

FAMILIES



COUPLES



PICTURES: THE FAMILY ADVENTURE COMPANY; MAZAGAN BEACH & GOLF RESORT

NORTH AFRICA

Couples Families

It's time to take another look at North Africa, writes Katie McGonagle →

Searching for a grown-up getaway, or a spot of family fun? Short spa weekend or activity-filled fortnight? How about a relaxing cultural cruise, or time to work on that golf swing?

Few regions could tick each of those boxes, but being a good all-rounder is core to the appeal of Egypt and Morocco. It's easy to lose sight of that given the dip in bookings over recent years, as terrorism plays on travellers' minds and Foreign & Commonwealth Office advice rules out flying to hotspot Sharm el-Sheikh.

Yet it seems customers haven't forgotten what made them love North Africa in the first place. Classic Collection Holidays has seen a "resurgence" in Morocco bookings for this summer, up 10% year on year, while sales of The Family Adventure Company's Egypt break have improved, with double the bookings this year. Both admit those increases are from a low base last year, but it's a positive sign nonetheless.

If you're wondering how to start getting North Africa bookings back on track, check out these tips for tailoring a break to suit different clients.

THE BEACH BREAK

Couples: If any good has come from the downturn in demand for Egypt, it's that pricing has never been more competitive, so couples on a budget will find it easier to bag a bargain here than anywhere else short-haul.

Cyplon's North Africa sales manager, Jerome Downer, says: "Local exchange rates mean Egypt is excellent value for money. Water sports are popular, as is snorkelling and diving - Egypt's coral reef is one of the best in the world."

With a week all-inclusive at five-star Sonesta Pharaoh Beach Resort in Hurgada for just £585 per person - including flights from Gatwick, baggage and private transfers in May - with Cyplon, this is a good option for couples on a shoestring.

Pairs with more spending power might find the new breed of luxury hotels in Morocco a good bet: the all-pool villa Banyan Tree Tamouda Bay opened late last year as the brand's first property in Africa or the Med, alongside Sofitel Tamouda Bay Beach & Spa.

Families: There are bargains for families in Egypt too, such as the



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free all-inclusive meal upgrade for kids in any Red Sea Hotels property, regardless of the board basis booked.

Water babies, however, might find Morocco's Atlantic coast more to their taste, with world-class surfing plus windsurfing, kitesurfing, jetskiing, paddleboarding and more.

Iberostar Founty Beach in Agadir offers free sports within the resort and links up with a local water sports centre, which hires out jet skis and inflatable crafts. Sofitel Agadir Thalassa Sea & Spa is also just yards from the beach, with a tennis court, bike hire, boating and jetskiing excursions, and children's clubs for ages four to 12.

THE SPORTY STAY

Couples: Golf is a strong seller here, and can be pitched as a long weekend in addition to a summer holiday. Somabay on the Red Sea coast is home to The Cascades Championship Golf Course, a



72-par course designed by Gary Player. It's at the Westin Soma Bay Golf Resort & Spa, but there is a free shuttle from other Somabay hotels and all guests get a free introductory golf lesson.

Golf widows and widowers can avail themselves of the resort's kitesurfing, sailing and diving, or hide out in the 65-room thalassa spa at The Cascades.

Gary Player has also sprinkled his magic over Morocco, with two links

courses at Sofitel Essaouira Mogador Golf & Spa, and the country's longest course at Mazagan Beach & Golf Resort, an hour southwest of Casablanca.

Joanne Fenton, agency sales manager for Elegant Resorts, recently led a fam trip to Mazagan. She says: "It's a fabulous resort. It has children's and teens' clubs, but is also good for couples. It has an amazing golf course, and the Chiringuito Beach Club has a brilliant vibe, almost like Ibiza, so you can chill and enjoy the sunshine or get involved in a whole host of activities."

Families: As Fenton and her fam group noted, Mazagan can also be tailored to families, with a baby and kids' club open for daily activities until 6pm, plus a dedicated kids' pool and horse-riding lessons. Club Rush, for 12 to 16-year-olds, also offers daily activities, plus a disco and big-screen cinema at weekends.

