

The New York Times

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 2020

It's Spring Break, Not Break the Bank

For wallet-friendly adventures, go farther afield and look into all-inclusive family packages.

By AMY TARA KOCH

If you are searching for a cost-effective spring break, there are two rules of thumb. Avoiding the hot spots like Miami, the Caribbean and popular European cities is crucial, and going all in with all-inclusive packages, a travel holy grail for families in search of getaways that don't break the bank.

Several experts weighed in on money-saving tips and less obvious but equally compelling destinations.

Fly South

For many families in winter, escaping the cold is top of mind. Gary Leff, whose blog View From The Wing focuses on travel deals and maximizing frequent flier miles, encourages people to travel farther afield—whether it's Mexico, Central America or elsewhere in Latin America. His reasoning? It's cheaper to be on the ground there, so airfare gets amortized across several nights, and offset by savings on hotel, meals and activities. He notes that Costa Rica and Belize can be reached with United Airlines miles, flying on their partners Avianca (via Bogotá) and Copa (via Panama City). Delta's new partnership with LATAM Airlines creates opportunities for connecting to Uruguay.

Jack Ezon, the founder of Embark Beyond, is a fan of the white sand beaches and boisterous activities in Punta del Este in Uruguay.

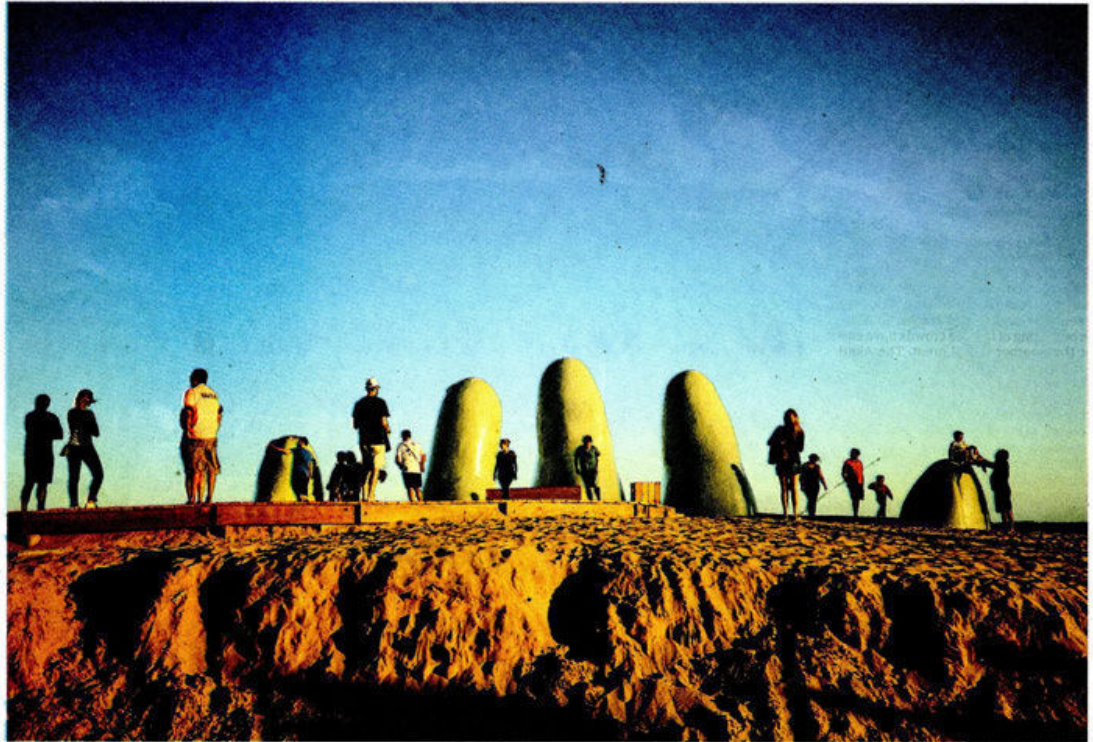
"This is Miami with a side of cowboy for a fraction of the cost," he said. "Families can swim, surf, snorkel with seals and spend time on a working ranch, or, estancia, for horseback riding and helping the gauchos with a cattle drive."

Five-star hotels like the Estancia Vik cost \$468 a night in Uruguay, while a more basic property, The Grand Hotel, is much less at \$176 a night.

In Mexico, Lindsey Epperly Sulek of Epperly Travel recommends the new Palladium Resort at Costa Mujeres, 30 minutes north of Cancun's hyperactive Hotel Zone. Since it's north of Riviera Maya, this beachfront all-inclusive with a water park, three pools, seven restaurants and teenagers' club, has a lower price point. A junior suite, with nightly rates beginning at \$629, can accommodate a family of four.

On the high end, Shawna Owen of Huffman Travel books families who want a tropical splurge for a week at Francis Ford Coppola's all-inclusive, eco-lodges in Belize.

"The mountain beach package, divided between two properties, delivers pristine beaches and jungle adventures like hiking through waterfalls and exploring Mayan ruins," Ms. Owen said. "The property takes care of everything, even airport transfers." (Rates for a family of four begin around \$10,283.)



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From top: Tourists can visit a sculpture depicting five human fingers in Punta del Este, Uruguay, or have some fun in the sun at La Mansa beach; hikers can take advantage of discounted in-park lodging in late March at Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona; and skiers will find end-of-season deals in locations like Mammoth Mountain in California.

