

October half-term holiday tracker: The best options for a family escape in 2020



The autumn half term is a matter of weeks away credit: ianm

By Nick Trend and Telegraph Travel 24 SEPTEMBER 2020, 11:30AM

Missed out on a family holiday this year? You couldn't make the most of the lockdown sunshine; your summer trip to the Med was cancelled; your staycation break was blown away by the August gales. Now schools are back, so you have one last chance for a rewarding trip for all - the autumn half term.

At the best of times you have to be selective about your destination - late October is a tricky time weather-wise. And the current Covid world of quarantine and cancellations and the unpredictability of the "air corridor" arrangements is going to make things even more complicated. You are going to have to tread very carefully and be prepared for last-minute changes. But don't give up.

We've put together a guide to help you navigate the uncertainties and maximise your chances of getting away - whether you're determined to find sunshine or just want a good dose of culture on a city break.

Discover the most likely destinations to be a safe bet this half-term below or keep scrolling for all the latest advice on when to book and how to get insurance.

Where should I go?

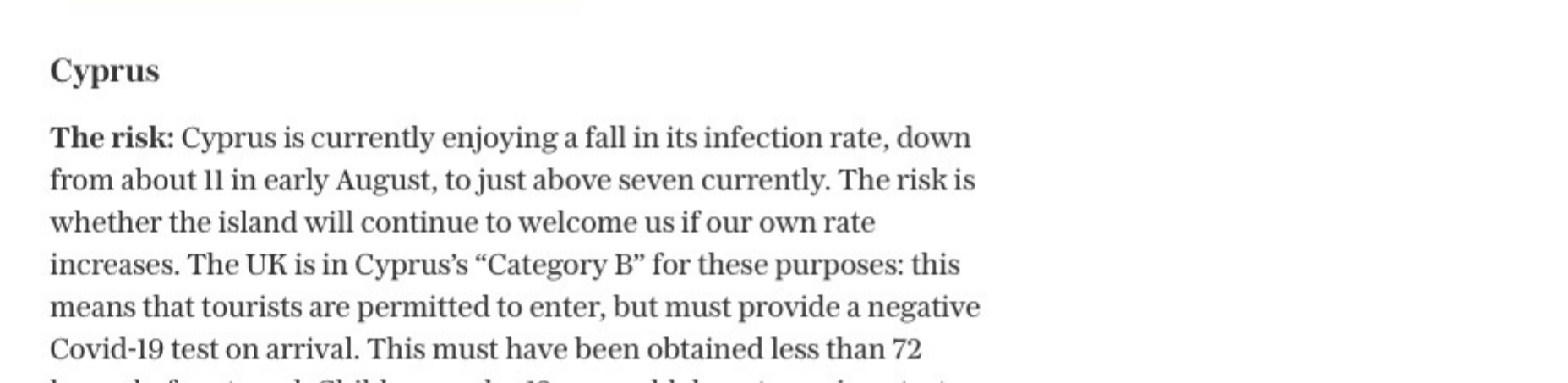
For sunshine

Here are seven destinations that are all good options for decent weather in late October and indications of how likely they are to keep, or have regained, green status for travellers.

Bodrum peninsula, Turkey

The risk: I don't want to tempt fate, but with an infection rate that has risen only gently through the summer season and is still under 15 per 100,000 - lower than the UK's - Turkey looks like it will be the safest bet among the major holiday destinations.

The reward: Summer lingers long on the south coast of Turkey, with temperatures in Bodrum, for example, typically peaking at 75F (24C), the sea a balmy 72F (22C) and eight hours of sunshine a day in October. Choose between the lively resorts of the peninsula, quieter corners such as Kalkan, and days either on the beach or visiting astonishing ancient ruins.



Summer lingers longer on the Bodrum peninsula credit: ianm

Getting there: There are lots of flights (easyJet are offering packages, see skyscanner.net), and many tour operators are BA for example. Simpson Travel (simpsontravel.com) has a variety of villas available in Kalkan.

