

The best time to go on a cruise

(Courtesy of Gwen Pratesi, The Points Guy)

Sorry to disappoint you, but the best time to go on a cruise is not a fixed week or month, as you might hope. The best time to take a cruise varies based on your travel preferences, including where you wish to travel.

First, you'll need to consider the weather at your destination. The best time of year to visit is typically when warm, sunny days are plentiful and rain is scarce.

If you're not a fan of crowds, you'll want to pass on traveling when everyone else is going during popular vacation weeks. That might mean embracing cooler weather and a little precipitation.

If price is a major factor in choosing the perfect cruise travel date, you'll also want to look at cruises in the shoulder season, when fewer people are traveling and fares are typically lower. However, don't rule out prime travel dates. You might be able to find cheaper cruises on older ships or in less desirable cabin categories, especially if an abundance of ships sails to your preferred destination.

In the end, the best time to cruise may come down to where you can go for the right price when your schedule allows a vacation. We've compiled the best times to cruise to the most popular cruise destinations based on the weather, lowest prices and fewer crowds. However, the decision of when to travel is ultimately up to you.

Best time to cruise Alaska: June-August

The cruise season in [Alaska](#) runs from mid-April to September, with a few cruise lines extending the season into early October. Nearly every month has something to recommend it, depending on what you're looking for.

When to cruise to Alaska for the best weather

If you want to avoid rain, May is typically the driest month, with plenty of sunshine and highs in the 50s. It's a great month for nature lovers to cruise to Alaska because May is when you'll see much of the wildlife emerging, including migrating gray whales, Dall sheep, moose and migratory birds.

If you want to travel to Alaska a little earlier in the season in April, the weather is cool but pleasant, and the nights are still long enough that you may be able to catch a glimpse of the northern lights.

July is the height of peak season, with the warmest weather of the year and long daylight hours. It's also the best month for wildlife viewing, especially for humpback whales, brown and black bears and migrating shorebirds and puffins. However, you should know that you'll have to deal with pesky mosquitos in late June and July, especially in the interior part of the state.

Best time to cruise Alaska for low prices

You can usually find the best prices for an Alaska cruise during the shoulder season months of April, May, September and October. For example, starting rates are as low as \$603 per person for a seven-night Inside Passage cruise sailing round-trip from Seattle with [Royal Caribbean](#) in May 2024. In mid-

September, the same itinerary starts at \$631 per person. However, by the peak summer season in late June and July, the starting price is \$921 per person.

Best time to cruise Alaska to avoid crowds

The shoulder season months are also the least crowded times to visit Alaska because kids are in school and fewer families are vacationing. Just be aware that if you head to Alaska early in the spring, some of the stores may not have opened yet. Arrive in the fall, and you may find that tour operators and shops have begun to cut back hours or have closed.

The advantage of traveling in the shoulder season is that you can experience the towns without the summer crowds and with cooler temperatures. Shoppers can take advantage of end-of-season sales on souvenirs.

Best time to cruise the Caribbean and Bahamas: December-May



MSC Seashore's first call at Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve. CONRAD SCHUTT/MSC CRUISES

Almost any time of year is a good time to sail to the [Caribbean](#) or [Bahamas](#), with year-round sunny skies, warm temperatures and glistening turquoise blue waters.

When to cruise to the Caribbean and Bahamas for the best weather

Some of the Caribbean's nicest weather is in May, at the start of shoulder season. The weather is particularly pleasant in the Southern Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Barbados, St. Lucia, Dominique, Grenada and St. Vincent, with highs in the 80s and just slightly cooler evenings in the 70s.

January through March also offers picture-perfect weather. January is the beginning of the dry season, so the humidity is lower, and the temperatures are in the 70s and 80s.

Best time to cruise the Caribbean and Bahamas for low prices

Shoulder season in the Caribbean is May through November, the months just before peak season, which is December through April. This is the time when you'll typically find better deals on pricing, especially in May and September to November.

Fares for seven-night cruises in May 2024 are as low as \$499 per person on an [MSC cruise](#) sailing round-trip from Miami and even less expensive at \$399 per person come September.

