

*This holiday season,
get off the couch and
out into the world.
Rather than must-have
toys and tech gear,
Spirit handpicked 32
action-filled trips that
will take you from the
snow-covered peaks
of Park City, Utah,
to the tale-tinged pubs
of New York City.*

EXPERIENCE GIFTS

Ready, set, wish!

SAILING

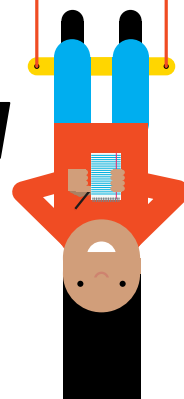
SCALE THE BAY

Berkeley, California-based OCSC Sailing provides all manner of maritime education, but its Basic Keelboat class is ideal for windjammer wannabes without a clue. Master the sport over five days or two consecutive weekends. On day one you'll be at the helm of a 24-footer; by the next afternoon you'll be commanding your crew to *Jibe ho!* The fog lifts from the San Francisco Bay in the winter months, making it an apt time to test the waters, which will host the 34th annual America's Cup catamaran race in 2013. \$995; ocsc.com

TRAPEZE FLYING

SWING HIGH

With locations in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, D.C., Trapeze School New York has helped thousands of aspiring acrobats catch air since its establishment in 2002. Most classes are open-level, meaning you don't have to have had a stint with Cirque du Soleil to try it, and participants learn everything from trapeze lingo to airborne knee-hangs and splits. You'll even practice falling with grace, a skill that will prove invaluable for beginners. From \$47; trapezeschool.com



SNOW HIKING

SCHUSS IT OUT

1 Sun Valley Trekking

This outfitter offers guided trips to each of its six cozy huts, set deep in the Sawtooth, Smoky, and Pioneer Mountains of central Idaho. Following a one- to six-mile trek in touring skis, you'll arrive at your destination, either a walled tent or Mongolian-style yurt. Creature comforts are few (gas lanterns for light, wood stoves for heat), but after a day of carving through untouched powder on the incredible mountain inclines just beyond your

digs, the wood-fired hot tub or sauna will be just the pampering you need. Guided trips from \$160 per person per day; svtrek.com

2 Appalachian Mountain Club

AMC, the country's oldest organization devoted to outdoor recreation and conservation, operates eight huts (three of them in all four seasons) along the Appalachian Trail in New Hampshire's White Mountains. Lonesome Lake Hut, which sleeps 48 in two bunkhouses, is

ideal for beginners, thanks to an easy 1.5-hour snowshoe hike. Zealand Falls Hut, a moderate 6.5-mile trek, is flanked by vast expanses of coveted cross-country skiing terrain. It's also a top spot for moose-watching. From \$44 per person per night; outdoors.org

3 Mount Tahoma Trails Association

This volunteer-run nonprofit maintains two huts and a yurt in the coniferous Tahoma and Elbe Hills State Forests of Washington. Beginners can traipse with ease to the Copper Creek Hut, while die-hard explorers will beeline for the High Hut. At an altitude of 4,760 feet, it offers an uninterrupted view of Mount Rainier and picture windows for fireside gazing. There's no overnight rate—simply pay the \$15 per person per night reservation fee online or at Whittaker Mountaineering in Ashford, Washington. skimtta.org

STARGAZING

Look Up!

Situated high in Arizona's Sonoran Desert, the cushy Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North (from \$199 per night; fourseasons.com) makes an ideal post from which to study the night sky. In addition to a telescope provided in every suite, the resort employs a professional astronomer to lead stargazing sessions. However, to get a true sky watcher's eyes to sparkle, head to Kitt Peak National Observatory (\$48 per person; noao.edu/kpno), 56 miles west of Tucson, where you can take advantage of the world's largest collections of optical telescopes in a spot known for its lack of light pollution.



DRIVE TIME
OCSC Sailing runs
the country's largest
single-location
sailing school, where
beginners learn
the ropes on the
San Francisco Bay.



