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Times2, page 17

Late Travel

Heady mix of intrigue and adventure

Follow in the footsteps of Fiennes and Palin

Tony Dawe

One of the best kept secrets in the world of travel is that Wexas, established more than 40 years ago as a members-only club, is now open to everyone. Many readers still think they must belong to the club before they can take advantage of its attractive deals but a few months ago Wexas Travel was launched with an expanded programme for all.

As well as planning tailor-made holidays months ahead, the company has a good choice of late deals, from Buckinghamshire to Berlin, Madeira to Mexico. Set up in 1970 by Ian Wilson, the current chairman, the company is endorsed by honorary presidents including the explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes, John Simpson, the BBC world affairs editor and Michael Palin, the much-travelled comedian and television presenter, so customers should be guaranteed some adventurous and intriguing trips.

That holiday in Buckinghamshire, for example, is at Cliveden House, above the Thames near Taplow. This impressive stately home, with oak panelling and fine works of art, is surrounded by formal gardens and parkland and has, for three centuries, welcomed the great and not so good of British and American society and became infamous during the Profumo Affair in 1963. Until the end of March, Wexas Travel offers two nights' B&B from £210 a person, based on two sharing.

In eight days' time one of the big events of the year opens in Berlin, the grey city at its most atmospheric in winter. Berlinale, the biennial film festival, runs until February 19 with 18 films being premiered, including Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod's *Bel Ami*, starring Robert Pattinson, Uma Thurman and Kristin Scott Thomas, and James Marsh's *Shadow Dancer*, with Clive Owen and Gillian Anderson.

The award of the Golden Bear is the highlight of the festival but this year it will also include several independent American films and works reflecting the Arab Spring. There is not space



Two nights' B&B at Cliveden, home of scenic splendour and Sixties' scandal, costs from £210 a person, based on two sharing

here to describe all the sights of the city but a visit to Berlin Story, a shop devoted to books about the city, will provide plenty of ideas, as will the concierge at the five-star Kempinski Bristol Berlin, where Wexas Travel has a special offer. Three nights with breakfast and return club class flights with British Airways from Heathrow cost from £555, a £375 saving, but book within the next fortnight.

For a relaxed week in a temperate climate, the company suggests staying at Quinta das Vistas in Funchal, Madeira. The traditional manor is now an ele-

gant hotel with rooms and suites overlooking the coast and mountains from private balconies. From now until mid-April, a week's B&B costs from £675 with a flight from Gatwick and private transfers.

Mexico is on Wexas Travel's hot list this year because 2012 signifies the end of the Mayan Calendar, a period of 26,000 years calculated from the position of the solar system to the milky way. To mark the momentous event, President Felipe Calderon has announced the launch of Munda Maya 2012, a countrywide celebration of

Mexico's rich cultural heritage. A 12-night highlights of colonial and Mayan Mexico tour costs from £2,995, with flights from London and three nights in Mexico City before heading to the pyramids of Teotihuacan, the Mayan site of Palenque and city of Chichén Itzá.

The company's most recent launch is a brochure for Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific, highlighting a range of itineraries from whale watching, to exclusive island retreats, to hiking, wine tours and pampering overlooking the South Pacific ocean.

● www.wexas.com - 020-75818761

Still time to sail off on a self-catering bargain break

This is the final week for taking advantage of savings with Brittany Ferries for both Channel crossings and holidays in France and Spain. The company is offering savings of up to 15 per cent on self-catering holidays this year, including over Easter and the summer school holidays, provided bookings are made by Monday.

Destinations include some of the most popular areas in France and Spain, from the rugged mountains and sandy coves of Cantabria to the Atlantic resorts of Aquitaine and family favourites in Brittany and Normandy.

The reductions apply to more than 1,500 properties, from simple gites to luxury villas and also apply to ferry sailings and cabins on the company's routes from Portsmouth, Poole and Plymouth to the French ports of Caen, Cherbourg, St Malo and Roscoff and from Portsmouth to Bilbao and Santander in northern Spain.

Some of the best savings are for a week's break over the early Spring Bank Holiday, which falls on May 7, with a total cost of £365 for a family holiday for four in Poitou-Charentes. This includes a ferry crossing with a car from Portsmouth to Caen and a week from May 5 in a raised single-storey stone house at Montignac le Coq. The house is a good base for touring the Dordogne to the east and visiting Angoulême, a lovely old town with ramshouses perched above the river Charente and which has a lively Sunday market.

Near Callac in the centre of Brittany and a few miles from the market town of Carhaix-Plouguer, the same week for a family of four in a gite, the middle cottage in a row of three, is £380, with a Portsmouth-Caen crossing.

Both properties are available with the 15 per cent discount in the high season, when the prices for a family for a week from August 11 with a ferry crossing are from £676 and £722.

● www.brittanyferries.com/offers - 0871 2441444