

AMERICAN AIRWAY

MODERN TRAVELER

Looking For A Cool Vacation Spot? Try Antarctica

Is It A Bald Eagle? No, It's Another Endangered Species: The COO

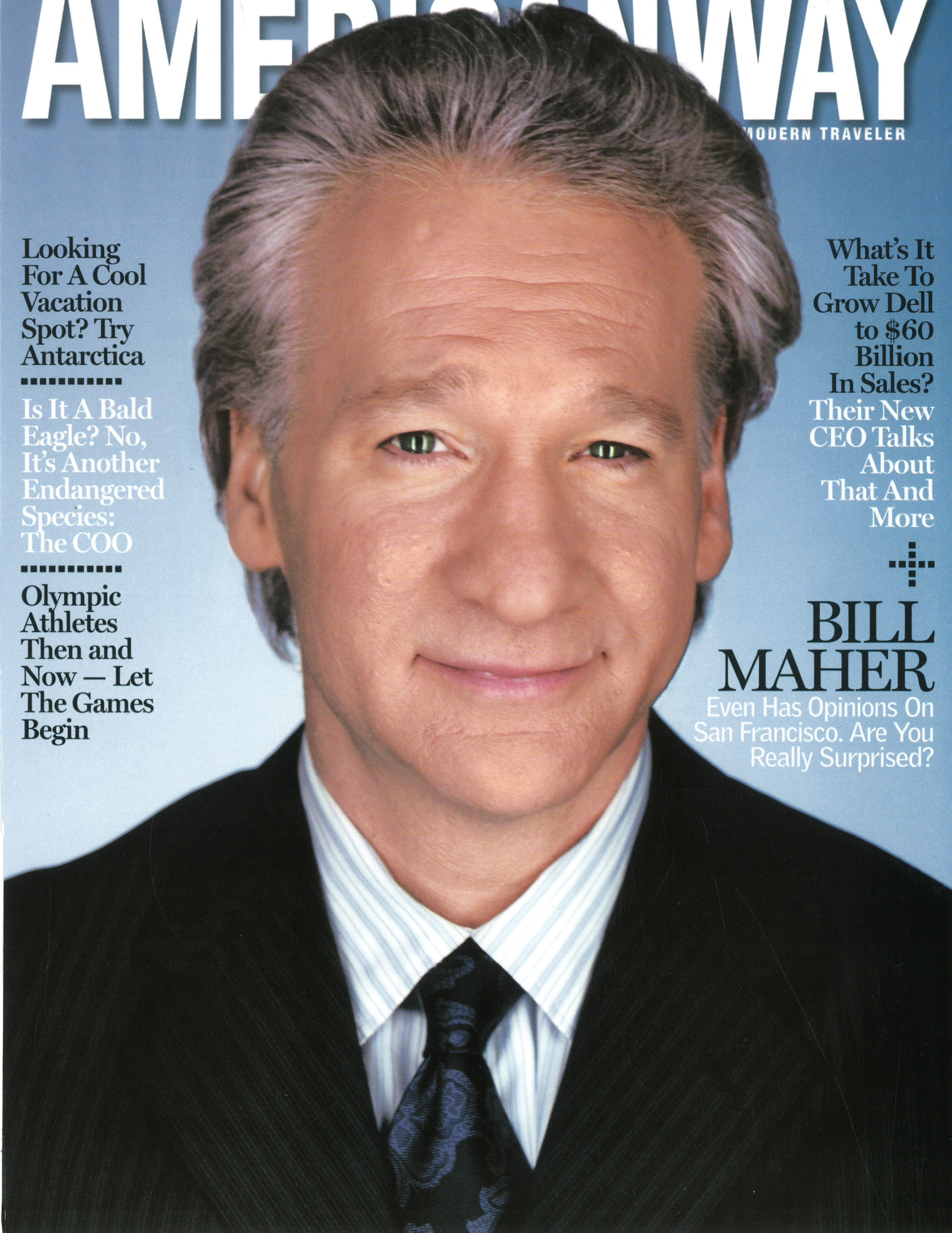
Olympic Athletes Then and Now — Let The Games Begin

What's It Take To Grow Dell to \$60 Billion In Sales? Their New CEO Talks About That And More



BILL MAHER

Even Has Opinions On San Francisco. Are You Really Surprised?





Growing numbers of travelers are turning their vacations upside down by forgoing peace and quiet for a piece of the action at places like Spencer Escape's three-day boot camp in Big Bear.

You Call This A Vacation?

