

Travel doctor Solving your holiday dilemmas



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Consumer expert

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Q We're keen to visit South America, the last continent on our bucket list. We're not too choosy when it comes to destination, but my wife gets unwell when the weather is poor on an ocean cruise, so those are out. We enjoy rail travel, but are open to other ideas, and we'd like to spend up to 14 days away. What do you recommend?
Tim Greenhill

A If you're looking for a South American package that's no longer than two weeks and involves rail travel, you're going to Peru. The no-hassle option is Titan Tours' 14-night Footsteps of the Incas itinerary, which includes tours of Lima, Arequipa and Cuzco, as well as trips to Lake Titicaca and Machu Picchu, and the epic day-long train journey from Puno to Cuzco aboard the 1920s Pullman-style carriages of the PeruRail Titicaca Train. If you choose the June departure, you'll also witness Inti Raymi, the ancient Inca festival of the sun, in Cuzco. That tour costs £3,599pp including flights and some meals, but you'd have to be prepared for some altitude sickness (titantravel.co.uk).

Q We are two friends keen to spend four or five days over new year somewhere interesting in Europe. We like good food and wine, spas, history and culture, walking and exploring. Direct flights from Edinburgh would be a bonus, and we'd also like a fun New Year's Eve dinner event. What can you suggest?
Evelyn Dougherty

A If dipping into steamy thermal waters after a morning's sightseeing is high on your new year's wish list then Budapest, spa capital of the world, would be perfect. The choice is between historic baths with outdoor pools and vigorous Turkish massages at Szechenyi, Gellert and Rudas (where

entry to its pools, saunas and steam rooms costs from £14 for a day), and swish spas at hotels such as the Aria, where a day pass costs £42 (treatments extra; ariahotelbudapest.com).

Sign up for a free walking tour of the city to get your bearings (guruwalk.com) and book a culinary tour starting in the Grand Central Market, Budapest's cathedral of food, with Taste Hungary (tastehungary.com). On New Year's Eve, a three-course dinner cruise on the Danube will have you in prime position in front of the Hungarian parliament for midnight fireworks (from £172pp; silver-line.hu).

If you want to splurge on five-star glamour, four nights from December 29 in a twin room with spa access at the Corinthia starts at £855 (corinthia.com). Or stay at the rococo Palazzo Zichy, which does not have a spa, where four nights starts at £700 (hotel-palazzo-zichy.hu).

Ryanair and Wizz Air fly from Edinburgh to Budapest, with return fares starting at about £165 over the new year.

Q We booked a property in Wales with Coast & Country Cottages for a week next Easter, but we need to cancel. We paid a "low" deposit of £109, and a further deposit of £182 is due next week. We understand we will lose the £109, but it seems unfair we will also lose the additional £182 — so in total 36 per cent of the cost of the cottage — especially as we are cancelling the booking more than six months in advance. What do you think?
Helen Tucker

A Low-deposit schemes may look attractive as a way of spreading payments, but the sting in the tail is that if you cancel you're liable to pay the rest of the deposit. This is standard travel-industry practice. Whether Coast & Country is justified in retaining a deposit that is more than a third of the holiday cost is another matter.

The Competition and Markets Authority says that if you cancel a contract, the business is generally only entitled to keep or receive an amount sufficient to cover their actual losses that directly result from your cancellation, and that non-refundable deposits should only be a small percentage of the total price.

Coast & Country said that it has cancellation policies in place to protect its property owners from lost earnings, and the balance of the deposit being payable even if a customer cancels is made clear during the booking process. But it is prepared to compromise. "We've been in contact with Ms Tucker to offer a change of dates as a gesture of goodwill and hope we can come to a resolution on this so she can eventually enjoy her stay at this property," it said.

Q Some years ago, we enjoyed a week cruising off the Turkish coast on a gulet. This was a reasonably priced package, flying out of Manchester to Dalaman, with a coach transfer to Marmaris. I'm having difficulty finding a similar holiday for September 2023. Could you help?
David Bricknell

A The only packaged gulet trip I could find for next September is for single travellers. Friendship Travel has a week's full-board cruise from Fethiye from £1,795, including your own cabin, flights to Bodrum or Dalaman, transfers and use of watersports equipment (friendshiptravel.com). Otherwise, if you're happy to organise your flights, Responsible Travel offers several cruises, also starting at Fethiye, from £1,001pp based on two sharing a cabin; transfers can be arranged from Dalaman or Antalya (responsibletravel.com). If you'd like a delicious dose of culture with your cruise, a Turkish gulet trip with expert-led excursions starts at £2,795pp based on two sharing a cabin, including full board and transfers (petersommer.com).



Contact us

If you have a gripe, suggestion or question relating to your holidays, please email traveldoctor@thetimes.co.uk



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Machu Picchu in Peru.
Below: the Hungarian parliament in Budapest