CENTURIES TOLD

Conner Prairie, a living-history museum 20 miles northeast of Indianapolis, offers an interactive look at life in the 1800s.



LEARNING

TRAVEL IN TIME

Live history in the heart of America at Conner Prairie in Fishers, Indiana (*adults, \$14; kids, \$9; connerprairie.org*). On the first three Saturdays of December, visitors can ramble through an “1836 village” in which residents are eagerly preparing for a celebration, and then join “the Ullmans” for the lighting of the menorah or crash “the Campbells” Christmas party. Back in Virginia, Colonial Williamsburg (*adults, \$38; kids 6–17, \$19; under 6, free; colonialwilliamsburg.com*) also amps up for the holidays, with 30-plus new activities including the Italian-inspired Feast of the Seven Fish. *Some experiences cost extra.*

ZIP-LINING

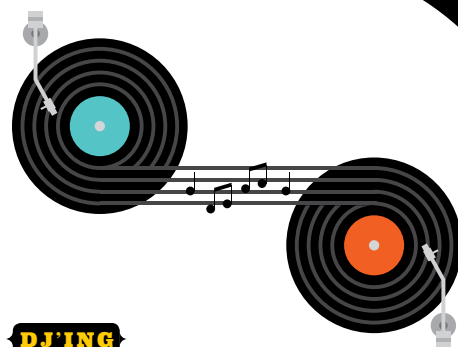
SAY “1, 2, WHEE!”

1 Bretton Woods As part of an ongoing \$60 million expansion, New Hampshire’s largest ski area recently put the finishing touches on a thrilling new addition: New England’s longest zip line canopy tour. With 4,600 feet of line connecting a series of treetop posts and suspension bridges, the course, which takes 3½ hours to complete, includes factoids about local flora and fauna from a seasoned guide and culminates with a scream-worthy whiz down the Williwaw Racing Zip, a side-by-side line that conveniently lands you at the base area for skiing. *\$110; brettonwoods.com*

2 Mega Cavern This man-made behemoth in Louisville, Kentucky, began as a limestone quarry in the 1930s. These days, it’s a prime locale for daredevil spelunkers eager to work their way through five zip lines and three challenge bridges. Careening through a dark cavern at the world’s only underground zip line tour? Not bad for bragging rights. *From \$59; louisville megacavern.com*

3 The Canyons Alpine-inclined adrenaline junkies, rejoice! This Park City, Utah, ski resort just opened two new zip tours. One is an intermediate adventure

that hurtles you through the rugged Red Pine area. The second, more advanced version flies you across the canyon between Lookout Peak and Red Pine Lodge, an expanse of more than 2,000 feet. *From \$20; thecanyons.com*

**DJ'ING**

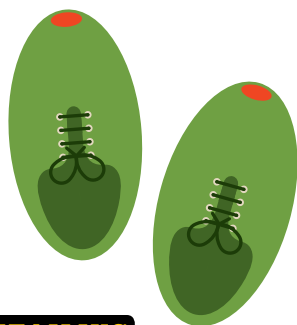
BREAK BEATS

The youngster in your life getting bored with piano? Mix it up a bit! Scratch DJ Academy, co-created by the late Jam Master Jay of Run-DMC, offers budding maestros of the wheels of steel the chance to spin with the industry’s best. The six-week DJ 101 youth course, available in Los Angeles, Miami, and New York, serves as an introduction to mash-tastic fundamentals like music theory, mixing, and song structure. For an hour and 40 minutes each week (plus, up to six additional hours of supervised lab time), students learn skills via hands-on lectures, group activities, and performances. You don’t have to bring a thing (except enthusiasm for beats, of course), and all genres are encouraged. That means you, Mini Moby. *\$350; scratch.com*

