

"I love to people  
watch on Queen  
or College"

—Joffrey Lupul,  
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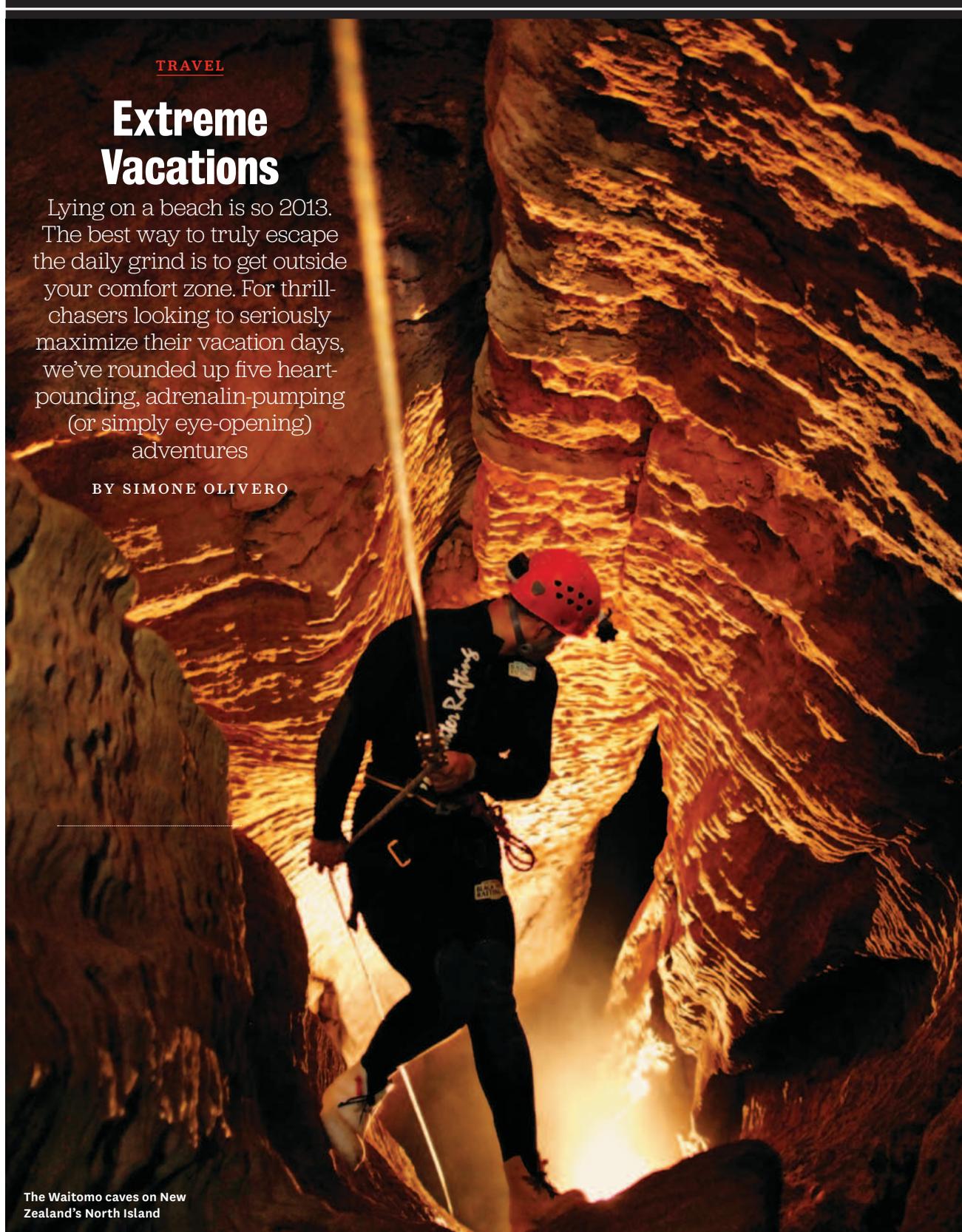
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TRAVEL

## Extreme Vacations

Lying on a beach is so 2013. The best way to truly escape the daily grind is to get outside your comfort zone. For thrill-chasers looking to seriously maximize their vacation days, we've rounded up five heart-pounding, adrenalin-pumping (or simply eye-opening) adventures

BY SIMONE OLIVERO



The Waitomo caves on New Zealand's North Island

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF LEGENDARY BLACK WATER RAFTING

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

**“When you look the shark in the eye, you feel this really intense connection. As soon as I got out of the water, I wanted to jump back in and do it again.”**

—Dave Bouskill, 43, travel blogger



**SHARK DIVING IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Nothing gets the adrenalin pumping like diving into a cloud of blood and fish guts in great white shark-infested waters. About two hours southeast of Cape Town, just off the coast of Gansbaai, thrill-seekers don extra-thick wetsuits and plunge into the icy South Atlantic for a close encounter with the curious predators, with only a cage between them. White Shark Projects is a leader in extreme expeditions—*National Geographic* photojournalists and English adventurer Charley Boorman have toured with them—providing experiences both educational and exhilarating.

