HIT THE ROAD, JACK

GREAT ESCAPES JUST A FEW HOURS FROM HOME

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hen was the last time you hopped in your car and ventured off on a good old-fashioned road trip? If you answered "Woodstock," you are long overdue to hit the highways.

What places are worth planning a road trip to see? Here are a few ideas for quick getaways and short day trips to get your wheels turning.

VIRGINIA

As ironic as it sounds, the first road trip suggestion is a hike in Virginia. After driving a mere 90 minutes or so, stop at the Shenandoah Valley for the Twin Creeks Llamas half-day hike (now taking winter reservations at www.twincreeksllamas.com) into the Blue Ridge Mountains. Escorted by four-course lunch-carrying llamas, families or nature and fitness buffs can enjoy the forest, wildflowers, mountains and ravines with flowing streams.

Whether taking the 3.5-mile Highpoint Trail or the 2-mile Paw Paw Trail, make sure you relish the sights of the Shenandoah river; it will wash away the grime of the Potomac.

After spending all day on your feet, why not let someone else do the walking for you. Visit Fauquier county for a taste of Virginia's wine country. You can enjoy a leisurely horseback ride at the Marriott Ranch and then finish the day a few miles down, warming up to a glass of cabernet sauvignon at Oasis winery (www.oasiswine.com).

"We have a brut sparkling wine that's ranked Top 10 in the world and one of the best views in the Virginia area," said Jennifer Wood, who handles booking and events for Oasis. "We have a three-layer deck nestled in the perfect place with a great lake and mountain view...not a 7-Eleven in sight."

If a small toast is not enough, Oasis coordinates limousine tours of other Virginia wineries. And if you want to know what that little guy on your Ralph Lauren shirt really does, authentic polo matches occur in the evening.

If hiking, horseback, wine and polo do not satiate your taste for enjoyable auto excursions, perhaps affluent eating on the go might.

"Epicurean food travel is another hot topic right now." said Richard Lewis, national public relations manager for the Virginia Tourism Corp. Lewis said he has noticed a growing fascination for people who like traveling to great restaurants around the country.

Those interested in filling up on a continent's worth of cuisine should visit www.virginia.org for a list of Virginia's restaurants. For a state-to-state look at the Top 10 restaurants, visit www.opentable.com and www.epicurious.com before you travel.

For those people who treat their canines better than first cousins, they are in luck. Lewis said a number of states, including Virginia, are busy promoting pet-friendly travel.

"You can take a dog to all or the great majority of Virginia state parks," Lewis said. "There are pet-friendly hotels. Keswick Hall is an exquisite place where the chef will even cook a meal for your dog."

Debby Harris, spokes-woman for the luxurious hotel Keswick Hall in Albemarle County near Charlottesville, said pets are given the royal treatment. The executive chef prepares menu items for pooches—served in special china—and a butler will walk your dog while the concierge schedules your private pampering appointment at the Club Spa.

This will not be a cheap stay, but if money is no object for you and your pet, visit www.keswick.com for details.