

Do shoulder seasons still exist? Advisors say ‘sort of’

The term “shoulder season” is generally defined as a stretch of time between a destination’s high and low tourism seasons. Usually that is fall, late winter and early spring, since the summer months and winter holidays bring traditional school and work breaks and therefore increased travel numbers, or peak season.

The benefits of shoulder season have historically been lower prices (driven down by lower demand) and thinner crowds even at popular museums and sights. But with travel sales through the roof, do shoulder seasons look different? And does shoulder-season travel still lead to savings? Here’s what travel advisors are seeing.

Ashley Taylor with Key to the World Travel says that the booking landscape has changed in an obvious way post-pandemic — clients are far more willing to book a trip anytime of the year, and often times no matter the cost or no matter the school days missed. They want to see the world, she says, and they don’t really want to wait for the “perfect” time.

“Shoulder season is still there, but it’s not as



Image courtesy of @balloonfiesta on X
prevalent,” Taylor said. “Especially since the pandemic, people seem to be thinking, ‘Life is too short.’”

For example, October may have been off-limits for families pre-pandemic, but nowadays, clients might pull their kids out of school for a few days, or even a full week, in order to travel. Taylor says some school districts, including her own, offer some version of “independent study” or “educational days,” meaning students can make up their work later and have their absences excused.

While not everyone will do this, Taylor still sees the change impacting shoulder seasons; the deals that used to exist are simply not as extreme, because demand isn’t as low during these time periods as it once was.

Family and romance travel specialist Patrycja Kobak of It’s Worth Traveling is seeing the same thing.

“The boundary between high and shoulder season is disappearing,” Kobak said. “Demand for travel is strong, even during off-season, and that brings prices up, and inventory down.”

Fall foliage travel breaks the rules:

September, October and November are typical shoulder-season months, but clients on a mission to see fall foliage are unlikely to find lower prices — no surprise there. When the gorgeous gold and auburn leaves draw a crowd, rates in the destination go up.

-Chelsee Lowe,
[Travel Age West](#)

Record fall travel costs increase popularity of budget-friendly destinations

Travelers are gearing up for what could be one of the most expensive fall travel seasons to-date, with average trip costs up over 30% compared to last fall.

As the cost of travel continues to rise, Squaremouth's data reveals that travelers are actively seeking out more affordable destinations this fall. This year, 8 out of the top 10 popular fall destinations (below) have trip costs less than the overall season average.

The Top 10 most popular, affordable fall destinations (based on insured trip costs) include the Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Phillipines, Bermuda, Aruba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Belize, and Costa Rica.

-Squaremouth

Consider a pop culture trip to avoid fall crowds: TripIt's 4 trends shaping pop-culture travel in 2024

Pop-culture trips trend up and to the right—and live up to the hype.

While music-related events were the top reason for pop-culture trips, travelers reported other reasons, as well. Nearly half (43%) of respondents traveled for sporting events. Almost a third (28%) traveled to locations from a movie, TV show, or book. For example, Kendyl recently traveled to Croatia to see where Game of Thrones was filmed there. And 16% of respondents were inspired to visit viral social media locations.

Younger generations are especially keen on pop-culture trips: 59% of Gen Zers and 58% of Millennials plan on taking a pop-culture trip in the next year, compared with 35% of Gen Xers and 19% of Boomers+.

One reason pop-culture trips are so popular is those who've taken them overwhelmingly agree that the experience has lived up to the hype. According to our

data, 93% of respondents say their pop-culture trip lived up to their expectations.

Why'd they feel this way? Almost all travelers (94%) said the memories they made during their pop-culture trip helped it live up to the hype. Nearly as many (86%) said that being able to share the experience with someone they love was a reason their trip lived up to their expectations.

Gen Z and millennial travelers, in particular, raved about their pop-culture trips—but their reasons for loving them varied from their older counterparts.

Despite the differences between generations and parental titles, one overarching theme rings true: Americans are motivated by pop culture to book trips. Who they see, where they go, how they share their experiences, and

how they get inspired may vary, but the desire to see the world through the lens of entertainment is salient—and growing.

-TriplIt

