



ADVENTURE

starts here...

Don't fancy a total-relaxation beach break for your next holiday? Then try your hand at horse trekking, kayaking, yoga, painting and more. All are guaranteed to exercise mind, body and soul, combined with an idyllic environment, says Imogen Lepere



This page: see submerged ruins at Simena by kayak. Below: Forte Village has activities to suit all ages. Opposite, top to bottom: the beach at Deniz Feneri Lighthouse hotel; Kekova island, Turkey



Kayaking **Simena, Turkey**

The only way to appreciate the eerie beauty of the underwater ruins in Simena is by kayak. Swimming is banned due to scuba theft and the water above the sunken city is too shallow for boats. Wonder at 2,000 years of Turkish history as you paddle over sarcophagi, cliff tombs and mosaics, following the outline of ancient streets with the help of a guide. Moor up on a pebble cove and explore Kekova island on foot; Byzantine ruins loom among the eucalyptus trees while the pretty villages Kale and Ucagiz cling to the vertiginous coast. Spend the night under the stars (tents are provided) with a glass of sweet *koyu cay*

traditional tea before paddling back to the hazy mainland at sunrise. Boutique hotel Deniz Feneri Lighthouse in nearby Kas is a luxurious option with a waterfront restaurant, Turkish bath and infinity pool. Indulge in a massage and cocktail before heading down to the hotel's private beach where kayaks are free of charge and loggerhead turtles live in the bay. **THE DETAIL** A week at Deniz Feneri Lighthouse with bed and breakfast and two-day kayak trip costs from £720 per person with Exclusive Escapes, exclusiveescapes.co.uk; flights from £340, germanwings.com



Water sports **Sardinia, Italy**

Luxurious Forte Village is an ode to excess, ambition and faultless planning. Nestled at the foot of the Santa Margherita di Pula mountains, its sub-tropical microclimate means the sea is two degrees warmer than anywhere else on the island. Head to the boathouse and take your pick from jet skis, catamarans, pedaloes and inflatables. While the resort owns an entire swathe of Sardinia's coastline, Cala Cipolla is best for watersports thanks to two granite promontories which ensure the bay is like glass even on a breezy day and underfoot is entirely rock-free.

There's plenty to entertain on dry land, too. Book early to bag a spot for your family in the sports academies where youngsters are coached by sporting heroes including Martin Johnson, Will Greenwood and England netball assistant coach Karen Atkinson.

Those looking to make the most of the excellent childcare will not be disappointed, leaving plenty of free time to keep active too.

Take your pick of 21 restaurants, ranging from simple tavernas to Michelin-starred fine dining. We recommend the Alfons Schuhbeck Restaurant, new this summer, which makes good use of the abundance of herbs in the resort gardens. There is also an entire piazza of designer boutiques, nine swimming pools and a spa offering the most sophisticated treatments on the market.

THE DETAIL A week at a superior bungalow at Bouganville, Forte Village, with unlimited access to non-motorised watersports facilities, is available from £1,435 half board with Abercrombie & Kent, abercrombiekent.co.uk; British Airways has flights from London Stansted to Cagliari from £365 return. ba.com

This page, top to bottom: São Miguel, the largest island in the Azores; less lugging of heavy bags with curated cycle tours. Opposite, clockwise from top: The Bandit Trail; before the climb; Costa Brava



Cycling **The Azores**

There are few better ways to discover São Miguel Island in The Azores than on bike. It's the perfect size for a week's holiday: big enough to have you wondering what's over the next horizon but compact enough to leave plenty of time for whale spotting and bathing in hot springs. Its rippling volcanic slopes were made for free-wheeling, while the microclimates nurture pockets of pretty azaleas and trees to provide welcome shade from the sun. Saddle Skedaddle's self-guided tour is curated to give a cycling holiday without the hassle of constantly unpacking bags and checking in. The accommodation is split between two luxurious hotels: 19th-century Colegió, which has an endearingly faded air, and Terra Nostra Garden Hotel with art-deco interiors and beautiful gardens. Call ahead to book a portion of *cozido*; a combination of spicy sausage and kale.

