

# EUROPE & BEYOND



THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE



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# EUROPE & BEYOND



## THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE

Welcome to the last, but by no means the least, of our destination brochures, designed to inspire and to excite you about the places where we love to travel.

'Europe & Beyond', however, is a little bit different. The previous six each concentrated on a specific continent - Africa, Asia, South America - whereas this edition begins in Europe but then extends beyond to the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Middle East, United States...

The way we organise these holidays is also different. Instead of using local destination suppliers, we work with tried and tested long-term UK partners whose service meets our own exacting standards.. You pay no more, but benefit from our ability to secure the best and most appropriate offer for your holiday.

Moreover, if you have travelled with us before, we will have a good idea of what you want and what you don't want from the holiday, thereby saving you the time and the effort of explaining all this to a new company.

Of course, what isn't different is the in depth knowledge and expertise shared by our team of experts here. Knowledge and expertise that will allow them to deliver you the Ultimate Experience.

With best wishes,

NICK VAN GRUISEN

# OCEAN CRUISING

*“Many of the world’s most dramatic, breathtaking shows of nature are best seen aboard a cruise ship.”*

Sunnfjordsfjorden Fjord, Norway

Whatever style of holiday on land you prefer - marvelling at stunning scenery, exploring historic cities, searching for wildlife or discovering exotic cultures, you'll find the same experiences on a cruise.

**T**hink of a cruise ship as a hotel, but one that happens to carry you from place to place (and usually overnight so you don't miss a thing!). Whatever type of hotel you prefer ashore, from five-star resorts awash with amenities and activities to more intimate, boutique-style properties, there are ships that share the same profile.

With such a choice of both ships and itineraries, that familiar cry of 'cruising's not for me' no longer holds water. But if you're new to it all, you may need just a little help in whittling down the options. That's where we can help.

## COASTAL SCENERY

Many of the world's most dramatic, breathtaking shows of nature are best seen aboard a cruise ship. Navigate the fabled Inside Passage from Vancouver (or Seattle) to Alaska, for example, and you'll have a front row seat for the planet's most dramatic coastal scenery. Nor is there a better way to explore the natural wonders of Antarctica, the remote shorelines of Patagonia or Australia's Kimberley coast. Indeed, many such places would be almost impossible to reach by any other means.

Cruise the Norwegian coast with its spectacular fjords, or head further north to Spitsbergen. In summer, you can bask in the 'land of the midnight sun'; in winter, the big treat is a sighting of the Northern Lights, those wispy cloud-like, green phantoms that flex and weave in a magical, other-worldly choreography. Think lava lamps on a celestial scale.

**Who to sail with: [Seabourn](#), [SeaDream](#)**



## WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

The enchanted islands of the Galapagos, Darwin's 'Living Laboratory', are at the top of most people's bucket lists. Home to a remarkable menagerie of wildlife, the indigenous animals are so fearless of humans that wonderfully intimate encounters are guaranteed. Each of the 19 islands that make up the archipelago has its own distinctive looks and inhabitants.

**Who to sail with:** Noble Caledonia, Silversea

## CULTURE QUESTS

The shorelines (and river banks) of the world are awash with historic cities and ancient sites, a legacy of the days before super highways and airports challenged travelling and transporting goods by sea.

So many of the **Mediterranean's** major historic cities - Barcelona, Dubrovnik, Genoa, Istanbul, Naples and Venice for example - are bang on the water. You may not be able to scoop them all up on any single cruise, but if you divide the Med into the east and the west, with Italy as the obvious partition, it makes the decision of where to sail in summer a much easier task.

**Who to sail with:** Celebrity, Holland America

**The Baltic** is another rich cruising ground. The Scandinavian cities of Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki and Oslo are all waterfront capitals, as are the East European ports of Tallinn, Riga and magnificent St Petersburg.

**Who to sail with:** Oceania, Regent Seven Seas

**Asia** has also begun to take the cruising world by storm. And that should come as little surprise. Nowhere offers such a rich melting pot of culture. From vibrant cities to remote hill tribes, ancient temples to mighty rivers, colonial heritage to irresistible shopping, Asia's diversity is simply boundless. And there's an equally diverse choice of itineraries, embracing China, Hong Kong, Indochina, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam.

**Who to sail with:** Cunard, Silversea



Galapagos



Singapore



Barbados



Royal Clipper



Hebridean Princess, Isle of Bute



Dubrovnik



Queen Victoria, Sydney Harbour

## ISLAND HOPPING

Cruising and island hopping are made for one another. And since most of the world's fleet relocates to the **Caribbean** in the winter months, this is where the best opportunities to indulge abound.

You might prefer to explore the larger islands of Barbados, Antigua, St Lucia and Jamaica, where there's much to do ashore. Or sail off-the-beaten-track to such exquisite jewels as Bequia, Nevis and St Barths. There are islands with strong British, Dutch, Spanish and French roots for those interested in colonial heritage. Or you can head west to the Yucatan coast of Mexico and the island of Cozumel. The choice is yours.

**Who to sail with:** Crystal, P&O

**Cuba** is, of course, the big news in the Caribbean. With a dearth of good accommodation on the ground, a cruise is the most comfortable way to explore the island, and an increasing number of ships are planning to sail there now that it is no longer off limits to US passengers.

**Who to sail with:** Star Clippers

For a jaw-dropping abundance of natural beauty, look no further than the **Seychelles**. Often called the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean, they are picture postcard perfect. Closer to home, you'll also find island hopping itineraries that focus on the **Greek Islands**, **Italy's Aeolian** and **Spain's Balearics**.

**Who to sail with:** Compagnie du Ponant, Noble Caledonia

Finally, don't forget the whole shoal of islands **right on our doorstep** - the Orkneys and Shetlands, Lewis and Harris, Mull and Skye, for example, are an integral part of many cruises that begin and/or end in the UK. There are even a few round-Britain itineraries, exploring a coastline that, if laid end to end, would stretch all the way from London to Vladivostok.

**Who to sail with:** Hebridean Princess

## WORLD CRUISES

Still undecided? Why not tackle the whole lot then?

Early in the New Year, some half a dozen ships embark on a circumnavigation of the globe, taking about three months to complete the circuit and calling in at around 30 to 40 ports along the way. Compared with the more familiar fly-cruise jaunts around the Med or Caribbean, these hugely popular voyages are the marathons of the cruising world.

While many passengers sign up for the full world cruise, which often includes dramatic transits of both Suez and Panama canals, more than half board for just a single leg of the journey. These sector options are ideal for those wanting, say, a focus on Asia, a one-way trip from Australia to Singapore, or just a passage from one end of the Mediterranean back to the UK.

**Who to sail with:** Cunard, P&O



# RIVER CRUISING

River cruising is one of the fastest growing (yet slowest moving!) of 'adventures'. In some respects, it really has more in common with a touring holiday by coach or car than a conventional cruise. Sightseeing is the big draw, with ever changing scenery to both port and starboard and long, lazy interludes in between. And with barely a ripple, let alone a wave to contend with, there's more chance of feeling nauseous watching your toothpaste water swirl down the sink.

Unlike touring overland, such aggravations as traffic jams and parking in city centres are never an issue. In Budapest for example, a highlight of all Danube cruises, ships berth for the night right in the heart of the matter, just along from the Parliament building in the shadow of Buda Castle.

Ships that ply rivers look very different from those on the world's oceans. Long and thin, with the proportions of a pencil case rather than the lines of a 'proper' ship, the standard river vessel is just two or three decks tall, with a wide, stem to stern sundeck and often a tiny pool.

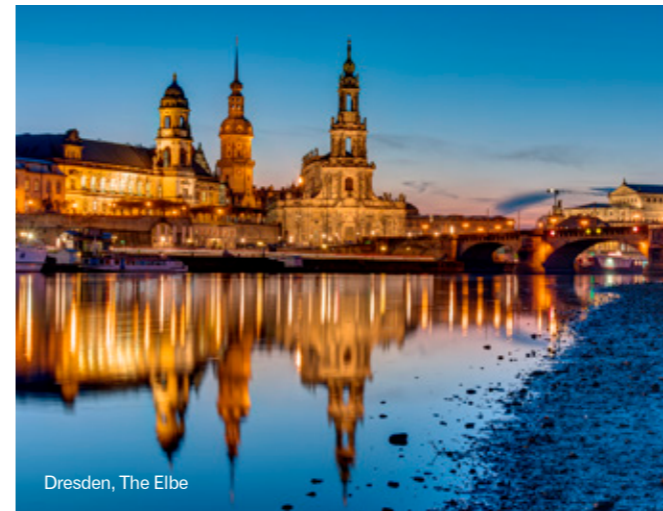
Passenger capacity varies from ship to ship but is usually around 150 to 200...so, just right for mixing with people you want to be with (and avoiding those you don't!).

For a more exclusive, private approach, opt for a luxury barge. With only five to six cabins, such a vessel is perfect for a large family or group of friends, as well as for those passionate about their food and wine - both vital ingredients in the river or canal barge experience.





Budapest, The Danube



Dresden, The Elbe



Rheinels Castle, The Rhine



Avignon, The Rhone



Douro Valley, Portugal

## WHICH RIVER

Choosing the right river is, in many ways, more important than the right ship. Among the most popular of Europe's great waterways are:

### THE DANUBE

Budapest, Vienna and Bratislava are all fed by the waters of the Danube (as are Belgrade and Bucharest for those cruising on down to the Black Sea). Other stops on the classic one-week itinerary include the Benedictine monastery of Melk, the immense cathedral at Esztergom, the walled wine village of Durnstein and arty, pretty Szentendre.

Passing scenery takes in the beautiful vineyards and apricot orchards of the Austrian Wachau region, and the wonky roof lines, peachy pastels and onion church toppings of its munchkin villages.

### THE RHINE

Highlights include fairy-tale castles, medieval towns such as Rudesheim, gothic architecture and any number of quaint villages. The stretch of river between the cathedral city of Cologne and Mainz is arguably the most scenic on the Continent.

Many cruises begin in Amsterdam, on the waterways of the Low Countries, and end in Basle, with some diverting to explore the Moselle.

### THE ELBE

Dresden and Prague, both meticulously restored from the ravages of war, are the major draws, but you'll also get the porcelain factory at Meissen, Luther's Wittenburg and often a first night in Berlin (90 minutes by road from the river).

The Elbe is surprisingly scenic, with its banks close to both beams on several stretches of river.

### THE SEINE

The most accessible of all Europe's rivers from the UK, the Seine offers a fresh perspective on Paris, as well as Versailles, Rouen, Honfleur, Richard the Lionheart's castle at Les Andelys and Monet's garden at Giverny.

The rural landscapes of Normandy are also a rich and ever-present companion.

### THE RHONE/SAONE

Combine the vineyards and villages of Burgundy with France second city of Lyon and Provence's historic towns of Arles, Avignon and Vienne.

Rather than flying, you can take the Eurostar to Lyon and enjoy rural France from the comfort of your air-conditioned carriage.

### THE DOURO

For one of the few shorter cruises on the market, consider Portugal's unsung but majestic River Douro.

A 5-night round trip from Porto combines delightful scenery, port vineyards and often a full day's excursion to the ancient university town of Salamanca.

### THE VOLGA

Linking Moscow with St Petersburg are a series of canals, ingenious locks from the Stalin era, inland lakes and of course the Volga - the 'Mother of all rivers'.

Apart from the myriad attractions of these two magnificent cities, shore time will combine visits to rural riverside villages with a plethora of beautiful churches and their attendant icons.

### RIVER CRUISING SPECIALISTS

The best of these include AmaWaterways, Avalon, Crystal, Scenic, Tauck, Uniworld and Viking. We work closely with them all, and each offers a wide selection of departures on the rivers above throughout the high season from March to October.

Away from the mainstream, they also offer cruises on the Oder and Vistula in Poland, the Dnieper in Russia, the Po in Italy, the Loire and Garonne in France, and the Guadalquivir in southern Spain.

### BEYOND EUROPE

With the notable exception of the Nile and the Amazon, river cruising beyond Europe largely revolves around Southeast Asia. Here, you can choose from such iconic thoroughfares as the Mekong, Irrawaddy, Yangtze and the Brahmaputra, which flows through the beautiful state of Assam in India's remote northeast.

