

June 1, 2008

31 Places to Go This Summer

Corrections Appended

THERE used to be a time — oh, let's call it 2007 — when summer was considered a time of almost limitless possibilities, a time of languorous vacations, of trips filled with the promise of discovery.

But the summer of 2008 is starting out like a cruel joke, with air travel increasingly a nightmare and with wildly escalating gas prices threatening to make the [road trip](#) all but obsolete. It's almost enough to make you sit at home and catch up on episodes of "Gossip Girl."

The summer vacation is still an inalienable right, however. And there is no reason to forgo it this year. It will just take a bit of creativity — and perhaps the willingness to stay a little closer to home this time around — to pull it off in 2008.

Thus, here are 31 options — from river [rafting](#) in eastern [Oregon](#) to [biking](#) in the [White Mountains](#) of [New Hampshire](#) — for a great summer vacation. Not one involves the terrifying conversion of dollars into euros, many can be enjoyed without ever getting on a plane, and the road trips are ones that actually justify filling up your tank, even if the price of gas hits \$5 a gallon this summer.

1. TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Who needs [Europe](#)? The Texas Hill Country, west of [Austin](#) and north of [San Antonio](#), might be the next best thing to crossing the Atlantic. The region is lush, colorful and, unlike much of the pancake-flat state, dotted with beautiful green hills that are evocative of [Tuscany](#) or the south of [France](#). Moreover, the region is speckled with 22 [wineries](#) (www.texaswinetrail.com) that buzz with food and [music](#) festivals year round. And towns like Fredericksburg offer a taste of the Old World, with German-style Biergartens and schnitzelhäuser.

2. [NEW HAMPSHIRE](#)

With 800,000 acres of rugged terrain and [biking](#) trails, the [White Mountains](#) of New Hampshire are sometimes called the [Moab](#) of the East. And while you won't get red-rock formations or Road Runner vistas, the White Mountains do offer their own purple majesty. The Cherry Mountain Loop near Twin Mountain, not far from Bretton Woods, features remote waterfalls and thick forests. The trails around North Conway, a small, outdoorsy town near the [Maine](#) border where volunteer

riders maintain more than 100 miles of downhill paths, are popular. For trail information, see the New Hampshire Trails Bureau (www.nhtrails.org) and New England Mountain Bicycling Association (www.nemba.org).

3. [LAS VEGAS](#)

The much-hyped efforts of Las Vegas to turn itself into a family destination a few years ago pretty much fizzled — there's still plenty of sin in Sin City — but anyone looking for a pool vacation for the kids this summer might want to consider this desert spot. The pool scenes at any number of hotels (including recent expansions at Mandalay Bay and the Excalibur) are fairly over-the-top, but few can rival the 15-acre “tropical oasis” at the Flamingo Las Vegas (888-902-9929; www.flamingolv.com), with four pools, a water slide, several waterfalls and a subterranean grotto that can be explored either on foot or by water. And for the adults, there's even a swim-up blackjack table. Weekend rates for a room with two queen-size beds (suitable for a family of four) start about \$140 this June and July.

4. [PHILADELPHIA](#)

There are enough history excursions in the City of Brotherly Love to fill an entire summer, including big landmarks like the National Constitution Center (215-409-6600; www.constitutioncenter.org), with its interactive displays in which kids can be sworn in as president or cast their ballots in authentic voting booths. But there's also plenty to do off the history track — much of it affordable for a family weekend. For starters: the new \$20 million Big Cat Falls exhibit at the Philadelphia Zoo (3400 West Girard Avenue; 215-243-1100; www.philadelphiazoo.org), where lions, tigers, baby pumas and snow leopards are on view. A quick trolley ride from Center City can take you to one of the nation's oldest — and most lovely — botanical [gardens](#), Bartram's Garden (54th Street and Lindbergh Boulevard; 215-729-5281; www.bartramsgarden.org). For local flavor, it's worth a lunch visit to John's Roast Pork (14 East Snyder Avenue; 215-463-1951; www.johnsroastpork.com), where the made-to-order cheese steaks are legendary (the James Beard Foundation declared John's one of “America's Classics”). The Loews Philadelphia Hotel is well situated at 1200 Market Street (215-627-1200; www.loewshotels.com), with occasional family packages. Rooms with two double beds start at \$179.

