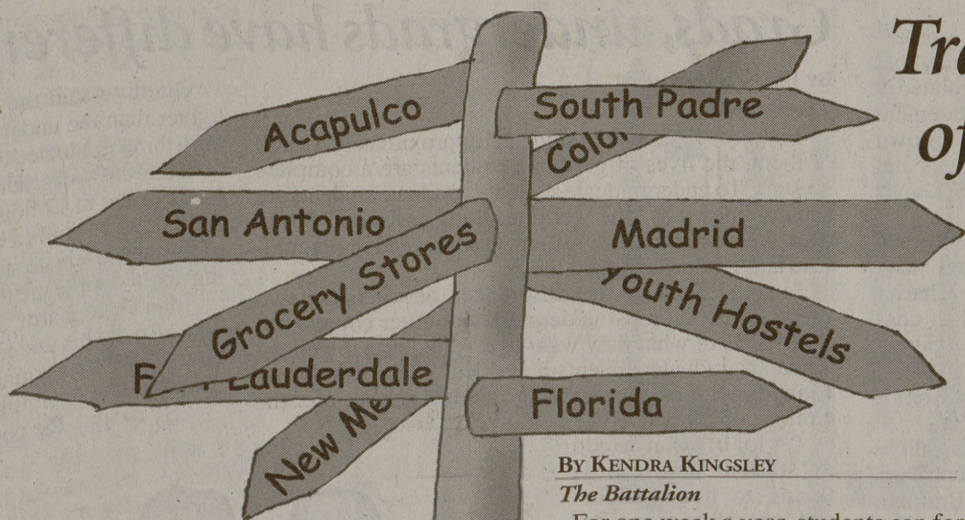


Put the books down ...

Traveling to hot spots for March break offers excitement, parties, relaxation



By KENDRA KINGSLEY
The Battalion

For one week a year, students can forgo the cruel and unusual punishment of cramming and exam-taking and flock to the most exotic backdrops their spring break budgets can afford. From the sandy beaches of Mexico to international locales, students can find seven days of blissful relaxation for a relatively small fee.

Loretta Newland, a travel agent for A&M Travel Services Inc., said vacation packages often provide the best deal for student travelers.

"Traveling to places like Cancun, Cozumel and Daytona Beach are almost always cheaper when you buy a package deal from a travel company because they include their own chartered airline, hotel and food," she said. "Mexico is especially appealing because anyone can afford it (the cheapest packages range from \$300 to \$400) and the touristy regions are really geared toward vacation."

Newland also said that, although many packages seem too good to be true, most are completely legitimate as long as students make sure to read all the fine print.

Students planning to take advantage of the deals at the last minute, however, had better start making arrangements for next year instead.

Cheryl Vulkowski, a travel agent for Carlson Wagonlit, said the earlier the trip is planned, the more money students could save. "If booked early, most trips range from \$450 to \$650, but if you wait until the last minute, they can usually run from \$850 to over \$1000," Vulkowski said. "As a result, most of our prepackaged plans have been sold out for months. Students should really start planning in September or October to get the best prices."

For those fortunate enough to have a vacation arrangement far in advance, the south-of-the-border tradition offers more than an unreg-

ulated drinking age. Meredith Houx, a freshman business management major, said Acapulco has the ideal atmosphere for a beach-bound spring break.

"My week will be spent tanning, partying and meeting people in Acapulco," Houx said. "[My friends and I] got a vacation package, which includes a flight out of and into Houston, tips, a hotel stay in the Super Deluxe and all of our food, for around \$800. I'm really excited about the trip because it's the same idea and price of Cancun but with a cleaner and more attractive atmosphere."

Although spending the week bathed in Mexican sunlight is an alluring option for many, others opt to stay within the boundaries of Texas. Andrew Offer, a freshman business finance major and member of the Greek organization Sigma Chi, plans to relax in a Texas town popular among college students during spring break.

week in Fort Lauderdale," he said. "To save money, all five of us are staying in a hotel room modeled for two people. We are also planning to buy groceries and make a lot of sandwiches rather than making a habit of eating out."

"I've been skiing, but the beach just seems like part of the college experience," he said. "When the idea to take a road trip to Florida came up, I jumped at the chance. I need to get all the vacation I can before law school starts next year and relaxing is basically over."

If staying within the United States sounds less than appealing, consider skipping the country. Jarrett Urban, a junior business accounting major, said he was looking for a unique adventure instead of the conventional spring break hot spots.

"My roommate, his sister and a few friends are spending seven days in and around Madrid," Urban said. "For the most part, we plan to visit museums, palaces and other historical parts of the city. We are also taking a one-hour bus ride to the monastery of San Lorenzo del Escorial and a train ride to Salamanca, where one of the oldest universities in Europe is located."

Urban described the innovative strategies he and his fellow travelers will use to save money.

"For under \$1,000, we have a reserved plane ticket, accommodations, food, transportation and the cost of attractions. Our goal is 'cheap,' so we're staying in a youth hostel, taking a train around Spain and buying our own groceries. I had thought about returning to London, where I interned last year, but I wanted a different experience."

Whether spring break plans include an international adventure or a road trip to the nearest city, the most important aspect to consider is the quality of the trip versus its effect on a limited budget. Websites like www.priceline.com and www.travelocity.com are places to check for low prices for airline tickets, car rentals and accommodations — the most expensive necessities of travel.

If the budget just won't accommodate even the cheapest of road trips, consider indulging in a little relaxation. John Ray, a freshman industrial distribution major, said he will go home for spring break and catch up on the sleep he missed throughout his college career.

