



Melanie Haiken, Contributor

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5 "Endless Summer" Vacations for Labor Day Weekend and Beyond



Sunrise Over Stearns Wharf in Santa Barbara

Just two weeks until Labor Day weekend, and like many of us, you're probably feeling the pangs of regret that accompany the end of summer. After all, we start the season with fantasies of hot summer nights, strolls along the boardwalk, seafood eaten fresh from the shell with our bare hands. And in September the real world

rushes back in, leaving us with many of our summer fantasies still unfulfilled. Here's the hope to hang on to: It's not too late. With school starting earlier and earlier, many resorts and beach towns find themselves with last-minute vacancies in the final weeks of August and first half of September. And s

1. Santa Barbara, California Thanks to a "banana belt" climate caused by warm air currents, Santa Barbara gets an average of 300 days of sunshine a year, which if you do the math means there are just 65 days a year when it's NOT sunny. And of course warm weather + beach = summer practically all year long. In recent years, this sleepy Spanish mission town has retooled itself as a super green, "car free" destination, with a free shuttle that takes you back and forth between the palm-lined beach and the happening downtown. Outdoor adventure options abound, too, from kayaking the calm waters of the bay to cycling along the shore to hiking the craggy peaks that shelter Santa Barbara from the dusty inland valleys. Santa Barbara Kayak Company has ocean kayaks, hobbies, and paddle boards too. Newbies can paddle around amongst the yachts and stay sheltered, while the more adventurous can venture out to the open water, where sea lion and dolphin sightings are common. Rent a beach cruiser or deuce coupe from Wheel Fun Rentals, with two convenient locations right on the boardwalk. Whether you want a two-person or four-person cruiser, or serious road bikes for an all-day ride, they've got what you need, helmets included. Venture south past the spectacular Biltmore Hotel and on to quiet Montecito Beach, where we had the waves almost to ourselves. Finish your day with fresh-caught crab or lobster right off the boat. At the Santa Barbara Shellfish Company, in a nondescript shack at the very end of the municipal pier, you choose your lunch or dinner from amongst the fat and happy crabs swimming around in a tank and watch them boil it right up for you. Not for the faint of heart, but the freshness can't be beat. Savor the best of Santa Barbara from the cliffside [Bacara Resort and Spa](#) or the [Four Seasons Santa Barbara](#), which showcases the artistry of Spanish tile and iron in every detail.

2. Rockland, Maine There's a reason the National Trust for Historical Preservation named Rockland, Maine a "distinctive destination;" this unassuming coastal hamlet delivers all the popular Maine favorites with half the stress of buzzier locales like Bar Harbor. In addition to the requisite lighthouses, lobster and harbors full of boats, there's a surprisingly edgy art scene, a reasonable number of top-notch restaurants, and the authentic feel of a working harbor buzzing around it all. Get your heart racing with a fast-paced walk out to the rock land Breakwater Lighthouse with stops at the Lighthouse Museum and the Project Puffin Visitor Center, then break for lunch at Waterman's Beach lobster or head out on one of the local lobster boats to catch your own. What sets Rockland apart from your typical sun-and-sand getaway, though, is the local arts and crafts scene, epitomized by the Farnsworth Museum and the satellite galleries all around it. If you can get out of town early, arrive in time for the First Friday Art Walk or get up early for the Saturday Art Festival, held downtown in Harbor Park. For a full-service upscale stay, choose the [Samoset Resort](#); for something with more local color, choose the historic [Limerock Inn](#) or [Old Granite Inn](#) in the historic district.

3. San Diego, California

With the Mexico border towns now a bit dicey for a relaxed beach vacation, San Diego is stepping forward as a sort of Tijuana North. Baja may be more famous for kayaking, but San Diego's La Jolla Shores offers the same gorgeous water and whale-watching opportunities without the work of a south-of-the-border trek. Even novices can head out from La Jolla Shores with Aqua Adventures or one of several other outfitters and see whales and leopard sharks within a few miles of shore. And kayaking the seven sea caves of La Jolla can be a special kind of magical adventure. Stay at Paradise Point resort and spa, where the tiki torches, lush landscaping, and cliffside views evoke Kauai crossed with Cabo. Start your day with fruit empanadas from Panchitas Bakery, spend the morning kayaking, and finish with a lunch of Cabo-style fish tacos at Wahoo. Many of the kayaking outfits offer trips that combine kayaking and snorkeling (of course you'll wear a wetsuit!) or biking. To finish off your north-of-Baja adventure, fit in a trip to Bazaar del Mundo, the warren of interconnected shops in Old Town featuring higher-quality Mexican handicrafts than you'd be likely to find across the border. To savor the classic California-ness of a San Diego summer, stay at historic [Hotel del Coronado](#); its prime beach location can't be beat and no matter how far down the beach you wander, its unmissable pink spires will call you back.

4. The Outer Banks, North Carolina If a classic hot weather beach town is your idea of endless summer, the Outer Banks offers some of the most picturesque options. With 130 miles of coastline dotted by islands, you won't run short of unspoiled white sand and uncrowded serenity. Don't miss Ocracoke, the historic town center, or the four lighthouses that warned ships off the coast in the olden days. The [Sanderling Resort and Spa](#) in Duck is one of the spiffier options for a quiet stay, while Nags Head Beach has many luxury hotels to choose from. But most visitors rent a beach house, for the privacy and uninterrupted beach access.

5. San Juan Island, Washington Although it's just three hours by car and ferry from Seattle, San Juan island feels much further away, and decades behind the modern fray. Spend the first half of the day shopping, spa-ing and socializing in lively Friday Harbor, and an hour later you're sipping chardonnay among the vines at peaceful San Juan Vineyards. Loll on the beach all day if it suits you, or sample one of the incredibly scenic hikes in Lime Kiln Point State Park, considered one of the best places in the world to see orcas from shore. For lunch, take a picnic to the Sculpture Garden, a 19-acre preserve showcasing zany modernist creations of stone and steel. Newly opened, [Zip San Juan](#) has 8 different ziplines that sail through a canopy of red cedar and across a dramatic landscape of lakes and wetlands. An easygoing all-in-one vacation retreat is the specialty of long-established resorts like [Roche Harbor Resort](#) and [Friday Harbor House](#), which offer everything from golf to whale watching to sailing. A more luxe experience is offered by [Poets Cove Resort and Spa](#), while if "glamping" (glamorous camping) is more your style, try it out at [Lakedale Resort](#) with its luxurious fully furnished canvas cabins. Some of the best eats on the island are at [Duck Soup](#), where the menu is based on what's growing in the garden.