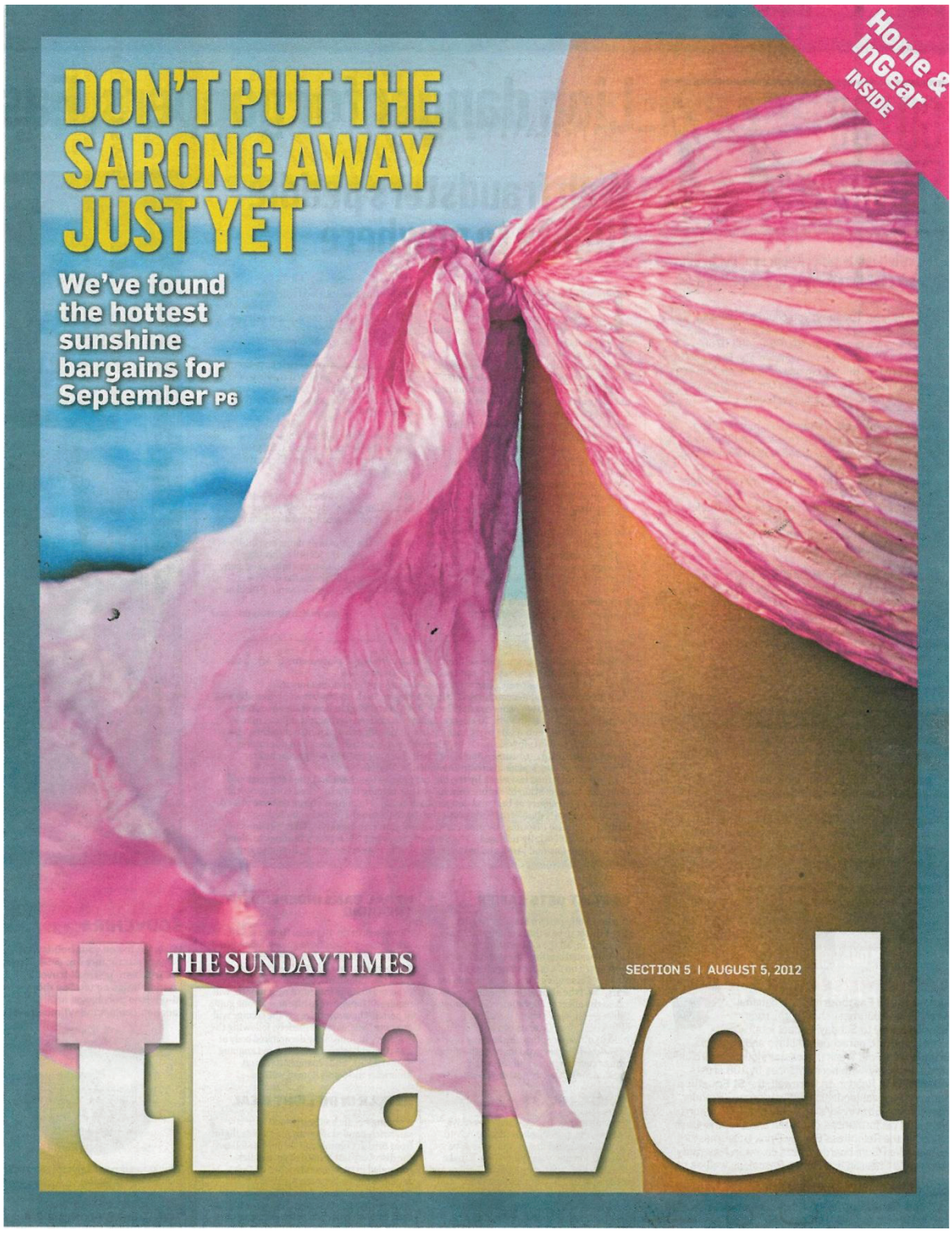

DON'T PUT THE SARONG AWAY JUST YET

We've found the hottest sunshine bargains for September P6

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travel

SEPTEMBER SUN — FRO

Prices are low, beaches are empty and the sun is still shining, so what are you waiting for? Chris Haslam has all the best deals

September is the kindest month. August has passed and places that just a fortnight previously were overpriced and overcrowded are now blissfully deserted. It's the best time of year for a holiday, so here's our pick of the September sunshine bargains.

