



⏸ PAUSE



▶ PLAY

## CAPE VERDE ISLANDS

# Pause & Play

Let stress melt away on the island of Sal off West Africa, writes Joey Tyson

**A** little-known cluster of islands off the coast of Senegal, the Cape Verdes live by a simple yet beautiful mantra: 'no stress'.

Fringed by white-sand beaches and clear waters, populated by laidback and friendly people, and with a charming mix of African and Portuguese cultures, Sal Island, in particular, makes good on its promise to eliminate the gripes and grumbles of daily life.

Even getting there is hassle-free: a six-hour flight almost due south means that there's no jet lag to contend with on arrival, and only an hour's time difference, with direct Thomson flights from Gatwick, Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol, or via Lisbon with Tap Portugal.

And then there's the glorious weather. Near-constant sunshine makes Sal a treat at any time of year, but particularly during the UK winter. When Britons back home are baulking at sub-zero temperatures, Cape Verde enjoys sunny days in the mid-20s.

Meanwhile, a mix of low-cost self-catering accommodation and

luxury all-inclusive retreats makes Sal a holiday hot spot for all budgets. No wonder more Brits than ever are turning to these islands for winter sun.

### ▶ SAND AND SURF

**Pause:** Santa Maria beach rivals anything the Caribbean could offer, which is probably why so many compare Cape Verde with its better-known cousins in the west. Beach bums will find endless sands, lapped by warm water and a steady pace of life that never threatens to break above a stroll. Brightly painted wooden boats bobbing gently around the old timber jetty complete the idyllic scene.

Backed by a handful of quaint bars and restaurants, the beach has everything clients need to unwind, whether it's an ice-cold Cape Verdean caipirinha (made with potent local spirit grogue) or grilled lobster, fresh in from the sea. Stress? What stress?

**Play:** Cape Verde's Atlantic location makes it one of the best places in the world for kitesurfing, with perfect winds

blowing in off the ocean throughout the UK's winter months. From first light to early evening, the skies above the aptly named Kite Beach are full of colourful kites. It makes for an awesome spectacle, even if clients don't fancy having a go themselves.

Adventurous types can get stuck in, however, with lessons, arranged either through The Resort Group - the company that has developed four hotels and a beachclub on the islands, with a further 6,500 rooms in the pipeline - or direct with Kite Boarding Club Sal. Beginners' sessions start at about €290 for two to three days of lessons. Experienced surfers, meanwhile, can take to the waves as they please, pitting their skills against Sal's challenging swells.

Surfing, windsurfing and boat trips can also be arranged.

### ▶ SEEING SAL

**Pause:** It might be hard to believe at first sight, but tiny Sal once produced salt for large swathes of Brazil and west Africa. Today,

its production is limited to the nine inhabited islands of Cape Verde, but the Pedra Lume salt mine offers a fascinating glimpse into the past of a once-mighty mineral empire.

Located at the centre of a huge crater, dramatically surrounded by imposing red-rock cliffs, the mine's pools are even saltier than the Dead Sea. Clients can spend the afternoon floating around in the sunshine, before a cooling drink in the mine's cafe. Entrance is €5 but save an extra euro for the shower, so you can rinse the dried salt away afterwards.

**Play:** Those who like a shot of adrenaline on their holiday won't be disappointed by Sal, either, especially if they take a trip to Shark's Bay. The waters around this rocky beach teem with life, which draws lemon sharks in to feed - daring types can quite literally walk with sharks.

Jaws they are not, however: despite growing up to two metres in length, lemon sharks have no interest in humans and will dart away into the waves if courageous clients get too



**RIGHT:**  
Salt lake

**FAR RIGHT:**  
Surfing at  
Melia Tortuga  
Beach

**BELOW:**  
Bikini Beach



→ close. Though just being near those black, ominous fins is enough to get the heart pumping. Island tours that include Shark's Bay can be arranged from The Resort Group hotels, starting at €20.

Not smitten with sharks? No problem. Take in Sal's rugged Mars-like interior by bicycle, instead. This exciting ride cuts through the island's barren interior, giving clients a different perspective. Tours can be arranged through Explore Cape Verde and cost €25.

## MEET THE LOCALS

**Pause:** Travellers seeking a better understanding of Cape Verde and the



**Just being near the black, ominous fins of a lemon shark is enough to get the heart thumping**

important role tourism plays here can visit the Cape Verde Foundation, a charity set up by The Resort Group to support the country's children.

The school and centre are located in Esapargos, Sal's capital, and provide education and care for children from the age of six months to seven years.

It's an important resource for parents, many of whom come from other islands to work in Sal's hotels, and cannot afford childcare.

**Play:** As night falls over Sal, Santa Maria's bars start to liven up, and Buddy Bar (Rua 1 de Junho) – the place for live music on the island – offers a friendly alternative to hotel entertainment. For a country of just over half a million people, the musical diversity of the Cape Verdes is quite remarkable: bands could be playing anything from reggae and rock to traditional folk music morna, which was made famous internationally by Cesária Évora. No matter what the genre, remind clients to bring their dancing shoes. **TV**

## BIKINI BEACH

Embrace the beachclub vibe at Bikini Beach, part club, part restaurant, all surrounding a private pool set 40 metres out into the Atlantic Ocean. Here, clients can lounge like celebs in the sun by day and enjoy gourmet dining by night, with all-inclusive drinks passes from €25, Sunday bottomless brunch for €50, and water sports starting at €25 for 15 minutes.





## ✓ Where to stay



**LEFT:**  
YHI Spa at  
Melia Llana  
Beach Resort

**RIGHT:**  
Melia Tortuga  
Beach hotel

**BELOW:**  
Santa Maria  
beach



### Melia Llana Beach Resort & Spa

The Resort Group's new, super-slick five-star spa resort is ideal for clients seeking a slice of luxury in Cape Verde. An adult-only, all-inclusive hotel, Melia Llana offers the chance to unwind in supreme style, with a YHI spa, range of fine-dining options, multiple pools, gym and an enviable beachfront location.

The hotel backs straight on to a private sandy beach and the exclusive Bikini Beach.

Clients upgrading to The Level get access to the

private pool club and opulent split-level rooms.

**Book it:** All-inclusive rates start at €270 in high season or €206 in low season.

### Melia Dunas Resort & Spa

Customers who want a bit of pampering, but also need to keep the kids entertained, will find Melia Dunas ticks all the right boxes.

The hotel boasts seven pools – one with a mini-water park for the kids – plus six impressive restaurants, private-beach access, spa and exclusive extras

for guests who book The Level service.

The sheer size of Melia Dunas affords clients the space to unwind, but also offers a lively atmosphere should they seek it out. There's a full programme of entertainment, with regular live music, special kids' shows and evening activities – perfect for young families and couples alike.

**Book it:** All-inclusive rates start at €180 per night in low season and €255 in high season.

### Melia Tortuga Beach

This peaceful, 286-room hotel has more of a village vibe to it,

as small blocks of rooms and villas combine to create a quiet community feeling.

The hotel stretches right out onto the lovely sands of Algodoeiro beach and has four wonderful pools (two for adults and two for children).

With four restaurants, a spa and large tropical gardens all on site, there's no shortage of luxury touches either.

**Book it:** All-inclusive rates start at €170 in low season and €245 in high season. [melia.com](http://melia.com)



PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK; DAVID RALITA; THE RESORT GROUP/STEPHEN HYDE