

THE TIMES Saturday September 3 2016

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Travel

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'The sea was an almost fluorescent turquoise, lapping against white beaches'
Hannah Fletcher on Florida's secret islands



2 Castello Banfi - Il Borgo, Tuscany

20 autumn escapes in Europe

Stay in a vineyard hotel in Tuscany or a finca in Seville — **Annabelle Thorpe** picks the best breaks to book now

1 Hike along the Corsican coast

September and October is the perfect time to go on a hiking break in Corsica when the sun is not too hot. The hills and coastline around Olmeto, in the southwest of the island, make good walking terrain; a particularly lovely ramble is along the cliff-top of nearby Capo di Muro, which offers superb views across the sea. A good base for a visit is *Bergene Olivella*, a hillside villa with a little pool.

Details A week's self-catering at *Bergerie Olivella*, which sleeps six, is from £499pp in September, including flights and car hire (01489 866931, corsica.co.uk); other properties sleeping two are available

2 Cooking and wine in Tuscany

Take part in a four-hour cooking lesson using seasonal local ingredients and learn how to pair dishes with suitable wines at *Castello Banfi - Il Borgo* in Tuscany. This chic and luxurious castle is in the heart of the foodie lovers' region and makes montalcino wine from its vineyards. Other activities include hiking and mountain biking in the hills. There are plush rooms, some with four posters.

Details B&B rooms are from about £590; cooking lessons are £212 (castellobanfililborgo.com)



3 Crillon le Brave, Provence

3 Join a truffle hunt in Provence

The most expensive fungi in the world burrow up through the earth in late October and November; this break at the luxurious *Crillon le Brave* hotel lets you join experienced *trufficulteurs* Frank and Alexis Jaumard. There's also a truffle-themed cooking lesson with the hotel's chef and a chance to visit one of *Château-neuf-du-Pape's* wineries.

Details Three-nights cost from £1,170 for two, half-board, including excursions but not train/flights to Marseilles or Avignon (00 33 4 90 65 61 61, crillonlebrave.com)

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SHANE LINDEN/GETTY IMAGES

18 Jardín Canario, Gran Canaria

4 Flamingos in Corfu

Even non-birdwatchers can't fail to be moved by the spectacular sight of hundreds of pastel-hued flamingos massing on the wetlands of Alikes Lefkimmis and Chalikounas Beach on a long stopover during their migration between Africa and Europe — the array of white, pink and black birds is one of the Med's most eye-catching autumn spectacles. Stay at the newly refurbished Marbella Corfu, overlooking the pristine beach at Agios Ioannis Peristeron.

Details A week costs from £573pp, including flights, transfers and half-board (0800 2949318, classic-collection.co.uk)

5 See the aurora in Finland

Although winter is traditionally aurora-spotting time, autumn in Finnish Lapland offers equally good opportunities to see the northern lights, with chances to spot wildlife — and to be there when the first snow falls. This four-night break includes an alfresco evening looking for the lights by the warmth of a campfire, while other evenings are spent in a minibus chasing the best view. Days include visits to a reindeer farm and a wilderness cookery school.

Details Four-night breaks run on selected dates from the end of September and cost from £1,225pp.



6 Masseria Trapana, Lecce

including flights, transfers, full-board and excursions (01670 785012, theaurorazone.com)

6 Make pasta in Puglia

The harvest months in Italy are the ideal time to sign up for a cookery class. Masseria Trapana, a new hotel near Lecce, is offering five days of classes (October 24-28) for guests to dip in and out of, learning the best of *cucina povera* — peasant's cooking, which includes dishes of local lamb and beef — and how to make *orecchiette*, the traditional, Puglian ear-shaped pasta. If you want to get out of the kitchen, the beautiful baroque town of Lecce is a short drive away.

Details From £236 per night full-board, including cooking class (00 39 0832 1832101, trapana.com). Ryanair flies from Stansted to Brindisi

7 Improve your photography in Cork

The soft autumn light is a dream for photographers, and this three-night break in west Cork is great for improvers. The tutor-student ratio is 1:4, which will allow you plenty of personal attention. Topics include landscape, macro and wildlife photography, and a trip out to sea to spot whales. The break runs for four weekends (Saturday to Tuesday) from September 24. Stay at the Yellow House, a cosy farmhouse on the Wild Atlantic Way overlooking the



Head Bay, which opens only for the photography breaks.

Details Three-night breaks cost from £501pp, including accommodation, all meals and tuition (theyellow-house.com)

8 Explore the Black Forest on foot

In autumn, the Black Forest becomes something of a misnomer; the great swathes of colours that wash across the German landscape make "the golden forest" a more accurate description. A new tour from Intravel gives you the chance to walk beneath the flame-hued canopy, staying in low-eaved inns that

seem straight out of *Hansel & Gretel*. The forest is a walker's dream, criss-crossed with trails that cater for serious hikers and entry-level walkers.

