



SUMMER



WINTER

ACTIVE HOLIDAYS

Summer Winter

Head to Italy or France for plenty of activity, whatever the weather, says Aby Dunsby

@AbraDunsby



Think Italy or France and lazy days spent lounging on the sand, and evenings spent sipping red wine or sauntering through winding cobbled streets are the images that spring to mind.

Yet both countries have plenty to offer those with an adventurous streak thanks to varied landscapes that move gracefully from glaciers to rolling hills or windswept beaches.

These natural playgrounds lend themselves to a range of activities, from the gentle to the extreme, and their mild weather and varied terrain make them year-round destinations that appeal to both beginners and pros.

The first step is considering which region to visit as that will determine how difficult the activity might be; a ramble across Umbria will be far less gruelling than trekking in the national parks of Abruzzo, while cycling the Alpe d'Huez in the Rhône-Alpes will burn thighs considerably more than a family-friendly bike ride that takes you past farms and villages in southern Normandy.

In winter, the Alps are a huge draw for clients seeking vertiginous ski slopes, then in summer, the Mediterranean attracts the crowds thanks to its dazzling stretch of coastline and clear waters for snorkelling, diving, water-skiing and kite-surfing.

► SUMMER: FINAL HEAT ON TWO WHEELS: Cycling and walking remain perennially popular, and in summer the conditions are dry and clear – though recommend a visit at the start or end of the season for the most pleasant temperatures, especially for harder walks or cycles.

The popularity of the Tour de France continues to inspire clients to take to the saddle themselves in France. Inghams recommends Morzine as an increasingly popular destination for cycling holidays: clients can ride the Col de Joux Verte, a 1,760-metre climb linking Morzine to Avoriaz, passing the Lac de Montriond via a series of tight, winding hairpins. The braver can take the Col de Joux Plane, which links Morzine with Samoens in the south and has been used in the Tour de France 11 times.

Explore offers self-guided cycling holidays to France that are usually easier than its group trips and a good option for those who prefer to take things at their own pace. Its escorted bike tours have a group size of between 10 and 16, and offer cycling alongside a healthy dose of culture. For example its Canal du Midi tour rides through the beautiful Corbières region, allowing clients to absorb the history of the area with stops at the 12th-century cathedral in Narbonne and medieval fortress town of Carcassonne.

G Adventures offers a more physically demanding group tour to the popular Loire Valley, rewarding clients for all their hard work with trips to markets, wine tastings and plenty of traditional French cuisine.

That might be too taxing for little legs, but families with younger children can try the new Learn to Ride initiative from Al Fresco Holidays, helping kids aged three and up to learn to cycle. Its Des Menhirs park in South Brittany has recently launched a programme for guests to hire bikes and take part in free guided tours.

In Italy, Inntravel has a new holiday by bike, exploring the lesser-known Maremma region of Tuscany.

ON FOOT: Tuscany is a top choice for gentle hikes too, and its rolling vineyards, ancient hill villages and silvery olive groves mean there's plenty to see along the way.

G Adventures offers both a cycling and walking holiday to the region. For tougher hikes, the Dolomites region is a good option. Thomson Lakes & Mountains recommends climbing a 'via ferrata' (steep climbing routes using steel cables and ladders) following the same route that Second World War soldiers used to navigate the mountains.

Inghams, which offers guided 'wanderwalks' holidays in many of its European resorts, suggests Champoluc in the mountains of

Monte Rosa. The region has more than 125 miles of marked walks for all levels.

Alison Hall, head of product development at Inntravel, says: "In spite of the European Football Championships in France this year, during what is the peak season for activity holidays, our walking holidays to France are holding their own and in some areas we have seen significant increases in numbers walking."

The Alsace region has seen numbers triple for the operator this year with the introduction of a new self-guided walking holiday, Castles, Vines & Forests of Alsace.

ON WATER: Those craving salty sea air can head to the French island of Corsica, which boasts more than 600 miles of scenic coastline and plenty of picturesque trails past quaint villages and lush vineyards.

Mark Warner's San Lucianu Beach Resort is well located for ramblers looking to explore the area, and offers a jam-packed activity programme as well as intensive road-cycling weeks.

Budding sailors can hop aboard a chartered or skippered yacht from Palermo to discover the Med with Sunsail, while those who prefer the tranquillity of the lakes should consider a sailing excursion to Lake Garda. Eurocamp's Altomincio Family Park near Lake Garda is close to a diving school, which



FAR LEFT:
Club Med,
Napitia, Italy

LEFT: Water
sports at
Eurocamp's
Union Lido, Italy

BELOW:
Walking in
Alsace with
Inntravel

➔ is ideal for families looking to get started on Padi training. Some of its parks, including Garden Paradiso and Union Lido on the Italian Adriatic, offer water-based activities including windsurfing and sailing.

Lovers of sun, sea and sand should also consider Club Med's Napitia resort in the south of Italy, which has a range of family-friendly activities including beach football and volleyball, kayaking, water polo and sailing, as well as a tennis school.

❖ WINTER: ICE AS NICE

ON THE SLOPES: The snow-blanketed Alps are filled with skiers and



The French Alps is one of the world's greatest ski regions and has one of the largest connected ski areas on the planet

snowboarders every year, and Italy and France's close proximity to the UK makes them popular options. Italy boasts affordable prices, great food, and a laid-back vibe suited to families

and less-advanced skiers, while France remains the number-one choice for Brits, with the French Alps offering resorts that appeal to skilled skiers.

