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THE SUNDAY TIMES



THE ASHES IN AUSTRALIA

Jonathan Agnew's guide to a cricketing trip down under **10**



Travel



Endless summer

Bargain escapes in
September and beyond **6**

Travel Cover story

Go anywhere in the Med – from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Carian Coast – and when you ask anyone about their favourite time of year, they'll say: "September, my friend. Or October." Or, if you know where to look, early November, when the *veranillo de San Martin* – St Martin's little summer – brings June-like weather to corners of Spain.

It's not just that the weather is kinder when August has gone; once the high-summer hordes have departed, the beaches are quieter, the restaurants are more relaxed and prices go through the floor, plunging by up to 60% against high season. So, if you can, write off August and book an autumn break: here's our selection of the best deals.

SEPTEMBER

SIMPLE PLEASURES, SARDINIA

126 * 8 * 45%

One of the highlights at the family-owned Hotel CalaCunheddi is drifting in the pool and watching the sun set over the peaks of Gallura. Other easy pastimes include wandering down to the beach, which is virtually private at this time of year, renting a motorboat to putter around the headland for lunch at Porto San Paolo (try Il Portolano, with mains from £13; www.ristorantellportolano.it), ambling along the waterfront at Olbia, 10 miles west, and hanging out in the fabulous spa. What more do you need? A week's B&B in September starts at £1,250pp, including car hire (01489 866959, sardinianplaces.co.uk).

THERMAL SPA, GREECE

127 * 9 * 44%

The Miraggio Thermal Spa Resort lies near the tip of the Kassandra peninsula, in Halkidiki, a place of mysterious beauty that's said to have been the home of the Gigantes, or earth-born giants. They left behind the mineral-rich subterranean hot spring that bubbles up through the rocks at 32C and fills the pools in the vast wellness centre. It is claimed to have rejuvenating properties, but then everything at this ultra-luxurious, eco-friendly beach resort has much the same effect. A week in September, with a free upgrade to half-board, costs £725pp (01244 355527, inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk).

SHEPHERD'S HUT, CORSICA

124 * 9 * 44%

They say U Caseddu is a former shepherd's house. If that's true, we're going into shepherding, because this lamb wrangler was clearly minted. The house lies just outside the village of Figari. It's spread over three floors, sleeps six, has a 25ft pool and is next door to Yves Canarelli's winery, which sells Corsica's most sought-after whites. We'd stay put for the whole week, but if you must go out, Porto Vecchio and the beach at La Tonnara are both nine miles away. A week's self-catering in September starts at £499pp, including car hire (01489 866931, corsica.co.uk).

WELLNESS, SICILY

124 * 7 * 38%

The Verdura Resort is a Rocco Forte property on a mile and a bit of private waterfront near Sciacca, on the island's southwest coast. It has three Kyle Phillips golf courses, a tennis academy and a serious spa offering thalassotherapy, anti-ageing and detox treatments. There are four restaurants and five bars, and a week's B&B starts at £2,700pp in high summer. Go in September and it's £1,684pp, including car hire (020 3582 4990, originaltravel.co.uk).



SUMMER EXTENDED

Dodge the hordes, save a packet, but still bask in sunshine: book now for a southern European break in September and beyond, says *Chris Haslam*

FIESTA, CANARY ISLANDS

128 * 8 * 38%

Late September sees Fuerteventura basking in temperatures we'd be happy with in July, and brings the Fiesta de la Virgen del Rosario, a 17-day knees-up with a bit of religion thrown in. It kicks off in Puerto del Rosario in the last week of September and involves processions, dancing and stick fights. There's action at the other end of the island, too, where the Robinson Club Esquinzo Playa offers windsurfing, tennis, four restaurants and a spa. An all-inclusive week costs £841pp, departing on September 30 (thomson.co.uk).

ROOM WITH A VIEW, TUSCANY

125 * 7 * 34%

It's *la vendemmia*, the grape harvest, in Tuscany in September, and you can watch it from the terrace at Casetta con Vista, a pragmatically named, terracotta-tiled bolthole for two, overlooking vineyards

KEY

126 Average daily maximum temperature in degrees C

*10 Average hours of sunshine a day

25% Saving against August prices

Unless stated, prices include flights and transfers

at the edge of the hamlet of Montebuoni. There's a shared pool, the nearest restaurant is a delightful walk of a mile or so down a footpath through the woods in Lecchi, and the medieval hill town of Radda in Chianti is 15 minutes to the north. A week's B&B in late September is £352pp (0121 286 7782, to-tuscany.com). Returns to Pisa start at £41 with Ryanair; Zest has car hire from £110 (zestcarrental.com).

