AMERICA'S SECRET BEACHES
+
LATE SEASON VACATION DEALS

25
SECLUDED SUN SPOTS

THE ULTIMATE PARIS COOKING EXPERIENCE
BEARS & BELUGAS IN MANITOBA
CRUISE THE GREAT LAKES

OUR 389 FAVORITE TRAVEL PICKS
WIGGLE MY TOES IN THE SAND, AN ICY DRINK SITTING NEXT TO ME.

A breeze stirs my hair as I open my eyes. Not a person in sight. Two pelicans soar inches above the water as I take a long sip.

Where is everyone else? Back at work, back in school, back home, away from the beach, their minds on fall. Me? I’m wringing one more beach trip out of summer’s waning days.

Hotels call this the shoulder season, that downtime between summer’s crowds and fall’s holidays. I simply call it bliss.

Whether you’re due for a vacation or you just can’t resist a fabulous deal, now is the time to grab one of these bargains. And while you’re enjoying your beach paradise, look for me. I’ll be the one down by the water with a floppy hat shading my smile.
Palm Beach, Fla.

Chic beachgoers flock to the Gold Coast year-round, but you’ll be styling in September for half the cost. The Atlantic-facing Ocean Boulevard may look like almost any other stretch of South Florida, but the town of Palm Beach has an identity all its own. Where else would you spay a lemon-yellow Rolls-Royce parked in front of a Gucci store? Check into one of the sophisticated hotels and you, too, will feel like a rock star.

Whether you stay at The Breakers or simply go for a drink at its Tapestry Bar, introduce yourself to this world-class five-star hotel. “The Breakers dazzles even for people who travel a lot,” says Mike Floyd, who frequents Palm Beach. The over-the-top architecture and decor are like a slice of Italian-Renaissance wedding cake. And the rates are halved during shoulder season.

Over at the uber-modern Omphoy, the glass, steel, and stucco exterior gives way to gorgeous guest rooms. The first boutique hotel added to Palm Beach in almost 20 years, the Omphoy boasts an infinity pool and a meditation garden with teak pagodas.

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<th>Peak season</th>
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<td>The Breakers</td>
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<td>(thebreakers.com)</td>
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All rates given are per single-night accommodations and are subject to change without notice.

Clearwater, Fla.

This is the perfect family vacation spot, with rows of beach resorts lining the Gulf of Mexico and plenty to do off the beach. Visit the tin-roofed John’s Pass Fishing Village, home to more than 130 restaurants and shops and the place to rent jet skis and schedule a pirate-ship cruise. Then head over to the Clearwater Marine Aquarium to meet Winter, the tailless dolphin that inspired the movie Dolphin Tale. In the evenings, the fun begins on Pier 60 with daily sunset festivals. Fire-eaters and street-walkers vie with jugglers and magicians for your attention amid the crafts fair.

And, of course, there’s the beach—miles of perfect blue water lapping against talcum-white sand. For a taste of wilderness, head up to Caladesi Island State Park on the city’s north edge, an ideal spot for beachcombing and bird-watching.

Choose from two hotels that drop rates but not style. The Hyatt Clearwater Beach Resort and Spa is the newest, with an eighth-floor pool that reflects spectacular sunsets. The Sandpearl Resort, on the site of the historic Clearwater Hotel, is an eco-friendly property with a lagoon-style pool that features a gentle waterfall and an indigenous garden.