

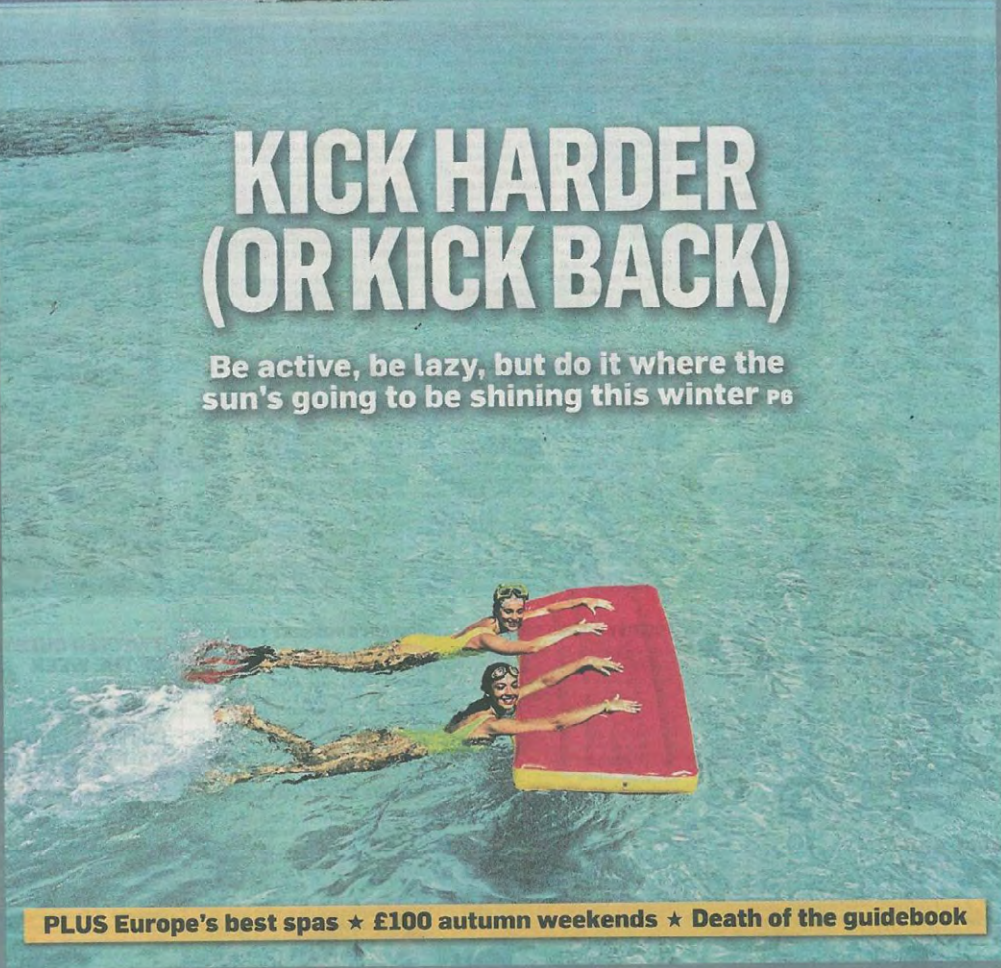
THE SUNDAY TIMES SECTION 7 | OCTOBER 14, 2012

travel

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INSIDE

KICK HARDER (OR KICK BACK)

Be active, be lazy, but do it where the sun's going to be shining this winter **P8**



PLUS Europe's best spas ★ £100 autumn weekends ★ Death of the guidebook

SO WHERE'S HOT THIS

We've trawled through the weather stats, calculated the flight times and pestered the operators for their best deals. Now all you have to do is pick your perfect spot for soaking up the sun. By Chris Haslam

CANARIES AND MADEIRA

✕ 3½ hours

Weather averages (La Gomera):

	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
↓	21	19	18	18	19
☀	9	8	9	9	10
☁	12	27	24	14	15

EL HIERRO

If you like Philippe Starck, you'll love El Hierro — the minimalist's island of black sand and alien landscapes is far removed from lager-and-chips Tenerife. Finca Wapa, in El Golfo, is a self-catering cottage sleeping three, built from black volcanic rock and close to the capital, Tigaday, as well as the natural swimming pools at La Maceta. A week costs £832 with Secret Destinations (020 8941 6588, www.secretdestinations.com). EasyJet (0843 104 5000, easyjet.com) flies to Tenerife; from there, the interisland airline BinterCanarias (00 34 902 391392, www.bintercanarias.com) can drop you in El Hierro.

