

Travel via the Moon

Some of The Best Spring Destinations in the U.S.

When flowers are blooming, allergies are raging, and stores are selling the world's finest seasonal candy—Reese's chocolate-and-peanut-butter eggs—it can only mean one thing: Spring is in the air. And there's no better way to reward yourself for making it through winter than by taking a trip. But where to go? The words "spring break" typically conjure images of rowdy undergrads turning the nation's beach towns into Jäger-shot distribution centers or, alternatively, families with children crowding into theme parks for 2-minute rides with 4-hour lines.

We left those types of vacations off this roundup of the best places in the United States to visit in March, April, and May. Instead, we focused on places with can't-miss natural or cultural events, good weather, and good bargains during this season of rebirth and renewal. Here are a few of the best spots in America to spring forward.

Images and other destinations can be viewed at the following link:

[Best Places in the U.S. for a Spring Vacation \(frommers.com\)](#)

1. Washington, D.C.

Like much of what's cool about America, Washington, D.C.'s cherry blossoms originated somewhere else. In 1912, the mayor of Tokyo gave the U.S. capital city 3,000 cherry trees as a gift of friendship. And for a brief spell each spring ever since, the trees' pink and white flowers give a delicate and dreamy cast to walks and paddleboat rides at the **Tidal Basin** in the shadow of the Washington Monument, Jefferson Memorial and other landmarks. Historically, April 4 is the peak bloom date, but the blossoms can reach their full glory as early as the middle of March. The annual **National Cherry Blossom Festival** features bloom watches, tours, and cruises, as well as a parade, music performances, garden walks, and kite-flying demonstrations. One thing to keep in mind: This is a busy time of year in D.C.; in addition to all the flower peepers, Congress is in session. Consequently, hotel prices tend to be high and the crowds thick at popular attractions like the National Air and Space Museum and the blockbuster National Museum of African American History and Culture. Still, spring is the city's most exciting season and that more than makes it worth the trouble.

2. Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina and Tennessee

Great Smoky Mountains National Park in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee is the nation's most visited national park, drawing more than 10 million tourists each year. The vast majority of them come in summer, so if you're looking to beat the crowds—and the region's hot and humid summer weather—dropping by between late March and early June is a smart move. On hikes and scenic drives through forests, over mountains, and past log cabins, streams, and waterfalls, springtime visitors are treated to colorful wildflower displays and later in the season, glimpses of black bears fresh from hibernation. Wallet-friendly lodgings can be found on the Tennessee side in the down-home mountain towns of **Gatlinburg** and **Pigeon Forge**, home of Dolly Parton's Dollywood theme park, which usually opens at least one new attraction this time of year.

3. Oregon Coast

The Oregon Coast has some of the country's most dramatic scenery no matter the season. Huge rock formations (monoliths) battered by waves, tide pools brimming with starfish and sea urchins, lonely lighthouses, and dense forests all reward close-up scrutiny as well as panoramic sweeps. In spring, there's the added spectacle of migrating gray whales making their way north to the Arctic from Baja California. From late March to June, around 20,000 of the enormous creatures pass through **Depoe Bay**, which is easily accessible from scenic **U.S. Highway 101** running the length of the coast. There are plenty of whale-watching excursions that will take you out on the water, but because the whales come so close to the

shoreline, you don't have to leave dry land to spot them. Rugged outcroppings at **Devils Punch Bowl** and **Tillamook Head** are good places to start.

4. Texas Hill Country

A true epicenter of wildflower appreciation is Texas Hill Country, the lush, rolling landscape north of San Antonio. The region's famous bluebonnets blanket the hills in March and April, but fields sport a dazzling coat of many other colors as well—orange, violet, yellow, red, you name it. For the best views, take a drive along winding country roads or hit **Highway 290**, which strings together several wildflower fields as well as numerous wineries in the country's second-largest wine-growing region by acreage. After a day of tastings and photo-snapping, head to the German-inflected town of **Fredericksburg** for some schnitzel and strudel.

Submitted by the Editor to honor the adventurous spirit of AGCM Moon Mullen, USN RET