

# Expedia Travel Trendwatch™

**BY CHRIS MCGINNIS**

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## Spring Break Travel Outlook Finds 29% Plan to Travel



### SPRING TRAVEL OUTLOOK

A cold winter in much of the country is sparking interest in trips to warmer climates and despite some economic slowing, travelers should prepare for spring break crowds along with higher airfares, especially for flights to the most popular destinations including

Florida, Las Vegas and Mexico. The spring break travel season is shorter this year than usual, just four peak weeks (roughly March 1-31) instead of the normal six, which could result in a higher concentration of travelers over a shorter period of time. Unlike recent years, “family” spring break

(when K-12 kids are out of school) and “student” spring break (when most college students are out of school) occur simultaneously this year.

The season begins March 1, but the largest crowds will likely be found during the week prior to Easter (March 16-23) when most college students *AND* families with kids take to the roads and skies. Also adding to increased volume that week are St. Patrick’s Day on Monday, March 17 and Easter on Sunday, March 23. Volumes will likely begin to dwindle following Easter and the peak spring break season will mostly subside by Monday, April 7.

Large crowds mean high demand, and high demand along with higher fuel costs is translating into higher airfares to the top 10 most popular spring destinations, which are up an average of 11 percent this March compared to March 2007 according to Expedia® data. However,

### Pricey March, Easy April

Top Destinations, March 2008	'06/'07 airfare	Top Destinations, April 2008	'06/'07 airfare
1. Orlando	+12.5%	1. Orlando	+3%
2. Las Vegas	+13%	2. Las Vegas	+4.5%
3. Cancun	+2.5%	3. Cancun	-2%
4. Fort Myers	+6%	4. Miami	+6%
5. Phoenix	+12%	5. St. Petersburg	+3%
6. St. Petersburg	+13%	6. Honolulu	+4%
7. Fort Lauderdale	+12.5%	7. Fort Myers	-3%
8. Miami	+18%	8. Phoenix	+3%
9. Denver	+12%	9. Maui	-2%
10. Honolulu	+6%	10. Fort Lauderdale	+5%

“Loyal college basketball followers can cause heavy airport and hotel traffic...”



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when demand falls in April, airfares to these destinations are expected to be up approximately two percent on average compared to April 2007. More Expedia travelers are headed to Florida cities for spring break this year than last with Ft. Myers and Tampa/St. Petersburg moving into the top 10 along with perennially popular Ft. Lauderdale, Orlando and Miami. Destinations with fewer expected travelers this spring compared to last spring include: New York, Jamaica, San Francisco and San Diego.

## SURVEY SAYS...

Twenty nine percent of US adults plan on taking a spring break vacation this year, according to a January Expedia poll<sup>1</sup>. Also, the Conference Board's most recent survey found that 45.8 percent of Americans intend to take a vacation within 6 months, down just a hair from 46.4 percent a year ago.

## EXPEDIA TRAVEL TRENDWATCH® TIPS:

Book spring trips now to get the flight times, routings and hotel accommodations you really want.

To get the best spring travel deals, avoid travel in March when airfares to the 10 most popular destinations are running 11 percent higher than last year. Consider travel in April when fares to these same places look to be approximately two percent higher over last year and actually show declines for flights to sunny favorites like Maui and Cancun.

Peak Travel Calendar: March 2008						
Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17 St. Patrick's	18	19	20	21	22
23 Easter	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	April 1	April 2	April 3	April 4	April 5

Peak Day      Near Peak Day      Lighter Day

Popular destinations showing the smallest year-over-year fare increases in March are Cancun and Ft. Myers. Those showing the largest fare increases in March include Miami, Las Vegas, Tampa/St. Petersburg, Orlando and Ft. Lauderdale.

Try to fly Sunday-Wednesday when flights should be less crowded. The busiest travel days during the spring break period are Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays according to Expedia data.

If you are seeking lower prices and have flexible travel dates, the April 15 - May 30 "shoulder season" is a great time to go. The crowds should dwindle, prices are likely to soften and the weather should be even warmer.

## SPORTY SPRING BREAKS

Sports fans are increasingly incorporating attendance at training camps, tournaments and even regular season games as part of their spring break activities. In fact, 21 percent of US adults anticipate taking a vacation in order to attend a college or professional sporting event this year

according to an Expedia poll<sup>2</sup>. This March and April, the two main sporting events drawing travelers are Major League Baseball's spring training in Florida and Arizona, and the NCAA college basketball playoff games in various locales.

## SPRING TRAINING:

March brings baseball fans from all over to cities throughout southern Florida to watch their favorite teams practice and compete in the 18-team "Grapefruit League." In Arizona, 12 teams practice and play in and around Phoenix and Tucson in the "Cactus League." Fans love the small town, laid back, up-close-and-personal feel, and great spring weather at these almost daily games. In addition, spring training travel can be a real bargain as most games take place in smaller, less expensive towns and airfares are low.

