

THE SUNDAY TIMES SECTION 6 | SEPTEMBER 2, 2012

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# travel

## A VINTAGE AUTUMN

Gorge on Europe's bounty  
at the season's most  
delicious festivals P10

PLUS Head south for a second spring ★ Go spinning with the dervishes



# ESCAPE TO THE SOUTH: SPRING

As our summer fizzles to an end, migrate over the equator for sun on your back, vivid blooms and some very cute baby animals. By Richard Green

**S**pring in the southern hemisphere is every bit as invigorating as it is here. Bulbs bloom, trees blossom and animals coax their newborns into the great outdoors. If you time it right, you can land slap bang amid the loveliness — soaking up the scenery, seeing the wildlife and joining the locals in welcoming the freshest of seasons.

✦ Unless stated, all packages include flights from London. Ask the operator about regional and Irish departure options

## SOUTH AFRICA

**Hermanus whale festival:** famed for the best land-based whale-watching in the world, Hermanus sees more than 100 southern right whales arrive in Walker Bay each spring to calve. From the cliff-top walk, you'll see these 60-ton creatures breaching, lobtailing, spyhopping and sailing — using their elevated flukes to catch the wind. There's a spring festival, too, with music, crafts, kids' entertainment and food stalls (September 28-October 1; [whalefestival.co.za](http://whalefestival.co.za)).

Abercrombie & Kent (0845 485 1546, [aberkrombiekent.co.uk](http://aberkrombiekent.co.uk)) has a two-centre trip from £2,590pp, with three nights' B&B at the elegant 13-room Cape Cadogan, in Cape Town ([capecadogan.co.za](http://capecadogan.co.za)), and four nights' full-board at Birkenhead House, an

11-room cliff-top stunner in Hermanus ([birkenheadhouse.com](http://birkenheadhouse.com)). The price includes car hire.

**Namaqua flowers:** after the winter rains, the corner of the Northern Cape known as Namaqualand bursts into colour; temperatures climb through the 20s and locals flock to see the floral carpets. The displays are extraordinary. Dash north from Cape Town and drive slowly back south — that way, you'll see millions of flowers head-on as they face the sun to the north.

A fly-drive from Cape Town is the best way to do it. Premier Holidays (0844 493 7542, [www.premierholidays.co.uk](http://www.premierholidays.co.uk)) has six days in the Cape — four nights at the Cape Town Hollow Hotel ([www.capeownhollow.co.za](http://www.capeownhollow.co.za)) and two at the River Manor, in Stellenbosch ([www.rivermanor.co.za](http://www.rivermanor.co.za)) — from £1,199pp, including transfers, car hire and a wine tasting.

For a base closer to the blooms, Abercrombie & Kent (0845 485 1546, [aberkrombiekent.co.uk](http://aberkrombiekent.co.uk)) has a nine-night trip from £2,345pp, with three nights' B&B at the Cape Cadogan (as above) and four nights' full-board at Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve & Wellness Retreat, 170 miles north of Cape Town. The price includes car hire.

**The Garden Route:** the coastal strip east of Cape Town is particularly lush in spring, while in the game reserves, elephants, antelopes and zebras will have new offspring. Fleewinter

(020 7112 0019, [fleewinter.com](http://fleewinter.com)) has a 15-night trip — five nights in Camps Bay, Cape Town, a two-night Winelands stay, two nights in Hermanus, three in Plettenberg Bay and three on safari — from £1,595pp, B&B, including car hire, six game drives and a whale-watching boat trip.

## AUSTRALIA

**Tasmania:** spring runs from September to November, and it's gorgeous. The countryside is swathed in colour — pink and white apple blossom, daffodils, luxuriant vineyards. The weather is warming up, but the mountains are still brilliantly snow-capped and local produce is in abundance.

Bridge & Wickers (020 7386 4610, [bridgeandwickers.co.uk](http://bridgeandwickers.co.uk)) has a 10-day Wilderness Tassie Self Drive, staying in spots such as at the Wheelhouse Apartments ([wheelhouseapartments.com.au](http://wheelhouseapartments.com.au)), in Strahan, Cradle Mountain Lodge ([cradlemountainlodge.com.au](http://cradlemountainlodge.com.au)), Peppers Seaport Hotel ([peppers.com.au](http://peppers.com.au)) and Freycinet Lodge ([freycinetlodge.com.au](http://freycinetlodge.com.au)). Prices start at £2,890pp, B&B, including 10 days' car hire, a Gordon River cruise and the Gourmet Wildlife and Wilderness Tour.

**Wild flowers of WA:** there are 12,000 plant species in Western Australia, and their blaze of colour starts in the far north in June, arriving south of Perth in November. There are 11 self-drive wild-flower trails around the state, on which you'll see delicate spring blooms

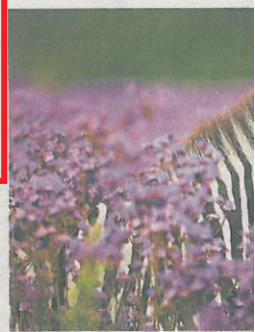
and spinifex grass sprouting from the deep-red desert soil. For details, visit [westernaustralia.com/wildflowers](http://westernaustralia.com/wildflowers).

