

Bon voyage! Five pages of cruise inspiration P.15

# TRAVEL

## Snap up Europe's greatest holiday hits for less

From Greek island hopping to an art tour of Tuscany, the continent's best travel experiences don't have to break the bank. Chris Moss picks 10 short-haul classics from as little as £200



**F**inding value for money in this year of economic challenges needn't mean staying in the UK or just hitting the "book" button on whatever the margin-hungry algorithms suggest. It's completely possible to aim for a classic European holiday - be it a Greek island-hopping adventure or a stylish Provençal escape - without breaking the bank.

So, how to do it? Well, a bit of planning is required, but it's not that difficult. Think about

where the bulk of your holiday money goes - accommodation, food and drink, transport - and see where you can make savings. A good start is avoiding hire cars (and inflated fuel costs), slick on touristy restaurants and swish hotel rooms you were never going to hang around in anyway.

Travelling off-season means lower prices, fewer people and shorter queues. Do some research: many cities, resorts and regions have culture passes, excellent public transport, and free events.

Finally, remember how you travelled when you were in your early 20s: a fresh baguette filled with delicious cuts from the deli; a bottle of decent wine from a local mini-market; a spot on the out-of-town beach - what more do you need?

The following is intended as inspiration rather than as instructions on where you should go. We've provided "DIY" suggestions for those happy to do some planning and make reserva-

tions from home, as well as package holiday offerings for those who want minimal fuss and, ideally, the back-up of an Atol-registered travel company. DIY is usually, but not always, cheaper. The prices quoted are per person and cover at least the basics of travelling there, getting around, and a bed (usually based on two sharing); some include essential tours and excursions.

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# The UK islands that put Europe in the shade

With airports in disarray this summer, why not swap the continent's offshore assets for some flight-free alternatives closer to home? Rob Crossan compares and contrasts

With flight cancellations galore, epic airport queues and staffing crises everywhere from check-in to baggage handling, that longed-for European island escape is looking more complicated than usual. Perhaps, then, this isn't such a bad time to explore options that are rather closer to home. The Isles that dot our shores offer everything from boutique accommodation to upmarket dining, wilderness escapes to cultural wonders. So, banish thoughts of cancellations and chaos, pack an overnight bag and book a ticket to explore some of our very own island getaways.

## Supper IBIZAN BIG BEATS for JERSEY'S SUBTLE COOL

The largest Channel Island may not party quite as hard as Ibiza, but Jersey is no slouch for nocturnal options these days. The late-night party scene is hottest at the belle époque-style Ce Soir (cesoirjersey.com), with its thumping beats and potent cocktails; try a Holy Grail with rum and Grand Marnier, then recover at St Helier's Grand Jersey Hotel and Spa (01534 722301; handpickinghotels.co.uk), which offers soothing views out over the ramparts of Elizabeth Castle. Doubles cost from £124 including breakfast. For sustenance, Bohemia (01534 880588; bohemiajersey.com), located inside the Club hotel in St Helier, is the only Michelin-starred restaurant on the island, serving up Jersey Angus beef tartare and local crab panna cotta.

The return ferry fare from Portsmouth to Jersey is £70 (duration 10hr 20mins). Book at [condorferries.co.uk](http://condorferries.co.uk)

## Supper A BUDGET BREAK IN MALTA for VALUE IN BUTE

Malta being one of the most wallet-friendly Mediterranean islands to visit, switching it for Bute may seem perplexing. But if you want sandy bays, ancient Christian sites and gentle walking routes without extensive travel times or high prices, this Argyll island carries weight. Iliou Victoria is the vibe in Rothesay, the island's tree-lined promenade and expansive gardens lies the fantasy gothic pile of Mount Stuart, whose vaulted marble hall stands testament to the grand tastes of the 7th Marquess of Bute. For added glamour, you can tell your friends that Stella McCartney got married here. The sandy stretch of Scalpsie Way has an eponymous farm (scalpsie-farm.com) boasting three solar-powered glamping "pods", with kitchen, indoor fireplace and patio, all just a spritz's throw from the beach. From £68 per night.

The return ferry fare from Wemyss Bay to Bute is £6.90 (duration 35mins). Book at [calmac.co.uk](http://calmac.co.uk)

## Supper LUSH MADEIRA for TRESCO'S HOME-GROWN EXOTICISM

As one of the most sun-drenched places in the UK, Tresco, in the Isles of Scilly, will give you the rays you would travel to Madeira to relish, combined with a tropical business that is unexpected this far north of Funchal.