# UNIWORLD

A UNIQUE APPROACH TO RIVER CRUISING



Budapest, The Danube

On board comforts are second to none. An entire wall in your deluxe stateroom will open as a virtual balcony. Your handmade Savoir bed will be fitted with 100% Egyptian cotton. The furniture will be handcrafted, the artwork inspired by the destination (with Picasso, Matisse and Klimt originals among the collection), and there'll be fresh flowers.

Choose a suite (one of many different stateroom categories) and your personal butler will have been trained by the Ivor Spencer School, where Buckingham Palace household staff learn their trade.

In 2008, Uniworld's parent company, The Travel Corporation (TTC) launched the TreadRight Foundation to encourage sustainable tourism. To date, Uniworld and its TTC sister-brands have helped fund and initiate some 40 projects that benefit the local environment, culture and heritage.

## KEY FACTS

- Uniworld's vessels carry up to 150 passengers and cruise all Europe's major waterways - the Danube, Douro, Garonne, Moselle, Rhine, Rhone, Seine, Saone, even the lagoons around Venice.
- Beyond Europe, Uniworld also run cruises on the Ganges, Mekong, Nile, Svir, Volga and Yangtze. Vessels are equally luxurious, but a little smaller with a capacity of up to 70 passengers.

Family-owned and run across four generations, Uniworld has more than a hundred years' experience in the world of luxury travel.

As a river cruising specialist, Uniworld has successfully modelled its approach to hospitality from the portfolio of boutique hotels owned by its sister company, Red Carnation. Guests on any of the cruises can therefore expect unmatched service and dedication that goes above and beyond expectations. This philosophy, which can be summed up by the promise 'No request too large, no detail too small', is deeply rooted in the company's DNA.

It's little surprise then that Uniworld's 'guest satisfaction' surveys score a remarkable 4.9 out of a possible 5 stars.

Aboard any one of Uniworld's European fleet of 12 vessels, the experience is one more akin to a floating boutique hotel. Although ships that cruise rivers look very similar from the outside, they are far from the same within, the interiors designed to reflect the destination - 'your ship may leave Paris but Paris never leaves the ship', and the same could be applied across Uniworld's portfolio.

Uniworld is where inclusivity meets exclusivity. The price you pay will include not only food (locally-sourced with both vegetarian and gluten free options), but an unlimited choice of fine regional wine, spirits and craft beers.

Your cruise will also include a choice of daily excursions in each port of call, with private visits to key attractions when closed to the general public, and activities that range from wine tasting to pasta making. Gratuities, transfers and WiFi are all included too, as is 24-hour room service.

The more active can choose from a daily menu of walking, cycling, kayaking and golf. On the Danube and the Rhone, you can even choose to cycle from one port to the next on one of the bikes carried on board. There's also a 'wellness on water' programme of yoga that is always popular, and select ships have small indoor pools with resistance jets so that you enjoy a 'proper' swim.





# ISLANDS OF THE CARIBBEAN

English Harbour, Antigua

*“...English Harbour and Nelson’s Dockyard, a tropical Greenwich restored as the old sea dogs would have known it, and arguably the most impressive man-made sight in the entire Caribbean..”*

When Columbus came to the Caribbean in 1492, he didn't have a clue which way to turn. 'There are so many islands,' he noted in the ship's log, 'I hardly knew where I should go first.' Some five hundred years later, many visitors still face the same dilemma.

All Caribbean islands bask in the same tropical sunshine, float in the same warm silky waters, and share the same make up of gorgeous beaches, whispering palms and rum in its gallons. But then the differences begin.

You may well have a favourite Caribbean island, even a hotel or villa that you visit every year, but for many people considering the Caribbean for the first time, or maybe wanting to try a different island, we offer a handy potted guide to a dozen of our personal favourites.

## ANTIGUA

Compared with the other mainstream islands, Antigua has neither the Caribbean pulse that you feel in Jamaica, the wondrous scenery of St Lucia nor the glamour of Barbados' west coast. But for beaches, with one for every day of the year, it leaves them at the starting gate.

The largest of the Leeward Islands, the bread board level landscapes of Antigua used to be beach-to-beach with whispering sugar cane, but today the conical stubs of cane-crushing windmills - some 200 according to the tourist board - stand as crumbling mausoleums, and only four percent of the land is now cultivated. Betty's Hope, a restored working mill, is an impressive, overpowering hunk of engineering and the best place to get a feel for the old days.

The most essential viewing is English Harbour and Nelson's Dockyard, a tropical Greenwich restored as the old sea dogs would have known it, and arguably the most impressive man-made sight in the entire Caribbean. If you then drive up to Shirley Heights, you'll see why the Navy picked Antigua, not only because of its hurricane-proof anchorage but, from the lofty perspective, any Unidentified Sailing Object could be canonised long before threatening the fleet.

**Where to stay: Jumby Bay, Curtain Bluff, Hermitage Bay, Carlisle Bay (good for families)** →





Pitons, St Lucia

## ST LUCIA

St Lucia is an island for all comers: first timers and old hands, sports lovers and loafers, the well-heeled and the huddled masses. Although often written off as the 'all-inclusive' island, it has beds for all bodies and budgets. Pick the right hotel and a week can easily pass in a warm, softly-focused blur of pleasures.

Roughly the size of the Isle of Wight and the shape of a pear, crumpled by mountains and creased by deep shaggy ravines, St Lucia should also be explored. Along with Jamaica and Dominica, St Lucia is a place of abundant nature. The most scenically magnificent corner is the southwest where the Pitons, a pair of soaring green fangs, are the topographical icons of the entire Caribbean. Save time, too, for the sleepy, kaleidoscopic and distinctly Caribbean town of Soufriere which lives under their shadow.

**Where to stay:** Calabash Cove, Sugar Beach, The Landings (good for families)

## NEVIS

The island was put squarely on the map in 1993 when Princess Diana came to escape a cold New Year at home, and it's that same promise of escape that continues to draw its many regular visitors who wouldn't dream of even trying a different Caribbean island.

It's a gentle, low impact destination with a history rooted in sugar cane plantations and grand estates, some transformed into luxurious inns.

**Where to stay:** Nisbet Plantation, Four Seasons (good for families)

## BARBADOS

First timers to the Caribbean will find the most easterly of the West Indies reassuringly British, with cricket, polo, afternoon tea, Home Counties' churches and a statue of Nelson in the capital Bridgetown (erected thirty years before the one in London went up).

It's not that Barbados holds a monopoly on exclusive retreats, but the west or so-called platinum coast does happen to have a lot more of them compared with many of its neighbours. So, you'll be spoilt for choice, with many of their regular guests still dabbing a hankie to their eyes over the demise of the weekly Concorde supersonic service. Barbados also boasts several excellent restaurants, including the spectacularly sited, and aptly called, The Cliff.

**Where to stay:** Cobblers Cove, Coral Reef, The Sandpiper, Sandy Lane (good for families)

## BEQUIA

The lushest of the 32 islands that make up the Grenadines, which lie in a more or less straight line between St Vincent and Grenada, Bequia is a fabulous, laid back little place.

It's easy to plug into local life, sipping rum punches in the bars, eating rotis on the waterfront or simply 'lazin and limin' under the big almond tree (known as 'The Houses of Parliament') in the middle of Port Elizabeth. Bequia's tiny main town oozes Caribbean charm, and you'll be as likely to pass the time of day chatting to the island's fishermen, seafarers and boat builders as other tourists.

**Where to stay:** Bequia Beach Hotel



Dunn's River Falls, Jamaica

## JAMAICA

With all the money in the world, it would be hard to beat Noel Coward's 20 year-long routine of spending two or three months every winter in Jamaica. The island, in many respects, is the cultural essence of the Caribbean. It's also one of the largest islands, so your experience will largely be determined by where you stay - in or around Montego Bay and the nearby seven-mile beach of Negril, or Ocho Rios close to the island's number one attraction, Dunn's River Falls.

Plan on a river trip by bamboo raft (the Rio Grande is best) and a visit to one of the old sugar estates, as well as a detour into the lush mountainous interior.

**Where to stay:** Goldeneye, Jamaica Inn, Half Moon (good for families)

## ST BARTHS

Officially a *sous prefecture* of France, and fed by regular imports (both food and chefs) from the mother country, St Barths is a place for doing very little. Indeed, beach loafing and eating top the agenda here.

The island may only measure eight square miles, but there are several top-notch restaurants to choose from, many in the best hotels. Although they draw a discerning, well-heeled, mostly Gallic crowd, and the occasional Hollywood A-lister in season, menus are by no means limited to snails, frogs' legs and other French classics.

**Where to stay:** Cheval Blanc, Eden Rock, Le Guanahani (good for families)

## ANGUILLA

On pure topography, Anguilla would appear to have drawn all the short straws. Yet the mostly flat, arid, infertile land, as scrubby as an old doormat and unable to yield much by way of bananas or sugar cane, has long been in hot demand by very wealthy people who come to do very little. The island's blazing white, flour-fine sands are arguably the best in the Caribbean. And the sea's not so bad either, every shade of blue with a shoreline hemmed by turquoise and opal.

The island's appeal lies as much in what it hasn't got as what it has, with no jet skis, casinos, shopping malls or mega cruise ships. Development is kept under a tight rein and, although that means hotels are few, standards are very high.

**Where to stay:** Belmond Cap Juluca, Four Seasons (good for families)



Sandy Lane, Barbados



Belmond Cap Juluca, Anguilla



Baths on Virgin Gorda, British Virgin Islands



Eden Roc, Dominican Republic



Parrot Cay, Turks and Caicos



Amanyara, Turks and Caicos

## GRENADA

Grenada, about the same size as Greater London, is the complete Caribbean experience on a single island. It simply ticks all the boxes, with a green and towering interior to rival the best of its neighbours, sandy beaches, several good places to eat, the pretty harbour town of St George's, lots of sailing and water sports, plus working spice plantations, rum distilleries and sugar cane plantations. One thing you won't find on Grenada is boredom.

Of the island's 40 odd beaches, the two-mile long, soft sandy swathe of Grand Anse is one of the finest in the Caribbean. But you'll miss half the fun of Grenada if you don't turn your back on the beach for at least a day or two of your holiday. A full day tour of the island should include visits to the River Antoine water-powered sugar cane plantation and rum distillery (in business since 1785), the Dougladstone spice estate and the historic nutmeg processing plant in Gouyave.

**Where to stay:** Calabash, Spice Island, Mount Cinnamon (good for families)

## BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Scattered over miles of incomparably blue sea, the BVI are steep and green, the peaks of a submerged chain of volcanoes. They were named by Columbus after St Ursula's supporting cast of 11,000 virgins, and indeed this dense seascape could have been crafted in heaven for lovers of the sea. Even the names on the charts - Dead Man's Bay, Fallen Jerusalem and Dead Chest - conjure up the ghosts of peg legs and swarthy sea dogs.

As well as some of the best sailing in the world, which explains why there are even more berths on boats than beds in hotels, the lie of the land is pretty wonderful too. There are superb stretches of pure white sand, some as good as the Caribbean gets, and the iconic Baths on Virgin Gorda, a fabulous grotto of pink-grey granite boulders, Dali soft and as big as clouds, secret caves and seawater Jacuzzis.

**Where to stay:** Rosewood Little Dix Bay, Peter Island (good for families)

## TURKS AND CAICOS

The eight inhabited islands of the Turks and Caicos are found in and amongst hundreds of gorgeous deserted cays. If your idea of the perfect Caribbean retreat looks a little like a Robinson Crusoe fantasy, then you've come to the right place. Most of the resorts are on tiny Providenciales, or Provo for short, overlooking the endless white sands of stunning Grace Bay. There's plenty of activity too, from snorkelling and diving (best within the Princess Alexandra marine reserve) to sailing and windsurfing in waters shared by sea turtles and dolphins.

Other distractions include a Karl Litten designed golf course, the ruins of the Cheshire Hall plantation, a conch farm and outings to other islands. These include Little Water Cay, home to some 50,000 rock iguanas; Grand Turk, the tiny capital where migrating humpback whales can be spotted from January to March; and North Caicos, its ruined plantations once owned by the Loyalists, who fled here from the American War of Independence, but now sanctuary to flocks of pink flamingos.

