

travel

The new riviervas

We've discovered some fabulous coastal destinations for your summer holidays – where there's enough style and culture for the adults and plenty of seaside fun for the children

Riviera dei Fiori, Italy

WHY GO?

This stretch of the Ligurian coast in northern Italy offers you everything from beaches, sunshine and bustling towns to mountains, castles, caves and medieval villages – plus the region is small enough to get around easily by car. Here history, art, culture and traditions blend perfectly with chic modern restaurants and bars, and various outdoor pursuits, such as sailing and climbing. And with the French border so close you can easily jump on a train or hire a car and be in Monaco in next to no time (it's worth noting that a 45-minute taxi ride from Bordighera to Monaco costs about £70). Any other reasons to go? Ah yes, there's the food – Liguria is one of the capitals of the healthy Mediterranean diet – think delicious pasta, fresh fish, mouthwatering fruit, vegetables and olive oil.

WHAT TO DO AND WHERE TO GO

One of the most charming places on the Riviera is Bordighera, the city of palms, which was greatly loved by the English nobility in the last century (and Italian Queen Margherita who had a summer residence there). It still has a very British feel, with the beautiful Anglican Church and the Bicknell Museum.

The town is an ideal family base from which to explore this lovely region. As well as boasting an attractive pebbly beach alongside a tree-lined promenade, it has great restaurants – try the upmarket La Via Romana (laviaromana.it; +39 0184

266681) or the modern seafront eaterie La Reserve on Via Arziglia (+39 0184 261322). And don't forget the Pallanca Exotic Garden where more than 3,000 species of cacti thrive in a stunning setting.

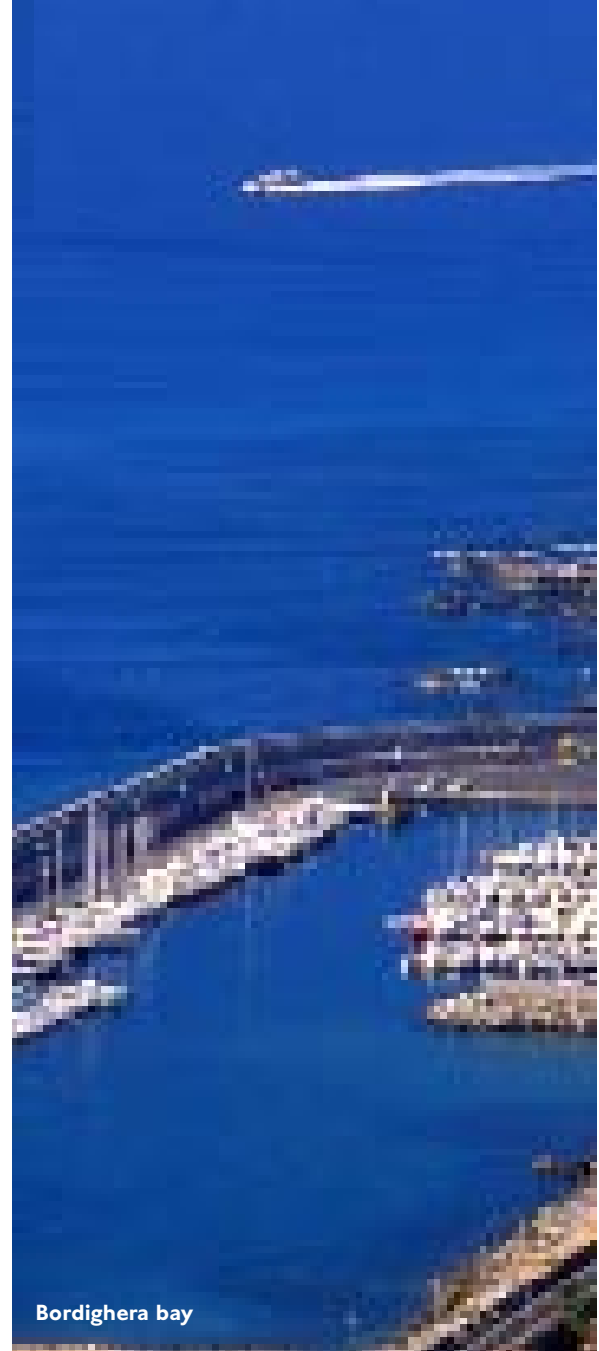
Market lovers can browse stalls in the town on Thursday mornings or head to nearby San Remo (Tuesdays and Saturday mornings) or Ventimiglia (Fridays).