Half-term deals: British Airways Holidays offers seven nights at the 5* Grand Yazici Club Marmaris Palace from £699 per person, travelling October 19, 2020 to October 25, 2020. Includes Euro Traveller return flights from London Heathrow Airport, 23kg luggage allowance and all-inclusive accommodation. Book by 27 September 20.

The best hotels on the Turquoise Coast

Cyprus

The risk: Cyprus is currently enjoying a fall in its infection rate, down from about 11 in early August, to just above seven currently. The risk is whether the island will continue to welcome us if our own rate increases. The UK is in Cyprus's "Category B" for these purposes: this means that tourists are permitted to enter, but must provide a negative Covid-19 test on arrival. This must have been obtained less than 72 hours before travel. Children under 12 years old do not require a test.

The reward: Nowhere in the Med does the summer warmth cling on more reliably than in Cyprus, which still gets nine hours of sunshine a day and temperatures peaking at 77F (25C) in October. Paphos is the most attractive of the south coast resorts.

Getting there: Flights are looking quite expensive (£400-£500). Tui (tui.co.uk) has plenty of package deals.

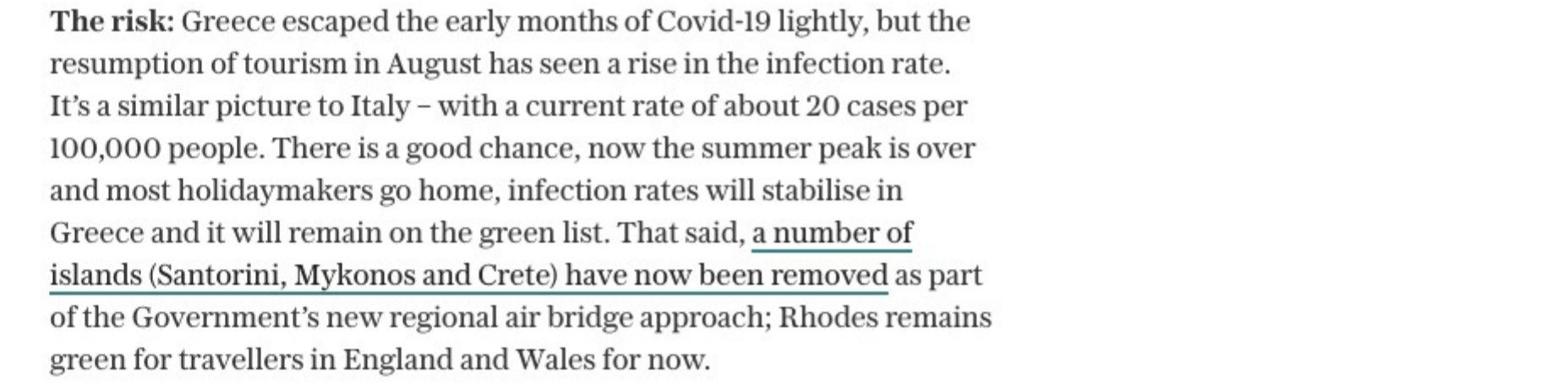
Half-term deals: Thomas Cook offers a stay at the four-star Mayfair Paphos Hotel in Cyprus for a family of four, bed and breakfast, flying from London on October 25 for a week from £2,068 (£517pp). Or spend seven nights at waterfront hotel Almyra, departing Saturday October 25 with Fish&Pips, from €2,772 (£2,540). Price is based on two adults and two children.

The best hotels and resorts in Cyprus

Sicily

The risk: After a nightmare start to the pandemic, Italy has managed its second wave more successfully and it remains on the green list. That could change, of course - the infection rate has risen from about four per 100,000 at the beginning of August to 18 at the end of September. But it does look like one of the most stable bets for October travel.

The reward: Sicily offers a wonderful combination of historical travel - from the ancient Greeks, to the Normans and the 18th-century baroque, a spectacular coastline, some lovely resorts and a warm autumn. At this time of year it's a great destination either for the beach or some sightseeing, or a combination of both.



