

Spring Break: Adult Edition

College kids have it right. Warmer, longer days offer unique opportunities for adventure, relaxation, or both. BY KIERA AARON



YOUR BODY IS THIRSTY FOR EXCITEMENT. UNLESS you spent your winter on the slopes or in the Southern Hemisphere, the cold, dark days of January and February have lulled you into hibernation mode—and you probably haven't been feeling like your usual upbeat self lately.

"Most people experience at least one symptom of seasonal depression in the winter," says Alfred Lewy, M.D., Ph.D., a researcher at Oregon Health & Science University who studies circadian rhythms. "Even if you're not feeling noticeably low, you're craving more carbs, your sex drive is down, and you're more lethargic."

But spring brings hormonal shifts and the chance to reinvent yourself. How? By using those vacation days to get the hell out of town.

College students do this every year by flooding the beaches of Panama City and Cancún. And what they want really isn't much different from what you're after: camaraderie with new people, wild sex in a new place far from the mundane hassles of home, and amazing stories to share (or hide?) upon your return.

Chasing these sorts of novel experiences beyond graduation may also help strengthen your brain. "Exploring new environments releases dopamine, which drives learning and may slow aging," says Nico Bunzeck, Ph.D., a neuroscientist at the University of Hamburg, Germany. One of Bunzeck's studies used MRIs to demonstrate that simply *looking* at pictures of new places and people can spike activation in the brain's pleasure and cognition zones. And with new places, you're forced to process new experiences and sample new foods. "That activates neurons in your brain's reward centers, stimulating gray matter," says Susan Krauss Whitbourne, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at UMass Amherst. Over time, this can improve your memory and may reduce your risk of Alzheimer's. It's like a cognitive workout.

Of course, you don't really need an excuse to go on spring break, do you? We spoke to travel experts, coastal researchers, and outdoor adventurers to find the five best trips for men. Book your travel now and you'll be primed to enter summer with a renewed sense of inspiration and purpose—hangover not required.



1

COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE, OR Tame the Rapids

Mt. Hood, a dormant volcano about 60 miles east of Portland, is well known for its year-round skiing and 900 or so miles of hiking trails. About 40 miles north of that lies the gorge, an 80-mile wind tunnel cut by the Columbia River. "Temperature differences from sea to land funnel air through, creating consistent winds that are perfect for kiteboarding and windsurfing," says Jon Miles, Ph.D., an associate professor of coastal engineering at Plymouth University.