How Bud Philbrook's new bride convinced him to forgo a bare-foot sailing cruise in the Caribbean for a week of volunteering in a rural Guatemalan village he may never know.

There were no sunset walks, no cocktails with tiny paper umbrellas, and no stone therapy massages on their honeymoon. What the couple got instead were hard-packed dirt floors, thatched roofs, primitive cots, and more moths than you could cram into their Minneapolis reception hall.

And today they wouldn't have it any other way.

Philbrook and his wife, Michele Gran, are among the growing number of people who are choosing to spend their vacations not sipping cappuccinos at a sidewalk cafe in Paris or bronzing their bodies on a beach in Hawaii (all wonderful vacations in our opinion), but rather rolling up their sleeves and getting down and dirty.

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS

Bud Philbrook and Michele Gran were so moved by the work they did on their honeymoon — helping a group of Guatemalan villagers pitch a grant proposal for a desperately needed irrigation system —

More and more people are trading in working on their tans at the beach for grueling volunteer and *Survivor*-like excursions. By Ruth Ann Hensley

that they cofounded an international service organization called Global Volunteers.

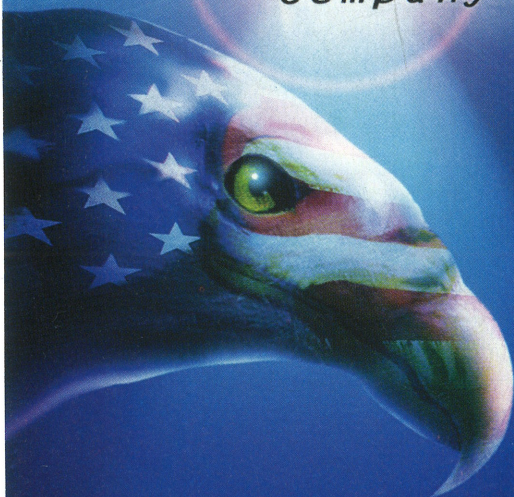
"We knew there was a great need in the world, and we knew that there were others like our-

selves who were willing to lend a hand," Philbrook explains. "People want to give something back."

And they have. Since its inception, Global Volunteers has coordinated the efforts of more than 15,000 people in projects all over the world. Assignments range from teaching kids in Tanzania how to use a toothbrush to building latrines in Costa Rica, and vary in length from one to three weeks.

What's even more astounding than the fact that so many people are spending their hard-earned vacations this way is knowing that they're gladly paying for the privilege. Global Volunteers' programs range from \$550 for domestic projects up to \$3,200 for international sojourns.

Lisa Ellin, president of a technical placement firm in New Jersey and a veteran of three Global Volunteer trips, thinks it's worth it, even though the conditions can sometimes be harsh, such as during a trip she took to Jamaica. "Our team was living in group housing



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VACATION

where the walls didn't always reach the ceiling, and we were sharing the house with other creatures, like chickens," she recalls. "But as much as I love lying on the beach, I really enjoy making a difference. It's an amazing experience."

Al Schlachtmeyer, a D.C.-area management consultant, likes the personal development and cultural immersion aspect of volunteer programs. "It wasn't a vacation," says Schlachtmeyer of his experience with International Executive Service Corps, a 40-year-old organization that unites businesspeople who are willing to travel and share their expertise with struggling entrepreneurs in developing nations. "You work a full day and there's no concierge to tell you the best place to eat dinner. You have to learn your own way around, but that's part of the adventure."

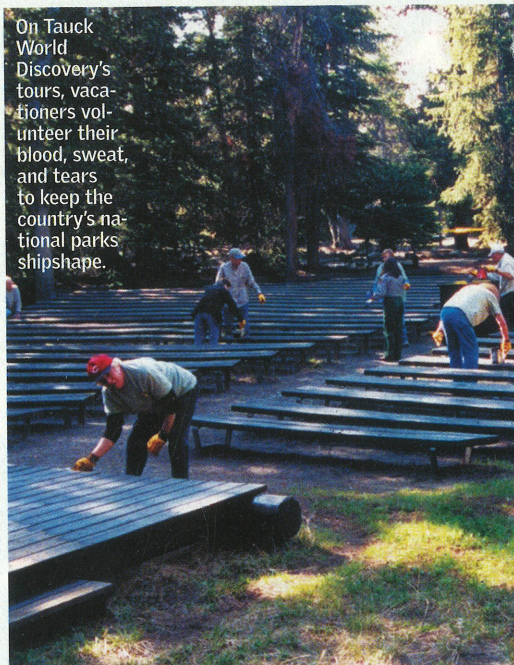
Kate McNamara, interim manager of public relations for Tauck World Discovery, says her company offers the best of both worlds for the beginner volunteer. Tauck has offered high-end tours in the U.S. since 1925, and has recently initiated volunteer travel packages in conjunction with Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Glacier National Parks. The trips average a week to 10 days and start at around \$2,000 per person.