5. A WESTERN ROAD TRIP

You could join the thousands of visitors vying for a glance of the fabled [Grand Canyon](#) before retiring to cafeteria lines and dorm-size rooms (surrounded by those same throngs). Or you could opt instead to navigate a series of mind-bendingly beautiful mesas and wild canyons in the [Capitol Reef National Park](#), in almost near solitude. En route from Las Vegas, is Bryce Canyon — shades of

the Grand Canyon with a fraction of the tourists. A bit farther, in Torrey, [Utah](#) (population about 200), the Cafe Diablo on Main Street (435-425-3070; www.cafediablo.net), serves rattlesnake cakes with ancho-rosemary aioli, glazed salmon, and margaritas at outdoor tables with views of the surrounding mountains. The nearby Hell's Backbone Grill in Boulder, Utah (population 1850), on the edge of Escalante's enormous slick-rock chasm, also serves food that's strikingly good (Utah North Highway 12; 435-335-7464). Along the way, the stretch of road on Highways 89 and 12 is one of the country's most stunning. (Information on Capitol Reef National Park, including camping permits: www.nps.gov; 435-425-3791.)

6. [MYRTLE BEACH](#), S.C.

The 55-acre Hard Rock Park (www.hardrockpark.com), billed as the “world's first rock 'n' roll theme park,” just opened in Myrtle Beach, complete with a [Led Zeppelin](#)-themed steel roller coaster and nightly fireworks set to Queen's “Bohemian Rhapsody.” It may be an unlikely addition to this popular resort, best known for its [golf](#) courses, but it's not the only reason to visit this summer. Many of the area's hotels are offering deep discounts on their weekend rates, ranging from three-bedroom suites for \$225 a night to two-bedroom golf villas starting at around \$200.

7. MONTAUK, N.Y.

It's cheaper, less crowded and arguably even prettier than [the Hamptons](#). And now the party scene is getting a boost, too. Montauk, the salty surfing and artists' village at the eastern tip of [Long Island](#), welcomed a new hotel this season, the Surf Lodge, created by the same celebrity-wrangling folks who brought you the Cain nightclub in New York's Chelsea neighborhood. The 32-room hotel is set on tranquil Fort Pond, and imports such Hamptons-like affectations as a mixologist, yoga gurus and a flip-flop-friendly restaurant helmed by the former “Top Chef” heartthrob Sam Talbot. (Surf Lodge, 183 Edgemere Street; 631-238-5190; www.thesurflodge.com.)

8. [NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE](#)

You won't find much evidence of [George Bernard Shaw](#) at the Shaw Festival (www.shawfest.com) this year — just “Mrs. Warren's Profession” and the seldom-performed “Getting Married.” But there are still excellent theatrical offerings this summer, including two [Stephen Sondheim](#) musicals, “A Little Night Music” and “Follies.” But even if you never go inside a theater, Niagara-on-the-Lake in [Ontario](#) has plenty to offer, including a lovely setting on Lake Ontario, a clutch of charming B & Bs and some excellent wineries — particularly Peller Estates (www.peller.com), with a restaurant featuring creative seasonal menus from its executive chef, Jason Parsons. The historic Prince of Wales Hotel, in the center of town (6 Picton Street; 905-468-3246), is an excellent place to park yourself for the weekend. Summer rates start at about 290 Canadian dollars, about the same in [United States](#) dollars.

9. [SCOTTSDALE](#), ARIZ.

