

Bargain travel destinations for 2010

You don't have to break the bank to have a great holiday. If you know where to look, next year has plenty of bargains up for grabs



The tour operators are unanimous: Turkey is 2010's bargain of the year. But they would say that. After last year's mass desertion from the eurozone, the holiday giants have hugely increased capacity from Kusadasi to Antalya, but caveat emptor: those extra rooms might lack both the spaciousness and the proximity to the beach everybody was raving about last summer, and local costs — eating out, shopping and taxis — have risen sharply, so choose wisely.

Expect to pay about £600 for a week in a good-quality all-inclusive beachside property: Thomas Cook (0844 412 5970, thomascook.com) has seven nights at the four-star Pasha's Princess, in Camyuva, for £615, departing on July 27.

Elsewhere, the holiday companies have been studying their maps to find destinations like Turkey, with guaranteed sun and sandy beaches, that are outside the eurozone. The holiday giant TUI is increasing the number of holidays it offers in Morocco by 120%, and it won't be long before we're being told that North Africa is the new Turkey.

Increasingly extravagant properties are opening almost every week in Morocco — the huge new Mazagan Beach Resort has an 18-hole Gary Player golf course, an Espa spa, a casino, three kids' clubs and more bars and restaurants than most towns in Somerset. A week there between April 26 and June 26 starts at £565 with Luxury Holidays Direct (020 8774 7299, luxuryholidaysdirect.com).

In Tunisia, where Thomson is upping the number of holidays on sale by 48% next summer, you can get an all-inclusive week at the confusingly named Caribbean World from £323, departing on May 5, with First Choice (0871 200 4455, firstchoice.co.uk). Or, if you fancy something more upmarket, try the Residence, where a week starts at £968 with Abercrombie & Kent (0845 618 2200, www.abercrombiekent.co.uk).

Greece is as broke as Dubai, but the discounts we were expecting are thin on the ground. Tour operators report that hoteliers have cut 5%-10% from tariffs, and while the specialists accept that Greece simply can't compete with Turkey in terms of value, the island expert Bernadette Askouni says the key is to go native. "Eat where the locals eat, drink local wines from the barrel, rather than imported, and negotiate the price of fish prior to ordering — seafood is usually priced by the kilo," she says.

A week in the self-catered Spiro apartment, in the lovely village of Agios Stefanos, on Corfu's northeast coast, starts at £479, based on two sharing and departing on May 3, with Ionian and Aegean Island Holidays (020 8459 0777, www.ionianislandholidays.com).

France knows we got our fingers badly burnt last summer on £6 beers and £60 lunches, and while the regional tourism organisations are aware of the need to cut prices to tempt us back, the problem, they say, is persuading greedy local businesses to play ball. The posh holiday-camp operator Sibleu (0871 911 7777, sibleu.com) has taken matters in hand by persuading certain bars and restaurants surrounding its sites to guarantee a rate of €1.25 to the pound, but it remains to be seen whether other resorts will follow their initiative.

In Spain, hoteliers from Cadaques to Cadiz are slashing prices by up to 30%. In the summer holidays, a week at the four-star Hotel Luabay, in Tenerife, starts at just £248 with On the Beach (0871 911 0202, onthebeach.co.uk). The key to Spanish value is to book a package — going direct will always be more expensive.

There are few indications that Italy has any plans to break with the tradition of fleecing visitors, but travellers can expect villa prices to fall to more reasonable levels. Hundreds of properties in Tuscany and Umbria stood empty in the peak-season weeks this summer, leaving hand-wringing owners waiting for you to make an offer they can't refuse.

The villa specialist Invitation to Tuscany (020 844 9500, invitationtotuscany.com) has pegged its portfolio at 2008 prices, with several properties dropping prices even lower for 2010 — the cost of an August week at the four-bedroom Borgo Personatina, south of Siena, is now £2,540, a grand cheaper than it was this summer.

Otherwise, our tip is to head for Puglia, the unspoilt heel of the boot and arguably home to Italy's finest food and wine. Unknown to the Chiantishire crowd, it also offers proper value for money: a summer week at the four-star Masseria Santa Lucia, in Marina di Ostuni — private beach, organic vegetable garden, cracking restaurant — starts at £546, including car hire, with Long Travel (01694 722193, long-travel.co.uk).

Middle East

Package prices in Egypt have gone up since last year, but the phalanx of all-inclusive resorts along the Red Sea riviera means it offers the second-best-value sun and sand within six hours of home (behind Turkey). Red Sea Holidays (0845 313 9949, redseaholidays.co.uk) has a year-round flat rate of £399 for children — the adult price for a week in late July at the Makadi Palace Family Star, a luxury all-inclusive outside Hurghada, is £864.

If Sharm has lost its charm, check out Marsa Matruh, on the country's Mediterranean coast. Unknown to the British, the resort has been a popular Egyptian summer bolt hole for decades, and now the entire coastline has been earmarked for riviera-style development. In the meantime, it's unexplored and unspoilt — although it lacks the Red Sea's marine life — and you can get an Easter week at the five-star Jaz Almutrah for just £520 with Thomson (0871 231 4691, thomson.co.uk).

On the other side of the Arabian peninsula, Dubai remains a bargain, especially if you build your own package using Travelsupermarket.com or Hotels.com. The best deals will be away from the beach, where city-centre five-star properties can be found for less than £50 a night.

Long-haul

Top value in 2010, as in 2009, is Thailand, which continues to offer some staggering deals. Back when we had cash, a week at the fabulous Six Senses Hideaway Yao Noi, in Phang Nga Bay, would have cost about £2,400. Now it's £1,245 for departures from April 10 through The Ultimate Travel Company (020 7386 4646, theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk).

Some prices are so low, you wonder if there's some mistake: Travelmood (0800 840 7802, travelmood.com) has a fortnight at the Patong Beach Hotel, in Phuket, departing on May 1, for £749; Destinology (0800 634 2866, destinology.co.uk) offers seven nights at Evason Hua Hin from £559, valid from May to October.

Also worth watching is Mauritius, which is in direct competition with its equally hard-hit Indian Ocean rival, the Seychelles. Its hotels are slashing prices and piling up the value-added deals — examples include two weeks for the price of one between May and July at the three-star Merville Beach for £1,379 with Destinology (0800 634 2866, destinology.co.uk); and £702 off a fortnight in May at the five-star Beau Rivage, on Belle Mare beach, now £1,772 with Mauritius Luxury Holidays (020 8441 2818, mauritiusluxuryholidays.co.uk).

The Dominican Republic is our top tip for the Caribbean, with a swathe of luxury resorts keen to secure your business on the back of new British Airways flights into Punta Cana. The beaches here are as good as anywhere in the Caribbean, and a week's stay on an "unlimited luxury" basis — read "posh all-inclusive" — at the vast yet tasteful Dreams Palm Beach starts at £999 in June with Tropical Sky (01342 331799, tropicsky.co.uk).

We're disappointed by Mexico's offerings — although the twin effects of recession and swine flu are still being felt along the Mayan riviera, the discounts on offer are feeble — but we're watching. If anything changes, we'll let you know.