**THE FACTS**

**White Shark Projects:** whitesharkprojects.co.za  
**Package prices:** \$45 for the dive, plus breakfast, lunch and a snack  
**Average Cape Town temps in January:** 21°C  
**Distance from Toronto:** 25 hours



WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

**“I rode down the big hills on my stomach because I was too scared to stand. You end up with sand in pretty much every crevice of your body, but it’s worth it for the adrenalin kick.”**

—Roop Gill, 24, postgraduate student

**SANDBOARDING IN PERU**

Snow is for wusses. The latest daredevil craze is sandboarding, and it’s drawing riders to southwestern Peru, where 90-metre peaks with teetering angles test even the bravest hearts. Home base is the oasis town of Huacachina, where companies like Huacachina Tours pick up adventurers right before sunset—thus avoiding the daytime desert heat. Strapped into rugged dune buggies with only roll bars for protection, boarders white-knuckle their way up and down the imposing dunes until completely surrounded by desert. At the peak, they tighten the sandboard straps around their sneakers before launching themselves down into a valley of the golden stuff. Sand dunes are softer and more forgiving than a hard-packed ski slope, but that won’t make the thrill of the drop or a mouthful of desert any less daunting.

**THE FACTS**

**Huacachina Tours:** huacachina.com  
**Package prices:** \$25 for boards and buggy ride  
**Average Huacachina temps in January:** 23°C  
**Distance from Toronto:** 18 hours

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHARK COURTESY OF **WHITE SHARK PROJECTS**; SANDBOARDING COURTESY OF **PERU ADVENTURE TOURS**; RORAIMA BY **GETTY IMAGES**; RAPELLING COURTESY OF **LEGENDARY BLACK WATER RAFTING**; CANYONING COURTESY OF **GROOVY GECKO TOURS**

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

“Hiking through Roraima was a challenge, especially with the unexpected stormy weather, but completing such a great feat is an amazing rush.” —Eden Pollock, 27, teacher



EXPLORING RORAIMA IN VENEZUELA

Bordering Venezuela, Brazil and Guyana, Roraima is a one-of-a-kind tepui (“house of the gods” in Pemon)—a place said to have inspired Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Lost World*. It’s a remote land of 400-metre cliffs, carnivorous plants, glassy pools of water and jaw-dropping views of the Gran Sabana. Toronto-based G Adventures offers a 15-day excursion that includes trekking to the top of Mount Roraima, sleeping under the stars in hammocks in the jungle and hiking around Angel Falls, the world’s tallest waterfall.

THE FACTS

G Adventures: [gadventures.com](http://gadventures.com)

Package prices: \$2,579 for camping, hotel stays, local transportation and most meals

Average Santa Elena temps in January: 21°C

Distance from Toronto: 29 hours

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

“The rappelling and zip lining were right up my alley. The glow worms added another level of excitement, because they gave you the eerie feeling you weren’t alone.”

—Walter Wood, 48, army officer



CAVING IN NEW ZEALAND

As if river rafting weren’t exciting enough, New Zealanders do it underground and in the dark. On the less beaten track of the country’s North Island, the ancient Waitomo caves feature steep grottos, subterranean waterfalls and picturesque openings draped in sparkling, crystal-like limestone formations. For the most adventurous, the Legendary Black Water Rafting Company offers the Black Abyss tour, featuring a 35-metre rappel into total darkness and a zip line that zooms down to the water below. Visitors are then rewarded with a tube ride along the underground river where thousands of *Arachnocampa luminosa*—glow worms—are scattered across the ceiling like a sprinkling of stars.

THE FACTS

Legendary Black Water Rafting Company: [waitomo.com](http://waitomo.com)

Package prices: \$195 for approximately five hours; includes all equipment

Average Hamilton temps in January: 17°C

Distance from Toronto: 26 hours

CANYONING IN VIETNAM

Tucked in the southern confines of Vietnam’s Central Highlands, Da Lat has long been a go-to spot for mountain biking and hiking. Now hard-core adrenaline junkies head to the canyons for some extreme water play. Groovy Gecko Tours runs one of the best full-day adventures, which begins with a one-hour lesson on technique. Then, suited up with a rope, harness, helmet and life jacket, visitors tackle 15- to 18-metre drops, rappelling down the cliff wall. Natural riverbed waterslides carry them to the biggest feat of the day: a 25-metre rappel down the middle of a waterfall, the heavy waters pounding at their shins. Partway down, they release the ropes, free-falling for the last six metres into the basin below. The day is capped off with a final heart-pounding cliff dive.

THE FACTS

Groovy Gecko Tours: [groovygecotours.net](http://groovygecotours.net)

Package prices: \$33 for the day

Average Da Lat temps in January: 20°C

Distance from Toronto: 27 hours

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

“That first step backward has got to be the most thrilling part. Your heart is pounding, you’re on the edge of a cliff, and there’s a waterfall blasting right beside you.” —Arienne Parzei, 30, writer and videographer