An absolute must is a journey into the mountains and a look around the ancient villages. If you only have time for one, head off to Dolceacqua, which has an antiquated castle (music festivals are held there in August); a single-span medieval bridge and beautiful churches – and the Visionarium, a tiny cinema showing 3D documentaries, complete with relevant odours and an amazing sound system.

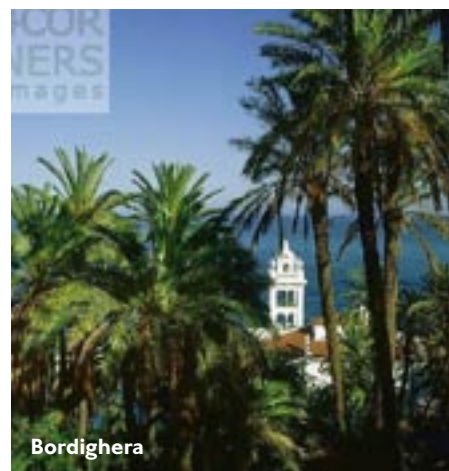
If you're feeling more adventurous, enjoy a glass of the famous Rossese and see how it's made by taking a trip into the mountains to the vineyard Terre Bianche (terrebianche.com). And for a real taste of old-fashioned Italian cuisine, drop into La Locanda degli Ulivi (+39 0184 206913) for delicious vegetables, followed by homemade ravioli, meat and potatoes. You can also browse around the delightful Hanbury Botanic Gardens in Ventimiglia.

WHEN TO GO

The climate is fairly mild all year round and there's plenty of culture on offer, which means there's something to do even on wet days. Those who don't like very hot weather may find July and August too



Bordighera bay



Bordighera

steamy as the temperature often soars well into the 30s. Locals suggest the best time to come is in May and June when the heat is comfortable and the region is in full, beautiful bloom.



Royal Hotel, San Remo

WHERE TO STAY

• **Budget** For a peaceful stay, head out of Bordighera towards Perinaldo to Il Rifugio Di Artemide (ilrifugiodiartemide.it; + 39 0184 672131), which stands on a hillside

and is popular with musicians and artists. Prices start from £51 a night per room and £65 for an apartment.

• **Mid-range** Highly recommended is the Victorian-style, family-run Hotel Villa Elisa (villaelisa.com; +39 0184 261313) in Bordighera, which provides a perfect spot to explore the Riviera – and Monte Carlo – and is within walking distance of the old town and the beach. Surrounded by a grove of orange and lemon trees, this three-star hotel has a heated outdoor pool, very comfortable rooms, a restaurant, and an invigorating Thai massage service, for around £15. Prices start from £68 for a double, including breakfast.

• **Luxury** The five-star Royal Hotel in San Remo (royalhotelsanremo.com; +39 0184 5391) has great Mediterranean views and it boasts a new, state-of-the-art wellness

centre. Rooms cost from £158 per night, including breakfast and use of facilities.

HOW TO GET THERE

Nice is the obvious gateway to the Riviera dei Fiori. Fly from Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds Bradford, Liverpool, Gatwick, Heathrow, Luton, Stansted, Manchester and Newcastle. Try British Airways (ba.com; 0870 850 9850); bmibaby (bmibaby.com; 0871 224 0224); easyJet (easyjet.com; 0871 244 2366) and Jet2 (jet2.com; 0871 226 1737). Prices start at around £50 return, including taxes. Trains from Nice take just over an hour to San Remo and cost a few euros.

