

DIRECT FROM **DENVER**

Don't let your vacation days go to waste. Hop a flight.

It's almost the end of 2018. Have you used all your vacation days?

Don't let them go to waste, as so many Americans do. Some studies show that 52 percent of employees report leaving unused vacation days on the table. Residents of the Centennial State do slightly better. Colorado leads the country in vacation days used, according to a new report by the US Travel Association's Project: Time Off. "Under-Vacationed America" surveyed American workers who receive paid time off from their employers and found that last year, Americans used 17.2 vacation days—the most since 2010. Coloradans lead the country with an average of 20.3 days.

That said, not all days off have equal benefit, according to Project Time: Off's Vice President Katie Denis. "Our studies have shown that employees who use their vacation days for travel are significantly happier than the ones who spend

their days off close to home, and that holds true at the state level too."

In this sense, Coloradans lead the way again, using 57 percent of the vacation days they take to travel—far more than the national average of 47 percent, according to the State of American Vacation 2018 report from Project Time: Off.

According to research published in the Journal of Happiness Studies, the ideal length for a vacation is exactly eight days. It's enough time to unpack, get the lay of the land, and settle into your routine of relaxation. But a three-day trip comes with less stress up front: there's less planning involved in a long weekend away, not to mention it's cheaper—a big factor during the gift-giving season.

So regardless of how many days you still have in your pocket, put them to good use. Here are some places you can get to direct from Denver International Airport.

