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Autumn in the Med

Once August is over, the shores of the Mediterranean offer warm seas, gentle heat and a calmer vibe. So if you are craving some sun after the washout summer at home, follow Nicola Iseard's tips for a mellow short-haul break



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The town of Oia on Santorini is overrun with tourists in the summer but relatively quiet come autumn. Photograph: Shaun Egan/Getty Images

Corsica

The French adore Corsica, so in August the beaches are rammed, restaurants fully-booked, prices sky high and the locals prone to exhibiting the worst of their legendary prickly temperament. Come September, the French return to the mainland, and the island lets out a collective sigh of relief. The lower temperatures mean it's a good time for car touring and walking, especially if you want to tackle a part of the 180km-long GR20, which traverses Corsica diagonally from north to south.

Average September temperature (at the hottest time of the day): 26C

Flights operate until: 27 September with Thomson (flights.thomson.co.uk) to Calvi from Gatwick and Manchester, and until 4 October to Figari from Gatwick. 4 October with Easyjet (easyjet.com) from Gatwick.

Where to stay: Corsican Places (0845 330 2113; corsica.co.uk) has several properties available in September, including the two-bedroom Apartment Georges in Calvi, which boasts views of the cathedral. Seven nights costs £398 for departures on 20 September, including flights from Gatwick and transfers. Coastline Villas (0844 557 1020; coastline.co.uk) also has availability at Villa Belvedere, a stunning four-bedroom hilltop villa near Porto Vecchio with infinity pool that costs from £484pp in September (based on eight sharing, including flights and car hire). Also check out VFB (01452 716840; vfbholidays.co.uk) for a good range of villas. The island isn't short of elegant boutique hotels either. With lush gardens and vaulted rooms, Boutique Hotel Miramar in Propriano (00 33 495 760613; miramarboutiquehotel.com) cuts its prices mid-September to €240 for a double.

Mallorca

While temperatures can reach the high twenties, the weather is generally cooler in September and October - perfect for exploring the island's superb walking routes. Head to the undiscovered western coast, where rugged limestone cliffs and turquoise bays are framed by the backdrop of the craggy Tramuntana mountains. If you visit towards the end of September, you can join in the Festa des Vermada, the annual celebration of the grape harvest in the Mallorcan wine capital, Binissalem. Taking place this year from 25-27 September, it begins with the firing of a rocket, before revellers follow a drummer and piper to a field for a massive grape fight. There are also street parades, dances and jugs of wine.

Average max temperature: 27C

Direct flights run until: 23 October with Flybe (flybe.com) from nine UK airports, including Manchester and Newcastle. Easyjet offers flights year-round from Gatwick, Stansted, Belfast, Bristol, Liverpool and Luton, as does Ryanair, with flights from Birmingham, East Midlands, Edinburgh, Leeds Bradford, Liverpool and Stansted.

Where to stay: Mallorca Farmhouses (0845 800 8080; mallorca.co.uk) has properties available throughout September, including Finca Rafal Antic, a four-bedroom farmhouse with pool, in the hamlet of Búger, 15 minutes' drive from Binissalem. It is available from 26 September from £1,362 a week. CV Travel (020 7401 1035; cvtravel.co.uk) also has some great properties in Mallorca, with locations including the historic hilltown of Arta. Or try Son Palou (00 34 971 148282; sonpalou.com), a stylishly -renovated agroturismo hotel in Orient on the north-west coast.

Ibiza

While most of the party crowds have gone, a small relaxed group enjoys the slower pace of life during the day, and the famous club closing parties at night. Space closes the season with one of its biggest parties yet on 27 September, while Amnesia's closing party is on 28 September and Privilege's on 30 September. Shake off your hangover with a trip inland to walk through the glorious pine forests, to a deserted rocky cove.

Average max temperature: 27C

Direct flights until: 1 November with Easyjet from Luton and Gatwick. All direct flights from the UK used to stop in winter, but Ryanair now offers flights year-round from Stansted.

Where to stay: Can Curreu (00 34 971 335 280; cancurreu.com) is a peaceful boutique retreat just outside San Carlos in the north-east of the island. All rooms have a private terrace with views of forested hills, and Cala Llenya, a quiet and sheltered beach, is a 10-minute drive away. Doubles from €220, including breakfast. For something a bit cheaper, Classic Collection (0800 008 7299; classic-collection.co.uk) offers several affordable hotels on the island. James Villas (0800 074 0122; jamesvillas.co.uk) has a good selection of villas across the island, starting around £350pp per week, including flights.

Sicily

Harvest season is in full swing by September, which means you can taste the first grapes and olive oils of the season, plus chestnuts and porcini mushrooms, and maybe even mandarins. San Vito Lo Capo, near Trapani on the west coast, holds its annual Couscous Festival from 22-27 September. Expect a couscous cook-off, music and plenty of wine tasting. In late September you'll also enjoy crowd-free beaches cooled by seasonal sirocco winds.

Average max temperature: 28C

Direct flights until: 1 November with Easyjet from Gatwick. 24 October with Thomson from Manchester. Ryanair offers flights year-round from Birmingham, Stansted and Luton.