PEACE AND QUIET, CEPHALONIA

126 * 10 * 33%

Assos is a fishing village half an hour south of Fiskardo. Days there involve going to the beach and keeping an eye on the harbour. When the fishing boats come in, proceed to the O Molos restaurant, on the quayside, where Dimitri will show you what's been caught for lunch. Then swim, walk up to the castle, watch the sunset and take a candlelit table at Nefeli-Anait for a taverna dinner (nefeli-anait.com).

And repeat. There's no bar scene and no nightclubs, just clear waters and pine-scented tranquillity. A week's B&B in September at the Cavos Inn starts at £719pp, including car hire (020 8459 0777, ionianislandholidays.com).

WINE FESTIVAL, LAKE GARDA

124 * 7 * 26%

After months of blazing sun, Garda's water is at its warmest in September, and the lemon trees are heavy with the last crop of the season. The biggest attraction, though, is the Bardolino Wine Festival, a five-day celebration of the lakeside town's dangerously drinkable reds that begins on September 28. The boozing is accompanied by food stalls, live bands, a huge fireworks display and a headache. A week at the family-owned Bologna hotel, in the centre of Bardolino, starts at £540pp, B&B, departing on September 27 (01483 791116, inghams.co.uk).



OCTOBER

SEA-VIEW VILLA, KALKAN

124 ⚡ 8 ⚡ 60%

October in Turkey is still warm enough for T-shirts and shorts. In Kalkan, there's salt-baked sea bass for lunch at waterfront restaurants. The crowds are gone and the gulet skippers will be keen to strike a deal on a day voyage down the coast to the kind of coves you've seen in your dreams. That's if you can drag yourself away from the infinity pool sea views at Villa Ilda, a palatial five-bedroom property in the hills above the harbour. A week's self-catering for two costs £950pp, including car hire (020 8392 5872, simpsontravel.com).

ACTIVE BREAK, ALGARVE

125 ⚡ 7 ⚡ 54%

Even if you haven't been to Pine Cliffs, you'll have read about it in this paper. It's an old favourite of ours, in a gorgeous clifftop location overlooking the Atlantic and the soft, golden sands of the Praia da Falesia. Within the 180-acre resort, you'll find luxury rooms, world-class sporting facilities such as the Annabel Croft Tennis Academy and a golf school, a new spa called Serenity, 13 restaurants and bars, and a glass lift with panoramic views to take you down to the beach. We always like a lift to the beach. A week starts at £935pp, B&B, departing on October 1 (020 8968 0501, thehealthyholidaycompany.co.uk).



CYCLING, MALLORCA

124 ⚡ 8 ⚡ 25%

Its thigh-melting inclines and perilous hairpins have made Mallorca one of the world's great cycling destinations, but this self-guided trip is more Bradley Walsh than Bradley Wiggins. It covers 164 miles in total, but instead of whizzing past the sights in a blur of Lycra, you'll have time to get off the bike and explore. The itinerary takes in Palma, the salt lakes of Sant Jordi, Lluçmajor and Inca, and you're based at one hotel for the entire trip, so no need to pack and unpack every day. The week costs £802pp, half-board, including bike hire and bus transfers (01273 224066, freedomtreks.co.uk). Returns to Palma start at £49 with easyJet.

From left, take a break from drinking wine at Lake Garda in September; cycle in Mallorca in October; and November heat in Huelva, Andalusia

HIP HOTEL, PAPHOS

127 ⚡ 9 ⚡ 15%

Summer lingers in Cyprus, with blazingly hot days right through October. The resort of Paphos is a 2017 European Capital of Culture, and there are a number of rather highbrow events taking place this month (see pafos2017.eu/en). None should really deter you from the important business of eating meze at the magnificent Seven St Georges taverna (Georgiou M Savva 37), wandering around the ruins of ancient Neo Pafos and loafing by the pool at the hip Almyra hotel, where a week's B&B starts at £1,012pp (thomascook.com).

NOVEMBER

ST MARTIN'S SUMMER, ANDALUSIA

124 ⚡ 8 ⚡ 10%

On a bitterly cold November night, so the legend goes, St Martin met a naked beggar and tore his cloak in two to clothe the man. God rewarded this act of charity by sending a burst of summer heat in late autumn, and the phenomenon became known as *el veranillo de San Martin*, or St Martin's little summer. It comes in early November, pushing temperatures up to the mid-20s and bathing the province of Huelva in sunshine. Enjoy it deep in the campo at Finca el Moro, where the chestnut trees are ablaze with autumn colours and riding, hiking, yoga and home-cured *jamon* are on offer. A week's self-catering in November starts at £385pp (00 34 627 479738, fincaelmoro.com). Ryanair has returns to Seville from £105; car hire starts at £60 (autoeurope.co.uk).