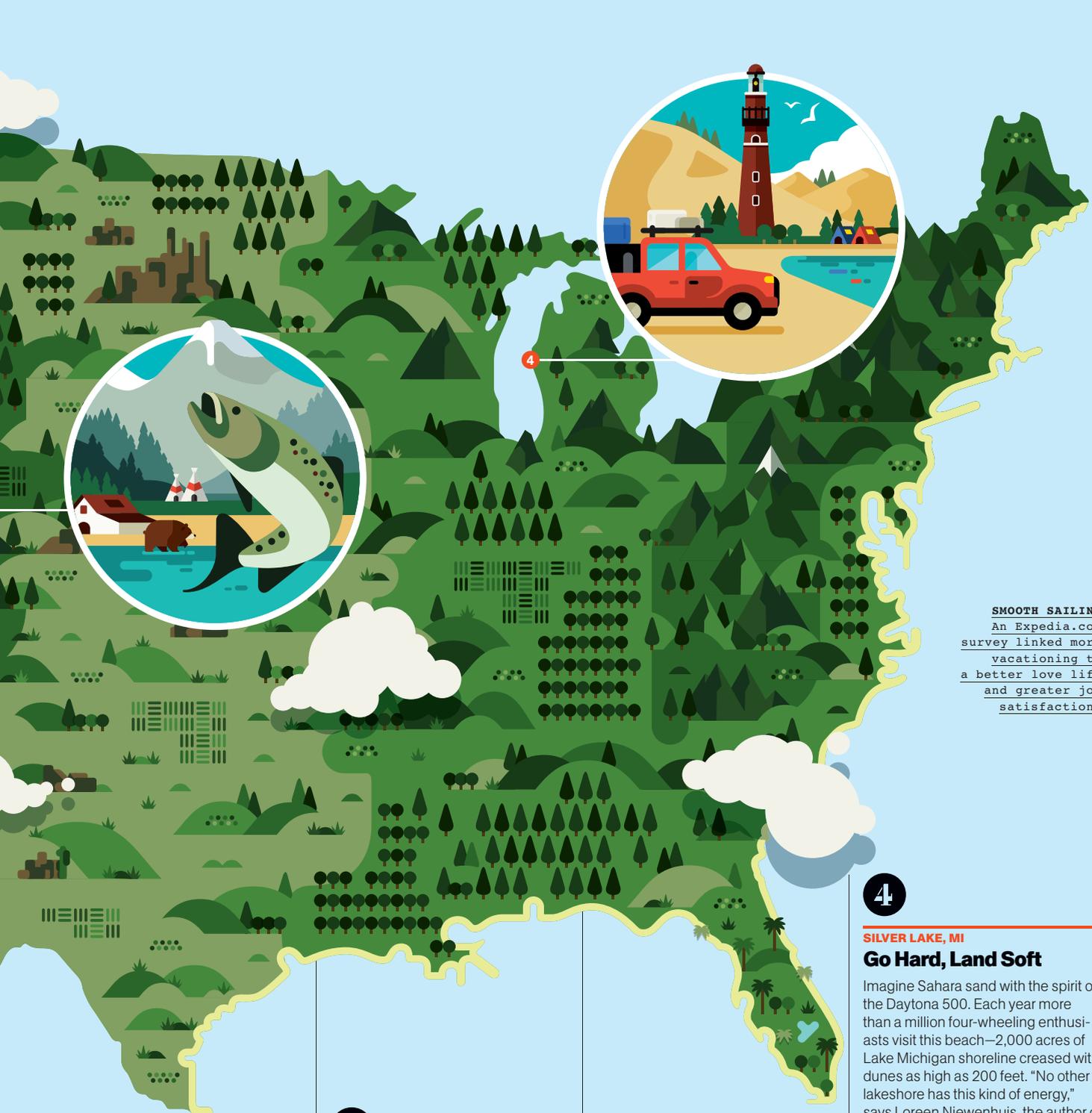
YOUR PLAN Rent a bike and ride the 27-mile round-trip along the Historic Columbia River Highway to the Rowena Crest. For water sports, you can rent kiteboards, windsurfing gear, stand-up paddleboards, and wetsuits at Big Winds (bigwinds.com). And check out the whitewater rafting, which can be thrilling when water levels are higher in April, says Temira Wagonfeld, a local wind forecaster and founder of the website *The Gorge Is My Gym*. "It's the perfect time to catch the class V rapids on the finicky Wind River," she says.

INSIDER TIP Play hard, drink local: Pacific Northwest vineyards make amazing wine, and Oregon is second in the nation for both hops production and craft brewers per capita. Enjoy a rotating menu of experimental beers and, according to Wagonfeld, the state's best thin-crust pizza at Double Mountain Brewery & Taproom.

2

CHANNEL ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK, CA Explore Like Darwin

Some call it the Galapagos of North America, and for good reason. On your hourlong boat ride off the California coast from Ventura to Santa Cruz Island, pelicans fly overhead, dolphins trail behind, and whales flip their fins in the distance. On the island, you'll find 60 unique species of plants and animals and some of the best ocean cave kayaking in the world. "Ducking into some of the narrow caves can be challenging, but seeing the cathedral-like interiors is worth it," says Ken McAlpine, author of *Islands Apart: A Year on the Edge of Civilization*.



SMOOTH SAILING
An Expedia.com survey linked more vacationing to a better love life and greater job satisfaction.

YOUR PLAN Stake a tent at Scorpion Anchorage, on the eastern point of Santa Cruz. (You won't find hotels—this is a national park, after all.) Book your transportation and a camping-kayaking package with Santa Barbara Adventure Company (sbadventureco.com), and then paddle to your heart's content through hundreds of quiet caves. Don't miss the Painted Cave—it's nearly a quarter mile long.

INSIDER TIP Check out a few of the small, more remote islands, such as San Miguel, says McAlpine. "You could be the only campers on the island, except for thousands—yes, thousands—of seals," he says.

3

DOLORES, CO
Relax and De-Stress

Where a 19th-century mining town once stood, you'll now find the rustic all-inclusive resort of Dunton Hot Springs (duntonhotsprings.com). It's built around a dozen log cabins nestled among 14,000-foot peaks, with four natural springs pumping out water ranging from 85° to 106°F.

YOUR PLAN After your morning soak, go out and explore the Rockies on horseback, take a half-day mountaineering class, or hone your fly-casting skills. "The West Fork of the Dolores River is home to five kinds of trout, and

this spot is one of the most beautiful private fishing areas in Colorado," says Mike Weist, a fishing guide at the adventure company Telluride Outside. Dunton's three-day "Sip & Soak" package (starting at \$2,625) includes all your meals and unlimited wine produced at Sutcliffe Vineyards, the resort's partner. After you leave, they'll ship you 12 bottles over the next year.