Adventure awaits in Sicily credit: westnews

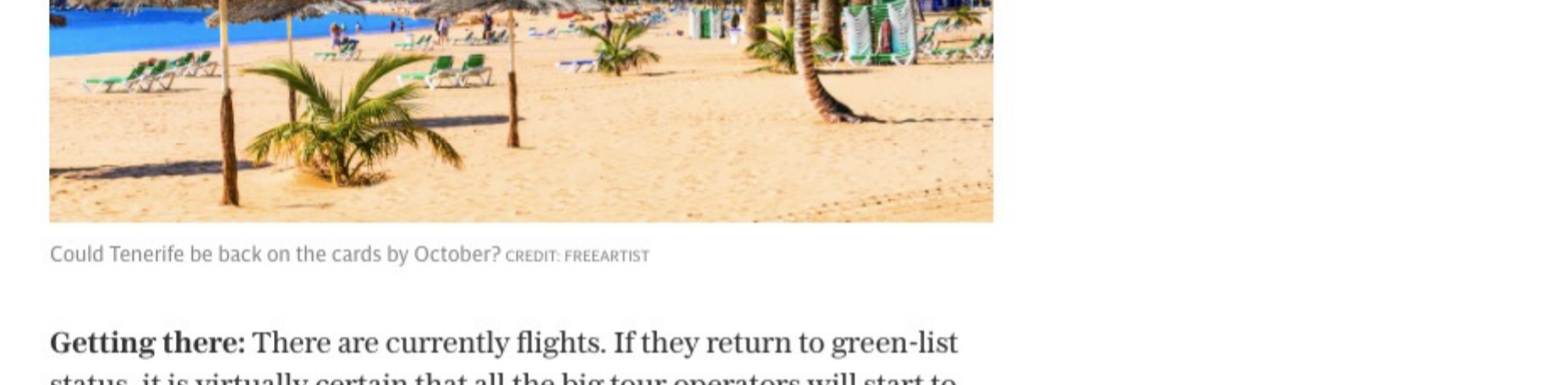
Getting there: BA has returns to Catania from about £200. The Thinking Traveller (thethinkingtraveller.com) has great villas.

The best hotels in Sicily

Puglia

The risk: Another Italian destination to consider, Puglia has recorded relatively low levels of infection, though this won't help it if the higher rates in the north of the country knock the whole country out of the green zone.

The reward: Puglia has a long golden autumn with October averages peaking at about 70F (21C). True, it doesn't have as many cultural attractions as Sicily, but there are some decent beaches and the local food and wine is excellent.



Enjoy a long golden autumn in Puglia credit: MIKE MAGES

Getting there: Check skyscanner for flights. Oliver's Travels (oliverstravels.com) has a good selection of villas and self-catering properties.

The best hotels and masserie in Puglia

Rhodes

The risk: Greece escaped the early months of Covid-19 lightly, but the resumption of tourism in August has seen a rise in the infection rate. It's a similar picture to Italy - with a current rate of about 20 cases per 100,000 people. There is a good chance, now the summer peak is over and most holidaymakers go home, infection rates will stabilise in Greece and it will remain on the green list. That said, a number of islands (Santorini, Mykonos and Crete) have now been removed as part of the Government's new regional air bridge approach; Rhodes remains green for travellers in England and Wales for now.

The reward: Close to the Turkish coast and almost as far south, Rhodes stays a degree or two warmer than Crete throughout October, and it too has the advantage of a decent choice of flights from several UK airports.

Getting there: All the major tour operators including Jet2 (jet2holidays.com) are currently offering packages.