Downtown Scottsdale is turning into a desert version of [Miami](#)'s South Beach. No ocean of course, but plenty of late-night partying and a buzzing hotel scene. The latest arrival is the 224-room W Scottsdale (www.whotels.com/scottsdale), scheduled to open in August, featuring a Bliss [spa](#), a 1,100-square-foot fitness center, a sprawling pool area (with 13 private cabanas) and a sushi restaurant. Rates start at \$449.

10. CHESAPEAKE BAY

The calm waters of Chesapeake Bay are an idyllic setting for a summer afternoon sail. But don't know your mast from your helm? Then check out the "Learn to Sail Package" being offered by the Tides Inn (www.tidesinn.com), a resort in Irvington, Va., set on an estuary that flows into the Rappahannock River and the Chesapeake. Starting at \$2,495 for two people, the package includes four nights in a suite in a part of the hotel with a private boat slip and two and a half days of expert instruction that will enable you to earn a basic keelboat certificate. More of a landlubber? Stay behind and hang out at the spa, where the treatments include a lava shell massage and a Sedona clay body wrap.

11. [PORTLAND](#), ORE.

As far as foodie havens go, Portland has been better known for its vegan cafes and eco-hippie cooperatives than for restaurants with gastronomic ambitions. But an emerging locavore movement has changed that. Drawn by the city's low rents and artsy vibe, young chefs are breaking the culinary mold and tapping into the Northwestern bounty of local fisheries, small meat purveyors and artisanal farms. Sample the heat at places like Clyde Common (Southwest 10th and Stark; 503-228-3333; www.clydecommon.com), which serves novel dishes like crispy pork belly with blood orange marmalade.

12. [MONUMENT VALLEY](#)

You've seen it in countless spaghetti westerns and Marlboro ads. But the iconic red buttes and mesas of Monument Valley, in the heart of Navajo country, offers more than just postcard-ready views of the quintessential American West. The wind-scraped valley, which spreads along the Utah and [Arizona](#) border like a rock sculpture garden, also draws horseback riders, mountain bikers, river rafters and other outdoor enthusiasts. Sacred Monument Tours (www.monumentvalley.net) has horseback rides starting at about \$57. Tours are also available at Goulding's Lodge (www.gouldings.com), currently the only lodging in the valley, at least until the View Hotel (www.monumentvalleyview.com) opens sometime in the fall. Other services can be found through the Navajo Parks and Recreation Department (www.navajonationparks.org).

13. HIGHWAY 101, OREGON

Oregon's Highway 101 may be a National Scenic Byway (www.byways.org), but that doesn't mean you have to drive it. This coastal highway is also great for biking. Yes, there are some challenging uphill stretches, but the reward is fragrant old-growth forests, misty ocean cliffs and isolated coves that you'd miss whizzing by in a car. Plus, it's easy to tack on a side trip to artsy little towns like Port Orford (www.portorford.org), the nearby historic Cape Blanco Lighthouse (www.capeblanco.org) and the [Bandon](#) Marsh National Wildlife Refuge, which is excellent for [bird](#)-watching. For lodging, try the eco-friendly Wildspring Guest Habitat (866-333-9453; www.wildspring.com), which has cedar cabins filled with [art](#) and antiques starting at \$245.

14. [THE SAN JUAN ISLANDS](#)

Although the San Juan Islands in the Pacific Northwest can be reached by plane or boat, traveling by ferry will make you rethink your concept of mass transit. Although the ferries, part of the Washington State Department of Transportation (www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries), are used mostly by commuters, these same ferries can be a leisurely (and economical) way to take in the stunning beauty of this popular tourist spot — an archipelago of more than 450 tiny islands roughly halfway between [Seattle](#) and [Vancouver](#). In particular, the route of the Illahee, the 45-minute ride between San Juan Island and [Orcas Island](#), has been described by a writer for the Travel section as “the most beautiful trip in the entire [Washington State](#) ferry system.”