The Abbey Gardens, set in the grounds of a ruined 12th-century priory, are full of coconut palms. Elsewhere, rolling fields, abandoned tin mines and shaded churchyards make for brilliant walking. Explore the island's two castles: Cromwell's spiral staircase tower on the north-west coast, and King Charles's unfortunate ruin, blown up by its own defenders as they retreated after the English Civil War, located right behind it. Then, check into the New Inn (01720 422849; tresco.co.uk). Here, order lobster with Tresco rocket salad in the dining room and luxuriate in guest rooms that are bright and breezy with a vibe more akin to the Caymans than Cornwall. Double rooms from £185 B&B.

The return ferry fare from Penzance to St Mary's is £65.95 (duration 2hr 40mins). The connecting boat to Tresco costs £6 (duration 30mins). Book at [islandscilly-travel.co.uk](http://islandscilly-travel.co.uk)

## Supper SARDINIA'S SEAFOOD for THE ISLE OF WIGHT'S PISCINE PLEASURES

With a rugged coastline, narrow streets and a sense of "otherness" from the mainland, the Isle of Wight stands tall against the Italian Med outpost. It goes toe to toe on the culinary front, too. Sardinia may have its bottarga and sea urchins, but this Solent outpost has the platters of local crab and tempura marinated anchovies served at the Seaview Hotel (01983 61271; seaviewhotel.co.uk), on the north-east coast of the island. Then there is the island's garlic, which is celebrated at the Garlic Farm Restaurant, in Newchurch (01983 965578; thegarlicfarm.co.uk), in its truffle risotto and king prawn Caesar salad. North House (01983 209453; northhousecoves.co.uk) is the most demure spot on the Coves



Bay, on the west coast, for a stroll on its gargantuan, tufted dunes. Bed down at the Macherie (01466 902330; thomashacie.co.uk) and vast, high-ceilinged lounges offering floor-to-ceiling views over the churning Atlantic. Doubles from £139.50 including breakfast.

The return ferry fare from Keweenaw to Inlay is £48.50 (duration 2hr 10mins). Book at [calmac.co.uk](http://calmac.co.uk)

## Supper WINDSWEEP FÜRTEVENTURA for TIREE'S SURFER CHIC

The buffeting winds of the most surf-friendly Hebridean island attract breaker bunnies in droves, but the Tree Wave Classic (treewaveclassic.co.uk) – held every October in this most westerly of Inner Hebridean Islands – holds its own as a place to ride the waves. Known as the Sunshine Isle, the most westerly of the Inner Hebrides benefits from the Gulf Stream and numerous crescents of deserted, sugar-white sandy beaches. Elsewhere, spot the minke whales, dolphins and porpoises that visit Tiree's waters, while navigating past Skerryvore, a lighthouse (with museum) described by Robert Louis Stevenson as "the noblest of all deep sea lights". The surf 'n'be extends to the Reef Inn (07960 633953; reef-tiree.com), a chic retreat where, if you pick up some of the (scarce) island beach litter, the owners will give you a free coffee. Doubles from £145 including breakfast.

The return ferry fare from Oban to Tiree is £22 (duration 4hr). Book at [calmac.co.uk](http://calmac.co.uk)

## Supper CRETE'S HISTORICAL BEAUTY for SKYE'S GAELIC TRADITIONS

Antiquity abounds in Crete, of course, but Skye has its own – equally robust – ancient history as the epicentre for Gaelic culture. Bellow a hearty "feaggar



math" (good evening) in the village of Eilean Iarmain, located in the southerly Sleat Peninsula, before experiencing a celtidh at the Hotel Eilean Iarmain (01471 833332; eileanarmain.co.uk).

The An Talla Dearg gallery (art-skye.co.uk), by the village pier, showcases local artists. While the entire island celebrates its Gaelic traditions with the Festival of Small Halls, in November (seal.co.uk). This week of live music across the island ends with a huge celtidh on St Andrew's Day. Quieter joys beckon at Mint Craft (mintcraftskye.com), a couple of beautifully restored crofters' cottages filled with sheepskins and crisp linens, one of which has a turf roof shrouded in wildflowers, overlooking Loch Salnair. Both cottages sleep two; four-night minimum stay from £1,320.