Wexas Travel (020 7838 5892, [www.wexas.com](http://www.wexas.com)) has a 10-day Wildflowers and Private Gardens escorted tour, with access to several private gardens and visits to the best blooms in the wild, from £3,725pp. The price includes all transport and most meals.

**Floriade, Canberra:** the largest floral festival in Australia runs from September 15 until October 14, with 1m bulbs turning the flower beds of Commonwealth Park into supersized petal pictures. Attractions include live music, food stalls, exhibitions, photography workshops and film screenings among the floodlit flowers. Canberra is a three-hour drive from Sydney, and return flights to either city during the festival period start at £1,100 with Qantas (0845 7747 767, [qantas.com](http://qantas.com)). For more information, visit [floriadeaustralia.com](http://floriadeaustralia.com).

**Spring racing, Melbourne:** to celebrate the return of the sunshine, this bonanza of horseracing, fashion and fun offers trackside soirées, thronging city streets and a carnival atmosphere ([springracingcarnival.com.au](http://springracingcarnival.com.au)). The centrepiece is the Melbourne Cup, on November 6, when the city roars the winner home on a public holiday granted especially for the event.

The city's 50 days of festivities also include the Melbourne Fringe Festival, the Royal Melbourne Show, Melbourne Spring Fashion Week and an international arts festival ([visitmelbourne.com](http://visitmelbourne.com)). Return flights to Melbourne during the carnival period start at £1,100 with Qantas (as above).



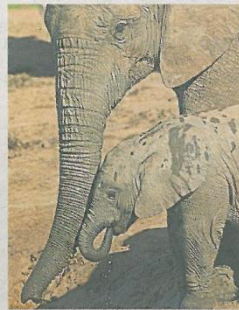
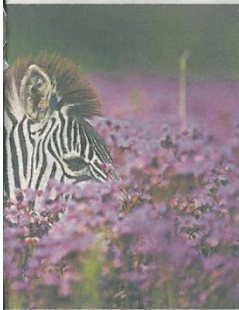
## NEW ZEALAND

Spring runs from September to November, and the countryside is flush with new grass, blooming trees and baby lambs. Christchurch is all blossoms, bluebells and daffodils, while Dunedin is a riot of rhododendrons. The weather can be changeable until mid-October, so be prepared for light rain. On South Island, late snowfalls in September are not uncommon.

Turquoise Holidays (01494 678400, [turquoiseholidays.co.uk](http://turquoiseholidays.co.uk)) has a 10-night self-catering trip to South Island, with five nights at One@25belfast, a lakeside apartment in Queenstown ([25belfast.co.nz](http://25belfast.co.nz)), and five nights at the luxury cottage Clifftops Retreat, near the Abel Tasman National Park ([clifftops-retreat.co.nz](http://clifftops-retreat.co.nz)). Prices start at £2,950pp, including car hire, a domestic flight from Queenstown to Nelson, a tour of Milford Sound and a boat trip in the Abel Tasman park.



# TRAVEL'S ALL SET TO EXPLODE



Superstock; Richard Du Toit/FLPA; Robert Garvay/Corbis; James Hager/Robert Harding

## CHILE

September in Patagonia sees ice melt, streams and rivers fill, and the temperature begin to rise. The air is clear, the mountains are capped with snow and flowers are in bloom. Here you'll find one of the world's most southerly cities, Punta Arenas, as well as Tierra del Fuego and the magnificent Torres del Paine National Park. Spring is quieter and less expensive than the summer high season — you'll see the intricate veins of the porcelain orchid and the vivid red flush of the Chilean firebush in bloom, while the glaciers around El Calafate are at their most impressive.

Cazenove+Loyd (020 7384 2332, cazloyd.com) has a nine-night trip — two nights' B&B at the W Santiago (starwoodhotels.com), then four all-inclusive nights at

Explora's Hotel Salta Chico (explora.com) and two more at the Singular (thesingular.com). Prices start at £3,625pp, including domestic flights to and from Punta Arenas, and all transfers. Last Frontiers (01296 653000, lastfrontiers.com) can arrange an eight-night package that takes in Torres del Paine, Punta Arenas and Santiago, staying in more modest accommodation, from £1,990pp, B&B.

## ARGENTINA

The sea around the Valdes peninsula is fabulous for whale-watching, as its sheltered waters provide a perfect mating site. Southern right whales arrive in May, but their numbers are greatest in September. The season continues until

November, as calves remain with their mothers. The orcas here are famous for the hunting technique they use to catch sea-lion and seal pups — they temporarily beach themselves to catch their prey — and they are in the area throughout the spring. Last Frontiers (01296 653000, lastfrontiers.com) has four nights at Las Restingas (lasrestingas.com) from £1,695pp, B&B.

## MADAGASCAR

Many orchid species bloom from September and, for just three or four days, jumping frogs gather in vast numbers to mate, turning a bright lemon yellow in the process. Rainforest birding is also best in spring, when most species perform mating calls and displays, before nesting. In September and October, the weather

is relatively mild and the jacarandas are in bloom, too.

