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FRUGAL TRAVELER

Deals Designed to Lure Travelers Off Their Couches

For better or for worse, travel companies are trying hard to get people, especially those who are vaccinated, back on the road (or on a plane) again.



By Elaine Glusac

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For a low-season trip to Honolulu in 2019, I scoured the internet for cheap, cheerful lodgings and the best I could come up with in Waikiki started around \$300 a night. Looking ahead to this summer, 18 months and one pandemic later, the [Ewa Hotel Waikiki](#) has a condo suite with a kitchen and terrace for \$129 a night, and the retro [White Sands Hotel](#) nearby has rooms from \$179.

Travel sales have reigned since the beginning of the pandemic, with few takers. Now, with the national vaccine rollout steaming full speed ahead, the travel industry, for better or for worse, is juicing its attempts to get Americans off their couches and into hotels, ships, airplane seats and tour buses, despite the rise in virus cases in many areas.

In the near term, 2021 still looks a lot like 2020, with mostly domestic travel and low [airfares](#).

“What we will likely see is a repeat of last year, where beach destinations, national parks and state parks did OK,” said Jan Freitag, the chief hospitality analyst at the CoStar Group, a commercial real estate research company. Mr. Freitag expects hotel occupancy to hover around 50 percent through the year, keeping prices low.

As travel picks up, bargains will fade, though the timing remains unclear. For those who are vaccinated and confident about venturing out, knowing the deals aren’t likely to get any better may make them more compelling, even as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continues to [warn](#) against nonessential travel.

Many immediate spring deals reflect shoulder season sales — April or May are usually good times to visit places like [Nantucket](#), Mass., [Jackson Hole](#), Wyo., [Cooperstown](#), N.Y., and [Laguna Beach](#), Calif. Others encourage you to plan now for future travel. In either case, if you do decide to travel, check the cancellation policies before you buy; many travel companies have relaxed them, but not all.

The following trends illustrate the lengths to which the industry is going to prime the pump for a return to travel.

Destination-wide deals

You know it's the season of the sale when much of Los Angeles, like other destinations, slashes prices.

In a travel comeback campaign, [Los Angeles Tourism](#) has assembled around 70 offers from local businesses, including up to 35 percent off hotels, tours and attractions (travel dates and restrictions differ). With it, the [Hotel Erwin](#) has 30 percent off rooms priced prediscout from \$279; [Handlebar Bike Tours](#) has \$5 off its day trips (use the booking code Comeback).

In the Caribbean, Bonaire is running an island-wide “[Bonaire Misses You](#)” campaign that offers 10 percent off at more than 50 participating businesses, including hotels, car rentals, restaurants and activities such as scuba diving, through August. (Bonaire’s [entry requirements](#) include a negative Covid test result.) Better yet, [Bamboo Bonaire](#) resort is taking \$45 off its nightly rates for cottages, which start at \$179, on stays of three nights or more, between April 10 and Dec. 18.

Modeled on New York City’s winter Restaurant Week, [Rhode Island Hotel Week](#), initiated in 2020, aims to drum up business in the bleak month of January. This year, the sale, moved because of the pandemic, is on now for travel April 17 to 30, with more than 40 hotels, inns and B&B’s offering nightly rates at \$100, \$200, \$300 or \$400, representing at least 30 percent off. They range from the hipster Dean hotel in Providence (\$100) to the Weekapaug Inn in Westerly (\$400).



In Lake Placid, N.Y., the Lake Placid Lodge, part of the Opal Collection of hotels, is one of many hotels and resorts offering deals to entice visitors. Ocean Properties

Brand-spanning room sales

Like destinations, some hotel companies are going all in on booking incentives. [Accor](#), the hospitality company that includes hotels under the Fairmont, Sofitel and 21c Museum Hotel brands, is holding a sale on 38 of its 50 hotels in the United States between April 15 and Sept. 6 for stays April 15 through Dec. 31. Discounts are based on length of stay, but it pays to join their free [loyalty program](#) as members get rates reduced up to 40 percent versus 30 percent for nonmembers.

The 21-hotel [Opal Collection](#) in Florida, New York and Maine is offering 20 percent off rooms, including breakfast for two, through May 31. After the discount, starting rates run from \$167 at the [Samoset Resort](#) in Rockport, Me., to \$499 at [Lake Placid Lodge](#) in Lake Placid, N.Y.

