

# The Boston Globe

SUMMER TRAVEL

## You're vaccinated and ready to roam. Here's how to make the most of your summer vacation

Tips for saving money and exploring off-the-beaten-path destinations this summer.

By Patricia Harris and David Lyon Updated April 30, 2021, 2 hours ago



**W**HEN ONE OF US jumped at a trip to the dentist just to leave the house, we realized that we really need a getaway. We're hardly alone.

Based on early bookings, representatives of all six New England state tourism agencies are predicting a busy summer. Travel professionals reading the tea leaves of industry data forecast a surge nationwide. A recent survey of Americans by global travel marketplace [Skyscanner](#) found anxiety about travel is at its lowest since March 2020.

News from...



2,143,524 unique  
monthly visitors

Adit Damodaran, economist at travel app [Hopper](#), says that his company is seeing “massive increases in search volume.” Moreover, its bookings are up 52 percent from the same period in 2019. Hopper’s demographic skews to under-40s, a group that has already been more comfortable traveling during the pandemic. But with vaccinations on the rise, people of all ages are ready to go. In early April, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention acknowledged that it was safe for fully vaccinated people [to travel domestically](#) while following the now-familiar mask-distancing-handwashing protocols. Flight searches and hotel bookings immediately soared.

What does that mean for your summer vacation? “Planning, planning, planning at a time when nobody wants to plan because everything seems so uncertain,” says Pauline Frommer, editorial director of [Frommers.com](#) and Frommer’s travel guides. Reservations may be necessary for attractions such as museums and theme parks, as well as for lodging and transportation. And time is of the essence: popular destinations are booking up quickly.

But don’t worry! We have you covered with some strategies for landing that summer getaway — with minimum stress.



## LOOK BEYOND THE OBVIOUS

If you're dreaming of a summer of New England travel, welcome to the party. Although things could change, by June 1 the last of the travel restrictions in the New England states are set to be lifted.

According to research sponsored by the state of Connecticut, roughly half of Northeast residents plan to travel this summer. "That means that there are *millions* of pent-up New Englanders," says Christine Castonguay, interim director of the Connecticut Office of Tourism. Equally telling is that 68.5 percent plan to stay within 100 miles from home — evidence that 2021 is shaping up as the summer of the within-driving-distance getaway.

But we New Englanders have to compete for hotels and beach towel space with the rest of the country. As Europe and Canada remain largely closed, fellow Americans are eyeing the region. New England states with an outdoorsy brand are definitely trending in online searches. "There's been a 97 percent increase in interest in Maine over 2019," says Damodaran, noting that Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket are also strong.

These trends fit the psychology of easing into travel with low-key, uncrowded outdoor experiences. "People's desire to get outside, get out into nature, is the first step to getting out and traveling," says Nate Formalarie, communications director for Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing. "People want to get out of cities, get out into fresh air." That said, state and federal campgrounds are filling quickly, so act now if you want to camp.

Actually, book now for all kinds of lodgings. Cabin and cottage rentals in traditional vacation spots like Southern Maine and Cape Cod have been extremely strong, and the pickings are getting slim in iconic summer destinations throughout the region. Remaining availability at such favorite getaways as Provincetown shows no bargains — not this year.



For more choice, opt for less obvious vacation destinations. Links on state tourism websites detail unusual destinations, package deals, and other money-saving offers. To get you started, here are some suggestions from state travel experts.

**Massachusetts and Rhode Island** ([visitma.com](http://visitma.com), [visitrhodeisland.com](http://visitrhodeisland.com))

For a different coastal getaway, Keiko Matsudo Orrall, executive director of the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, reminds travelers of the nearly 4-mile strand at Salisbury Beach. She also suggests a Central Massachusetts holiday, pointing to the family-friendly experience of Old Sturbridge Village and the beautiful plantings at Tower Hill Botanic Garden in Boylston. Extend your Central Massachusetts trip to the Blackstone River Valley, which flows into the Ocean State. Matt Sheaff, acting chief marketing officer for Rhode Island, extols the Blackstone's "beautiful walking and cycling trails."



THEY WALK FOR THE BOSTON LINE.

<http://www.pdf-tools.com>

## SAVE IN THE CITY

“Some people might be sick of scenery,” says Gemma Jamieson, global public relations and communications manager for Skyscanner. “People have had nothing to do for a year. They just really want some entertainment, a nice restaurant, a nice bar.” If that sounds familiar, you’re in luck. America’s cities may be 2021’s biggest travel bargains.

“Hotels have lost their convention and business travelers,” explains Pauline Frommer. “That’s where the biggest deals will be in the coming months. You can probably save money by doing a city break.” She points out that hotel rooms are now often less expensive than Airbnb or VRBO rentals. For a stay-cation, have a look at Boston hotel packages on the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau website ([bostonusa.com](http://bostonusa.com)), where rooms tend to be deeply discounted over pre-pandemic prices. Matsudo Orrall, of the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, hopes that some travel dollars will support local business, especially in hard-hit Chinatown.

