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LIFESTYLE | TRAVEL

Heat Waves Are Becoming More Common. Here's How to Stay Cool (and Safe) While Traveling.

These days, a summer vacation to parts of the U.S. or to Europe can mean dealing with heat waves. Here, experts share their coping mechanisms, from packing tips to must-have apps.

By Zechi Budhu
July 27, 2025 2:00 pm ET

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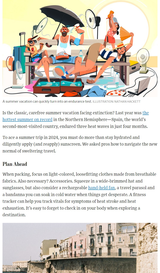


A summer vacation can quickly turn into a sweltering ordeal. PHOTO: ILLUSTRATION BY ADOBE STOCK

In the classic, carefree summer vacation facing extinction? Last year was the hottest summer on record in the Northern Hemisphere—the world's second-most-visited country, France, was overrun with fires and temperatures soared to 120 degrees Fahrenheit in Greece.

To see a summer trip in 2026, you must do more than stop hydrated and diligently reapply sunscreen. You also need advice on how to navigate the new normal of sweltering travel.

Plan Ahead

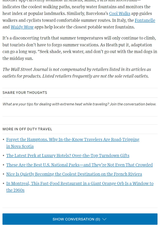
When packing, focus on light-colored, loosefitting clothes made from breathable fabrics. Also necessary? Accessories. Squeeze in a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, but also consider a rechargeable hand-held fan, a travel parasol and a bandanna you can soak in cold water when things get desperate. A fitness tracker can help you keep an eye on your heart rate, hydration and heat exhaustion. It's easy to forget to check in on your body when exploring a destination.

Travelers and locals alike flock to the seaside during the punishing Italian summer. PHOTO: SCARLETT CHAILLOT

Look for a travel insurance policy that covers weather (not all do), though even those probably won't cover issues, Jennifer Rudisill, who co-founders travel outfit as a "climate-risk tech company," reimburses travelers for certain bookings disrupted by extreme heat. Consider purchasing cancel-for-any-reason coverage, Collective 180 Country in central Texas to offer a "high temperature guarantee," for an extra fee, letting guests get their money back if the temperature exceeds a certain threshold.

Be Flexible

In some of the world's summer places—southern Spain, Italy, Greece—the afternoon siesta is a way of life. Tourists should be said to follow the locals' lead, and daily activities to early morning and evening. Zach Stephenson, co-founder of Flash Pack, an adventure-travel outfit, says that the company always draws up contingency plans for hot weather. After a particularly hot summer hiking trip in Colombia last year, Flash Pack tweaked the schedule for future tours so most riding happens right after breakfast.



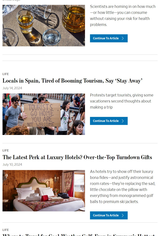
Hikers take on the crest of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in southern California. PHOTO: ZOCHER BLAKEMORE

Sometimes, you might need to cancel activities entirely—and that's OK, says Maria Snipes, who, as Los Angeles's first chief heat officer, is tasked with leading the city's heat resilience. In L.A., Snipes said, if it feels too hot for a hike, call it off or "make it short, hike with buddies and get plenty of water, rest and shade."

Embrace Shoulder Season

Elizabeth Heath, owner of Umbria-based Villarotte Tours, refrains from offering tours in summer, even though it is the most popular time to visit Italy. "I just don't want to bring people over here to have them be uncomfortable," she said. In some big-city destinations, travel agents report that fall bookings are outpacing those for July and August.

Even in summer, consider skipping Mediterranean hot spots. Jessica Winkler, owner of travel advisory Walks Around the World, says she's noticed more clients interested in northern destinations in Scandinavia and the Baltics.



A woman finds solace in the shade on a hot day in Barcelona. PHOTO: SCOTT TI MANOS

Check the Apps

Before leaving home, get a detailed weather app that covers your destination, Mirela, for instance, monitors heat waves across Europe, while Extreme—another app currently available in Athens, Milan, Paris and Rotterdam—provides real-time alerts and forecasts. Another option is to research the best shaded or popular landmarks. Similarly, Rockwell's Cool Walk app offers walkers and cyclists toward comfortable summer routes. In Italy, the Fontanelle and Water Here apps help locate the closest potable water fountains.

It's a disconcerting truth that summer temperatures will only continue to climb, but tourists don't have to lose vacations altogether. As Brodh put it, adaptation can go a long way. "Bring a hat, bring water, and don't go out with the mask during the midday sun.

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