Unless stated, prices are per person, based on two sharing, and include flights from London, transfers and/or car hire and B&B hotel accommodation

GREECE

Laid-back Ithaca for £738

The Ithacan village of Kioni doesn't get especially crowded in high season. In low season, it's even quieter, with an enchanting sense of acceptance that soon makes you feel as if you've been coming here for years. Expect warm waters, pine-shaded beaches and a harbour edged with family-run tavernas. A fortnight at the Kyparissa Apartments — plain decor, amazing sea views — starts at £738 with Sunvil (020 8758 4758, sunvil.co.uk).

Simple Douliana for £542

Find the simple life in the Cretan hamlet of Douliana, a dozen miles east of Chania. Souda Bay lies to the north, the White Mountains lie to the south, and the beaches of Almyrida and Kalyves are a 10-minute drive. Your accommodation is Milo Petra 1, an old olive mill that sleeps two, with a shared pool; if you like quirkiness, peace and quiet, you'll be charmed. A week costs £542 through Freelance Holidays (01789 297705, freelance-holidays.co.uk). Allow £230 for flights with EasyJet (0843 104 5000, easyjet.com), and £125 for a car with Economy Car Hire (0845 450 0877, economycarhire.co.uk).

Sporty Halkidiki for £769

Neilson (0845 070 3460, neilson.co.uk) has taken £230 off the price of a week at the Anastasia beach club, in Halkidiki; it now costs £769. You can try dinghy sailing, waterskiing, wakeboarding, kayaking and yachting, learn to dive, go mountain-biking or work out in the Elemis spa. And for the entire month of September, kids are banned.

Indulgent Elounda for £989

If all you want is five-star everything, try the Domes of Elounda resort, in Crete. Your suite has Egyptian-cotton this and plasma that, posh toiletries and an outdoor hot tub. If you do venture out, you'll find three bars, three restaurants, a narrow beach, the regulation infinity pool and the Milfey Spa Center. A week was £1,273, but now costs £989, with Olympic Holidays (0844 576 2386, olympicholidays.com).

Hedonistic Mykonos for £1,695

Prefer things a little livelier? Try Mykonos, where bars such as Caprice and Destijl, and the super Paradise Club, are partying like there's no tomorrow. The place to stay is the chic, intimate Grace Mykonos, which sits above a beach that you probably won't visit. A week, departing on September 15, costs £1,695 — down from £2,540 — with Select Collection (020 7491 7171, www.selectcollection.co.uk).

TURKEY

Discreet Datca for £950

The Mehmet Ali Aga Mansion is a museum-hotel on the Datca peninsula. Some of the 18 rooms feature Anatolian frescoes and original wood panels, others are boutiquey and modern. It has a pool and a traditional hammam in which to while away the hours until dusk, when cocktails are served in the rose garden by candlelight. Exclusive Escapes (020 8605 3500, exclusiveescapes.co.uk) has cut £300 off the price of a week, making it just £950.

Blingtastic Bodrum for £1,209

Remember when Bodrum was rougher than a robber's dog? Not any more. The mongrel of the eastern Med has been transformed into a coiffured labradoodle. The Kempinski Hotel Barbaros Bay, described by our own Nick Redman as "very Vegas, with a mega-spa and an emphasis on high-gleam marble", sums up the metamorphosis. Go there in August and a week costs £2,156. Wait until September and it's just £1,209, with Classic Collection Holidays (0800 294 9323, classic-collection.co.uk).

SPAIN

Chilled Casares for £485

The DDG Retreat, outside Casares, on the Costa del Sol, comprises five *casas* in lush tropical gardens, with views across the Strait of Gibraltar to Africa. It has a sauna and hammam, a tennis court, an organic restaurant, bikes to borrow and kaleidoscopic bird life to enjoy. A week starts at £375 — down from £675. Allow £70 for flights to Malaga with Ryanair (0871 246 0000, ryanair.com), and £80 for a car with Economy Car Hire (0845 450 0877, economycarhire.co.uk).

