

# choose your own adventure

**a high-octane vacation needn't  
involve a bungee cord, zip line or parachute.**

GET READY FOR A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME TRIP THAT'LL LET YOU STIMULATE  
YOUR SENSES WITHOUT RISKING LIFE AND LIMB.

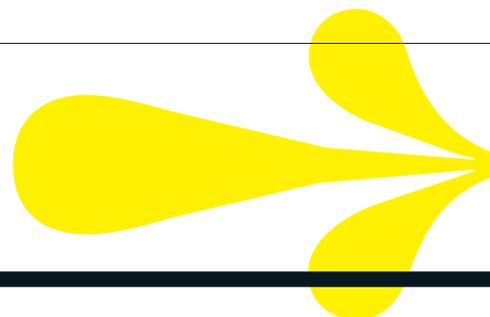
**imagine biking across moonlit sand  
dunes or standing only feet away  
from an enormous gray whale.**

now that's what we're talking about.

**the result:**

**thrills even scaredy-cats can get behind.**

BY KAREN CATCHPOLE





# bike sand dunes under a full moon

ALAMOGORDO, NEW MEXICO

➤ One magical night each fall, the White Sands National Monument stays open late just so visitors can go on a breathtaking moonlit ride. The waves of sand, beautiful any time of day, cover 275 square miles of desert, forming the world's largest gypsum-crystal dune field. Join the **Full Moon Bike Ride** ([nps.gov/whsa](http://nps.gov/whsa); \$5 for adults, \$2.50 for children under 16) and you'll pedal 8 miles until you reach the heart of the dunes, silent and golden-flecked. A park ranger will point out any foxes, bobcats or the rare mountain lion.

✚ **SLEEP** The century-old **Lodge Resort at Cloudcroft** (601 Corona Place, Cloudcroft, [thelodgeresort.com](http://thelodgeresort.com), 800-395-6343; doubles from \$115) has hosted Judy Garland and Clark Gable. Today, the quaint rooms have four-poster beds and whirlpool tubs, along with modern conveniences like Wi-Fi. The promise of a pool, nine-hole golf course and spa makes the hour-long drive from the dunes fly by.

**EAT** The **Hi-D-Ho** drive-in (414 White Sands Road, Alamogordo, 575-437-6400; burgers from \$3.50), which opened in 1952, serves sandwiches, Mexican food and the large, popular Tiger Burger (a double burger and fries named after the local high school's mascot). Bike right up and place your order!

WHEN  
**October 23**  
8 P.M.—11 P.M.

# Go White-Water Rafting in Style

LEWISTON, IDAHO

Guests on **Row Adventure's Culinary Whitewater Series rafting trips** ([rowadventures.com](http://rowadventures.com), 800-451-6034) paddle the warm waters of the exquisite Salmon River. There are plenty of tranquil stretches on the 52-mile route, allowing time to appreciate the basalt cliffs and forests of ponderosa pine. Though this trip is suitable for first-time rafters, dozens of rapids—with names like Roller Coaster, Devil's Slide and Bodacious Bounce—keep things interesting. For a four-day, all-inclusive adventure, *Every Day with Rachael Ray* readers will pay just \$890 (that's \$360 off!).

✚ **SLEEP** Guides travel ahead and set up **comfortable camps on sandy beaches along the river**. They'll supply tents, sleeping bags, toilets, tables and chairs. All you need to bring is a toothbrush.

**EAT** Each night you'll **take a cooking class and learn camp-food essentials**, like how to grill on an open fire and how to use a dutch oven outdoors. You'll help prepare gourmet dishes like prime rib, salmon with huckleberry sauce, and pineapple upside-down cake. Dinners are paired with wines from Idaho, Washington and Oregon.

WHEN  
**August 22–25**  
**August 29–September 1**  
**September 5–8**  
**September 12–15**



WHITE SANDS NATIONAL MONUMENT, DIANE COOK AND LEN JENSEL; SALMON RIVER, TOM BEAR PHOTOGRAPHY.



SPACE SHUTTLE, ERIC MOHL.

# Attend the **Space Shuttle's** Final Launch

CAPE CANAVERAL, FLORIDA

Ever been to a Space Shuttle launch? The Earth shakes. People gasp. Then the shuttle disappears from view. It's the most dramatic 120 seconds you may ever experience. Go soon: November marks the end of **NASA's space shuttle program**; afterward, the space agency will use a different type of craft, and there aren't any public launches scheduled yet. Go to an official viewing site ([kennedyspacecenter.com](http://kennedyspacecenter.com); \$38 to \$58 for adults, \$28 to \$48 for children) or watch for free ([spacecoastlaunches.com](http://spacecoastlaunches.com) for a map of viewing spots).



**SLEEP** Many hotels double rates during a launch, but the surfer-chic **Ron Jon Cape Caribe Resort** (1000 Shorewood Drive, Cape Canaveral, [ronjonresort.com](http://ronjonresort.com); doubles from \$98) keeps regular prices. Plus, it has a water park.

**EAT** Locals adore the rock shrimp at the kitschy **Dixie Crossroads** (1475 Garden St., Titusville, 321-268-5000; rock shrimp from \$13). Get 'em broiled, steamed or fried.

WHEN  
**November 2010**



# look a gray whale in the eye

SAN IGNACIO LAGOON, NORTHERN BAJA, MEXICO

Each year hundreds of female gray whales congregate in Mexican lagoons to calve and feed in the warm, predator-free water. To avoid stressing out the mothers and babies, the Mexican government allows visitors to **watch the whales from small motorboats** only; your guide will turn off the engine, and the boat will bob along until the giants approach. The females swim languidly beneath the boats, blowing bubbles just hard enough to gently rock them, while the newborn whales are known to nudge the vessels and stare at passengers.

**+** **SLEEP** Conveniently, you can arrange your boat tour through the **Kuyimá Eco-Lodge** ([kuyima.com](http://kuyima.com); \$40 per person per night at the lodge, \$40 for the tour, \$13 for round-trip transportation), which is also an affordable, lovely place to stay. In your thatched-roof hut, which sits on stilts along the San Ignacio Lagoon, you'll be lulled to sleep by the sound of whales gently spouting. Even with its shared bathrooms, Kuyimá sells out fast, so book now!

**EAT** It's worth the 90-mile drive north along Highway 1 for the *mano de leon* ("lion's hand") scallops sold at **any of the roadside restaurants** in Guerrero Negro. True to their name, the scallops are about as big as a lion's paw, and they're tender, sweet and nearly impossible to find outside this region. Enjoy them fresh off the boat, flash-cooked with butter and garlic. With a beer, you'll pay less than \$10.

WHEN  
**January** THROUGH **April**

➤ *bonus*

## Meet a Million Monarch Butterflies

VALLE DE BRAVO, MEXICO

Interested in close encounters with a slightly smaller creature? Between November and March, several million monarch butterflies navigate their way to Central Mexico, flying thousands of miles from their birthplaces in the U.S. and Canada. (Scientists say they're drawn to Mexico's fir trees.) Once the butterflies arrive, they rest, eat and mate like mad before attempting the return flight home. Many never make it. Skip the most famous viewing areas (like El Rosario), which are woefully overcrowded. Go instead to the newly opened **Piedra Herrada sanctuary** (\$2) near Valle de Bravo. After a steep and dusty two-hour hike, you'll find plenty of fluttering butterflies, but very few members of your own species.



WHALES, NORBERT WU/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STOCK; BUTTERFLIES, GETTY IMAGES.