

diversions



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Great Escapes

Spring Break is a time for unbridled debauchery and guilty pleasures, even for the A&E staff.

The San Francisco art community got a jolt in 1995 when the current location of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art opened in the trendy South of Market area, convenient to the downtown Financial District (and to the subway lines for suburbanites like myself).

The building, designed by Swiss architect Mario Botta, provides a perfect container to the ever-changing collection of 20th century painting and sculpture, a collection that constantly challenges the viewer to see what's really there.

This collection includes a white and gold porcelain sculpture that, on first glance, appears to be a religious icon holding a child.

However, upon closer examination, it is actually revealed to be Michael Jackson with a monkey.

The museum also includes a Lichtenstein print of multicolored polka dots - close up, they're gibberish, but from a distance, they actually create an image of Rouen Cathedral in France.

Another image by Andy Warhol silk-screens multiple images of Elizabeth Taylor from "National Velvet."

And also, one artist parroted Leonardo di Vinci's "The Last Supper" by recreating it in caramel. Inspired or heretic?

cal, it's hard to say.

But perhaps the most surreal piece is called "Things Fall Apart" by Sarah Size, which involves a Jeep Cherokee hacked apart and decorated with pipe cleaners and its own insulation, among other items, to appear as though it's at the bottom of the ocean.

What complicates matters is that the various pieces are situated on ascending levels of the main staircase, providing a piece of art that visitors see in stages as they move from one gallery to the next.

Call it postmodern or pop art or whatever, but this is SFMOMA's forte.

Despite that, other traditionally modern artists can be found within the museum's walls. An impressive selection of Matisse is housed in

its own wing. The current photography exhibit showcases Edward Weston, who did a lot of work on the beaches along the Monterey Peninsula but also photographed bell peppers and cabbage in ways that made them unrecognizable.

But perhaps the most striking work of modern art is the museum itself. The five-story rectangular structure has striped granite walls leading up to a central oculus that lets in the San Francisco sunlight.

The top floor includes a metallic bridge through the sunlit turret that offers views to the atrium 75 feet below and to the equally picturesque Yerba Buena Gardens across the street.

The heavy stone walls provide a calm sanctuary from the surrounding bustle and, save for the occasional sounds of nearby construction equipment, provide a serene bubble in the middle of a hectic city.

Much of the art in SFMOMA makes you do a double take, requiring further inspection. There's no better place to find the atmosphere for such heavy contemplation.

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Gazing up at San Fran's MOMA

Driving to Panama City Beach, I had three main goals in mind: get a tan, bond with my best friends and party.

Unfortunately these goals came at a price: being subjected to catcalls and enduring wet T-shirt contests.

I knew Spring Break would be a little wild and crazy, but no more than I had witnessed at Myrtle Beach during Senior Beach Week. In Florida, there were only more beads, Confederate flags and boobs.

The Queen Bees never showed our goodies for some beads, but my friend and her friends from school managed to find a better use for their tans, entering wet T-shirt contests and flashing bartenders for drinks.

They are some really cool girls, and even as we cheered them on during the contests, I couldn't help but think how

degrading it was for women. But then again, my friend was getting me free drinks, so I didn't complain.

Our sextet enjoys having some drinks and dancing but not enough to spend a lot to get into a club. That took Spinnakers and La Villa out of our places-to-go list, but we found a nice, less expensive club.

Latitudes was a fun club with a huge bar and plenty of room to dance, either inside or outside on the deck that overlooked the gulf. Underage kids were allowed in for \$5 and indulged rigorously thanks to lax carding habits and a lack of ageism.

Our time there was great, but so was the walk back with my friend Stephanie. We had a few drinks, and when she tried to smuggle one out in her pants, Steph fell and found herself sprawled out on the wooden steps of the club.

As she hobbled back to the motel with me, she also managed to fall multiple times because I kept making her laugh. Every time she'd end up on the ground, we'd draw a crowd of spectators, especially when she tried to go to the motel next door.

To be honest, time spent laying out on the beach, the drive down and hanging out in the

motel were the highlights of the trip.

We laughed about past trips as we smoked and watched the planes with ads trailing fly above us on the beach. The drive seemed short as we joked around on the walkie talkies and laughed every time someone said "breaker breaker."