At seven of its all-inclusive resorts in Mexico, the Caribbean and Florida, [Club Med](#) is offering 45 percent off bookings made through May 4 for travel through Nov. 5. Rates after the discount start at \$136 per person.

Move in, or at least stay a while

The care needed to travel, including testing and quarantining, has slowed things down, just as work-from-home lifestyles have encouraged working from anywhere. Longer stays — of a week, a month or more — remain popular sales offers.

In New Orleans, [Hotel Peter & Paul](#), housed in a 19th-century former church complex, has a “snowbird” promotion offering 30 nights for \$3,000, which can also be broken into multiple stays, through Aug. 1. The standard nightly rate for a comparable room, a split-level suite with small appliances like a coffee maker and a mini fridge, starts at \$224.

Make it a [month](#) for \$2,500, including breakfast, through 2021 at the [Santarena Hotel](#) in Las Catalinas on the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica, where rooms normally start at \$200. A month at the [Freehand Hotels](#), located in New York, Chicago, Miami and Los Angeles, costs \$2,499 and includes 10 percent off food and beverage bills, among other perks.

Luxury hotels want you to stay longer, too. In Marrakesh, Morocco, the stylish hotel [El Fenn](#) — inhabiting a series of 12 interconnected riads — is offering weeklong stays at \$2,076 for two, a savings of more than \$1,100. (Travel [requirements](#) include a negative Covid-19 test and proof of a hotel reservation.)

Stay 14 days or more at the [Mauna Kea Beach Hotel](#) on the island of Hawaii to get 40 percent off its rates, which start at \$699, through Dec. 18.



The Walker Hotel in New York City's Greenwich Village is one of many urban hotels around the country that is offering incentives to visitors. Walker Hotels

City hotels want you back

Without business travelers, urban hotels are urging leisure visitors in with generous rates and perks. In Washington, D.C., the [Hamilton Hotel](#) has rooms at 35 percent off through April, starting around \$99 post-discount.

Weekends from April 1 to Sept. 6, the [Walker Hotels](#) in Greenwich Village (from \$259) and Tribeca (from \$134) in New York City are offering 9 a.m. check-ins on Fridays and 6 p.m. checkouts on Sundays. Guests staying in April also get a bottle of wine and bike tours of the city guided by bike messengers.

If you are jetting off for a vacation from Minneapolis, the suburban [Radisson Blu Mall of America](#) is offering a [one-night](#), predeparture stay from \$184, including transfers to and from the airport, and seven nights of valet parking while you're away, through the end of the year.

Cruising returns smaller, shorter and on sale

Before the pandemic, it was fairly easy to find a deal on a big ship. Now it's hard to find a [big ship](#). While waiting for safety protocols to be issued that would allow them to resume sailing from U.S. ports, some cruise lines are coming up with a workaround by starting service in the Caribbean. This includes the Celebrity Millennium from [Celebrity Cruises](#), which will offer weeklong sailings from St. Maarten, June 5 through Aug. 21. The 2,218-passenger ship will be limited to 40 percent, or 887 guests who have been vaccinated. (Children under 18 will need a negative test result.)

Cruises visit three islands — Aruba, Curaçao and Barbados, or Tortola, St. Lucia and Barbados — and start at \$1,999, roughly equivalent to previous trips. But this year, the fare includes round-trip [airfare](#), drinks, Wi-Fi and gratuities.

[Celestyal Cruises](#) plans to resume sailing in the Greek Islands and the Eastern Mediterranean from Athens beginning May 29. Passengers on the ship — which normally takes 900 and will now book up to 720 guests — must be vaccinated or have proof of a negative Covid test.

Bookings for seven-night [sailings](#) made by June 30 for travel before July 31 cost \$729 a person, a little more than half off; thereafter, departures through August start at \$1,019 or about a third off. Rates include drinks, two shore excursions and gratuities.



At the Singita Sabora Tented Camp in Tanzania (open to Americans), a four-nights-for-the-price-of-three sale brings the all-inclusive nightly rate to \$1,275 from \$1,700. Singita Sabora Tented Camp

Bucket list trips going once, going twice

Many travel companies aim to trigger your wanderlust by dangling rare bucket-list bargains.

The adventure outfitter MT Sobek is offering its 11-day Galápagos [trips](#) aboard the 16-passenger yacht Integrity in November and six other departures in 2022 starting at \$8,695 a person, \$1,000 off the usual price. (A negative Covid-19 test is [required](#) of travelers arriving in Ecuador.)

