

## Nine places you didn't know you could afford in 2016

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9 Photos

### The hottest destinations for budget-conscious travelers



(Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto)

If visions of glassy lakes in New Zealand or sun-soaked vineyards in Europe sound a little too pricey for your budget, you may be in for a surprise. With the U.S. dollar on the upswing and cheap new air routes popping up all across the globe, there's never been a better time to plan that trip you didn't think you could afford.

Here are this year's hottest dream destinations for value-conscious travelers.

#### Australia and New Zealand

Flights to New Zealand and Australia are usually sky-high-expensive, and the cost-of-living expenses once you get there can make for a nasty one-two punch on your budget. But both flights and local costs are more affordable this year thanks to the strong U.S. dollar, low fuel prices and expanding air deals. It's no longer uncommon to see round-trip flights to Australia for as little as \$1,099 or to New Zealand for as low as \$899.

The U.S. dollar is stronger than New Zealand or Aussie dollars these days, too.

Once you're Down Under, there's no shortage of free and cheap activities. From ocean-fed pools and botanic gardens in Sydney to museums and hiking on the [South Island](#), there's no price attached to having an unforgettable experience in either country.



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### Martinique

If the islands of the French Caribbean are more your style, you're in luck: Seasonal airfare to Martinique has dropped significantly thanks to new [Norwegian Air Shuttle routes](#) from the East Coast. How low? Fares dipped to just \$99 each way this past winter. In reality, deals were generally closer to about \$300 round-trip — still a steal, and will return this November. These cheap flights sell out fast, so be sure to book well in advance.

The French-speaking volcanic island in the West Indies is distinctively colorful, mountainous and covered in rainforest. Martinique is on the euro currency, which remains slightly stronger than the U.S. dollar at the moment, but the currency exchange is better than it has been in recent years — and airfare savings make this the perfect year to visit.

### Canada

All of the favorable budget travel trends this year converge in Canada: cheap airfare, affordable accommodations and an advantageous U.S. currency exchange that gets you a discount on all things Canadian.

For the answer to all your outdoorsy needs, think of kayaking, biking and hiking as on sale here, since every U.S. dollar you spend is currently about 30% stronger than its Canadian counterpart. Take a week-long bike tour around all of Quebec with [Pure Adventures](#), or see the [Canadian Rockies by train](#) and stop only to explore glaciers and stay in a castle.

Canada is also arguably the best place to get your urban fix this summer, whether it's sampling French cuisine in Old Montreal, exploring textile and art museums in Toronto, or strolling Vancouver's seawall and public markets. Skip the airport and take a road

trip over the border if you're in the northern U.S., or invest in a flight that will be well worth the time it saves you.

### South Africa

Safaris attract a certain type of traveler — the wealthy type — for a reason. Most require you to shell out many thousands of dollars for lodging and guided adventures, but with the rise of affordable, millennial-focused travel, one well-known travel company is partnering with the Holy Grail of nature journalism to make safaris more accessible than ever. G Adventures and National Geographic have teamed up for an epic offering of [African safari journeys](#) that start at just \$1,999 for a seven-day trip to Kruger National Park in South Africa.

You won't be wasting vacation days or money on this once-in-a-lifetime experience. The trip features game drives, talks with National Geographic experts, a visit to a local school and stays at glamorous safari camps fit for even the most high-maintenance of travelers. The experience isn't exactly cheap, but there's no doubt that it has never been more affordable.

### Western Europe

You might already know that Eastern Europe is an affordable alternative to splashy European destinations like Paris and Rome. But this year you can probably afford to cross those Western European cities off your list, too.

Trans-Atlantic flights to Europe are insanely inexpensive lately — think as low as \$400 round-trip from some East Coast airports — thanks to a rise in budget airlines like WOW Air (via Reykjavik), Norwegian Air Shuttle (via Copenhagen) and [TAP's new JetBlue partnership](#) that launched more flights to Portugal. From these air hubs it's easy to hop a cheap connecting flight or even book a train to anywhere in Europe. Vineyards in the French countryside, Spanish tapas and Portugal's sunny coastline have never seemed so close.



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### United Arab Emirates

Few destinations are as opulent as Abu Dhabi or Dubai, but its reputation for extravagance doesn't mean the UAE is just for people with heavily padded wallets.

Airfare to these Middle Eastern hubs is cheaper than ever thanks to competition following expanded routes by Emirates and Qatar Airways, and the local currency exchange is currently in your favor — the U.S. dollar is about three times as strong as Emirati dirham. Flights to Abu Dhabi from the East Coast for just \$700 aren't unheard of, and hotel rates as low as \$70 per night are easy to find.

### Colombia

Colombia's recent rebirth as a safe, adventure-packed destination hasn't compromised its authenticity or its low price tag. While the bargain cost may not surprise you, what you can get for your money just might. Sprawling rainforests, Caribbean beaches, world-class coffee tourism and yearly carnivals have made this South American gem a major competitor to Mexico and the Caribbean islands.

Depending on which city you choose — colorful Baranquilla, mountainous Medellin, colonial Cartagena — you can snag a flight as low as \$500 round-trip, and most nightly hotel rates are well below \$100.

### New Orleans

Whether you make the drive or want to save time by pouncing on a cheap flight, New Orleans has affordable lodging and free festivals to accommodate any budget traveler. After high season around Mardi Gras, air deals in the \$200 to \$300 round-trip range pop up often, and the city's extensive Airbnb options make it easy to stay in a charming southern-style home or French Quarter apartment for as low as \$50 per night.

Year-round warm weather, live jazz and cheap eats are calling your name, and the best way to experience them all is at a festival. Southern food, art, music and French Quarter festivals are in town all year long, and New Orleans' late fall or winter holiday events are perfect for travelers looking to escape the cold and warm up with bourbon and gumbo.

### Vietnam

Travelers in Asia have long frequented Thailand for its beaches and inexpensive hotels, but a more understated and authentic destination has pulled ahead of Thailand in terms of value.

Vietnam is far less overrun with tourists, so hotel and rental rates are much more affordable. A hotel on the beach in Vietnam is likely to cost less than \$100 per night. Local food like banh mi is deliciously inexpensive, airfare can drop to as low as \$700 round-trip from some West Coast U.S. cities, and Vietnam has so far responded better to increased tourism than busy Thailand has, so you can feel better about enjoying its coastlines and temples. It might be the best place to go in Southeast Asia this year.

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