15. [THE BOUNDARY WATERS](#)

Every summer, thousands of [canoe](#) paddlers head to the small [Minnesota](#) town of Ely to explore the [Boundary Waters Canoe Area](#) Wilderness, a 1.3 million-acre park that runs along the border between the United States and [Canada](#). The frenzy sometimes gives Ely the feel of the Old West, with travelers loading up on food and liquor before heading out into the great unknown. But the sights and sounds of a boomtown are soon replaced by the lull of a canoe gliding through water and the near-absence of any other living soul. Among the many local outfitters is the Piragis Northwoods Company (www.piragis.com), which offers four-day weekend excursions over the summer, with rates starting at \$695 a person.

16. [QUEBEC CITY](#)

The city's celebration of its 400th anniversary will mean a full summer schedule of events, including a sound and light show with 2,000-foot-long grain silos serving as projection screens for images of the city; an exhibition of 277 pieces on loan from the [Louvre](#) at the Musée National des Beaux-Arts (866-220-2150; www.mnba.qc.ca); and — mais oui — a free concert by [Celine Dion](#) on Aug. 22 (418-648-2008; www.myquebec2008.com).

17. PASO ROBLES, CALIF.

Blame it on “Sideways.” Ever since that 2004 film uncorked central [California](#) as a discerning wine region, the boutique vineyards and wineries in Paso Robles have blossomed into the region’s next viticulture center. The number of bonded wineries has tripled to 170 in recent years, cultivating everything from cabernet sauvignon to zinfandel. Elegant hotels like the Hotel Cheval (1021 Pine Street; 866-522-6999; www.hotelcheval.com) have sprouted. And so have delectable restaurants and artisanal shops like Pasolivo Olive Oil (8530 Vineyard Drive; 805-227-0186; www.pasolivo.com). For tasting maps, see the Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance’s Web site, www.pasowine.com.

18. BAHIA HONDA KEY, FLA.

Pristine [beaches](#). Crystal blue waters. Zero development. Bahia Honda Key (www.bahiahondapark.com) might be mistaken for a chic Brazilian preserve, but this 524-acre islet in the Lower [Florida Keys](#), between [Key West](#) and Marathon, is actually a state park with beautiful beaches, amazing [snorkeling](#) and a precious biodiversity with nurse sharks and trumpet-shaped lily thorns. Even rarer are the prices. Admission is \$3.50 for one person. Snorkeling rentals start at \$3 for a mask. And the park has three duplex cabins, with showers and a deck, that run under \$140 a night.

19. SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

Cavallo Point, a retreat center devoted to environmental health and sustainability, is opening on the grounds of the century-old Fort Baker, in Marin County across the Golden Gate from [San Francisco](#). The latest step in the Bay Area’s slow-food obsession, the complex officially opens June 14, with rotating guest chefs, a spa, adventure programs and an eagerly awaited restaurant. Units in the historic section, set in former lieutenants’ and generals’ quarters, start at \$350 for a room with a view and \$250 for one without a view (888-651-2003; www.cavallopoint.com).

20. [TELLURIDE](#), COLO.

Sometimes called Little Switzerland, with its steep peaks, crisp streams, alpine basins and swaths of wildflowers, the [ski](#) resort of Telluride becomes a [hiking](#) mecca in the summer. Guided day trips as well as technical rock climbs can be arranged through the San Juan Outdoor School (300 South Mahoney Drive; 970-728-4101; www.tellurideadventures.com), starting at \$125 a person for a group of four or more. The three-day “adventure kids’ camp” program includes climbing, hiking and outdoor games for \$325.

21. OWYHEE RIVER, OREGON

Snaking through the remote eastern desert of Oregon, the Owyhee River, with its deep sandstone cliffs and silty desert waters, has garnered comparisons to the Colorado River or the Salmon. But its mild white water and lazy meanderings make it manageable for those who aren't experts but still want a classic river rafting adventure. An updated list of outfitters is available from the United States [Bureau of Land Management](#) office in Vale, Ore.; (541) 473-3144).