TO FIND OUT MORE

• *Log on to bordighera.it to read about the town. For the Riviera, check out rivieradefiori.org* ▷



Dubrovnik's Old Town, Croatia

Dalmatian coast, Croatia

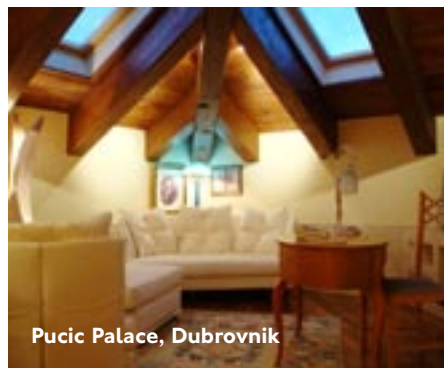
WHY GO?

◁ A decade on from the war, Croatia's old-style European charm and Mediterranean sunshine is drawing a fresh generation of visitors. And, in turn, the influx of tourists is contributing to the country's renewed sense of confidence. It's not yet as pricy – or as crowded – as its Latin counterpart across the water (though with Roman Abramovich and the like among the country's regular summer visitors, it can't be long before prices catch up). This time around it's being developed in a more sensitive way than it was under the communists, who favoured monster beach resorts. Now, with boutique hotels to check into, pretty, yacht-filled harbours to explore and stunning beaches to laze on, it's no wonder Croatia's island-peppered coastline is gaining ground on the independent traveller's map.

WHAT TO DO AND SEE

While the atmospheric old city of Dubrovnik is deservedly the country's top attraction, Split is a more obvious starting

point for exploring the Dalmatian coast because it's one of the region's biggest ferry hubs. It developed around the remains of Diocletian's Palace, the retirement home of the Roman emperor. Just up the coast is Trogir, a pretty medieval town and a UNESCO world heritage site. Alternatively, take a ferry to Brac and join the crowds on Zlatni Rat, a finger-shaped beach with a blossoming watersports scene. More chichi is Hvar, a Venetian harbour town on the island of the same name. Then there's picturesque Vis, a pine-strewn island further offshore.



Pucic Palace, Dubrovnik

WHEN TO GO

Any time of year is good, though many of the hotels on – and ferries to – the islands shut down between October and May. If you want to hit the beaches, July and August are the best months, although, during the peak summer season, you'll also have to share the sand with large numbers of fellow tourists.

WHERE TO STAY

• **Budget** The small and friendly Pension Curin (hvar.hr/teo-curin; +385 21741989) in Hvar has breezy en-suite rooms with fridges and balconies (some with a sea view), all have access to a shared kitchen. Doubles cost £20, room only.

• **Mid-range** Hang out with the beautiful people at the Hotel Podstine (podstine.com; +385 2174 0400), just outside Hvar. Doubles at this secluded, 40-room hotel start from around £99, with breakfast.

• **Luxury** Consider a stay at the Pucic Palace (thepucicpalace.com; +385 2032 6200) in Dubrovnik for a real treat. This former nobleman's home on the main square has been transformed into a chic boutique hotel. Decorated with antiques and art, each of its 19 rooms has been named after a Croatian poet, artist or musician. Doubles cost from around £250 a night, including breakfast.

HOW TO GET THERE

The closest airports to the coast are Dubrovnik, Split in the south and Rijeka in the north. British Airways (ba.com; 0870 850 9850) flies from Gatwick to Dubrovnik and Split; Flybe (flybe.com; 0871 522 6100) from Birmingham to Dubrovnik and Split; Easyjet (easyjet.com; 0871 244 2366) from Bristol; Luton to Rijeka; and from Gatwick to Split. Return fares are from £50 to £150. Or you can hop across the Channel, drive to Italy and then take a car ferry from Bari to Dubrovnik or from Ancona to Split.

TO FIND OUT MORE

• *Contact the Croatian National Tourist Board (croatia.hr; 020 8563 7979) or visit croatiatraveler.com, run by Jeanne Oliver, author of Croatia – Lonely Planet Country Guide (Lonely Planet, £13.99) ▷*



Padstow, Cornwall

Cornwall

WHY GO?

First came the new wave of surfers (ones bearing Le Creuset pans and bottles of Chablis rather than camper vans and beer), then Tate St Ives and “Padstein” – Rick Stein’s foodie empire in Padstow. Now even Jamie Oliver has ventured way out west, with a branch of restaurant Fifteen in Watergate Bay outside Newquay. However, the county’s thriving cultural scene and untamed landscape has softened the edges of its commercial development.

