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Spring break for grown-ups

Enjoy a spring fling without the crowds — or wet T-shirt contests

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By **Stephanie Stephens**



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Despite what MTV may want us to believe during their annual [spring break](#) media extravaganza, the world's beaches are not completely overrun by hard-partying college students desperate to blow off mid-term steam.

Yes, it can be difficult for grown-ups to craft civilized vacations in warm climates during the peak bacchanalia times of March and April. But it's by no means impossible—if you know where to go.

As determined by student visits, Florida claims nearly 60 percent of spring breakers who travel within the United States. In the "Funshine State", they visit Daytona, Miami (especially South Beach), Panama City and Key West; other domestic destinations include Lake Havasu City, Ariz. and South Padre Island, Texas. Mexico lures them to Acapulco, Cancun, Mazatlan, San Jose del Cabo and Puerto Vallarta, while in the Caribbean, it's Nassau and Paradise Island in the Bahamas, Montego Bay and Negril, Jamaica. At a quick glance, it seems that the cast of "Animal House" has taken over the world, but plenty of places are off the spring break map. Some are too staid for university-aged visitors; others are too pricey. But all offer at least one thing: bars without wet T-shirt contests.



Ben Gearing & Jill Swann / © Amanyara

Real "up-and-comers" commanding their share of island buzz, these islands are custom-made for your sunning, swimming and diving pleasure. You could also set sail to see marine glow-worms mate. Flow in, flow out, of Aman Resorts' stunning Amanyara, with pavilions and villas tastefully accented by sisal, teak and terrazzo textures, just steps from Malcolm's Beach.

In the Southeast U.S., “The Paris of the South” is Asheville, N.C., with an eclectic downtown and 30-plus art galleries all framed by the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains. Renowned accommodations include the Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa and the Cottage on Biltmore Estate (that’s George Vanderbilt’s 8,000-acre place and site of America’s largest home). Richmond Hill Inn also has an elegant, B&B-inspired ambience. March’s variable weather could bring either snow tubing downhill or rafting on the French Broad River.

Farther south, there’s family-friendly [Hilton Head Island](#), designed by Charles Fraser in 1956 as the prototypical modern resort community. Stay at the famed Palmetto Dunes or Sea Pines Resorts, with a staggering selection of homes, villas and condominiums; there are also 24 golf courses and 300 tennis courts. The Scottish-influenced Inn at Harbour Town is a brilliant boutique hotel; 30 minutes away in the Lowcountry, the Inn at Palmetto Bluff on the May River is worth an overnight detour.

Still further south, you end up in Florida. But worry not—several stretches of the Sunshine State’s sand are sans beer-bottle-toting spring break kids. At Santa Rosa Beach, on Northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast, consider staying at the award-winning WaterColor Inn and Resort, near a rare coastal dune lake.

On the other coast, or about 99 miles inland from it, to be precise, is the prince of kitsch resorts: Palm Springs, Calif. It’s a haven for mature adults, yupsters and anyone else who craves golf, tennis and swimming with a retro vibe. Sure, the main drags bustle a bit more during spring break, but in a matter of seconds you’re already in the slower-paced streets

that back up right to the bottom of the towering San Jacinto Mountains. Vintage modernism and a George Jetson vibe predominate at the Orbit In, while the Korakia Pensione welcomes you with Mediterranean and Moroccan-flavored villas, plus two sexy swimming pools.

One needn't stay in the U.S. to avoid the college kids. Far from the madding crowds in Mexico, laid-back Zihuatanejo sits in the Sierra Madre along the Pacific coast. The tame nature of this village on the beach invites a serene, if not subdued experience, possibly best enjoyed at the top-notch La Casa Que Canta, nestled snugly into

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the cliffs.

Don't tell Costa Rica that "ecotourism" is a new trend—their travel industry began adopting environmentally friendly practices 25 years ago. This democratic and peaceful country is filled with volcanoes, rain forests, waterfalls and rivers—and still plenty of affordable yet luxurious lodgings. For a Pacific bluff with a "pool on the hill," check into the arty Hotel Punta Islita near Guanacaste. Among eco-lodges, Sí Como No in Manuel Antonio National Park also garners high marks.

While spring breakers aren't unheard of in Barbados, the classy British West Indies island tends to rise above the frenzy. It's less Van Wilder and more Vanderbilt—and counts Mick Jagger and the Beckhams among its celebrity fans. Crystal Cove Hotel Barbados in St. James, one of the best all-inclusive resorts, features two restaurants, two bars and three lagoon-style swimming pools. There's even supervised child-care services. (How's that for an anti-spring break destination?) For golf and spa enthusiasts, the venerable and elegant Sandy Lane receives consistently high marks from its return visitors.



Michael G. Smith / © istockphoto.com

The word "peaceful" isn't taken lightly in Costa Rica—this Central American country hasn't had an army since 1949. At Hotel Punta Islita, the wellness attributes of the Nicoya Peninsula and the herbalist wisdom of native Chorotega tribes are artfully combined in the spa for a spring break you'll want to take with you.

The 40-island British West Indies archipelago of the Turks and Caicos is no longer “undiscovered,” but you’re still assured of lone walks on long, drop-dead-gorgeous beaches. Eight of the isles are inhabited and you’ll be well set on Providenciales, or “Provo,” at the “wow-factored” Grace Bay Club. For double the “wow,” try Amanyara on Provo’s northwest point, where the cool contemporary design and “floors” of crystal-clear reflecting pools and ponds are sure to stimulate your senses.



Sheldon Kralstein / © istockphoto.com

If you’re Hawaii-bound, Kauai’s Coconut or Napali coasts and Waimea Canyon are consistent draws, as are the Wet and Dry Caves

of Haena or surfing at Kalihiwai Point. The Garden Island was grand enough for the movies “South Pacific,” “King Kong” and “Jurassic Park,” and it’s still a perennial winner. Since roughly 10 percent of Kauai is accessible by car only, hiking is a popular pastime. And regulars return for the amenities at Princeville Resort and Grand Kauai Resort & Spa.

Europe is ever the great choice for a spring fling, and Lisbon is approximately 68° F in March. Toast a glass of greenish Vino Verde as you hum along to fado, Portuguese folk

Fun springs eternal: Go for a hike, ride your bike, perfect your putt or serve it up on the courts. Palm Canyon Drive might be busier during Spring Break, but off the path you’ll find charming, one-of-a-kind inns that ooze character —perennial favorites of celebs and “regular” Angelenos on weekend getaways. Touch down at the funky Orbit In or rise above it all at The Willows.

music. On rolling hillsides beside the River Tagus, this capital city boasts more than 50 museums. Bed down at Lisbon's first contemporary boutique hotel, the five-star Bairro Alto in the heart of the city, or at two chic design hotel newcomers: Fontana Park, also centrally located, or Jeronimos 8 in historic Belém.

No matter what your taste this season, there's a stretch of sand, a tranquil mountain town or even a capital city that won't be clogged with collegians. Yes, even during spring break.



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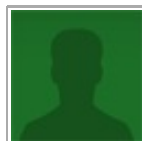
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