



IN SEARCH OF SUN: BEACH, VINEYARD, AND CITY ESCAPES

Few annual pilgrimages have defined travel as much as the search for sun. After all, many beachy destinations around the globe claim their spots on the visitor circuit because of one thing: the glorious sun. But in this savvy travel age, these geographically lucky spots need to promise more than just warm weather — and they do.

From Barcelona to St. Barts to Brazil, visitors can now enjoy fun in the sun with plenty of bonuses, from new gourmet seafood shacks to elegant waterfront hotels to riverboat cruises. Here's our roundup of five top spots to travel in search of sun.



Spain: Barcelona and Sitges

Barcelona has so many artistic sights that it's sometimes easy to overlook its natural ones. The city's coastline is a boon for sun-seekers, with miles (or rather, kilometers) of sandy beaches.

Barcelona's beachfront couldn't be easier to access: Walk south along the famous walking street of Las Ramblas — taking in the open-air theater of buskers, mimes, and performers along the way — and you'll be deposited directly onto the sand. After a dip in the Mediterranean, wander the nearby neighborhood of Barceloneta, a former fishing village that offers a glimpse into old Barcelona, with its narrow streets, small corner bars, and wrought-iron balconies with flapping laundry on the line.

Kick off the evening with a beer on tap at **Vaso de Oro** and then head to **L'Òstia** for *pescadito frito*, fried fish served in a newspaper cone. The main drag of Sant Joan de Borbó is dotted with seafood restaurants, like the aptly named **La Mar Salada (The Salty Sea)**. The seafood arrives directly from the fish quay across the street — try fragrant cannelloni stuffed with crab.



Barcelona locals admire their own beaches in passing, but prefer to escape the city limits for vacation. Follow suit and hop on the train to the historic town of Sitges, 25 miles south of Barcelona, which has a series of lovely *platjas* (beaches) and a long seafront promenade. Sitges is known for its paella and rice dishes — dine at the family-run **La Nansa**, which has wood-paneled walls, brass lanterns, and a hanging *nansa* (fishing net). Try the regional favorite, arroz a la Sitgetana (rice with meat, prawns, clams, and a generous splash of Sitges Malvasia wine).



Germany: Rhine Valley

The best proof that the Rhine Valley is regularly soaked by sun? The lush vineyards that tumble down its slopes.

Riverboating is the ideal way to explore the Rhine Valley — embark on an elegant **CroisiEurope** cruise, lounge on the front deck with a Riesling wine in hand and watch the valley scenery unfold: Castles preside high above the Rhine Gorge, while the riverbanks are lined with rolling green fields punctuated by historic villages. Highlights along the way include stately Loreley rock, jutting into the blue sky over the Rhine; and the wine-making town of Rudewheim, which has a beautifully preserved Old Town and the bar-lined Drosselgasse, where you can sip frothy mugs of beer while tapping your feet to oompah bands.



Photo Courtesy Discover Los Angeles

California: Los Angeles

"In Los Angeles, everyone is a star," actor Denzel Washington once opined. But though the celebrity culture of Hollywood often dominates the city, for many the real star is the gorgeous coastline.

The richly diverse California coastline around L.A. essentially has a beach for every beachgoer. To escape the city noise, drive the winding Pacific Coast Highway to El Matador Beach, 10 miles northwest of Malibu, which offers screensaver-worthy views — craggy cliffs, milky-white sands, pounding surf. At the opposite end of the spectrum, spend a day at colorful Venice Beach, just south of Santa Monica Beach, among inline skaters, pumped-up gym rats, and raucous volleyball players. Surf's up at the rugged Leo Carrillo State Beach, 28 miles north of Santa Monica, with mellow waves and blissfully crowd-free beaches framed by striking rock formations.

Of course, what's a day at the beach without a cocktail (or three) to toast the setting sun? Settle in at the airy **The Bungalow** in Santa Monica, where you can ease into the evening surrounded by palm trees as the last rays of the sun sink into the horizon.



Caribbean: St. Barts, Puerto Rico, Martinique, Anguilla

"Fun in the sun" is a hallmark of the Caribbean. And though the islands have had a captive audience for decades, that doesn't mean they've become lackadaisical — quite the contrary.

This year, the Caribbean is gearing up for one of its strongest summers, with an array of new openings and renovations. St. Barthelemy may be best known as a Caribbean playground for the rich and richer, but there's a lot more to the island, from the colorful fishing village of Corossol to quiet beaches such as Anse a Colombier. New accommodation on the island include St. Barth Properties' spacious **Villa Brume de Mer**, opened in June 2015, with a breezy gazebo and solar-heated pool and Jacuzzi. How close is the Caribbean Sea? Very close: The Baie des Flamands is just a three-minute stroll away.

Other trending news around the Caribbean includes the revitalization of the San Juan beachfront in Puerto Rico, anchored by the renovation of the famed **Condado Vanderbilt Hotel**; the new fragrant Jardin Botanique du Carbet in Martinique, built around the ruins of an 18th-century sugar mill; and the rebirth of the beloved **Malliouhana Resort** in Anguilla, which includes a new restaurant helmed by chef Jeremy Bearman, with dishes that riff on traditional cuisine, like curried goat sausage with whipped bananas.



Brazil: Rio de Janeiro

Brazil is one of the world's hottest destinations in 2015 — and not just because of the sun. The country is coming off the heels of a successful World Cup in 2014 and is currently in the enthusiastic throes of planning for the 2016 Summer Olympics — the first time a South American country will host the world's largest sporting event. This means that 2015 is an ideal time to visit — you can take advantage of the new openings and infrastructure that's being put in place for the Olympics, without having to contend with the crowds of 2016.

Make your base in Barra da Tijuca, a seaside suburb just ten miles west of the famed Copacabana Beach. This is one of Rio's fastest-growing neighborhoods, with numerous new hotels popping up to accommodate the upcoming influx of Olympic visitors. Hilton made its Rio debut with the stylish **Hilton Barra Rio de Janeiro** in April 2015, and the Brazilian chain **Windsor** also will be opening a Barra de Tijuca outpost by fall 2015. Plus, new trains and a subway line have also been launched, making it a breeze to zip into the city to see iconic sights like Sugarloaf Mountain and, of course, Inanema beach.