The official Atlantic hurricane season, June 1 to Nov. 30, falls within shoulder season, so you may need to weigh low prices with the risk of a storm affecting your trip. Also, some fares in the summer months can be higher with many families taking vacations. Prices for similar cruises with MSC between June and August range from \$649 to \$799.

Best time to cruise the Caribbean and Bahamas to avoid crowds

The best time to cruise to the Caribbean without all the tourists is typically in late fall and between the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. You can also avoid the crowds in late April and early May after the spring break rush but before school lets out and summer vacations begin.

Best time to cruise the Mediterranean: April-May, September-October

The cruise season in the [Mediterranean](#) usually begins in April and ends in November, with peak season falling between June and September. Some cruise lines also offer sailings into the winter months to southern Mediterranean destinations, such as Egypt, Israel, Morocco, southern Spain and the Canary Islands, because they have warm weather during that time.

When to cruise the Mediterranean for the best weather

The spring (April and May) and the fall (September and October) afford some of the best weather in the Mediterranean, with sunny days and comfortable temperatures. Though the busiest season for Mediterranean cruises is typically July and August, the temperatures can be unbearably hot (85 degrees and higher).

Best time to cruise the Mediterranean for low prices

Look to the shoulder season to find the best deals on Mediterranean cruises. During April and May and September to November, the combination of cooler temperatures, a higher chance of rain and a lack of family vacations leads to more availability and lower prices for cruises.

For example, in May 2023, you can sail on a seven-night Western Mediterranean voyage from Barcelona to Rome with [Princess Cruises](#) starting at \$699 per person. If you prefer to travel in the fall, you can still

find a good deal on the same itinerary for \$848 per person in September. In mid-June, the same voyage costs \$1,132. Since you'll have the greatest choice of ships midsummer, you might luck out and find a one-off deal if you can be flexible about ship and sail date.

Best time to cruise the Mediterranean to avoid crowds

Lower prices also mean fewer crowds. The height of summer is incredibly busy in the Mediterranean, especially in smaller destinations, including the port towns in the Greek islands of Santorini and Mykonos and in popular cities in Italy, France and Croatia. The spring and fall are the optimal times to visit, with fewer tourists, cooler temperatures and lower prices. You'll also find that most everything is open during that time and easier to see without battling the crowds.

Best time to cruise Hawaii: June-August

[Hawaii](#) is a year-round destination, but you'll only find one ship that sails the islands throughout the entire year: Norwegian Cruise Line's Pride of America. Other ships sail one-way or round-trip itineraries to the Hawaiian Islands from the U.S. West Coast, typically between September and April.

When to cruise to Hawaii for the best weather

Hawaii has just two seasons due to its tropical climate. Summer is from May to October, and winter falls between November and April. There's not much variation in temperature between the two seasons, with daytime temperatures hovering around 80 degrees in the summer and not falling much more than that into the high 70s in the winter. Since the temperatures are similar during both seasons, the best time to cruise the islands is when there's less chance of precipitation, which is during the summer months of June, July and August.

Best time to cruise Hawaii for low prices

Cruises to Hawaii will be less expensive in the fall when school is in session.

Summer is peak season with family vacations and honeymooners, so prices will be higher then. Expect a lift during spring break weeks, as well. Even though January, February and March bring more rain, the winter months are also peak season for tourists ... and whales.

For example, a seven-night round-trip cruise in November or early December 2024 with [Norwegian Cruise Line](#) starts at \$1,649. The highest fares are in June, at \$2,149. January and February fares are as high as \$1,949.

If your heart is set on traveling to Hawaii in the summer, or you want to escape the winter's snow at home in February, look for deals with an early booking. You can also take a chance and wait for last-minute specials if you're flexible.

Best time to cruise Hawaii to avoid crowds

Springtime will be the quietest time to visit the Aloha State, although you might find an uptick of families traveling for spring break during March and April. The summer is the busiest time for vacationers, and the winter months bring whale-watching enthusiasts and surfers. There are also two major sporting events in January, so you'll want to avoid the crowds on Oahu and Maui during that month.

Best time to cruise Northern Europe: June-August

The cruise season is short if you want to sail to Northern Europe, the Baltic or the Scandinavian fjords; itineraries run from April through October. However, if you love the cold and want to chase the aurora borealis in Norway, several lines offer northern lights itineraries in the winter months.

