

A swim-off villa holiday in THE MALDIVES

Ahh the Maldives, perfect beaches and laid-back glamour. But which of these beautiful jewels in the Indian Ocean to choose? You can't go wrong with Kandolhu, a 25-minute hop by seaplane from the Maldives' capital, Malé. As you fly in, gaze on this perfect tropical island surrounded by a protective reef and crystal-clear turquoise waters. Breathe deeply. Contented sigh. And relax.

The place to stay All 30 Kandolhu villas are beautifully decorated and amazingly equipped, but for the ultimate island experience book an Ocean Pool Villa, with its huge king-size bed, flatscreen, in-house iPad, and not forgetting the highlight, a spectacular outdoor bathroom – you can slip directly from your sun deck via steps into the ocean. Kandolhu boasts one of the best reefs in the Maldives so grab your snorkelling equipment – the fish and coral are a psychedelic wonderland of colour and it's not unusual to see turtles, reef sharks and octopuses.

The vibe This is beyond relaxed, not even flip-flops required – barefoot glamour at its unashamed best.

The weather now It's hot all year with temperatures hovering around 30°C. Expect a little more rain in July and August – a downpour at the end of the day takes away the humidity.

Eat Where to start? The resort has four restaurants – choose from à la carte, Mediterranean, catch of the day and Japanese.

Pack Light, light, light. You'll only need a few bikinis and sundresses.

The lowdown Kuoni (01306 747008; kuoni.co.uk) offers seven nights with breakfast at the five-star Kandolhu Island, Maldives in a Jacuzzi Beach Villa including flights with British Airways from London Gatwick and group transfers to resort. Prices for 2014 are from £1,919 per person, based on two adults sharing. To book, quote: MV070.



I'M A GRAZIA GIRL... GET ME OUT OF HERE!

Need a holiday NOW? Here's our pick of the best destinations to escape to this week...



Mooching and mojitos in FLORENCE

Florence, home of the world's most important collection of Renaissance art, Michelangelo's masterpieces, romantic bridges, Gothic cathedrals – and the place where Kim Kardashian married Kanye West. Now, if that's not a reason to visit one of Italy's most popular cities, we don't know what is...

The place to stay Hotel Continentale goes against the Florence norm. 'Modern' in the sense it takes its influence from the 1950s with a simple design and neutral colours. Designed by Florentine architect Michele Bönan, it's located right by the Ponte Vecchio.

The vibe It's all about the roof terrace – La Terrazza on the top floor of the hotel's medieval Consorti tower – word on the Florence street is that it's the place to enjoy cocktails. Pop in early evening after a day on your feet, when the sun sets (mojitos recommended) or after dark, when the city

lights up, to enjoy the gorgeous views.

The weather now In July and August temperatures can reach 30°C.

Eat There are your standard pasta and pizza places, and lots of seafood restaurants too. Interestingly, the city seems to be enjoying a burger revolution with venues popping up all over the place. Who knew?

Pack Summer clobber. It's wise to cover arms and legs when visiting churches and cathedrals. Florence is a relaxed city brimming with tourists and no one dressing too smartly for dinner (unless you're part of the Kardashian clan, obv).

The lowdown Hotel Continentale (+39 055 2726 4000, lungarnocollection.com or email reservations@lungarnocollection.com) is available from £176 per night excluding VAT and city tax based on two adults sharing a Continentale Room.

Pampering, sleeping late, eating lots in TUNISIA

Three years ago, Tunisia was in the grip of the Arab Spring, which wiped out the tourism trade. But now the country is back on its feet – and with miles of quiet beaches, exotic history and culture and a colourful North African backdrop, the place is ripe for rediscovery. We were sold because a) it's only two and half hours from the UK, and b) flights are comparatively cheap. Which makes it a great girly weekend retreat for anyone looking for R&R and a quick blast of sun.

The place to stay The Residence in Tunis, Tunisia's capital city. A five-star, orange-blossom scented Moorish-style oasis with elegant spa and hammam (steam bathhouse). The spa is famous for its thalassotherapy (seawater treatments) and has just added ESPA skincare to its treatment menu. The hotel is a pebble's throw from the beach, and a short drive from the colourful medina and souks of Tunis.

