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## The Best Summer Apps for 2012

Whether they're predicting rain showers or tracking travel purchases, these apps can help take the stress out of a vacation.

By [QUENTIN FOTTRELL](#)

**P**lanning a vacation can be stressful; managing the trip once it's begun, even more so. Whether they're dodging raindrops or ultraviolet radiation, scrambling to fill a near-empty gas tank or to placate a tantrum-ready toddler, summer travelers lose an incalculable amount of time and money coping with unexpected hassles.

Fortunately, as the ads used to say, there's an app for that. Or more likely apps, plural: just last week, Apple's App Store announced that it hit a new milestone with 650,000 mobile apps available, up more than

50% from last summer. (The market tops a million once Android and other operating systems are included.) For those seeking a helping hand on vacation, there's no shortage of apps to help them get from A to B with crisp summer linens and tan intact, score real-time hotel deals on-the-go, and find activities that will please (almost) everyone in the family.

If anything, experts say, it's become increasingly tricky to choose the right app now that options have proliferated. Reliable reviews are hard to pin down, says Rick Singer, CEO of [GreatApps.com](http://GreatApps.com), a media company that focuses on app marketing. "It's hard for consumers to keep up with the deluge," he adds. So SmartMoney.com asked a handful of independent experts to help us choose some of the best new apps to take on vacation this summer.

Some of their recommendations fall into the category you might call "everyday apps with vacation benefits." GasBuddy.com and GasPriceWatch.com aim to find the cheapest gas prices in the user's area. Airport guides GateGuru and iFly update flight times, while Yelp and TripAdvisor showcase customer-generated reviews of hotels and restaurants. Mike Vallez, founder of news and review site [CrazyMikesApps.com](http://CrazyMikesApps.com), says he likes Pandora Internet Radio's app and the digital music service Spotify, which help music-lovers endure long road trips without lots of repeats; he also recommends Viber, which allows users to make free calls and texts on 3G or Wi-Fi. Movie-oriented apps like The Amazing Spider-Man keep kids occupied during long car journeys, Vallez adds. Honk an app that tells you when your parking meter has run out of time and makes a note of the car's location recently saved travel consultant [Christopher Elliott](#) from getting a ticket when he lost track of time during a visit to Salem, Mass.

Industry pros recommend test-driving free versions of any given app before moving onto the paid versions

(which are usually ad-free); they also say it's worth taking time to watch how-to videos made by the developer, or YouTube reviews by consumers. One other caveat: It's possible to get too app-dependent. "You don't want to spend the entire summer vacation on your smartphone," says Elliott. With all that in mind, here are the standouts among our experts' picks:

## Wolfram Sun Exposure Reference

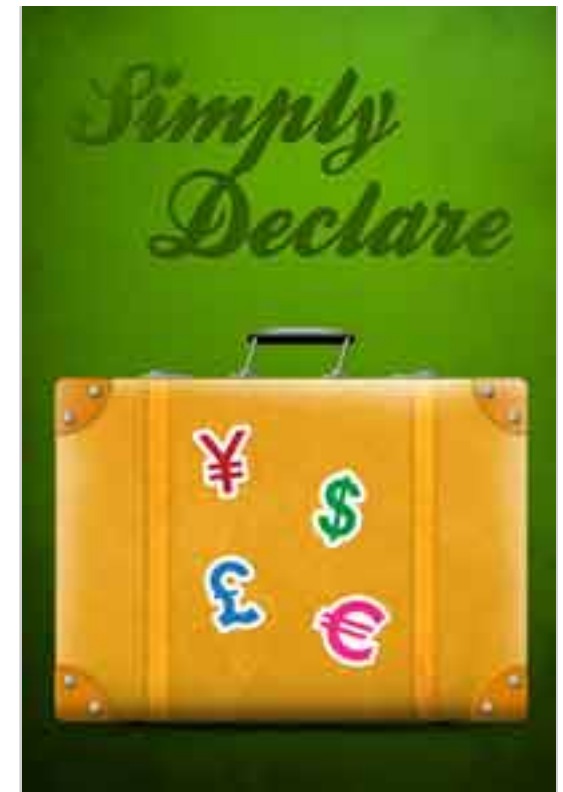
Perhaps not the catchiest of names, but [Wolfram Sun Exposure Reference](#) could be a skin saver. It gives people guidance about what sun protection factor they should use based on the ultraviolet radiation index, time of day, location and their skin type. The makers of Wolfram claim to give an accurate prediction of "time to sunburn," down to the minute; with the help of weather service satellite data, the app also forecasts the UV levels for five days. It was launched late last year for the iPhone and costs 99 cents. Bonus features include sunrise and sunset time, the current position of the sun and the weather forecast. (The app also interfaces with Siri, Apple's voice activated search engine: If you ask, "What's the UV forecast for the day?", Siri can answer using Wolfram-sourced data.) There are many other sunscreen apps on the market, including the more expensive [Sunblock](#) (\$1.99 from the Apple App Store). But of course, all of these apps are advisory guides: they can't actually prevent burning.



