

Escape the heat at these 10 cool U.S. destinations

Cool down this summer with glaciers, waterfalls, and wild places.

Summer arrives with a rush of excitement and a blast of hot air. But the sunshine that makes for a great day at the beach can feel oppressive in other places.

Already this year, heat waves have been [sweeping the globe](#) in the Northern Hemisphere. In the U.S., the Midwest, Plains, and southern regions are facing extreme temperatures. Extreme temperatures in Europe, China, India, and Japan are making life difficult for residents and visitors alike.

Unfortunately, such sizzling extremes are becoming more frequent, [as National Geographic reported](#) in the summer of 2021. “The deadly heat waves, floods, and droughts that are upending the lives of thousands of people, from the American West to southern Europe and central China, will likely only get worse as global temperatures continue to rise,” reports Sarah Gibbens, citing [a U.N. report](#) on the state of the world’s climate.

While everyone is affected by the problems of a warming planet, the goal of many travelers is to beat the heat—at least for a week—in places that offer breezy adventures or a coastal respite.

From treks through one of [Alaska](#)’s ice caves or sledding down one of [Colorado](#)’s tallest sand dunes, here are 10 superlative adventures in surprising destinations for chilling out this summer.

Mendenhall Glacier, Alaska

Known as Aak’wtaaksit (“Glacier Behind the Little Lake”) and Sitaantaago (“the Glacier Behind the Town”) to the Indigenous Tlingit people, the [Mendenhall Glacier](#) ice caves immerse travelers in a dazzling world of sapphire and ice.

One of the most accessible glaciers in North America, it’s just minutes from the airport; the caves sit 12 miles outside of Juneau. They are accessible via hike or kayak. The best time to visit is May through October when temperatures are most mild.

Tip: While solo adventures into the caves are permitted, it is strongly recommended to join a group tour or hire a guide to ensure a safe arrival.

Hamilton Pool, Texas

After wilting in [Texas](#)' scorching heat, plunge into the depths of the [Hamilton Pool](#) in Dripping Springs, Texas. A few miles outside [Austin](#), the refreshing waters can dip as low as 50°F. While floating, watch as Hamilton Creek spills over a limestone edge, creating a 50-foot waterfall.

Tip: Book ahead. Reservations are required to enter Hamilton Pool Preserve during May-October and space fills up fast.

Thor's Well, Oregon

Sitting on the edge of the [Oregon](#) coast near Cape Perpetua, [Thor's Well](#) first appears like one of the gates to hell. However, while the drainpipe seems like a bottomless whirlpool, the hole is actually about 20 feet deep. There are plenty of viewpoints to see the natural phenomenon, but for curious travelers wanting a closer look, tread carefully during high tide.

Tip: Arrive one hour before the high tide to watch the empty crater fill with gushing water.

Great Sand Dunes National Park, Colorado

Skip the coast for [Great Sand Dunes National Park](#) to marvel at some of the tallest sand dunes in [North America](#). Walk around, hike up, or sled down the dunes all year long. If you are still craving a beach vacation, head over to the park's "beach" at [Medano Creek](#) to build a sandcastle.

Tip: Late-May to late-July is the best time to enjoy a splash in the shallow waters of Medano Creek.

Ichetucknee Springs State Park, Florida

Chilling at a year-round temperature of 72°F, the [Blue Hole Spring](#) at the [Ichetucknee Springs State Park](#) is a welcome respite from [Florida's](#) humidity. Dive into bright, turquoise waters to explore the

winding cave system some 40 feet below the surface, where snorkelers and swimmers can see the river's aquatic life.

Tip: Divers are permitted in the Blue Hole between October and March.

(This wildlife refuge in Florida comes with rockets.)

Central Idaho Dark Sky Reserve, Idaho

In 2017, [Idaho](#) became the first [International Dark Sky Reserve](#) in the [United States](#). As night falls, the sky lights up, giving stargazers a glimpse of infinity and beyond. Nestled in the remote and rugged lands of the Sawtooth Mountains, the cities of Sun Valley, Ketchum, and Stanley offer visitors places to stay and dine while viewing the night spectacular.

Tip: The Friedman Memorial Airport is under 30 minutes away from the reserve and provides easy access to the Ketchum and Sun Valley area, or the Boise Airport is just a 2.5-hour drive outside of the reserve.

(Dark sky tourism is on the rise across the U.S.)

Mackinac Island, Michigan

Nearly 80 percent parkland, [Mackinac Island](#) is a car-free, laid-back oasis ideal for a quick summer getaway. Enjoy a light breeze as you explore the island's scenic routes, preserved Victorian houses, and lounge on one of the world's longest front porches at the Grand Hotel.

Tip: Head to Sunset Rock, located on the West End of the island near The Inn at Stonecliffe, for gorgeous sunset views over Lake Huron and the [Upper Peninsula](#).

(Discover 10 destinations where you can ditch your car this summer.)

Tallulah Gorge State Park, Georgia

[Georgia](#) may not be known for its brisk summers, but [Tallulah Gorge's](#)—a two miles long and nearly a thousand-foot-deep swimming hole—offers cooling relief. Not for the fainthearted, [Hurricane Falls Trail](#) has hikers

scrambling over rocks, scaling dizzying heights, and gasping in awe over stunning views of the waterfall from a suspension bridge.

From the trail, take the 550 metal steps down to the gorge floor. Hiking the base gets you an up-close view of Bridal Veil Falls and the chance to slide down the aptly-named Sliding Rock into the refreshing waters of the gorge.

Tip: A free permit is required before accessing the gorge floor. Forgot the permit? Tallulah Falls Lake is open to the public, and the water is just as refreshing.

Hoh Rain Forest, Washington

Don your raincoat and hiking shoes to explore the [Olympic Peninsula](#)'s only UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Walk into the enchanting [Hoh Rain Forest](#), where verdant paths bewitch hikers with fairy tale-like beauty and shade. The forest's temperature rarely peaks above 80°F.

Tip: If you're searching for the sound of silence, acoustic ecologist Gordon Hempton called the forest one of the [quietest places in the U.S.](#)

Watkins Glen State Park, New York

Feel the refreshing mist on the Gorge Trail as you trek over, under, and through two of [Watkins Glen State Park's](#) iconic waterfalls—[Rainbow Falls and Cavern Cascade](#). At the end of the trail, let Jacob Ladder's 180-step ascent leave you breathless.

Tip: Plan to visit during the summer and spring, as Gorge Trail is closed during the winter.