Each package offers guests the opportunity to spend one afternoon or half a day of volunteerism at the park being visited. "They plant, they scrape paint, they pull weeds, and 94 percent of them say they would do it again," says McNamara.

They're not alone. A recent survey by the National Park Service revealed that in 2003, approximately 121,000 people contributed 4.5 million hours of service to the parks system, and those numbers have increased by an average of two percent every year since 1990.

"People are looking for ways to get back to nature and revitalize," says Molly McCahan, publicity manager for Sierra Club Outings, which offers more than 350 trips a year on all seven continents. Service trips, their version of volunteer programs, make up 25 percent of their packages and are growing in demand, according to McCahan. Almost 70 percent of their service trips for 2004 were booked up by the first week of March.

"A special kind of bonding happens on these service trips," McCahan says. "It's a skill-building thing and a personal development thing."



On Tauck World Discovery's tours, vacationers volunteer their blood, sweat, and tears to keep the country's national parks shipshape.

GIVING HEDONISM A HOLIDAY

Imagine you and 23 of your closest friends are flown to a small island chain off the coast of southern Florida, and you're divided into two teams, briefly oriented on basic survival skills, given a map and a boat, and sent off to a private island to camp, compete, and, ultimately, bond.

That's what happens on a Reality Escapes trip, a year-old program from Daily Plan-it, a corporate incentive travel company based in Missouri.

"These kinds of experiences bring harmony and balance to a person's life," says Reality Escapes creator Jill Snodgrass. For \$2,400 per person, you'll sleep out under the stars with no tents, no sleeping bags, no toothbrushes, and no triple lattes — although some lucky castaway

ESCAPE THE ORDINARY

For more information on the trips mentioned here, contact:

- **The Ashram**, www.theashram.com
- **Daily Plan-it**, www.dailyplan-it.net
- **Global Volunteers**, www.globalvolunteers.org
- **International Executive Service Corps**, www.iesc.org
- **Sierra Club**, www.sierraclub.org
- **Spencer Escape**, www.spencerescape.com
- **Tauck World Discovery**, www.tauck.com



may "win" such luxury items through various contests and skills competitions.

If it all sounds very *Survivoresque*, it is. In fact, Daily Plan-it has access to 80 percent of the show's former castaways and can arrange for two of your favorites to accompany you on the trip.

If fishing for your supper isn't enough, perhaps a weekend at Adventure Boot Camp is more your style. An operation called Spencer Escape in Big Bear, California, will put you through the ropes — literally. In addition to precariously balancing yourself on rigging 30 feet off the ground, you'll also be run through an obstacle course patterned after that of the Los Angeles SWAT team.

"There's a select group of people who are a little more adventurous and into physical well-being," says Christina Knapp, Spencer Escape's program director. "They want to take advantage of the opportunity to do something different during their vacation." Spencer Escape offers programs for all fitness levels. They're even hosting a couple's boot camp in October.

While in California, you can do like the celebrities do and book The Ashram, about an hour from LAX. Oprah Winfrey and Ashley Judd are among those who have plunked down \$3,500 to spend a week with 12 other people in a spartan lodge, living on a 1,200-calorie-a-day, organic vegetarian diet and engaging in a grueling, dictated daily routine.

Don't let the glam and glitz clientele fool you. There's a six-month waiting list, and 50 percent of them are repeat visitors. Ap-

parently, even divas need a day off, and The Ashram is where they get it. "They have no choices," says Catharina Hedberg, director of The Ashram. "When we say it's time to hike, they have to do it. No one can say, 'I want to sit by the pool.'"


Why would people spend their hard-earned money on a place that Hedberg says has been called many things, but none of them easy? Because it's a place where they can find peace and get centered. "It happens

to be a place where you find yourself again," says Hedberg.

So, whether you find yourself while balancing a bag of concrete on your shoulder in a rural Mexican village or while balancing precariously on a rope 30 feet above the ground, the trend today is to spend your vacation discovering rather than recovering. **AW**

RUTH ANN HENSLEY is a Dallas freelance writer whose last story for *American Way* involved a tour of Colorado beer country. Talk about a vacation!

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