When to cruise Northern Europe for the best weather

The warmest months in Northern Europe are mid-June to August, making the height of the summer season the most desirable time to cruise Scandinavia and the Baltic region. This is also the Land of the Midnight Sun, where you'll have nearly 24 hours of sunlight in places like northern Norway from early June to mid-July.

The two shoulder seasons – from April to early June and September to October – offer comfortable temperatures, but you'll need to dress in layers.

Best time to cruise Northern Europe for low prices

The shoulder seasons may not be the warmest, but they typically offer better pricing than summer cruises. For example, a 14-night sailing to the Baltic with [Holland America](#) is \$949 in early May 2023 but \$1,329 in mid-June.

Best time to cruise Northern Europe to avoid crowds

The shoulder seasons will also have fewer passengers and tourists — and you may even have some attractions to yourself in the cities and towns.

Best time to cruise the Panama Canal: December-March

Transiting the [Panama Canal](#) from the Caribbean to the Pacific Ocean is a bucket-list trip for many travelers. Panama and the bordering countries in Central America have a tropical climate with lush landscapes and rainforests, so you can expect wet weather at certain times of the year. The height of the Panama Canal cruise season is between October and April.

When to cruise the Panama Canal for the best weather

You'll find moderate temperatures (in the mid-70s to low 80s) and drier weather in January and February. During those months, it's more pleasant to engage in outdoor adventures like hiking and kayaking, which are a highlight when visiting places like Panama and Costa Rica.

December, March and April also offer nice weather, although the rainy season sometimes starts as early as mid-March before continuing through the fall.

Best time to cruise the Panama Canal for low prices

It's hard to determine the best time to cruise the Panama Canal at the lowest prices. Many cruise lines offer short seasons or mix up itineraries, so there's not much grounds for comparison. However, if you want a deal, the one thing that's certain is you should not sail over the holidays.

For example, [Windstar Cruises](#)' seven-night Costa Rica and Panama Canal sailings mostly start at \$2,299 in February and March 2024 and \$2,399 in January. However, its New Year's sailing starts at \$2,799 per person.

Best time to cruise the Panama Canal to avoid crowds

The Panama Canal cruise season picks up at the end of the rainy season, so you'll find fewer tourists during October and November when the weather is still wet.

To avoid crowds in port, try not to cruise during the Panamanian festivals that take place in early spring and from November into the winter. These festivals can also affect the opening of attractions, restaurants, banks and other venues you might want to visit ashore.

Best time to cruise Mexico: November-May

The [Mexican Riviera](#) (i.e., the Pacific coast of Mexico) is a year-round cruise destination. Most ships sail the itinerary in the fall, winter and spring because those same ships head to Alaska for the summer.

When to cruise to Mexico for the best weather

For the best weather, book your cruise during the dry season, between November and May. The weather can be cool at times along the Pacific coast, so if you're looking for warmer temperatures, you'll need to head to cities located farther south, such as Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Vallarta and Mazatlan.

Best time to cruise Mexico for low prices

The summer months and early fall will have some of the best rates, but you'll need to take into consideration the hotter temperatures in the summer that can reach into the 90s – and with high humidity. It's also the rainy season, and it's possible to have hurricanes during these months.

For example, a seven-night round-trip voyage from Long Beach, California, along Mexico's Pacific coast with [Carnival Cruise Line](#) starts at \$629 in June. The same cruise is even less expensive in October at \$464 per person.

Best time to cruise Mexico to avoid crowds

The dry season is also the quietest time to cruise to Mexico. Family vacations are over, and the kids are back in school. You will, however, want to avoid booking a cruise around the holidays at the end of the year and during spring break (March and early April).

Best time to cruise Canada and New England: September-October

The cruise season in Canada and New England begins in May and ends in October, with a few ships even making the voyage in April. You'll find more ships in this region between August and October as it gets closer to peak leaf-peeping season.

When to cruise to Canada and New England for the best weather

The summer offers some of the nicest weather, with daytime highs in Boston and New York between 80 and 90 degrees. Along the coastal areas in Maine and Canada, you'll find highs in the 70s in July. Be prepared for cooler evenings.

