



# 10 best budget vacations for spring

Budget Travel Editors • Updated 1st March 2018



**(CNN)** — Smart travelers know that there's no time like the present to visit brag-worthy beaches and celebrated cities -- for a fraction of what the crowds will be paying in summer. From the shores of the Atlantic to party towns like Vegas and NOLA, we've got stylish steals that'll make your spring getaway great.

## **1. Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee/North Carolina**

Tour an American paradise before the summer crowds pour in. America's most popular national park, a major theme park and miles of trails and streams for under \$100 per night? Yup.

Head to the [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) for fishing, hiking and scenic drives like the six-mile Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail, and don't forget to spend at least one day at 150-acre Dollywood for authentic Tennessee music, food and, of course, thrill rides such as the Wild Eagle and Mystery Mine. [The Park Vista-a DoubleTree](#) by Hilton-Gatlinburg features two restaurants, an indoor pool and mountain views.

## **2. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina**

Why wait till summer for a warm beach getaway?

If you want a dreamy beach vacation, it's already warming up down in Myrtle Beach. Its miles of sand, charter fishing expeditions and [Ripley's Aquarium](#) (where you can get nose-to-nose with sharks) will keep you busy while the sun shines, and its world-class eateries roll out a southern-style welcome with local micro-brews, seafood buffets and oceanfront tables.

The [Myrtle Beach Oceanfront Boardwalk and Promenade](#), which opened just five years ago, feels as if it's been here forever. Welcoming crowds by the million, the boardwalk features the Family Kingdom amusement park that includes the massive Skywheel and Slingshot and the Twist 'n Shout steel roller coaster. [Westgate Myrtle Beach Oceanfront Resort](#) provides beach access and ocean views, a heated outdoor pool, heated "lazy river," kids' water play area and a "kids eat free" policy.

## **3. Point Pleasant, New Jersey**

Psst! The boardwalk of your dreams opens in spring, but don't tell or everyone will want to go.

Point Pleasant is, well, pleasant enough in summer if you enjoy being part of a major scene, rubbing elbows with in-the-know New Yorkers, Philadelphians and Jersey girls and boys who love Jenkinson's Boardwalk and the lovely stretch of beach here. (Point Pleasant is about 70 miles south of New York City and about 75 miles northeast of Philadelphia.)

But the place starts hopping on weekends in April, the rides are open, the cotton candy is just as sweet, but rates for hotel rooms just a block from the beach can be literally a third of the summer price. Grab dinner on the boardwalk, or hit [Woodchucks BBQ](#) for a half-slab of baby back ribs with cornbread and your choice of two sides. [The White Sands](#) is a reliable, friendly hotel right on the beach.

## 4. Dominican Republic

Affordable all-inclusive resorts put this island paradise within reach.

The DR offers everything you might want on a Caribbean break, without the sticker shock you might expect. One of the reasons is incredible all-inclusive resorts like the [Majestic Colonial Beach Resort](#) in Punta Cana (a steal at \$212 per night for two people). Las Terrenas, a lesser-known but no less appealing former fishing village in the Samaná province, has amazing beaches and wallet-friendly prices.

Explore Los Haitises National Park, a protected forest, in a kayak with a guide who will take you through lagoons and mangrove canals amid pelicans and leatherback turtles. Another affordable lodging option is [Eva Luna](#), in Las Terrenas, which has five Mexican-style villas, each with a kitchen.

## 5. New Orleans, Louisiana

The [Big Easy](#) is easier than ever once [Mardi Gras](#) crowds have headed home.

Cobblestone streets! Hot jazz! Unforgettable cuisine! [New Orleans](#)'s French Quarter is just the beginning of a great getaway that combines warm spring weather with elbow room now that Mardi Gras has turned into Lent. Trendy nightclubs, ivy-covered townhouses and Creole cottages make for a backdrop like no other.