SNOWBOARDING

Shred Like a Pro

The X-Games-obsessed will go gaga at Burton Snowboard Academy, located at Truckee, California’s Northstar-at-Tahoe ski resort. Unlike many winter sports schools, here there’s a four-person-per-class max, and instructors guarantee that every participant will be crisscrossing down the slopes (or “linking turns” in snowboarder-speak) by day’s end. Extra motivation to do so? For the 2011/2012 season, this resort will serve as Olympic snowboarder Shaun White’s primary training ground. *Pricing available in early November at burtonsnowboardacademy.com.*



COCKTAILING

SIP AND STROLL

New Orleans overflows with palatable pleasures, so it's no surprise that one of the city's finest tours is based on historical imbibing. "The Sazerac was created by a French apothecary named Antoine Peychaud, who also created Peychaud's Bitters," explains Joe Gendusa, lead guide of the Gray Line Original New Orleans Cocktail Tour. The once-daily walk includes at least four storied stops in the French Quarter. Among them: Muriel's, home of the Champagne-based Fleur-de-Lis martini; Arnaud's French 75 Bar, where legendary barman Chris Hannah slings supreme; and the rotating Carousel Bar inside the 125-year old Hotel Monteleone. \$27; graylineneworleans.com

COOKING

SHARPEN YOUR SKILLS

1 Blue Chair Fruit
Before opening her artisanal marmalade and jam company in Oakland, California, in 2008, Rachel Saunders spent ten years studying the craft. Now a national jamming authority and author of *The Blue Chair Jam Cookbook*, Rachel also leads four-hour workshops in which students learn how to coax the best flavor and texture out of local produce using simple, old-school tactics. Along with four jars of the (preserved) fruits of your labor, you'll leave with the knowledge to keep jamming long after class is done. \$195; bluechairfruit.com

chile sauce. Amateurs will revel in courses like Salsa, Tacos, and Chile Amor, while the three-day Boot Camp, which includes knife skills and flavor labs, will captivate even the most discriminating kitchen zealot. From \$50; santafeschoolofcooking.com

3 Mozzarella Company
When Paula Lambert opened her cheese factory in 1982, she was one of only a handful of artisan cheese-makers in the

country. Still running the show from the same Dallas digs, she now teaches the public how to prepare her famous mozzarella, which has acquired a national following. Students roll up their sleeves and plunge hands—first into the craft, shaping fresh curd into *bocconcini* and mozzarella rolls, and whipping up fresh ricotta on the spot. Classes also include a behind-the-scenes tour of the facility and a wine-paired tasting of other cheeses made on-site. \$75; mozzco.com

2 Santa Fe School of Cooking
A forerunner of culinary education, this 22-year-old cooking school has two James Beard Award-winning chefs on its faculty and a lengthy lineup of classes that teach everything from how to make basic blue corn tortillas to how to prepare modern Southwestern cuisine like poblano Madeira

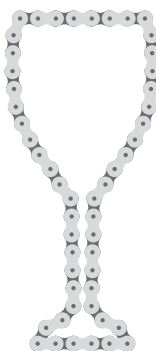
CAKE DECORATING

Garnish With Grace

Welcome to a world where flawless fondant, edible adornments, and silken buttercream frosting are no longer the exclusive domain of nitpicky bakers. With a class at Bethesda, Maryland's Fancy Cakes by Leslie, you'll quickly learn the skills of artful cake-making alongside owner Leslie Poyourow, who has created complex confections for everyone from J. Lo to Pope Benedict XVI. Perfection takes practice, of course, but this session is a darn good start. From \$95; fancycakesbyleslie.com

WINE TASTING

CYCLE WITH A SOMMELIER



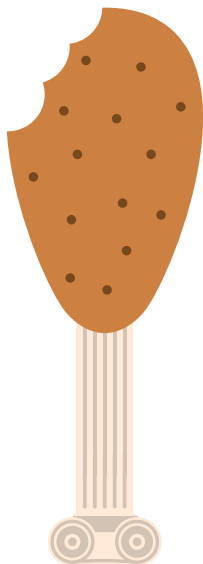
For the oenophile in your life with two-wheeled tendencies, this pedal-powered sojourn through California wine country is the ultimate amusement. Choose a valley (Dry Creek, Russian River, Santa Ynez, Napa, or Sonoma) and a duration (day trip or weekend getaway), and let Gears and Grapes do the rest. A staff sommelier accompanies every group, and there's an ever-present support van to carry your spoils. Day trips \$269 per person; weekend trips from \$1,195 per person; gearsandgrapes.com