## COLLEGE BASKETBALL FINALS:

Loyal college basketball followers can cause heavy airport and hotel traffic, especially as competition peaks during the last week of March and the first week in April. Regional games will be held in Charlotte,

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Phoenix, Detroit and Houston March 23-27. The final four games will be held April 5-7 in San Antonio.

## **PAYING THE PRICE TO BE GREEN**

A January Expedia survey<sup>3</sup> found that more than half of US adults are likely or somewhat likely to pay more for a trip with “green” components such as carbon offsets or environmentally friendly resorts.

Separately, research conducted by Expedia found that 67 percent of those surveyed believe it is important for a travel company to offer sustainable tourism products and 37 percent would spend extra time searching for sustainable options if their travel company offered them.

## **SOUTHWARD MIGRATION:**

With the dollar at record lows against many major world currencies, travelers yearning to go overseas are increasingly headed south—to Mexico, Central America and South America.

Year-over-year booking volume from the US to Latin America is up seven percent according to Expedia data. The US Department of Commerce reports that 1.8 million US citizens traveled to South America between January and September 2007, a 7.6 percent increase over the same period in 2006. Travel to Central America was up 8 percent, (1.9 million US citizens) and 4.2 million Americans traveled to Mexico. More Americans traveled to Mexico, South America and Central America in March, June and July 2007 than during other months.

Despite the increase in demand, airfares to Latin America are flat year-over-year; with the average round trip fare of \$489 remaining virtually unchanged from 2006 to 2007 according to Expedia data. However, hotel rates in the region increased 19.7 percent in 2007 on average, according to the January 2008 HotelBenchmark Survey by Deloitte.

The top Latin American destinations among Expedia® travelers are:

1. Mexico
2. Puerto Rico
3. Dominican Republic
4. Costa Rica
5. Colombia
6. Brazil
7. Peru
8. Argentina
9. Guatemala
10. Panama

Mexico is by far the most popular Latin American destination among Expedia travelers, garnering six times as many bookings as Puerto Rico, the second most frequented destination in the region. The cities that drive the numbers to make Mexico so popular are: Cabo San Lucas, Mexico City, Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta and Cancun.

In addition to low prices, Latin America offers travelers a wide array of cultural attractions and a cosmopolitan hotel scene in many of its larger cities. The region is an interesting alternative to crowded and higher-priced Europe, with something for everyone, including foreign languages, exotic cuisine, long sandy beaches, outdoor adventure, jungles, vineyards, and glaciers.

## **THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE IN LATIN AMERICA**

**Speak:** Learn a foreign language in Antigua, Guatemala or Cuernavaca, Mexico where some of the best Spanish language schools in the world are.

**Relax:** White sand and turquoise water? You can't be the sexy beaches of Cancun, Mexico, or Ipanema in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Deal hunters should check out the all-inclusive resorts in the Dominican Republic.

**Hike/Ski:** You'll find some of the best “summer” skiing in the Andean alpine region between Chile and Argentina near Bariloche, a town that looks straight out of Switzerland.

**Glaciers:** Extreme adventurers flock to the rocks and ice in the Ushuaia region of Argentina.

**Culture:** 500 year old cathedrals built by the Spaniard are surrounded by plazas, fountains, outdoor markets and cafes in the mountainous “Colonial” region north Guadalajara, Mexico. You'll find something similar 2,000 miles to the east in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico.

**Dining:** With the Argentine peso and the US dollar still on favorable terms, two people can enjoy a great steak dinner, including wine and dessert for about \$25 USD. If you want to dine with the locals, don't arrive before 10 pm.

**Adventure and Eco-Tours:** Costa Rica can't be beat for seeing exotic flora and fauna, but if you don't like crowds and high prices, check out relatively undiscovered and inexpensive Nicaragua next door.

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## KNOW YOUR NOMENCLATURE:

**Latin America** is a region defined by language and culture more than geography. It includes Spanish-speaking Mexico (technically North America), plus Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic (all three technically the Caribbean) and all of Central and South America where Spanish and Portuguese are the dominant languages. “**Central America**” extends from the Mexico-Guatemala border in the north to Panama’s border with Columbia, where South America begins, and extends all the way south to Cape Horn, near Antarctica.

<sup>1</sup> Harris Interactive® fielded the online survey on behalf of Expedia.com between January 10 and January 14, 2008, among 3,079 U.S. adults 18 years of age or older. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available through Expedia.com

<sup>2</sup> Expedia.com survey conducted by Harris Interactive in January 2008.

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## INSIGHT AND EXPERTISE

Chris McGinnis, a 20-year travel industry veteran most recently serving as a travel correspondent on CNN Headline News, is the editor of the Expedia Travel Trendwatch™. Each report provides travelers with a treasure trove of trends, data and advice designed to help people make better travel decisions.

McGinnis’s travel industry insight and expertise, coupled with the unparalleled travel intelligence of Expedia®, can be found throughout this report, arming travelers with an invaluable source of insider knowledge on travel trends.

Photo by Melissa Wuschnig