

of the BEST

BUDGET-FRIENDLY WINTER-SUN SPOTS

Laura French looks into the best-value breaks for clients in search of a winter escape

Winter is fast approaching and the thermometer will soon be dropping, but it needn't mean throwing in the beach towel just yet – the world is pretty generous when it comes to year-round sunny spots, and it doesn't always have to cost the Earth to reach them.

From the Canaries to The Gambia, the Middle East to Mexico, there's a plethora of places to choose from that offer sunny skies without a whopping price tag. Here are some of our favourites.



1 GRAN CANARIA

From turquoise coastlines to rolling sand dunes, crashing waterfalls to caldera views, the Canaries are beautifully diverse, as well as affordable. For some of the best deals – and most dramatic terrain – look to Gran Canaria, where 147 miles of coastline meets wildlife-filled pine forests that have earned the island Unesco World Biosphere Reserve status. For a peaceful base, suggest Puerto de Mogán, a fishing village whose bridged waterways have given it the nickname the 'Venice of the Canaries'.

Book it: Jet2holidays offers a week's B&B at the five-star Radisson Blu Resort & Spa Gran Canaria, Puerto de Mogán, from £699 per person, including flights from Stansted on December 3. jet2holidays.com



2 THAILAND

With a dry season running from November to April, Thailand's best months are perfectly aligned with the UK's coldest, making its white-sand beaches, verdant jungles and vibrant cities a go-to for when the nights draw in. There is accommodation and food to suit most palates, and sightseeing ranges from Chiang Mai's glittering temples to Khao Sok National Park's pearl-like lakes. But for those in search of total seclusion, Travel 2's assistant product manager for Asia, Natalie Jones, recommends Krabi: "It's an unspoilt region of turquoise sea and tropical forests with the most idyllic beach resorts."

Book it: Travel 2 offers a week's B&B in a D'Light Room at DusitD2 Ao Nang Krabi from £999 per person, including flights from Gatwick in January. travel2.com

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THE GAMBIA

Gold-sand beaches brushed by emerald-green palms are the order of the day in The Gambia – and it needn't mean breaking the bank. "One of the smallest African countries, it's ideal for winter sun and offers great value," says Ricky Wason, head of product and purchasing at Olympic Holidays. "It's rich in heritage with vibrant markets and extremely welcoming locals, and it has almost zero rainfall." The real draw, of course, is the wildlife, with chimpanzees, colobus monkeys, crocodiles, manatees and hippos all stalking its varied landscapes, and nearly 600 species of birds flitting above them.

Book it: Olympic Holidays offers a week's B&B at Palm Beach Hotel from £542 per person, including flights from Gatwick; clients can upgrade to half-board from £13 per day. olympicholidays.com



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AJMAN

When it comes to guaranteed sun, the Middle East comes up trumps. But for a cheaper alternative to the UAE's bigger emirates, look to Ajman, says Nikki Hain, product manager at Premier Holidays.

"It offers great value for those after a five-star luxury stay," she says. "You can potentially save hundreds, compared with a similar break in Dubai." For those wanting to go beyond the resort, there's wildlife at Al Zorah Nature Reserve, hiking in the Hajar Mountains and safaris in the nearby desert – plus Dubai is only a 45-minute drive away.

Book it: Premier Holidays offers five nights' B&B at the Oberoi Beach Resort from £1,339 per person, including flights and private transfers, for departures between January 13 and March 20, 2020. trade.premierholidays.co.uk



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MEXICO

For those after Caribbean climes without the price tag of the islands, suggest Mexico. The range of accommodation means there's excellent value to be had here, and temperatures rest in the early 20s during the UK winter. Mayan ruins, exotic jungles, dramatic canyons and other intriguing phenomena are on hand across the country to keep those with itchy feet happy, while world-class diving, family-friendly theme parks and immaculate, fine-sand beaches add to the appeal.

Book it: Tui offers seven nights' all-inclusive at the Holiday Inn Resort Los Cabos from £688 per person, based on two sharing, including transfers and flights from Gatwick on November 21.

tui.co.uk

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EGYPT

With a flight time of less than five hours, Egypt combines year-round warmth with ease of accessibility, and few spots can beat it on the value front. Excellent diving, bath-warm waters and gold-sand beaches make fly-and-flopping in its Red Sea resorts a sure-fire hit, while camel rides in the desert and the Pyramids lure explorer types. For a beachfront base, suggest El Gouna, where Thomas Cook has just opened an adult-only Cook's Club with windsurfing, kitesurfing and other watersports on its lagoon, and a resident DJ by the pool.

Book it: A week's B&B at Cook's Club El Gouna starts at £533 per person, based on two sharing, flying from Birmingham on October 31.

thomascook.com



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BEST OF THE REST

✿ **Tenerife:** Easy to reach, with consistent blue skies and a host of family-friendly resorts, Tenerife is a no-brainer for winter – and flights are cheap as chips. Jet2holidays offers a week's B&B at Hard Rock Hotel Tenerife from £550 per person, flying from Stansted.

✿ **Vietnam:** Travellers seeking culture and adventure in equal measure will find plenty to occupy them in Vietnam, from the emerald-green, serene slopes of Sapa to the frenetic pace of its cities, and it offers excellent value. For the best beaches, Premier Holidays recommends Phu Quoc, a remote archipelago of picture-perfect islands where you can find some excellent savings.

✿ **Sri Lanka:** Confidence in Sri Lanka is returning, and now's a good time to grab a bargain. You can get a night's B&B in a Sleep King room at Ozo Kandy for £49, bringing the country's *Jungle Book*-style scenes, epic wildlife and icing-sugar beaches within reach, regardless of your budget.

CYPRUS

Some 320 days of sun a year make Cyprus a winter winner, and you can get some decent bargains. The island holds widespread appeal, with postcard-worthy beaches, traditional villages, scenic hiking routes and idyllic vineyards, while the Troodos Mountains beckon active types and ancient archaeological sites call anyone who's into history. Paphos makes an excellent base for the latter, but for a smaller resort try Coral Bay. There's a lively, family-friendly beach with a string of bars and restaurants, and a plethora of villa accommodation makes it a good bet for clients on a budget.

Book it: James Villa Holidays offers a week at Villa Ellison from £259 per person based on six sharing, including flights from Stansted on November 17.
jamesvillas.co.uk

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MAURITIUS

Sand the colour of snow, shelving water so perfectly jade it looks as if it's come out of a bottle – welcome to Mauritius. And while Indian Ocean getaways can come with a hefty price tag, this one doesn't have to, thanks to a wide choice of accommodation that spans all budgets. The climate is at its best during our winter, and there's something to suit all tastes, from natural phenomena such as the kaleidoscopic Seven Coloured Earth – a wavy ocean of reds, purples and oranges, formed from volcanic rock – to exotic tea plantations, vibrant, colourful markets and idyllic, castaway-style islands.

Book it: Gold Medal offers seven nights' all-inclusive at the four-star Maritim Crystals Beach Hotel from £1,299 per person, based on two sharing a superior room in December, with Emirates flights from Gatwick.
goldmedal.co.uk

