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Spring Break: Cheap Trips

Budget Spring Break Travel in the Caribbean

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A growing number of cheap resorts, many of them all-inclusive, are cropping up throughout the Caribbean's emerald waters -- additionally, expanding flight routes from low-cost carriers like JetBlue help make paradise a budget trip away.

The Bahamas

Comprising more than 700 islands, the Bahamas is just off the Florida shore, consistently making it one of the most popular warm-weather vacation spots for Americans. Freeport on Grand Bahama Island and Nassau on New Providence Island are the most happening spots with lazy beach-side bars and all-night clubs. If you'd rather travel via water than air, opt for the Student City's [Bahama Party Cruise](#), complete with an onboard pool, casino and bar; the boat transports you from Fort Lauderdale right to your hotel. Freeport cruises are just an afternoon's ride away, and you'll enjoy 4 nights on Grand Bahama Island before making the journey back. If Nassau is your final destination, you'll stay overnight on the ship each way, with 2 nights on the island.

Like elsewhere in the Caribbean, snorkeling and scuba diving are favorite pastimes, as the crystal-clear water makes for excellent visibility. Parasailing and windsurfing are other spring break musts if you have a few extra dollars to spare. If you'd rather save your funds for nights on the town, there are plenty of reefs and local settlements that you can explore for free. Bring your own snorkel and head out to Rose Island Reef or Booby Rock Channel on New Providence or Theo's Wreck and Lucayan National Park's Gold Rock Beach on Grand Bahama. For budget spring break trips, check you local [STA office](#) for special promotions.

Dominican Republic

Sharing a landmass with Haiti, this Spanish-speaking nation is quickly becoming one of the hotter spring break spots in the Western Hemisphere. The weather is usually perfect no matter the time of year, save an occasional tropical storm; hotels are the cheapest you'll find in the Caribbean Sea; and the laid-back atmosphere requires you to do little else but bask in the sun and relax all day long.

Avoid the dilapidated capital Santo Domingo altogether, and head to one of the coastal areas, like La Romana or Puerto Plata. Punta Cana, both a region and a town, occupies the Dominican Republic's eastern shore and has its own airport, with increasing direct flights from major US cities offered by airlines like Delta, American and Continental. You likely won't leave your resort once you check in, as the majority have everything you could need upon their own private grounds. Amenities may include water sports centers featuring PADI [Professional Association of Diving Instructors] professionals, swim-up bars, beach access, golf courses and more.

Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico has recently edged out its aforementioned competitors to emerge as the most visited spring break island spot in recent years. A global melting pot of ethnicities and cultures, this US territory has a unique blend of Spanish flavor, thanks to 400 years of ownership by the European country. While its capital, San Juan, is a tourist trap, the perimeter is home to a handful of stunning beaches and coastal towns like Rincón, Boquerón, Playa Higüero and Playa de Ponce. In Rincón, in particular, you'll find a cheap place to lay your head at the Rincón Inn, where rooms are organized in dorms of 4 beds and the beach is just 2 blocks away.

If you have a little more money to spend but still want a less expensive vacation than, say, any of the Caribbean islands that begin with "Saint" (a telltale sign that they're far from cheap), hop a domestic flight or ferry to Puerto Rico's crown jewel, Vieques. For years it was a Naval training ground, now it's miles of untouched beach and unspoiled scenery. Although the island has seen an influx of tourists since the Navy's departure in 2003, Vieques is still one of the Caribbean's more preserved gems and, thanks to the push for ecotourism, has maintained its rural Old World charm. Surprisingly, you'll find small budget hotels like Casa Alta Vista in the tourist epicenter of Esperanza and Great Escape Bed & Breakfast in La Llave. Since Vieques is particularly small, there is just one main stretch of bars, El Malecón -- which houses Amapola, Bananas and Duffy's -- in Esperanza. If you still need other reasons to book a vacation to Puerto Rico, here are a couple: The legal drinking age is just 18 (though drink responsibly, we feel inclined to say!), and you don't need a passport to enter.

Jamaica

The chill, reggae-influenced nation's most legendary native, Bob Marley, said it the best: "Money can't buy life." So it's fitting that this island's vibe is accompanied by its low cost of living, all the more perfect for students on a budget. Spring breakers who choose Jamaica, go there for one reason -- to party. In the island's most popular cities among youth, Montego Bay and Negril, the fun doesn't stop.

Negril is the smaller of the 2 towns (Montego Bay is more commercial) and the place you're likely to find lower prices, particularly in high season. When not sunbathing on the miles of

Negril's stretch of sugar-white beaches, you'll probably be partying on them, as most of the action takes place near the water. Bars are also reasonably priced for the most part, even the ones along the beach; stop by 3 Dives, Mama Flo's or Jungle club during your next jaunt to Negril. If you're arranging a group vacation, consider consulting a company to do all the planning. Many travel agencies like [Paradise Parties](#) offer groups discounts and sometimes even a free trip for the organizer if a certain quota of participants is met. It doesn't get cheaper than that.