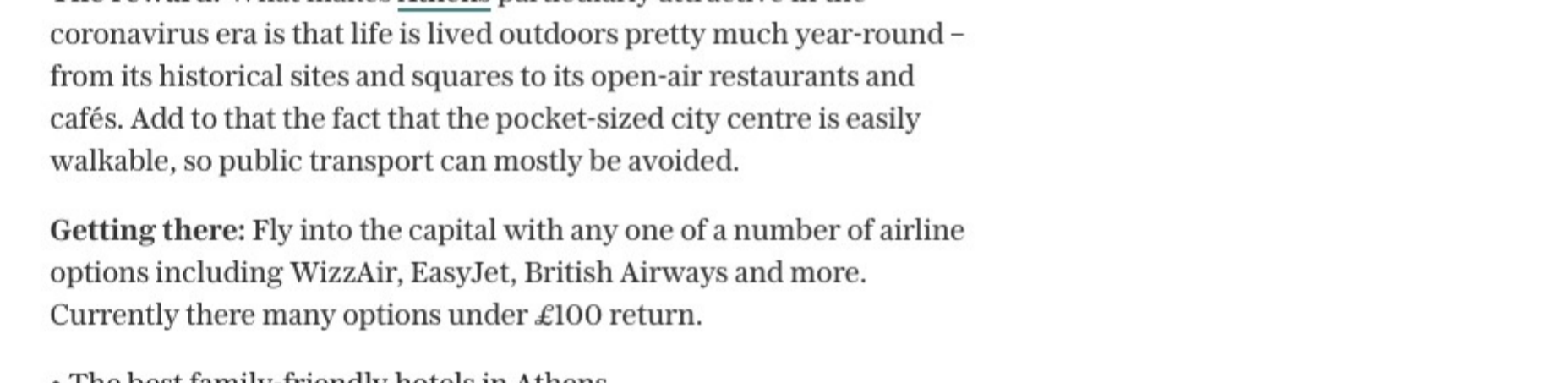
Half-term deals: Thomas Cook offers a stay at four-star Labranda Blue Bay Resort in Rhodes for a family of four, all inclusive, flying from London on 24th October for a week from £1,710 (£427pp).

Telegraph Travel's favourite hotels on the island can be found here

The Canary Islands

The risk: Sadly, the Canaries are looking like quite a long shot at the moment. While the overall infection rate in Spain soared in August, and is now over 100, the Canaries - 620 miles away in the Atlantic - had relatively few cases. Gran Canaria, Tenerife and Lanzarote have now seen sharp rises, and hopes that the UK Government might give the islands a travel corridor are fading. But there is still a month to go until half term, and the UK Government has now given 'regional travel corridors' to the Portuguese islands of Madeira and the Azores, setting a precedent that could be followed in the Canaries.

The reward: They are so far south that the holiday season lasts all year, and October is one of the best months of all.



Could Tenerife be back on the cards by October? credit: HERRBERT

Getting there: There are currently flights. If they return to green-list status, it is virtually certain that all the big tour operators will start to offer packages again.

