

THE TRAVEL ISSUE

# Sunset

LIVING IN THE WEST

## Camping in Style

25 Perfect sites, amazing views, and great hikes

FOOD FINDS  
THE BEST  
SANDWICH  
YOU'LL  
EVER EAT  
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Gourmet  
recipes for  
campfire  
meals

Small-town  
Alaska  
10 reasons  
to go now

LONG WEEKEND  
The cool  
new side of  
San Diego

MAY 2012

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Move over, Napa.  
This is the hot new wine country

# Next in the West

## Hotel U

It might look like just another day at the pool, but at Carmel Valley Ranch in California, activities go way beyond the usual resort fare. Learn about the hotel-class craze and four other trends that could change the way you travel.



## 1. RETURN OF THE LONGER VACATION

The three-day weekend trip still reigns supreme, but lengthier stays are on the upswing too, according to travel agents like Stacy Small, president of L.A.-based Elite Travel International. Her most frequent requests: longer summer vacations in mountain locales like Deer Valley Resort, Utah, and Beaver Creek, Colorado, as well as extended California coast trips down the Pacific Coast Highway from Big Sur (above) to San Diego.

## 2. THE TRAVEL AGENT IS BACK

The flip side of the online booking frenzy (see number 3) is that some people are going back to basics and letting agents do the heavy lifting. Susan Sparks of Aspen's Brownell Travel has seen a boost in bookings from travelers who have been burned by unreliable trip reviews online or who don't have the time to sift through dozens of travel sites. And services are getting more specialized, like the wine country itineraries put together by Jackie Richmond in Napa ([winetrip.com](http://winetrip.com)).

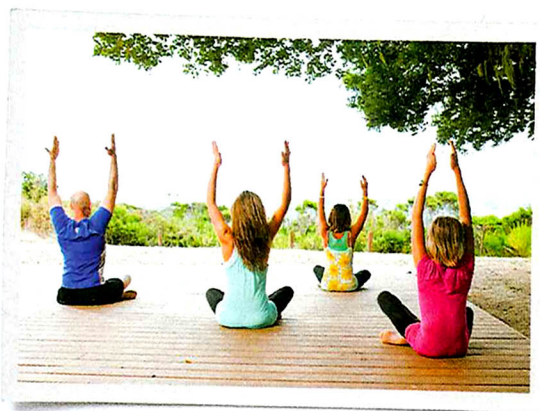


## 3. RISE OF THE IMPROMPTU GETAWAY

Two-day to weeklong flash sales at sites like [sniqaway.com](http://sniqaway.com), [tablethotels.com](http://tablethotels.com), and [jetsetter.com](http://jetsetter.com) offer discounts on hotels and vacation packages of as much as 60 percent. Popular spontaneous destinations now: Palm Springs (above); Santa Cruz, California; and Valle de Guadalupe in Baja, Mexico. Groupon Getaways and LivingSocial Escapes are also worth a look, but there's a big difference: With these, you're buying a voucher, not a confirmed reservation. Check for restrictions, blackout dates, and extra fees.

## 4. COMMUNITY TRAVEL

Group travel is big now—but in a rent-a-villa-with-friends way, not in a sit-with-strangers-on-a-tour-bus way. Stacy notes an uptick in the “friendmoon,” where a couple's pals join them on part of their post-wedding trip. Find houses on [homeaway.com](http://homeaway.com) and [flipkey.com](http://flipkey.com)



## 5. HOTEL U

Cooking lessons. Cocktail seminars. Free morning yoga. These days, it seems that any hotel worth its salt is getting into the classes gig. We're partial to the ones at California's Carmel Valley Ranch ([from \\$400; carmelvalleyranch.com](http://carmelvalleyranch.com)), where you can learn to cook with veggies from the hotel's garden or even suit up for beekeeping lessons.