

SHAPE YOUR LIFE

# SHAPE

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## Let Your Vacation "Games" Begin



by Deborah Abrams Kaplan

Maybe you don't like the thought of fighting the crowds in Beijing this August but you're feeling inspired to take a sports-centered vacation. Then consider heading to a former Olympic city. You'll not only encounter fewer people, in some cases you'll have access to the athletic venues for *your* workout (something you'd never be able to get in China). In addition to world-class sports facilities, these sites boast plenty of active ways for you to stage your own games. Whether you're [riding](#) in the Olympic equestrian park outside Atlanta or rowing in Montréal's Olympic Basin, you'll stay in shape and come home feeling like a winner.

### Bump, Set, and Spike in the Sun

#### *Los Angeles*

While [beach volleyball](#) wasn't an Olympic sport when L.A. hosted the 1984 games, the power and grace (not to mention bikinis) of the players have been a huge draw since its Olympic introduction in 1996. One of beach [volleyball's](#) best players, three-time Olympian

Holly McPeak, hails from Manhattan Beach, aka volleyball central, just three miles south of Los Angeles International Airport. On its two miles of sandy waterfront, this exclusive coastal town boasts 150 volleyball courts, so it's easy to join a pickup game or start one of your own. The Beach Cities Ski Club runs open games (anyone can come) on Wednesday evenings and free Sunday volleyball clinics at the pink nets south of the Manhattan Beach Pier ([bcskiclub.org](http://bcskiclub.org)).

#### **In your spare time**

With near-perfect year-round temperatures, the action is all outdoors here. Stretching 22 miles from Will Rogers State Beach in Pacific Palisades to Torrance County Beach, two separate but adjacent paths teem with bikers, walkers, skaters, and joggers. Rent wheels at Fun Bunn's Beach Rentals (bikes from \$7 per hour, [inline skates](#) from \$6 per hour; 1116 Manhattan Ave.) and check out the jaw-dropping oceanfront real estate along the paved trails.

To get your Olympics fix, drive 30 to 45 minutes from Manhattan Beach to the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum in Exposition Park, just south of the University of Southern California. The site of both the 1932 and 1984 Olympic track and field events as well as the opening and closing ceremonies, the Coliseum is now home to USC Trojan football games and other events.

#### **Where to stay**

Manhattan Beach's first luxury boutique hotel, Shade, is in the heart of downtown (from \$275; [shadehotel.com](http://shadehotel.com)). After an active day, soak in the two-person spa while basking in the glow of chromatherapy lighting (the colors change to suit your mood).

#### **Explore on Foot and Wheels**

##### ***Amsterdam, Netherlands***

While the Netherlands' best-known sport is biking, running just might be a close second. (The city's 1928 games marked the first time women were allowed to compete in track and field.) For those keeping time, Amsterdam's flat landscape makes for a fast course. Lace up your shoes and run from the central Dam Square to the Olympisch Stadion (or Olympic Stadium), about five miles [round-trip](#). On the way you'll run through the 120-acre Vondelpark and cross over several of the city's famous canals. The stadium hosts numerous athletic events and sports a museum in its catacombs that spotlights Dutch Olympic athletes.

#### **In your spare time**

Amsterdam's free Friday Night Skate, where hundreds of skaters meet up to roll through the city, has been going on for 11 years. Rent wheels from De Vondeltoein Rent a Skate at Vondelpark 7 (from \$8\* per hour; [vondeltoein.nl](http://vondeltoein.nl))-the same park where you'll meet up with your fellow skaters-then take to the roads en masse, skating about 12 miles over bridges and on brick-paved roads. (There's a different route each week.)

#### **Where to stay**

Rooms at the Seven Bridges Hotel are a unique mix of local art, Biedermeier antiques, Oriental rugs, and Art Deco furniture (from \$175, including breakfast; [sevenbridges](http://sevenbridges))

[hotel.nl](#)). With picturesque buildings and bridges outside, you'll love the city views from this 300- year-old property.

