

THE SUNDAY TIMES

SECTION 6 | SEPTEMBER 25, 2011

Travel

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TRAVEL PLANNER 2011-12

Beaches or cities, long weekends or longer adventures —
wherever and whatever you want over the next 12 months,
we've got it covered



THE SUNDAY TIMES

travel

PLANNER

2011-12



ere at Travel, there are two questions we're asked more than any others:

(1) "I have a week off in November (or January or March), where should I go/what should I do?"; and (2) "I want to go on safari (or have a cultural break, or grab some guaranteed sun), where's good when?" The Sunday Times Travel Planner will provide the answers.

Over the next 30 pages, our writer **Robert Ryan** has collated 164 holidays in seven broad groupings: sun,

weekends away, nature, cities, big trips, cultural events, and action and adventure. Each grouping is divided into the 12 months of the year, beginning with next month, October.

So, if you have a week off in January, and need ideas, you'll find Ethiopia's Timket celebrations in Events, a gastronomic trip to San Sebastian in Weekenders and a spot of lotus-eating on the Mayan Riviera in Sun.

Or, if you long to go a little wild, turn straight to the Nature section, on page 10. You'll find that the Galapagos Islands are at their warm and

sunny best in April, and that January is the ideal time to see the northern lights.

Visit thesundaytimes.co.uk, or download the iPad app, and the Travel Planner is transformed into an interactive map, with videos, hundreds of photos and extra articles about the destinations. We'll rotate and update the Planner each month, so you'll always have a year's worth of great holiday ideas at your fingertips.

The Sunday Times Travel Planner: the best thing to happen to holidays since the wheellie suitcase.

OCTOBER

The blowtorch heat of summer has faded in **Seville**, making October a perfect time to explore the city's Moorish heart and gypsy soul — and perhaps nip downtown for seafood and chilled marzanilla at Sanlúcar. Stay at Casa No 7, a lovely six-bedroom house with a roof terrace (and a butler, no less), deep in the maze of Barrio Santa Cruz. Three nights cost £231pp, B&B, at i-escape.com; fly to Seville with Ryanair (0871 246 0000, ryanair.com) or Vueling (vueling.com).

If ever a season and a country were made for each other, they would be autumn and France, with its grape harvests, truffles and rich, gamey food. A couple of hours' drive from Calais, Compiègne, in **Normandy**, sits on the edge of a 35,000-acre forest, once the hunting ground of kings. Restaurants in town and in the nearby villages will be serving rabbit, wild duck, wild boar and venison. L'Ermilage (00 33 33 44 42 85 64, ermilage-pietrefonds.fr; doubles from €56, B&B) is a grand gothic pile with French country style. SeaFrance (0871 222 2500, seafrance.com) has return Dover-Calais ferry crossings from €60 for a car and up to five passengers; or try DFDS Seaways (0871 574 7235, dfdsseaways.co.uk), from Dover to Dunkirk.

NOVEMBER

A fantastic chance for adventurers, armchair or otherwise, to hear, meet and watch alpinists and daredevils at the Kendal Mountain Festival, in the **Lake District**. It runs November 17-20 and features conversations, lectures and spectacular high-altitude films. Tickets for events (prices vary) are available at mountainfest.co.uk; or call 01539 732141. Stay in more comfort than you'll see on screen at Stonecross Manor (01539 735559, stonecrossmanor.co.uk; doubles from £98, B&B).

DECEMBER

Christmas markets pop up all over Europe from late November onwards. The one in **Tallinn**, Estonia, is held on the medieval Town Hall square — there is a good chance of (real) snow, and the certainty of hot sausages and mulled wine. Three nights at the four-star St Petersbourg hotel, in the centre of the old town, start at €539pp with Kirker (020 7593 2283, kirkerholidays.com). Christmas at a British hotel often breaks the bank, but the two-day package at Stanwell House (0844 704 6820, stanwellhousehotel.com), in Lymington, on the edge of the **New Forest**, is good value from €395pp. You'll start with cream tea when you arrive on Christmas Eve, and finish with breakfast on Boxing Day. Dogs are welcome, too. If you have young kids, consider Calcot Manor (01666 890391, www.calcotmanor.co.uk), in Tebury, **Gloucestershire**, where a three-night slice of food and entertainment starts at £980pp, B&B, with reductions for children. There's an excellent spa, too.

