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# 5 Destinations to Add to Your Bucket List this Summer

**Whether you're looking to reignite your adventurous spirit for the weekend or unwind from the work world for a week, these getaways are worthy of a calendar countdown**

BY RAMONA FLUME

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MCWAY FALLS IN BIG SUR, CALIFORNIA

## 1. MONTEREY COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Spanning Carmel, Monterey, and Big Sur, Monterey County occupies a particularly golden portion of central California. Travelers can blend in with the masses of smiling, sun-kissed locals by actively basking in the region's diverse natural beauty, whether it's taking a sunrise jog along Carmel's public beach, hiking throughout coastal state parks, or kayaking past the sea otters and kelp forests in Monterey Bay.

**SEE:** It's easy to understand the inspirational appeal that has attracted artists, poets, and writers to Monterey County for centuries while wandering amidst places like the Point Lobos State Natural Reserve. The craggy cliffs and sculptured coves of its Pacific coastline were the real-life blueprints for Spyglass Hill in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel, *Treasure Island*. Hike along the park's seaside trails while spotting sea lions, harbor seals, and migrating gray whales. [parks.ca.gov](http://parks.ca.gov)

**DO:** Get up close and personal with Monterey Bay's vibrant ecosystem on a sea kayaking excursion. Sunrise, sunset, and full moon tours (beginner and intermediate; \$30) launch from Monterey Beach and meander throughout the harbor—a designated national marine

sanctuary—paddling within arms’ reach of playful sea otters and the barking sea lions of Fisherman’s Wharf. [montereybaykayaks.com](http://montereybaykayaks.com)



**EAT:** Blessed with temperate microclimates and year-long growing seasons, Monterey County’s lush valleys have long been a haven for spirited epicures and independent farmers. Savor the region’s cornucopia of organic cuisine, from beloved outposts like the highway-side Earthbound Farm Stand or unparalleled fine dining destinations like Aubergine at Carmel’s chic L’Auberge boutique hotel. [auberginecarmel.com](http://auberginecarmel.com)

**DON’T MISS:** Wine might be the region’s most popular byproduct, with nearly 200 independent vineyards in Monterey County alone; some of which can be accessed along a scenic Salinas Valley route known as the River Road Wine Trail. There are also ten tasting rooms right in the heart of Carmel-by-the-Sea’s historic downtown. The local visitor center offers a Wine Walk Passport (\$65) that’s good for one free flight (normally \$10) at each tasting room. Expect even more oenophiles roaming around during the annual Monterey Wine Festival (June 6–7), now in its 39th year. [carmelcalifornia.org](http://carmelcalifornia.org)

**STAY:** The luxurious La Playa Carmel by the Sea Resort embodies Carmel’s classic seaside glamour, with rates starting at \$290. Just a short walk down the city’s public beach, the Carmel Lamp Lighter Inn offers cozy rooms and special extras like “beach kits” with everything one might need for a beachside bonfire—from wood and lighter fluid to a bottle of wine and corkscrew. Rates start at \$185. [laplayahotel.com](http://laplayahotel.com); [carmellamplighter.com](http://carmellamplighter.com)

**WHEN YOU GO:** Round trip flights from Austin to the Monterey Peninsula Airport start around \$400.

## 2. ROATAN, HONDURAS

The Caribbean island of Roatan, located 35 miles off the coast





of Honduras, is known for its world-class barrier reef diving. Most tourists hope to experience what's known as the "Roatan Vortex" amidst the isle's raucous West End—a crowded strip of white sand beaches, seaside cafes, and souvenir shops. But Pristine Bay, in the lesser-known French Harbor area, is home to Roatan's most exclusive getaway—Las Verandas Hotel & Villas. Luxurious seaside villas, a 1,000-foot private beach, the island's only 18-hole golf course and access to unparalleled diving sites lie just five minutes from shore.

