



# GO TROPICAL THIS SUMMER

## For the best deals this year, you need to head beyond Europe.

### Susan d'Arcy finds the long-haul bargains well worth the extra journey

**T**he weak pound means the Med is hardly a bargain now, which is one good reason to look further afield for your summer holiday this year. Equally persuasive is the fact that some resorts in the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and beyond are so anxious about bookings, they are offering unprecedented deals — giving away free rooms for children and throwing in complimentary lunches, dinners and even drinks — while airlines, burdened with overcapacity, are slashing fares.

Together, these factors are allowing tour operators to create their cheapest packages in years. Although these far-flung destinations are in low season, if you choose wisely, the weather can be more pleasant than the blistering heat of mainland Europe, and the resorts won't be as crowded — which all adds up to the best year ever to push the boat out and go long-haul.

*Unless stated, all packages include flights from London and transfers. For details of UK regional, and Irish flight options, contact the operator*

## THE CARIBBEAN

### BARBADOS

Hurricanes are the big Caribbean concern in the summer months, but Barbados's track record is reassuring. The last one to cause significant damage landed back in 1955, and although you can expect rain in

July and August, according to the meteorologists, it's most likely to fall between 2am and 5am. We suspect that if you're still up then, you could

probably do with a cold shower.

Despite the reliable weather and its considerable kudos, even Simon Cowell's favourite resort, Sandy Lane, is feeling the pinch. It has been forced into its most competitive deals ever: Seasons in Style (01244 202000, seasonsinstyle.com) has a week for a family of five with three under-12s from £1,862pp in July or August — that's £1,020 cheaper than the same trip last summer. If you don't mind falling foul of the head teacher, or can travel in September, it's just £1,445pp, B&B, for a family of four staying in two rooms — a saving of £1,782pp — if you book by Friday.

If you prefer something low-key and typically Bajan, Caribtours (020 7751 0660, www.caribtours.co.uk) has discounted seven-night stays at the Colony Club, which is on a beach just as pretty as Sandy Lane's. A week starts at £1,135pp, B&B, a saving of £450pp. Book by August 31 for travel by October 31.

### ST LUCIA

The island hasn't had more than the odd palm tree ruffled by heavy winds in the past 12 years. Visit in July or August, and you'll be rewarded with the sight of giant leatherback turtles heaving themselves onto the beaches to lay their eggs — rather more inspiring than the hordes of holidaymakers that cover the sands throughout the winter months.

Cap Maison, which is in the north, so less prone to rainstorms than the mountainous south, is one of the Caribbean's hottest hotels. Set on a pretty private cove, it has a champagne zip wire between bar and beach, so you don't even have to stir for sundowners. Harlequin Holidays (0845 277 3397, harlequinholidays.com)

has a week from £1,645pp, full-board, throughout July and August, including a complimentary room upgrade, two spa treatments, £300 worth of drinks credits and three days' car hire, adding up to a discount of £1,250pp.

### ANTIGUA

The minimalist Carlisle Bay showed Caribbean designers there was an alternative to fit-inducing florals and garish gold taps. Fortunately, the resort is cool in every sense. Tradewinds ensure it doesn't get stiflingly humid in July and August, and its backdrop of rolling hills protects its beautiful bay from much of the rain. To make it even more attractive, it's offering free board to guests and £300 worth of drinks credit per couple.

Abercrombie & Kent (0845 618 2200, www.abercrombiekent.co.uk) has a week from £1,995pp — a 33% reduction

**"The Grenadines provided the backdrop for the Pirates of the Caribbean films"**

on the usual low-season price — and, as under-15s can stay for free and you can receive a 50% discount on a second suite, there's no need to offload the offspring on reluctant grandparents.

### THE GRENADINES

This string of islands provided the spectacular backdrop for the Pirates of the Caribbean films. Raffles Canouan is the archipelago's Oscar-winner in terms of resorts, protected from the worst excesses of the weather by cooling tradewinds and one of the world's largest coral reefs.





Throughout July and August, Elegant Resorts (01244 897505, elegantresorts.co.uk) has a week from £1,602pp, B&B, for a family of four, including 10 free hours in the kids' club — a saving of up to £1,250pp.

JAMAICA

Lots of islands have great beaches and fascinating rainforests, but Jamaica also has a vibrant, accessible culture, something many of its neighbours lack. It was hit by Hurricane Ivan in September 2004, but in July and August, there's usually eight hours of sunshine a day and just the occasional downpour, with temperatures at 28C.

