

Top 10 Summer Destinations

Our list of top summer destinations highlights the best spots to be at during the height of the season, from northern capitals to cool seaside and lakefront retreats that refresh and rejuvenate.

By ShermansTravel editorial staff

Warm days, long nights, garden barbecues, and ice-cream cones on the boardwalk...For many of us, summer is the best season of all, when everything moves outdoors, cities come alive with festivals, and freshwater lakes and backyard pools beckon.

Our list of top summer destinations highlights the best spots to be at the height of the season, from northern capitals that truly flourish from June through Labor Day, to cool seaside and lakefront retreats that refresh and rejuvenate. Of course, nothing is more quintessentially North American come summertime than a canoe and camping trip—don't worry, we've got you covered there, too.

1. Capri

Italy's most glamorous getaway, the island of Capri is one of the most picturesque islands around. With white-washed villas shrouded in bougainvillea, cliffs reaching up from the sea, and medieval alleyways winding through romantic villages, Capri's charms are unwavering, even in the crowded summer months. Accessible only by boat, the tiny island on the Bay of Naples, off the Amalfi Coast, attracts jet-setters and glitterati who flock to the Piazzetta, just as Audrey Hepburn and Jackie Onassis did when they helped popularize the island in the 1950 and '60s. The island is also home to mysterious natural wonders, like the massive rock formations of Faraglioni and Blue Grotto, an underground sea cave that continues to awe visitors with its brilliant, almost iridescent waters.

2. The Hamptons

Long stretches of sand, seaside villages, sprawling vineyards, and grand estates...the Atlantic-facing Hamptons are simply spectacular come summer and the perfect antidote to bustling New York City, just 120 miles away (approximately). Whether busing in on the Hamptons Jitney or flying in by helicopter, droves of Manhattanites clear out of town each Friday afternoon in anticipation of some sun, R&R, and mingling with the rich-and-famous who make the nightlife one of the best on the East Coast. Most visitors head to one of four areas: colonial [Southampton](#), the old-money neck of the woods, with high-priced boutiques on chic Job Lane; elegant Bridgehampton, where you can sample wine from nearby vineyards and join the upper crust for the prestigious Hampton Classic Horse Show (Labor Day weekend) and Mercedes-Benz Polo Challenge (mid-July–mid-Aug.); hip East Hampton, popular with the new-money arts and media crowd, including Martha Stewart, Jerry Seinfeld, and Sean "Puffy" Combs (who all maintain homes here); and, finally, Montauk, favored by yachters and fishermen for its boating community and abundant catch.

-[Expedia: Great deals on Summer travel. Book now!](#)

3. Greek Islands

Scattered in the sparkling Aegean Sea, the Greek Islands are a much-fantasized-about summer hotspot, with Europeans and Americans alike flocking to their dazzling shores for hedonistic fun in the sun. All the islands have something different to offer but no self-respecting island hopper can skip two of Greece's most beloved: Santorini and Mykonos. The volcanic isle of [Santorini](#) is renowned for its magnificent scenery of white-washed houses and blue-domed churches, the lot of it accented by beaches of dark-red and black volcanic sands; backpackers and billionaires climb the steep winding road to the cliff-top town of Fira for postcard-perfect views. On the island of [Mykonos](#), meanwhile, homage is paid to Dionysus—the Greek god of revelry. While Mykonos also has immaculate white villages with winding cobblestone streets, it's the nightlife that draws visitors here; beach bars turn up the music as the sun sets and, before you can say *oohah!*, dancing and drinking takes over the sand. The party continues into the wee hours, with waterfront bars and hidden alcoves pouring plenty of ouzo as dawn breaks.

4. London

London is never more animated than in the height of summer, when fair weather brings out the best in Londoners, who endure an infamously gloomy weather forecast the rest of the year. Eating, drinking, and all around merry-making abound, with a slew of events ranging from outdoor theater and music shows to special exhibitions and oddball festivals. The royal city parks, including Hyde or Regent's, overflow with sunbathers and picnickers, who come to enjoy the lush greenery and English garden splendor, like the magnificent Queen Mary's Rose Gardens in Regent's Park. Stick around after sunset for your own mid-summer night's dream—twilight Shakespeare performances unfold, alfresco, in Regent's Park (May–Sept) throughout the summer months.

5. Montreal

Montreal's joie de vivre is most visible in summer, when festivals and celebrations light up the town and droves of locals and visitors take to the streets to join the fun. Eleven days of non-stop musical entertainment, otherwise known as the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal, enlivens the city annually in early July; streets get closed down and over 350 free outdoor concerts delight the ears of music aficionados. Also in July, downtown Montreal hosts the world's largest comedy festival, Just for Laughs, featuring some 1,000 performances from top-name comics who are bound to keep you in stitches. Even if you happen to visit in between festivals, summer is simply a fine time to hang out at an outdoor café and people-watch under the warm sun.

