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TRAVEL

Avoid Summer's Rush; Plan a Fall Getaway

Prices will be lower, you'll encounter fewer crowds, and pandemic restrictions are likely to ease even more.

by: **Emma Patch** - June 24, 2021



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The world is reopening. With vaccination rates for Americans and Europeans steadily rising, so is confidence among travelers. Plus, travel is easier to navigate as restrictions ease. This summer, those factors led tourists back to the road and the skies in droves. But summer travel can be stressful, with flight delays, surge pricing and higher fuel costs. If you have flexibility in your schedule, booking a trip this fall is a better option. You'll encounter fewer crowds, and pandemic restrictions are likely to loosen up even more.

Even better, prices are usually cheaper in shoulder season. Airfares are expected to drop, and hotel rates are generally lower at summer's end and into the fall. If you can be flexible with your dates, such as traveling on weekdays or extending your stay, you can often find even lower prices. And with a rental-car shortage, you'll have a better shot of booking a vehicle at a cheaper rate (or finding one at all) if you go this fall.

We rounded up some good bets for autumn travel, including leaf-peeping trips, cruising the coast of Alaska and touring Italy. We also let you know what to expect as you travel in these still uncertain times.

International travel

The reintroduction of international travel has been staggered and unpredictable. Some places have shown more eagerness than others to dismantle their barriers to entry and are welcoming tourists with varying COVID safety protocols. For example, Mexico began a slow region-by-region reopening in June 2020 and lifted many coronavirus restrictions. Several Caribbean destinations also opened to American tourism ahead of the curve. And Iceland allowed travelers to return in April 2021.

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The European Union is expected to lift its restrictions on American tourists this summer, and then it will be up to the 27 member states whether to add their own restrictions. But much of Europe already took steps to invite American tourists for summer travel, with Greece,

Italy, Spain and France making some of the earliest announcements. Greece and Italy started welcoming vaccinated and COVID-negative tourists, including those from the U.S., in May, while Spain and France reopened to vaccinated travelers in June.

In early June, the U.S. State Department said that it was taking 58 countries and territories out of the Level 4, or “Do Not Travel,” category and designating them as Level 3, or “Reconsider Travel,” destinations. Countries no longer designated “Do Not Travel” include Canada and Mexico, France, Greece, Italy, Japan, Spain and Switzerland.

Airlines act as the first line of defense for international destinations’ documentation requirements, and now, that often means producing a negative test or proof of vaccination. If you’re flying somewhere where vaccinated travelers are allowed to bypass testing or quarantine requirements, expect to be asked for proof of vaccination before your flight—as well as once you arrive.

Like many other tour operators, Steve Perillo, CEO and owner of Perillo Tours, is optimistic about the steps European countries have taken this summer. “We’ve had two steps forward and one step back for a while now, but I think that’s stopped,” says Perillo. For that reason, he strongly recommends booking a trip in the off-season, when the crowds of summer will have subsided, the weather will be more mild and, most likely, the cost of travel will have dropped.

But as the world reopens, the destinations that have made early moves to invite tourists back have seen an influx of eager travelers—and in some cases, increased community spread of the coronavirus. For example, Mexico and the Caribbean have been welcoming Americans since very early in the pandemic, but surges in virus cases and deaths hit Quintana Roo, the Mexican state on the Yucatán Peninsula that’s home to both Cancún and Tulum, in late spring and summer.

“The fact is that the pandemic isn’t over,” says Melanie Lieberman, senior travel editor of [The Points Guy](#). “While the vaccine rollout has been great in the U.S., the situation is not the same internationally.”

Where to go in Europe

Italy tops the list of international destinations travelers are booking for 2021, according to a survey from the United States Tour Operators Association. Perillo Tours will resume custom tours of Italy after Labor Day (see [ItalyVacations.com](https://www.perillotours.com/italy-vacations)). You could book a six-night trip split between Rome and Positano on the Amalfi coast, including a private tour of Rome and a private boat ride to the island of Capri. The tour, which also includes accommodations and airfare, starts at about \$4,300 per person in September.

Price drops in the shoulder season should extend well beyond the Italian borders. As countries reopen, it will be easier to find more deals, says Melanie Lieberman, senior travel editor for The Points Guy. “In the summer, there has been a ton of demand and limited supply,” she says, and even though the travel industry has been ramping up, they can’t really keep up with all that demand. By the time fall rolls around, the hope is that more of the kinks will be worked out.

The best international travel deals often don’t linger long after announcements of reopening. If you have your eye on a destination that has been closed to tourists, be ready to book once that announcement has been made. But stay flexible. Surges in COVID cases can quickly shut down a destination.

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