THE DETAIL A week's B&B with cycling support, from £815 with Saddle Skedaddle, skedaddle.co.uk; bike hire £140 a week. Flights to Ponta Delgada from £334 return, ryanair.com





Horse riding **Spain**

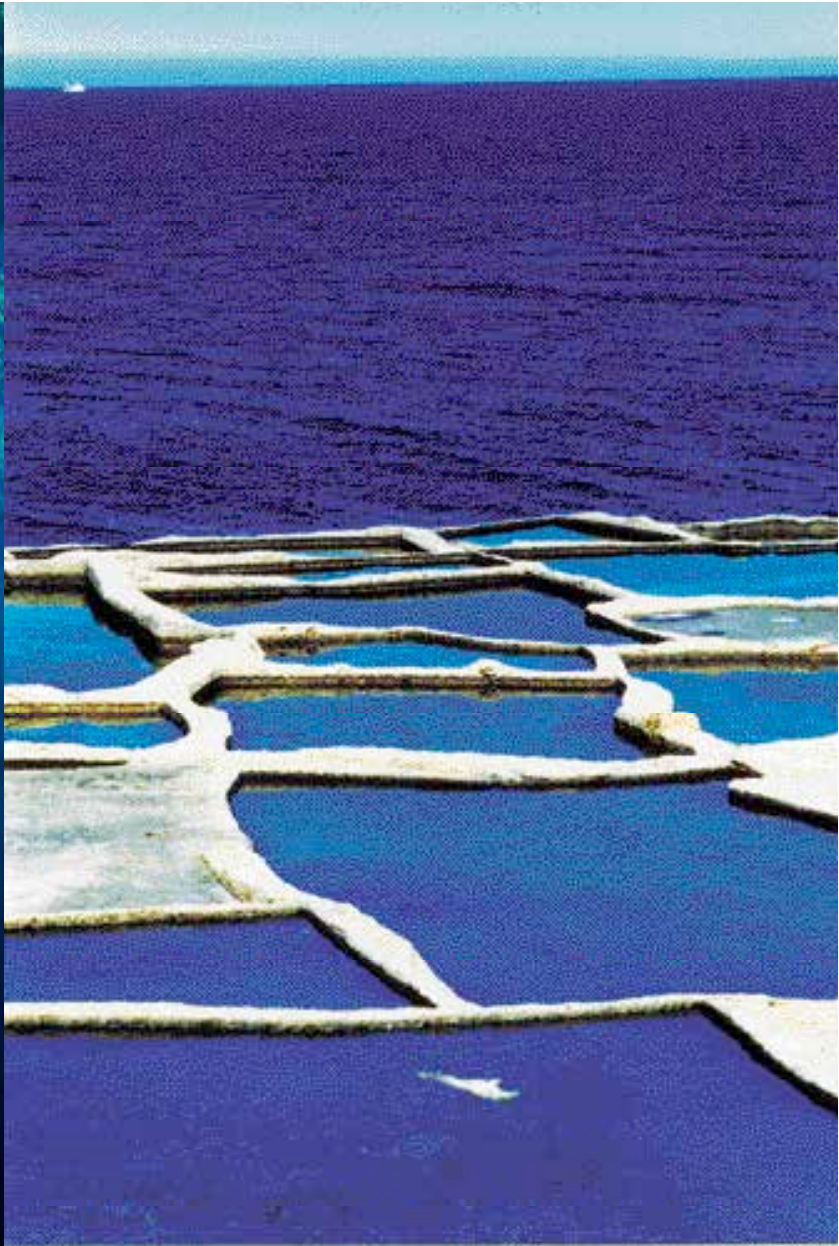
During the 17th century, the forest-filled canyons of the Catalan coast were patrolled by the famous bandolero Joan de Serrallonga and his men, immortalised in folklore in a similar way to Robin Hood. Spend a week exploring ‘The Bandit Trail’ on horseback, wending your way through the canyons of the Pyrenees mountains with a local guide pointing out hidden waterfalls and flower-filled meadows ideal for tapas picnics. While Andalusian horses are adept at navigating rocky trails, this 180km adventure is suitable only for experienced riders who are confident at all paces, and adept at using both Spanish and English. Accommodation is in intimate guesthouses along the way, which make up in atmosphere what they lack in luxury; think cool terracotta tiles, red geraniums and brightly painted shutters. Our pick of the week is El Guell, a traditional horse farm where

the horses wander the valley freely and you’ll be entertained with tales of outlaws over a bowl of chicken flavoured with prunes and a *porró* of local wine.

