert landscape is dry, hot and harsh, but spring means the low-lying, thick-skinned creosote, agave and cactuses are joined by delicate flowers, softening the landscape with splashes of yellow, white and purple. To wrap your head around its enormity, think about the park in three distinct environs: mountain, desert and river. If you prefer your isolation with some serious physical exertion, hike the 14-mile South Rim Trail from end to end. Up here, desert flora gives way to fir, cypress and staggering views of Mexico's barren Chihuahua Desert. Back on lower ground, sign up for a float trip through the Santa Elena Canyon—its limestone walls rise up to 1,500 feet above the Rio Grande.

Cap your visit with a trek to The Window, in the center of the park. This downhill hike commences at a rock chasm, slickened by eons of rainfall and snowmelt. Go at sunset and peer out over the grand, unfettered desert below.

Also consider: Set in the forested floodplain of the Congaree and Wateree Rivers 115 miles inland from Charleston, South Carolina, **Congaree National Park** (free; NPS.gov/Cong) is best explored by kayak or canoe. The Cedar Creek Canoe Trail weaves 15 miles

through primeval forest draped in Spanish moss. Don't forget to look up: Many of the park's inhabitants dwell in the towering trees—some of the tallest east of the Mississippi. The birdsong, spliced with the sound of your paddle gliding through the water, is serenity as you've never heard it before.

GET WELL.

The revered **Rancho La Puerta** (from \$3,400 for a weeklong stay, all-inclusive; RanchoLaPuerta.com) resort an hour south of San Diego in Tecate, Mexico, (an hour south of San Diego) was created in 1940. All 83 rooms are luxurious freestanding casitas set in a valley beneath 3,885-foot Mount Kuchumaa. Think of it as an idyllic, wellness-focused village—one where hammocks are strung between trees and a six-acre organic farm feeds the residents. Expect a mix of communal activities, personal reflection and recovery time. You'll plan your weeklong stay from a robust roster of activities ranging from low-impact fitness classes like balance and coordination to heart-rate-boosting endeavors like cardio drumming. One course you won't want to miss: Taking the Ranch Home. You'll learn specific, goal-oriented practices to boost your well-being long after your vacation is over. Need proof that whole-body wellness offers lasting rewards? Ninety-four-year-old Deborah Szekely, who co-founded



DAVID R. GLUNS



JENNY KIRCHNER PHOTOGRAPHY



JOHN C. CAMPBELL FOLK SCHOOL



JOHN C. CAMPBELL FOLK SCHOOL

the ranch with her husband 76 years ago, delivers her weekly lecture “Aging by Choice.” Pencil it in.

Also consider: Hiking is paramount at **Mountain Trek** (\$4,800 for a weeklong stay, all-inclusive; MountainTrek.com) in Nelson, British Columbia. A stately lodge overlooking Kootenay Lake is your respite for the week. Days are spent doing yoga; eating the healthiest, freshest, most nourishing food you’ve ever had; and, of course, hiking—all while breathing the kind of clean mountain air that can be had only in the Canadian Rockies. Fitness classes, health seminars, spa treatments and soaks in the natural mineral pool complete the weeklong health program here. The goal? Go home detoxed, rejuvenated, and a few pounds lighter, armed with the know-how and willpower to keep it that way.

LEARN SOMETHING.

Tucked among the pines and cedars a mile high in California’s San Jacinto Mountains, **Idyllwild Arts** (from \$175 for one-day workshops; from \$250 for weekend workshops; from \$725 for weeklong workshops; IdyllwildArts.org) is a beacon of immersive, arts-focused learning. A

boarding school for high-schoolers from September to May, it opens to the public in the summer (June 19 to Aug. 14), offering courses in everything from metalwork and jewelry-making to Native American arts like Cahuilla basketry. Your typical day goes something like this: four hours in a small, instructor-led class followed by a cafeteria lunch and studio time (instructors often stick around so you can nab one-on-one time). In the evenings, take in an art show, lecture or performance in the new concert hall, complete with kiln-dried beams meant to mimic the surrounding terrain. All the while you’ll be surrounded by people wholly dedicated to their craft and to Idyllwild.

“We find the absolute best teachers available in the field,” says program director Mark Davis. “They’re motivated to be here because they have a special draw to Idyllwild, because it’s important to them.” This year, write poetry under the tutelage of Los Angeles’ poet laureate, craft a rug with a fifth-generation Navajo weaver, or learn visual storytelling tactics from an illustrator whose clients include *Mad* magazine and Disney.

“There’s a community here that spurs you to think differently, and that feeds into whatever you do as a profession, whether you’re

COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: HIKERS AT MOUNTAIN TREK, PERFORMERS AT IDYLLWILD ARTS, VARIOUS COURSES OFFERED AT CAMPBELL FOLK SCHOOL

MY BEST GETAWAY



VINCENZO VILLAMENA FOUNDER, ONLINETAXMAN.COM

The most rewarding vacations have been those in which I've been able to truly disconnect from the world. There have been two places—Bolivia and Burma—where I've really been able to do that. In Bolivia I climbed mountains, trekked the salt flats, set off dynamite in a gold mine, swam with dolphins and fished for piranha in the rainforest. In Burma I trekked through mountains and villages and slept in Buddhist temples, learning the art of meditation. On both of these vacations I immersed myself in a completely different culture and entered an element that's the exact opposite of what I'm used to. I connected with locals and understand not only their customs and traditions, but also their struggles. I also connected with myself.



JOHN C. CAMPBELL FOLK SCHOOL

in the arts or not," Davis adds. Got kids? Sign up for Family Camp (from \$2,735, all-inclusive; June 25 to July 1). While the little ones (as young as 3) are dancing, drawing and crafting ceramic sculptures, you can immerse yourself in gourd basketry, encaustic painting or Japanese cloth-dying. You'll reconvene for meals and nighttime activities such as a talent show. Families stay on site in dorms, but adults traveling without kids have the option to venture off campus: Idyllwild—an unincorporated town with a golden retriever, Maximus Mighty-Dog Mueller II, for its mayor—brims with charming inns and cabins, many within walking or biking distance of campus.

Also consider: Two hours north of Atlanta in the Chattahoochee National Forest, a longstanding institution called the **John C. Campbell Folk School** (weekend courses from \$334; weeklong courses from \$532; FolkSchool.org) ensures endangered crafts like basketry, blacksmithing and scrimshaw are never lost. Weekend and weeklong classes are offered year-round, for adults only. ♦

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