**SEE:** Snorkel or scuba dive throughout Roatan's surrounding Mesoamerican barrier reef—the second largest in the world after Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Las Verandas' onsite Black Pearl Dive Shop offers snorkeling, PADI certification

classes, and Master Diver plunges. No matter the skill level, divers can witness stunning underwater spectacles like swim-through coral caves and pentacle reef formations, all inhabited by a colorful carousel of nearly 1,000 species of tropical fish, mollusk, and sea turtles.

**DO:** Explore beyond Pristine Bay on a 4x4 sand buggy tour throughout some of Roatan's wildest terrain, from jungle mountaintops to secluded private beaches. A half-day off-road adventure includes a nice stop for lunch on the east end of the island. The front desk can arrange the tours, including pick-up and drop-off shuttle service, in addition to other excursions like swimming with bottlenose dolphins at Roatan's Institute of Marine Science. [facebook.com/RoatanSandBlaster](https://www.facebook.com/RoatanSandBlaster), [anthonyskey.com](http://anthonyskey.com)

**EAT:** It's nice to know that Las Verandas' beachside Palapa Bar is one of the best restaurants in Roatan, with both traditional island and international cuisine. But you're on vacation, so switch things up at Entre Pisco y Nazca, a lovely modern Peruvian eatery, located a short drive away in Sandy Bay. [entrepiscynazca.com](http://entrepiscynazca.com)

**DON'T MISS:** Take a break from the serenity of Pristine Bay to experience a wild night in the West End. It might be crowded, but the tourist mecca knows how to party, with casual cigar bars, live music, all-night street food, and a frenzied discoteque called El Bosque that rages into the wee hours.

**STAY:** Las Verandas has a range of room options, from one-room suites to sprawling, family-sized villas

overlooking the resort's private beach. Rates start at \$195. [las-verandas.com](http://las-verandas.com)

**WHEN YOU GO:** Traveling from Austin is a breeze, with direct connections from Houston and round trip fares starting around \$700.

### 3. MT. HOOD TERRITORY, OREGON

Oregon's historic Mt. Hood Territory is only a 30-minute drive from Portland, Oregon, but the rural area's signature 11,245-foot peak and surrounding Willamette Valley still maintain the same exploratory sense of adventure once recorded in the journals of Lewis and Clark and some of the Oregon Trail's first settlers. More recently, the cinematic beauty of the Pacific Northwest territory could be seen in last year's Academy Award-nominated film, *Wild*, starring Reese Witherspoon on an epic journey along the Pacific Crest Trail.

**WILD SIDE:** All but seven of the movie's scenes were filmed in Oregon, but travelers don't have to commit to the same 1,100-mile stretch of the Pacific Crest Trail that *Wild* writer Cheryl Strayed embarked upon to witness some of the film's most stunning backdrops. The local Mt. Hood Adventure outfitters can tailor customized hikes that lead to iconic landmarks, like Timberline Lodge (est. 1935), that were featured in the movie. [mthoodadventure.com](http://mthoodadventure.com)

**DO:** Timberline Lodge, located within Mt. Hood National Forest, is no stranger to the silver screen. The national landmark was first made famous by Stanley Kubrick, who used it as the exterior of the Overlook Hotel in his 1980 classic, *The Shining*. U.S. Forest Rangers lead free daily tours of the WPA-era lodge, which is also home to the longest ski season in North America, with snow on the ground and daily lift service through Labor Day. Summer lift day passes cost \$60. [timberlinelodge.com](http://timberlinelodge.com)

**EAT & DRINK:** Mt. Hood Territory's craft beer scene is having a moment right now, with towns like Oregon City becoming new epicenters of buzzworthy breweries like Feckin Irish Brewing and the highly anticipated Coin Toss Brewing Co., set to open in June. Sample the latest microbrews along Main Street or explore more of Clackamas County via a new bike concierge program that offers customized routes to several Willamette wineries and farms. [feckinbrew.com](http://feckinbrew.com); [cointossbrewing.com](http://cointossbrewing.com); [thebikeconcierge.com](http://thebikeconcierge.com)

**DON'T MISS:** The new seasonal Field & Vine dinners (March-Dec), an exclusive farm-to-table dining experience, features a six-course

meal, locally sourced from the various Mt. Hood Territory farms and wineries where the dinners are hosted. Reservations are required for the Saturday night affairs, with tickets starting at \$85.