Other highlights include the chance to see medieval villages such as Tavertet, which clings to a gorge above the Pantà de Sau reservoir; beech and fragrant pine trees cluster around the lake, while morning mists give the scene a disarmingly wild beauty. The trip culminates with a ride along the edge of a mountain, known as the roof of Catalonia, and a sunset picnic in the shadows of El Far monastery.

THE DETAIL The Bandit Trail is available from £869 per person for seven nights, with full board, horses and transfers included, with In The Saddle, inthesaddle.com; Ryanair has flights from London Stansted to Barcelona for £178 return, ryanair.com





Clockwise: diving into the clear water around Gozo; salt pans near Qbajjar; luxury farm houses; with private pools; salt harvesting

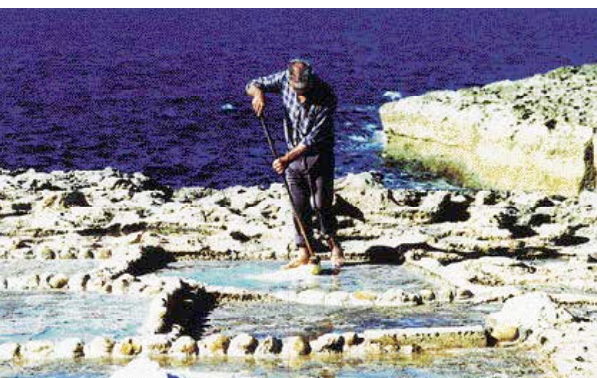
Diving Gozo

The strait between Gozo and Malta is widely recognised as among the best diving spots in the world, with great visibility and warm water all year round. In a single dive you can navigate through an underwater arch into the Blue Hole, a colourful haven of anemones and Neptune grass, before wriggling up a cleft in the rock known as the Chimney into the Coral Garden, a sunlight amphitheatre alive with scorpion fish. Throw in shipwrecks, sea caves and the cobalt Blue Lagoon and you have a mecca for diving enthusiasts.

Malta's unassuming little sister has heaps to offer on land too, with a wealth of local curiosities, including Ggantija, one of the world's oldest man-made structures (3,700 BC, if you're wondering), a temple complex thought to be where mythical sea nymph Calypso seduced Odysseus, and some glorious red-sand beaches including Ramla Bay and San Blas Bay. Stay in one of Off the Map Travel's

traditional farmhouses which have been converted into luxury villas with infinity pools, hot tubs and the option of a private chef. When dusk falls, stroll through the caper bushes to the citadel in Victoria. This Unesco World Heritage Site has been occupied since the bronze age and its twisting alleyways are irresistible for history buffs and romantics alike. Ta Rikardu on Fossos Street is a Gozo institution. Locals come from all over the island for the lively atmosphere and well-priced sharing platters of sun-dried tomatoes and *gbejniet* (salty sheep's cheese) washed down with homemade wine. Definitely worth booking ahead, 00 356 2155 5953.

THE DETAIL A week in a luxury farmhouse in Gozo with three dives and car hire included is available from £1,175 per person with Off the Map Travel, offthemaptravel.co.uk; Air Malta has flights from London Stanstead to Malta for £218 return. airmalta.com





Yoga **Formentera, Spain**

The hedonism of Ibiza never quite reached Formentera. This tiny island's tranquillity has saved the souls of troubled artists including Joni Mitchell, who wrote *Blue* on its pearl-tinted beaches and fig-tree groves. Separated from its sister islands by a mere 25-minute boat journey, sunrise on the two islands couldn't look more different. While partygoers stagger out of superclubs, the beautiful people of Formentera greet the dawn with juice and yoga. Join them on the deck of five-star hotel Gecko Beach Club for a dynamic class followed by a meditation session on the private beach. A five-day retreat with Formentera Yoga is very much a holiday rather than a bootcamp and suits all levels (and flexibilities). With just a morning and sunset class, you're free to try snorkelling, relax in the hotel hammocks or join the bangle-bedecked locals at El Pilar market on Wednesdays and Sundays. Sarongs at the ready... **THE DETAIL** A five-day yoga holiday at Gecko Beach Club and half board is available from £860 with Formentera Yoga, formenterayoga.com; flights from £161, monarch.co.uk

Clockwise from top:
Gecko Beach, Formentera; sunset yoga class;
Donald Steel-designed golf course at Château des Vigiers, France



Golf **Dordogne, France**

Château des Vigiers' 27-hole course is up there with the very best in Europe. The three nine-hole loops mean plenty of choice during your week's stay, with each set offering varying difficulty and undulating views of the central castle. Donald Steel – one of the greatest course designers of all time – named the 18th hole his favourite ever.