As of press time, Providence hotels and the Rhode Island state tourism office were ironing out details of a summer promotion program to offer travelers big savings on in-city spending. Specifics will be announced on the state website. Historic architecture, a riverfront esplanade, Roger Williams Park Zoo, and great dining options might make Providence ([goprovidence.com](http://goprovidence.com)) the perfect summer getaway. From Providence, Newport is only a half-hour ferry ride away. With COVID travel restrictions easing, the iconic Newport folk and jazz festivals are scheduled to return. Attendance size and other protocols are being formulated.

Other great cities — New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington — are just a train ride away. Amtrak has launched some steep discounts this spring and its booking site shows you what percentage of each train's seats are taken, handy if you're still feeling agoraphobic after a year in lockdown or skittish about full trains of potentially unvaccinated travelers. As of mid-April, Skyscanner was showing summer rates at quality hotels in these city centers as low as \$100-\$150 per night. Amtrak fares were as low as \$29-\$49 each way. Prices could change with demand.



TRACY BAKER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

<http://www.profittools.com>



## TEST YOUR WINGS

Now that the CDC has cautiously sanctioned domestic air travel for the fully vaccinated, summer vacation getaways are limited only by local travel restrictions. Moreover, airfares remain surprisingly low. According to Hopper, the average domestic airfare for summer 2021 is around \$270 round trip, as opposed to \$315 in pre-pandemic 2019.

If that savings is enough to get you onto a plane, consider if you'll need a rental car at your destination. "One of the unexpected side effects of the pandemic," explains Frommer, "is that car rental agencies sold off their fleets to stay afloat. So there's a shortage of rental cars." Your best bet is to book far in advance.

As in New England, many popular destinations nationwide are all about the great outdoors. National parks may not be so uncrowded after all. "Travelers are setting the agenda," says Skyscanner's Gemma Jamieson. "Carriers are re-routing capacity to suit their demands." For example, airlines have added flights to Jackson, Wyoming; and Bozeman and Kalispell, Montana — all gateways to Yellowstone or Glacier national parks.

Plan ahead for best airfares. Hopper finds that the cheapest fares are generally three months in advance of departure. Three weeks before departure, prices start rising. "One to two weeks out, they spike," says Hopper's Damodaran. He does note that the expansion of low-cost carriers is driving down airfares in many markets, including at the big airlines. "Legacy carriers are reacting by bringing down their own rates to hold onto market share," he says.

<http://www.potterbooks.com>

Again, as in New England, urban destinations represent maximum bang for the buck. Hopper finds city hotel rates at or near historic lows. “For example,” Damodaran says, “hotel prices are down 65 percent in Las Vegas.” Summer flights from Boston are as low as \$191 — round trip.

If you want to use your passport this summer, Canada and most of Europe remain questionable, but the Caribbean is wide open. Most of the islands (and Caribbean Mexico) require a negative COVID test before arrival and another on departure. “Thanks to the protocols,” says Vanessa Ledesma, acting CEO and director general of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association, “our destinations have some of the lowest COVID incidence in the entire world.” The association’s website updates each destination’s requirements almost daily ([caribbeantravel.com](http://caribbeantravel.com)).

Some parts of the region are already in high demand, including Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, where Americans don’t need passports. Bookings are also strong in Jamaica, Aruba, Turks and Caicos, the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, and Cancun, Mexico. To beat the crowds, Ledesma suggests Antigua and Barbuda, where, she says, “they have a beach for every day of the year and a good mix of properties from all-inclusive resorts to small independents.”

Frommer’s in-house research finds that conventional air-hotel packages offer an average of 35 percent savings on beach vacations in Caribbean Mexico. Skyscanner, which covers more options than typical travel search engines, advises that separate comparison shopping of airfare and lodging can yield even greater savings. So do your homework.

Ledesma says that, so far, hotels and resorts have not posted price reductions. “It’s all about value added,” she says. That could include upgraded rooms, free or reduced-fee activities, on-site entertainment, culinary experiences, or even COVID tests. Some properties that normally close during the autumn storm season (September through mid-November) are planning to stay open. If you can wait a little longer, that’s when there may be bargains. Airfares also tend to drop in September.



COVID disruption has made protecting your travel expenditure more important than ever. Check change and cancellation policies on flights and hotels. Many travelers are now more open to travel insurance — whether for weather or health reasons. (Some smaller Caribbean destinations require health insurance for airlift home in case of illness.) Frommer especially recommends travel insurance for packages. “There’s no one travel insurance company that’s always the best,” she says. She recommends looking at marketplace websites that identify a number of options.

Consumers may be in the driver’s seat for a while. “We think travel will remain quite flexible for a long time as a hangover from the pandemic,” says Skyscanner’s Jamieson. “We also expect prices to fluctuate with demand, but they should remain competitive while airlines try to win back travelers as they dust off their suitcases.”

<http://www.pdf-tools.com>