

SPRING BREAKS



1 here's something magical about springtime, when pink blossoms decorate the trees, flowers carpet the fields and music, arts and cultural festivals bring revellers out to play under warm, sunny skies.

And nowhere does it quite like the US, where a whole host of activities and festivities take place – from jazz festivals to whale-watching trips, spring skiing to desert explorations. Cherry blossom festivals light up many cities, and the national parks are at their quietest, with pleasant temperatures and low room rates adding to the appeal.

So where do you start when it comes to selling the season? We've put together a guide to some of the highlights to cater for city, beach and nature lovers alike.



Washington DC

Washington DC: The capital transforms into a pastel-painted vision in spring with pink blossoms covering its trees, and never more so than when the National Cherry Blossom Festival is celebrated every March. Highlights include a flamboyant, float-filled parade; a kite-flying competition that sees kids and adults battling it out; and a day-long festival ending with fireworks over the waterfront, with plenty of blossom-themed drinks, menus and parties across the city. Beyond the festival, spring sees outdoor theatre productions and sporting events crop up, with a focus on baseball as the season restarts. "What better way to celebrate than catching a game at Nationals Park?" says Ross Sinclair, Gold Medal's senior product manager for the US.

San Francisco: California's coolest city plays hosts to its own cherry blossom festival in April, with 200,000

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people flocking to the Japantown neighbourhood to glimpse the bursts of fuschia that colour its trees. Traditional Japanese food, music, dance performances and other cultural festivities take over the streets, with an all-singing, all-dancing Grand Parade at the heart of it. The festival takes place across two weekends: April 11-12 and April 18-19, 2020. There are plenty more reasons to visit in spring, not least the mild temperatures, low rainfall levels and the fact it's wine season again.

New Orleans: For music lovers, nothing quite beats The Big Easy, and it's in spring that the city really comes alive. April sees the arrival of the French Quarter Festival, with Louisiana-themed music, food and culture taking over the neighbourhood (April 16-19, 2020). Next is the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, where a jam-packed line-up of artists joins craft tents, cultural pavilions and food joints designed to celebrate the region's rich heritage (April 23-May 3, 2020). In March, hundreds of wineries and restaurants create special culinary experiences, tasting sessions and dining evenings, turning the city into a foodie paradise, as part of the New Orleans Food and Wine Experience. "The climate is also perfect in spring, with days getting warmer but humidity still relatively low," adds Tim Greatehead, US product manager for Premier Holidays. ➤

BEST OF THE REST

New York: Warm weather, blossoming parks, fewer crowds and seasonal sales make New York an excellent bet for spring. What's more, in March, the Edge, a 1,100ft-tall observation tower that promises to be the highest outdoor sky deck in the western hemisphere, will open.

Seattle: This culture-filled city has plenty to explore at any time of year, but it's especially vibrant in spring, when the Seattle Cherry Blossom Festival arrives, celebrating Japanese culture with a roster of events (April 24-26, 2020).

Atlanta: Cycling trails, civil rights history and some impressive street art all put Atlanta on the map, while the annual Atlanta Dogwood Festival – a flower-filled gala that's the oldest outdoor event in the city – ups the appeal come April.

Boise: Music meets film, dance and art at the Treefort Festival in the city of Boise, Idaho, every spring (from March 25-29, 2020). Outside the festival, the city has an impressive food and craft beer scene, as well as mountain bike trails, fishing and boating on the Boise River.



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DESTINATIONS

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Provincetown, Cape Cod

WHALE WATCHING

Monterey, California: Humpbacks, finbacks, minke, blue and killer whales all stalk Monterey's shores from mid-April onwards, seeking the nutrient-rich currents.

San Juan Islands, Washington: Orca whales are present year-round, but spring offers some of the best chances to glimpse minke, grey and humpback species, thanks to the warmer climes.

Juneau, Alaska: One of the US's best places for whale watching offers plenty of opportunities to spot migrating humpbacks from May to September.

Waianae, Oahu, Hawaii: As well as humpbacks, you can spot dolphins (bottlenose, spotted and spinner) and turtles. The best time to see them is from December to April.



