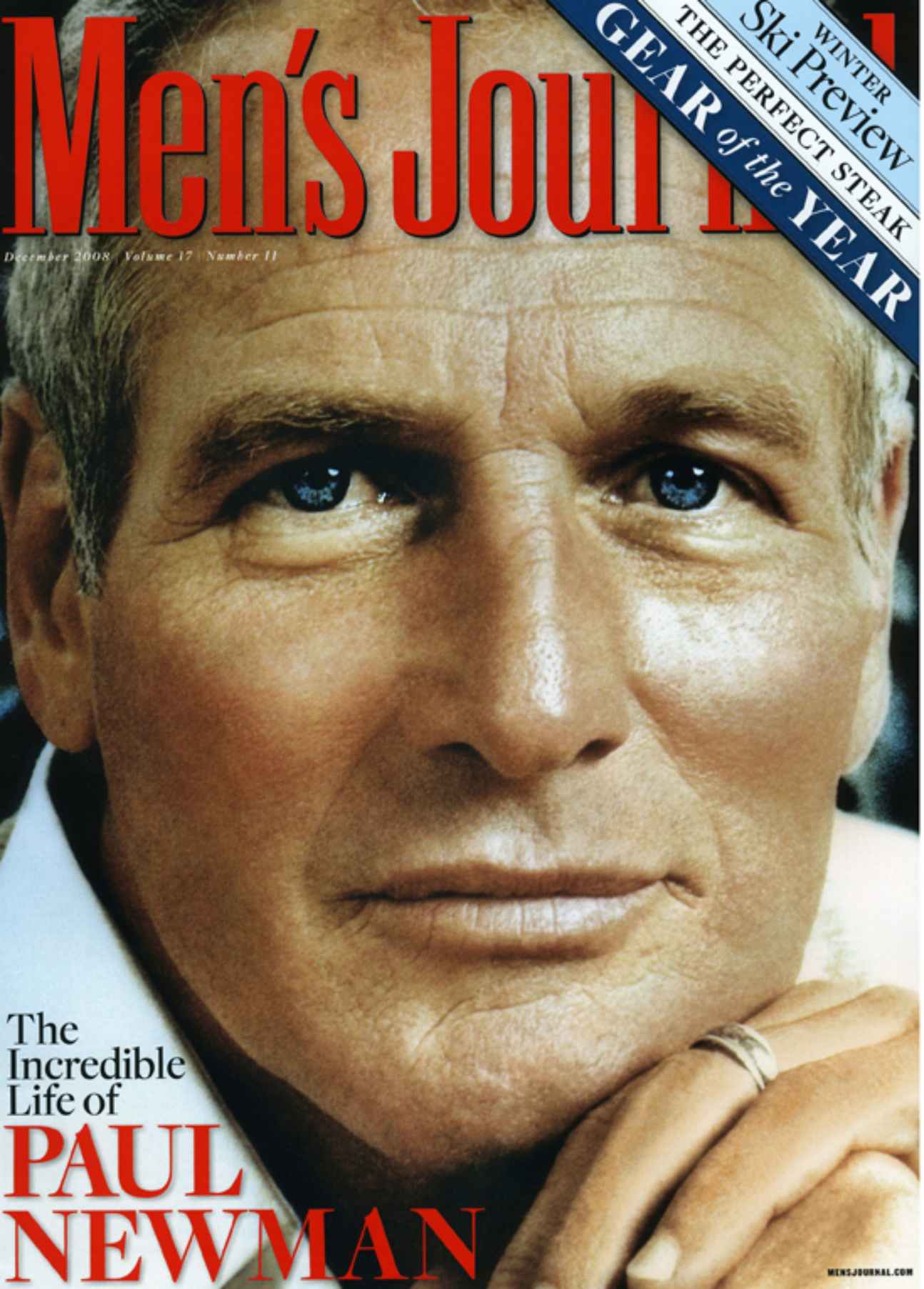

Get to St. Kitts before this picture fills with tourists in beach chairs.

AN ISLAND APART

NOW'S THE TIME TO VISIT ST. KITTS, A TINY CARIBBEAN nation enjoying a short window of bliss — it's several years removed from the collapse of its sugar industry and a devastating hurricane, and still a few years away from a massive resort development going up on the island's southern tip. With secluded beaches, wreck diving, volcano and jungle trekking, and elegant plantation inns, St. Kitts is so diverse you'll want to allow time to split your nights between forays both up- and down-island.