WEEKEND GETAWAY:
VANCOUVER, CANADA

Get There

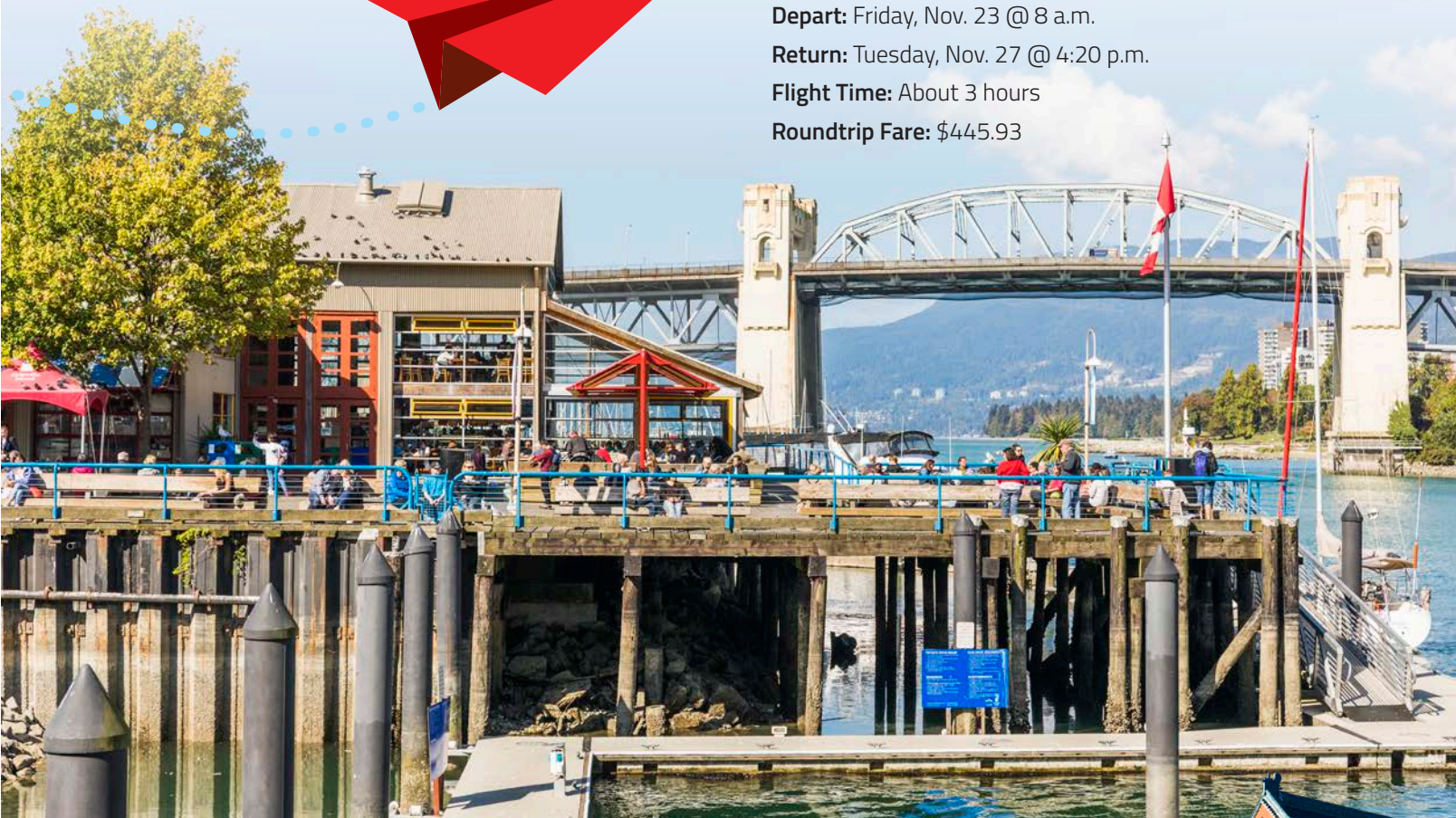
Airline: Air Canada

Depart: Friday, Nov. 23 @ 8 a.m.

Return: Tuesday, Nov. 27 @ 4:20 p.m.

Flight Time: About 3 hours

Roundtrip Fare: \$445.93



Great options available on Airbnb as of mid-October, including a downtown apartment three blocks from Vancouver Art Gallery available for just \$85 a night.

Cannabis stores—aka dispensaries where you can purchase recreational marijuana—went into effect October 17.

Direct flights to Vancouver depart Denver on the daily, and one-way prices start just around \$200 for dates surrounding Thanksgiving. Tack one or two of your remaining PTO days onto the end of the four-day weekend for an extended office break.

Stick around to gorge on grammy's pumpkin pie on Thursday, fly out early Friday, and you can be flagging down a dim sum cart in Vancouver's China Town by lunch. After fueling up, wander the streets of the historic downtown neighborhood—the second-oldest China Town in North America, after San Francisco—mingling with the culture mavens browsing the carefully curated offerings on display at the area's chic galleries and boutiques.



If you've got two vacation days to spare, fly back Tuesday when advertised fares are less than half Sunday's rate.

In November, the average daytime highs are just below 50 degrees F, with lows of 37. According to US News, November is one of the best times to visit Vancouver: the weather is mild and hotel rooms can be found at bargain rates.

This is an outdoor town, so pack accordingly. Spend a day meandering the paths crisscrossing the 1,000-acre Stanley Park, home to some of the city's most visited attractions.

The urban oasis, set just north of the West End, is a natural West Coast rainforest dotted with First Nations art and totem poles and offering stunning views of the mountains and water, especially along the nearly 20-mile-long Seawall lining the city waterfront.

Other Vancouver must-see attractions: Vancouver Art Gallery, where Guo Pei: Couture Beyond is the first Canadian exhibition devoted to the work of China's preeminent couturière. Granville Island, a former industrial site transformed into the city's trendiest neighborhood. The Public Market, one of the most celebrated open-air markets in North America, bustles with a fascinating assortment of colorful stalls proffering lavish displays of fresh produce, local handmade crafts, and an array of the freshest seafood. Queen Elizabeth Park, where you can get a taste for the tropics in the Bloedel Conservatory—a domed lush paradise where 120 exotic birds fly freely among the 500 exotic plants and flowers thriving within the three climate zones. The Conservatory is set atop the city's highest point, offering spectacular views of the skyline, surrounding mountains, and shoreline.

On November 22, Capilano Suspension Bridge Park, already one of Vancouver's top attractions, gets lit. The Can-

yon Lights winter festival—named one of the nine most spectacular holiday light displays in the world by CNN Travel last year—transforms the rainforest and canyon, where the flowing river glows blue, green, and violet, the flowing river glows bright, and each towering Douglas fir twinkles with over 8,000 lights.

Take a walk across Capilano Suspension Bridge to immerse in the serenity of the West Coast rainforest. The 450-foot-long bridge suspended 230 feet above the Capilano River provides access to the 27-acre rainforest park.

 **A WEEK IN THE JUNGLE:**
● BELIZE CITY, BELIZE

Get There

Airline: Southwest

Depart: Sunday, Nov. 25 @ 11 a.m.

Return: Saturday, Dec. 1 @ 5 p.m.

Flight Time: About 4 hours

Round Trip Total*: \$407.03

*price based on fares as of press time.



Southwest debuted its direct flight to Belize City last spring.