[fieldandvineevents.com](http://fieldandvineevents.com)



**STAY:** The best way to experience the territory is in your very own log cabin and Mt. Hood Vacation Rentals offers a wide range of private guesthouses, from rustic riverside cabins to luxurious mountain chalets, with rates to fit every budget. The Resort at The Mountain has an approachable, all-inclusive vibe, with a 27-hole golf course, spa, and complimentary nature concierge that can book offsite adventures, like mountain biking daytrips and whitewater rafting tours. Standard rooms start at \$120.

[mthoodrentals.com](http://mthoodrentals.com); [theresort.com](http://theresort.com)

**WHEN YOU GO:** Mt. Hood Territory is a short drive from Portland International Airport, with round trip fares from Austin starting around \$350. Visit [mthoodterritory.com](http://mthoodterritory.com) for more information.

## 4. GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

Grand Rapids, located a few hours from Detroit and just east of Lake Michigan's Gold Coast, has emerged as an important arts destination in recent years—without acquiring the highbrow pretensions of larger epicenters like L.A. or New York. Residents of this bustling riverfront city like to keep things casual, with an array of public art and community-oriented green spaces (some designed by world-renowned artists like Maya Lin), a beloved craft beer scene, outdoor music festivals, and a faction of fitness buffs that can be seen hiking, biking, and kayaking in droves all throughout the Grand River—the city's historic main artery.

**DO:** Head straight to the Riverwalk hike and bike trails for a vigorous overview of Grand Rapids' crown jewel, the longest river in the state of Michigan. Crisscross the gentle rapids of "The Grand" on the historic Sixth Street Bridge or the pedestrian-only Blue Bridge, stopping off at sites like the Gerald R.

Ford Presidential Museum. Bikes can be rented at most local cycle shops and GR Paddling, a conveniently located downtown operator can organize a variety of kayak excursions. [grpaddling.com](http://grpaddling.com)

**SEE:** The innovative exhibits at the Grand Rapids Art Museum and student-led shows at downtown's Kendall College of Art & Design are not to be missed. But travelers can expect to see works of art everywhere they turn, from abstract installations anchored in the middle of the Grand River to interactive "tire swing" sculptures in public plazas—even the city's garbage trucks are adorned with brightly colored graffiti murals. Annual gatherings further ignite the city's creative flames, like the Festival of the Arts (June 5–7) and ArtPrize (Sept–Oct), an international art competition featuring more than 1,500 artists and hundreds of thousands of attendees who act as both spectator and judge. [artmuseumgr.org](http://artmuseumgr.org), [artprize.org](http://artprize.org)

**DRINK:** Last year, *USA Today* readers voted Grand Rapids as the "Best Beer Town" in the country. Discover why at more than a dozen local breweries, including Grand Rapids Brewing Co. (Michigan's only USDA-certified organic brewery), not to mention award-winning pubs and outdoor beer gardens, like HopCat and Founders Brewing Co. [foundersbrewing.com](http://foundersbrewing.com), [grbrewingcompany.com](http://grbrewingcompany.com)

**EAT:** Grand Rapids is also getting attention for its "farm to fork" movement, from the locally sourced fare found at the city's most popular gastropubs to the range of artisanal attractions at the Downtown Market—a mixed-use facility featuring daily farmers' markets, cooking classes, rooftop gardens, and other culinary-focused special events. [downtownmarketgr.com](http://downtownmarketgr.com)



