

After Labor Day, foliage thins out, making it easier to view caribou, moose, and bears as they live it up before winter's chill returns in October. The National Park Service stops running its shuttles mid-month, but visitors can still access many park roads by private car.

DENALI NATIONAL PARK

COLORADO SKI COUNTRY

Most ski resorts reopen in November, but skiers generally don't arrive until the week of Christmas. To get customers onto the lifts, resorts run promotions such as free ski passes for children when parents buy their own. Tip: Breckenridge Mountain Lodge is offering starting rates of \$43 a night—43 percent off regular-season rates (breckresorts.com).

COSTA RICA

The average November rainfall of six inches is half the level of September and October, but tourists haven't yet arrived in droves for winter surfing and zip lining.

CAPE COD

By mid-September, a timeworn cliché comes true: The coast is clear. And it's still warm enough to explore the area's sand dunes. On weekends, B&Bs don't so much drop their prices as pile on the free perks.

NOVA SCOTIA

Fall-foliage season peaks in October, later than in parts of New England. Lodging here is also a better value than in high-season Vermont, partly because of an exchange rate favorable to American visitors.

SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN

Lying outside the hurricane belt, these islands (including Aruba and Bonaire) deliver tranquil weather that's only a few degrees hotter in September than during the rest of the year.

The jacarandas bloom with lavender-blue flowers in November. But 23 percent fewer Americans fly to the Argentine capital this month than in December, resulting in a lower demand for tickets. Fares from New York City are about \$100 cheaper now than in December.

BUENOS AIRES

As leaves fall in London's parks, so do hotel prices citywide. Tourist sites are less crowded in October, so you'll have some breathing room in museums such as the Tate Modern. British Airways traditionally runs sales with fares discounted roughly one-third off summer prices. Temperatures tend to hover in the upper 50s; as always, pack a broly in case of rain.

LONDON

Chilly temperatures in the upper 40s during the day don't put an end to whale-watching tours, glacier hikes, and dips in hot thermal springs; the only difference from the warmer summer (other than reduced museum hours) is that large group tours are replaced with intimate outings. Weekend hotel rates in Reykjavik drop by about 15 percent.

ICELAND

The City of Light is always buzzing, but its convention business slows down in November. Airfares and hotel prices plunge. In 2008, the average air/hotel package price booked via Expedia for November was half the average for April. Scattered showers are typical, but much of Paris's charm is indoors, anyway—in its cafés, galleries, and boutiques.

PARIS

GREEK ISLANDS

The European college kids return to their home countries by October, yet the sea retains its summer warmth. Hotels, inns, and ferries generally charge 20 percent less than peak-season rates.

MARRAKECH

In September, demand for the traditional riad (a courtyard home turned into a hotel) is below its December crest, when the Europeans swarm in. Expect hotel discounts of up to 50 percent and sunny days with an average high of 90 degrees.

THAILAND'S ANDAMAN COAST

The wet season is winding down. If you don't mind occasional showers, you'll enjoy verdant foliage and clear water for diving and snorkeling. Hotels slash their rates by about 50 percent compared with the peak winter (dry season) prices.

CAPE TOWN

One of the world's prettiest cities shows off its seaside views in September, a great time for whale-watching. Hotels and inns are historically only 60 percent full, prompting hoteliers to unveil deep discounts.

Secret Routes to Savings

If you're willing to go one way, you can score big in shoulder season.

CRUISES

So-called repositioning cruises typically sail during the fall and spring, when cruise lines move their ships to better climates (from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean in the fall, for example). These cruises often last longer than standard ones, yet cost up to half as much per day per person. Cruisecompare.com can point you to travel agents who book the trips.

RV RENTALS

When the seasons change, rental companies entice travelers to take their RVs to other parts of the U.S. to meet expected demand. This past June, for example, El Monte RV touted an 11-night one-way rental of a 23-foot-long vehicle from Atlanta to Boston for \$539—a 70 percent savings (elmonterv.com). Along with El Monte RV, Cruise America is a big player (cruiseamerica.com).

RENTAL CARS

In the spring, rental agencies shift part of their fleets from Florida to other states, following the tourist migration. One-way rates often start at \$10 per day for unlimited mileage on midsize cars—with no drop-off fees. But you won't find these deals by using the standard booking engines; you'll need to look on the car-rental companies' websites (either on the home page or on the "special offers" page). You may need a promo code to claim the discount.

WHERE THE BARGAINS ARE

Shoulder season doesn't fall at the same time everywhere, but if you time your visits right, you can see some of the world's greatest places for a fraction of the price.

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

Illustration by Nicholas Felton