**Where to stay:** Amanyara, COMO Parrot Cay, Grace Bay (good for families)

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

For years the Dominican Republic was the domain of mid-range hotels and charter flights, but the recent unveiling of several luxury properties and a twice weekly, non-stop service to Punta Cana with British Airways has significantly raised its profile. Sharing the island of Espanola with Haiti, the Republic also boasts championship golf courses of the highest pedigree, excellent facilities for water sports (kite surfing, deep sea fishing, diving etc.) and several leading brand spas, as well as a diversely rich heritage of African, Spanish and Taino Indian culture.

With 1,000 miles of coastline, the DR's beaches are many and legendary, but there are a number of attractions to tempt you away from the sun lounger - the Indigenous Eyes Ecological Park, the Los Haitises National Park near Samana, and the Spanish colonial capital of Santo Domingo with its cobbled streets, Baroque architecture and Cathedral Primada de America, where Christopher Columbus's son Diego laid the first stone in 1514.

**Where to stay:** Amanera, Eden Roc at Cap Cana (good for families)

# THE INDIAN OCEAN

Few destinations have captured the imagination of travellers in quite the same way as the islands of the Indian Ocean. The lure of coral sand beaches, aquamarine seas and warm tropical sunshine has been the catalyst for some of the world's most sought-after hotels - from romantic hideaways in the Seychelles to elegantly sophisticated resorts in Mauritius and island hideaways in the Maldives.

## THE SEYCHELLES

One look at a policeman's badge - a tortoise with a palm tree growing from its back - will tell you where priorities lie in the Seychelles. This cluster of islands, 1,000 miles from anywhere, are the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean, gorgeous worlds of natural beauty - and you can walk in the deep green heart of any one without fear of wild beast or insect.

Mahe, being the gateway for flights (including a new, twice weekly, non-stop service with British Airways), is always the first port of call. Once the hub of the spice trade, the largest of the Seychelles' islands is voluptuous, mountainous and has a number of idyllic resorts that are perfect for the first few nights.

Unlike the Maldives, the best way to enjoy the Seychelles is to island hop, by boat, seaplane or helicopter, taking in the incredible diversity of this picture postcard archipelago, from peaky granite islands to coral atolls. Choosing just one island to visit is akin to picking one chocolate from a complete box of gourmet Belgian truffles!

Praslin, second in size to Mahe, is a paradise for bird watchers. It's also the home of the coco de mer palm, whose smoothly rounded seed is the largest of its kind in the world and has been revered for hundreds of years as a fertility symbol. Neighbouring La Digue, traffic-free and just a boat ride away, is best explored by bike, while Desroches is a heartbreakingly beautiful strip of palm-fringed coral and home to giant tortoises, many of them more than a hundred years old. Denis is also back on the map since the reopening of its private island villa resort - always a popular spot with honeymooners.

**Where to stay:** **Constance Lemuria, Praslin Island**  
**Six Senses Zil Pasyon, Felicite Island**  
**Four Seasons, Mahe Island (good for families)**

**When to go:** **Best from April to October, when the tropical weather is at its driest and coolest. The Seychelles are not affected by cyclones.**





One&Only Le St Geran, Mauritius



Shangri-La's Le Touessrok, Mauritius



Baros, The Maldives



Four Seasons at Landaa Giraavaru, The Maldives

## MAURITIUS

Described as a land of 'rainbows, waterfalls and shooting stars', and lying some 1,000 miles off the coast of East Africa, Mauritius may appear a mere pinprick on the world map but is the same size as Surrey. Its history is brief but busy. In the 17th century it was occupied by the Dutch, whose principal legacy appears to have been the eradication of the dodo. It was then taken by the French, followed by the British, before gaining independence in 1968.

Mauritius is a happy island and the mood is infectious. Even the immigration officials smile. There is also a delightful pottiness about the place. In the capital of Port Louis, for example, you can overhear Indians ordering Chinese food in Creole, while reading French newspapers and grumbling in Gujarati about having to complete their tax return forms in English, all under the disapproving eyes of Queen Victoria's statue and to a background soundtrack of the local muezzin calling the devout to prayer!

Mauritius also holds a major trump card in the global rivalry between tropical paradises: its hotels seem to have stars as abundant as the Milky Way. But behind the hundred miles of sandy beaches fronting these stellar resorts lies a land clothed almost head to foot in whispering sugar cane, with occasional patches of tea and tobacco, that is well worth exploring. The most scenic corner of the island is

the forested highlands and valleys in the wild south west, beautifully scarred by the Black River Gorge.

One unmissable distraction from the beach is the Royal Botanic Garden at Pamplemousses, where you can crush leaves between your fingers to unleash perfumes of cloves, camphor, ginger, grapefruit and cinnamon. You'll also see local families picnicking under the trees, the women in saris as bright as the blooms, yellow-footed myna birds who look as if they've been paddling in custard, and giant water lilies the size of small trampolines.

Other trump cards include minimal jet lag, French cuisine, championship golf courses, water sport facilities of the highest calibre, and the perfect setting for romance. Little wonder then that Mauritius is a hugely popular destination for weddings, vow renewals and, of course, honeymoons.

**Where to stay:** [Constance Prince Maurice](#), [One&Only Le St Geran](#), [Shangri-La's Le Touessrok](#) (good for families)

**When to go:** [Best from May to November. Cyclones can occur during the period of heaviest rainfall from December to March.](#)

## THE MALDIVES

The Maldives could be described as a flotilla of a country, with more than 1,000 islands dotting a remote expanse of Indian Ocean far to the south of the Indian Subcontinent. For every square mile of island, there are some 350 square miles of ocean. Varying in size between tiny and very tiny, all share the same simple topographical template: a deep green heart of palm tree and sea grape, fringed by perfect white sand beach and a surrounding lagoon of the most fabulous calm, pale lime, turquoise and azure water. From the air they look impossible, more like a shoal of mutant plankton. There is no such thing as a Maldivian contour, let alone a hill.

The islands differ not in their nature but in the style of the resorts grafted upon them. There are around 100, spread over different atolls, each with an island to itself. Think of the Maldives as an archipelago of hotels rather than islands and you will have the right idea.

The great majority of these private island hideaways are firmly in the luxury five-star category, with a choice of restaurants, swimming pools and overwater bungalows, built on stilts and embedded into the lagoon. All have spas, water sports facilities and dive centres - in the Maldives, the beauty lies as much below the surface as above. Some have kids' clubs, tennis courts and other land based activities.

Don't bother with more than one Maldivian. Island hopping is never easy. Just choose your resort carefully, take lots to read and listen to, together with plenty of sun cream and your swimwear, then stay very, very put.

**Where to stay:** [Baros](#), [Soneva Fushi](#), [Four Seasons at Landaa Giraavaru](#) (good for families)

**When to go:** [Best from December to April, when the weather is warm and dry with just the occasional shower.](#)

# THE MEDITERRANEAN

Most of us dream of travel to exotic, faraway places. To the Maharajas' palaces of India, the immensity of the Grand Canyon, Australia's Great Barrier Reef and Africa's endless, game rich savannahs.

But when it comes to summer, the Med makes a strong case for a perfect holiday. The weather is at its prime, the flights are relatively short, the food and culture are excitingly different and there's a broad range of places to stay, from villas to grand hotels.

**S**o, who does summer best? That depends on what you are looking for. With luck, and a helping hand from the gods of weather, you can be fairly sure of warmth and sunshine wherever you go in the Med, but different parts have their own particular characteristics.



*“...the voluptuous lie of the land, its hills cloaked in trees or ribbed by vines, the lower ground quilted by patchworks of wheat fields or olive groves.”*



Tuscany, Italy



Puerto de Soller, Mallorca



Alhambra, Granada

## ITALY

### Tuscany

If the sea isn't vital to your Italian pleasure, consider Tuscany. You'd be hard pushed to find anywhere in Europe more beautiful. That's partly down to the natural scheme of things, the voluptuous lie of the land, its hills cloaked in trees or ribbed by vines, the lower ground quilted by patchworks of wheat fields or olive groves.

Tuscany is also remarkable for the harmonious way that man has blended into the picture, with farmhouses and hill top villages that almost look as if they've simply grown out of the earth. God, as they say, was the architect of Tuscany but he brought in Michelangelo to do the decorating.

**Where to stay:** [Castello Banfi](#), [Castello del Nero](#)

### The Amalfi Coast

One of the most famous and best loved stretches of Mediterranean coast. The spectacular scenery, with its vineyards, citrus and olive groves, almond trees, oleanders, camellias and bougainvillea, are irresistible. Resorts include Sorrento, from where you can catch a ferry to nearby Capri, the ridiculously pretty, confetti colourful Positano, and Amalfi with its knot of medieval streets and kasbah-like alleyways.

But should you tire of the coast, there is always the exquisite hilltop retreat of Ravello, a place of elegant palaces, old churches and gardens suspended between sky and sea.

**Where to stay:** [Excelsior Vittoria](#), [Sorrento Santa Caterina](#), [Amalfi](#)

### Also consider...

- Sicily, an island to explore rather than for staying in one place.
- Puglia, the 'heel of the boot', whose myriad attractions include long sandy beaches, a string of hill towns, the baroque city of Lecce and uniquely hobbit-like 'trulli' architecture, as well as terrific food and wine (Puglia is Italy's market garden).
- the Italian Riviera, close to the French border.
- Sardinia, the island home to yet more gorgeous beaches and some wonderful family hotels.

## SPAIN

### Andalusia

The Costas are synonymous with holidays to Spain, but you'll generally get a much better sense of place inland. Andalusia, for example, is home to seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites and best known for its 'golden triangle' - Seville, crowned by an immense Gothic cathedral; Granada with its magnificent Alhambra palace; and Cordoba, whose star attraction is the Great Mosque of Mesquita.

If you wish to broaden your horizons, you can head further inland to the so-called 'frontier towns', with Jerez de la Frontera the one for flamenco and sherry bodegas, and to the 'pueblos blancos' or white villages, which are made up of almost Cycladic houses, cobbled streets and narrow alleyways.

The best and most spectacular Andalusian beaches can be found on the Costa de la Luz.

**Where to stay:** [Hacienda de San Rafael](#), [Parador de Cadiz](#)

### Mallorca

Don't ever let those tabloid tales of raucous goings on in Magaluf deter you from visiting Mallorca. The southern sprawl of resorts, which covers just ten percent of the island's coastline, absorbs more than fifty percent of Mallorca's visitors but is just one small corner of a beautiful island. There are lots of reasons why Mallorca is our number one holiday destination, including a wide choice of both scheduled and charter flights from several UK airports.

If you want to be beside the sea, try Puerto de Soller on the west coast. For the mountains head for Deia, beloved by Robert Graves. For a secluded retreat, among olive, almond, lemon and walnut groves in the north of the island, rent a house near Pollenca and drive the short distance to the coast whenever you crave seawater rather than the pool.

Save time, too, for Palma, Mallorca's capital and as authentic a Spanish city as anywhere on the mainland.

**Where to stay:** [Belmond La Residencia](#), [Jumeirah Port Soller](#)

### Also consider...

- the other Balearic Islands of Ibiza, Menorca and Formentera.
- Catalonia for its cities (Barcelona, Girona) and fishing villages (Dali's Cadaques).
- a grander tour, staying in historic *paradores* along the way.



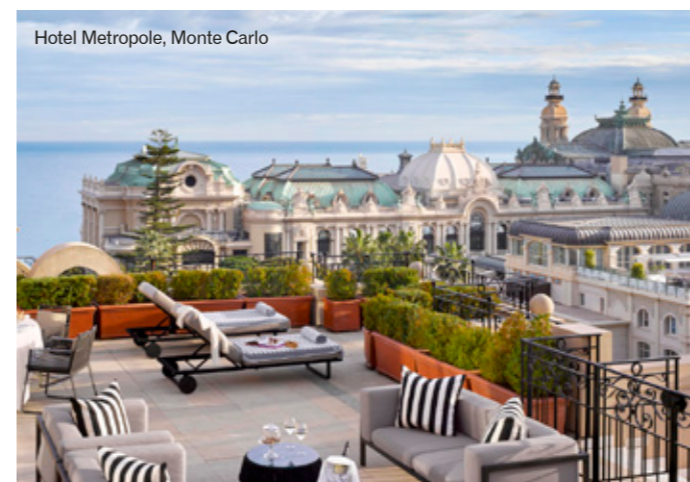
Santorini, Greece



Kalkan, Turkey



Sveti Stefan, Croatia



Hotel Metropole, Monte Carlo

## GREECE

If you had a whole summer at your disposal, you could have a wonderful time island hopping in the Cyclades or along the chain of Dodecanese. Failing that, you'd be better off choosing a single island and enjoying a classic style of holiday that has changed little with the passage of time - swimming in the sea, soaking up the Mediterranean sun, reading in the shade and, more importantly, indulging in long lazy lunches at beachfront tavernas.

