



(Above) Iconic sandstone buttes dominate in northern Arizona's Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park. (Bottom right) Bischoff's Shades of the West, in Scottsdale, is an old-style trading post selling handcrafted leather, jewellery and Mexican folk art.

Southern Comforts

Snowbird season is just around the corner—time to skip town for a warm, sun-drenched destination

By Fiona Tapp and Jacqueline Kovacs

EVERY YEAR, just before the first blizzard hits, Canadian snowbirds swap boots for sandals and head south. If you're lucky enough to join the flock, here are three popular winter havens to consider—a desert retreat in the U.S., a sunny Central American getaway and an island escape in the Caribbean.

ARIZONA

The Grand Canyon State is a snowbird favourite, offering endless sunshine and clear azure skies, perfect for plenty of outdoor activities. Its proximity to Canada (especially for those out west) also makes Arizona an enticing destination.

STAY

- Options for long-term accommodations vary from luxury gated communities to RV and mobile-home parks.
- Cities on the favoured list of snowbirds include Phoenix, Tucson, Mesa and Chandler.
- Snowbirds also settle in Yuma and Sun City, which has eight golf courses and is among Arizona's largest active adult communities.

PLAY

- Visit Phoenix, the state's vibrant capital, for its lively and walkable Roosevelt Row arts district and exemplary shopping.
- Tour Old Town Scottsdale, the historic heart of the city. Browse Western-themed stores, high-end boutiques and art galleries.
- Find serenity in Sedona, in Arizona's high desert, with its stunning red rock formations and numerous nature trails. Take in the swirling spiritual energy of the area's famous vortexes.
- Arizona has 29 state parks, three national parks and six national forests. Hike, bike or paddle across lakes. Or opt to cross the desert in a hot-air balloon.
- The state shares borders with New Mexico, California, Utah and Nevada, which means many more adventures are just a road trip away.



PLAN

Canadians can stay in the U.S. for six months without a visa. However, the Internal Revenue Service can determine your tax liability via the substantial presence test (SPT), which calculates how much time you've spent in the country over the previous three years.

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PANAMA

This S-shaped land bridge linking North and South America is renowned for its natural beauty—pristine beaches, tropical islands, rainforests and majestic mountains. Panama's low cost of living also attracts snowbirds looking to save on accommodations, dining options and transportation.

STAY

- Choose from a wide range of accommodations, from condominiums in the city and small beachfront homes to island resorts and mountain lodges.
- Plan an indulgent weekend in Panama City, at Hotel La Compañía, founded by Canadian developer Chris Lenz. Spanning almost a whole city block, this hotel is comprised of multiple buildings from different time periods, the oldest being the colonial wing, which dates back to 1688.
- Coronado is a popular beach town, about an hour's drive from Panama City, with plenty of shopping and dining choices, as well as access to medical services.
- For a tropical getaway, head to Bocas del Toro, an archipelago in the Caribbean Sea, world-famous for its biodiversity.
- Boquete, a small town in the Chiriquí Highlands, is known for its cool climate, coffee plantations and dramatic mountain scenery.

PLAY

- In Panama City, check out the shopping, restaurants, golf and, of course, the engineering marvel that is the Panama Canal.
- Tour the historic UNESCO-listed Casco Viejo and immerse yourself in its rich and diverse cultural heritage, including Indigenous roots and Spanish colonial influences.
- Go on a day trip to the mountain resort town of El Valle de Anton, 120 kilometres southwest of Panama City and located in the crater of an extinct volcano. Visit the crafts-and-



With its many vibrant coral reefs, Bocas del Toro is a watery wonderland for paddlers and divers.

“Panama is renowned for its natural beauty—pristine beaches, tropical islands, rainforests and majestic mountains

food market and the butterfly haven, as well as the magnificent Chorro El Macho waterfall.

PLAN

Canadians can stay in Panama for up to 180 days without a visa. For longer stays, Panama provides a very attractive incentive for relocating retirees, even if they only live there part-time. The Pensionado (Spanish for “pensioner”) program offers discounts of 25 percent off airfare to anywhere in the world, 50 percent off ticket prices to movies and sporting events, 20 percent off medical prescription costs and much more. To qualify, your monthly pension income must be equivalent to US\$1,000 or more.



Casco Viejo, Panama City's historic district, offers four avenues lined with popular restaurants and trendy bars.