LA GOMERA

Visible from Tenerife, La Gomera isn't quite as remote as El Hierro, but if you're looking for Canarian sunshine without Canarian mass tourism, this is the spot. You'll find vast seascapes, dramatic volcanic scenery, a Unesco-listed cloud forest and unique cuisine — the roast pork and *almogrote* (spreadable goat's cheese) are worth the visit on their own. Stay at the Jardín Tecina hotel, a peaceful resort set in huge, scientifically significant subtropical gardens on a clifftop in the island's sheltered southeast. A week starts at £617pp with Sovereign (0844 415 1984, sovereign.com).

LANZAROTE

Prefer a little less conservation and a little more action? Lanzarote can be grotty, but the five-star Princesa Yaiza Suite Hotel Resort, on Playa Blanca, bucks the trend, not just by having six pools, sophisticated bars and a spa, but through its membership of the slow-food movement. Until Christmas, Carlos Perez and Paolo Soggiu, who oversee the resort's eight restaurants, will be running gourmet workshops (£80 for three hours). A week costs £699pp with Thomas Cook (0844 879 8400, thomascook.com).

MADEIRA

The Hotel Moniz Sol lies on the northwestern tip of the island, with its stupendous sea views echoed by the collection of modern art within. Intimate yet sophisticated, it has no outdoor pool: everybody goes to the gorgeous natural rock pools in Porto Moniz, two minutes down the road. The *levada* walking is particularly good here, and the hotel has a free Turkish bath, sauna and steam room for when you find your way back. A week costs £605pp, including car hire, with Sunvil (020 8568 4499, sunvil.co.uk).

EGYPT AND MIDDLE EAST

✕ 5½-7 hours

Weather averages (Sharm el Sheikh):

	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
↓	23	19	18	19	21
☀	10	9	9	10	11
☁	1	4	1	2	1

RED SEA

Five-star hotels on the Red Sea Riviera are still offering astonishing value for

money, as Egypt works hard to regain tourist confidence. Here's the proof: the cheapest flight we could find to Hurghada in December was £218 with EasyJet. And Hayes & Jarvis (0844 855 4488, hayesandjarvis.co.uk) has a week at the five-star Jaz Makadi Star & Spa for £598pp, half-board — excluding the flight, that's about £55 a night. In Sharm el Sheikh, Ebookers.com has a week in a sea-view room in the five-star Concorde El Salam Hotel, on White Knight Beach, for £430pp.

OMAN

The Six Senses Zighy Bay resort allows exhibitionists to arrive by paraglider, while others take the speedboat or the 4x4 option. Built like an oligarch's idea of a traditional fishing village, above a white-sand beach on the northern Musandam peninsula, it is both spectacular and remote. There's a spa, a dive centre, the Vintheque wine bar and, hidden away up a secret staircase from the restaurant, the Starlight Table, just for you. A week starts at £1,412pp with Destinology (0800 072 2222, destinology.co.uk).

ABU DHABI

The Yas Viceroy Abu Dhabi has a Formula One track running through it, but the race is only once a year. The rest of the time, this extraordinary building is the hippest address in the emirate, perfectly placed for the beaches of Yas Island, the marina, the golf course and the Ferrari World theme park, home of Formula Rossa, the fastest rollercoaster on the planet. Back at the hotel, you'll find an Espa spa, two rooftop pools, four bars and 12 restaurants. A week starts at £840pp with Travel Republic (020 8974 7200, travelrepublic.co.uk).

CARIBBEAN

✕ 8½-9½ hours

Weather averages (Antigua):

	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
↓	26	25	25	25	25
☀	7	7	8	8	8
☁	90	50	30	20	30

VIRGIN GORDA

A reef protects Little Dix Bay, turning the beachfront into a dazzling blue pool-cum-aquarium in which you'll see hundreds of tropical fish species, rays and cheeky local pelicans, which have no compunction about dropping from a great height into the bath-warm water right beside you while you're swimming, kayaking or paddleboarding. The beach is home to the Rosewood Little Dix Bay, formerly a Rockefeller-owned estate: it has all the usual facilities, as well as free boat trips to even more amazing beaches.