Cape Cod: Are your clients into long, leisurely drives, blue sea on one side, open road on the other? Look no further than the East Coast's Cape Cod, where quaint seaside villages such as Chatham and Provincetown – home to bohemian art galleries, eclectic boutiques and a fishing harbour – meet whitewashed churches, excellent whale watching and vast sand dunes. The Inspiring Travel Company says spring is the best time to travel, with cooler temperatures and fewer visitors than in summer. The operator combines the area with pretty Nantucket Island and charming Martha's Vineyard – a celebrity

hotspot, where 19th-century houses neighbour old-fashioned cottages – on a nine-night Best of Cape Cod & The Islands fly-drive, priced from £3,279, including accommodation, flights, transfers and car hire.

Georgia: Charming in a different way is Georgia's coast, where kayaking, turtle spotting and hiking take place around lighthouse-clad isles. Tybee Island is home to the state's oldest lighthouse as well as long serene beaches. Visitors can head out on a dolphin tour or kick back and indulge in the generous portions of delicious seafood. Coastal cities add further appeal,

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with Savannah hosting the annual Savannah Music Festival in March – bringing music lovers flocking from across the country. “Spring is a wonderful time to visit Georgia,” says Malcolm Davies, product destination manager for Funway Holidays. “The weather in the summer is hot, while in spring the temperatures are cooler and room rates can be lower.”

California: For the ultimate in iconic coastal trips, look no further than California. Amtrak Vacations has a trip down the Coast Starlight route, starting in San Francisco and ending in San Diego, with head-turning views of the Pacific Ocean along the way, plus lush forests, fertile valleys and other scenic backdrops. There's also a stop in Los Angeles and a harbour cruise in San Diego – all without the heat and crowds that summer brings to the west coast. The five-night Essential California trip starts at £899 for a March 2020 departure, including accommodation, entry to attractions and coach and rail travel. ➤

Everglades National Park:

Counting among the world's biggest tropical wetlands, Florida's Everglades is bucket-list territory – and for good reason, with lush-green forests and mirror-blue waters forming the backdrop for leatherback turtles, Florida panthers, West Indian manatees and a host of other exotic wildlife species. December to April is dry season with low humidity, minimal rainfall and pleasant temperatures, making early spring a great time to visit.

Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows:

Clients after a spot of spring skiing? Look to Squaw Valley in California, where snow stays on the peaks throughout spring and into early summer, offering slopes beneath the sunshine for all levels. Ski Safari offers a 14-night trip leading in at £1,995 per person based on two

sharing accommodation in San Francisco, Squaw Valley, Mammoth Mountain and Santa Monica, including flights and car hire.

Arizona: For desert adventures without the sweltering temperatures, spring is an excellent time to visit Arizona. Tom Waite, Kuoni's senior product executive for the US and Canada, suggests pairing the state with time in southern California on a self-drive. The operator has a 10-night itinerary including craft beer-loving Flagstaff, Phoenix, Palm Springs and Scottsdale, with prices from £1,973, including car hire and flights on April 25. But for first-time clients seeking a classic experience, nothing beats the rainbow-coloured cavity that is the Grand Canyon or the towering red rocks of Zion. First Class Holidays combines them with Lake Powell, Monument

Valley and beyond on a six-night Enchanting Canyons escorted tour. Prices start at £2,829 per person, including flights from Heathrow on April 26, 2020.

Shenandoah National Park: If it's more springtime flowers, verdant forests and soaring mountains clients are into, suggest this scenic park in Virginia, about two hours from Washington DC. The options available include hiking, nature walks, watersports and horse riding, all taking place amid some of the country's most impressive landscapes. It's not just for hikers, either, as April sees the arrival of the Apple Blossom Festival, when parades, dance performances, a 10k race and wine festival turn the quaint town of Winchester into a giant party, with breathtaking mountain views as a backdrop. **TW**

BOOK IT



CITY

Shearings Holidays offers a four-night break in San Francisco including a Napa Valley and Sonoma wine tour, trip along 17-Mile Drive, a Big Bus Tours ticket, bay cruise and Alcatraz entry. Prices start at £1,279 in the spring, including flights from Heathrow. shearingsagent.com

COAST

Tauck has an eight-day Southern Charms: Savannah, Hilton Head & Charleston tour taking in the highlights of Georgia's coast and more. Prices, from £2,540, include a cooking class in Savannah, a cruise around Charleston Harbour, plus a welcome dinner (flights not included). tauck.co.uk

NATURE

America As You Like It's six-night From Summit to Shore self-drive takes in the highlights of the Shenandoah Valley and wider Capitol Region, ending in Washington DC. Prices start at £1,175, including flights, car hire and accommodation. americaasyoulikeit.com



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