## Simply Declare

In a season where many Americans are taking in the London Olympics or

planning a shopping trip to Paris, [Simply Declare](#) helps travelers manage their duty-free purchases, alerting users once they're nearing their customs-exempt spending limit. Once a user punches in his limit around \$800 per person per trip for U.S. citizens traveling overseas the app goes to work, deducting the value of each purchase while also converting 34 local currencies in real-time and updating those conversions at the end of the vacation. The app also stores digital images of credit-card receipts for those who don't like to keep them or are prone to losing them, says Rae Mapey, an accountant based on Vancouver Island, B.C. who created Simply Declare. Mapey, a self described "snowbird" who winters in Phoenix, says she built the app for herself to use for her annual Canada-to-Arizona trek. It costs \$1.99 and also works on Wi-Fi crucial for U.S. smartphone users eager to avoid roaming charges. The app launched on Apple's store in March and will be coming to Android soon. One drawback: it only catalogues one trip at a time. (Mapey says she wanted to keep it simple and easy to use.)



## Woofound

This app is a [GPS search engine](#) with a twist. It asks users to play a "personality game" to build up a profile of preferences that the app can use to make personalized recommendations of what to do while on vacation. "It's designed to cut out the endless searching of figuring out where to go," says co-founder Joshua Spears. Woofound presents readers with a slideshow of either/or questions. One example: "National Parks: Me or Not Me?" Much like a

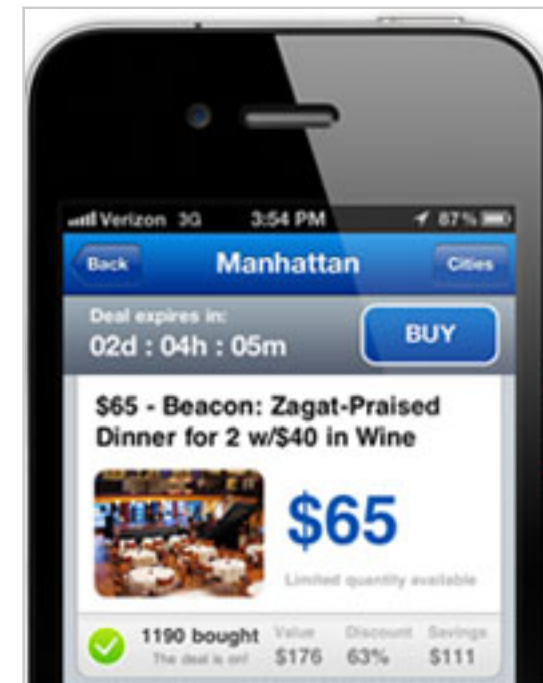


dating website, Spears says, the more questions you answer, the more likely the recommendations will hit the mark. The company has three psychologists on staff and has worked with Noreen Honeycutt, a psychoanalyst based in Baltimore, to map out 300 different personality types. It can combine the accounts of several different users, which means it can help plan activities for family vacations. Currently, Woofound covers only 70 American cities, but Spears says it's partnering with a data aggregator next month to add 50 more countries. The app is free and launched on iPhone this month; the Android version arrives in September.



## TravelZoo

Deal aggregator site TravelZoo.com might be best known as a tool for broader vacation planning hunting for cheap flights and travel packages, for example. But the site's [app version](#) offers real-time local travel deals on-the-go, using coupons that don't need to be printed out. On a recent visit, the app was offering 55% off a \$110 fishing trip with lunch in Point Pleasant, NJ., nearly 60% off an \$80 sea life cruise with lunch in California's Channel Islands, and \$80 pizza-making classes in New York City's Tribeca district at half-price. The app has a "Local Deals Near Me" function for travelers who roll into a new town. Its Top 20 deals section doesn't sort offers by subject or location, but does give a random selection of last-minute holiday deals. (Other apps like [Meal Ticket](#) focus solely on restaurant deals.) Don't expect too many hidden gems: the "Entertainment"



section for New York City, for example, offers up to 50% off Broadway shows, but tourists can get the same discounts if they care to stand in line at the TKTS booth in Times Square. The app is free; it was launched for the iPhone last year and Android earlier this year.

## RainAware

If you're planning 18 holes of golf or a cross-country drive, unexpected rain can be a nemesis. [RainAware](#) aims to predict showers within an accuracy of one mile and five minutes. Developer Ryan McGee says algorithms designed by a team of meteorologists work with National Weather Service data to forecast when rain or storms will start and stop. The weather station data only gives the general direction of rain clouds, McGee says, but GPS technology and further computer analysis by his meteorologists give minute-by-minute details on the location and magnitude of impending showers. Launched in March 2012, RainAware is only available on iPhone and costs \$3.99. It also has some free competition: [OurCast](#) was launched on Apple's App Store in April and launched on Android last week. OurCast uses weather service data and information from "several thousand" users to give a heads-up on showers up to two hours away, according to co-founder Luis Corrales; McGee claims that RainAware's algorithms can predict rain up to three hours in advance.



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