Julie Franklin, agency sales manager at Mark Warner, says: "The French Alps is one of the world's greatest ski and snowboarding regions – and also the place with the largest connected ski area on the planet. This gives experienced skiers and boarders scope to drop from one valley to the next and even take in several top resorts in one day, while beginners and children can feel safe and secure on the plentiful easy slopes and fun parks at the base of the slopes." ➔



Crystal Ski offers a week's self-catering, lift pass and equipment hire at the three-star Les Villages Bachat in Chamrousse from £435 per person (based on four sharing) including flights from Gatwick and transfers, departing January 14, 2017. crystalski.co.uk

GAdventures offers seven days on its Cycling in Tuscany holiday from £892 including cycling equipment, breakfast and dinner each day and accommodation. gadventures.co.uk





→ For families, the operator's chalet hotel in family-friendly resort La Plagne offers the usual childcare services as well as ski classes for children as young as three. For those with more cash to splash, suggest Courcheval, which boasts unbeatable skiing in chic surroundings. Those staying at Club Med's Val Thorens are just 10 miles from Courcheval, and the resort also has an indoor climbing wall, snow park, and snow garden for young children.

IN THE SNOW: Crystal Ski offers skiing and snowboarding in 40 resorts in France and 22 in Italy. Those keen to try their hand at more than just skiing should consider Chamrousse, where clients can take part in snowshoeing or horse riding, while Tignes is popular for more extreme sports including ice scuba diving and ice driving.

In Italy, clients can learn to 'skate ski' to a backdrop of the



“Tignes is popular for more extreme sports including ice scuba diving and ice driving

scenic village of Versciaco di Sopra, near the border with Austria, as part of a new Exodus trip. The skating course is open to newcomers and those who want to perfect their technique, and includes instruction and the hire of cross-country skis. The operator has also added a new activity week to Mont Blanc for winter, which will see clients take part in cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, downhill skiing and dog sledding (from £1,399). **TW**

FAR LEFT: Skiing in La Plagne with Mark Warner

LEFT: Val Thorens, Club Med

BELOW: Snowshoeing with Crystal Ski



ASK THE EXPERT



Jim Eite, product manager, Exodus

“Italy and France are both growing destinations for us, perfect for the adventure traveller with great scenery, fantastic cycling and walking, and delicious food and wine. For trekkers the choice ranges from summiting Mont Blanc or scrambling over tackling the via ferrata in the Dolomites, to gentle day walks around the Amalfi Coast or Corsica. For cyclists, clients can emulate heroes on the classic cols of the Tour de France or discover areas such as Puglia with a guided group, or as a self-guided itinerary.”



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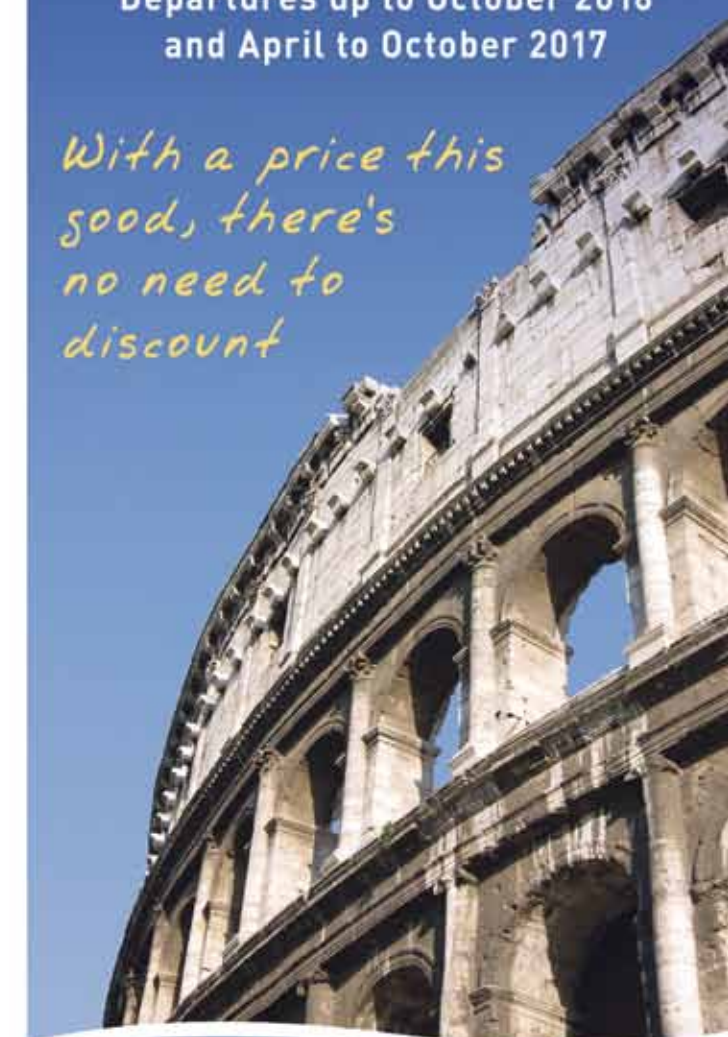
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