For monarchic grandeur, stay in the chateau or, for a more summery approach, try The Relais des Vigiers, which has tastefully muted woodwork and an excellent view of the first tee. After your round, spend the day exploring the Dordogne

valley, which is sprinkled with picturesque villages, fairy-tale castles and lush vineyards. The Saint-Alvère market on Wednesdays and Saturdays specialises in foie gras, truffles and cheese, or opt for private wine tasting at the Saint-Emilion vineyards. When dusk falls, dine under the plum trees at Les Fresques, the hotel's Michelin-starred restaurant. Beef tenderloin accompanied by red berries and gingerbread is an indulgent taste of the region.

THE DETAIL A week at Château des Vigiers is available from £1,149 per person on a bed-and-breakfast basis with Powder Byrne, powderbyrne.com; flights from £246, ryanair.com





Sea swimming **Mathraki, Greece**

The island of Mathraki is a green speck in the Ionian Sea with gentle slopes blurred by pine forests and long, lonely expanses of sand. Its 300 residents potter between the two villages on the island's only road, cultivating olives by hand and fishing in the inky seas. Mathraki's solitude makes it perfect for sea swimmers who need not fear the hordes of yachts which descend on Corfu at this time of year. A week with SwimQuest is intimate and nurturing, with no more than 5km of swimming per day. You'll have the chance to watch your technique on film followed by an individual analysis session with your personal coach.

A typical day starts with yoghurt and honey at the guesthouse, followed by a swim to any of the nearby uninhabited islets. Look

out for nesting falcons as you wallow in the warm shallows of clandestine coves, cool yourself in the shade of sea caverns and enjoy the Mediterranean from an entirely different vantage point. Watch the sunset from the Dolphin Taverna with a cold Mythos beer before heading to the Kafenion in Ano Mathraki, where the island's elderly residents gather to sip raki long into the night.

THE DETAIL A week's swimming with accommodation in a local guesthouse on a half-board basis, a guide and support team is available for £795 with SwimQuest, swimquest.uk.com; flights from £294, easyjet.co.uk; boats from Corfu New Harbour or Agios Stefanos depart daily, 00 30 26 6136 5200, or pre-book a water taxi from Corfu Paradise Mathraki hotel, corfuparadise.com





Opposite page:
Greek island
bliss includes
fresh seafood
and swimming
between islets.
This page: Hvar,
Croatia; the
Dalmatian coast;
capturing picture-
perfect Tuscany
on canvas



Painting **Tuscany, Italy**

What could be more inspiring than learning to paint in the region that fostered some of the greatest artists? Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci once wandered the rolling hills and medieval towns of Tuscany. Now you too can immerse yourself in a ten-day art retreat in Casole d'Elsa thanks to a collaboration between the St Ives School of Painting and the Verrocchio Art Centre.

Guests have six days of tuition and unlimited studio time, although with the breathtaking Elsa Valley within strolling distance you may find yourself seeking open-air inspiration. Stay in a traditional house owned by the school with a vine-shaded terrace – perfect for alfresco dining. Delve into the old town for a coffee and gelato at Lettieri Alba and don't miss the frescoes in the church of San Nicolo. **THE DETAIL** Ten days' half-board with six classes, transfer and unlimited materials costs £1,245 with St Ives School of Painting, schoolofpainting.co.uk; flights from £179 return. ryanair.com



Below: see the
islands of Solta,
Vis and Brac in a
private yacht

Sailing **Croatia**

Island-hopping, seafood grilled over olive wood and sailing – what could be better than cruising the Dalmatian coast in a private yacht, spending the days chasing the horizon and the nights sleeping under the star-spangled sky? Keen sailors can captain their own two-cabin monohull (though they must have an ICC licence) or charter a skipper and embrace the freedom of the region.

You'll see five islands over the week. Our pick are little Solta with its family-run vineyard (make sure you try the delicate myrtle liqueur), rugged Vis, and Brac, which has an excellent restaurant called Ribarska Kucica in a converted fishermen's shack.

THE DETAIL A week's hire of a fully equipped yacht (sleeps six) with linen and 24-hour support crew is available from £720 through Sunsail, sunsail.com; flights from £228, easyjet.co.uk

