

Red Light. Green Light **05/MAR/2009**

When's the best time to go?

There is one thing every traveller wants to know: When is the best time to go?

The answer is as varied as there are destinations.

Weather Or Not

For most people, weather is the biggest concern, with hurricanes topping the list. Hurricanes (also called 'typhoons') occur at different times of year. The official hurricane season for the North Atlantic (covering the Caribbean, Florida and the Gulf of Mexico) is June 1 to November 30, when 97% of hurricanes occur. They peak between August and October. In the Southern Hemisphere, seasonality is reversed: December through March is the bad weather season. And for the Indian sub-continent, avoid the main monsoon period of June to September.



The good news is that some tour operators and resorts offer "hurricane guarantees" that promise a refund for the days of your vacation affected, or at the very least a future credit. SuperClubs and Club Med have such guarantees. Bear in mind, certain Caribbean destinations are more prone to hurricanes than others. Aruba and Curacao, for instance, are effectively outside the hurricane belt.

You can even obtain rain insurance from companies such as Sunquest. For \$39.95 per passenger over 12 years of age, you get your money back if it rains over ½" a day for half the days of your holiday. Of course, some actuary has done the math on this to turn a profit, and it's not available for many destinations. In the UK and Ireland, for example, it is likely to rain at almost any time of year. Research the average monthly rainfall and you'll minimize your chances of getting drenched. Regardless, you're always well advised to pack a rain slicker.

Once inclement weather has been weighed, travellers focus on temperature. Don't automatically assume "hotter is better". For instance, the cooler spring and fall are less crowded times to tour Europe. Winter in Australia (June – August) is more comfortable than the scorching summer months.

Seeing The Light



Daylight length can be a big factor when travelling to Northern Canada, Alaska and Scandinavia. Try to visit these regions June to early September, not only because it's warmest, but also because of the increased daylight. However, the best months to see the Northern Lights in Canada are late August to mid-April. Daylight changes are more extreme the further north - or south - you are, and most marked around the equinoxes of March 21 and September 21. At these times, a change of one week in your travel date can mean 45 minutes more daylight daily!

As for Disney aficionados, they often recommend the summer months due to long daylight hours, with the parks open as late as 11p.m. The only drawback can be the afternoon heat, which is why summer Disney tours are best in the mornings and evenings.

There are few places where the question “best time to visit” is more strongly linked to avoiding crowds than the Disney Parks. A good alternative for Canadians is to travel when the US schools are not on March break. Also consider late Fall between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when the parks are beautifully decorated. The shortest queues occur during the first two weeks of December.

Where The Wild Things Are

Whale watching in the Maritime’s Bay of Fundy is best from late July to Fall. Looking for humpback whales? In the Dominican Republic vacation hot spots, try mid-December to mid-March. Turtle nesting on the beach varies by species and destination, so check in advance. In Costa Rica for example, March to August is best on the Caribbean coast, but October to April is prime time for the Pacific coast. And animal safaris in Africa, South America and India are always best planned in the local dry seasons, when sparse vegetation allows easier game spotting and animals are concentrated around water sources.



BOTTOM LINE

Hurricane information:

Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory <http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/>

National Hurricane Centre: www.nhc.noaa.gov

The Storm Track System: hurricane.terrapin.com

Weather patterns by month:

www.whentotravel.net

www.weather2travel.com

Festivals: City and Tourist Board sites are the best source of information here.

Tourism Offices Worldwide Directory: www.towd.com



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