JANUARY

San Sebastian, in the Spanish Basque country, is famed for its pintxos — the bar snacks that make regular taps look like pork scratchings — and the

cider houses (*sagardega*) that surround it. The season for visiting these starts in January and ends in March or April, depending on when the previous year's cider stock runs out. They are big, boisterous barns of places in towns such as Astigarraga, a short drive from the city. Do it properly, on an evening tour run by the Basque experts San Sebastian Food (020 3286 7777, sansebastianfood.com). A five-course meal costs €83pp, with unlimited booze and transport (plew). Stay at Astoriaz (00 34 943 445000, astoriazhotel.com; doubles from €90, B&B), an old cinema imaginatively converted into a funky 102-room hotel. Fly to Biarritz with Ryanair (0871 246 0000, ryanair.com) or EasyJet (0843 104 5000, easyjet.com).

"Mallorca is blooming with almond flowers in February"

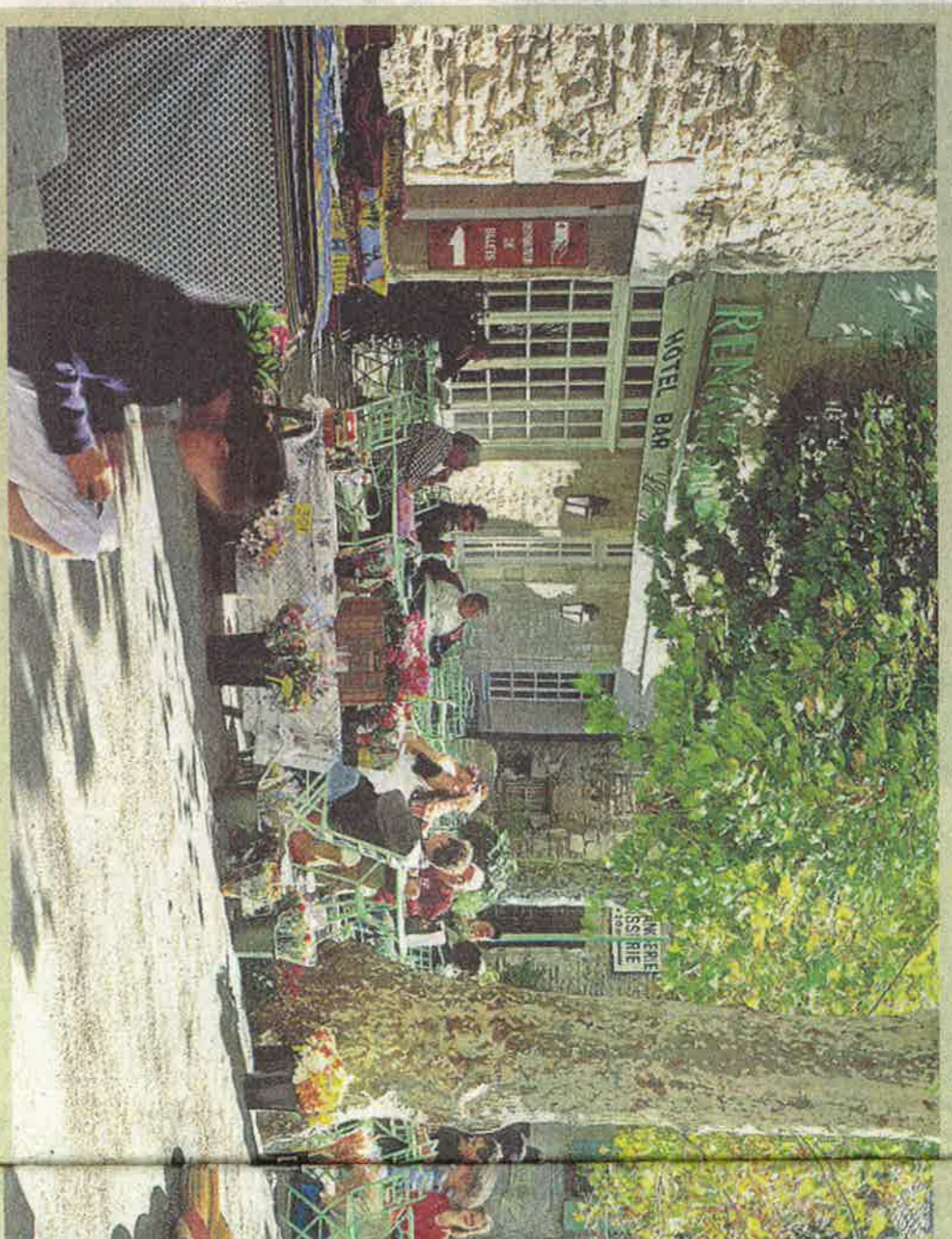
FEBRUARY

It's not as famous as Japan's cherry blossom, perhaps, but Mallorca is blooming with almond flowers about now. It's also quiet — the roads won't be clogged with peak-season hire cars. Mallorca Farmhouses (0845 800 8080, mallorca.co.uk) has short breaks at Cas Mal Ric, in the southeast, a stunning farmhouse sleeping 10, set in large gardens, with a tennis court through the orange grove, as well as a kids' play area; a four-day long weekend costs €995. Or stay at the eight-bedroom, boutique Hotel L'Avenida (00 34 971 634075, avenida-hotel.com), in Soller, which has three nights from €366pp, including breakfast and three-course dinner. Airlines flying to Palma include BMI Baby (bmibaby.com) and Jet2 (0871 226 1287, jet2.com); Rhino (0845 882 2019, rhinocarhire.com) has four days' car hire from €35.

