

Why September Is Becoming the New Summer for European Travel

For years, July and August were considered the obvious months for a European holiday. Now, more travellers are deliberately waiting until September. The reason is simple: the weather can still be warm, the sea is often comfortable for swimming, prices can be lower and famous destinations are usually less crowded. But the growing popularity of the "shoulder season" is creating a new problem: September may eventually become crowded too.

The Rise of "Super September"

Travel organisations have noticed a clear change in behaviour.

According to ABTA's Travel Trends 2026 report, 24% of travellers surveyed in 2025 said they intended to take a holiday abroad in September. That was up from 23% in 2024 and only 17% in 2023.

Travel company eSky has reported an even stronger increase. September bookings on its platform are up 57% year on year.

The idea is attractive. Why spend your holiday walking through a crowded European city in 35-degree heat when you can visit almost the same place a few weeks later?

The Weather Is Part of the Story

Climate is one reason the traditional summer season is changing.

Southern European destinations can remain warm well into September and sometimes October. That makes it possible to enjoy a beach holiday without travelling during the hottest and busiest part of the year.

But travellers are also looking for more than beaches.

September can be particularly attractive for city breaks. Walking around Rome, Barcelona or Madrid is more comfortable when temperatures are lower, while restaurants and museums are easier to enjoy when the streets are not packed with visitors.

The change is also visible in active tourism. Adventure travel company Backroads reported that its autumn reservations have increased by more than 30% since 2023. The company says travellers are attracted by milder weather, fewer visitors and better opportunities to interact with local communities.

The Price Difference Can Be Significant

One reason for the trend is financial.

Data reported by eSky showed that some flights from Brussels to Spain were dramatically cheaper in September than in July. Flights to Madrid, for example, fell from €219 in July to €114 in September, while flights to Málaga fell from €278 to €148.

Not every destination becomes cheaper, however. Autumn travel is becoming popular enough that some hotels and flights remain expensive.

Expedia's 2026 data shows that travellers are increasingly searching for less traditional destinations. Interest among British travellers in Luxembourg, for example, rose by 470% for autumn travel. Searches for Strasbourg increased by 170%, while interest in Albania's Sarandë rose by 110%.

That tells us something important: people are not simply travelling at a different time. They are also looking for different places.

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The Problem With Finding the "Perfect" Quiet Destination

There is an obvious contradiction here.

Travellers want fewer tourists, so they choose September.

Then everyone discovers September.

The same thing can happen with lesser-known destinations. Once a place becomes famous on social media, the people looking for an "authentic alternative" can create exactly the kind of tourism pressure they were trying to avoid.

Mallorca is an extreme example. The island expects around 14 million tourists in 2026 despite having a population of about one million. Local residents have complained about housing shortages, overcrowding and the conversion of homes into short-term rentals. The European Union is now considering new rules for short-term rentals such as Airbnb, partly because of concerns about housing affordability in popular tourist destinations.

Tourism Is Becoming a Balancing Act

Tourism is extremely important to many European economies. Hotels, restaurants, airlines, museums and local shops all depend on visitors.

But too many visitors can damage the very places tourists want to see.

Venice, Barcelona, Mallorca and other destinations have already experimented with visitor limits, tourist taxes or restrictions on short-term rentals. The challenge is finding a balance between welcoming visitors and protecting the people who actually live there.

The growth of September travel may help because spreading tourists across more months can reduce pressure during July and August.

But it only works if travellers actually spread out.

Is September the New August?

For some travellers, it already is.

The idea of a European holiday is slowly becoming less connected to a specific two-month summer period. People who are not tied to school holidays can choose the time of year based on weather, prices and crowds.

That could be good news for travellers and destinations alike.

But there is a catch.

If millions of people discover that September is the perfect month to travel, September may eventually become the next August.

The real solution may therefore not be finding a single "best" month. It may be learning to travel throughout the year.