

## 31 Places to Go This Summer

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THERE used to be a time -- oh, let's call it 2007 -- when summer was considered a time of almost limitless possibilities, a time of languorous vacations, of trips filled with the promise of discovery.

But the summer of 2008 is starting out like a cruel joke, with air travel increasingly a nightmare and with wildly escalating gas prices threatening to make the road trip all but obsolete. It's almost enough to make you sit at home and catch up on episodes of "Gossip Girl."

The summer vacation is still an inalienable right, however. And there is no reason to forgo it this year. It will just take a bit of creativity -- and perhaps the willingness to stay a little closer to home this time around -- to pull it off in 2008.

Thus, here are 31 options -- from river rafting in eastern Oregon to biking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire -- for a great summer vacation. Not one involves the terrifying conversion of dollars into euros, many can be enjoyed without ever getting on a plane, and the road trips are ones that actually justify filling up your tank, even if the price of gas hits \$5 a gallon this summer.

### 1. TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Who needs Europe? The Texas Hill Country, west of Austin and north of San Antonio, might be the next best thing to crossing the Atlantic. The region is lush, colorful and, unlike much of the pancake-flat state, dotted with beautiful green hills that are evocative of Tuscany or the south of France. Moreover, the region is speckled with 22 wineries ([www.texaswinetrail.com](http://www.texaswinetrail.com)) that buzz with food and music festivals year round. And towns like Fredericksburg offer a taste of the Old World, with German-style biergartens and schnitzelhäuser.

### 2. NEW HAMPSHIRE

With 800,000 acres of rugged terrain and biking trails, the White Mountains of New Hampshire are sometimes called the Moab of the East. And while you won't get red-rock formations or Road Runner vistas, the White Mountains do offer their own purple majesty. The Cherry Mountain Loop near Twin Mountain, not far from Bretton Woods, features remote waterfalls and thick forests. The trails around North Conway, a small, outdoorsy town near the Maine border where volunteer riders maintain more than 100 miles of downhill paths, are popular. For trail information, see the New Hampshire Trails Bureau ([www.nhtrails.org](http://www.nhtrails.org)) and New England Mountain Bicycling Association ([www.nemba.org](http://www.nemba.org)).

### 3. LAS VEGAS

The much-hyped efforts of Las Vegas to turn itself into a family destination a few years ago pretty much fizzled -- there's still plenty of sin in Sin City -- but anyone looking for a pool vacation for the kids this summer might want to consider this desert spot. The pool scenes at any number of hotels (including recent expansions at Mandalay Bay and the Excalibur) are fairly over-the-top, but few can rival the 15-acre "tropical oasis" at the Flamingo Las Vegas (888-902-9929; [www.flamingolv.com](http://www.flamingolv.com)), with four pools, a water

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slide, several waterfalls and a subterranean grotto that can be explored either on foot or by water. And for the adults, there's even a swim-up blackjack table. Weekend rates for a room with two queen-size beds (suitable for a family of four) start about \$140 this June and July.

#### 4. PHILADELPHIA

There are enough history excursions in the City of Brotherly Love to fill an entire summer, including big landmarks like the National Constitution Center (215-409-6600; [www.constitutioncenter.org](http://www.constitutioncenter.org)), with its interactive displays in which kids can be sworn in as president or cast their ballots in authentic voting booths. But there's also plenty to do off the history track -- much of it affordable for a family weekend. For starters: the new \$20 million Big Cat Falls exhibit at the Philadelphia Zoo (3400 West Girard Avenue; 215-243-1100; [www.philadelphiazoo.org](http://www.philadelphiazoo.org)), where lions, tigers, baby pumas and snow leopards are on view. A quick trolley ride from Center City can take you to one of the nation's oldest -- and most lovely -- botanical gardens, Bartram's Garden (54th Street and Lindbergh Boulevard; 215-729-5281; [www.bartramsgarden.org](http://www.bartramsgarden.org)). For local flavor, it's worth a lunch visit to John's Roast Pork (14 East Snyder Avenue; 215-463-1951; [www.johnsroastpork.com](http://www.johnsroastpork.com)), where the made-to-order cheese steaks are legendary (the James Beard Foundation declared John's one of "America's Classics"). The Loews Philadelphia Hotel is well situated at 1200 Market Street (215-627-1200; [www.loewshotels.com](http://www.loewshotels.com)), with occasional family packages. Rooms with two double beds start at \$179.

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*Reporting for this article was done by Stuart Emmrich, Denny Lee, Suzanne MacNeille and Laura Marmor.*

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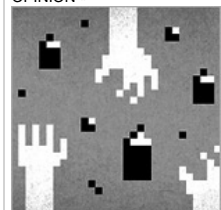

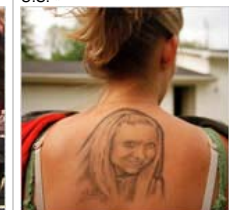
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