The return ferry fare from Mallaig to Armadale starts at £5.40 (duration 50mins). Book at [calmac.co.uk](http://calmac.co.uk). You can also drive to Skye over the bridge from the Kyle of Lochalsh to Kyleakin

## Supper THE WILDNESSE OF THE AZORES for JURA'S STARK LANDSCAPES

Craggy and remote, the Azores may seem almost undiscovered at times, but Jura's quiet isolation and tricky-to-ascend peaks are just as mighty and aloof as the Atlantic islands' volcanoes. The "Paps", Jura's most striking feature, are three cone-shaped, steep-sided quartzite hills on the western side of the island. The other thing you will spot here are the deer, whose population outnumbers people by about 40 to one. Walk the six miles to the far end of the island and you will find Barnhill, the isolated farmhouse that George Orwell holed up in to write *1984*. The island's only village, Craighouse, is home to Jura's sole hotel (01496 820243; jura-hotel.co.uk), an old-school charmer with just the right amount of tweed and tartan. Rooms come with whisky-infused toiletries and the dining room serves local langoustines and venison. Doubles from £130 including breakfast.

The return ferry fare from Taysalich to Jura starts at £165 (duration 50mins). Book at [jura-passengerferry.com](http://jura-passengerferry.com)

## Supper CHILLED CAVALLO for RELAXING RATHLIN ISLAND

Shaped like a bally chiselled boomerang, Rathlin is the only inhabited offshore island in Ulster – a place, like Carralle, on which to embrace the art of doing nothing. The 150-strong population shares the island with grey seals, and puffins which nest on the western cliffs. Meander past damp meadows and finish at the Manor House café (manorhouseathlin.com), for plates of lobster and lythe – the local name for pollock. There are no hotels on Rathlin, so check into Shore House (07858 730764; ballycattandathlinalternatives.com), a sturdy Victorian-built self-catering home on the edge of Church Bay. There are three cosy bedrooms, plus chairs in the front yard, and it is just a two-minute walk to McCraig's Bar for a pint. From £150 a night.

The return ferry fare from Ballycastle to Rathlin starts at £12 (duration 25mins). Book at [rathlinballycastleferry.com](http://rathlinballycastleferry.com)

## Supper BUCOLIC VIS for THE RURAL IDYLL OF ANGLESEY

With its tumble-down cottages, tapering narrow roads, footpaths galore, and a feeling of being at the end of the earth, the Croston Island has much in common with the north-western bend of Wales. Anglesey's 150-mile circular footpath is worth tackling, at least in part, as it meanders past precipitous headlands, sandy coves and the grey immensity of Edward I's Beaumaris Castle. Orientations accommodation beckons at Château Rhainfa (01248 890090; chateaurhainfa.co.uk), a Grade II listed castle with turrets and crenellated peaks out across to the crumpled peaks of Snowdonia. Doubles from £178 including breakfast.

Return train fares from Ballycastle to Rathlin start at £70 (duration 2hr 50mins). Book at [northernrail.com](http://northernrail.com)

All ferry prices are for one adult foot passenger

waterfront, a Victorian townhouse given a loving makeover. Rooms deftly segue between quirky and elegant, with vintage tea sets and roll-top baths. Doubles from £285 including breakfast.

The return hovercraft fare from Southton to Ryde starts at £27 (duration 10mins). Book at [hovertravel.co.uk](http://hovertravel.co.uk)

## Supper NAXOS'S LAKES AND VILLAGES for ISLAY'S CRAGGY DELIGHTS

Naxos may have sun-drenched coves galore, but Islay's lochs on a summer's day beguile in equal measure. If you only have time to visit one of the island's seven distilleries, opt for Laphroaig (laphroaig.com), producer of the only Islay malt made by royal appointment to Prince Charles. The white-washed houses that line Fort Ellen are the first things you will see when the boat chugs into dock. Push on from the fudge-coloured sands here and head to Loch Gruinart for a wild swim in the warmest waters on the island. Then hit Machir

★ Surf's up: you are never too young to try it





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Bay, on the west coast, for a stroll on its gargantuan, tufted dunes. Bed down at the Machrie (01496 302310; [themachrie.links.com](http://themachrie.links.com)), with its championship golf course and vast, high-ceilinged lounges offering floor-to-ceiling views over the churning Atlantic. Doubles from £139.50 including breakfast.

*The return ferry fare from Kennacraig to Islay is £14.50 (duration 2hr 10min). Book at [calmac.co.uk](http://calmac.co.uk)*

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The buffeting winds of the most surf-friendly Balearic island attract breaker bunnies in droves, but the Tiree Wave Classic ([tireewaveclassic.co.uk](http://tireewaveclassic.co.uk)) – held every October in this most westerly of Inner Hebridean islands – holds its own as a place to ride the waves. Known as the Sunshine Isle, the most westerly of the Inner Hebrides benefits from the Gulf Stream and numerous crescents of deserted, sugar-white sandy beaches.

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