Once the heart of the great Mayan civilization, this Belize is a biodiversity hotspot, ripe for exploration. Ancient Mayan ruins are invisible amid lush, jungle-covered mountaintops where toucans, iguanas, and howler monkeys roam.

During your stay, hike rainforest trails, take a zip-line course through the treetops, or hop on an inner tube and float through spectacular limestone caves. The country's network of rivers and waterfalls flows out to the Caribbean Sea, where the barrier reef beckons with some of the world's best diving. Hundreds of minuscule desert isles are oases for those types of travelers who prefer to do nothing more than sink their toes in the sand where the land meets the sea.

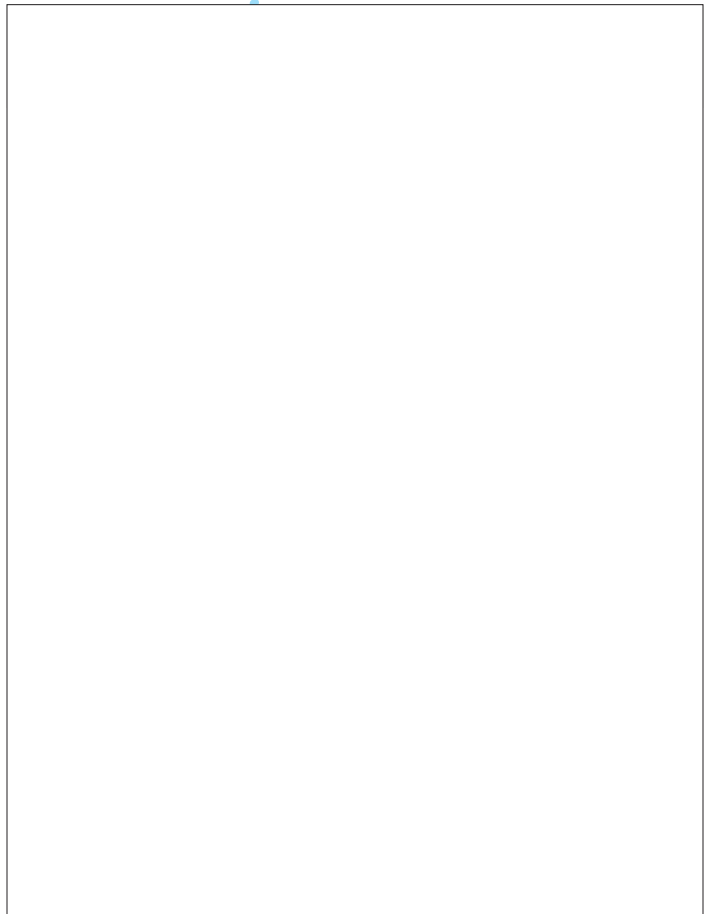
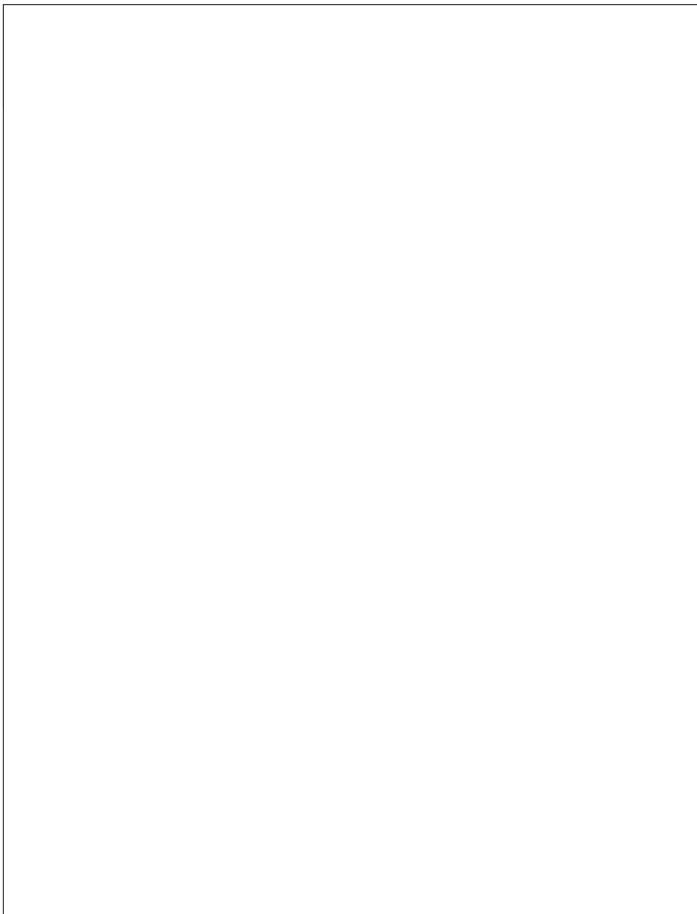
There's plenty to do within Belize City itself, but the most captivating wonders are just an excursion away. Between the years AD 250 and 900, the region was the heart of the Mayan civilization. Hundreds of undiscovered ruins are still hidden within the depths of the rainforest, but there are three sites you can explore.

