

THE BEST PLACES FOR AMERICANS TO TAKE A VACATION RIGHT NOW

Halfway through 2017 -- a year when the phrase “travel ban” became international news -- the conditions for a big trip are, well, surprisingly favorable! The US dollar is near historical highs against currency in places you might want to roll like a trust-funder: Mexico, Great Britain, Europe. Domestically, gas prices are the lowest they’ve been in any summer since 2005. And the rise of cheap flight options and low-cost carrier price wars have led to bafflingly cheap fares to Spain and Italy, to name just two faraway places you might actually be able to afford right now.

In short, this is the year to feel rich when you travel, even if the rest of your regular ol’ life is simply cranking along. Our early predictions for the best places to go in the US and the best places to go abroad this year still hold up. But we refocused for this midsummer travel season and looked to the rest of the year for these picks to beat the pack, to save a buck, or to simply live the dream.



SNOQUALMIE FALLS AND SALISH LODGE AND SPA | RICHARD A. MCMILLIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

North Bend, Washington

Why you should go: Driving east out of Seattle on I-90 is like traversing into some kind of alt-Jurassic Park, Pacific Northwest edition. In less than an hour you leave the shimmering depths of Puget Sound, and soon the highway is engulfed on either side by rich pine forest... and then you catch your first glimpse of the towering hump of snow-capped rock that looms above the beloved town of Twin Peaks. In reality, that's Mt. Si (pronounced *sigh*) and the town is North Bend. Rather than a portal to some dark and inscrutable dimension, this place is the gateway to excellent outdoor recreation -- climbing, backpacking, kayaking, fly fishing, hot-springing -- in the wild and scenic Cascades.

Why you should go right now: Thanks to *Twin Peaks: The Return*, we're in the midst of the much-anticipated revival of one of the most influential television shows of all time, and North Bend is at the epicenter. Summer and fall in the Northwest is about as good as weather gets, with light lingering past 10pm -- plenty of time to explore town with fellow fans drawn by the cult classic's return to TV after a 25-year gap. Visit Twede's Cafe (the Double R in the show) purely for the kitsch factor and not the food; save your appetite for the Woodman Lodge in the neighboring town of Snoqualmie, which has all the rustic roadhouse ambiance of the Bang Bang Bar (minus Sharon Van Etten on-stage).

Take some pics at the newly erected replica of the "Welcome to Twin Peaks" sign on SE Reinig Road outside the town of Snoqualmie -- right where David Lynch intended it. Check out raging Snoqualmie Falls and adjacent Salish Lodge and Spa, aka the Great Northern, which has good cocktails and delicious beer on tap, straight from Snoqualmie Brewery. Or hit Goldmyer Hot Springs, a short drive and 4-mile hike outside town. The 125-degree waters issue from inside a cave, which you can venture into if you're bold enough. There's great riverside camping right nearby, too. Just remember: The owls are not what they seem. --
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