

PONTA DO SOL, MADEIRA

Laura Dixon writes for i-escape.com, *Condé Nast Traveller* and *BA HighLife*



I went to Madeira in February and was staggered by the hip hotels, great design and fantastic weather. Gin and golf have gone out the window and it's now a trendy haven for Lisbon's young weekend crowd. The south-east corner is very popular with international surfers and is a great place to watch the experts catch colossal waves.

The top spot is the Ponta do Sol Hotel on the south coast of the island, which has a hot tub in the spa area overlooking the cliffs. As the sun sets, the views are to die for. To stay, The Estalagem da Ponta do Sol (pontadosol.com) is an incredible clash of ancient and modern design.

"Madeira is now a trendy haven for Lisbon's young weekend crowd"



DISCOVER HIDDEN GEMS LIKE THE INFINITY POOL AT MADEIRA'S ESTALAGEM DA PONTA DO SOL HOTEL

Plus it's got an infinity pool.

For food, The Vine is the newest five-star hotel on the island and has the best restaurant. Think scallops, truffles and guinea fowl in its rooftop restaurant overlooking Funchal (hotelthevine.com). Go in February as it's warm but not too crowded.

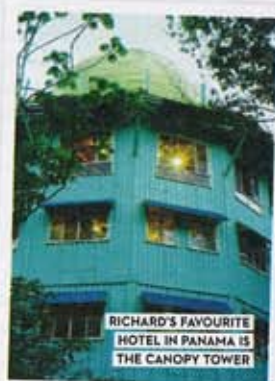
Book now Ponta do Sol Hotel costs from £107 per room, per night. November flights start at £34.99 from Easyjet.com.

PANAMA CITY, PANAMA

Richard Arghiris is the author of the *Footprint Costa Rica, Nicaragua And Panama Handbook* and the blog at interamericana.co.uk.



In winter, Panama can be well above 20°C without a single cloud in the sky. And it's incredibly diverse, boasting mountains,



RICHARD'S FAVOURITE HOTEL IN PANAMA IS THE CANOPY TOWER

rainforests, cloud forests, Pacific and Caribbean beaches, stunning coral reefs, and hundreds of tiny blissful islands.

I've seen lots of hotels in Panama, but my all-time favourite is the Canopy Tower (above), a rainforest eco-lodge. It overlooks the forest, so you're awakened each morning to the sounds of chattering tropical birds (canopytower.com).

My secret spot? The Kuna Yala archipelago comprises 400 gorgeous white-sand islands, many of them blissfully uninhabited. This is the historic homeland of the Kuna people and a true tropical paradise

which is untouched by commercial tourism.

The word 'Panama' means 'abundance of fishes', and the seafood is indeed delicious. Bocas del Toro in El Pecado is one of the better restaurants.

Book now Double rooms at Canopy cost £153 per night. Flights via Miami with American Airlines start at £500.

LUXOR, EGYPT

Wendy Gomersall writes for *The Mail On Sunday* and *The Scotsman*.



Egypt is actually better in winter for the British, as temperatures in the south can top 40°C in the summer. In winter it's still 25°C most days. I like to go for a couple of weeks mid-January.

If I want an uncomplicated, inexpensive week of chilling out, I love the Mercure Hotel, Luxor (mecure.com), which has a pool area tucked away in the gardens. But if I feel like a treat, I adore the newly refurbished Hilton Luxor Resort & Spa (hiltonworldresorts.com), which is in a fabulous location overlooking the Nile.

While in Luxor, you should wander around the jasmine-scented gardens at the back of the grand Old Winter Palace Hotel, then have a nightcap in the bar (sofitel.com). It's always worth sailing on the Nile in a felucca, the traditional sailing boat, and a dawn balloon ride over the Valley of the Kings is unforgettable.

Food? The Steinberger Nile Palace hotel in Luxor (steinberger.com) has a great Lebanese restaurant. And if you want to sight-see further afield, I'd recommend a week's Nile cruise to explore southern Egypt's wealth of temples and tombs followed by a week in a Red Sea Resort. **Book now** Discover Egypt (0844-880 0461, discoveregypt.co.uk) offers seven nights at the Mercure Hotel for £499 including flights and transfers.



THE HILTON LUXOR HOTEL & SPA. "NO, NO, DON'T GET UP..."

FLAMANDS BAY, ST BARTS

Jane Anderson is author of *A Place To Wed* (Conran Octopus Limited, £16.99) and travel writer for *Sunday Times Travel Magazine*



St Barthelemy in the French Caribbean is achingly hip in a boho-chic kind of way that the French do so well. As soon as I land on its tiny runway, I instantly feel the rigours of real life slipping away.

As a treat I'll stay at the Hotel St Barth Isle De France (isle-de-france.com), or a private villa. Anse De Grand Saline is a stretch of mostly deserted beach where the odd boogie boarder and



ST BARTS OFFERS ACHINGLY HIP R&R - WE'LL SEE YOU AT THE BAR...

nudist play. I'm a spa addict, so I also love Hotel Guanahani (leguanahani.com), which is nestled amongst the Creole architecture.

There are plenty of places serving top-notch food. At Eddy's, in Gustavia (00-1 59 02 75 417), choose the assiette cru: market-fresh fish served in a multitude of styles, from sashimi to tempura. Alternatively snuggle up in your villa with gourmet takeaways from Maya's-To-Go near the

airport (st-barts.com/mayas-to-go) or Kiki-é Mo (st-barts.com/kiki-e-mo) in St Jean. December's my favourite month to go; a fortnight will pass in the shake of a cocktail.

Book now Caribtours (caribtours.co.uk) offers seven nights plus flights for £2,487 per person, based on two sharing.

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