Altun Ha, the most extensively excavated of the sites, was once a major Mayan trading center. Unlike Altun Ha, Lamanai



was still inhabited when the Europeans arrived in the 16th century. The ruins are surrounded by a dense jungle where giant masks depicting Mayan gods emerge from the foliage.

Xuantunich, the most impressive of the three ruins, is about 80 miles west of Belize City but well worth the trek. More than 25 ancient structures are still intact. Climb to the top of the 130-foot-tall El Castillo pyramid for breathtaking views of Guatemala, and witness flocks of toucans and parrots in the canopies below. Also keep an eye out for the rare exotic creatures that roam the jungle and lurk in the nearby river—jaguars, pumas, and crocodiles.



DIVE INTO RELAXATION:
COZUMEL, MEXICO

Get There

Airline: United

Depart: Saturday, Dec. 22 @ 8 a.m.

Return: Saturday, Dec. 29 @ 5 p.m.

Round Trip Total*: \$699

*price based on fares as of press time.

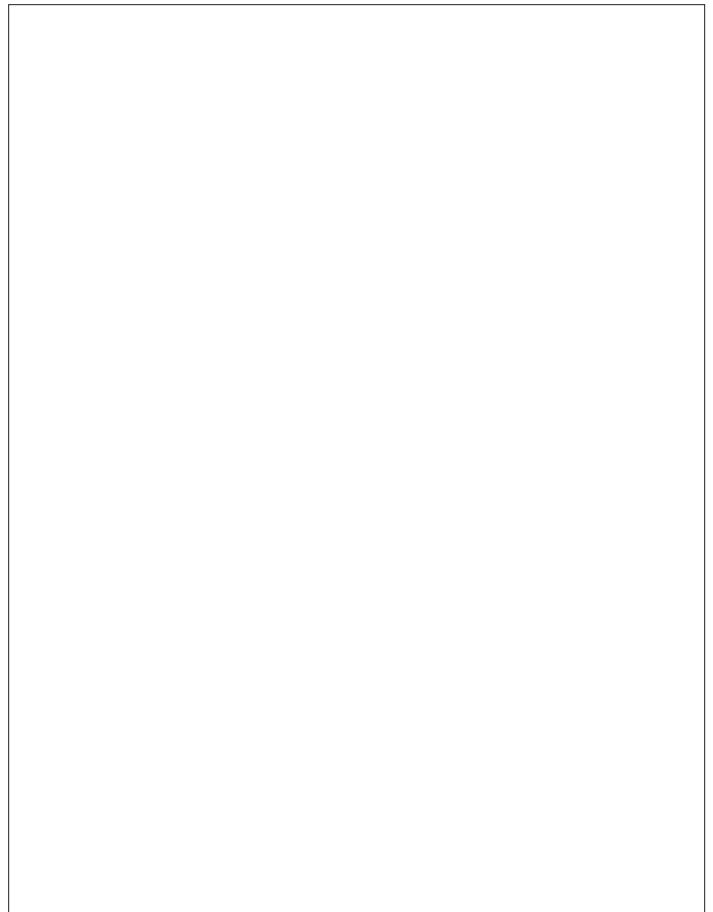
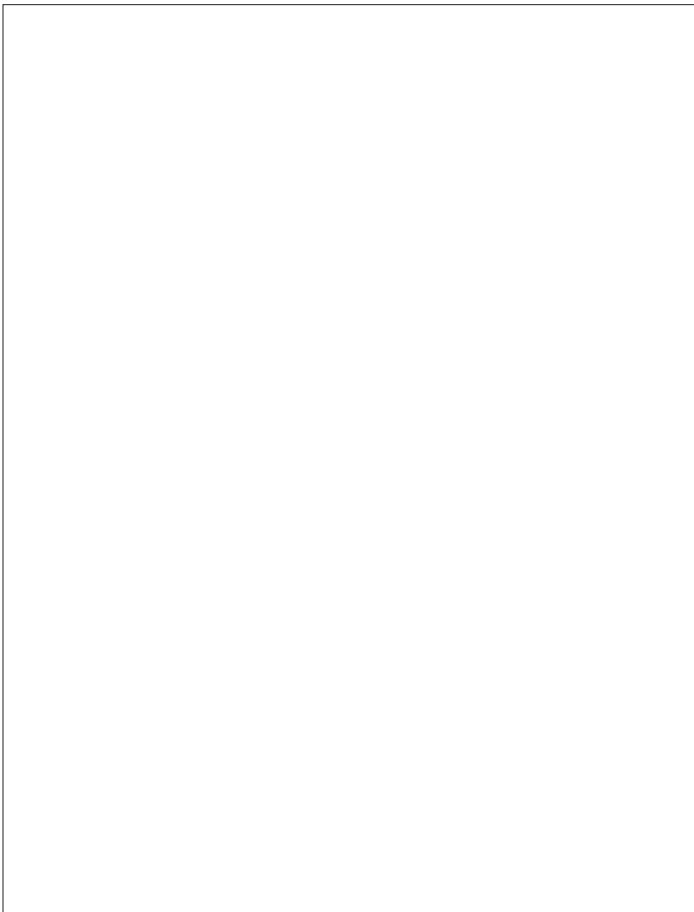
Go here for some of the best diving in the Caribbean. United launched a direct route December 2017, and the airline is bringing back nonstop service on select few days next month.

