10 Graduation Trip Ideas for Every Budget and Travel Style

From Peru to Paris, these are some of the best trips to take after graduation.

By **Lydia Mansel** | Published on April 4, 2024

PHOTO: VALERIE DE LEON/TRAVEL + LEISURE

Everyone travels for a different reason. For some, travel is an adventure, a way to discover all that the world has to offer. Others use it as a means of escaping everyday stresses. It's also one of the best ways to celebrate life's biggest moments, whether it's a new beginning, an exciting achievement, or both. Graduation certainly falls into the latter category, and you'll often see those earning a high school, college, or post-grad diploma marking the accomplishment with a memorable travel experience. Plus, this is an occasion that's often accompanied by the rare chance to travel without missing classes or taking off work. So if there's ever a good time to go on that trip you've always dreamed about, it's right after graduation.

When it comes to graduation trips, there are no hard-and-fast rules about how or where you should travel; they can run the gamut from quick beach weekends to week-long, multi-country adventures. It all depends on your preference, budget, and availability. To help narrow down your choices, we spoke with two of *Travel + Leisure*'s trusted A-List advisors, Maria Diego of Diego Travel and Jean Sanz of JSB Journeys, to curate a list of the best graduation trip ideas.

01 of 10 | Costa Rica

PHOTO: TAYLOR MCINTYRE/TRAVEL + LEISURE

When you want a graduation trip with lots of sunshine, salt water, and beautiful scenery, but you don't want a super long flight, choose Costa Rica, T+L's 2024 Destination of the Year. "The proximity to the U.S. makes this a quick jump over if time is of the essence," Sanz tells T+L. Start your journey by indulging in a bit of luxurious relaxation — "You can enjoy hot springs and hang out with friends at The Springs Resort & Spa while sipping on a drink as you overlook the Arenal Volcano," says Sanz — then move on to something more active. There are numerous hiking opportunities in this biodiverse country, ranging from beginner to more advanced trails. If you're really looking to challenge yourself, embark on the 174-mile Camino de Costa Rica.

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02
of 10

San Diego

PHOTO: LAUREN BREEDLOVE/TRAVEL + LEISURE

Thinking about a West Coast trip? San Diego could be in the cards. The Southern California city is known for its warm, dry summers, and there are plenty of activities to fill an itinerary, no matter your interests. If you want an active graduation trip, book a surf lesson with Surf Diva, hike Torrey Pines State Park Loop, and practice your swing at the famed Torrey Pines Golf Course. For a trip that's centered around art, explore the collections at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, The San Diego Museum of Art, and

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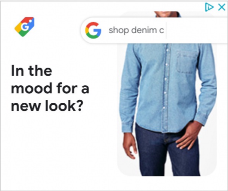
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the Mingei International Museum. If you want to do nothing but lounge by the beach or pool, check into Hotel del Coronado or The Lodge at Torrey Pines for a few extra-luxe nights.

03
of 10

St. Barts

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While Diego notes that she wouldn't recommend St. Barts for a high school graduation trip, it is a special, celebratory destination that could be a good option for those graduating from college. In Diego's words, it's an "island that outshines them all," and if you visit in the late summer (as opposed to the popular winter season), you'll often see lower prices and fewer crowds. "Eden Rock is always a popular choice if you want to see and be seen, or if you're looking for more of a hideaway with an ultra-chic clientele and [a] lower-key beach club, I recommend Le Toiny," she says.

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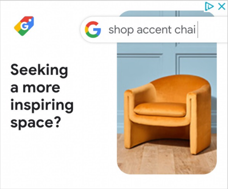

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04
of 10

Buenos Aires and Patagonia

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“Aside from the fact that it should be on everyone's bucket list, Buenos Aires is an eclectic cosmopolitan city, with cocktail bars, nightclubs, and an incredible food scene,” says Sanz. After spending a few days in the city, make your way to Patagonia, where you’ll need your hiking boots, waterproof layers, and plenty of bug spray and sunscreen. “You can hike from camp to camp as you overlook the amazing Fitz Roy mountain and end in a fabulous adventure lodge like Explora. The food and the dramatic landscapes are also a great way to treat yourself as you walk into a new world,” she adds.

