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## Ten brilliant holidays for half term and beyond

From family fun in Cyprus to adventures on the slopes, Greg Dickinson rounds up the best options

**T**he summer may be over, but the 2023 holiday season certainly isn't. Now is a perfect moment to think about punctuating the long, pre-Christmas run-in with a memorable getaway. So where should you go?

October half term offers a chance for late-season sun in the Med, where the mercury will still hover in the early 20s across the Greek islands and the Balearics. Yes, there will be fewer sunshine hours, but there will also be fewer tourists sharing the beach. A fair compromise.

The ski season begins proper from Christmas, but there are resorts across the Alps that offer a strong chance of snow before the festivities kick off. Find resorts at 1,500m altitude or higher, ideally with slopes on a glacier, and take a look at snow patterns in recent years to maximise your chances of decent ski conditions.

If you're hoping to get into the festive spirit, Europe offers a splendid selection of fairy-tale markets throughout November and December – though few are more magical than Vienna's, with their twinkling lights and warming mugs of glühwein.

Or if you're feeling deprived of vitamin D after the washout summer, it might be time to find guaranteed sun further afield. Look east, if you're keen to travel before Christmas, where sunny, dry weather awaits in the Indian Ocean idylls; while southeast Asia moves away from its monsoon season yet still enjoys relatively warm days.

Here are 10 ways to jet off before the

year is out, from whales in the Azores, to winter sun and VIP skiing.

### Family fun in Cyprus

A wise option if you have children with energy to spare. The Parklane, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa in Cyprus, has an expansive kids' club and multi-activity pool to keep the little ones occupied. For parents, the Kalloni Spa offers a rare moment of peace. Inspiring Travel (01244 729748; inspiringtravel.co.uk) offers a package from £3,235 per family (two adults, two children) including breakfast and return flights from Gatwick, plus

transfers. Price valid for travel between October 21 and 29.

### Whale-watching in the Azores

For families looking for a different half-term escape, this trip to the "Galapagos of Europe" could be just the ticket. The itinerary incorporates a tuk-tuk tour of Ponta Delgada, visits to hot springs and volcanic calderas, plus a whale- and dolphin-watching excursion. Temperatures will lurk in the late teens and early 20s. Sunvil (020 8758 4722; sunvil.co.uk) offers a seven-night break at Antilia Hotel Apartments costing £1,554 per person (two adults, two children) including return flights from Heathrow, via Lisbon, plus transfers.

### A Cretan escape

With temperatures hovering around the

early 20s, October is a delightful time to visit Crete, with fewer crowds and cheaper deals than you'll find during the busy summer season, and most tavernas and hotels still open for business. A seven-night itinerary with Stubborn Mule (01728 752751; stubbornmuletravel.com) can be tailor-made for every family, with options for snorkelling, cycling through orange groves or a visit to Samaria Gorge national park, a World Biosphere Reserve. Prices start from £5,995 for a family of four, including flights and activities. Departs October 21.

### Medieval markets in Vienna

Vienna is perhaps at its prettiest over Christmas, with its lit-up streets, elaborately decorated shop windows and little huts selling gifts, wine and cheese at the Christkindlmarkt (one of the biggest and best in Europe). Kirker (020 7593 2288; kirker-holidays.com) has a five-night itinerary from £3,695 per person, departing December 22, including return British Airways flights from Heathrow, accommodation at the five-star art deco Hotel Bristol, plus tickets to a performance at the magnificent Vienna State Operahouse next door.

### Walk the Lycian Way

If you'd rather escape all things festive this winter, a trek along Turkey's Lycian Way could be the solution. The long-distance footpath leads you through cedar forests, deep gorges and time-warped





rural villages. Ramblers Walking Holidays (01707 331133; ramblersholidays.co.uk) offers a 14-night itinerary, from £1,895 per person, including flights, transfers, accommodation and dinners. Departs December 21.

## Christmas Day in Umbria

See the “world’s largest Christmas tree” (a quite spectacular giant light installation shining down from Mount Ingino) on this winter tour of Italy, visiting hilltop towns and medieval villages across Umbria and Tuscany. Adagio (01707 386700; adagio.co.uk) offers a seven-night Artistic Umbria tour from £2,029 per person, including flights, activities and local transport. Departs December 21.

## Tignes in December

With an altitude of 2,000m, with most runs above the treeline, Tignes is a snow-sure resort perfect for all levels. And with easy access to village bars, and a short distance to the slopes, Chalet Hotel L'Ecrin in Val Claret village (above Tignes Le Lac) is an ideal place to stay. Mark Warner (0845 322 5037; markwarner.co.uk) offers a seven-night holiday departing December 3, costing from £999 per person including return flights, transfers, breakfast and dinner.

## Ski like a VIP

Blow off the cobwebs of the office festive parties with a short ski break to the French Alps, getting you back in time for Christmas dinner. VIP Ski (0203 830 0030; vip-chalets.com) has a five-night getaway at Bear Lodge in France's Arc 1950 (described by our *Telegraph Travel* ski expert as a “game changer”), departing December 15, with transfers from Geneva, from £998 per person.

## A serene escape in the Maldives

The five-star Obu Select Sangeli, situated in the northwestern tip of the Male Atoll of the Maldives, offers a carefree getaway that's equally suitable for couples and families. The resort has some of the largest entry-level beach family suites in the Mal-

dives (sleeping six), with snorkelling and dives on the doorstep. Kenwood Travel (0207 749 9241; kenwoodtravel.co.uk) offers seven nights from £2,927 per person through November, including flights from London and transfers.

## Find your own secret beach in Thailand

If you're looking for winter warmth with a bit more substance than the usual sun, sea and sand packages, look no further than Thailand. Take a tour of Bangkok's city temples and go on a private boat trip to the world's oldest floating markets in Don Wai, before embarking on an unforgettable retreat to the crystal clear waters of island paradises Koh Samet and Koh Kood. Original Travel (020 3582 4990; originaltravel.co.uk) offers an 11-night itinerary across varying dates from £4,500 per person, including return flights, tours and activities, private car and boat transfers plus B&B accommodation.







GETTY IMAGES

▲ Discover a blissfully secluded beach in Thailand; below, catch Vienna at its prettiest over the Christmas period

