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## What to Expect for Summer Travel

Bargains abound overseas, but you'll have to spend more in the U.S., with a strong dollar and Trump administration rules among the factors



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Many of the biggest bargains for U.S. travelers this summer will require a passport. But while international fares are dropping for the coming months, domestic fares are rising.

The dollar remains strong, airlines are adding lots of seats and the [Trump travel ban](#) and terrorism fears have crimped international travel. The average price of air tickets sold so far for summer travel to Europe is down 15% compared with the same buying period last year, according to Airlines Reporting Corp., which processes tickets booked through travel agencies.



It is a turbulent summer for travel, with new factors to navigate, such as a ban on laptops in cabins of some flights and political threats to possibly require visas for Americans in Europe. Domestic hotel rates are also rising as more Americans stay stateside.

Airlines Reporting Corp., or ARC, studied 11 million airline tickets purchased through travel agencies before April 20 for travel May 26 through Aug. 31 and found the average price was down 2% to \$613. The number of purchased tickets was about the same as a year earlier.

Within that, prices for domestic trips were up almost 5% and prices for Europe fell to an average \$1,069, down from \$1,263 a year earlier. Discount European airlines are having a huge impact on prices, as established competitors cut fares to compete, along with reduced demand from Europe for tickets to the U.S.

Global events and politics are affecting travel significantly this year. The State Department issued a [Europe travel alert](#) on May 1 urging caution due to a continuing terror threat that could target large tourist crowds this summer.



Travelers could possibly face changes in visa requirements by other countries in retaliation to Trump administration travel changes. In March, the European Union's [parliament urged ending visa-free travel](#) within Europe for U.S. citizens. Then in April the U.S. said it was considering [ending visa-free travel for Europeans](#).

Tensions escalated with the executive order banning entry for travelers from six majority-Muslim countries that is [blocked by courts](#); reports of [extreme vetting](#) by U.S. officials at [border checkpoints](#); the southern [border wall plan](#); and [laptop restrictions](#) on some flights from Africa and the Middle East that could possibly be expanded.

"If you're willing to take whatever risk you perceive of traveling internationally, there are some incredible deals that you can get this year," says Patrick Surry, chief data scientist at fare-tracking firm Hopper.

Many travelers are taking advantage of bargains. The number of tickets sold in the U.S. for trips to Europe is actually up 26%, ARC says. Ticket volume for London is up 19%, Rome 15%, Paris 9%, Barcelona 19% and Athens 41%.

On the other side of the Atlantic, travelers are not reciprocating. Tickets purchased in Europe to the U.S. increased only 1.7%.



A slowdown in foreign tourism into the U.S. tempers domestic price increases and opens up hotel rooms, restaurant tables and spots in amusement-park lines.

But it's still too early to say just how much impact there will be. Last week, the U.S. Travel Association reported that international travel to the U.S. in March grew 3.6% compared with a year earlier. That's the slowest growth in 11 months, U.S. Travel says.

The strong dollar, which makes the U.S. more expensive to foreigners, plays a role. Since most overseas trips are planned about two months in advance, the impact of Trump travel changes wouldn't show up fully until April results are tallied, U.S. Travel says.

"The modest pace of international inbound travel growth represents a dramatic slowdown, and portends a potential decline in the months to come," says David Huether, senior vice president of research at the nonprofit promoter of travel to the U.S.

Travel companies expect a busy summer season. The U.S. economy is growing and financial markets have been strong. Airline capacity in May was up about 5% in the U.S. and 8% world-wide from the same time in 2016, according to consulting firm Oliver Wyman's PlaneStats database. Travel agents say customers are booking longer trips, taking advantage of the Fourth of July falling on a Tuesday to create four- and five-day weekends.



Barbados is seeing a rebound in summer visitors after Zika virus worries last year, travel companies say. Barcelona is seeing a surge because of cheap new flights and the strong U.S. dollar. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES; ISTOCK

But growth in summer travel does appear to be slowing. Adobe's Insights division, which tracks data from major airline, hotel, car-rental and cruise-line booking sites, says online summer travel spending will be up 5% this year but grew 15% last year.

A study for the American Society of Travel Agents found 55% of consumers surveyed this spring said the travel ban would make them feel less welcome when traveling abroad. "There's a little bit of trepidation," says Zane Kerby, ASTA's chief executive.

One big winner in 2017, indicative of stronger domestic demand: The number of tickets to Hawaii purchased this year for summer travel jumped 16%, according to ARC.

Expedia says areas hit in 2016 by the Zika virus are showing a strong rebound this year. The number of trips booked to Barbados for June-August travel dates is up 15% this year over summer 2016. ARC says airfares are up to Miami.

But political tensions are impacting travel even from strong tourism partners. Virtuoso Travel, a network of luxury travel agencies, says it has seen reduced bookings for Mexican clients coming north. "The demand for travel has not changed. But people will switch where they go," says CEO Matthew Upchurch.

At the same time, he notes Virtuoso has clients who like to go to places right after incidents and mass cancellations, like Paris. Prices are cheaper, prime tables are available at the best restaurants and locals are appreciative of tourists. "There's a price-elasticity to fear," Mr. Upchurch says.

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## TRUMP TRAVEL

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Travel in the age of Trump requires some additional considerations. Here are some suggestions for U.S. summer vacationers heading abroad.

### **Be ready in case of an expanded cabin electronics ban.**

The Trump administration has banned laptop computers, tablets and camera from carry-on bags on nonstop flights to the U.S. from eight countries in the Middle East and northern Africa. That could be expanded. You might want to consider traveling without your laptop—checking computers in luggage can lead to theft and damage. Protect sensitive information if it's going to be out of your control.

### **Be ready for more intensive examinations entering the U.S.**

Some companies have urged employees to remove sensitive information and contacts from personal devices like phones that could be subject to inspection by Customs and Border Protection. A simple step: Plan more connecting time between flights in case CBP lines are long or you end up in an interrogation.

### **Stay in touch.**

Vacations are about escape, but it makes sense to watch headlines. Use STEP, the State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free service that links you to the nearest embassy or consulate. Make sure you have phone or computer access to communicate with relatives back home.

### **Consider using a well-connected travel agent.**

Having someone to find hotel rooms or help reroute you in a travel disruption, rather than just relying on airlines for rebooking, could prove very valuable.

### **Consider travel insurance.**

But remember, you can't buy insurance for events that have already happened. Check to see if you'll be covered at your destinations for any policy you consider. Many have restrictions. "Cancel for any reason" insurance provides less reimbursement and is more expensive, but can be much more useful.