✕ Flight time
 ○ Average temperature (C)
 ☀ Daily sunshine (hours)
 ☁ Monthly rainfall (mm)

Unless stated, prices include B&B accommodation, flights from London and transfers, and are based on mid-December departures. Ask the operator about regional flight options

The water's lovely in Mozambique. Above, from left, catch of the day in Zanzibar; quiet Canaries in La Gomera; into the deep in Egypt

Jean-Daniel Sutz/ry/Stephane Lemaire/Hemis.fr, Reinhard Schmid/Sattimo



SWINTER?



including the wonderful Baths National Park. A week starts at £2,169pp with ITC Classics (01244 355527, itcclassics.co.uk).

NEVIS

Not much happens on Nevis. The sun rises behind the mountain, stays out all day, then drops into the Caribbean just in time for cocktails, the traditional choice of which is the Planter's Punch.

The radical alternative is the Killer Bee, served at Sunshine's Beach Bar, on Pinney's Beach. The owner, Sunshine, won't say what's in it, but it delivers a potent sting. The bar is just a short stumble from the celebrity-favoured Four Seasons Resort Nevis, where a week starts at £2,048pp with Kuoni (0844 488 0286, kuoni.co.uk).

ANTIGUA

Just along Dickenson Bay's beach from the Sandals resort, you'll find the Siboney Beach Club, a bougainvillea-covered

boutique property with just 12 rooms, a tiny pool and a bar so close to the water, waves occasionally pop in for a drink. Owned by Tony Johnson — a charming octogenarian who arrived on a boat more than 50 years ago and never left — the hotel happens to be right next door to Coconut Grove, which locals say is Antigua's finest restaurant. The best rooms are on the top floor, with terraces in the trees. Tropic Breeze (01752 880880, tropicbreeze.co.uk) has a week from £1,499pp, room-only.

ST LUCIA

The Landings isn't so much a hotel as a collection of posh people's condos around a harbour full of posh people's yachts on Rodney Bay, said by some (mainly those who own the condos) to be the poshest beach on the island. It has a huge spa, a couple of restaurants and a cocktail bar, but the suites are the main attraction: huge luxury pads, they have fully fitted kitchens, plunge pools and gorgeous sea views. A week starts at £1,725pp with Wexas (020 7590 0610, wexas.com).

SOUTHERN AFRICA

✕ 12 hours

Weather averages (Cape Town):

	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
☀	18	20	22	23	21
☀	10	11	11	10	9
☁	29	24	21	24	27

CAPE TOWN

Want big-city glamour with your sun and sand? Fleewinter (020 7112 0019, fleewinter.com) has a week in fashionable Camps Bay, Cape Town, staying at Sea Five, a boutique hotel with views of Table Mountain and the ocean, in probably the best spot on the entire bay. A week starts at £1,749pp, including car hire, a ride on the Table Mountain Aerial Cableway, a wine safari, a gourmet picnic and tickets for a show at the African Dance Theatre.

MOZAMBIQUE

Africans say the Mozambique sun is the strongest on the continent,

so make sure that the only lobster you encounter is the one on your plate, served up in the gorgeous rooftop restaurant at Ibo Island Lodge, a soporific spot in the beautiful Quirimbas archipelago. The hotel's beach — a tiny deserted islet of dazzling white sand surrounded by a dozen shades of blue — is reached by boat. If you fancy exploring further afield, book the wonderful dhow safari and spend a couple of nights camping on yet more desert islands. A week starts at £3,197pp with Aardvark Safaris (01980 849160, aardvarksafaris.co.uk).

ZANZIBAR

Beach: white. Sea: turquoise. Water temperature: 29C. Reef: 500yd offshore. Hotel: Mchanga Beach Lodge. Accommodation: simple. Cottage: thatched. Mobile signal: dodgy. Wi-fi: take a wild stab. Pool: infinity-style. Dinner: fish. Price: £1,797pp for a week, half-board. Book through: Expert Africa (020 8232 9777, expertafrica.com).