Details Six nights costs from £802pp, including most meals, luggage transport and rail travel from Basel (01653 617002, intravel.co.uk). EasyJet (easyjet.com) flies from Gatwick to Basel

9 Paint ancient ruins in Istria, Croatia

Hilltop towns, vineyards and olive groves — the northern region of Istria is like Tuscany without the crowds, and this new painting week from Authentic Adventures

out Here

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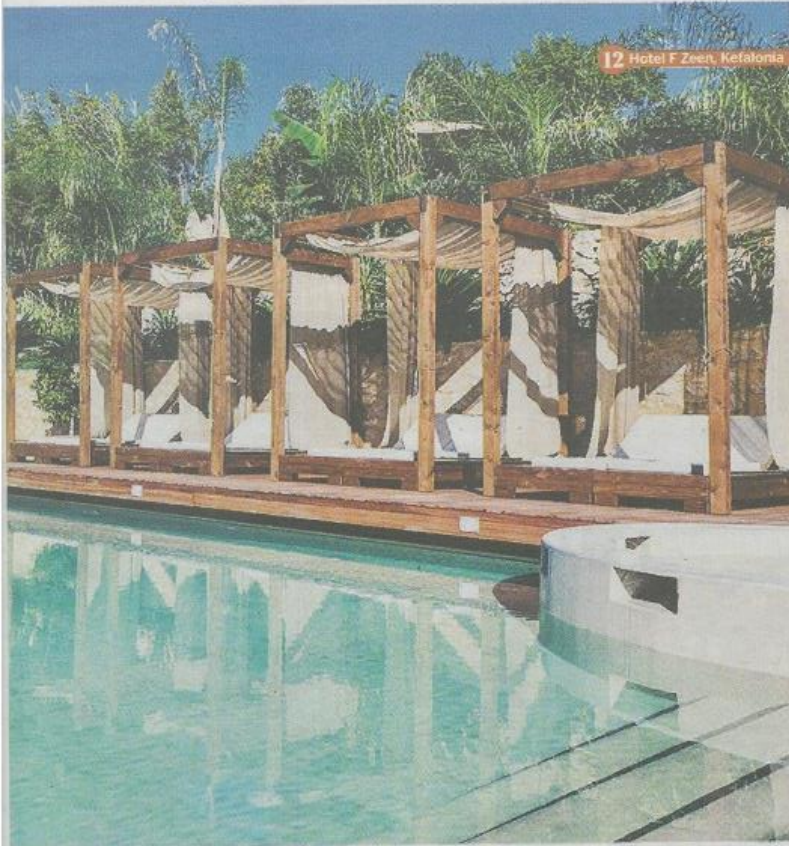
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BERMUDA



12 Hotel F Zeen, Kefalonia

makes the most of the glorious autumn light and gorgeous scenery. Departing September 24, you will have the chance to paint everything from the elegant Venetian architecture in Rovinj to the Roman amphitheatre at Pula. **Details** A week costs from £1,599pp, including full-board and excursions but not flights (01453 823328, authenticadventures.co.uk). EasyJet flies from Gatwick to Pula

10 See flamenco in Seville

Lovers of dance should head to Seville for the Bienal de Flamenco from September 8 to October 2 (labienal.com). Every kind of flamenco is on show, from traditional to avant-garde, with many well-known performers on stage at venues scattered across the city. Base yourself at cosy Casa 109, a traditional Seville townhouse in the heart of the city, with two comfortable double bedrooms and a lovely roof terrace. **Details** A three-night break costs from £375, self-catering (00 34 627 479738, fincaelmoro.com). Flights are extra

11 Go wolf-watching in northern Spain

Go off the beaten track in northern Spain for a spot of serious wildlife spotting: the little-known region of north Palencia offers the best chance in Europe to see Iberian wolves. This atmospheric part of Spain is at its best in autumn, when deserted villages glow softly beneath the sun and wild boar, brown bears and deer are preparing for winter. Home base is three cosy farm cottages in the heart of the mountains. **Details** Four-night breaks cost from £895pp, including flights and full-board (01962 733051, naturetrek.co.uk)

12 Join the olive harvest in Kefalonia

Captain Corelli's island is covered in olive groves and in late autumn the islanders come together to harvest the fruit. The newly opened Hotel F Zeen is offering guests who stay in October the chance to join the pickers and learn about turning the olives into oil (a bottle will be sent to their home once it has matured). F Zeen opened in March after a refit, with 28 chic, cream-hued bedrooms. **Details** From £138 a night, B&B (020 7183 5383, uniquekefalonia.com). EasyJet flies from Gatwick and Manchester to Kefalonia