Which island? There are around a hundred to choose from, but personal favourites include the northeast corner of Corfu; the olive-green island of Paxos; Skopelos, with its easy hydrofoil links to Skiathos, Alonissos and Skyros in the Sporades; fashionable Mykonos; dramatic Santorini; and Crete, which enjoys the longest summer.

**Where to stay:** Elounda Mare, Crete  
Grace Mykonos, Grace Santorini

### Also consider...

- the mainland coast, from the gorgeous beaches of the Halkidiki Peninsula in the north (stay at Eagles Palace) to the Pelion and Peloponnese in the south.

## CROATIA

Since much of the country is one long, thin stretch of coast, it is an obvious candidate for another of those classic summer holidays. There are 1,000 miles of seaside, stretching from the Istrian Peninsula on the Slovenian border in the north to Montenegro in the south.

True, most of the beaches are narrow and pebbly, but they are lapped by the clearest and cleanest waters in the Med. More than 100 beaches fly Blue Flags. Croatia also comes with an incredible heritage of UNESCO-protected cities, founded by the Venetians in the Middle Ages as showcases of their maritime supremacy. Dubrovnik, Byron's 'Pearl of the Adriatic,' is the best known, even more so since its starring role in 'Game of Thrones'.

**Where to stay:** Sveti Stefan, Montenegro  
Villa Dubrovnik

### Also consider...

- one or more of Croatia's 1,185 islands, many as easy to reach as the Isle of Wight is from mainland Hampshire. Hvar, Korcula and Brac are the most popular.

## TURKEY

Despite Turkey's ascendancy into the jet stream of mass tourism, the coast has by no means been ruined. The simple reason being that there's a lot of it, around 5,000 miles, and that's not counting the shores of the Black Sea. The big tour operators have also focused their energies on a limited number of major resorts which have acted like planets, pulling other critical masses into their orbit.

Kalkan, for example, is an unsung gem of the Med. Backed by mountains, which have put a serious constraint on high rise development, it's large enough to offer a full quota of holiday pleasures but still sufficiently intimate to make its visitors feel they've found somewhere rather special.

**Where to stay:** Amanruya, Bodrum  
D Maris Bay, Marmaris

## FRANCE

Ever since it was colonised by the English aristocracy at the *fin de siècle*, the French Riviera has retained those seductive images of moonlit bays and whispering palms, of reckless dashes along the Corniche by open-topped Bugatti, of small fortunes shifting to the whims of a roulette wheel, and of starlets sipping cocktails on yachts. It may not be quite so *chi-chi* now, but it's still the number one stretch of Med for summering in style.

Each of the main resorts has its own personality. Nice is ideal for those wanting big city distractions (including astounding collections of art). Cannes has its famous 'see and be seen' promenade; St Tropez attracts the wealthy yachting crowd and celebrity seekers. Menton remains charmingly English. St Raphael or Cagnes sur Mer offer greater tranquillity, while Monaco is all about sheer glamour.

**Where to stay:** Hotel Metropole, Monte Carlo  
Hotel La Perouse, Nice

### Also consider...

- Corsica, arguably the most beautiful island in the Mediterranean.
- the hilltop citadels, wine estates and ravishing countryside of inland Provence (stay at Hotel Crillon Le Brave near Avignon)

## CYPRUS

Cyprus, say the Cypriots, has two seasons - the short-sleeve shirt season and the long-sleeve shirt season. Unlike much of the Med, its big bonus is that you can safely rely on wonderful springs and autumns in this long, hot summer of a country.

Apart from its roll call of thirty-something Blue Flag beaches, the best of the island largely lies inland. Take your pick from a rash of Unesco-protected and Byzantine-frescoed churches and monasteries, the crusader castle of Kolossi, the Roman theatre at Kourion and the mosaics in the Paphos Archaeological Park.

**Where to stay:** Asimina Suites, Paphos  
Columbia Beach, Pissouri Bay



Asimina Suites, Cyprus

# THE MED FOR FAMILIES



The Ritz-Carlton Abama, Tenerife

Many of the resorts we have already singled out will be just as exciting for families as for couples. The key consideration is to choose the right hotel, one which not only caters for children but which makes them feel as welcome as the accompanying parents

## PUENTE ROMANO, MARBELLA

Named after the ancient Roman bridge that stands beside it, and set in sub-tropical gardens, this Andalusian village style resort presides over a seven-kilometre-long beach promenade punctuated by sun loungers.

Water sports are a key feature here, but when not at sea, there are fitness and wellness sessions, three swimming pools, two Dave Thomas-designed golf courses, horse riding in the Benahavis Mountains, tennis on championship courts which have hosted the Davis Cup, and - of course - a range of fine dining options. The hotel even has its own 55-foot yacht available for private hire.

## THE RITZ-CARLTON ABAMA, TENERIFE

While the grown-ups take to the fairways on the hotel's beautiful but challenging 18-hole course, or indulge in the spa, the Ritz Kids programme will delight the kids with supervised activities covering land and sea, with the emphasis on environmental and cultural responsibility.

Other attractions on the 160-hectare private estate, tucked away in one of Tenerife's most secluded spots, include a funicular carriage to an unspoilt, private beach, seven swimming pools and two natural pools, a tennis academy and a whole menu of restaurants.

## VILA VITA PARC, ALGARVE

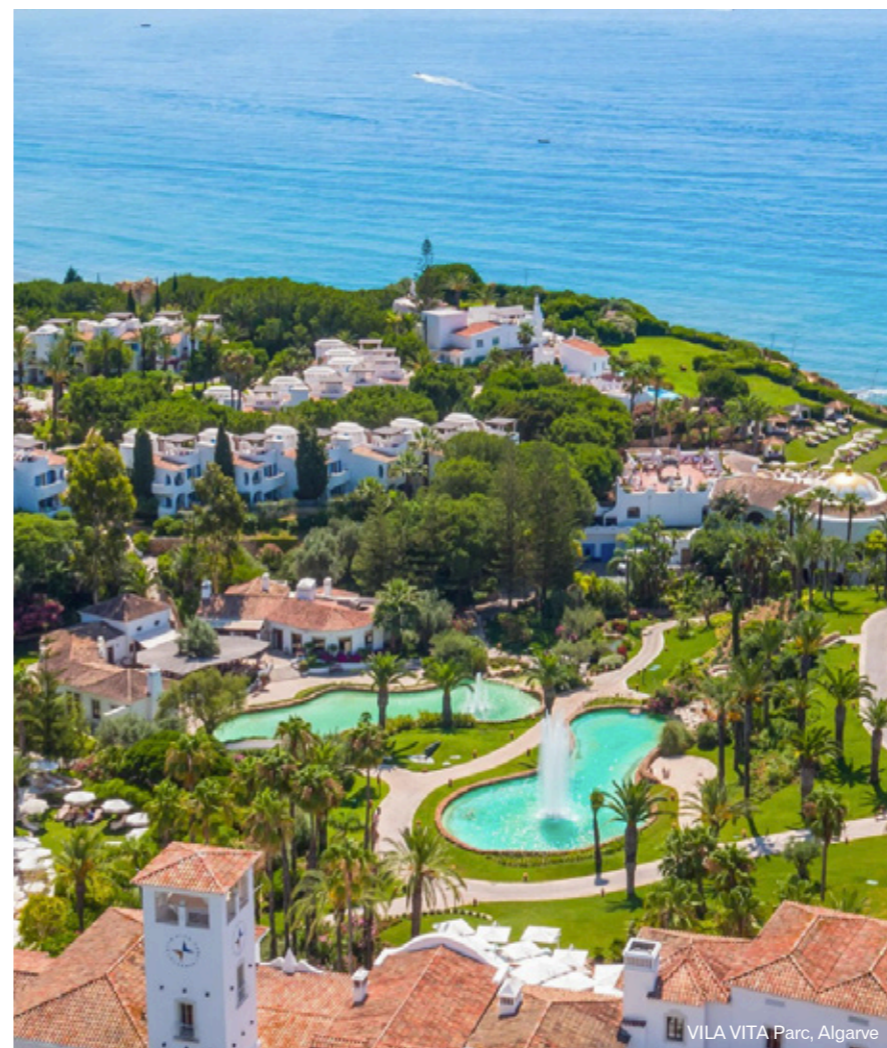
Stroll through the resort's 54-acre gardens, take in stunning seascapes, or laze on the white sand beach... whatever you do at VILA VITA Parc, you'll be experiencing the best of the Algarve.

Stay at this clifftop landmark, just 35 minutes' drive from the airport at Faro, and you can choose from six bars, eight different restaurants that range from stylish and modern to traditionally Portuguese, and 170 guest rooms, suites and villas, each with gorgeous garden or sea views from balconies or terraces. There's also a spa, tennis courts, sailing, canoeing, water skiing, windsurfing, banana boating and loads of activities for children, as well as a striking wine cellar ten metres below ground

## PINE CLIFFS RESIDENCE, ALGARVE

For keen golfers - at whatever level - the course at Pine Cliffs Residence offers a wonderful challenge with its rolling greens, multiple hazards and beautiful backdrop.

But once back at the 19th, you have at your disposal a private white sand beach, spa, fitness centre, five swimming pools, four restaurants, excursions to picturesque Moorish villages, and a choice of one, two or three-bedroom suites that are ideal for families.



VILA VITA Parc, Algarve



Borgo Egnazia, Puglia



Anassa, Cyprus

## FORTE VILLAGE, SARDINIA

Set amidst lush greenery beside a stretch of white sandy beach on the south coast of Sardinia, this highly acclaimed family resort boasts a wide choice of cutting edge accommodation, more than 20 restaurants, a leading brand spa and a quite sensational kids' club.

You'll also find a ten-pin bowling alley, go kart course, Chelsea Football Academy, tennis courts, mountain bikes, water sports...and a guest list that includes the likes of Serena Williams and Silvio Berlusconi.

## BORG EGNAZIA, PUGLIA

The sense of place you get from Borgo Egnazia is pure Puglia. Days can be spent exploring the region's Neolithic sites and charming hilltop villages, relaxing on fine beaches, or visiting the showcase of stunning baroque architecture that is Lecce, before returning to this wonderfully atmospheric Apulian retreat.

Set between the olive trees of the Itria Valley and the Adriatic Sea, Borgo Egnazia houses its privileged guests in garden and balcony 'La Corte' rooms within the main building, or in townhouse villas that come with three bedrooms, four bathrooms and private pool. There's also an indoor pool, three large outdoor pools, one of the world's best spas, golf at nearby San Domenico, cookery classes and a range of sporting activities both on and off the water.

## ANASSA, CYPRUS

The Anassa promises a family holiday for everyone. Here on the Akamas Peninsula, with the forested Troodos mountains as backdrop, you can play tennis, squash or cricket on the beach, ride quad bikes, be outrageously spoilt in the spa, practise yoga...or simply relax on your sun terrace while the little ones are in the kids' clubs, which cater for all ages including those hard to please teenagers.

Adding to your Anassa experience is a choice of 166 luxury rooms, suites and residences to suit all sizes, restaurants with child friendly menus, and evening family feasts accompanied by traditional music and folk dancing.

## ALSO CONSIDER...

One of the 'beach clubs' operated by either Neilson, Sunsail or Mark Warner. Spread across the Mediterranean, each of these resorts organises a huge range of sports - from tennis to windsurfing, and mountain biking to water skiing. And age-banded children's clubs allow parents to indulge in their own activities safe in the knowledge that their offspring are having (supervised) fun.



