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SMARTER LIVING

20 Places to Travel in Your 20s

A starter kit of suggestions for young people who want to set out and see the world.

By DAN SALTZSTEIN

There's no better way to change your perception of the world — and maybe yourself — than travel. You'll experience different cultures, meet new friends and make lifelong memories. But traveling in your 20s poses challenges: You might have financial constraints, limited time off from work and concerns about safety. So think of this selection of 20 places less as a checklist and more as a starter kit to world travel. (We've left out the obvious classic cities: New York, Paris, London. They are, of course, great places to visit, too.)

1. A NATIONAL PARK They represent so much of what's great about the United States — beauty, diversity of landscape, freedom. But which one to visit? There's Acadia in Maine, the Badlands in South Dakota, Joshua Tree in California and more than 50 others. Pluses for young travelers: Camping (or park cabins) will help save on lodging; parks are equally suited to solo travelers and groups; and they are endlessly Instagram-friendly. (Also consider Canada's national parks, which will offer free admission for all of 2017, the country's 150th birthday.)

2. PRAGUE Sure, it's a bit of an after-college travel cliché, but Prague is still a great spot for backpackers — full of charm, great beer and energy. And the food has gotten a lot better. Visit the beautiful city center, but stay in Vinohrady or Zizkov, which are full of young Pragueres and expats.

3. OAXACA, MEXICO One of the world's great gastronomic destinations, Oaxaca is also cheap, friendly and safe. Start in Oaxaca City (eat and drink your way through the sprawling markets and *mezcalerías*), and then take a very short flight or longer minibus ride down to the coast for surfing, swimming and whale-watching.

4. CUBA It's a lot easier to get to than it used to be, and still pulses with youthful energy. Start in Havana, but getting around the country will give you a real sense of the culture — perhaps before it starts its post-embargo transformation.

5. AMSTERDAM Yes, there are plenty of places to get high. But even without the decriminalized marijuana, Amsterdam would be one of the most charming places on earth: gorgeous, friendly, easy to get around, incredibly diverse. The famous/in-



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famous hostels can be fine, though more appealing lodging sits outside the city center, in neighborhoods like De Pijp and Westerpark.

6. PATAGONIA, ARGENTINA It feels like the ends of the earth and basically is, but you'll be glad you took the flight or (very scenic) train ride from Buenos Aires. Stunningly beautiful, it's home to lakes, skiing, plentiful wildlife and some of the world's healthiest and most accessible glaciers.

7. NEW ORLEANS This city is the closest you'll get to an overseas experience in the continental United States. It's a world unto itself, full of history, character and friendly folks. The food and drink scene is unlike anywhere else: po'boys, gumbo, beignets, Sazeracs. Skip Bourbon Street's debauched chaos in favor of live music at the clubs on Frenchmen Street.

Clockwise from top left, Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, a welcoming city for young people; Amsterdam is gorgeous and friendly, even aside from the decriminalized marijuana; Iceland offers otherworldly beauty outside the capital.

8. BERLIN There are few cities as welcoming for young people as Berlin — affordable, vibrant and friendly, with plenty of English speakers. Fans of contemporary art and beer will be especially pleased. Try Prenzlauer Berg and Kreuzberg as home bases. (The city is also a great hub for getting around Europe.)

9. MONTREAL Like New Orleans, it's a taste of Europe without leaving North America. The food is spectacular, and summertime means easy biking and overflowing markets. If you have a few days to get out of town, the rest of Quebec is gorgeous all year long.

10. VIETNAM A trip to Southeast Asia would be tough to squeeze into a week, but if you find yourself with a bit more time, consider Vietnam, a country rich in cuisine, culture and natural beauty — and light on the wallet. Set your sights in particular on the seaside town of Hoi An and Hue, a former national capital. A boat trip through Ha Long Bay is equally memorable.

11. BUDAPEST It's come a long way from its Soviet days. Language can be a bit of a challenge, but it's a welcoming place full of charm and a youthful energy. Take a soak in one of its famous bathhouses and enjoy the city's laid-back cafe culture.

12. NEW ZEALAND It's a long (and expensive) flight from the United States, but one with great rewards. Reasonably priced bus tours are easy ways to get around the islands, which offer the stunning, diverse beauty made famous in the "Lord of the Rings" movies.

13. ICELAND Not quite as cheap for Americans as it was after its economy collapsed, Iceland is still a quick flight from the East Coast. Its otherworldly beauty — hot springs, volcanic fields, waterfalls and the

famous Blue Lagoon — is best appreciated by getting out of the capital, Reykjavik; consider booking a tour.

14. BARCELONA Few cities offer such a wealth of dining and night life options as Barcelona. Architecture fans can take a tour of the wild work of Antoni Gaudí, including the soaring Sagrada Família. Neighborhoods to explore include medieval Barri Gòtic and seaside Barceloneta. It even has great beaches.

15. CALIFORNIA COAST A trip up the Pacific Coast Highway requires driving skills and stamina, but you can't beat the views. Save by camping along the way, in over 20 designated spots.

16. MOROCCO Culturally rich, easy to get around and budget-friendly, Morocco is perfect for adventurous young travelers. Start in Casablanca (your flight will probably take you there anyway), but use the extensive train and bus system to get to Fez (and its dizzying medina), Marrakesh (and the wildly colorful Jardin Majorelle) and the coastal town of Essaouira (and its piers, where you can eat fresh-off-the-boat seafood). If time permits, you can even head by camel into the desert.

17. COSTA RICA A few reasons to visit: Rain forests teeming with wildlife, two coasts peppered with reasonably priced eco-resorts and creative ways to get around (horseback riding and rafting, for example). Flights from the United States tend to be reasonable.

18. A GREEK ISLAND THAT'S NOT MYKONOS, IOS OR SANTORINI The Cyclades — the islands south of Athens — offer unrivaled beauty and relaxation, particularly if you stay away from the party destinations. There's nothing wrong with them, of course, but less-visited islands like Naxos and Folegandros offer fewer tourists and more intact culture. Spend your days swimming, eating amazing grilled seafood and exploring ancient ruins. Evenings are for music, more food and ouzo.

19. LISBON Lisbon is an utterly charming city, both youthful and ancient. Neighborhoods to visit include colorful Bairro Alto, Alfama and Intendente. Also consider a side trip to Sintra, a storybook village nestled in the hills with a castle and not one but two alluring palaces.

20. THE CROATIAN COAST It's gotten fancier over the years, but bopping down the Adriatic coast in Croatia is still a great option for young travelers. Start in scenic Dubrovnik and hit laid-back and lovely spots like Rovinj, Kornati Islands National Park and Makarska. You'll find great food and wine, dazzling vistas and a welcoming attitude.