PRO BOWL
Aspiring jam
masters learn
from the skilled
hands of Rachel
Saunders (shown
here), founder of
Blue Chair Fruit.



HANDPRINT
They crank out
some beautiful work
at the Minnesota
Center for Book Arts.

FEASTING**TASTE HISTORY**

Explore Pliny the Elder's ancient Rome, Francisco de Goya's 18th-century Spain, or Miguel Covarrubias' early 20th-century Cuba—then feast as these historical heavyweights did. It's all possible on the Art Bites tour, available in seven cities, including Austin, Nashville, and Boston, in which Maite Gomez-Rejón, pedigreed museum educator and French

Culinary Institute-trained chef, leads a museum walk and then follows it up with a hands-on period dinner. You might learn, for example, what Alexander the Great likely sampled during his conquest of Asia Minor before you head to the kitchen to prepare Turkish leek-and-feta fritters, Persian lamb meatballs, and Egyptian semolina cakes. Says Gomez-Rejón, "It starts out a class but ends up a party." *From \$55; artbites.net*

TOURING**GET LITERAL****1 Tennessee Williams Walking Tour**

Trace the footsteps of one of America's most prolific and profound playwrights in the city where he once lived and which inspired *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Organized by retired University of New Orleans professor Kenneth Holditch and led by dynamic local expert Inez Douglas, each two-hour tour winds through New Orleans' French Quarter, stopping at Tennessee Williams' favorite bars and restaurants, as well as the places he lived and wrote about. *\$20 per person (three-person minimum per group); 504-451-1082*

2 Greenwich Village Literary Pub Crawl

Belly up to the bar as local actors regale you with personal tales of literary greats such as Dylan Thomas, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Jack

Kerouac, and James Baldwin on this three-hour New York City jaunt, held every Saturday at 2 p.m. The journey begins at the White Horse Tavern, a watering hole once frequented by Kerouac and Thomas (who, according to legend, drank himself to death there) and continues to other ripe establishments frequented by the city's illustrious creative elite. *\$20; bakerloo.org*

3 The Dashiell Hammett Tour

Clad in a trench coat and snap-brim hat, Don Herron invites you to immerse yourself in the mysterious world created by pulp-crime novelist Dashiell Hammett. Herron, in business in San Francisco since 1977, leads you to the sights, sounds, and smells the author chronicled in his celebrated detective novel *The Maltese Falcon*, including the apartment in which he wrote it. *\$10; donherron.com*

CRAFTING

Book It Bibliophiles fretting over the printed page's slow demise will rejoice at this novel gift idea. The Minnesota Center for Book Arts in Minneapolis offers an inspiring lineup of classes covering all things fit to print, bind, or press. In workshops ranging from three to 18 hours (spread over evenings or a weekend), learn how to transform your garden clippings into delicate, translucent paper; bind a handmade journal with the quirky "caterpillar stitch"; or create a 3-D reading experience using pop-ups. *From \$45; mnbookarts.org*

PAINTING**PICTURE A PINOT NOIR**

To be sure, many a masterpiece began with a glass of wine. Luckily, art studios that encourage imbibing are a growing phenomena. Most, such as Chicago's Bottle & Bottega (*\$35; bottleandbottega.com*) or Pinot's Palette (*from \$35; pinotspalette.com*) in Houston, are BYOB.



A few, like Denver's Sipping N' Painting (*from \$35; sippingnpainting.com*), offer wine and beer for purchase. All provide supplies, as well as instructors to guide you stroke by stroke.