# CITY BREAKS

OUR 'FIRST ELEVEN' FOR THAT  
PERFECT WEEKEND GETAWAY...



*“Start with a boat trip, one of the floating bubbles that glide effortlessly along the web of canals, past the largest core of historic buildings in Europe.”*

Amsterdam



Paris

## AMSTERDAM

Compact and surprisingly provincial in scale for a European capital, Amsterdam has more bicycles than people. And there's more chance of spotting a heron than a high rise. Start with a boat trip, one of the floating bubbles that glide effortlessly along the web of canals, past the largest core of historic buildings in Europe. Go again at night when they light up like an advent calendar, then squirrel away an hour or two in a snug 'brown cafe' such as Hoppe, which dates back to 1670.

Amsterdam's stock of museums is vast, so ruthless editing is essential. But do not miss the Van Gogh, Stedelijk (which has a new wing nicknamed the 'Bath Tub') and Rijksmuseum, home to Rembrandt's Night Watch and many other works by Dutch Golden Age masters.

On Saturday morning check out the stalls on the Noordermarkt in the old working class district of De Jordaan, and tuck into a slice of the world's finest apple pie at Winkel 43. And for some of the best boutique shopping and cosiest cafes, wander the so-called 'Nine Streets' neighbourhood.

*Eurostar now operates a direct service from London St Pancras to Amsterdam, so you only need to change trains in Brussels on the return journey (this should also be direct by 2019).*

**Where to stay:** [Hotel Pulitzer](#), [The Dylan](#)

## PARIS

Nowhere in the world beats Paris for the weekend. More airlines fly there from more UK airports and some fifteen Eurostars a day set off from St Pancras, arriving at the Gare du Nord in a little over two hours.

Don't feel guilty if your weekend skips the Louvre, does not climb the Eiffel Tower, turns its back on the Sacre Coeur, skips the overpriced cafes on the Champs Elysees, and gives the inside of Notre Dame a wide berth. You've probably been before, and almost certainly will be going again, so why not keep things simple and focus on a single neighbourhood, one which offers a broad spectrum of pleasures as well as an unmistakable Parisian atmosphere?

Our favourite is the historic Marais. Here you can shop in independent boutiques, enjoy aperitifs in authentic bars, take your pick from a stock of museums including the wonderful Musee Picasso, stroll round the arcaded Place des Vosges (the city's most exquisite set piece of medieval architecture), and wander down the Rue des Rosiers, the spine of the old Jewish neighbourhood.

**Where to stay:** [Hotel Le Bristol](#), [Le Pavillon de la Reine](#), [La Reserve](#)

## VENICE

Venice is a city built for show, its sights global icons of art and architecture. If you've never been before, you're in for one of the most amazing treats of the travel world, an experience described by Truman Capote as 'eating an entire box of chocolate liqueurs in one go'.

Straddling 120 islands, sliced by 177 canals and crossed by 450 bridges, it is a place designed for meandering. And getting lost - let the magic rather than the map take over. Sooner or later you'll find Piazza San Marco, the 'finest drawing room in Europe' according to Napoleon, fronted by the Doges Palace and the Byzantine jewel box of the Basilica.

Take a vaporetto along the Grand Canal, lined with fancy-fronted medieval palaces, cross the Rialto Bridge, the Wall Street of the Middle Ages, check out the artworks in the Accademia and the Guggenheim. And save time for the satellite islands of Murano, Burano and Torcello.

*The most stylish approach to Venice is on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, its plush, wood-panelled cabins, white gloved stewards, champagne served in crystal glasses and original Art Deco dining cars echoing the 1920s glamour and romance of the 'Golden Age of Travel'.*

**Where to stay:** [Belmond Hotel Cipriani, Ca' Sagredo, Londra Palace](#)

## ROME

In no other city in the world do you stumble across history at every other step. Rome's 2,000-year roots sprout from the ground like rampant weeds, the centuries from pagan to Papal ingrained in the everyday fabric of the city. Head first for the *Centro Storico*, at its heart the baroque fountains of the Piazza Navona, the exuberant Trevi Fountain (remember your three coins) and the Pantheon, the ancient world's best-preserved monument and built, according to Michelangelo, 'by angels, not by men'.

Of course, you'll need to see the Forum and the Colosseum, the Spanish Steps and the fancy stores along Via Condotti. Then there's St Peter's, its cavernous interior likened by Goethe to 'entering eternity' and Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, that 'stew of nudes' as one Pope described it. The eternal City wasn't built in a day, nor can it be seen in one, but give yourself at least a long weekend to cover some of the ground, fuelled by some delicious Roman food.

**Where to stay:** [Hotel D'Inghilterra, Hotel de Russie](#)

## FLORENCE

Crucible of the Renaissance, with the Uffizi the greatest treasure house of Old Masters on the planet (although you'll need to step across to the Accademia to admire Michelangelo's David). Focal point of this wondrous city is the Duomo, the great iceberg of a cathedral with its distinctive pink, green and white 'cassata' stripes.

Shoppers will find all the leading fashion brands on Via de' Tornabuoni, but don't miss the Leather School on Piazza Santa Croce where you can watch craftsmen at work before buying.

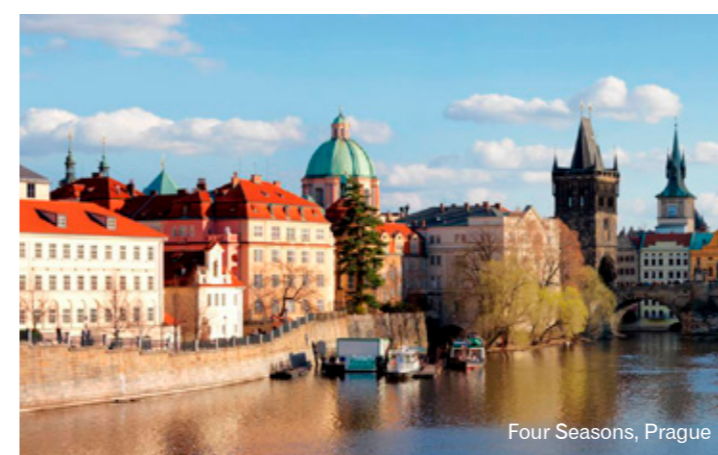
**Where to stay:** [Belmond Villa San Michele, Hotel Brunelleschi, Il Salviatino](#)



Rialto Bridge, Venice



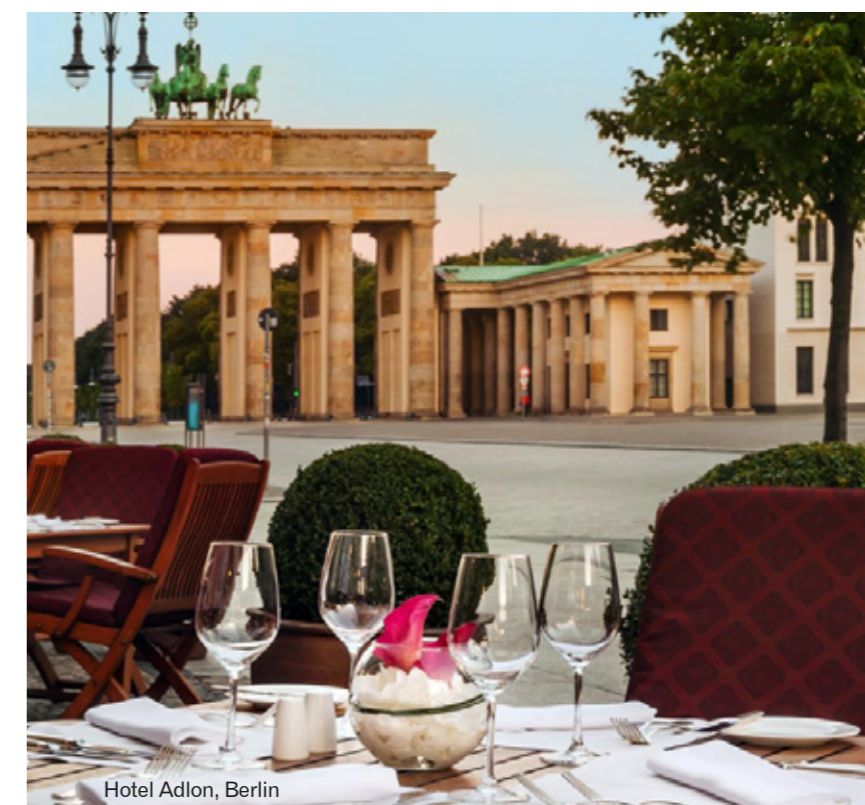
Rome



Four Seasons, Prague



Belmond Villa San Michele, Florence



Hotel Adlon, Berlin

## BERLIN

Begin in aptly named Mitte, close to the Brandenburg Gate and incised by Unter den Linden, the grandest of all Berlin's boulevards. This historic district is now the dynamic heart of the city, with many of its great art museums on an island here in the River Spree. Arguably the single must see is the Pergamon, which contains antiquities equal to those in either the Louvre or British Museum.

Walk the famous shopping street, Kurfurstendamm (Ku'damm for short), and check out the food halls in the KaDaWe department store. You'll discover more varieties of sausage than you ever thought possible. Other essentials include the Daniel Libeskind designed Jewish Museum and the iconic Reichstag, renovated by Norman Foster in the early 1990s to symbolise Germany's unification.

**Where to stay:** [Hotel Adlon, Das Stue](#)

## PRAGUE

Known as the 'Paris of the East', Prague's history spans many centuries. Untouched by the Second World War and left alone by city planners during its 40 years under communism, Prague has an impressive cultural heritage, its architectural influences spanning Renaissance arcades to soaring gothic towers.

If you do nothing else in this enchanting and beautiful city, then brave the throngs crossing historic Charles Bridge and climb the cobbled streets leading to the majestic castle complex and gargantuan St Vitus Cathedral, which contains the tomb of King Vaclav (Wenceslas of Christmas carol fame). The views from here across the city and the Vltava River are wonderful.

**Where to stay:** [Aria Hotel Prague, Four Seasons](#)

## MADRID

Compared with Paris, Rome and Amsterdam, even its arch rival Barcelona, Madrid has far fewer essential sights, must see icons or striking works of architecture. But it does have outstanding collections of art in the Prado (Goya, El Greco, Velázquez etc.), Reina Sofia (home to Picasso's Guernica) and Thyssen-Bornemisza (from Caravaggio to Chagall) museums.

The city's second draw is its nightlife. Madrid never sleeps, but eats, drinks and dances till dawn. The locals are known as 'The Cats' for good reason. However, with fast and frequent trains from Atocha station, it's worth keeping something in reserve for a day trip to the walled city of Toledo and the ecclesiastical extravaganza of its Gothic cathedral.

**Where to stay:** [Hotel Ritz, Villa Real](#)



Nimb Hotel, Copenhagen



Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

## COPENHAGEN

With its museum and galleries, cool bars and hot restaurants, not to mention the now fashionable concept of 'hygge' (enjoying life's simple pleasures), the Danish capital has been slowly climbing the hit parade of city breaks. It will appeal to a broad range of interests. Must 'sees and dos' include a boat trip from the historic Nyhavn quayside, browsing the signature stores - Illums Bolighus for houseware, Georg Jensen for jewellery and Royal Copenhagen for porcelain - on pedestrianised Stroget, and exploring Tivoli, part funfair, part garden and part fairy tale.

Denmark is of course synonymous with design, best reflected in the Kunstinstitut and the Danish Design Centre. Foodies will want a table at Noma, but as one of the world's best restaurants you'll need to book months in advance and warn the bank manager. And for modern art, hop on the local train to Louisiana, spectacularly located overlooking the sea with the Oresund Bridge in the distance and Sweden on the horizon.