## Hone Your Riding Skills

### *Atlanta*

During the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, the Georgia International Horse Park in Conyers was the site for all things equestrian. Thirty minutes from downtown Atlanta, this park also hosted the first Olympic [mountain bike](#) race and the final two pentathlon competitions. The venue is still open for sporting events as well as individual horseback rides through Linda's Riding School. With 30 horses, Linda offers a variety of options, including a onehour lesson in a covered arena at her stables or a threehour trail ride in the hilly outskirts of Conyers or in the Horse Park (\$45 for a private lesson, \$50 for a three-hour outing; [lindasridingschool.com](#)). If you're a seasoned equestrienne, you can practice jumping and dressage (think horse ballet) at her stables.

### **In your spare time**

Jog through 21-acre Centennial Olympic Park in downtown Atlanta. Built for medal presentations and entertainment, it's now a popular attraction for outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy the year-round festivals and concerts, including live lunchtime music on Tuesdays and Thursdays through October and Wednesday Wind Down concerts at dusk through September.

### **Where to stay**

Stick close to downtown at Twelve Centennial Park. The all-suite hotel boasts kitchens in every room (from \$189; [twelvehotels.com](#)).

## Bike Down Under *Sydney, Australia*

While the athletes are sweating through a Beijing summer, you can revel in this city's 60-degree winter temps as you enjoy the legacy of the 2000 games. Organizers created public facilities at Sydney Olympic Park for sports like archery, [swimming](#), and motocross-and you can sample them all year-round! Learn archery basics during a Come 'n' Try class (\$19 for 90 minutes; [archery centre.com.au](#)); check out a weekend Ride With a Pro BMX bike clinic (\$19 for one hour; [monsterpark.com.au](#)); or skip the instruction altogether and just dive into the pool and swim laps on your own at the park's Aquatic Centre, where Jenny Thompson and the U.S. women's team won all three relay gold medals (\$6; [sydneyolympicpark.com.au](#)). Before you commit to anything, though, rent a bike at the visitors' center (\$11 per hour or \$30 per day; [sydneyolympicpark.com.au](#)) and take in the highlights of the 1,580-acre park. There are three well-marked four- to nine-mile circuits for cyclists to choose from.

### **In your spare time**

For the best skyline view around, head to the Sydney Harbour Bridge for a three-and-a-half- hour guided climb ([tickets](#) from \$168; [bridgeclimb.com](#)). You'll don a harness with a safety line, then ascend stairs and mesh catwalks and crawl under girders. Climbers top out at the span's upper arch, 440 feet above Sydney Harbour. From here you'll be able to look out over the water and the famous Sydney Opera House, Luna Park roller coaster, and Royal Botanic Gardens.

### **Where to stay**

If you want to be in the park itself, check into Sydney's newest five-star property, the solar-powered, 18-story Pullman Hotel (from \$237; [accorhotels.com.au](http://accorhotels.com.au)).

## **Row Like A Pro**

### ***Montréal***

Not only was Montréal the first Canadian city to host the Olympics, the 1976 games there were the first to feature women rowers. Montréal built the Olympic Basin at Île Notre-Dame for the games, and it continues to be used by novice to world-class rowers from the Montréal Rowing Club. Take a weekend Learn to Row class from coaches (they speak French and English) who'll have you plying this 1.4-mile-long self-contained waterway in no time. During the eight-hour course, you'll learn techniques in a rowing tank before venturing out to the water (\$130 for a daylong clinic, private lessons start at \$49 per hour; [avironmontreal.com](http://avironmontreal.com)).

### **In your spare time**

One hundred years before the Olympics came to town, Montréal inaugurated Mount Royal Park (referred to as Le Mont Royal by locals). At this hub of year-round outdoor activities, you can jog, hike, and pedal-boat in warm months. Stop by the Smith House, the park's visitors center, for walking-tour maps (\$2; [lemontroyal.qc.ca](http://lemontroyal.qc.ca)), then set out on a 20-minute hike to Camillien Houde Lookout, where you can spot the Olympic Stadium in the distance and enjoy fabulous city views.

### **Where to stay**

Less than two miles from Mount Royal in Old Montréal is Hotel Gault, a boutique property in an ornate stone building that offers modern, open loft rooms (from \$190; [hotelgault.com](http://hotelgault.com)).

**\*Prices quoted throughout are in U.S. dollars.**