In our rooms, new jokes abounded as we bonded over our drinks and talked to the neighbors. You couldn't walk out on the balcony without talking to someone standing on theirs.

Our male neighbors from Missouri frequented our room to hang out, and Rick's antics grated on my nerves as he managed to pick up every bra he saw, probably because every bra he picked up was mine. Also, Jake wore out his welcome when he wouldn't take a hint and leave.

Sadly enough, these guys were the cream of the crop we met down there.

Despite the sometime skank quality that permeated Panama City Beach, I had a blast hanging out with my friends, getting tan and partying.

Plus, all the flashing gave us a new joke, yelling, "Tits tits tits"

would appreciate such tactful humor on this crisp night. Perhaps these two were different, I thought. Perhaps they would laugh it off and join us later for cocktails. Perhaps.

We kept walking. And with that, the savagery began. In an instant I was flanked by one of the men, while the tall one swung like a wino in the direction of my friends. Engulfed in shock, I smashed my lit cigarette into the man's cheek, and he flailed away like a wild animal. I cursed him as he ran, his burning face-flesh convincing him to keep running.

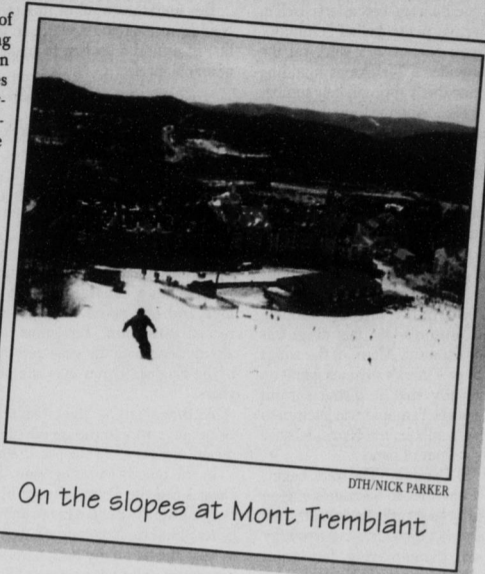
Now scared, I blindly implored the spirit of old George to come to my aid. After all, a 12-foot granite statue of America's first president is always a valuable asset to have in a street fight. However, when I came to my senses, it turned out to be a non-issue.

My two friends had run away like cowards. "Bastards," I yelled into the night. "Lousy bastards!" My shirt was torn, and my buzz was all but lost. And on top of that, my cigarette was completely out.

The second would-be aggressor had given up on chasing my two friends and had apparently retreated to whatever loathsome hole he came from. I was left alone. I suddenly felt like Holden Caulfield, alone in The City That Never Sleeps.

The middle of New York City is not an ideal locale, especially late at night and after such a fiasco. My choices consisted of wandering around this raging hormone of a city, aimlessly looking for my friends or trying to maneuver the late-night subway system back to Queens and the unfurnished basement with no bathroom that we called home.

"I need a drink," I muttered into the wind.



On the slopes at Mont Tremblant

Standing at the summit of Mont Tremblant, staring down at a massive frozen lake behind wide white slopes speckled by skiers and snowboarders, I wondered why anyone would want to go to the beach.

Instead of rough, dirty sand I got pure, perfect snow; instead of salt in the eyes and shark attacks I got the wind in my face and an adrenaline rush; instead of sunburns and a hangover I got rolling moguls ... and a hangover.

Next year try something new for Spring Break. Get in your car and drive more than 1,000 miles in the opposite direction from everyone else - Canada has a lot more to offer than maple syrup and high taxes.

After a grueling 16-hour road trip through some of the most boring landscape in the country (New York City is the only thing in New York), most of which I spent sprawled out on the air mattress in the back of my Chevrolet Suburban, we pulled into the quaint Mont Tremblant Ski Resort only to be greeted by a raging blizzard and howling winds. I think my two friends and I actually chimed the exact same expletive in unison and with the exact same inflection.

But after a huge dinner and a good night's sleep we woke up to find the sun shining, the snow glistening and the mountain calling. Even though Neil kicked my bed every two minutes and howled "Nicolaaaaaa" in imitation of the Ricola commercial, I managed to refrain from stabbing him in the belly and dragging myself onto the slopes.