Rainbow Tours (020 7666 1250, rainbowtours.co.uk) has a 12-night trip — two nights' B&B in Antananarivo, then three nights' full-board at Manafiay Beach & Rainforest Lodge (madaclassic.com) — from £4,150pp, including entrance fees and transfers.

## FALKLAND ISLANDS AND SOUTH GEORGIA

It's all action after the winter slumber, and with days lengthening, and the waters filling with life, breeding is top of the agenda. Gentoo and magellanic penguins arrive in September, followed by the black-browed albatross and elephant seals. Courtship rituals commence. The elephant seals will have pupped by early October, and they suckle for about a month after

that. The king penguin colonies are packed, with new parents tending chicks in humongous huddles: an incredible spectacle. Plant life is also in bloom — vanilla daisies, snake plants and lady's slippers. On South Georgia, Antarctic hairgrass shimmers over the mountain slopes.

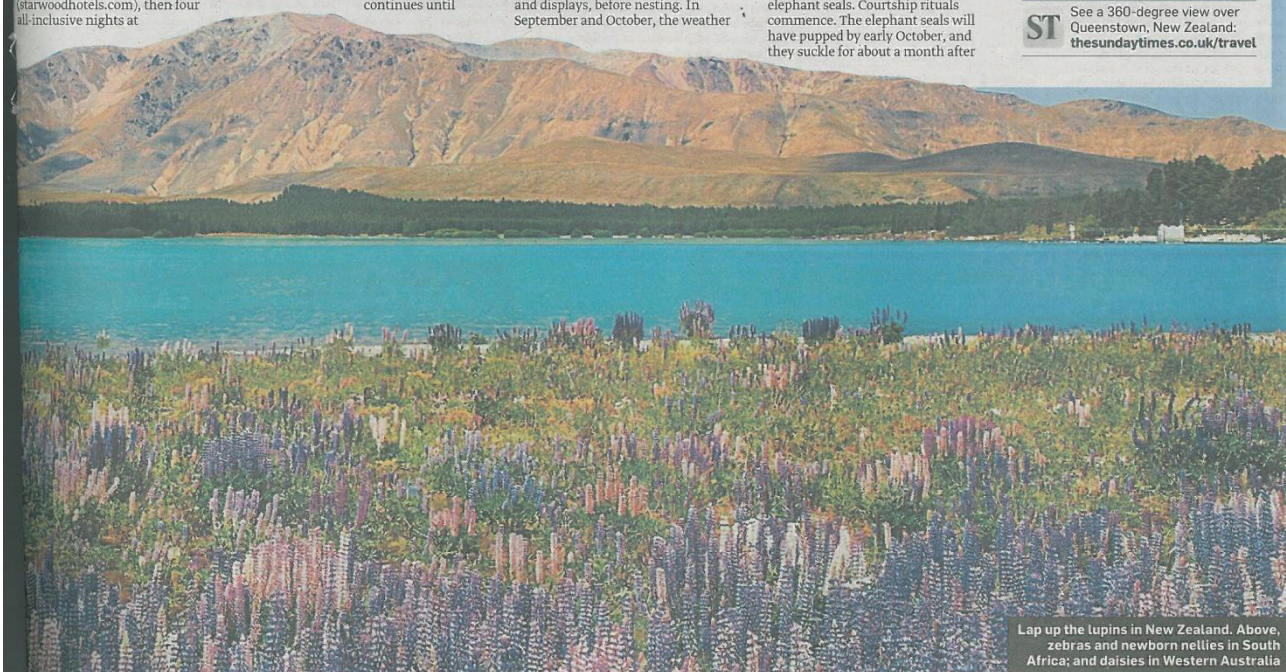
With Steppes Travel (01285 880980, steppestravel.co.uk), you can save £1,325pp on the first voyage of the season aboard the Ocean Nova, sailing on October 22. Prices now start at £5,500pp, full-board, for a triple cabin, or £8,100pp for a twin cabin, including shore landings, excursions, expedition staff and lectures.

## ANTARCTICA

In spring, from October until early November, landing sites are at their most pristine — the season has yet to hit full swing — with lots of sea ice and bergs about for the ultimate polar atmosphere. Discover the World (01737 214291, discover-the-world.co.uk) has 25% off its first voyage, which sails from Ushuaia, in Argentina, on November 11: nine nights on the MV Ushuaia, sharing a twin cabin, now start at £3,225pp. On the itinerary are visits to the Antarctic peninsula — as far as mountainous Anvers Island, at 64 degrees south — and the South Shetland Islands. The price includes all meals on board, shore landings and lectures; the operator can arrange flights from Heathrow to Ushuaia, via Buenos Aires, from about £1,100pp.

## SUNDAY TIMES DIGITAL

See a 360-degree view over Queenstown, New Zealand: [thesundaytimes.co.uk/travel](http://thesundaytimes.co.uk/travel)



Lap up the lupins in New Zealand. Above, zebras and newborn calves in South Africa; and daisies in Western Australia