

TRAVEL

Where to escape this winter: Canada's travel writers share their favourite sun destinations

Here's a shortlist of dream destinations if you're looking for sun, surf, sand — and the feeling of endless summer.

By **Lola Augustine Brown** Special to the Star
Fri., Nov. 4, 2022 | 4 min. read

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READ THE CONVERSATION



Planning to switch snow boots for flip-flops once the Canadian winter takes hold? We asked Canadian travel writers and content creators to tell us their top sun destinations to inspire you to explore somewhere new.

Claire Sibonney, travel writer

"The first time I visited Jamaica, I was gobsmacked by the pristine white-sand beaches and clear Caribbean Sea, with its soft, lapping waves. But more than that, what has drawn me back over the years is the vibrancy of the island. I recently tasted what luxury travel is like in Jamaica, and I'm afraid I'm now spoiled for anything more budget-friendly. I'm still daydreaming about the cliffside tree house massage I had at the 'anti-inclusive' Jamaica Inn in Ocho Rios. In Montego Bay, the ultra-luxe Half Moon resort is memorable in every carefully curated detail, from the stand-alone tubs and vanity tables in the massive bathrooms (bigger than my first apartment) to the charming, vintage-style grab-and-go bicycles parked throughout the sprawling property. This year marks the 60th anniversary of Jamaican independence from British rule, giving travellers even more reason to revisit, or check out the island for the first time."

Christopher Mitchell, travel content creator

"If you hear someone say they're 'going to Cabo,' it's likely they're talking about Cabo San Lucas, a Mexican resort city where tourism is very present. However, as far as I'm concerned, it's San José del Cabo that is the true gem in this region. It's about a 30-minute drive from Cabo San Lucas, but you'd be hard-pressed to find a city that feels more different, and I mean that in the best way. It's much quieter and much easier to tap into the local culture. Picture an art district with vibrant yellow walls and colour everywhere you look, a central square filled with laughing, dancing and the ever-photogenic Mission of San José del Cabo, plus a sophisticated and energized restaurant scene, the nearby San José Estuary and Bird Sanctuary, and beaches galore."

Renée Suen, food and travel writer and editor

The real hook for Antigua and Barbuda is the twin-island nation's 365 stunning sandy beaches, one for every day of the year. Antigua is perfect for those who love to sightsee; standouts are Shirley Heights Lookout, where you can attend a sunset party with aerial views of the UNESCO World Heritage site Nelson's Dockyard, and Betty's Hope, a former sugar plantation that gives a sombre look at Antigua's slavery past. Barbuda is great for nature adventures. You can take a boat tour to the Frigate Bird Sanctuary, which has the largest colony in the Western Hemisphere, walk the pink-sand beaches, or soft hike to Darby's Cave, which is more like a 70-foot sinkhole with its own ecosystem that contrasts the near-desert conditions above ground. Visit the Caribbean tropical paradise of Antigua, then visit Barbuda for a very different, nature-centric experience. The two islands together provide a perfect package."

Barb Sligl, travel writer

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"Like most Canadians, Tenerife wasn't on my radar as a tropical destination until recently, even though Europeans have long retreated here for the copious sunshine — more than 320 days a year. But the largest of Spain's Canary Islands, off the coast of northwest Africa, is far more than a beach getaway. The volcanic landscape is dramatic, from Spain's highest mountain, El Teide, to 600-metre-high sea cliffs, Los Gigantes. Adventure seekers can trek more than 1,000 kilometres of hiking trails (48 per cent of Tenerife's land is protected), or cycle Teide National Park (a prime Ironman training ground). They can also surf, kite surf, paraglide, kayak, dive, whale watch ... then refuel with stellar Spanish food and local wine."

Tim Johnson, travel writer

"Belize is one of my favourites, a tiny Central American country with a long Caribbean coastline, bordered by the biggest coral reef in the Western Hemisphere. A bunch of new luxury hotels are opening soon, so now is the time to go, to enjoy its relaxed pace. — especially on Caye Caulker, a small island on the reef where the official slogan is 'Go slow.' Head to the beach to hand-feed stingrays at sunset. Motor out on a boat tour to swim with nurse sharks. Or just swing in a hammock and let the day move at a beautifully slow pace."

Will Tang, digital travel content creator

"French Polynesia (also known as the Islands of Tahiti) is an incredible sun destination, begging to be discovered by those who want to sample a Robinson Crusoe life, enjoy the most epic scuba diving in the world and roam untouched lands. This destination is often associated with the overwater bungalows of Bora Bora for honeymooners and luxury travellers, but you can visit the country on a budget by staying in guest houses, which are much more affordable and authentic as well. You can choose from a wealth of islands — 118 altogether across five distinct archipelagos. The lesser-known islands we loved for diving especially were Rangiroa, which is known for its dolphins, Fakarava for its sharks, and Tikehau for its beautiful pink sand."

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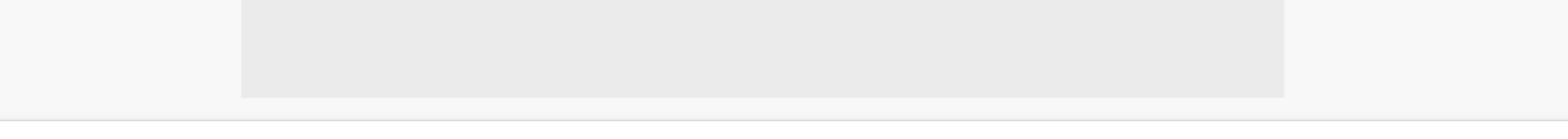
DAVID | 9 DAYS AGO
It's hard to believe anyone could write about warm winter holidays without mentioning Cuba. After all pre-pandemic over 1 million Cdn's journeyed to Cuba every year.
Pardon my cynicism but I can't get past the thought this omission is related to US/Canada (because Canada does not have an independent policy) policy to damage the Cuban economy.
#3 | 4/5

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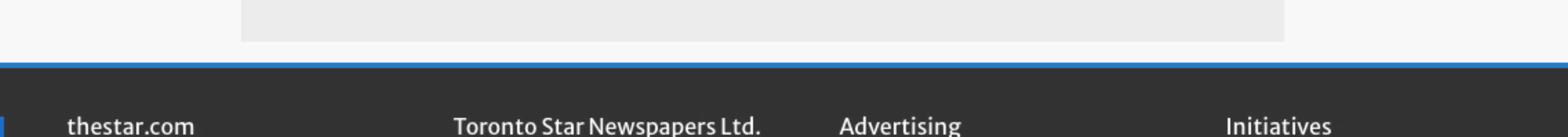
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