And thus the pain began. We confidently attacked the black diamond runs on our first trip down the mountain and I ended up launching a preteen who decided to cut me off about 30 feet down a cliff and into a tree. Punk should have watched where he was going.

We made it to the bottom, winded and sore only to realize that we had another five hours of skiing before the lifts closed. So to assuage our bruised egos after being burned by a 4-year-old strapped on to a pair of rockets, we followed the beginner's ski school class

around for an hour and hazed the instructor.

It wasn't until the third day on the mountain, with a much deeper snow base and a few less snowboarders on speed that we decided that "Closed Trail" signs are just like speed limits - more of a suggestion than an order.

After dodging the ski patrol and flicking off a disgruntled old man who called us a pack of "hooligans," we found out exactly why they use bright orange ropes to keep people out - rocks. Big, sharp, evil rocks.

But, after nearly breaking my thumb and tearing a rivet in my skis that is longer than my forearm (thank God for rentals), we came out of the woods on a frozen lake and skated a half mile to the nearest lift.

It was so much fun. Between the amazing slopes, beautiful views, food that was distinctly non-Canadian and a drive through Montreal that found Neil in his helmet thrashing in my front seat, I could not have asked for more.

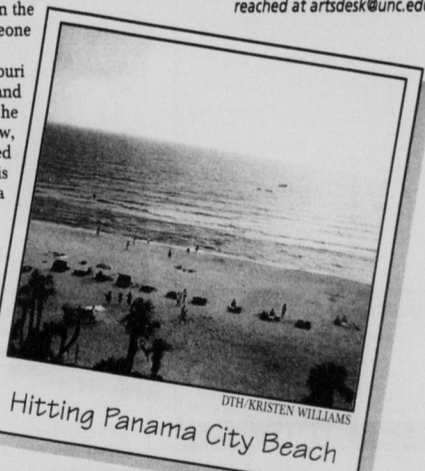
If you want a break from burns, beaches and lopsided boobs, head north instead of south - the Canadians will let anyone over the border.

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on our walkie talkies as we drove home.

Hopefully wherever we go next year, that phrase won't be shouted everywhere we turn and the atmosphere will compliment our laid-back style. But if you enjoy debauchery, PCB is the place to be.

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Hitting Panama City Beach

Indeed. I wiped my brow and walked toward the lights. I found my so-called compatriots sitting at the far end of a corner bar, swilling strong drink. They gazed at me with surprise, sheltering their eyes from my contempt. I ordered two beers for myself and slammed them down on the bar.

"What's wrong with you?" asked my friend Steve. "Oh, nothing really," I said. "I often enjoy fighting for my life while you two scoundrels run like toddlers to have a quick drink."

The barkeep overheard our hateful exchange and shook his head with disdain. My friends ordered more drinks and changed the subject. I brooded for a while and smoked until my lungs hurt. There was no further discussion.

Truth be told, I did not see the night's events as unpleasant or foolish. New York proved itself to me this Spring Break. The Big Apple, as it were, kept us on our toes and made it abundantly clear that there are still adventures to be had - especially when you don't keep your mouth shut.

A light rain started outside as the bartender swept the floor, and us, out. The jukebox played Miles Davis as we finished our drinks and slowly ambled out the door. We walked home under a yellow electric sky.

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Looking at a revised New York skyline

The night was cold, and the gray moon cast blue, wet shadows on the concrete before us. My two friends and I were engulfed by New York City, wandering around in its bowels.

We were in some kind of weird park where a giant statue of George Washington watched over us as we walked along, silently waiting for some kind, any kind, of adventure to unfold. It didn't take long.

Two men in dark clothes appeared from nowhere. "Looks like you guys need a couple ounces of hydro," one sneered, seeking some sort of cheap intimidation-based thrill.

"Only two ounces?" I muttered, within the range of their ears. "Let me go find an ATM." One chuckled back, "What's that, guy?"

"Oh, nothing," my fellow traveler retorted, continuing to walk, but not before turning to offer the man a mocking grin and a wink. You would think a couple of second-rate ruffians

San Francisco, Calif.



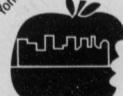
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