THE SOUTHERN PENINSULA

WHERE TO STAY The best lodging close to the only area of St. Kitts offering stereotypically gorgeous stretches of Caribbean sand is the new St. Kitts Marriott, in North Frigate Bay. It's massive, but spread out enough that you won't feel crowded. Request a suite on one of the top two floors for an unbroken view out over the Atlantic (*from $149; marriott.com*).

WHERE TO SWIM The adjacent beaches of Frigate Bay offer the standard water sports and beach-bar shacks. To get a stretch of sand to yourself, take a cab (the driver will know where to go) farther down the mountainous peninsula for a succession of hidden beaches reachable only by unmarked dirt roads or boat.

WHERE TO DIVE Deserted White House Bay has wrecks in water shallow enough for snorkeling and nearby reefs inhabited by turtles and octopuses (*$10 a day for snorkel rental, $80 for an offshore scuba dive with equipment; prodiversstkitts.com*).

WHERE TO DRINK Cockleshell Beach boasts the island's best bar, Reggae Beach Bar, which offers "Ting with a sting" (grapefruit soda with sugarcane liquor) and a built-in drinking buddy: Wilbur, a 600-pound pig (*reggaebeachbar.com*).

THE NORTHERN JUNGLE

WHERE TO STAY Of several old sugar plantations turned inns, the most elegant is Ottley's Plantation, with a 66-foot pool built into the ruins of a 17th-century sugar refinery. Ask manager Marty Lowell to take you on a rainforest hike to see the vervet monkeys that pillage his mango orchard (*$254–$778; ottleys.com*).

WHERE TO EAT The Royal Palm Restaurant at Ottley's is the most elegant on the island. For a more casual dinner, head to Sprat Net. Here the fishermen-owners will heap the day's catch on a table for you to pick out what you want grilled (*869-466-7535*).

WHERE TO HIKE That towering peak is 3,792-foot volcano Mount Misery. Trails aren't marked, so hike to the crater with a guide (*$90; gregsafaris.com*). You can explore St. Kitts's violent history at the imposing British fortress atop Brimstone Hill. Or pull off the road in nearby Bloody Point — a 15-minute rock scramble upstream is a spot few tourists ever see, where 2,000 Caribs were massacred and the canyon walls are covered with dozens of pre-Columbian petroglyphs. —CHARLES COXE

ENDLESS SUMMER SPORTS

Don't want to give up your warm-weather activities just because there's snow outside? Try spending part of the off-season at one of these temperate training meccas.

ROCK CLIMBING
Waco, Texas

Harker Heights, near Waco, has about 10,000 square feet of indoor climbing at Boulders Sport Climbing Center. But you didn't come all the way to Texas to pull plastic; so head 25 miles south to Rogers Park for a half-mile stretch of limestone with upward of 350 bouldering routes. When you'd like to rope up, hit Morgan's Point, a sport climbing crag full of technical climbs starting at 5.10. The BSCC offers $12 day passes and trips to nearby crags (*climbboulders.com*).

MOUNTAIN BIKING
Gooseberry Mesa, Utah

Just south of the mountain bike–free Zion National Park, pros like fat-tire legend David "Tinker" Juarez and team Cannondale can be found tearing over this epic 20-mile network of slickrock trails linked by sweeping singletrack. "It's a mix of Moab and classic desert riding, with both technical and flowing dirt sections," says biker Mark Sevenoff. Winter nights can be chilly, but they're much preferable to the summer's 100-degree temps (*rentals from $38 per day; bicyclesunlimited.com*).

ROWING
Austin, Texas

The worst part about rowing in winter on Lady Bird Lake is that you're likely to be handed your ass by other boats. "Teams from Michigan, Iowa – basically all the northern and midwestern schools – come down for a week in the winter to row," explains Austin Rowing Club's Elisabeth Gardner. Single scullers don't have it any easier; guys like Olympian Ken Jurkowski have trained here too. If you're in town for a week, you can train with the ARC for free (*austinrowing.org*).

COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JULIEN CAPRIEL/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY BOULDERS SPORT CLIMBING CENTER; ANTHONY WESTCOMBE; PATRICK BYRD; ALAMY; MAP: ALAN KIRCHU