05
of 10

National Park Road Trip

PHOTO: IRJALIINA PAAVONPERA/TRAVEL + LEISURE

“A road trip is always a great way to celebrate a milestone. We have some of the most beautiful parks and animals on the planet in our own backyard,” says Diego. If you’re planning an extended graduation trip, spread out over several weeks, you could try to plot out some of our nation’s biggest national parks out West— from the Great Sand Dunes to Zion — and check them all off on an epic road trip. But if you’re only planning on traveling for about a week, and you still want to see some impressive wildlife and scenery, head to Grand Teton National Park and Yellowstone National Park, which are about an hour’s drive from one another. Most travelers fly into Jackson Hole

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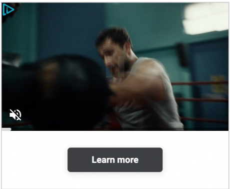

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Airport, the only commercial airport within a U.S. national park, and use Jackson Hole as their base camp for exploring Grand Teton National Park over a period of two to three days. Yellowstone takes a bit more time; plan on spending three to four days traversing the park and checking off your top highlights and points of interest.

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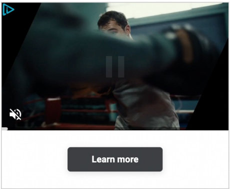

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06
of 10

New York City

PHOTO: VALERIE DE LEON/TRAVEL + LEISURE

New York City has something for everyone — and that includes recent grads. If it's your first time in the Big Apple, you'll probably want to experience all of the classics: a Yankees game, Central Park, a slice at a quintessential pizzeria, a Broadway show, and some of New York City's best museums, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Guggenheim, and The Whitney. It'll be a packed trip, so don't forget your best walking shoes; depending on your schedule, you'll probably end up trekking multiple miles as you make your way through the boroughs. While NYC isn't known as a particularly cheap destination, it does have a whole host of free things to do if you're looking to keep costs down.

07
of 10

Rwanda

PHOTO: GUENTERGUNI/GETTY IMAGES

"I think Africa is the perfect option for a graduation trip, particularly gorilla trekking in Rwanda," says Diego. "In order to do the chimpanzee and gorilla treks, the minimum age requirement is 18, which would be a fantastic age to have this experience." She also suggests starting your trip at the Kigali Genocide Memorial in the capital of Rwanda: "While extremely sad, it is very educational and sets a context for the entirety of the trip. Once you see the history of what this small country has gone through, and overcome, it changes you in a very impactful way. I can't think of a better gift to share with a young adult than the entire experience that is Rwanda."

08
of 10

London and Paris

LE BOEUF À LA MODE
Restaurant Brasserie
"LA VANNERIE"

PHOTO: LEOPOLDINE BAUER/TRAVEL + LEISURE

Out of all the cities in the world, London and Paris are two of the most iconic — and they're only two hours apart by train. Start your trip in the Big Smoke, where you can cheers to your diploma over Champagne afternoon tea at The Ritz and get your steps in while walking through Green Park, St. James's Park, and some of the city's most picturesque neighborhoods. Rest up at The Laslett, an expertly designed boutique hotel in Notting Hill, before hopping aboard the Eurostar to Paris. You may have a long list of must-sees in the City of Lights, but leave time for the best parts of a Parisian adventure: leisurely coffee breaks at cafés, croissant and baguette runs, and a long stroll down the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. For a particularly memorable stay in Paris, Diego recommends Le Grand Contrôle, "the hotel in the Château de Versailles that allows special access without the crowds."

09
of 10

Peru

PHOTO: RORY FULLER/TRAVEL + LEISURE

Travelers might want to use this time off to tour Peru, the home of Machu Picchu and part of the Amazon rainforest. "Hiking the last part of the Inca Trail and arriving at the majestic citadel of Machu Picchu gives you a mystical sense of being — and [it's] a great feeling of freedom to have after several years of university," says Sanz. She suggests staying at the Palacio del Inka in Cusco, where you can sip piscos on your balcony, and leaving time for Lima. When in the capital, follow Sanz's advice and "explore the culinary delights of Mayta [and its] fantastic cocktail menu."

10
of 10

Charleston

PHOTO: TAYLOR MCINTYRE/TRAVEL + LEISURE

When the only thing you want to do after graduation is soak up some sun on the beach, look no further than Charleston. The Holy City is known for its laidback lifestyle, and there are several beaches within driving distance of the downtown area. Folly Beach is where you'll find kitschy beach shops, amazing seafood restaurants, and opportunities to surf. Sullivan's Island is a bit quieter, but its main street, Middle Street, becomes a hub of activity on summer weekends. If the whole family is joining your grad trip, book a stay at Wild Dunes Resort on Isle of Palms. No matter which beach you choose, you'll be able to find plenty of R&R before starting your next life chapter.

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