13 Cycle in Provence

Headwater's new hilltop villages of Provence cycling tour, which runs until the end of October, could be a bit taxing in summer, but in the cooler autumn months the stiff ascents are more doable, and you can reward yourself with time in picturesque villages, including Roussillon, Ménerbes and Maubec. The itinerary allows for a spot of wine tasting and a visit to the monastery of St Paul de Mausole, where Vincent van Gogh lived and painted. **Details** From £1,229 for six nights, including flights and rail transfers, B&B, four additional meals, bike hire, luggage transfers and route maps (01606 369410, headwater.com)

14 Wine tasting in Maribor, Slovenia

For the whole of October and into November, the Slovenian city of Maribor



14 Maribor, Slovenia

celebrates the Old Vine Festival with a programme of wine tastings, vineyard tours and gastronomic evenings, culminating in a huge celebration of St Martin's Day on November 11. Stay at the Hotel City Maribor — it feels very modern, but it's right at the heart of the action. **Details** From £88 a night, B&B (00 386 2 292 7000, cityhotel-mb.si). Ryanair flies from Stansted to Graz, about 40km from Maribor

15 Gather mushrooms in the Greek mountains

Mix mornings hunting mushrooms in the spectacular Greek mountains of the Zagori region with afternoons relaxing in the spa, or simply drinking in the dramatic views at the Aristi Mountain Resort. Aristi's mountain guide will take guests away from the well-trodden walking paths and into the damp, quiet woods where mushrooms thrive, with hearty dinners back at base before guests return to their firelit rooms — the perfect autumn hideaway. **Details** Two-night breaks cost from £176, half-board, including walks (00 30 265 304 1330, aristi.eu/en). Ryanair flies from Stansted to Salonika

16 Enjoy a foodie break in Crete

Crete's mountain village of Vamos (vamosvillage.gr) is famous on the island for its traditions and heritage, and in the autumn, visitors can join in with the grape harvest, help with the raki distillation and take cookery classes that make the most of the rich autumn produce. There is also the chance to visit local producers of oil, wine, cheeses and meals, and do a fair bit of tasting along the way. Stay at the Arosman Village Hotel, a cluster of ten stone and cypress-wood cottages, just a short drive away. **Details** A week at the hotel costs from £834pp, including flights and car hire (020 8003 6557, simpsonstravel.com)

17 Mix art and music in Berlin

Berlin's vibrant art scene has long been one of the most diverse in Europe, and Berlin Art Week from September 13-18 (berlinartweek.de) brings together the best of the city's contemporary artists, with a series of exhibitions, talks and two huge art fairs, Positions Berlin and Art Berlin Contemporary. Mix art with a little music: the city's Musikfest (berliner-festspiele.de) runs until

September 20, bringing together some of the world's best choirs, orchestras and soloists. Stay at Andel's by Vienna House, a retro-designed hip hotel in the heart of Friedrichshain. **Details** From £73 a night, room-only (00 49 304 530 530, viennahouse.com)

18 Explore the gardens of Gran Canaria

Temperatures can also climb well into the twenties in the Canary Islands during September and October. One of the highlights of Gran Canaria is its extensive Jardin Canario botanical garden, which is pleasantly cooler than in the height of summer; more than 500 species of plants are to be found in its rambling 27 acres of land. In autumn the island's beaches are peaceful and perfect for relaxing walks. Stay at the colourful five-star Seaside Palm Beach hotel, a 1970s retro hotel with a palm garden. **Details** A week's half-board is from £883pp with transfers and flights from Luton, Stansted, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle or Glasgow on September 26 (0871 2314691, thomson.co.uk)

19 Learn the art of Sicilian cooking

Enjoy the spectacle of the olive harvest at Mandranova, a farm in the south of Sicily with more than 10,000 olive trees. The harvest takes place from mid September to mid October and olives are processed soon after being picked in its mills; those who are really keen can take part in the picking. The best place to stay is Azienda Agricola Mandranova, a stylish and comfortable country house hotel on the farm itself. The owner, Silvia, offers cooking lessons highlighting local specialities. **Details** A three-night B&B break is from £695pp, including flights and car hire (020 7593 2283, kirkerholidays.com)

20 Chill out on an empty beach in Menorca

Autumn in Menorca brings temperatures touching 26C and often deserted sandy beaches; the island is just right for a chilled out (but warm) visit in September. The place to stay for pampering without breaking the bank is Barcelo Hamilton Menorca, a chic four-star hotel (for adults only) close to the entrance of the port of Mahon. There are two pools, a spa with a Finnish sauna and massage treatments and a rooftop bar with hot tubs for sunset cocktails. **Details** B&B doubles are from £80 a night (barcelohamiltonmenorca.com)



4 Flamingos in Corfu



13 Cycling in Provence

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