Don't miss the annual [French Quarter Festival](#) in April, load up on beignets at [Café Du Monde](#), and explore the city's unique music scene with a free self-guided audio tour courtesy of the New Orleans Jazz Historical Park. Stay at the [Westin New Orleans Canal Place](#).

## 6. Washington, D.C.

Celebrate your freedom in our nation's capital—where it seems every attraction is FREE.

From tours of the Capitol building to the endless galleries and exhibits of the Smithsonian Institution, from the National Archives (you may have heard of some of its contents—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution?) to the Library of Congress, this town offers more in the way of freebies than anywhere else.

When you're ready to step outside and enjoy the spring air and cherry blossoms, pay a visit to the Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. It may be surprising to you, but it's not to locals and other insiders, that one of the best restaurants in town is the Mitsitam Native Foods Café at the National Museum of the American Indian—you can try buffalo and fry bread, among other delights.

The Normandy Hotel is a comfortable lodging a short walk or Metro ride to the Mall, with great access to the lively Dupont Circle neighborhood and its international cuisine and smart bookstores.

## 7. Las Vegas, Nevada

It's always open, it's always jumping, and it's surprisingly affordable even for "low-rollers."

If you haven't found yourself on the Strip yet -- it's one of the most popular destinations for girl getaways, bachelor parties and of course impromptu weddings—you should put it on your list.

In addition to the grand décor (including faux European landmarks like the Eiffel Tower and Venetian canals) and the obvious strike-it-rich lure of slots, cards and dice, Las Vegas offers a \$2 billion airport, the Mob Museum, and kitschy retro finds like Champagnes Café, which does its best to bring '50s chic back to life. The Orleans Hotel & Casino is an absolute steal, a short shuttle ride from the action-packed Strip.

## 8. Montreal, Quebec, Canada

An old-world city in the heart of North America. Just strolling the streets of [this friendly, moderately priced Canadian city](#) feels like you've crossed the Atlantic and entered a whole new world.

Once the thrill of hearing French—and tasting continental treats like fresh croissants—has worn off a bit, hit the Montreal Biodôme, which re-creates four ecosystems, including more than 200 species of animals. Don't miss the landmark Notre-Dame Basilica, the Vieux-Port de Montreal park and the Musée des Beaux Arts de Montreal. Stay at [Le Square Phillips Hotel & Suites](#).

## 9. Cape Ann, Massachusetts

For authentic New England without the throngs, Gloucester, MA, a tight-knit fishing community on Cape Ann, just 45 minutes north of Boston, is a good place to start. Expansive beaches, frothy seas, wonderfully old-fashioned Main Streets, historic lighthouses, and some of the freshest locally sourced meals around make this "other cape" a reason to bypass the better known-and infinitely pricier-beach destinations along the Massachusetts coast.

Hit Gloucester's [Good Harbor Beach](#), a wide stretch of fine, white sand edged by dunes and a gurgling creek leading into a refreshingly chilly pocket of the Atlantic, and Rocky Neck artists' colony, where you can soak up some of the sumptuous light that has drawn artists including Milton Avery, Edward Hopper and Winslow Homer. [Blue Shutters Beachside Inn](#) has comfortable rooms with beach views and a welcoming living room with a fireplace that's surprisingly welcome even on summer evenings.

## 10. Sanibel Island, Florida

Your own private island? Well, it's about as close as you'll find...

Sure, there's a long list of things you can do on Sanibel Island. But maybe the most appealing of all is... nothing. If your idea of a spring vacation involves warm sand, subtropical breezes and the luxury of staring, snoring, or reading, this island has your name on it.

Check into the [Tropical Winds Beachfront Motel and Cottages](#) and you'll enjoy a private beach and outdoor pool. Feeling a bit adventurous? Sanibel is a mecca for outdoors enthusiasts and you can take your pick of cycling the island's miles of trails; kayaking or canoeing its waterways; water-skiing; and fishing. Or hit the golf course or tennis courts. Grab a bowl of fish stew at [Sweet Melissa's Cafe](#).