September is the unsung hero of travel months. The busiest travel season has come and gone, places are less crowded because kids are back in school, and as a result, prices on airfare, accommodations—and even attractions—drop. Despite the fact that summer officially ends September 21, your vacation season is far from over. Here's where to travel in September.
The English Countryside

Avid leaf peepers should consider a tour of the English countryside this fall, starting with a stay at manor house hotel Heckfield Place in Hampshire, pictured. It was a painstaking, almost decade-long process to convert this Jane Austen-era home into a genteel country getaway, with 400 acres of gardens, an onsite farm that helps supply chef Skye Gyngell’s kitchens, and the chance to go fly-fishing or horseback riding; the entire operation is overseen by GM Olivia Richli, an Aman alum. Combine this with a tour round the vineyards nearby producing sparkling wines that have begun besting champagne in blind tastings—after all, the chalky terroir is much the same. Try the fash-pack favorite Nyetimber, Hambledon, and newcomer Rathfinny.
Beijing

This month see the inaugural iteration of Design Beijing, an offshoot of the buzzy Design Shanghai showcase. It will commandeer one of the largest exhibition sites in the city to showcase more than 80 different brands, including one-off art pieces and collectibles. Another sign of Beijing’s increasing status among the art elite: the pop-up Serpentine Pavilion, pictured, on show through the end of October. Every summer for the last 18 years, the Serpentine gallery in London has commissioned a boldfaced name in architecture to create a temporary pavilion in Hyde Park for screenings, events, and a café; for the first time, the idea has been exported overseas with this soaring structure by Liu Jiakun in downtown Beijing. When you’re not prowling the halls of the design show, or lounging at the pavilion, stay at the month-old, 42-room Muji hotel, operated by the minimalist Japanese lifestyle store. The second of its soon-to-explode, moderately priced hotel chain is centrally located near Tiananmen Square, and has soothing, earth-toned rooms. Need another incentive? Airfare to Beijing right now is insanely cheap for that long a trip.

French Polynesia

September is the sweet spot to visit French Polynesia in the South Pacific. It’s quieter than during the peak of summer, with lower rates
to match: the rains don’t appear until November, so the weather remains glorious. Even better, this is the time when humpback whales are most visible and plentiful, returning to the archipelago to give birth and feed. The vibe of each island varies so you can take your pick according to your preference. To maximize your chance of whale-spotting, opt for Moorea (pictured)—stay at the Manava Beach Resort, where overwater bungalows were invented 50 years ago. Bora Bora is renowned as a honeymoon locale, so come here to do nothing but lounge by the pool at the Conrad Bora Bora Nui, one of our Hot List hotels. Divers should bee-line to Tuamotus, a cluster of coral atolls with impressive reefs and dive sites. Or you could just splurge on one of the 25 villas on Tetiaroa, a former Marlon Brando hideaway. It’s now home to a namesake, ultra-luxe eco-friendly hotel.

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Charleston, S.C.

What better time to come to the culinary capital of the south than September, when it hosts both a Restaurant Week and a Beer Week? Try Lowcountry eats like She Crab soup at 82 Queen or one of the craft beers from the two dozen or so local breweries. Burn off that indulgence with a few hours strolling round the brand new South Carolina Historical Society museum, which also opens this month. Housed in the so-called Fireproof Building from 1826, built by Washington Monument architect Robert Mills, the six-gallery site will spotlight more than four centuries of history here via ordinary artifacts like a handwritten recipe book from the 1850s. Stay at the supremely well located Planters Inn, pictured, and if it’s booked, check out any of our favorite Charleston hotels.

South Africa

Shoulder season is the ideal time to visit South Africa, when the weather remains reasonably dry but visitor numbers have thinned considerably. To minimize crowds even more, try a less well-known safari spot like Tswalu in the Kalahari (pictured), an enormous privately owned reserve under the auspices of the De Beers–owning Oppenheimer family. Expect to see its signature black-maned Kalahari lions, as well as cheetah, giraffe and, hopefully, the
endangered black rhino. Combine this with a trip to the Cape, just as its renowned floral kingdom, home to 18,000 species of plants and a UNESCO-designated treasure, begins to bloom. Paternoster is a former fishing village on the Western Cape that is quietly emerging as one of the coolest getaways in the country—spend a weekend at the Strandloper hotel, right on the ocean. Of course, the easiest way to whipsaw across the country like this is with a tour operator. Try luxe outfit Roar Africa.