Half Moon is a classic Jamaican hotel, spread over a mile and a half of Montego Bay. It's offering 14 nights for the price of seven through ITC Classics (01244 355527, itcclassics.co.uk) until September 30. A fortnight now costs £1,322pp, room-only, a saving of £799pp.

TURKS AND CAICOS

July and August are a great time to visit, with temperatures in the late

twenties and less chance of rain than on many islands further south. The swankiest place to stay is Amanayara, which has imported stunning Asian styling, perfectly complemented by outstanding service. Exsus (020 7337 9000, exsus.com) has a week from £3,865pp, full-board — still far from cheap, but a £900pp saving on the usual price.

THE INDIAN OCEAN

MAURITIUS

Peak season here is November to April. That's when it's hot, humid, rainy and expensive. Low season is July and August. That's when it's warm, dry and much cheaper. No, we can't work it out either.

Scott Dunn (020 8682 5020, scottdunn.com) has two weeks for the price of one deals at the Constance Belle Mare Plage resort, where 14 nights start at £1,958pp, half-board, for a family of four staying in a two-bedroom pool villa, with a

dedicated "Villa Master" to cater to their every whim. The hotel is also throwing in watersports and green fees at two championship golf courses.

Le Prince Maurice is another great choice for families: luxurious, but with an excellent kids' club. It is offering two weeks for the price of one and a free second room for juniors, so Ultimate Family Hideaways (01425 672482, ultimatehideaways.co.uk) can offer 14 nights from £1,549pp, half-board, until July 31.

Meanwhile, Thomson Tailormade (0871 664 0273, thomsonworldwide.com) has the elegantly informal five-star Beau Rivage from £1,429pp, half-board, in July — that's £966pp off usual low-season prices.

Le Saint Géran, regarded as one of the top hotels in the world, has 10 nights for the price of six and complimentary half-board from £2,185pp — that's up to £1,420pp off — for travel by October 15. Book with Elegant Resorts (01244 897505, elegantresorts.co.uk) by July 15.

THE MALDIVES

It's rainy season in the Brits' favourite Indian Ocean destination, but don't let that put you off. Showers tend to last for no more than an hour a day before the sun puts its hat on again. The fact that the palm-fringed islands are a magnet for honeymooners generally keeps low-season prices annoyingly buoyant but, unusually, some of the archipelago's most prestigious resorts have value-added deals this year. They're still pricey, but now they're getting tempting.

Soneva Fushi, for example, has seven nights for the price of five, and is throwing in free dinners to those booking B&B deals. Through Exsus (020 7337 9000, exsus.com), that brings the price down by an agreeable £900pp to £2,285pp.

Meanwhile Reethi Rah is chucking in free half-board and one night's complimentary accommodation on week-long bookings, trimming £945pp off the bottom line. A week now costs £2,385pp through Carrier (0161 491 7660, carrier.co.uk), for travel until October 15.

Ultimate Hideaways (01425 672482, ultimatehideaways.co.uk) has free

nights and upgrades from B&B to half-board at Cocoa Island, which reduce a week there to £1,610pp until October 15, a saving of £1,190pp.

One of the criticisms levelled at the country is that resorts are effectively gilded cages, giving visitors little interaction with Maldivians. The new superslick Shangri-La Villingili is an exception. It's linked by road to five local islands that guests can explore on bikes, so you shouldn't feel trapped in your room. Seasons in Style (01244 202000, seasonsinstyle.com) has a week at Villingili from £2,260pp, half-board (a £1,465pp saving), from July 26 until October 31.

Diva is a great choice for families, with complimentary childcare and a family-friendly swimming pool for younger ones, and a day-time hang-out and nightclub for teenagers. Until the end of September, it's throwing in a junior suite for junior, which would normally set mum and dad back £2,548. Essential Escapes (020 7284 3344, essentialescapes.com) has a week for a family of four with two under-12s from £1,752pp, B&B.

If that's still too rich for your blood, Bandos is one of the better four-stars, with the added bonus of being just a 20-minute boat trip from the airport (lengthy seaplane transfers after an international flight often provide the first serious test of newlyweds' marital vows). Thomson Tailormade (0871 664 0273, thomsonworldwide.com) has sliced off £364pp a week, so prices now start at £879pp, B&B, during August.

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Stephen Frink/Getty



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## WORLDWIDE

### AUSTRALIA

To be honest, there is one main reason not to visit during the antipodean summer: it's just too hot. So go in July, August or September instead: considering the Gold Coast averages 22C during their winter, even the palest-skinned pommie can still return to Blighty with a tan if they so wish.