INSIDER TIP Telluride, the town known for its scenic skiing, river rafting, rock climbing, hiking, and mountain biking, is just 65 miles from Dolores. So tack on a couple of extra nights to your vacation. Go in March and you'll be there toward the end of the ski season.

4

SILVER LAKE, MI
Go Hard, Land Soft

Imagine Sahara sand with the spirit of the Daytona 500. Each year more than a million four-wheeling enthusiasts visit this beach—2,000 acres of Lake Michigan shoreline creased with dunes as high as 200 feet. "No other lakeshore has this kind of energy," says Loreen Niewenhuis, the author of *A 1,000-Mile Great Lakes Walk*.

YOUR PLAN Rent a jeep for the family, a dune buggy for you and a buddy, or a quad for solo riding (parrotslanding.com). Then hit the shore, where you can crest dunes at up to 50 miles an hour and come down on pillow soft sand. Afterward, relax on the beach or head back to camp to swap stories around the fire. The dunes open for the season on April 1, so book now.

INSIDER TIP Be sure to pack a tow strap before you go, says Jim Martino, a Chicago native who rides the dunes weekly during the summer months. When you get stuck in the sand—and you will—you can just flag down another rider and ask for a pullout.

5

THE FLORIDA KEYS

Have It All—All Day and Night

The more than 1,000 islands and 42 bridges of the Keys begin about an hour south of the peninsula and are set in some of the clearest water in the continental United States. But don't mistake them for the more juvenile spring break destinations up north: Instead of passing out on a beach towel, you can snorkel in one of the world's largest barrier reef systems or board a fishing boat to land mahi mahi, sailfish, and tarpon. Many local restaurants will even cook your catch, depending on the species. Be sure to hit these three spots.

Best for Great Diving

A KEY LARGO

This key divides Florida Bay from the ocean, providing great conditions for coral growth, says marine biologist Martha Loizeaux, cofounder of the tour company EcoKeys. Find a dive center at fla-keys.com, get scuba-certified, and then swim among shipwrecks and coral with dolphins and 500 species of fish.

INSIDER TIP Save time on scuba lessons: Take an online course before you go. Register at padi.com.

Best for Rowdy Nightlife

B KEY WEST

A beautiful drive from Key Largo, Key West is the cultural hub of the chain. Live music pumps out of most bars, and thanks to Cuban immigrants and their descendants, you'll eat some of the best shredded beef on the planet. Go May 7 to 11 to take in the Key West Songwriter's Festival.

INSIDER TIP End a night at proud-to-be-diver Green Parrot bar and you'll find yourself dancing with the island's wildest crowd.

Best for Dodging the Crowds

C THE DRY TORTUGAS

Take a two-plus-hour ferry from Key West (\$165, yankeefreedom.com) and visit Fort Jefferson, a Civil War military prison. Then snorkel the shallow water for clear views of tropical fish, coral, and shipwrecks.

INSIDER TIP Skip the last ferry back and camp near the pristine white beach. "Once the day-tripping tourists disembark, it's truly a deserted island," says James Branaman, a Florida photojournalist.



THE BEST SEX OF YOUR LIFE

Sixty-nine percent of women and 72 percent of men say sex is better on vacation, according to a survey by the dating site Zoosk. Here's how to up the erotic ante while you're away from home.

IF YOU'RE SINGLE...

See that table of women? Some kind of reunion? Ignore them. Women are least likely to be open to a casual thing when they're in groups, notes a study in *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. Instead, look for a woman traveling either alone or with one other friend, and ask if you can buy her (or them) a drink. And consider wearing a red shirt: The color may make you more attractive to her, a University of Rochester study found.

IF YOU'RE A COUPLE...

There's no better time to try something new—like role-playing or light bondage. "People are typically more relaxed and sexually open on vacation," says Kristen Mark, Ph.D., a sex and relationship researcher at the University of Kentucky. Worried she won't be into your fantasy? Tell her you had a dream about it and gauge her reply. "If the reaction is positive, you can transition into how to make it happen," Mark says.

IF THE KIDS ARE ALONG...

Think you'll find a moment to sneak off for some time alone? It'll never happen... unless you make a dedicated effort. "You really need to make sex a top priority," says Mark. If the kids are old enough to have their own room, it's worth shelling out for. If they're not, seek out a resort that offers onsite child care (ask before you book), or create a profile at care.com to find a local babysitter based on user reviews.

Illustrations by LEUO; Pascal Chevallier/theicnsimgproject.com (opening page photo), Fuse/Getty Images (couple)