The summer months are also the best time to see several species of whales off the coast of Newfoundland, including humpback whales.

However, many travelers choose to cruise to Canada and New England specifically for the fall foliage. Peak leaf season begins around mid-September and runs through October. If fall colors are your goal, resign yourself to cooler temperatures on your sailing, especially in the evenings.

Best time to cruise Canada and New England for low prices

For the best cruise deals, look at voyages sailing before August. A seven-night sailing from Boston to Montreal in May 2024 with Holland America starts at \$779 per person. A similar seven-night itinerary from Boston to Quebec City in late September starts at \$1,279 per person.

Best time to cruise New England and Canada to avoid crowds

You'll have fewer crowds on shore and in the port towns during the shoulder season in the spring when kids are in school and before mid-September, which is the beginning of peak foliage season in Canada.

Summertime is busy in Canada and New England because of the optimal weather and family vacations. You can also expect more ships and crowds in town during late September and October at the height of the leaf-peeping season.

Best time to cruise Bermuda: April-June

Bermuda's cruise season runs between April and November, with a few ships calling on Royal Naval Dockyard in December. While the pink-sand beaches and glistening, turquoise waters offer a slice of paradise, the archipelago in the western North Atlantic Ocean does not stay warm year-round. The subtropical climate of these British islands has winter temperatures that dip down into the low 60s and high 50s.

When to cruise to Bermuda for the best weather

April is one of the best months to sail to Bermuda as the temperatures are pleasant and in the 70s, and it's one of the driest months of the year, along with May. May and early June are great options for cruises to the archipelago, and you can expect highs in the low 80s by June.

July and August are the hottest months with high humidity, but it's a great time to hit the beach with water temperatures around 81 degrees.

Best time to cruise Bermuda for low prices

April through early June and September to November are typically when you'll find the cheapest prices. Norwegian Cruise Line has a seven-night itinerary sailing round-trip from Boston in April that starts at \$779 per person. The same itinerary is \$979 in June and \$1,019 per person in July.

Best time to cruise Bermuda to avoid crowds

If you want the beaches to yourself, book a cruise in April. Even though there are festivities during the month (including Easter and the Peppercorn Ceremony), it's still early in the tourist season.

By late spring, summer and fall, there are more festivals, sporting events and golf tournaments that bring visitors to the islands. In the summertime, you'll have family vacations and people with vacation homes in Bermuda returning for the season and warmer weather.

Best time to cruise Australia and New Zealand: December-February

The height of the cruise season in Australia and New Zealand begins in early October and runs through the end of April because these months are spring and summer in the Southern Hemisphere. You will find a few lines sailing an extended season Down Under.

When to cruise to Australia and New Zealand for the best weather

The summer months of December through February offer some of the best weather for cruising in Australia and New Zealand. Major cities will have high temperatures in the 70s and 80s during that time.

In Australia, summer is the perfect season to enjoy the country's beautiful beaches, especially in the south near Sydney. However, if you plan to head north to destinations like northern Queensland, know that summer is that region's wet season. Most days are sunny, but you'll likely encounter an afternoon or evening storm.

In New Zealand, summer brings long, sunny days with mild evenings. New Zealand's beaches are also a top attraction in the summer, along with outdoor activities and water sports.

Best time to cruise Australia and New Zealand for low prices

Look for the best prices during the shoulder seasons, from September to November (spring) and from March to May (fall). Avoid the December holidays when prices can be high.

For example, [Celebrity Cruises](#) has an 11-night cruise sailing round-trip from Sydney in March for \$1,320. As you get closer to the holidays in December, a 13-night round-trip itinerary from Sydney with the line costs \$2,231.

Best time to cruise Australia and New Zealand to avoid crowds

The shoulder seasons, when temperatures are warming up or cooling off, are a less busy time to cruise Australia and New Zealand and offer slightly lower fares.

If you don't enjoy big crowds with lots of partying, avoid a cruise to Australia during the New Year's Eve festivities, as it's one of the busiest times of year for tourists, especially in Sydney. Australia Day celebrations can also draw crowds, so be aware if your itinerary includes that January holiday.