



AMERICAN WAY

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PIOV

Grad Pads

Boutique hotels in college towns are the best treat for parents since tailgating

I DON'T REMEMBER if it was my daughter's first or second phone call from college when I realized how much work her education was going to be. "I've got my schedule, Daddy. I'm not sure if you need to come see me two or three weekends yet. There's Parent's Day, and then there's Homecoming, and then there's ..."

I stopped listening about then. Me go there? Between tuition and housing and food and textbooks and new clothes and university-approved baubles, wasn't this costing me enough money already?

The answer, as you may imagine, was no. I was expected to travel to Oxford (Ole Miss) and then Stillwater (Oklahoma State) often to see my daughter. Which wouldn't have been so bad if the hotel options in small college towns weren't so universally lousy.

Lucky for you, fellow parent of a college student, that's changing thanks to a new crop of boutique hotels in college towns across

America. Graduate Hotels are popping up in places like Madison, Wisconsin; Athens, Georgia; and, yes, even Oxford, Mississippi. The boutiques are trying to offer modern amenities while giving small design nods to the traditions and the colleges that define these towns. "A Graduate Hotel is not just a place to sleep, it's an experience," says Ben Weprin, CEO of AJ Capital Partners/ Graduate Hotels. —ERIC CELESTE

EXAMPLE: Graduate Athens, Georgia, showcases locally sourced vintage and contemporary art that references the community and university. "We spend an extraordinary amount of time meeting with locals and learning about what makes each community special. We then weave those stories into the hotel's DNA," Weprin says. Check Graduatehotels.com for more openings scheduled this year and in 2016.



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Hop In a Hot-Air Balloon

Riding in a hot-air balloon should top your bucket list

Hot-air balloons are pretty from below, but nothing beats a 2,000-foot-high view. The Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta takes place next month, Oct. 3-11.

PHOTOS: KAYMOND WATT, NBCUNIVERSAL