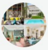
CHECK OUT THE RESULTS OF OUR READER'S CHOICE AWARDS 2020 NOW. CLICK HERE FOR THE WINNERS

DESTINATIONS
Syros, Greece: the quiet curveball Greek island



PLACES TO STAY
The 10 best Airbnbs in Paris

INSPIRATION
The best cities in Europe 2020

INSPIRATION
A road trip tour of the best places in Sicily

STYLE
Where
filmed

All products are independently selected by our editors. If you buy something, we may earn an affiliate commission.

INSPIRATION

THE BEST WINTER-SUN DESTINATIONS IN EUROPE

Crete HERO
CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

Just because we're limited when it comes to travel right now, doesn't mean we have to completely miss out on a sunny escape. Keep your next trip closer to home with our pick of Europe's best winter-sun destinations

by DAVID ANNAND
David Annand is Men's Editor of Condé Nast Traveller magazine
Friday 9 October 2020

The Thai islands or Bali may be more synonymous with scorching-hot beaches in January, but with the current travel restrictions and UK quarantine rules in place, this season we're going to have to get creative when it comes to soaking up some winter sun. Thankfully, however, there are alternatives – parts of Europe that are unlikely to have you sunbathing, but should supply you with enough vitamin D to see you through to March. And some of these destinations are currently safe to travel to right now from the UK.

CYPRUS

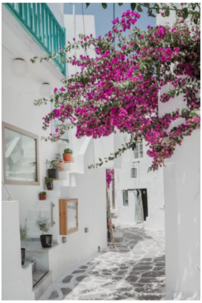
Status: Travellers from the UK must supply a negative covid-19 test carried out no more than 72 hours before travelling in order to enter Cyprus. Upon return to the UK travellers do not need to quarantine.
Best for: nature lovers
December temperature range: 10–19°C

It's easy to forget that Cyprus is only about 130 miles off the coast of Lebanon. And, unsurprisingly, its winter temperatures run closer to those of the Levant than much of continental Europe, which means T-shirt weather during the off season. The seaside city of Paphos is a brilliant base for exploring the island. Stay at Almyra design hotel (the chef is a Nobu alumnus), and visit the city's ancient ruins. In the north are some of the island's prettiest beaches, where loggerhead and green turtles come to nest, along with the beachside Anassa hotel, located a short boat ride away from the Blue Lagoon. Winter is also a great time to go hiking in Cyprus's dense forests, where you can stumble across fascinating Byzantine monasteries.

Cyprus insider guide

ISLANDS
Cyprus – an insider guide
CONTINUE READING

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES



THE GREEK ISLANDS

Status: As of 10 October, UK travellers must self-isolate for 14-days upon return to the UK if visiting Mykonos and Crete. Travel to the rest of Greece is exempt from quarantine.
Best for: open-water swimmers
December temperature range: depending on which island you're on, temperatures range from 12–17°C

The gorgeous Aegean is surely the loveliest of Europe's seas and the water off many of the Cyclades, such as Paros, Santorini and Milos, is still tolerable in winter, making it a year-round destination for swimmers. In places like Santorini, visiting in the off-season means you can explore the picturesque vistas without the crowds, while Rhodes is known to have clear blue skies and warm temperatures well into winter. On Paros, stay at Parīlio, recently named one of our best new Greek Islands hotels, with guestrooms set around a pool and an absolutely steal for the price (about £190 for a double room).

Why winter is the perfect time to visit Santorini

INSPIRATION
Why winter is the perfect time to visit Santorini
CONTINUE READING

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

MADEIRA

Status: Madeira can be visited by travellers from England, Wales and Northern Ireland without having to self-isolate for 14-days. Upon arrival, travellers must supply a negative covid-19 test carried out no more than 72 hours before travel.
Best for: thrill-seekers (but still good for pensioners, too)
December temperature range: 15 - 20°C
The long-time destination of choice for Britain's blue-rinse brigade, staid old Madeira has been busy reinventing itself as a place for adrenaline-fueled adventure. And why not? The island is an outdoor Eden in miniature, with black-sand beaches, tumbling canyons and epic rock faces. Which means great mountain biking and wonderful views for those who dare to go paragliding. The network of levadas (water-irrigation channels carved into the volcanic island) makes for thrilling trail running. It is also, as far as we know, the only place to offer year-round urban tobogganing in wicker sleds, which are steered downhill at great speed.

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

SICILY

Status: Travellers from the UK must supply a negative covid-19 test carried out no more than 72 hours before travelling in order to enter Italy. Upon return to the UK travellers do not need to quarantine.
Best for: adventurous foodies
December temperature range: 11–17°C
Italy's southernmost island is closer to Tunis than Rome and has winter weather to match. Visiting at this time of year allows you to get up close to Sicily's incredible historic spaces such as the Temple of Concordia in Agrigento, which is reliably overrun in high season. Stay at Verdura Golf

and Spa in Sciacca with the family or, for a romantic break, head to off the beaten track to baroque town Noto, with its boutique hotels. With a distinct food culture, Sicily has gastronomic delights beyond summer's glut of glorious fruit and veg – visit in February to experience the sea urchin season in full swing.