**DON'T MISS:** The Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, an impressive 158-acre property with sprawling sculpture gardens and botanical offerings like a tropical conservatory and a carnivorous plant house, also hosts a popular summer concert series (June–Sept). Their outdoor amphitheater, with terraced lawn seating that looks like sculpture itself, will welcome dozens of headlining acts this year, including The Beach Boys

and Austin's own Gary Clark Jr. [meijergardens.org](http://meijergardens.org)



**STAY:** Downtown's Amtrak Grand Plaza Hotel has it all—a great location, upscale accommodations, and scenic views with rooms overlooking the Grand River. Rates start at \$200. [amwaygrand.com](http://amwaygrand.com)

**WHEN YOU GO:** Round trip flights from Austin to Grand Rapids' Gerald R. Ford International Airport start at \$400.

## 5. FLORIDA KEYS

The Florida Keys, the famed archipelago of 1,700 or so islands trailing off the tip of the Sunshine State, is the kind of tropical paradise that lives up to the picture-perfect portraits seen in glossy magazine ads and airport kiosk postcards. There's no Photoshop needed for these palm tree-lined beaches, but there are plenty of reasons to venture beyond the shore—from deep-sea fishing and parasailing to snorkeling and street festival reveling. Take a road trip along the 113-mile stretch of the Overseas Highway, spanning the string of islets from Key Largo to Key West (aka Mile Zero), to discover what locals call the “Conch Republic.” Its alluring (and admittedly contagious) mañana-paced way of life has a tendency to make travelers feel far away from the mainland.

**GETTING AROUND:** The best way to soak up the Keys' sprawling beauty is to rent a car and leisurely cruise up and down the lone Overseas Highway, stopping off at any seaside café, scenic photo-op, or secluded beach that strikes your fancy.

**DO:** Get an aerial overview of the southernmost beaches in the continental U.S. with the trusty guides at Sunset Watersports, the oldest parasailing operator in Key West. Tandem (two-person) rides are only \$75. The Keys' offshore coral reefs are also worth exploring on snorkel or scuba diving tours, with several charter options available at Key Largo's John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. Two-hour trips start at \$30.

[sunsetwatersportskeywest.com](http://sunsetwatersportskeywest.com),  
[pennekamppark.com](http://pennekamppark.com)

**PIT STOP:** Travelers can book a variety of charters throughout the Upper and Middle Keys, from deep-





sea fishing excursions to sunset cruises, but crowds flock to piers like Robbie's of Islamorada just to experience the shock and awe of hand feeding tarpon. The behemoth local game fish are known to unexpectedly catapult out of the water to snag dangling baitfish, sold by the bucket for a few bucks each. [robbies.com](http://robbies.com)

**DON'T MISS:** Gather with sundowners from all walks of life at the nightly Sunset Celebrations at Key West's Mallory Square and watch the last rays disappear over the Gulf of Mexico. The menagerie of attendees, from local artists and musicians to tightrope walkers and fire breathers, make the quirky street fest an ideal way to kick-start a night of barhopping on Duval Street. For travelers that prefer the peace and quiet of smaller Lower Keys like Big Pine, the endangered Key deer—an adorably pint-sized, white-tailed species—can be seen bounding between the shore's mangrove trees every night at dusk.

**STAY:** Pitch a tent at Bahia Honda State Park, a 500-acre nature preserve boasting some of the Keys' best beaches, just an hour from Key West. Enjoy the isolated beauty of 80 private campsites, starting at \$36 during peak summer months. Further north in Islamorada, the Cheeca Lodge & Spa is the ultimate splurge, with a golf course, tiki bar, and plush oceanview suites with private lanais and jacuzzis. Rooms start around \$200. [bahiahondapark.com](http://bahiahondapark.com), [cheeca.com](http://cheeca.com)

**WHEN YOU GO:** Travelers can fly into Key West International, with round trip fares from Austin starting under \$600, or find flights for half the price into Miami International, located an hour's drive from Key Largo. Visit [fla-keys.com](http://fla-keys.com) for more information.

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