

Why This Is The Week to Book Fall Travel



NEW YORK -- Fall doesn't start for about another month, but welcome to the start of fall's bargain travel season.

The travel calendar is loaded with great off-peak dates in the early weeks of December, much of January and even early summer, but seldom does everything come together as well as it does in late August and the September weeks following Labor Day. Rick Seaney, chief executive of travel site FareCompare.com, notes that Aug. 25 begins fall bargain travel season by taking a huge bite out of the price of travel. With children going back to school, older kids headed to college and their parents immersed in back-to-school shopping and fall routines, Seaney notes that demand for hotel rooms and flights plummets starting on that date, recovers briefly for Labor Day and slides into a deep autumn lull.

"As for airfare prices, they can drop as much as a third or more over summer airfare," Seaney says. "For my money, autumn is the best time of the year for a vacation: it packs the one-two punch of great weather and great airfare prices."

Back in July, Seaney and his crew put this theory to the test by pricing out late-August flights from Dallas to New York, Los Angeles to New York and Chicago to Miami. A Dallas-NYC weekend trip that cost \$282 from Aug. 21-23 dropped 23 percent to \$217 for Aug. 28-30. A four-day trip from L.A. to New York that fetched \$382 from Aug. 20-24 fell 18 percent to \$312 when it was pushed back to Aug. 28-31. If you're looking to escape Chicago for Miami, the \$230 cost of a week-long trip from Aug. 11 to 17 drops 27 percent to just \$167 from Aug. 25 through Aug. 30. Granted, Atlantic hurricane season has a whole lot to do with the discount on that last entry, but FareCompare wasn't alone in noting the steep drop-off in airfare pricing nationwide around

this time of year.

Way back in May, travel site Hopper noted that flights to Seattle, Denver, San Francisco and New York that averaged \$430 to \$490 in late May and June dropped by \$100 or more by the week of Aug. 30. Granted, you wouldn't want to book the last week of August now, but late September tends to be just as charitable and falls within FareCompare's recommended booking window of 30 days to three months before departure. An added tip: If you book online on a Tuesday at about 3 p.m. Eastern, you stand the best chance of hitting an airline sale and getting the best price on tickets.

Meanwhile, the folks at TripAdvisor Vacation Rentals note that the cost of rental homes are sliced nearly in half from August to September. The houses in Edgartown, Massachusetts, on Martha's Vineyard, that averaged nearly \$3,000 a week in August, drop to about \$2,150 a week in post-Labor Day September. Spots in Ocean City, Maryland, that fetched \$1,500 a week in August slump to less than \$1,100 by September.

"Early fall is a great time for a vacation -- travelers can avoid the humidity and crowds of the peak summer travel period, but still enjoy beautiful warm weather, while saving substantially on the cost of their vacation rental," says Laurel Greatrix, a TripAdvisor Vacation Rentals spokesperson. "Rates drop across most of the U.S, particularly in beach destinations, and budget-conscious travelers can easily save themselves one-quarter to half of what they'd pay in July or August. Beyond the savings, vacation rentals offer travelers flexibility, amenities such as full kitchens, pools and patios and more space, making them a great option for travelers of all types."

While some of the biggest rental discounts can be found at Fort Walton Beach, Florida, and North Topsail Beach, North Carolina (both 34 percent less than their summer peak), the best deal is found a bit further up the Atlantic Coast. Bethany Beach, Delaware -- with its massive homes and ocean views -- offers a 44 percent cut that drops the average price of a weekly rental from \$1,900 during the peak summer months to less than \$1,100 in early fall. That's a 44 percent decrease that offers all of the offseason discount with none of the wintry chill.

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