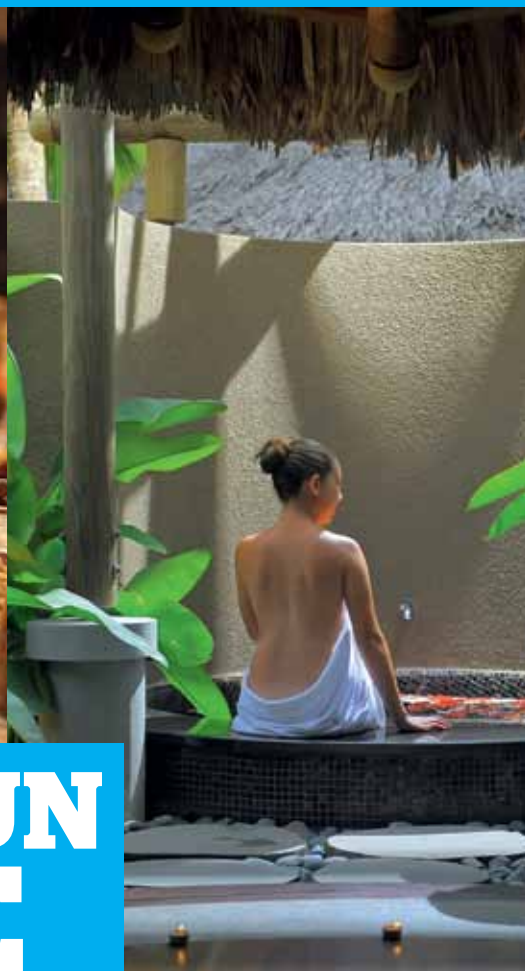




PASSPORT CONTROL
DEPARTURE



WINTER SUN THREE WAYS

save, spend, splurge

Whatever your client's budget, there's a winter holiday to suit, says Sarah Gordon

» Britain may have glinted with gold medals this summer, but it certainly wasn't bathed in golden sunshine.

And now, with temperatures plummeting and nights drawing in, clients will be turning their thoughts to warmer climes in a bid to boost vitamin D levels and make winter that bit more bearable.

And catching some out-of-season rays doesn't have to break the bank. There are plenty of options out there for every budget, whether customers are looking for a glitzy Caribbean holiday or a more affordable trip to the classic Canaries and North Africa.

In particular, Cape Verde is positioning itself as a Caribbean alternative, Prestige reports that Morocco is selling well – despite recent protests in North Africa – and new direct flights from Virgin Atlantic are increasing options to Mexico's Mayan Riviera.

1 SAVE

One of the best-value destinations for winter sun is Egypt and its glorious stretches

of coastline on the Red Sea Riviera. For customers on a tight budget, Olympic Holidays offers seven nights' half-board at the three-star Halomy Hotel in Sharm el-Sheikh for £340 in December, when the average temperature is still 19C. The hotel has views over Naama Bay and many rooms have a private balcony or terrace. The price includes return flights from Gatwick and transfers.

Gran Canaria has long been a popular winter-sun spot thanks to its varied package options, from self-catering to five-star, which offer real value for money. Thomas Cook offers half-board accommodation at the friendly,

four-star Eugenia Victoria hotel, just half a mile from popular Playa del Ingles. A tennis court, mini-golf and squash facilities are available at the resort, along with a swimming pool and whirlpool, and watersports are on offer at the beach. Seven nights costs from £414 in December, including flights from Manchester.

Despite recent protests across the wider region, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not issued any travel alerts for popular Tunisia. First Choice offers an all-inclusive holiday to the four-star-plus ClubHotel Riu Marco Polo in Hammamet, on the south of the country's tourist-friendly

promontory. The beachfront hotel, set around a grand outdoor pool and boasting a heated indoor pool and its own spa with sauna and Turkish bath, is part of the operator's Premier Collection. Seven nights, with flights from Gatwick, costs from £572.

Morocco's coastal resort of Agadir boasts more than 300 days of sunshine a year and six miles of beaches. Prestige Holidays is offering seven nights in December at the modern, activity-packed Founty Beach hotel from £510 per adult and £178 per child. The price is for a Family Studio on an all-inclusive basis (based on two adults and two children under 12 years sharing) and includes flights from Gatwick to Agadir.

2 SPEND

Amid much fanfare, Virgin Atlantic started a Gatwick-Cancun service in June and has already announced plans to increase frequency from twice to thrice weekly. Virgin Holidays is offering seven nights' all-inclusive at the 4V-rated Viva Wyndham ▶

Maya from £799, including return flights from Gatwick. Based a mile from tourist hub Playa del Carmen, the resort has a pool overlooking the beach, a spa and activities including sailing and tennis as well as four dining options.

For clients seeking glitz and glamour without travelling as far as the Caribbean, Dubai, just over seven hours away, offers sea, sand and shopping malls galore. Funway Holidays has a 50% off room rate from December 15 to 26, meaning seven nights in a Superior room at the five-star Sofitel Jumeirah in Dubai, on a B&B basis, costs from £1,039.