INDIAN OCEAN

✕ 12 hours

Weather averages (Seychelles):

	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
☀	27	27	27	28	28
☀	7	6	5	6	7
☁	201	292	379	288	200

MALDIVES

Remote tropical atolls are the stuff of dreams, but the costs can be a nightmare. Drinks, lunches and candlelit suppers add up, and it's not as though you can nip out of the hotel to a cheap local bistro for dinner. So we like the all-inclusive deal at the Constance Moofushi Resort, which offers unlimited premium-brand booze, all buffet meals, one à la carte dinner, a boat trip, snorkelling excursions, and much more. A week starts at £3,086pp with British Airways (0844 493 0758, britishairways.com/travel).

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SEYCHELLES

Can't settle on a single island? Wexas Travel (020 7838 5892, wexas.com) has a two-centre itinerary comprising four nights at the Four Seasons Resort Seychelles, on Mahé, in a jungle treehouse villa above Petite Anse — the best beach in the archipelago, some say — followed by four at Raffles, on Praslin — the one with the big boulders among the coconut palms. A week starts at £2,998pp.

MAURITIUS

Here's a winter-sun deal: book your Mauritian winter-sun holiday before October 31, for travel any time up to March 31, excepting Christmas and New Year, and ITC Classics (01244 355527, itcclassics.co.uk) will give you 50% off room rates, an upgrade to full-board and a complimentary spa treatment, at the five-star St Regis Mauritius Resort, on the white sands of Le Morne. A week starts at £2,189pp.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

X 12-16 hours

Weather averages (Ha Long Bay, Vietnam):

	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
↓	28	29	29	29	29
☀	8	9	7	7	8
☁	33	20	18	39	43

All this, on an all-inclusive basis, in the Maldives

Sako Papadopoulos/Robert Harding



BORNEO

Gaya Island Resort is a new luxury resort built on a tropical islet off the north coast of Borneo. It has a pool, a spa village, a private retreat on a remote paradise beach and a programme of activities designed for explorers, with a resident marine biologist and a jungle guide waiting to satisfy your curiosity. Audley (01993 838100, audleytravel.com) has eight nights from £1,980pp, including a room upgrade.

VIETNAM

Two years ago, Lang Co was a tiny fishing village squeezed between a green lagoon and the South China Sea. Now, it's the home of Asia's hottest new hotel, the Banyan Tree Laguna Lang Co, which opens on November 1. Expect world-class restaurants, an 18-hole golf course, a spa, two miles of white sand and a choice of beach-pool or lagoon-pool villas. Because it's new, it's a deal: a week starts at £2,630pp with Carrier (0161 492 1358, carrier.co.uk)

CAMBODIA

Five-star resorts are going up all over Cambodia, but none is as eclectic as Knai Bang Chatt, on the south coast. The three minimalist 1970s concrete-and-steel buildings that make up the hotel look like the sort James Bond infiltrates on a regular basis, but inside it's more organic — all driftwood, lotus flowers and smiling girls. If you're looking for a resort experience, however, you'll be disappointed. Instead, come

for pampering, privacy and utter relaxation. A six-night break costs £1,382pp with Travelbag (0871 703 460, travelbag.co.uk).

BALI

Less than 15 miles up the coast from Kuta, between the rice terraces and a sparkly black-sand beach, is the Alila Villas Soori. If you're looking for romance, this is the place: it combines Balinese serenity, hugely distracting views across the straits of Java, techy mod cons and some of the best service you'll ever experience. A week starts at £2,725pp with Ampersand Travel (020 7289 6100, ampersandtravel.com).

THAILAND

Lastly, a top Thai tip: the Saboey Resort and Villas, on Bangrak beach, in Bophut, on Ko Samui, is a three-star hideaway that deserves five for service and serenity. It has just 18 villas and suites, an infinity pool and a small restaurant set in lush tropical gardens. The suites are big and airy, with hardwood floors and rattan furniture — if the place isn't busy when you check in, ask to upgrade to one of the two beach villas, which have their own stretch of sand. A week starts at £1,119pp with Tropical Sky (0843 636 7845, tropicalskey.co.uk).

SUNDAY TIMES DIGITAL

ST See a 360-degree view across the Baie du Cap, Mauritius: thesundaytimes.co.uk/travel