

# Top five bargain destinations for spring 2010

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Been in travel hibernation lately? These spring bargains are just the thing to rouse you from your slumber. Our top picks represent closer-to-home destinations where providers understand vacationers may be getting back out on the road, but still aren't willing to spend a lot.

Whether you're looking to replenish your vitamin D supply with a beach vacation, get outdoors, or jump into the bustle of an urban escape, these destinations deliver. This spring, the name of the game is affordability, and these hot spots know how to play.

I've monitored trends, industry news, and sale patterns to point you in the direction of places that offer the best bargain value for the coming season. Below you'll find examples of deals presently available for spring trips. Like all deals, these are sure to expire; however, a little research on your part can yield similar results when you're ready to book.

## Jamaica

While the majority of the Caribbean has struggled to attract vacationers during the slow economy, Jamaica hit on the magic formula of increased air service and affordable prices to keep a steady stream of visitors sun kissed and happy. The trend should continue this spring, as [AirTran](#) and [JetBlue](#) introduce new service, and hotels around the island entice visitors with lower rates.

Low-cost carriers are boosting the direct links from East Coast cities to Jamaica. JetBlue introduced Jamaica flights from New York City last May with great success, and has been expanding service ever since. New routes between Boston and Montego Bay started in January, and between Orlando and Montego Bay in February. On February 11, Air Tran launched new service between Montego Bay and Atlanta, Baltimore/Washington, and Orlando. Legacy lines are increasing service as well: In December, [US Airways](#) introduced a nonstop route between Phoenix and Montego Bay, and has expanded seasonal service from Boston through mid-April.

In addition to US Airways' new service, the airline has released sale fares to Montego Bay from the Western U.S., with round-trip prices like \$310 from Los Angeles or \$384 from Seattle for travel through late May. Delta is also running a spring sale that includes flights to Jamaica, though the booking deadline is February 15. Air Jamaica has discounted rates for spring travel booked by February 18 or 28 (depending on your route), with round-trip fares such as \$138 from Orlando or \$238 from New York City.

[Pleasant Holidays](#) has posted three-night, air-and-hotel packages to Jamaica from \$495 per person for stays in April and May. [CheapCaribbean](#) also has discounted vacation packages for spring dates. [Sandals Resorts](#) is offering \$250 spa credits on seven-night stays booked before February 15, and other hotels around the island are running sales or offering added value to spring stays.

## Toronto

Vancouver may be basking in the spotlight right now, but come spring, Toronto will have plenty of reasons to shine. New air service will totally transform how easy it is to reach the city, sales are putting it within reach of more travelers, and affordable hotel rates and attraction packages mean that visitors can live large even on small budgets.

[Air Canada](#) is making it seven times easier to get to Toronto with new daily service between seven U.S. cities and Toronto this spring. Flights from Orange County, California, begin on April

6; in May, the airline begins service from Memphis, Cincinnati, Syracuse, and Portland, Maine. In June, [Air Canada](#) launches new routes from San Diego and Portland, Oregon.

Airfare sales on Toronto flights make the city more affordable to reach as well. Air Canada has a sale on spring flights booked by February 16, with fares such as \$231 round-trip from Orlando. And United is running a sale from Chicago, Denver, and Washington, D.C., to Toronto and other Canada destinations for travel through the end of April, with fares like \$390 round-trip from Washington, D.C.

Air service providers aren't the only ones conspiring to make Toronto an appealing bargain destination this spring. A drop in visitor numbers last year seems to have put Toronto hotels in the mood to woo travelers with affordable options. For instance, Tourism Toronto has a list of [weekend rates from \\$99](#) per night, plus "hot deals" on [themed packages](#) that include sports, theater, and sightseeing activities.

## **Hawaii**

Jamaica is great if you're headed there from the Eastern half of the U.S., but the Caribbean can seem awfully far away if you're traveling from other parts of the country. Luckily, Left Coasters and Western Staters have a closer tropical bargain option this spring, one that delivers increased air service, plenty of hotel sales, plus hula dancing, volcanoes, and buckets of sand. That's right, we're talking Hawaii.

This spring, travelers can take advantage of new service from Alaska and Continental from the West Coast to Hawaii. Alaska starts flights between San Jose, California, and Maui on March 11, and begins a San Jose-Kona route on March 12. It rounds out its offerings with service between Sacramento and Maui on March 26. Meanwhile, Continental launches new routes between Orange County and Maui, and Orange County and Honolulu, on March 7.

Looking for a vacation package to keep costs to Hawaii low? At press time, [Pleasant Holidays](#) was advertising a three-night stay on Oahu and round-trip airfare from San Francisco from \$349 per person.

Travelers looking to book their accommodations separately will find plenty of hotel and resort sales as well. [Aston Hotels](#) around the island are offering up to 45% off regular rates in April, May, and June. Through June 11, the [Honua Kai Resort & Spa](#) on Maui has discounts of 35% off one- and two-bedroom suites. At [Starwood Resorts](#), for every night guests pay the regular rate, they'll receive the next night at fifty percent off. Sales at hotels and resorts in Hawaii are still common, so wherever you stay, check for discounted rates.

## **Panama City Beach**

Though it hasn't moved an inch, Panama City Beach is about to seem a whole lot closer to most travelers. This spring, the Florida panhandle beach city will welcome not just a brand-new airport but service from low-cost giant Southwest.

The Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport is gearing up to open in May, and Southwest has announced daily service between Panama City Beach and Baltimore/Washington, Houston, Nashville, and Orlando starting May 23. Airfares start at \$49 each way from Orlando, and \$69 each way from the other cities. Delta will connect Panama City with Atlanta and Memphis.

Already known as an affordable beach destination, the major boost in accessibility will put this bargain vacation city within reach of more people. When you're comparing prices on

accommodations, be sure to check vacation rentals in addition to traditional hotel and resort options. Look for free nights, spring specials, and other sales on lodging by entering your vacation date on the [Panama City Beach](#) tourism website.

## **Gatlinburg**

Want a vacation that combines small-town charm with outdoor adventure, all at an affordable price? Gatlinburg, Tennessee, might be just the ticket, with recently introduced air service to two nearby airports, plus new attractions for spring and a flower festival ready to bloom.

On April 6, [American Eagle](#) will start seasonal nonstop service between Dallas and Asheville, North Carolina, about a two-hour drive from Gatlinburg. And in 2009, AirTran started flying between Orlando and Asheville. The airline also began service between Orlando and Knoxville, Tennessee, just an hour's drive from Gatlinburg. Accommodations [sales and specials](#) keep the destination affordable.

New attractions and seasonal celebrations make this spring the ideal time to visit. March brings the grand opening of a new \$5 million penguin exhibit at the Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies. In April, the Nantahala Outdoor Center will open its doors, offering a climbing wall, rope bridge, outdoor gear, clinics, classes, and even an outdoor concierge to help guests choose from among the activities in the region. The new Carousel Gardens, a shopping, dining, and cultural complex, opens in March. And the Smoky Mountain SpringFest and 60th Annual Spring Wildflower Pilgrimage celebrate the season and Gatlinburg's natural surroundings.

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