**Where to stay:** Nimb Hotel, 71 Nyhavn

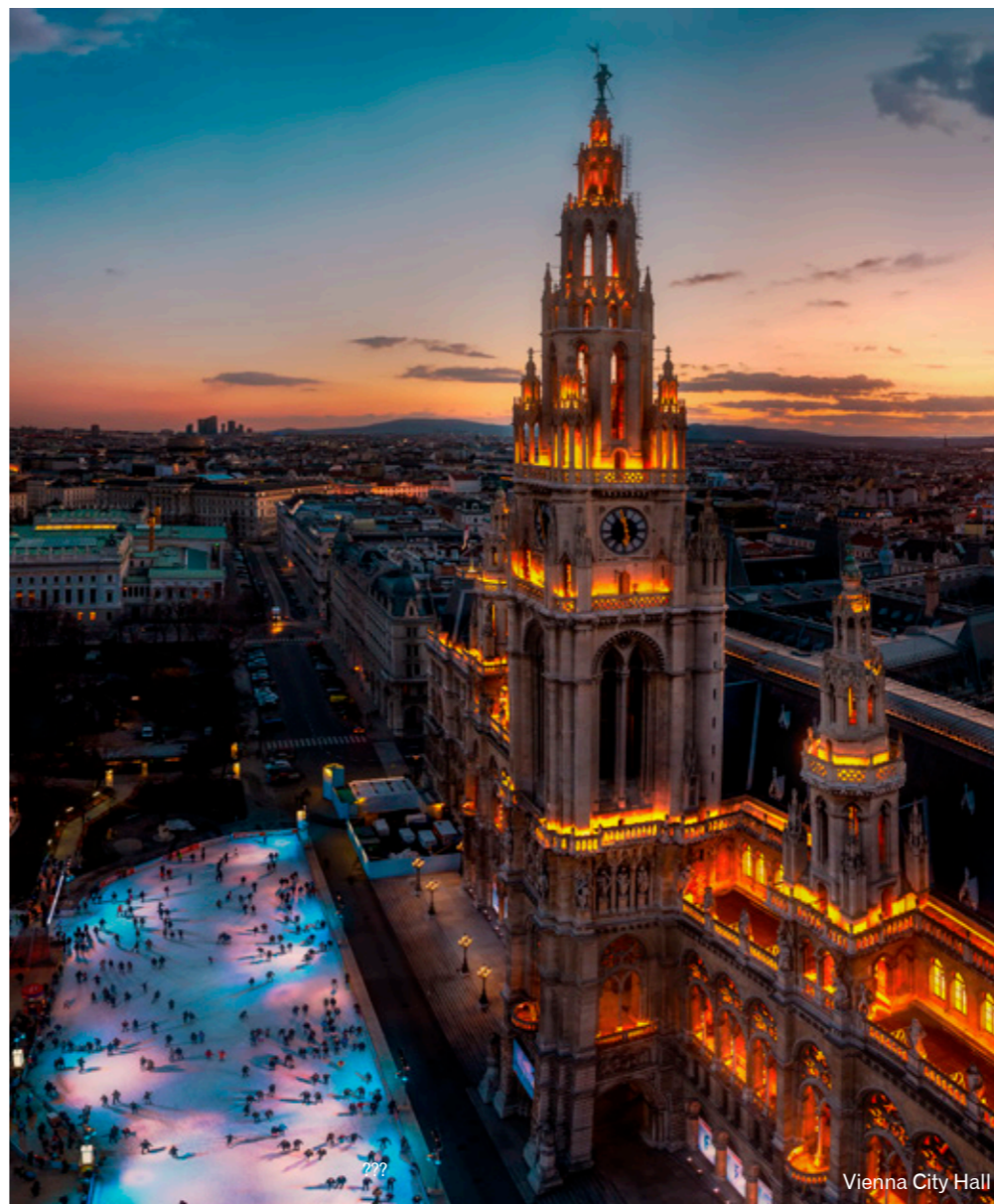
## ST PETERSBURG

Russia's 'Window on the West', the creation of Peter the Great on the Neva River, never fails to amaze, the sheer grandeur of its imperial buildings all the more remarkable given the effects of the Russian Revolution and World War II. The jewel in the city's crown is of course the Romanovs' old Winter Palace, which now houses one of the finest collections of art in the world in its Hermitage Museum. The collection is also vast - spend just seven minutes in front of each painting and you'll emerge 49 years later.

Best of the many other lavish piles built for the tsars in and around St Petersburg are Pavlovsk, Alexander Palace and the baroque Catherine Palace at Pushkin. Save time too for the fabulous Faberge Museum, a little opera or ballet at the Mariinsky Theatre, and a stroll along Nevsky Prospekt, the city's Champs Elysees whose opulence is reflected in a number of deluxe five-star hotels.

*You might also want to consider a twin centre trip, linking St Petersburg with Moscow via the new Sapsan high speed train.*

**Where to stay:** Hotel Astoria, Belmond Grand Hotel Europe, Four Seasons



Vienna City Hall

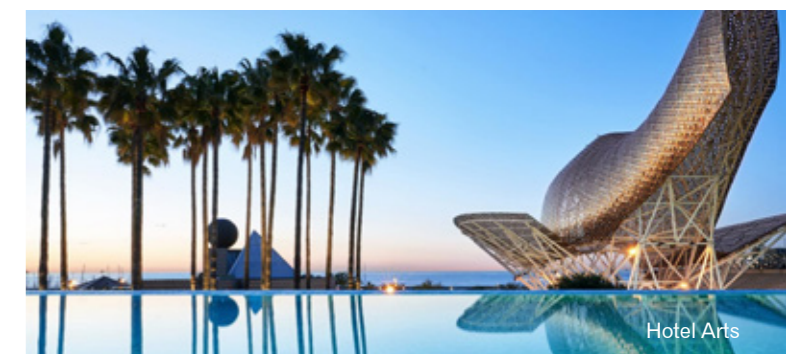
## VIENNA

Home to more than 100 museums, from Freud to funerals, its new Museumsquartier the contemporary antidote to imperial magnificence with modernist works by Schiele, Klimt and Kokoschka housed within the former Baroque stables of the Habsburg emperors. For an initial overview of the city though, take a ride on tram number 1 around the Ringstrasse past a pageant of historic buildings from different eras - the neo-Gothic City Hall, the neoclassical Parliament the neo-Renaissance Opera House and even the neo-Tudor army barracks.

If the weather is fine, head for the Prater, part funfair with its iconic 200-foot high Ferris wheel of Third Man fame. Make time too for both the Schonbrunn summer palace (the Hofburg winter palace is home to the famous Spanish Riding School) and St Stephen's Cathedral, whose eerie catacombs lie at the heart of the city. You'll also find scores of traditional cafes such as Demel, a gateaux grotto of dark woods, pitted mirrors and crystal chandeliers.

**Where to stay:** Hotel Konig von Ungarn, Hotel Sacher

## BEST OF THE REST...



Hotel Arts

### Barcelona

The colossal Sagrada Família is of course a 'must see' here in the city of Gaudi, but make time too for the indoor markets at art deco La Boqueria and for a leisurely stroll along Las Ramblas, Barcelona's main artery but as much theatre as thoroughfare.

**Stay at:** Hotel Arts



### Seville

'Qui no ha vista Sevilla, no ha vista maravilla', and indeed this wondrous city jealously guards a magnificent cultural legacy dominated by a Gothic cathedral that is the largest of its kind in the world.

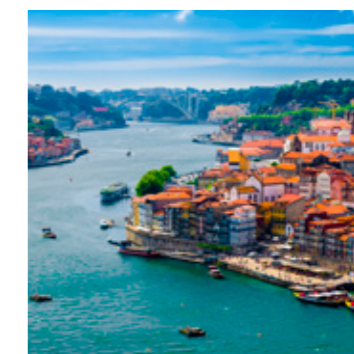
**Stay at:** Hospes Las Casas del Rey de Baeza



### Krakow

Poland's second city is a medieval gem and the country's cultural hub, with galleries, museums, churches and castles radiating from the vast Rynek Glowny square at its centre. It is also the gateway to Auschwitz, 40 miles to the west.

**Stay at:** Hotel Copernicus



### Oporto

The many port wine cellars may be its biggest draw, but this handsome and historic town on the banks of the Douro has cobbled charm and a great Saturday morning market.

**Stay at:** The Yeatman



### Helsinki

Finland's seaside capital is a compact world of cathedrals, museums, art nouveau architecture, designer shopping and boutique cafes.

**Stay at:** Hotel Kamp

# BELMOND'S EUROPE



Belmond Hotel Cipriani, Venice

As the ultimate curator and connoisseur of travel experiences, Belmond brings a unique brand of luxury to its global collection of hotels, trains and river cruises.

The collection includes some of the most iconic hotels in the world, intimate, atmospheric and historic properties that offer an unmistakable sense of place. You'll always know where you are with Belmond.

## CITIES

Belmond has a foothold in three of Europe's most historic and best-loved cities. In Venice, Belmond Hotel Cipriani sits on the tip of Giudecca Island across the lagoon from St Mark's Square; Belmond Villa San Michele overlooks Florence from its hillside setting in Fiesole; and Belmond Grand Hotel Europe is located on Nevsky Prospekt in the heart of St Petersburg.

London will also be on the map shortly, when Belmond Cadogan Hotel reopens for the Christmas season in December 2018.

## THE MED

The Mediterranean boasts five Belmond properties, two of which are on the Italian mainland. Belmond Hotel Splendido has glorious sea views from its rooms and terraced restaurant high above picturesque Portofino on the Ligurian coast. Further to the south on the Amalfi coast, Belmond Hotel Caruso offers equally outstanding views from its balcony perch in the jasmine-scented, medieval village of Ravello.



Belmond Castello Di Casole, Tuscany



Alouette, Belmond Afloat in France



Belmond Hotel Caruso, Ravello



Venice Simplon-Orient-Express

## ISLANDS

Also in Italy, but just off its toe on the island of Sicily, the chic resort town of Taormina plays host to both the elegant private beach residence of Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea and the timeless Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo. It was here that Truman Capote once stayed for two years, and where DH Lawrence wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Hidden away among olive and citrus orchards on the north-west coast of Mallorca is Belmond La Residencia. This intimate hideaway with its award-winning spa looks across the hilltop village of Deia, perhaps best known most famously as the home of war poet Robert Graves.

Last but not least of the island portfolio is Belmond Reid's Palace, grand dame of Madeira with breathtaking ocean views but whose world of timeless indulgence is very family friendly.

## COUNTRYSIDE ESCAPES

Oxford heritage meets French flair at Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, where maitre de maison Raymond Blanc continues to set the standard for haute cuisine in the UK at this picture perfect 15th century manor house.

And when it opens at the end of May 2018, Belmond Castello Di Casole's 400-acre estate will showcase the very best of rural Tuscany.

## TRAINS & CRUISES

As the ultimate curator of travel experiences, Belmond can also move you from place to place, perhaps most famously aboard its flagship Venice Simplon-Orient-Express which has recently unveiled new luxury grand suites.

Closer to home, you can choose between a weekend break on Belmond British Pullman or one of the longer rail journeys offered by Belmond Royal Scotsman and the wonderful Belmond Grand Hibernian. Whichever you choose though, you will travel in timeless style aboard elegant carriages through some of the finest scenery in the British Isles.

The Belmond experience also extends to rivers and canals. Head across the Channel and you can step aboard one of the seven luxury barges that make up Belmond Afloat in France for a leisurely exploration of the country's most celebrated waterways.

## THE CARIBBEAN

Beyond Europe, and basking in the warm glow of the Caribbean, you'll find Belmond La Samanna on one of St Martin's purest white-sand beaches and the enchanting Anguillan hideaway of Belmond Cap Juluca - due to open following a complete renovation in November 2018.

# THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



Weekend city breaks, longer journeys through New England and California, dude ranch adventures in the rugged 'wild west' of Montana...a selection of ideas from our North American portfolio.



## NEW YORK

Whether it's your first visit to the 'Big Apple' or your fiftieth, New York never ceases to amaze. That tired old saying 'been there, done that' simply could never apply. As sandbanks shift, so neighbourhoods are always changing here, run down blocks are renovated, and chic stores open in previous no go zones. The city now has one of the lowest crime rates in the USA.

NYC makes a slow start at weekends, so there's no need to rush your American breakfast before heading out. Begin in Washington Square, the heart of Greenwich Village and hub of the old Beat culture. From there, pick up the High Line elevated walkway, once a railway track but now planted with trees, flowers and shrubs, and head for the new Whitney Museum of American Art and the bustling Chelsea Market foot court.