"I'll spend about \$40 for gas money to get home, which is cheap compared to the cost of an actual trip, and spend the rest of the week hanging out with friends, napping and relaxing," he said. "I had planned to go on vacation with a few guys, but sleep and saving money won out."

"There's about 15 of us staying in a house designed for six people, which means we can chill, party and hang out on the beach all week for around \$150 per person."

— Andrew Offer
freshman business finance major

"My fraternity is driving down to South Padre in an overcrowded Suburban to save cash," Offer said. "We were going to rent a Winnebago and camp out, but we decided to rent a beachside condo instead. There's about 15 of us staying in a house designed for six people, which means we can chill, party and hang out on the beach all week for around \$150 per person."

For those who prefer a more metropolitan experience, cities such as Dallas, Houston and San Antonio make perfect destinations.

Urban entertainment, from museums to four-star restaurants, comes with the territory of a city road trip. At www.ticketmaster.com, theater, concert and sporting-event tickets are available at the click of the mouse. Because many large cities offer inexpensive hotel rates and are within a few hours of A&M, students may find metropolitan mini-vacations give the best bang for their buck.

Despite the Lone Star State's many attractions, some may prefer a change of scenery for their one week of freedom. Garrett Cornelison, a senior English rhetoric major, said his first choice for a spring break excursion includes plans to jump Texas' eastern border and head east.

"My friends and I made plans to spend the



for Spring Break 2001

Adventure lurks just outside the College Station city limits

By BROOKE HOLBERT
The Battalion

Americans love a road trip. This infatuation is chronicled in popular songs from the Indigo Girls' "Get Out the Map" to the Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Road Trippin'." This music soothes listeners with romantic stories of easy traveling on a winding road and is an excellent way to ease the worried mind and realize that there is a lot more fun to have in a car than simply getting from point A to point B. The journey is the destination. There is a certain intimacy in road trips with which an airplane cannot compete. Leave the calendar at home, listen to cheesy country songs with a good friend and get philosophical. Abandoning yourself to a few unscheduled days on the road can create a true road warrior.

Kemah

About 120 miles toward Galveston on Interstate 45 lies Kemah, a small tourist town. This is a fun place of escape when one is weary of the party scene and appreciates the more serene environment of a seaside town. Marinas, boating, shopping for silver jewelry and eating at funky beachside restaurants make Kemah a breezy getaway from College Station.

"There is a really neat restaurant called The Aquarium that has walls of fish tanks in it, and there is a little Ferris wheel and train to go on," said junior speech communication major Sarah Graham. "It is not the place to go and party like Austin or something, but it is a fun thing to do on the weekend."

This may not be the typical man's idea of

a high-energy weekend, but it is a fun change of pace for couples or a group of girls. Kemah offers several reasonable bed-and-breakfast type hotels with rates that start at \$40.

Hidalgo Falls

The Hidalgo Falls are a series of exposed limestone shoals along the Brazos River that formed after years of erosion. The falls eroded into a mini-white-water-rafting attraction that allows visitors to cavort as a raft-wearing nature-lover for a few hours and brave the rapids.

"My friends and I got kayaks and went on the river," said Craig Hargas, a junior finance major. "The kayaks are fun, but it's also nice to just get a lawn chair and sit in the shallow end. It is easy to throw a grill in the car and just make a day trip out of it. And there is a great tree swing."

Hidalgo Falls is about 30 minutes south of College Station, heading down Wellborn Road. Admission to the river is \$1.

Austin

Sometimes the homesick student just craves a little exposure to

a larger city. As charming as small towns can be, there is something addictive about the traffic, entertainment and anonymity of city life. Take advantage of the easy hour-and-a-half drive to Austin.

"I will begin to really miss Austin after a while," said Don Stroope, a sophomore chemical engineering major. "The live music and energy of Sixth Street is like nothing else. There is no single place to go. Everything is always new and changing and there are just so many things to do."

Sixth Street and Guadalupe Street are famous for the wide variety of

restaurants, coffee shops, clubs, stores and street-side vendors. Austin brags of its diversity, and the eclectic, edgy feel of the hippie city delivers. A college favorite includes The Hole in the Wall bar, right next to the campus of the University of Texas, with live music from reggae to jazz. Antone's Blues Club is deemed the best blues club in the city, a crowded joint known for bridging generation gaps and bringing together all blues lovers.

A popular event is the South by Southwest music and film festival held during spring break this year. The festival offers

different admission prices to the seven days of concerts and films starting at a student rate of \$130.

New Braunfels

Though many people are drawn to New Braunfels to tube down the Guadalupe and Comal rivers, Greane Hall is less well-known. This is the dance hall where John Travolta shimmied as a disreputable angel alongside Andie MacDowell in the movie *Michael*. Surrounding the dance hall are rows of old-fashioned craft and general stores.

"Greane Hall is the oldest dance hall in Texas," said senior civil engineering major Dave Kneuper. "All the Texas legends have played there, like Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Jack Ingram. You can leave here at 10 and be on the river by 1. Float all afternoon on the river and go to Greane Hall at night."

New Braunfels is about two and a half hours away, down Highway 21 toward San Marcos, then Interstate 35 to New Braunfels.

Remember, absence does make the heart grow fonder. Back within the familiar city limits of the Brazos Valley, the Freebirds burrito will taste much sweeter, Northgate will once again sparkle with life and Aggie pride will be recharged.



GRAPHICS BY KATIE EASTERLING/THE BATTALION