Telegraph Travel's recommended hotels in the Canaries

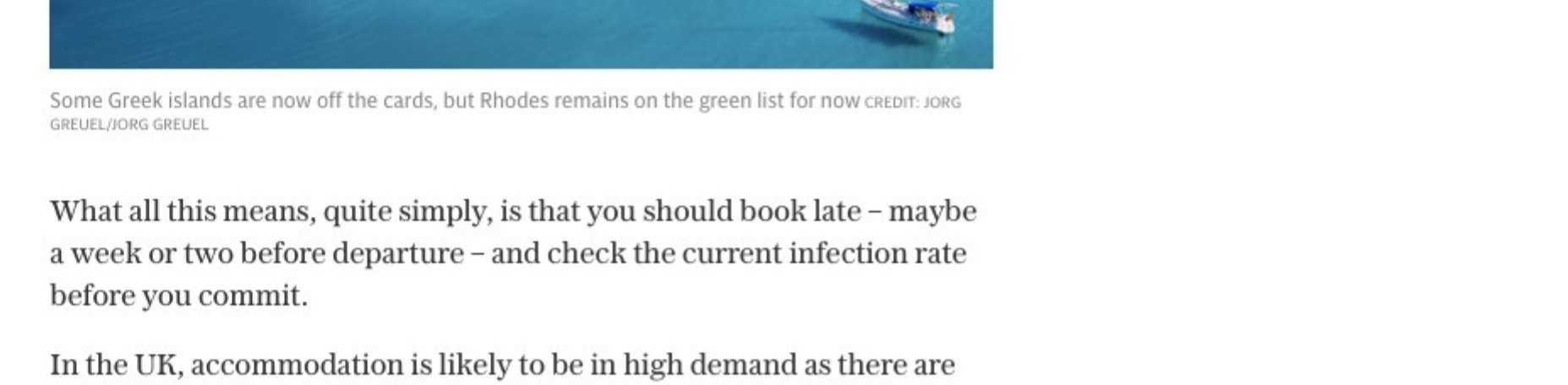
For city breaks

Here are three places that are all excellent options for city breaks full of culture, with indications of how likely they are to keep, or have regained, green status for travellers.

Rome

The risk: With proper safeguards in place, even Italy's iconic cities like Rome - remarkably crowd-free this season and likely to still be so in October - can be part of your holiday itinerary. What's more, Italy has remained on the green list since being announced as one of the first air bridges from the UK in early July. As we know, this could change in a flash but as it stands it is still one of the most stable options out of the key European holiday destinations. All airports have resumed direct international flights and hotels, bars, restaurants, shops and museums have been spruced up.

The reward: Rome has been around for almost three thousand years and yet carries all that weight of history with a delicate youth lightness of heart. It's a city that combines the intimacy and human scale of a village with the cultural draws of a historic, art-laden European metropolis.



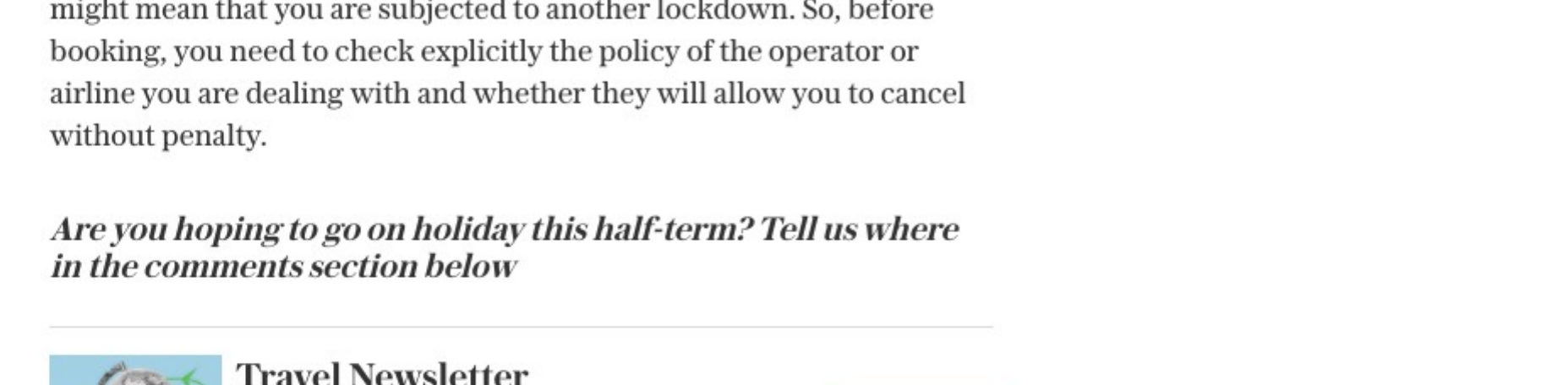
The Spanish Steps are among the many parks, fountains and churches that you can experience in Rome without spending any money credit: SALVATORE MESSINA/ALFAPACE

Getting there: There are currently lots of flights available (British Airways and RyanAir for example, see skyscanner.net) under the £100 mark.

Find family-friendly hotels in Rome here

Athens

The risk: The resumption of tourism in August may have seen a rise in the infection rate in Greece, but so far it seems that it is the islands that have seen the biggest surge. On September 7, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced that a number of Greek islands (including Santorini, Mykonos and Crete) would be removed from the green list as part of the Government's new regional approach to quarantine. For now, the mainland still has the all clear for England and Wales, though is red-listed in Scotland.