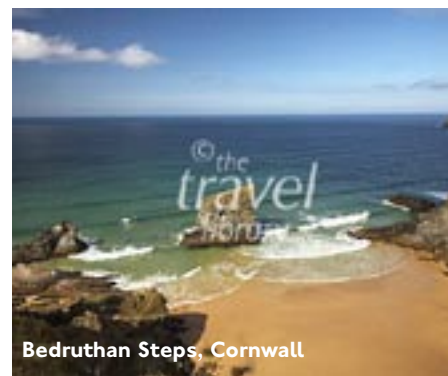
WHAT TO DO AND SEE

Long before the Tate opened a Cornish outpost above Porthmeor Beach in St Ives (tate.org.uk; 01736 796226), Cornwall had drawn an artistic crowd. The region’s most famous artist’s colony was started in the 1930s by sculptor Barbara Hepworth and her husband Ben Nicholson. Visit the magical Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden on Barnoon Hill in St Ives (01736 796226); a joint ticket with Tate St Ives costs £8.75. Next, fill up on fresh crab sandwiches from a stall or café and head out for a windswept stroll between Lamorna and Mousehole. Then there’s the Minack Theatre (minack.com; 01736 810181), an amphitheatre hewn out of the cliff by its eccentric founder, Rowena Cade. This summer’s performances include *The True Story of Martin Guerre* and *Twelfth Night*. You can also test out the surf at the National Surfing Centre (nationalsurfingcentre.com; 01637850737); day courses cost £50. Or stop off at the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth

(nmmc.co.uk; 01326 313388) – a spectacularly designed building on the harbour. Finally, if you’re interested in plants and botany, make sure you leave time to visit the space-age Eden Project (edenproject.com; 01726 811911).

WHEN TO GO

With bracing coastal walks in winter and sunny days in summer, every time of year has something to offer but most people visit between June and September. Be warned though, it can get crowded.



Bedruthan Steps, Cornwall



Hotel Tresanton, St Mawes

WHERE TO STAY

- **Budget** Cornish Tipi Holidays (cornish-tipi-holidays.co.uk; 01208 880781) rents wigwams for two from £375 per week.
- **Mid-range** Primrose Valley Hotel (primroseonline.co.uk; 01736 794939) near Porthminster Beach in St Ives, combines style with eco-awareness (guests can donate £1 a night to the Marine Conservation Society). Doubles cost from £85 a night including breakfast.
- **Luxury** Try Hotel Tresanton (tresanton.com; 01326 270055) by the harbour at St Mawes. Each room contains one-off furniture and Cornish art. There is a terrace restaurant and facilities for children. Doubles start from £170 a night including breakfast.

HOW TO GET THERE

The most romantic way to get to Cornwall from London is by sleeper train; bed down in Paddington and wake up in Penzance (thetrainline.com; 0845 484950). Trains take well under six hours from London and there are good connections from the rest of the country. Or fly from Stansted, Bradford, Manchester, Gatwick, Dublin, Leeds, Edinburgh, Belfast and other airports (visitnewquay-airport.co.uk).

TO FIND OUT MORE

- *Contact the Cornwall Tourist Board* (cornwalltouristboard.co.uk; 01872 322800) □

For more holiday ideas go to SHE's website, www.allaboutyou.com/escape

how to...

Last-minute holiday bargains

If you want to get away at the drop of a hat, we show you where and how to find the best deals



Cala Salada beach, Ibiza

Travellers tend to fall into two camps. There are those for whom holidaying is a mission so precise that they booked this year's trip as soon as they unpacked their suitcases after last year's jaunt. Then there are those who would rather fly by the seat of their pants, realising only at the start of July that they fancy getting away. If you're one of life's more accidental tourists, the good news is that finding a last-minute holiday has never been easier. Here are our seven top tips...

1 CHECK OUT THE WEB
If you want a cheap package holiday, try the 'Big Three' tour operators; Thomson (**thomson.co.uk**), First Choice (**firstchoice.co.uk**) and Thomas Cook (**thomascook.com**). There are often good deals to be had.