After the rush: Turkey's Azure Coast and Italy's Lake Garda (right) are crowd-free in September

Lavish Loja for £710

An hour north of Malaga lies the five-star Barcelo La Bobadilla, which has a lake-sized pool, a huge spa, the La Finca restaurant — the finest in the region — and an impressive wine cellar. A week costs £599 when you book direct (00800 4227 2356, barcelo.com). Flights to Malaga start at £70 with Ryanair (0871 246 0000, ryanair.com); Auto Europe (0800 358 1229, autoeurope.com) has car hire for about £80.

Rural Mallorca for £954

Villa Olivera is just outside Pollensa, seven miles from the beaches at Cala Sant Vicenc. It has a pool, a barbecue and daily deliveries of bread and pastries; you can call in a chef or order spa treatments. A week for two costs £734 with Coastline (0844 557 1020, coastline.co.uk). Add £160 for flights to Palma with EasyJet (0843 104 5000, easyjet.com), and £120 for a car with Economy Car Hire (0845 450 0877, economycarhire.co.uk).

FRANCE

Top-end St Tropez for £1,750

Byblos has just been awarded Palace status by the French government — and, as if you needed reminding, the hotel is home to the Caves du Roy nightclub, the world's first Sisley spa and Alain Ducasse's Spoon at Byblos restaurant. A week in August would set you back £3,395, but in September it costs just £1,750, with Carrier (0161 492 1357, carrier.co.uk).

Gourmet Gascony for £2,120

The secret of French canal cruising is to leave the work to a professional while you sit in the sun drinking wine. The Rosa is a hotel-barge with just four double cabins that cruises the Canal de Garonne down to Toulouse, pausing only to take on foie gras, fine wines and armagnac. Departing on September 9 or 30, the eight-day cruise costs £2,050 — down from £2,550 — including gourmet meals, with European Waterways (01753 598555, gobarging.com). Flights to Bordeaux start at £70 with EasyJet (0843 104 5000, easyjet.com).

ITALY

Tower in Marsala for £535

Confine yourselves to a tower on the Badia estate, just outside Marsala, in Sicily. Set in a garden of palm trees and oleander, it is more for show than anything else, as the two-person apartment — almost Disneyesque, with blue tiles and an alcove bedroom — is on the ground floor. Solo Sicily (020 7193 0158, solosicily.com) has a week there for £360. Flights to Trapani start at about £100 with Ryanair (0871 246 0000, ryanair.com); Holiday Autos (0871 472 5229, holidayautos.com) has a week's car hire for about £125.

Golf in Sicily for £1,489

Rocco Forte's Verdura Golf & Spa Resort is set in 570 acres of parkland in the south of Sicily, with more than a mile of private coastline. It has 203 rooms and suites designed by Olga Polizzi, with private terraces and sea views, two 18-hole golf courses, a nine-hole course and a vast Verdura spa. Booked direct (00800 7666 6667, roccofortehotels.com), a week costs £1,289pp. Add £200 for flights to Palermo with EasyJet (0843 104 5000, easyjet.com).

Fairy-tale Tuscany for £593

Argentone is a mountain cottage on the forested slopes of the Apuan Alps. Inside, it's all Hansel and Gretel; outside, it's all wow. Never mind the hot tub — look at the view, stretching down through the forest and across beaches to Corsica, 80 miles away. A week for two costs £900 with Invitation to Tuscany (020 8444 9500, invitationtotuscany.com), which can arrange hire of a Fiat 500 for £135. Ryanair (0871 246 0000, ryanair.com) has flights to Pisa from £75.