There's an irreplaceable energy that has propelled Athens through a decade of austerity to become Europe's most happening cultural capital credit: @MIAN CHAIROUKI/WWW.TORNAAL.COM

The reward: What makes Athens particularly attractive in the coronavirus era is that life is lived outdoors pretty much year-round - from its historical sites and squares to its open-air restaurants and cafes. Add to that the fact that the pocket-sized city centre is easily walkable, so public transport can mostly be avoided.

Getting there: Fly into the capital with any one of a number of airline options including WizzAir, EasyJet, British Airways and more. Currently there are many options under £100 return.

The best family-friendly hotels in Athens

Copenhagen

The risk: From July 4, Denmark has been exempt from the FCO advice against all non-essential international travel. Currently, there is no need to quarantine on either side. That said, the rate of infection has now significantly surpassed the 20 mark (climbing to 56), meaning it could lose its green list status soon.

The reward: Copenhagen always ranks highly in surveys of the world's best cities, and little wonder. Size certainly helps: it's big enough to have world-class museums, restaurants and attractions; small enough to make them easily accessible. Then there's its unerring ability to blend quaint and cool.

Getting there: British Airways offers direct flights, with many for less than £100.

The best family-friendly hotels in Copenhagen

When should I book?

As you have surely noticed, the Government has been changing its advice on which countries are "safe" to travel to - the "green list" - each week. We have seen major destinations such as Spain, Portugal and France removed from the list. An announcement is usually made on a Thursday or Friday, and less than 48 hours notice may be given on the change. If a country is taken off the list, then returning travellers have to self-isolate for 14 days and tour operators invariably cancel packages to the country. Usually, airlines also drastically reduce the number of flights.

The Government normally decides to take a country off its green list if cases there exceed 20 per 100,000 people over the previous week. (Though the rate in the UK is currently about 38). But there are exceptions - like when the Scottish government removed Greece from its own green list because of a surge of infection in holidaymakers returning from the islands. And the infection rate can rise very quickly.

Some Greek islands are now off the cards, but Rhodes remains on the green list for now credit: JOSS GREEN/JONAS GREEN

What all this means, quite simply, is that you should book late - maybe a week or two before departure - and check the current infection rate before you commit.

In the UK, accommodation is likely to be in high demand as there are fewer factors to consider for a domestic holiday in comparison to international travel this year. This is clearly visible on travel company websites, where some of the more popular possibilities for a week away on British soil are close to selling out - if they have not done so already. There are still some lovely options available though. The best move is then to book early for staycations but check cancellation policies before committing. You can find some great options here, or read on for more advice on travelling abroad and where to go in Europe this half-term.

Will my money be safe?

Many travel firms are struggling and we may well see a rush of financial failures before long. But as long as you book with an Aol-bonded tour operator, or - in most cases - pay for your holiday with a credit card, you will get a refund in the event of insolvency. Package holiday providers also have a legal responsibility for your safety, so they won't take you to a destination that the FCO advises against, and they are legally obliged to refund you for a cancellation - though many have been taking weeks or months to do so.

What about insurance?

Many travel insurance companies have now started to sell policies again and nearly all will cover you if get ill. Relatively few offer Covid-related cancellation cover. Exceptions are AllClear (allcleartravel.co.uk), CoverForYou (coverforyou.com), StaySure (staysure.co.uk) and Trailfinders (trailfinders.com). One of the very few companies that can arrange insurance if you travel against FCO advice is Campbell Irvine (campbellirvinedirect.com).

What about a UK lockdown?

Another key thing to consider, of course, is whether your chosen destination stays open, an uptick in coronavirus cases in your area might mean that you are subjected to another lockdown. So, before booking, you need to check explicitly the policy of the operator or airline you are dealing with and whether they will allow you to cancel without penalty.

Are you hoping to go on holiday this half-term? Tell us where in the comments section below

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