Walk off brunch or lunch with a stroll or bike ride around Central Park. Book tickets for MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) and view its collection of Picassos, Matisse and Jackson Pollocks. By way of contrast, the Frick Collection is full of Old Masters, including Rembrandt and Vermeer. And for serious art lovers, there's the original Whitney and maybe the Guggenheim, whose collection is housed in Frank Lloyd Wright's distinctive 'helter skelter' building.

For dramatic views of the New York skyline, don't miss out on your free ride past the Statue of Liberty on the Staten Island Ferry. Or cross Brooklyn Bridge on foot, before heading back towards Wall Street and the deeply moving 9/11 Memorial and Museum.

Stay at: [Baccarat](#), [The Carlyle](#), [The Surrey](#)

## BOSTON

Boston is a city for walkers. Take a stroll around the charming, historic, gas-lit neighbourhood of Beacon Hill. Then pick up the Freedom Trail, a line of red dots on the sidewalk that will lead you through 200 years of US history and several revolutionary sites, including the church steeple where Paul Revere hung his lanterns to warn of the impending British invasion.

'God made Boston on a wet Sunday,' wrote Raymond Chandler, which might explain why the city has so many excellent museums. In affluent Back Bay, there's the Museum of Fine Arts and the unique Isabella Stewart Gardner, a Venetian mansion groaning with treasures from Rembrandts to Rubens and tapestries to Titians that were collected by this 19th century society queen and philanthropist.

Two worthy but very different waterfront attractions include the Aquarium and the powerful Kennedy Museum, on the edge of town and housed in IM Pei's striking building. And if time allows, ride 'The T' subway to Cambridge on the north bank of the Charles River and explore the Harvard campus and one or two of its many museums. Pick of the collections would include the 800 species of flowers beautifully crafted from glass in the Botanical Museum, and the Islamic art in the Sackler Gallery.

Stay at: [Boston Harbor Hotel](#), [The Elliot Hotel](#)



## WASHINGTON

Washington is one of the world's great imperial cities, its squint-white marble memorials and monuments, towering statuary, triumphal avenues, obelisks, shrines and stately edifices every inch as majestic as those in Paris or Rome, Vienna or St Petersburg.

In many ways Washington is a surprisingly un-American city, full of breadth, incised by wide boulevards, punctuated with circuses and partitioned by parks. A fifth of the map is shaded green. Washington's famous National Mall is not a shoppers' paradise with branches of Gap or Walmart, but a swathe of grass and gravel, a déjà vu of the Tuileries Gardens in Paris rather than utterly urban USA.

Washington is also a museum city, a repository for some of America's greatest treasures. Stretching for two miles, from the arm-chaired Abe at the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol, the Mall is lined with fourteen separate museums. Make that a very long weekend if you can!

**Stay at: [Kimpton Hotel Palomar](#), [Kimpton Rouge Hotel](#)**

## CHICAGO

Chicago is the classic American city, an open-air museum of architecture and one of the few places in the world where the words 'high rise' are synonymous with structural magnificence. 'Make no little plans,' urged the city planner Daniel H Burnham, 'they have no magic to stir men's blood.'

To appreciate Chicago's fine looks, take a Chicago's First Lady cruise on the city's eponymous waterway. Then ride the escalator to the airy summit of Willis Tower. For a more architectural bias to your weekends, head out to Oak Park, a quiet semi-rural village on the edge of town where Frank Lloyd Wright's prairie-style masterpieces abound. You can also visit his home and studio.

There are many museums here too, but the one not to miss is the Art Institute of Chicago in Millennium Park, one of the city's many green acreages on the shores of Lake Michigan.

**Stay at: [The Palmer House Hilton](#), [The Peninsula Chicago](#)**

## DUDE RANCHING

For a true taste of the American West, book yourself into a dude ranch. You'll find them in several states, particularly in Montana and Wyoming but also in Arizona, Texas, Utah and Colorado. Subject to location, some open year-round, others are seasonal.

There are ranches that welcome complete beginners, with riding done at the gentlest of clops, some that are more resort than ranch with all the home comforts and a range of activities, and a few that are genuine working farms where you can live the cowboy (or cowgirl!) dream and wrangle for real.

The Resort at Paws Up offers the best of both worlds. Here, on this 37,000-acre working cattle ranch under the vast skies of Montana, guests can combine as much time in the saddle as they want with hiking, fly fishing, white water rafting and hot air ballooning. You can also choose to stay in either a cabin or a luxury safari-style tent, and eat at one or two restaurants or al fresco round the camp fire on barbecued prime US steaks.

**Stay at: [The Resort at Paws Up, Montana](#)  
[Brush Creek Ranch, Wyoming](#)**



Washington



Vermont, New England



Lincoln Memorial, Washington



Oak Park, Chicago



Big Sur, California



The Resort at Paws Up, Montana

## NEW ENGLAND

Boston is the gateway to New England. To the south lies Cape Cod, a wholly maritime place with nowhere more than six miles from the sound of waves and the screech of scavenging gulls. Cape Cod in turn is the gateway to two very different islands but both an easy ferry journey away, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

To the west lie the softly rolling Berkshires and some of the prettiest villages in the US, an enchanting world of wooden churches with pencil fine spires, traditional country stores and elegant weatherboarded inns. For an even deeper rural experience, head north to Vermont, 'a state in a natural state' to borrow from long-time resident and poet, Robert Frost.

An easy week of motoring will give you plenty of time to explore the Green Mountains of Vermont, before crossing the Connecticut River to the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Find a few more days, and you can add the stunning shoreline of Maine as far as Bar Harbor and the Acadia National Park, a wild fist of coastal glory, before returning to Boston for your flight home.

**When to go: [Either in high summer from June to August, or from late September to early November for the glorious fall colours.](#)**

## CALIFORNIA

Three times the size of England, with blazing deserts and snow-capped peaks, wild Pacific surf, enthralling cities and internationally-acclaimed vineyards, California cries out to be explored.

Begin in San Francisco. Bound on three sides by water, its roller coaster streets lined with pastel pretty Victorian houses, San Francisco is a city of neighbourhoods, ranging from enormous Chinatown to Italian North Beach and each with a distinctive social demographic. San Francisco is also a city of wonderful museums.

From Frisco, hire a car and follow route 101 north across the Golden Gate Bridge towards the historic city of Sonoma and the Napa Valley, whose renowned vineyards produce the finest American wine. Then turn inland to the vertical world of Yosemite National Park, where waterfalls hang from 3,000-foot granite cliffs like bridal veils.

Heading back to the coast, drive slowly south to Los Angeles, hugging the voluptuous ocean shoreline on Pacific Highway 1 via Big Sur. It's one of the most scenic drives on the planet, so take your time and stop off at Monterey (home to Cannery Row and an excellent aquarium), the artsy town of Carmel, Randolph Hearst's castle and Santa Barbara, picture postcard queen of America's 'Riviera'.

End your California road trip in 'La La Land'. It's everything you've seen in the movies, but then magnified, stretched and glamorized many times over. Essential viewings include Hollywood with its iconic 'Walk of Fame', Beverly Hills, funky Venice Beach, the Third Street Promenade at Santa Monica and the exclusive boutiques on Rodeo Drive (stratospheric prices maybe, but definitely worth a browse). And if you're travelling with the kids, then Universal Studios and Disneyland should also be on the agenda.

**When to go: [Best from May to October. If you want to avoid the crowds and benefit from low season rates, travel in late November/early December following Thanksgiving.](#)**

# DUBAI & OMAN



One&Only Royal Mirage, Dubai

From the 'Riviera of the Middle East' to an authentic Arabian adventure in the ancient kingdom of Oman - the very best of the Persian Gulf.

## DUBAI

For years, the sheikdom of Dubai was little more than a pit stop, a place where planes bound for the Far East topped up their tanks with fuel hot off the wells. Dubai as a destination in its own right was not even a consideration.

Today, the so-called 'Riviera of the Middle East' is one of the fastest growing tourist destinations in the world. With superb white sands and a perfect climate from November to March, day or night flights of less than seven hours in both directions, just a three-hour time difference, and a string of superb hotels within an hour's drive of the airport, it's little wonder that Dubai leads the way when it comes to winter sun.

Dubai is healthy, hygienic and super-sanitized. You can drink the water and, more to the point, you can drink the wine, the beer and whisky (in hotels at least, not out and about). You don't need any jabs, there's no malaria, you don't need a visa and there are no hustlers either on the beach or even in the souks.

Apart from a tiny pocket of old town, with a ruined fortress, an excellent museum and a few distinctive wind towers built to funnel the whisper

of a breeze before air conditioning was born, there's nothing of historical or archaeological note.

But aside from doing very little beside the hotel pool or on the beach, there's an interesting menu of activities to keep you amused. 4WD vehicles are on hand for 'wadi bashing' adventures along desiccated river beds and for roller coaster rides across a vast, desolate ocean of dunes, tilting and tipping at heart-thumping angles. Or you might prefer the bounce of the ball and a round or two on one of the many cutting edge, championship golf courses.

There's also shopping for herbal cures, saffron and frankincense in the spice souk and gold in another selling nothing but. And if you have the kids with you, go for a splash and a plethora of thrills in the Wild Wadi Water Park next to the Jumeirah Beach hotel.

**Where to stay:** [Madinat Jumeirah](#), [One&Only Royal Mirage](#), [Zabeel Saray \(good for families\)](#)



Alila Jebel Akhdar



Wahiba Sands



Musandam Peninsula

## OMAN

You could spend an entire week in Oman idling on a sunbed, luxuriating in a five-star hotel, enjoying glorious winter sunshine...but you'd be missing a treat.

Oman, an ancient kingdom whose previous visitors included the Queen of Sheba, Job, Sinbad the Sailor and Alexander the Great, offers an authentic sense of place. It is a rich blend of traditional Arabian culture, historic forts and palaces, beautiful mosques, wild mountains and remarkable deserts.

As a bonus, all these natural and man-made assets are underpinned by a warm hospitality from Omanis, who seem remarkably content with life under their benevolent Sultan.

First stop...modern, civilised Muscat. Oman's capital, with its colossal Grand Mosque, Sultan's Palace and Muttrah Souq, where you can stock up on everything from pashminas to frankincense, is well worth a day or two's pause. And if you travel in the first few months of the year and stay at the Shangri-La, you might be lucky enough to see turtles lumbering ashore at night to lay their eggs, leaving the tiny hatchlings to make the hazardous journey alone back to the sanctuary of the water.

Then head inland, either with a guide or your own 4WD, to explore the country's mysterious interior. Highlights should include the

ancient capital of Nizwa and its Friday morning livestock market, a sight unchanged since Biblical times; the spectacular Jebel Akhdar mountains, as wild, barren and bone dry a landscape as you'll find anywhere on the planet; the medieval oasis of Misfah, known as the 'Heaven on Earth' because of its cool summer temperatures and abundance of fruit (pomegranate, mango, papaya, fig, banana, date, lemon...) that is nurtured by an ingenious web of spring-fed channels in another scene straight from the Old Testament; and the Wahiba Sands, a desert straight out of central castings, a Lawrence of Arabia world of immense, rolling, golden dunes that crest at over 100 metres and stretch for more than 100 miles. You can spend the night here at the aptly named Desert Nights Camp under a blazing canopy of stars. Utterly romantic.

By this stage, you've probably earned some R&R and a few more days back in Muscat at one of those luxurious, five-star hotels beside the shimmering azure waters of the Arabian Sea.