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

THE AZORES

Status: The Azores can be visited by travellers from England, Wales and Northern Ireland without having to self-isolate for 14-days. Upon arrival, travellers must supply a negative covid-19 test carried out no more than 72 hours before travel.

Best for: eco-conscious adventurers

December temperature range: 13–18°C

You might think that including the Azores is stretching the definition of Europe to breaking point, but the Atlantic archipelago is actually about five hours from London. And, in any case, they're not your typical isolated island group. For starters, it's never that hot here, even in summer. People don't visit to laze on the beach Maldives-style. They come because it's a natural nirvana, rich in wildlife, full of rugged, dramatic craters and caverns, hot springs and lush forests. All of which are being sustainably managed: only 5 per cent of the land is developed and the islands are dotted with marine conservation parks. Stay at Santa Barbara Eco-Beach or the similarly green-minded Sete Cidades Lake Lodge, both on São Miguel.

Azores islands - things to do and places to stay in São Miguel

DESTINATIONS
The Azores – Europe's most exotic islands
CONTINUE READING

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

WINTER-SUN DESTINATIONS NOT EXEMPT FROM UK QUARANTINE RULES

MALTA

Best for: design buffs and hotel obsessives

December temperature range: 11–17°C

Its frankly ridiculous 300 days of sunshine a year would be the standout selling point for most islands of Malta's size, but the understated Mediterranean gem is also a history-soaked gastronomic hub, packed with first-class hotels and surrounded by some of the world's best diving sites. Visit in winter for a weekend exploring striking Valletta, the ancient capital that's had a bit of a revival of late, converting some of its gorgeous townhouses into excellent design hotels. The restaurant scene is thriving, too. Head to Panorama at the British Hotel in Valletta or Barracuda near the Sliema coast for a taste of traditional Mediterranean food.

Cool new things in Malta

CITY BREAKS

Cool new things in Malta

CONTINUE READING

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

CANARY ISLANDS

Best for: dyed-in-the-wool sun seekers

December temperature range: 11–21°C

In summer, the breeze that hits Lanzarote and Fuerteventura is blessed relief from the intense heat and a major draw for windsurfers. In winter, said breeze brings with it a bit of a chill, so you're better off heading to Tenerife or Gran Canaria. The former has made great strides repositioning itself as a cultural hub with a new art gallery designed by Swiss firm Herzog and de Meuron and Santiago Calatrava's concert hall in Santa Cruz. And the latter has plenty of charm beyond the overdeveloped tourist spots. The capital, Las Palmas, has a lively food scene and one of the islands' best boutique hotels, Bed and Chic. And the landscape, particularly around village Artenara, is manna for hikers. Flights to both islands from London are under four and a half hours.

Luxury travel guide Canary Islands, Spain

GUIDES

Travel Guide To Canary Islands

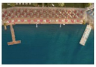
CONTINUE READING

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

ANTALYA

Best for: stop-and-flop and families
December temperature range: 10–16°C
Straddling two continents, Turkey's enormous landmass is diverse enough to justify its nickname: the land of four seasons. For winter sun, the best part of the country to visit is, predictably, the south coast, particularly the area around Antalya. There's a long stretch of fairly upmarket hotels to the west of the city, many of which are family-friendly entertainment retreats in their own right, with golf courses and adventure playgrounds beside the beach. On Turkey's wilder south-west coast, there's the pretty city of Bodrum and lovely Didyma with its astonishing ruined temple.

10 things for families to do in Antalya and Bodrum



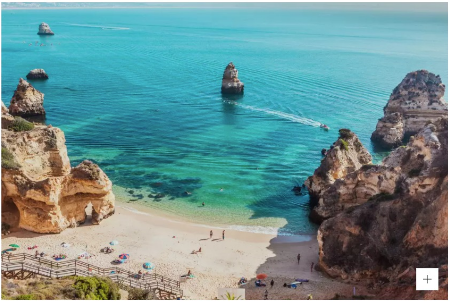
CONDÉ NAST TRAVELLER PARTNERSHIP

10 things for families to do in Antalya and Bodrum

VOYAGE

CONTINUE READING

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES



THE ALGARVE

Best for: getting away from it all
December temperature range: 9–18°C
Continental Europe's most south-western region has its own sunny microclimate that makes it consistently warmer than the rest of Portugal. You won't be in a bikini in winter, but the pleasant T-shirt temperatures mean that an increasing number of hotels and restaurants stay open year-

round, and cities such as Albufeira retain a buzz. Away from the package tourist haunts, there are dramatic red-cliff coastlines and Moorish villages dotted among the hills to explore. Stay at airy Casa Mãe in Lagos.

Algarve, Portugal

PLACES TO STAY

The best hotels in Europe: The Gold List 2020

CONTINUE READING

Like this? Now read:
The best hotels in Europe

PLACES TO STAY

The best hotels in Europe: The Gold List 2020

CONTINUE READING

Where to go at Christmas: 15 ideas

INSPIRATION

Where to go at Christmas: 20 ideas

CONTINUE READING

Where to go on holiday in December

INSPIRATION

Where to go on holiday in December: 25 top destinations

CONTINUE READING

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

INSPIRATION WINTER SUN MALTA CANARY ISLANDS MADEIRA CYPRUS CRETE SICILY ALGARVE

SHARE THIS ARTICLE