22. LAKE POWELL

With nearly 200 miles of clear blue water and stark red rock, Lake Powell is a boating paradise. The lake, which straddles the Utah-Arizona border in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, is the second-largest artificial reservoir in the United States, after Lake Mead. And since you'll also need a place to stay, why not do so on a houseboat? Lake Powell Resorts & Marinas (888-896-3829; www.lakepowell.com) has a large fleet that includes the 46-foot-long Voyager XL, with an outdoor grill, stargazing cushions and enough beds to sleep eight, for \$2,415 for three days.

23. FARMINGTON, N.M.

Not far from Mesa Verde National Park, in a cliff face near the La Plata River in New Mexico, sits a most bizarre — but intriguing — B.&B. option. Kokopelli's Cave is a one-bedroom cave home carved from a 65-million-year-old sandstone formation, with Southwestern-style furniture, food-stocked kitchens, a washer and dryer — and views of the spectacular mountain ranges of the Four Corners region. The cave was blasted out in the 1980s by a geologist, Bruce Black, who planned to use it as an office. Instead, Mr. Black's son and daughter-in-law made it their home and transformed it into a B. & B. soon after. Rates start at \$240 a night depending on the number of guests. (505-326-2461; www.bbonline.com/nm/kokopelli).

24. MONTREAL

Whether your [iPhone](#) is loaded with chamber music or [Arcade Fire](#), Montreal is music to all ears this summer. The Osheaga Music and Arts Festival (www.osheaga.com), a new showcase for avant-garde talent, is on Aug. 3 and 4. The huge Montreal Jazz Festival (www.montrealjazzfest.com) takes over the entire city from June 26 to July 6, with 3,000 performers including [Leonard Cohen](#) and [Woody Allen](#) (yes, that one). And every Sunday, Piknic Électronik brings the rising stars of Montreal's electronic music scene to Jean Drapeau Park. The city's revamped Web site (www.tourisme-montreal.org) has listings, maps and a nifty planner.

25. TANGLEWOOD, MASS.

For a little Brahms to go with your Brie, picnic under the stars at the Tanglewood Music Festival (www.tanglewood.org), the summer home of the [Boston Symphony Orchestra](#) in the pastoral [Massachusetts Berkshires](#). Under the direction of [James Levine](#), the symphony's opera-rich

season kicks off on July 5 with a concert performance of “Les Troyens” by Berlioz and continues with weekend-long [Beethoven](#) and [Mozart](#) festivals. John Williams also returns to conduct the popular “Boston Pops: Film Night at Tanglewood” on July 26, featuring selections from his latest blockbuster with [Steven Spielberg](#), “Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull.”

26. BEARTOOTH ROAD

[Charles Kuralt](#) once called it America’s most beautiful highway, 68.7 miles of high-altitude, high-adrenaline road that zigzags through the Beartooth Mountains in [Montana](#) and [Wyoming](#). He might have been right. The two-lane Beartooth All-American Road (www.beartoothhighway.com) climbs over 10,000 feet (Winnebago drivers: don’t bother), going from forest to alpine tundra in an hour. Dazzling sights await around every hairpin turn: 12,000-foot-plus mountains, waterfalls, glacial lakes, wildflowers and the occasional mountain goat. Besides gawking, the area offers fly-[fishing](#), hiking, even summer skiing. Midway along the route, you’ll find affordable rooms at Top of the World Resort (2823 U.S. 212, [Cody](#), Wyo.; 307-587-5368; www.topoftheworldresort.com) starting at \$55, and plenty of other options in the gateway towns of Cooke City and Red Lodge in Montana.

27. PACIFIC NORTHWEST (BY RAIL)

[Amtrak](#)’s Empire Builder delivers a greatest hits of the American landscape. Beginning in [Chicago](#), passing through the Great Plains and the other-worldly [Glacier National Park](#) and ending in Seattle or Portland, Ore., the roughly 48-hour ride is a throwback to the golden age of train travel. Old-fashioned dining cars serve freshly cooked meals (flat iron steak, roasted game hen) on tables decked out in white tablecloths. The panoramic sightseeing lounge and sleeping compartments have a certain “North by Northwest” charm. And rangers from the [National Park](#) service are periodically on board to provide narrative along the route as a part of a Trails and Rails program. Beyond the nostalgia, the Empire Builder cars were refurbished last year. Fares and accommodations vary; a mid-level two-berth roomette for two adults from Chicago to Seattle, with meals and nonalcoholic drinks, can range be \$760 to over \$900 (www.amtrak.com; 800-872-7245.)