**Where to stay:** [Muscat - Shangri-La Al Husn](#), [The Chedi, Al Bustan Palace \(good for families\)](#), [Jebel Akhdar - Alila](#), [Anantara Musandam Peninsula - Six Senses Zighy Bay](#)

*“Raymond Blanc’s flagship at Le Manoir, and the touchstone of haute cuisine for more than 30 years, has two of these defining Michelin stars.”*

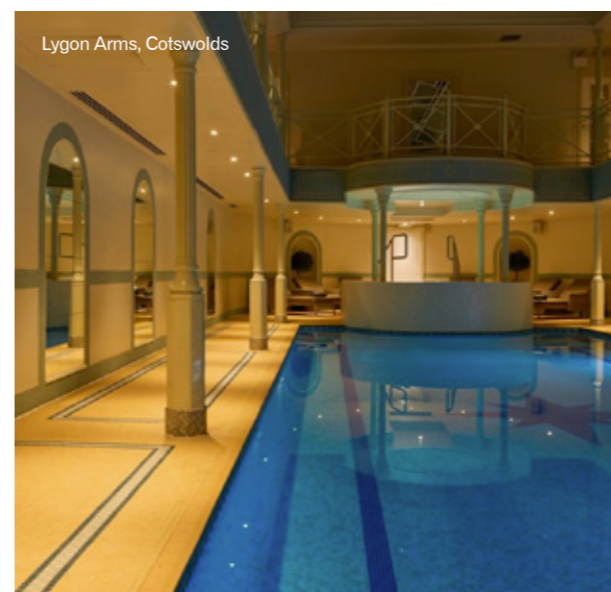
# THE BEST OF THE REST

WE’VE COVERED OCEAN AND RIVER CRUISING, THE CARIBBEAN AND INDIAN OCEAN, FAMILY HOLIDAYS IN THE MED AND CITY BREAKS, BUT THERE ARE STILL A FEW STRINGS LEFT TO OUR BOW...

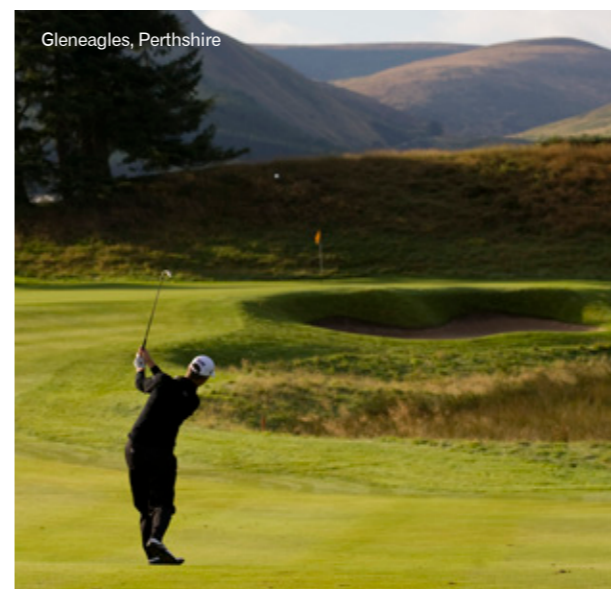
Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons, Oxfordshire



Belmond Royal Scotsman



Lygon Arms, Cotswolds



Gleneagles, Perthshire

## HOLIDAYS AT HOME

With the growing interest in ‘staycations’, we are well placed to organise holidays for you in the UK.

You might want to try out the enormous range of facilities provided by some of our grandest hotels, Scotland’s imposing Gleneagles with its three championship golf courses for example. Or enjoy the culinary delights of a more intimate retreat such as Raymond Blanc’s Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons near Oxford. Whatever your preference, we are more than happy to help you find your perfect roost at home as well as abroad.

Indeed, the rising standards in our kitchens over the last few years has been nothing short of remarkable. Chances are that wherever you choose to holiday in the UK, you’ll not be far from one of the constellation of Michelin-starred restaurants. Blanc’s flagship at Le Manoir, and the touchstone of haute cuisine for more than 30 years, has two of these defining stars.

At many of these hotels and resorts you’ll also find state of the art wellness centres, where you can indulge in a wide range of therapies from Swedish massage to ayurveda. Gleneagles, again, has an award winning spa where you can recover from your golfing exertions, whereas England is well served by the likes of Chewton Glen in Hampshire’s New Forest and Lygon Arms in the Cotswolds.

For those looking to travel around the country rather than stay put, we can instead design fly drive itineraries based on properties that belong to the Relais & Chateaux or Pride of Britain portfolios.

And if you prefer to let the train take the strain, then Belmond offer a choice of day trips or weekend breaks on the British Pullman, as well as longer journeys aboard the Royal Scotsman and their wonderful new Grand Hibernian, whose elegant carriages each bear the name of an Irish county.





Zermatt, Switzerland



Oasis of the Seas, Royal Caribbean



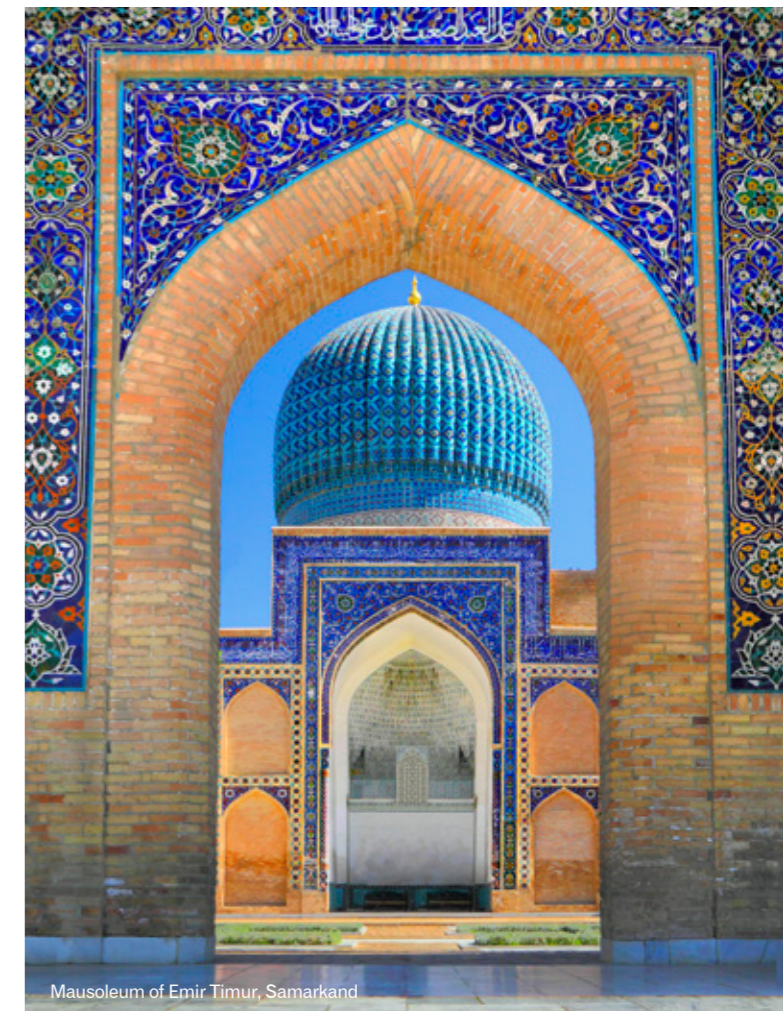
Shanti Maurice, Mauritius



Elounda Beach, Crete



Vardzia, Georgia



Mausoleum of Emir Timur, Samarkand

## SLOPING OFF

While winter induces a craving for tropical sunshine, swaying palm fronds and sugar white beaches for some, for others it's the time of year when the compass swings decisively towards the Alps and the prospect of a week or two on the slopes.

Whether you're an absolute beginner or seasoned pro, skier or snowboarder, or someone who simply enjoys soaking up the charms of a traditional Alpine village, we can not only guide you to the best resort for your needs but also to some of the finest hotels and smartest catered chalets.

**Best for chalets: Meribel and Val D'Isere, France**  
**Verbier, Switzerland**

**Best for hotels: Austrian Arlberg, Italian Dolomites**  
**Zermatt, Switzerland**

The arctic tundra of northern Scandinavia also comes into its own at this time of year, with husky mushing, heli-skiing, ice hotels, Father Christmas and the wondrous spectacle of the Northern Lights all vying for your attention.

And don't forget that many resorts don't just shut up shop when the last snows have melted. Indeed, it was to the Alps and not the Costas that we first ventured abroad on package summer holidays, to take the clean air, hop aboard paddle steamers, hike the hills and swim in mountain lakes. Today, the menu of activities is even more extensive, with mountain biking, via ferrata climbing and glacier skiing to set your pulse racing that little bit quicker.

**Best summer resorts: Alpbach, Austria**  
**Megeve, France**  
**St Moritz, Switzerland**  
**San Cassiano, Italy**

## GOING SOLO

Travelling on your own can be tough, as anyone who's tried smearing sun cream between their own shoulder blades knows only too well! Single travellers should perhaps consider an escorted tour, where there is a built-in level of companionship and reduced surcharges for single room occupancy.

*We have our own Escorted Tours programme - please ask us for details*

Cruising also offers an ideal atmosphere to make friends in an environment that's especially secure for women travelling on their own. Many ships have single cabins, with social activities and events organised on a regular basis throughout the cruise.

**Best cruises for single passengers: Royal Caribbean**

## VILLAS

Villas are just the ticket for private groups of families and friends. Whether there are six of you or as many as twenty, we can find you a property that will fit you and fit your needs. We can even take the 'self' out of the self-catering by arranging for a cook to prepare all your meals.

Or you can choose a villa that's part of a resort complex, where you can combine the freedom and exclusivity of your own 'place' with all the communal and recreational facilities of the hotel, including its pools, spas, bars and restaurants.

**Best villa resorts: Bahia del Duque, Tenerife**  
**Blue Waters, Antigua**  
**Elounda Beach, Crete**  
**Monte da Quinta, Algarve**  
**Round Hill, Jamaica**

## UZBEKISTAN

Follow in the wake of Genghis Khan along the ancient Silk Road to the historic cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, worlds of ancient palaces, mosques and minarets. You'll also explore the labyrinthine alleyways of historic Khiva, more living museum than town.

And if you want to add another 'Stan' or two to your journey through Central Asia, then Uzbekistan shares a border with four of them - Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

**When to go: Either in the spring from April to May or in the autumn from September to early November, when the desert climate is comfortably warm and dry.**

## GEORGIA

Hidden away for centuries behind the soaring, natural fortifications of the Caucasus Mountains, and more recently by the Iron Curtain, Georgia is a place little changed, little visited, but full of undiscovered surprises.

The scenery is spectacular. Natural highlights include the Darial Gorge, carved out by the Terek River on Georgia's border with Russia; the unique 12th century cave monasteries of Vardzia, perched high on a cliff above the Kura River; and Mtskheta, a UNESCO World Heritage city of medieval buildings and Coptic-style churches.

**When to go: Either side of the summer heat and winter freeze, so in May, June and September.**

## WELLNESS

Long before the Beatles embarked on their famous pilgrimage to Rishikesh back in 1969, the town had been a focus for devotees seeking spiritual enlightenment. Located on the banks of the Upper Ganges, in the foothills of the Himalaya, Rishikesh was also the birthplace of yoga.

Some fifty years on, 'Wellness Travel' has become a global phenomenon. The Subcontinent may still lead the way, but it has now spread far and wide with spa retreats and health resorts rapidly on the increase across the world.

Many of the hotels we feature, in Europe, the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, have state of the art facilities that offer everything from yoga and pilates to meditation and ayurvedic therapy. Some are dedicated 'destination spas' where you will be tended to round the clock by qualified medical practitioners, others offer wellness as part of a broader spectrum, but wherever you end up, the chances now of you returning home from holiday in better holistic shape than when you left have greatly improved!

**Best spa resorts: Canyon Ranch Tucson, Arizona**  
**La Reserve Ramatuelle, Cote d'Azur**  
**Sha Wellness, Alicante**  
**Shanti Maurice, Mauritius**

# MEET THE TEAM

AND SHARE THEIR  
'ULTIMATE EXPERIENCES'



**RICHARD FRENCH**

Hard at work on board luxury canal barge, 'La Belle Epoque', somewhere between Tanlay and Venarey-les-Laumes. With just twelve guests, fine regional cuisine and even finer wines, it's the perfect way to enjoy the myriad attractions of Burgundy.



**CATHERINE MURPHY  
BIRCHALL**

All kitted out and saddled up for my first cattle drive across the rolling prairies of stunning Brush Creek in Wyoming. Living the cowgirl dream on America's finest dude ranch...yee-haw!



**ALISON JONES**

Time for a sunset beach barbecue, and maybe the odd glass of calou, at the wonderful Raffles resort on Praslin Island. Barefoot luxury at its Seychelles finest.

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# EXPLORE OUR WORLD



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THE ORIENT



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THE POLES



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SUBCONTINENT



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