Roughly 30 miles south of Cancun and 11 miles east of Playa del Carmen sits a 250-square-mile island paradise. Cozumel has it all: a bustling waterfront town, excellent shopping, delicious food, sun-soaked beaches, Mayan ruins, crystal-clear warm waters, and activities galore. Just offshore, the world's second-largest coral reef is part of an underwater national park, one of the many reasons undersea explorer Jacques Cousteau dubbed Cozumel a diver's paradise.



San Miguel, its main city, is laid out in an easy grid around a central plaza, Plaza del Sol, which is a bit of an oasis in the midst of the bustling shopping district. It is a great spot to settle in with a margarita for some people watching. Dining in town is a gustatory treat, a fusion of traditional Mexican cuisine and Caribbean flair.

You'll discover a lot of the things to do in Cozumel take place in the water that surrounds it, where the temps hover in the 80's year-round and visibility reaches up to 200 feet. Cozumel is known for being a diver's paradise. The Mesoamerican Reef—the Great Barrier Reef of the Western Hemisphere—flourishes in the water along Mexico's Yu-





catán Peninsula. Cozumel has more than 30 chartered reefs, 85 percent of which are within the Cozumel National Marine Park, a government-protected underwater territory.

Experienced divers will enjoy the Santa Rosa Wall—one of the island’s signature dive sites. A constant north-to-south current can carry underwater explorers at a speed up to 1.5 knots (about two miles per hour), which makes the drift-diving technique popular here. Tunnels and caves offer plenty of enclaves for divers to explore, and overhangs provide escapes from the steady current. The site attracts barracuda, large black grouper, colorful parrotfish, French and queen angelfish, and other exotic species.

With some reefs in just 10 feet of water, snorkeling is sometimes a better option than diving. Palancar Reef is a top snorkeling spot, thanks to its mild currents and shallow waters. Tall coral formations attract all sorts of marine species, including the occasional sea turtle. Keep an eye on the sandy ocean floor, where stingrays like to hide out. Columbia Reef also attracts a fair share of snorkelers to float in the calm waters above a colorful underwater garden. Coral mounds called bolones are home to a variety of tropical fish and sponges.

The most spectacular Mayan ruins are found on the Mexican mainland at Tulum, an ancient city surrounded by a 16-foot-tall, 25-foot-thick wall. Visiting Tulum is a full-day trip complete with a 45-minute ferry ride to and from Playa del Carmen on the Mexican mainland. Its largest building, El Castillo, sits on the edge of a 40-foot-tall cliff overlooking the water. There’s a small beach next to one of the temples, so you can gaze up at the ancient ruins while floating in the Caribbean, a perfect blend of activities for an unforgettable day. **S**

FLY DIA

11: Colorado destinations with direct flights

11: Countries served direct from DIA

26: International destinations served from Denver

23: Airlines flying out of DIA

190: Nonstop destinations you can reach from Denver

500: The radius in miles in which Denver is the only major hub airport