Classic Collection recommends Paradis Plage Surf Yoga & Spa Resort in Taghazout as another family favourite. Morocco purchaser Doranne Dawson says: "It's a four-star resort right on the beach in an area renowned for the quality of its surf. It offers paddle and body-boarding classes alongside surfing, so there are plenty of fun things to do, and all rooms are suites, meaning there's plenty of space for families."



ABOVE LEFT: Paradis Plage Surf Yoga & Spa Resort, Taghazout

ABOVE: Royal Esadora, Nile



Egypt offers a fantastic mix of culture, history and adventure. It's great to see the destination starting to recover

THE CULTURE HIT

Couples: Cruising the Nile is a perennial favourite with culture-loving couples, and Orbital Travel has seen signs of recovery here, with Nile cruise sales up more than 60% in the first five weeks of this year. It has twice-weekly departures on *Royal Esadora* on Mondays (with a Heathrow-Luxor flight) and *Minerva* on Wednesdays (flying via Cairo), from £799 and £829 respectively.

"It's a great time to visit," says managing director John McCallum. "There are no crowds at the historical sites and excellent value when shopping for locally made goods and mementos."

Specialist operator Discover Egypt is also increasing efforts to help agents sell the country. Director Philip Breckner says: "For agents who are hesitant to book Egypt, we're happy to offer training to help them sell it better and we will be running fam trips this year.

The more we can do with agents to bring the Nile back to life, the better."

Cruise customers might also be tempted to try a tour, especially one with a cultural bent. Insight Vacations' 10-day Best of Morocco trip takes in the busy souks and quiet gardens of Marrakech, a fresh seafood dinner in Essaouira, 4x4 trip in the desert and a visit to the kasbahs of Ait Benhaddou. Prices start at £1,595, excluding flights.

A tour takes care of all the logistics, but if couples would rather stay put, opt for a Marrakech city break. Prestige Holidays marketing manager Nicky Shafe says: "La Maison Arabe is the perfect hotel for couples on a short trip to Marrakech. It is in a quiet but convenient location close to Djemaa el Fna and the Koutoubia Mosque, making it perfect for couples wanting to discover the city on foot. The hotel also has a private garden and cookery school just a 15-minute shuttle ride away." Five nights with breakfast, easyJet flights from Gatwick in April and a free room upgrade on arrival starts at £775.

Families: Kids and culture don't always go hand-in-hand, but no child could fail to be enthralled by twisting souks, aromatic spice stalls and snake charmers in Djemaa el Fna. If the bustle of Marrakech's centre is a bit much, choose a hotel in La Palmeraie, where the new Iberostar Club Palmeraie opens in April, with sports, cookery classes, camel rides and hot-air balloon flights (at extra cost) for days when they don't fancy city sightseeing.

Egypt has plenty to attract families, but parents who are - understandably - anxious about bringing the brood might find reassurance in a family-focused tour. Michael Edwards, managing director of The Family Adventure Company, says: "Egypt offers a fantastic mix of culture, history and adventure and it's great to see the destination starting to recover. Families find travelling in a group with a local leader gives them that extra confidence to explore the country away from the main tourist sites, and get close to local life."

The operator's Egypt Family Holiday should be a winner with kids of all ages, who get to gaze at the Pyramids in Giza, hop on a camel in Aswan, cruise the Nile in a traditional felucca, and end with snorkelling in the Red Sea. **TW**



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Elegant Resorts offers five nights in a pool view room at Mazagan Beach & Golf Resort from £725, with breakfast, economy flights, UK lounge passes and private transfers, valid June 1-August 17. elegantresorts.co.uk

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The Family Adventure Company's Egypt Family Holiday starts at £1,315 per adult and £1,184 per child including flights, accommodation, transport, selected meals and activities, departing July 29 or August 12. Minimum age five. familyadventurecompany.co.uk



LEFT: Iberostar Founty Beach, Agadir