MURAL-MAKING

Paint the Town With 3,500 murals, Philadelphia has more wall paintings than any other city in the world. Help it maintain its status as “Mural Capital of the World” during community paint days, put on at least once a month by the Mural Arts Program, the largest public art initiative in the country. Under the direction of a local artist and crew, anyone can take part. “People can come back years from now and see the work they did,” says Ryan Derfler, director of business enterprises. How’s that for leaving your mark? *Free; muralarts.org*

PRESERVING & OBSERVING

NURTURE NATURE

1 American Hiking Society AHS, the nation’s authority on hiking trails, coordinates volunteer vacations throughout the year in 30 U.S. states. Options range from easy (a one-mile hike to repair walking bridges in South Carolina’s Francis Marion National Forest) to strenuous (high-elevation backpacking through New Mexico’s Santa Fe National Forest). Expect days filled with brush clearing and installing signage,

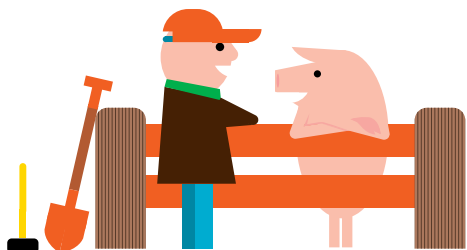
followed by cooking and collecting firewood alongside a gaggle of compassion-filled new friends. \$275; *americanhiking.org*

2 Sierra Club Some 150 years ago, the American Southwest was ripe with high desert grasslands—landscapes filled with grasses and plants that helped hold onto the minimal rainfall. Overgrazing led to destruction; now, one of southeast Arizona’s last remaining ecosystems of this kind can be found at Muleshoe Ranch, a 50,000-acre preserve where seven on-site streams serve as a habitat for some 80 percent of area wildlife at some point of their lives. On weeklong Sierra Club service trips, offered every November and

February, volunteers plant cottonwoods to stabilize stream banks and remove fencing and debris so animals can roam at liberty. On the free day, visitors can explore the area. Our tip: Head straight to the hot springs for a soak. \$895; *sierraclub.org*

3 Earthwatch Join university researchers on their quest to determine how climate change affects grey whales in Palos Verdes, California, on select weekends from January through March. The three-day trip begins with a lesson on migration patterns and current threats. Volunteers then board boats to take photos, observe behavior, and add their findings to research being compiled onshore. \$895; *earthwatch.org*

FARMING



GO HOG WILD

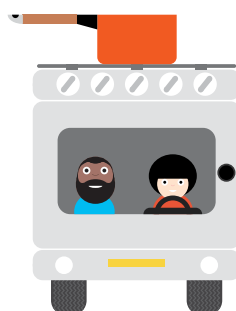
Even Old MacDonald can’t compete with Farm Sanctuary, a 25-year-old animal-care nonprofit with three outposts and more than 1,000 animals. With help from local animal protection agencies, the organization identifies cases and works with authorities to legally rescue sheep, pigs, goats, and more. Clean out barns, build fences, and socialize with the animals in Watkins Glen, New York; Acton, California; or Orland, California, during “work parties” held monthly April through November. Want to give back closer to home? Farm Sanctuary holds an Adopt-a-Turkey project every Thanksgiving, encouraging people to financially sponsor a feathered friend instead of eating one. *Free; farmsanctuary.org*

COOKING

JUST ADD ZEST

Remember that summer you spent flipping burgers? Put those skills to use in underserved communities of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast with Culinary Corps. Anyone with professional cooking experience is welcome on the weeklong trips, in which the organization works with city leaders and food-related nonprofits to creatively provide meals

for residents in need. According to founder Christine Carroll, it’s “peace corps for cooks.” *From \$250; culinarycorps.org*





PET PROJECT

ZuZu the goat, once abused and emaciated, now lives among friends at Farm Sanctuary's Watkins Glen, New York, shelter.