Qantas Holidays (020 8222 9124, qantasholidays.co.uk) is among the operators exploiting the extraordinarily cheap air fares currently available. It's offering a 12-night tour for £1,299pp, including all flights, transfers and four nights, room-only, at the four-star Vibe Hotels in Sydney, Melbourne and the Gold Coast (Vibe is the down-under equivalent of the UK's Malmaison chain). That's for travel from August 15 and throughout September; book by July 15.

Byron Bay, in New South Wales, is one part glamorous St Tropez and two parts surfer-cool Tarifa, with a generous sprinkling of white-knuckle Queenstown thrown in. Turquoise Holidays (01494 678400, www.turquoiseholidays.co.uk) has trimmed £550 off 10 nights at the trendy Byron at Byron Resort, with car hire and a coveted Heidi Klein bikini (worth £165) thrown in to ensure you'll

get noticed on the beach — particularly if you're male. The price is now £1,599pp, room-only.

### SOUTH AFRICA

Officially, this is low season, but it remains sunny and fairly warm in August (although July can be rainy) — and it comes minus the jet lag. Furthermore, it's a great time to go on safari, with the wildlife easier to spot when the vegetation dies back.

Rainbow Tours (020 7226 1004, rainbowtours.co.uk) has two nights at the five-star Lobengula Lodge, in the Shamwari Game Reserve, for £1,765pp, all-inclusive, and throws in two free nights on a B&B deal at the country's hot new hotel, the lavish One&Only Cape Town — a saving of £500pp.

### SRI LANKA

As well as the effects of the recession, Sri Lanka has also had the negative impact of its bitter civil war to deal with. In May, however, the Tamil Tigers admitted defeat after a 26-year fight for a homeland, so now the herculean task of wooing back tourists begins. And they're putting on plenty of offers to entice us.

It's monsoon season now, but the rains fall mainly at night, and the upside is that you'll travel through an incredibly lush landscape. Audley (01993 838000, audleytravel.com) has 10 nights — including two in Colombo, and stays at the Aman resorts in the

historic fort city of Galle and the chilled beach resort of Tangalle — from £2,185pp, B&B, a saving of £1,115pp, until September 30.

At the other end of the scale, Hayes & Jarvis (0871 664 0246, hayesandjarvis.com) has eight nights at the four-star Eden Resort, in Beruwela, which often appears on lists of the world's best beaches, for £699pp during August. That's a 34% discount on rates that haven't increased in years.

### INDIA

It's also monsoon time here, but ayurveda doctors believe that this is the best season to receive treatments — the dust-free atmosphere helps to open pores and makes the body more receptive to herbal oils and medicines, apparently.

The undisputed reigning champion of ayurvedic spas is Ananda, in the Himalayas, and Wellbeing Escapes (0845 602 6202, wellbeingescapes.co.uk) has discounted a week by £600pp to £1,890pp, full-board, until October 15, including two treatments daily.

While you may be drenched elsewhere, you're unlikely to see much rain in the desert state of Rajasthan. Despite this, its hotels drop rates just as dramatically as the rest of the country, making it incredibly good value (if searingly hot). Real Holidays (020 7359 3938, indiaportfolio.co.uk) has a 12-day trip, visiting Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Udaipur and Mumbai,

and staying in top-rated Oberoi properties, from £2,390pp next month — that's 34% less than the cost of the

same trip last August.

### THAILAND

You definitely won't escape regular rainfall if you visit in July or August, but it tends to occur in late afternoon or early evening, so you can spend the mornings beside the beach before retreating to the spa or bar when the skies darken.

The country's island hotels have dropped rates even more than competitors elsewhere because Thailand is still feeling the knock-on effects of the anti-government airport protests that disrupted flights for more than a week last November.

Bales (0845 057 0600, balesworldwide.com) has a week at the Pimalai Resort and Spa, in a slow-paced and unspoilt corner of Ko Lanta, from £1,165pp, B&B — that's £560pp cheaper than the same time last year.

If you want something a bit racier, there's always Phuket, where Tropical Locations (0845 277 3310, tropical-locations.com) is touting the Chedi. It has a lot in common with Phuket's Amanpuri, as they share the same designer (Ed Tuttle) and the same beach — although, right now, nothing like the same prices, as the Chedi has halved its rates. A week between Saturday and August 9 now costs £886pp, B&B. Book by July 17.







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**Ladies at Aman Galle, Sri Lanka, top left; speedy service at Jamaica's Half Moon, above; the Prince Maurice Hotel, left; and the Oberoi Udaivilas, Udaipur, below**

Hervé Hughes/Hemis.fr; Chris Caldwell/Axiom