The rise of low-cost airlines and internet shopping means that sales of ready-made package holidays have fallen over the past few years. The result of this has been a lot of holidays sold off at bargain prices in June and July.

2 FINDING A FLIGHT
Check out charter airlines such as Thomsonfly (**thomsonfly.com**), Thomas Cook Airlines (**thomascook.com**) and Excel (**xl.com**). These often offer low prices at the last minute, unlike the 'budget' airlines, whose lowest prices are available when tickets first go on sale and then tend to increase. If you'd rather get further off the beaten track, there are several flight-comparison websites, such as **whichbudget.com**, **flycheapo.com** and **kayak.co.uk**. Make sure you double-check prices on the airlines' own websites too. Once you've added in taxes, luggage charges, fuel supplements, and transport to the airport, is it still such a great deal?

3 FINDING A HOTEL
Some of the best hotel deals are available through last-minute booking websites, such as **laterooms.com**, **wotif.com** and **hotels.com**, though it's always worth double-checking rates against the hotels' own offers. Also check sites like **tripadvisor.co.uk** and **holiday-suncovered.com** to see how the destination scores with other travellers. If all else fails, haggle. Ask the hotel if they can offer a better rate, or a free upgrade, and they'll often come back with a deal. If you're after somewhere interesting, **sawdays.co.uk** lists a great selection of B&Bs, small hotels and cottages as far afield as Orkney and Marrakech, while **rusticae.es** represents some lovely independently owned places in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries; an English-language version of its website is imminent. If you'd rather book both a flight

and a hotel through one site, many of the online travel agents have specialist pages dedicated to last-minute holidays. Try **expedia.co.uk**, **ebookers.co.uk**, **lastminute.com**, **opodo.co.uk** and **lowcosthols.com**. Or, if you're *really* in a hurry, try sites like **traveljungle.co.uk** and **travelsupermarket.com**. These trawl through other websites for you.

4 LEARN TO COMPROMISE
Be as flexible as possible when it comes to your destination. Hotel prices are often cheaper in the summer in the Caribbean, Florida and many parts of the Indian subcontinent because of the hurricane and monsoon seasons. But, if you can cope with heat and humidity, you'll often have sunny days with only occasional showers. Likewise, be flexible when searching for flights; mid-week fares are often cheaper than those on Fridays and Sundays.

5 TALK TO THE EXPERTS
Tour operators offer great insider information. They sometimes also have access to fares not widely available to the public. For a list of independent tour operators specialising in the region or activity you're interested in, log on to The Association of Independent Tour Operators' website (**aito.co.uk**). Or, try Trailfinders (**trailfinders.com**; 0845 058 5858) or Travelbag (**travelbag.co.uk**; 0800 082 5000).

6 WATCH OUT FOR POSSIBLE PITFALLS
Always have travel insurance and make sure you've read the small print about cancellation

charges or ticket changes. If you're booking a package, try to ensure accommodation is specified. "A lot of packages are based on hotels being allocated on arrival," says Mike Pedley of *Holiday Which?* magazine. "This is all right as long as you've been given a guaranteed star rating but, if you get there and you find the hotel's still being built, bring it up with the rep immediately and ask to be moved. If you've booked with one of the big tour operators they will usually try to help in order to protect their reputation."

Also, check whether you're protected if the airline goes bust. Under the Package Travel Regulations (PTR), every package that includes a flight should be covered by an Air Travel Organiser's Licence (ATOL). But if you book a hotel and flight independently, or if your travel agent sells you a 'dynamic' package (for example sells you flights, hotel and car hire separately) – you're not covered.

7 USE YOUR CREDIT CARD
For extra peace of mind, book with a credit card. The card issuer is jointly liable for breaches of contractor "misrepresentations". But, if it all goes wrong and you find you're in a half-built hotel, three hours from the beach with a tour rep who doesn't listen, try to relax. Some of the best trips I've had have been the ones where plan A has gone awry. □

Go to SHE's website, www.allaboutyou.com/escape for more great holiday ideas to suit all budgets and tastes