While the whole world seems to be going to Marrakesh, opt for a far less westernised experience by hopping over the Atlas range to **Quarazate**, where parts of Lawrence of Arabia and *Gladiator* were filmed. Drive over the mountains and along the astonishing Dra'a Valley, past the towering mud kasbahs and date groves, ending up in the oasis of Zagora. Okay, you'll need a long weekend: it's five nights if you sleep out on an extra camel trek into the desert. Best of Morocco (0800 171 2151, bestofmorocco.co.uk) has the trip from €65pp, including car hire.

MARCH

There is never a totally quiet time to visit **Venice**, but March is the breathing space between busy Carnival and Easter. It might be chilly, misty or even drizzly, or full of bright days of low spring sun, but the beauty of this city is that the weather doesn't matter: the ostentatious La Serenissima itself is the star turn. You can now buy online a Venice Connected card, which gives discounted rates for transfers on the airport bus, passes on the ACTV and Alilaguna boat systems, city tours, access to museums and churches, the municipal wi-fi system and even public lavatories (€24 for 48 hours; veniceconnected.com; you have to buy the card at least seven days before travel). Stay on Dorsoduro, near the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, at DD724 (00 39 041 277 0262, dd724.it), a contemporary hotel that bills itself as "a charming house". And it is. Doubles start at €154, B&B, in March. Airlines flying to Venice include BMI Baby (bmibaby.com) and Ryanair (0871 246 0000, ryanair.com).



WEEKEND

From raves to camel rides, stretch your short break to the limit

APRIL
The Floriade festival, near **Venlo**, in southwest Holland, is a huge horticultural exhibition that takes place just once every 10 years. It's like Chelsea on steroids. The River Cruise Line (0844 544 6437, rivercruise.co.uk) has a four-night trip out of Amsterdam on the Lady Anne, sailing through blooming Dutch bulbfields, which includes a visit to the festival. Prices start at £449pp, full-board, including return ferry crossings from

Dover to Calais and coach travel from departure points in the UK. The wine specialist Arblaster & Clarke (01730 263111, whitetours.co.uk) has introduced a top-end "cooking in Provence" trip for 2012. Running April 15-20, it takes you to the village





Shop, drink and lounge in Provence in April

Chris Evers, Robert Harding, Camille Moreno, Colin Matthew, Dennis F...



ERS

of La Cadrière-d'Azur for lessons with René Bérard, a Michelin-starred chef, in his own rustic kitchen, as well as visits to an apiculturist, an olive mill and wineries in, hopefully, wonderful spring weather. Five nights, with an enormous amount of food and wine, cost £2,399pp. Airlines flying to Marseilles include EasyJet (0843 104 5000, easyjet.com) and Ryanair (0871 246 0000, ryanair.com).

MAY

The past three years have seen Copenhagen become a vital foodie destination in Europe, thanks mainly to the reputation of Noma (00 45-3296 3297, noma.dk) and its foraged and local food (for example, summer deer with snails, forest shoots and chanterelles). It's not the only place in town that's had the critics drooling, though — there are a dozen other Michelin-starred joints, including Geranium (6996 0020, geranium.dk), whose chef and co-owner, Rasmus Kofoed, won the last Bocuse d'Or, the culinary Olympics. It is as innovative — and expensive — as Noma. Another Danish kitchen star is Thomas Hernan of Nimb, who has a restaurant, a better-value brasserie and a bar and grill on the edge of Tivoli Gardens (8870 0000, tivoli.dk/nimb). Don't miss the reasonably priced wine and snacks at

Café Quote (3332 5151, cafequote.dk).

Push the boat out at Skt Petri, a department store turned super-designer hotel (3345 9100, www.hotelsktpetri.com; doubles from £220, room-only), More modest is Hotel Bethel, in Nyhavn, a former seaman's hostel (3313 0870, hotel-bethel.dk; doubles from £99, B&B). Airlines flying to Copenhagen include SAS (0871 521 6000, flysas.com) and Norwegian (020 809 97254, norwegian.com).

