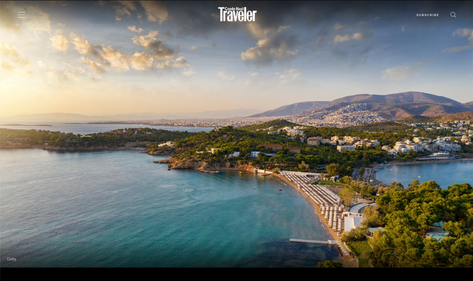

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Best Places to Visit in September

12 PHOTOS

by MARK ELLWOOD
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Summer may officially end on September 23, but your vacation season is far from over.

September is the unsung hero of travel months: The busiest vacation season has come and gone, places are less crowded because kids are back in school, and as a result, prices on airfare, accommodations—and even attractions—have dropped. So what are you waiting for? Here's where to travel in September, from Fiji to the Athens Riviera.

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Fiji

It's easier than ever to get from the mainland U.S. to this 300-plus cluster of islands in the central Pacific, thanks to year-round non-stop service on its national carrier, Fiji Airways, out of both LAX and SFO. Head there after the summertime crowds have cleared out in September for the perfect combination of balmy weather, clear oceans and lower prices. The soft coral surrounding the country is some of the finest in the world, and Rakiraki off the main island of Viti Levu is ideal for diving, whether you're a beginner or a pro, full of reef flats and swim-throughs. Experts, meanwhile, should beeline for Namena Island. It's surrounded by a namesake marine reserve, a horseshoe-shaped barrier reef that's home to over 1,000 species of fish and countless invertebrates. Those reefs are also a magnet for humpback whales each September, as they spend their mating season in and around them here every year. Where better to stay, then, than the luxury Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort nearby, run by the son of its namesake, the legendary late scuba pioneer—the hotel even allows guests to participate in a giant clam repopulation project led by its in-house marine biologist.

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Boise, Idaho

What's now the city of Boise was founded by an American army troop who sighted woodlands and rightly knew that greenery meant fresh water—and it was their French-speaking guide who dubbed the resulting settlement Boise (or wooded). That encampment has grown into a funky college town that's still Idaho's largest city with just over 200,000 residents, but Boise remains an appealingly leafy urban hub with more than 90 parks within its limits. It's fitting, then, that this September, it will celebrate 50 years of the Boise River Greenbelt, which was established to help maintain and create a warren of paths and green spaces along the river that snakes through the city center. From September 19 - 21, the 25-mile-long park will be celebrated with guided tours, concerts, and historical talks, packed with opportunities to rollerblade, bike, bike, or even do a spot of fishing. While you're in town, duck into the new, $8.9 million expansion of Zoo Boise, developed in partnership with Mozambique's Gorongosa National Park, featuring hyenas, wild dogs, and baboons; admission helps support conservation of endangered animals.

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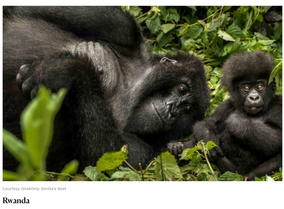
Athens Riviera

Astir Beach was once a 1960s hotspot similar to St Tropez. Brigitte Bardot, Jackie Onassis, and Frank Sinatra were all spotted strolling the beach there. Considered the heart of the Athens Riviera, it's just 30 minutes from the Acropolis and other ancient wonders downtown. The rise of island-hopping elbowed this urban resort area aside in the 1980s, but recently, Astir Beach and the surrounding area has been injected with new life to help them recapture some of the magic. Its most famous hotel, the 300-room Astir Palace, has reopened as the country's first Four Seasons, tucked into a more than 70-acre garden right on the ocean, while Matsuhisa Athens is the latest temple to Japanese cuisine owned by chef Nobu, and Nice'n'Easy is the sceniest spot for a long, lingering lunch right on the sand. (With summertime crowds thinning, you'll have the pick of the best seats in the house.) Of course, since this is Athens, there's also ancient culture on call nearby: the Temple of Apollo Zoster, dating back to the 6th Century BCE, sits right behind the main beach.



Courtesy One&Only Gorilla's Nest

Rwanda

Rwanda's tourism is centered around its astonishing wildlife, particularly its population of primates, whether chimps in Nyungwe Forest or gorillas in Volcanoes National Park. The latter are celebrated this month during Kwita Izina, a week of events culminating in a naming ceremony for the newborns on September 6. The ceremony was introduced in 2005 as a focal point for conservation and draws local dignitaries and visitors to see around 20 infants named, followed by riotous music and dancing. For the best place to participate in the celebration, stay at the newly-opened One & Only Gorilla's Nest, right next to Volcanoes National Park. To reach it, you'll need to go via the capital, Kigali, home to the country's unflinching Genocide Memorial. Spend a few days there exploring: book a room at the new Radisson Blu, enjoy a pan-African dinner and live music at Heaven Restaurant, and sample some locally made spirits via a tour of the 1000 Hills distillery.

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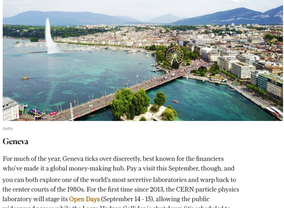
Toronto

Want a jump on winning next year's Oscar pool? Head to Toronto for the 10-day Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), which runs from September 5 - 15. The last of the big three (alongside Cannes and Venice), it tees up the beginning of the award season; buzzy word of mouth here often translates to Oscar gold six months later. The festival is headquartered in the custom-designed Bell Lightbox, an entire city block downtown, and unlike its European rivals, tickets are both affordable and widely available; this year, organizers have also added a new award, named after movie-pioneer Mary Pickford, which will spotlight an emerging female filmmaker. Stay at the Bisha boutique hotel, a nightlife-driven alternative to the business-friendly options that have long held sway in this part of town (after all, Four Seasons and Fairmont both began here). Finish the evening with a glass of champagne on its rooftop bar, overlooking the CN Tower.



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Geneva

For much of the year, Geneva ticks over discreetly, best known for the financiers who've made it a global money-making hub. Pay a visit this September, though, and you can both explore one of the world's most secretive laboratories and warp back to the center courts of the 1980s. For the first time since 2013, the CERN particle physics laboratory will stage its Open Days (September 14 - 15), allowing the public widespread access while the Large Hadron Collider is shut down (it's scheduled to restart some time in 2021). Pair that with a visit to the third edition of the Laver Cup (September 20-22), the upstart men's tennis tournament inspired by golf's Ryder. In this case, the two six-man teams competing on behalf of Europe and the rest of the world, are captained by Björn Borg and his onetime rival John McEnroe. It's a tennis nerd's dream, with confirmed competitors for 2019 including both Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer, the latter of whom helped Europe scoop the title last year. And while you're there, don't forget to check out some of the region's wineries, which are often unfairly overlooked.