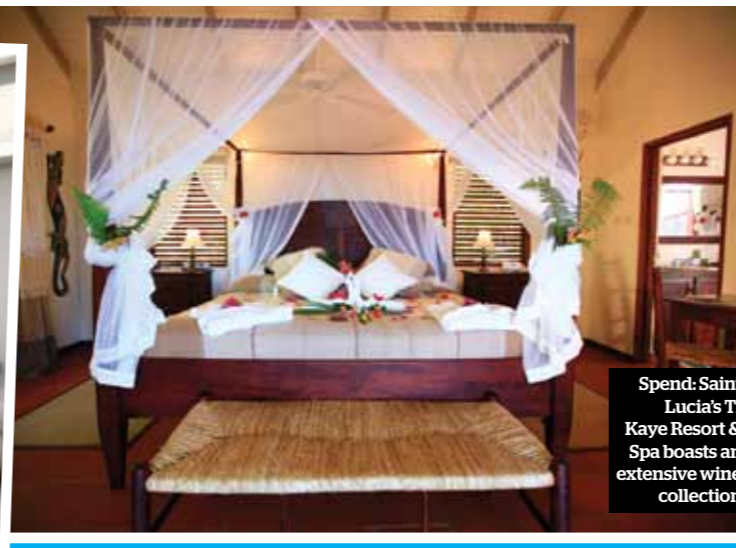
For those after an affordable Caribbean stay, Ti Kaye Resort & Spa is a boutique hideaway in Saint Lucia, perched on the secluded cove of Anse Cochon and boasting one of the largest wine cellars in the region. A nearby reef and wreck make it a great spot for divers, and kayaking and volleyball are also available on the beach.



Save: Founty Beach, Agadir, offers lots of activities



Splurge: The Astroea Beach is a boutique property in Mauritius



Spend: Saint Lucia's Ti Kaye Resort & Spa boasts an extensive wine collection

FAST FACT
Three, five or seven-night private tours of Senegal can be added to any hotel stay in Gambia this winter with The Gambia Experience

Other activities include waterfall biking, horse riding and a sunset cruises, as well as treatments at the Kai Koka Spa. Seven nights with Western & Oriental costs from £919, including flights from Gatwick and B&B accommodation.

Madeira and Porto Santo, a couple of Portuguese islands flung off the coast of Morocco, are ideal escapes and just a three-hour flight

away. Anatolian Sky Holidays has a new, tailor-made twin-centre holiday, combining four nights in Madeira and three nights in Porto Santo, from £769. Clients can enjoy culture and beautiful scenery at the traditional Quinta Bela Sao Tiago in Madeira and golden beaches at the Porto Santo Hotel & Spa.

Goa offers a taste of exotic

India mixed with a strong Portuguese influence left over from its colonial days. It has long been an affordable option for a more far-flung winter-sun spot. Thomson offers seven nights at the plush 5T-rated Alila Diwa hotel, located by Majorda Beach and surrounded by rice plantations and palm groves. It has a spa, three restaurants and offers spice

plantation and fish market tours. B&B accommodation and Gatwick flights cost from £999. Cape Verde, a smattering of islands six hours away, off the coast of Senegal, is also battling to tempt holidaymakers seeking an alternative to the Caribbean. The Cape Verde Experience is offering flights from Gatwick and a week's all-inclusive in a one-

bedroom suite at the five-star Meliá Tortuga Beach Resort & Spa, Sal, from £838.

3 SPLURGE It is known as the Sunshine State and is one of Britons' favourite holiday destinations. Just north of Miami and Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach has 47 miles of pristine coastline, golf courses and shopping districts. The grand The Breakers hotel, founded in 1896, has half a mile of private beach, five swimming pools, a spa, tennis courts, golf courses and nine restaurants. USAirtours offers seven nights' room-only, including flights from London from £1,809.

Mauritius combines the spectacular beaches you'd expect from the Indian Ocean, without feeling like you are cut-off from all culture and nature on a desert atoll. Kuoni has seven nights at the three-star-plus Astroea Beach, a pretty white retreat with just 16 rooms that is sat right on the

beach and surrounded with palm trees. The package, including indirect flights from Gatwick, costs from £1,243.

The Dominican Republic has great all-inclusive packages available at large, modern resorts. Hayes & Jarvis offers seven nights at the five-star Dreams Punta Cana Resort and Spa, a huge beachside complex with lush vegetation and a winding pool that leads from the hotel down to the sand. An all-inclusive stay with flights from Gatwick costs from £1,349.

Another Indian Ocean escape is the Seychelles, chosen by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge for their honeymoon. Elite Vacations has seven nights in a junior suite on a half-board basis at the four-star Constance Ephelia Resort, from £2,149 in February and March. Constance Ephelia is a large resort with activities including a zip wire, climbing wall, tennis courts and squash. **TW**

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