There are four great months to be in Madrid — May, June, September and October. May marks the beginning of the summer, and is the month when Madrid throws its biggest party, the Fiesta de San Isidro, with parades, speeches, music, dance and lots of food taking over the city's squares and parks. Dressing up in your finery is very definitely allowed. Visit sanisidro.esmadrid.com for exact dates in 2012, but it revolves around the 15th. Stay at Hospes (00 34 932 388314, hospes.com; doubles from £185, room-only), on Plaza de la Independencia, at the northern end of the grand Retiro Park. Or try the four modern, buzzy Room Mate hotels (room-matehotels.com), where simple but stylish doubles start at £101. B&B. Airlines flying to Madrid include Iberia (0870 609 0500, iberia.com) and EasyJet (0843 104 5000, easyjet.com).

JUNE

The Monaco Grand Prix is the one Formula 1 race even non-petrolheads want to go to — but it's pricey and it's hard to get a good spot. Try the European Grand Prix, in Valencia, instead: a semi-street circuit with good views and a beautiful, lively, affordable city, with beaches as a backdrop. In fact, even motorsport haters might



ALAIN DUCASSE, Chef

MY HOLS

I go to Seville (October) quite often. You've got the beautiful gardens of the Alcazar and, all around, you can see the Arab influence on the architecture. It's a unique cocktail of style. I love Spain. We're all Latin, but some people say we French are latin's fraters, whereas the Spanish are latin's jaykus.

enjoy a weekend — and a plate of paella — here. Prices for 2012 have yet to be set, but this year Thomas Cook Sport (0844 800 9900, thomascosport.com) had a European Grand Prix package from £1,468pp, including three nights' B&B at a three-star hotel, a Friday drinks reception, transfers and earplugs. Next year's race is on June 24.

Our dear Queen celebrates her diamond jubilee in June 2012, and we get to celebrate an extra-long weekend with bank holidays declared for Monday, June 4, and Tuesday, June 5. "Fitting events" have been promised, but expect crowds down and around the Mall. Perhaps a fly-past, Ma'am? You can stay in the heart of St James's at the discreetly positioned Dukes hotel (020 7491 4840, dukeshotel.com), bolt hole (and watering hole) of many a royal. It has just opened a new restaurant, Thirty Six by Nigel Meadham, and is renowned for its martinis (it's the home of the vesper). Not cheap — over that weekend doubles start at £474 per night, room-only, but it's fit for a queen.

JULY

Cheltenham is getting quite a name for itself as a festival town: for jazz (May), science (June), literature (October) and the daddy of them all, the Music Festival (01242 505444, cheltenhamfestivals.com), which in 2012 runs July 4-15. Previous years gave us the pianists Lef Ove Andsnes and Boris Giltburg, the percussionist Evelyn Glennie, the Dvorak Quartet and the Liverpool Phil. Book in at the elegant Montpellier Chapter (01242 527788, themontpellierchapterhotel.com; doubles from £160, room-only), where the television chef Simon Hopkinson designed the menu.

AUGUST

The taiga forest covering the Russian fringes of Finland represents the best

chance to spot shy brown bears in Europe, and it can be done on a three-day trip. Naturtrek (01962 733051, naturtrek.co.uk) has four August departures. Based in a wilderness guesthouse in northern Finland, guests spend one or two of the long, light, summer nights in a specially constructed hide, where they might see up to 20 bears (and maybe a wolf/venue). The price is £995pp, including flights, transfers, breakfasts, dinners and snacks.

SEPTEMBER

It's over, it's time to call it a day... Well, it is in Ibiza at least. September sees most of the closing parties for the big clubs, as they say farewell to another season of hedonism — with one last burst of it. Some hotels take advantage of 24-hour party people to skip on service and comfort, but you won't be taken for a ride with Black Tomato (020 7426 9888, blacktomato.co.uk), which will not only book you a stylish room, but get you VIP access to clubs, restaurants and even DJ lessons. Four nights at the Hotel Es Vive, in Ibiza Town, cost £999pp. B&B, including flights. For independent travellers, Deliciously Sorted (00 34 971 197867, deliciouslysortedibiza.com) is a concierge service that can arrange hotels, villas and VIP club access.

Known for its seafood, the Ligger Hotel (01872 501322, www.liggerhotel.com) in Portloe, Cornwall, is offering a full fishy experience in September and early October. The day begins at sea with a local fisherman, pulling up lobster and crab pots before manning the rods for sea bass and mackerel. Back in the kitchen, chef demonstrates how to prepare, cook and dress the lobster, which is then served up on the terrace with a crisp bottle of muscadet. Prices for 2012 have not been fixed, but the two-night break, including the above catch-and-cook day, cost £220pp this year.