Relaxed Lake Garda for £743

Garda is at its best in September, when the sunshine is more gentle and the atmosphere more relaxed. Stay at the 17th-century Villa Cordevigo, on the eastern shores. It offers cookery classes, wine tastings, a pool and views. A five-night stay costs £618, including car rental, with ExpertoItaly (020 7520 3100, expertoitaly.com). EasyJet (0843 104 5000, easyjet.com) has flights to Verona from £125.

Peaceful Umbria for £989

September is altogether better in Umbria, with fewer tourists, nicer weather and lower prices. Villa Rubia is 200yd from the nearest bar and surrounded by Roman ruins. It has a

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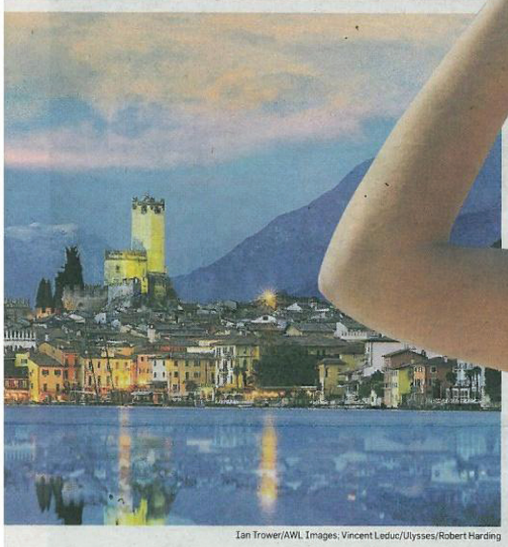

Ian Trower/AWL Images; Vincent Leduc/Ulysses/Robert Harding

private pool, a four-poster bed and classical landscapes in every direction. A week for two costs £1,620, through Quality Villas (01442 870055, qualityvillas.com). Ryanair (0871 246 0000, ryanair.com) has flights to Rome from £85; car hire costs about £190 with Holiday Autos (0871 472 5229, holidayautos.com).

CARIBBEAN

Cheerful St Lucia for £959

September is still hurricane season in the Caribbean, and there's always the chance of catching a named storm, so prices are low. British Airways (0844 493 0758, ba.com/stlucia) has a week at the Coco Palm Resort, in Gros Islet, known for its great bar, for £959 — down from £1,269.

Posh Barbados for £1,649

They start the day with champagne breakfasts at the House, in Paynes Bay. There's a certain swagger about this place. Not only does it know it's the coolest host on the coast, it also has the best restaurant. Daphne's is the Barbados branch of the South Kensington diner, and is reputed to be the better of the two. Let us know whether you agree. A week at the House costs £1,649 — a saving of £1,000 — with Caribtours (020 3131 0174, caribtours.co.uk).

Spiritual Grenada for £1,829

To rejuvenate your soul, check in at La Source. Days start with a yoga class, followed by a seaweed wrap in the spa, then meditation at the Relaxation Pavilion and a session with the personal trainer. Tropical Sky (0844 332 9349, tropicalsky.co.uk) has an all-inclusive week, with six spa treatments, three dives for Padi-qualified divers, yoga and t'ai chi, for £1,829.

EGYPT

Cut-price Sharm for £599

Hayes & Jarvis (0844 415 1918, hayesandjarvis.com) has a week at the five-star Ritz-Carlton in Sharm el Sheikh for just £599 in September. If you're worried about going, don't be. The Red Sea resorts have been almost entirely unaffected by the revolution.

INDIAN OCEAN

Secret Mauritius for £1,797

Shanti Maurice is a boutique hideaway between cane fields and the Indian Ocean. You go for the Nira spa, the best on the island; treatments combine the ancient knowledge of ayurveda and yoga with modern practices such as hydrotherapy. A week in September costs £1,797 with Wexas Travel (020 7838 5892, wexas.com).

Raffles Seychelles for £1,848

Scattered among boulders above Anse Boudin, the Raffles Praslin Seychelles has 86 villas and rooms, each with a private pool. Golf buggies take you to the spa, the infinity pools or the beach. If that's too much effort, stay put and send your butler. Just Seychelles (020 8840 0969, justseychelles.com) has a week in September for £1,848.