28. SUNSHINE COAST

The Sunshine Coast of [British Columbia](#) certainly lives up to its name. Averaging upward of 2,400 hours of sunny skies a year, the resort area is two hours northwest of Vancouver and is dotted with scenic restaurants, hippie cafes and arty shops. Despite its popularity, the region remains pristine because the coastline is largely accessible by boat only. Kayakers will find marine life galore, including phosphorescent plankton that glow during moonlight paddles. Sunbathers will find long stretches of sandy beaches, lagoons and rocky tide pools. Lodging can be found near the town of

Sechelt (www.sechelt.com). An affordable little resort called Rockwater Secret Cove (877-296-4593; www.rockwatersecretcoveresort.com) has its own beach, with rooms starting at 119 Canadian dollars.

29. JEMEZ SPRINGS, N.M.

The tiny town of Jemez Springs (www.jemezsprings.org), about an hour north of [Albuquerque](#), is easy to miss. Except for an 1870s bathhouse in the center of town, there's little to tempt visitors except for several Southwestern diners, a family-run winery and a Japanese Buddhist monastery. And that's precisely its charm. You can spend the day hiking and fishing in the recently created Valles Caldera National Preserve (www.vallescaldera.gov), an 89,000-acre preserve inside a collapsed volcano, then spend the night soaking at the Jemez Springs Bathhouse (www.jemezspringsbathhouse.com), which was recently restored by the town and is fed by the smelly, steaming waters from the area's natural hot springs. An hour soak is \$15, and massages start at \$37.

30. MANITOBA

On the surface, yoga and canoeing may seem like conflicting pastimes. Yoga involves stretching and letting your mind come to rest, while canoeing is about using force and repetitive motion. But marrying the two is exactly what Northern Soul Wilderness Adventures (www.northernsoul.ca) offers in the backwoods and glacial lakes outside Winnipeg, Manitoba. After paddling to a clearing in the forest, students lay down their mats and strike their yoga poses, surrounded by nothing but pine and scurrying chipmunks. The cost of the three-day trips (July 25 to 27 and Aug. 22 to 24) is 399 Canadian dollars. No prior canoeing or yoga experience is necessary. Meals are, not surprisingly, organic and [vegetarian](#).

31. THE GLACIERS OF ALASKA

In the land of the midnight sun, perhaps no summer activity is more otherworldly than hiking Alaska's majestic glaciers. Several outfitters offer guided summer excursions, including MICA Guides (800-956-6422; www.micaguides.com; \$70 a person, plus entry fee into Glacier Park), which leads daytime and evening treks on Matanuska Glacier, two hours northeast of [Anchorage](#). Midnight sun hikes on Alyeska Glacier are offered by Ascending Path (877-783-0505; www.theascendingpath.com; \$139 a person) from June 13 to July 13, while more far-flung excursions are offered by North Star Trekking (www.glaciertrekking.com) and Above and Beyond Alaska (www.beyondak.com).

Reporting for this article was done by Stuart Emmrich, Denny Lee, Suzanne MacNeille and Laura Marmor.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: June 29, 2008

An article on June 1 about 31 places to go this summer described Mesa Verde incorrectly and a correction in this space on June 8 misidentified the state in which it is located. Mesa Verde is a national park, not a national monument, and it is in southwestern Colorado, not in New Mexico.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: June 8, 2008

An article last Sunday about 31 places to go this summer described Mesa Verde in Farmington, N.M., incorrectly. It is a national park, not a national monument.

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