6. National Parks

Summer and the great outdoors go hand and hand, and the outdoors just don't get much greater than in our national parks. The US counts 388 of them, and you could easily spend a weekend hiking any of them. Of course, two of the most spectacular ones—the Grand Canyon and Yosemite—offer more than hiking. One of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Grand Canyon is truly a sight to behold: A vast abyss of multi-hued canyon walls stretching some 277 miles long and as much as a mile deep, the [Grand Canyon](#) was sculpted over millions of years by the pulsating Colorado River. Another gem, [Yosemite National Park](#) is a preserve of breathtaking Sierra Nevada valley-and-mountain scenery, jutting granite rock formations, giant sequoia trees, and magnificent cascading waterfalls. For hikers, bikers, or white-water rafters, or simply those who prefer to appreciate the views, these pristine land reserves are meccas for nature-lovers.

7. New England

New England truly springs to life between the July 4 and Labor Day holidays, when a vibrant summer culture produces a mind-boggling array of special events in the region's many maritime and mountain towns and historic cities. Out-of-towners snatch up beach houses on the Cape and cottages at inland lakes, and spend their vacations perusing antique shows, old-fashioned county fairs, arts-and-crafts festivals, and, of course, traditional New England lobster feasts and clam bakes. Cultural types head off in search of top summer festivals, like the famed Tanglewood Music Festival in the [Berkshires](#) (July-Aug.), while outdoorsy folks soak up ocean scenery by hiking and biking the [Outer Cape](#) or by sailing windjammers in [Camden](#) and yachts in scenic [Marblehead](#). Strolls through quaint towns like Stockbridge, immortalized in Norman Rockwell's paintings, serve up quintessential Main Street U.S.A., while opportunities for scenic drives abound, like along [Newport's](#) Ocean Drive. Or, if you're looking to throw back a cold one or sip a martini at a beach bar, you can't do better than P-Town (more formally known as [Provincetown](#)), the Cape's most happening summer nightlife scene.

8. Russia

Notorious for its long, frigid winters, summer shines an entirely different light on Russia, particularly on its thriving cultural capitals of Moscow and [St. Petersburg](#). While the sunny season is short (flurries can be seen as late as May or as early as September), Russians know how to make the most of it, hosting a magical mix of alfresco festivities and events. During the white nights of summer in these Russian cities, dusk is simultaneously greeted by dawn, and as such, you can gaze at the Kremlin and majestic Red Square or stroll the Nevsky Prospekt well into the wee hours of the morning without the help of streetlights. St. Petersburg commemorates the white nights phenomenon during the weeks surrounding the summer solstice, when the Stars of the White Nights Festival (mid-May–mid-July), an acclaimed celebration of music, dance, and opera, is held in the city's famous Mariinsky Theatre. During this summertime time warp, when the sun virtually never sets, midnight and later are as good a time as any to plan a picnic or take a cruise along St. Petersburg's Neva River—you may even get to see the aptly named Summer Palace, the home of Peter the Great in the mid-1700s, nearby.

9. Scandinavia

While you'd have to be a thick-skinned Viking to make it through a Scandinavian winter, happily, you needn't be much more than a reveling vacationer with a good pair of sunglasses during the summer months. Scandinavia is a sizzling summer destination, where the northerly latitude of this country fivesome—namely, [Norway](#), [Denmark](#), [Sweden](#), [Finland](#), and [Iceland](#)—translates to unending daylight hours during summer. Head out on a midnight whim to go hiking, biking, or white-water rafting in Norway's exquisite wilderness, composed of stunning fjords, majestic mountains, glistening glaciers, and serene valleys. Visit the Danish cultural capital of [Copenhagen](#) and stroll through the lovely Tivoli Gardens, or head to magnificent [Stockholm](#), to check out traditional Swedish folk music and traditions at Skansen, where a jovial Midsummer festival (late-June) is also held to celebrate the lightest night of the year. Or, you may prefer to simply soak up the animated nightlife of beer gardens and street musicians that lingers well into the night in Iceland's lively capital of Reykjavik. There are tons of other special summer events scheduled, as well, ranging from midnight marathons to gay pride parades to cultural events—try the [Helsinki](#) Festival (late-Aug.–early-Sept.), for example, when the Finnish capital lets loose with music, theatre, dance, visual arts, film and more before autumn comes around.

10. Upper Peninsula, Michigan

If city-living gets too hot, pack up some marshmallows, hot dogs and camping gear and head to the refreshing Upper Peninsula of Michigan, where majestic wildlife, unspoiled rivers, waterfalls and dense forests abound. Blessed with some 1700 miles of shoreline along three of the Great Lakes—Superior, Michigan and Huron—it should come as no surprise that fishing, canoeing, and camping are prime activities here, with moose, bears, and beavers as common companions. The region's strong Native American and French Canadian heritage are experienced everywhere as well; enclaves with names like Sault Ste-Marie and bridges like the Mackinac hearken back to the days of the earliest settlers. You'll probably feel like one of North America's earliest explorers yourself as you paddle the waterways here and set up camp in the woods.

This article was compiled by the editorial staff at [ShermansTravel](#), including editorial director [Arabella Bowen](#).

Have we missed your favorite summer travel destination? Share your favorite spot on MSN Travel's [Seasonal Travel](#) Message Board.