The vibe Relaxed, friendly and luxurious. The staff have all worked at the Residence for years, which in our books, is a sign of a good hotel.

The weather now A very bikini-friendly 27°C.

Eat Have grilled snapper and fresh mint tea at the shady pool bar for lunch. Spiced couscous and flatbread in the hotel's restaurant El Dar at night.

Pack Ancient Greek Sandals and folk-style embroidered kaftans for lounging by the pool. Something to cover your shoulders and knees to explore the medina.

The Lowdown ITC Luxury Travel (01244 355 527; itcluxurytravel.co.uk) has prices at The Residence Tunis from £1,085 per person based on two adults sharing a Garden View Room for seven nights, including daily breakfast, return economy flights with Tunisair and private transfers. ▶



People watching and pool parties in **MONTE CARLO**

» Is there anywhere glitzier, more glamorous, more damn swanky than Monaco and Monte Carlo? Hard to imagine. Nicole Kidman's movie *Grace Of Monaco* may have been panned by the critics, but this independent principality is still a Cartier-clad jewel in the French Riviera, just an hour's drive from Nice.

The place to stay The Fairmont Hotel is super-glam, and has the best pool parties outside of LA. We're talking Euro chic a-go-go here. Built in the '70s as the iconic Loews hotel, it had a €45 million makeover last year and, with 605 rooms, is one of the biggest luxury hotels in Europe. It's even got its own casino, just in case you want to break the bank of Monte Carlo.

The vibe Moneyed, designer-dripping, no expense spared. The place to party is the Monte Carlo institution that is Jimmy's, where inevitably someone will dance on the tables before the night has come to an end.

The weather now The South of France is perfect at the moment. Temperatures are around 25°C, much better than when the sweltering heat and crowds take over in August.

Eat The Café de Paris (casinocafedeparis.com/) The Brasserie-Cafe-de-Paris is the place to see and be seen – a Monaco institution. The food's OK, but you'll be too busy celeb-spotting to really appreciate it.

Pack The most glamorous gear you can muster.

As many designer sunglasses as you can fit in your suitcase. Swarovski crystals are appropriate on any clothing at any time of day.

The lowdown Flights with Monarch (monarch.co.uk) from Birmingham start at £39.99 each way and £32.99 from London Gatwick to Nice. Rooms at the Fairmont (fairmont.com/monte-carlo) start from £259 per night.



A spa with a difference in **DORSET**

» For a quick break without leaving the UK, head to rural Dorset for an unconventional home-away-from-home with a big helping of hippy holistic vibes. Stepping off the train at Sherborne station, just two hours from London, you feel like you're walking straight into a period drama. This is Hardy country, with proper rolling English countryside.

The place to stay Middle Piccadilly Rural Spa. 'It's not what people expect of a spa,' said the landlord of the local pub (yes, don't worry, there are two pubs within walking distance if you're not quite up for a full detox). And Middle Piccadilly is most certainly not your conventional spa. But it does have world-class spa treatments. Fact.

The vibe This is a family-run country cottage and you will be personally welcomed by husband and wife, Dominic and Lisa. They never have more than nine guests staying and dinner is served around the kitchen table. Their policy is relaxed and

laid-back and the spa is peaceful, homely and nurturing.

The weather now English summer – be prepared for anything!

Eat There are three food options: vegetarian, raw and a detox juice programme. The vegetarian food is exceptional, with fresh vegetables grown in the family garden. And they cater for any allergies or intolerances.

Pack Comfortable countryside clothes. Despite the lack of a pool, a bikini is advisable if you fancy a wrap. Also bring walking boots/trainers as there are some lovely local routes.

The lowdown Prices at Middle Piccadilly (Holwell, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 5LW; 01963 23468; middlepiccadilly.com) start from £75 per person per night for full-board accommodation, detox option. £100 for vegetarian option. £125 for the raw-food option. Therapies range from £30-£85. ■