If the Amazon rainforest is on your list, check out the 26-room, three-cabin [Sacha Lodge](#) in Ecuador on a 5,000-acre preserve. It is offering 25 percent off through June 30 for trips through year-end. A four-day itinerary, including meals and activities such as canopy walks and a night safari by canoe, starts at \$1,190 a person prediscout.

In Africa, [Singita](#), which runs a collection of safari camps and lodges, has a range of offers throughout most of 2021. At its rebuilt [Singita Sabora Tented Camp](#) in Tanzania ([open](#) to Americans), its four-nights-for-the-price-of-three sale brings the all-inclusive nightly rate to \$1,275 a person, from \$1,700.

Sixteen [African Bush Camps](#) in [Botswana](#), [Zambia](#) and [Zimbabwe](#) (all open to American travelers) are waiving the single supplement for travel in 2021 on bookings made by April 30. That means a solo traveler would pay \$3,794 on a six-night trip in the [Mana Pool](#) region of Zimbabwe, saving \$1,855.

For a change of climate, head to the south coast of Iceland, which is [open](#) to vaccinated travelers. There, the [Hotel Ranga](#) is offering the seventh night [free](#) on weeklong stays, including breakfast and your choice of an activity — a trip to hot springs or an ice cave — between June 1 and Sept. 30 (from 3,084 euros, or about \$3,608, for two).

Recently, Amtrak was offering trips for as low as \$19 on certain U.S. routes in the Northeast. Alas, that sale has ended, but train lovers looking for more ambitious trips can still find deals. Within the United States, take a swing through four national parks with [Amtrak Vacations](#), the tour operator for the train company, which is offering \$200 to \$500 off several itineraries. Book by April 30 for travel through 2022 to get the nine-day [trip](#) from Denver to Salt Lake City from \$3,998 for two before a \$400 discount, including travel by train, hotel overnights and tours of four parks.



Is Greece the new Italy?

With most of Italy on lockdown at least through Easter (and currently [closed](#) to Americans), Mediterranean lovers are being tempted to [Greece](#), which may reopen to vaccinated and Covid-negative travelers in mid-May.

Resorts there are unfurling the welcome mat in the form of deals. Through April, [Katikies](#), which has seven boutique hotels between the islands of Mykonos and Santorini, is offering 20 percent off rates and 100-euro (about \$118) food and beverage credits for three-night-minimum stays throughout 2021, including a full refund in case a pandemic-related travel ban is in place. Prediscount, rates at the [Katikies Garden Santorini](#) start at 310 euros.

On Crete, guests staying five nights or more at the new [Cretan Malia Park](#) can book the [History Package](#) to get daily breakfast and dinner and a guided tour to Knossos archaeological site followed by lunch at a local tavern. Rates start at \$250 a night.

Savings on the slopes

Annual ski pass offers usually start low and end, by the time the resorts open, higher, giving skiers and riders incentive to think snow in summer. This year, Vail Resorts is piling on pressure by slashing its [Epic Passes](#) by 20 percent, bringing fares back down to 2015-2016 season prices.

Right now, an Epic Pass is \$783, down from \$979 last season, offering access to more than 70 resorts worldwide, including unlimited access to 37 ski areas like Vail and Breckenridge in Colorado and Park City, Utah. By comparison, a one-day lift ticket at Vail currently costs \$219.

Vail has not said if the price for the pass will rise. The competing [Ikon Pass](#), on sale now at \$999, offers access to 44 destinations during the 2021-2022 season and seven for most of the remainder of this year's spring skiing season.

What about vacation rentals?

Vacation homes have been a relative bright spot in the travel industry during the pandemic, as travelers sought the privacy and control of rental homes. AirDNA, which analyzes the short-term rental market, says prices have been creeping up in early 2021, especially in rural areas and resort locations; average daily rates were up more than nine percent in February 2021 compared to the same period last year.

Sitewide sales on rental platforms are rare, but [AvantStay](#), which has more than 400 properties in the United States and Mexico, is offering \$250 off bookings from June 20 to Sept. 22 using the booking code SUMMER250.

[TurnKey Vacation Rentals](#), which manages more than 6,000 vacation homes around the United States, has a spring deal at 10 percent off stays of seven nights or more. Use the code SPRING10, through May 31, for stays up to a year from booking.

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