Where to stay: The best place to stay to take advantage of such food frenzy is a working agriturismo. Just 10 miles from Trapani is Baglio Fontanasalsa, a stone-built farm that produces olive oil and wine. It has a large pool, orchard, vaulted dining room and pergola-covered courtyard. Real Holidays (020 7359 3938; realholidays.co.uk) has

a week from £364 during September, and can book your flights and car hire. If it's a villa you're after, Think Sicily (020 7377 8518; thinksicily.com) has a wide range, including La Mora, on the edge of the Madonie Mountains. It sleeps seven and costs €2140 per week in October.

Santorini

Towns that are normally overrun with tourists, such as Perissa and Oia, are relatively quiet at this time of year, giving you the chance to soak up the laid-back Greek atmosphere of the tavernas and shops (many of which are still open late in September). You'll see fewer cruise ships, too. Fira hosts an International Music Festival from 6-20 September (santorini.info), with jazz recitals, orchestral music and opera from all over the world.

Average max temperature: 27C

Direct flights run until: 4 October with Easyjet from Gatwick, and until 19 October with Thomson also from Gatwick.

Where to stay: Perched on the volcanic cliffs of Imerovigli, with jaw-dropping views of the Aegean, the Astra Apartments and Suites take some beating. An apartment for two costs from €200 per night with breakfast (book via 0845 034 0700; mrandmrsmith.com). Sovereign (0871 200 6677; sovereign.com) also offers upmarket hotels on Santorini, as does Kuoni (01306 747002; kuoni.co.uk). Holiday Rentals (holiday-rentals.co.uk) has a range of villas including one in a gorgeous converted windmill, which sleeps five and is available throughout September from €2,660 a week.

Istria

Istria, a peninsula in the north of [Croatia](#), enjoys a temperate Mediterranean climate, which means autumn days will be comfortably warm but nights cooler - perfect if you want to get out and about exploring. The region's vineyards come alive in autumn, as this is a time for picking malvasia, teran and muscat grapes. Wine trail excursions can take you to the best cellars in the region. It's also the start of the truffle season, which is celebrated with the two-month-long Days of Truffles festival. This kicks off in Buzet on 12 September - where a giant omelette with more than 2,000 eggs and 10kg of truffles is prepared in a huge pan - and continues until 8 November with fairs, demos of truffle searching, tastings and auctions (istria-gourmet.com).

Average max temperature: 25C

Direct flights until: Croatia Airlines (croatiaairlines.com) offers year-round flights to Pula from Gatwick.

Where to stay: Hotel San Rocco, in Brtonigla (00 385 052 725000; san-rocco.hr), has elegantly decorated rooms and a spa, and is about 40 minutes by car from Buzet. Doubles from €129, including breakfast. Superb villas can be booked through Vintage Travel (0845 344 0460; vintagetravel.co.uk) or Hidden Croatia (0800 021 7771; hiddencroatia.com).

Sardinia

The sea is at its warmest in September and October, so go snorkelling at Cala Luna beach, rich with marine life. You can also witness the colourful nine-day San Salvatore Festival at Cabras, in the western province of Oristano. At dawn on the first Saturday in September, a group of around a thousand runners - all barefoot young men in white robes - carry a statue of San Salvatore from the church of Santa Maria Assunta to the church of San Salvatore, in the countryside 7km away. The run is repeated on the Sunday in the opposite direction to return the statue to Cabras. In the evening, celebrations take place with grilled fish and Vernaccia, a sherry-like wine typical of this region.

Average max temperature: 27C

Direct flights run until: 25 September with Thomson to Alghero from Birmingham. Easyjet flies all year round to Cagliari from Luton, as does Ryanair, from Bristol, Liverpool, Stansted and Edinburgh.

Where to stay: Hotel Le Dune Ingurtosu (00 39 070 276691; hosteras.it) is a remarkable hotel set among sand dunes in the valley of Piscinas, south of Cabras on the south-west coast; doubles in September from €310 half-board. If you're looking for a villa, apartment, farm stay or yacht charter, Just Sardinia (01202 484858; justsardinia.co.uk) offers accommodation across the island, as does Holiday Options (0844 477 0451; holidayoptions.co.uk).

Kalkan

The small harbour town of Kalkan is on a horseshoe bay in southern Turkey, and stays warm well into the autumn. All of the shops and cafes are still open for business in September and this is a perfect time of year to take a gulet cruise to explore the bay and the neighbouring islands (Kekova Island is a must), all of which are quieter during the autumn. As are the beaches - Kalkan itself has a small pebbly beach, but it's worth travelling out to Kaputas or the famous Patara Beach, which is part of a national park and rich in birdlife. Both beaches can be reached using the regular dolmus (shared taxi/minibus) service from the town centre, as well as by boats from the marina.

Average max temperature: 30C

Direct flights until: 2 November with Easyjet to Dalaman (approximately two hours from Kalkan) from Gatwick and Manchester. Thomas Cook (flythomascook.com) offers flights year-round to Dalaman from Gatwick, Manchester and Stansted.

Where to stay: Rhapsody Hotel, a five-minute walk from the centre of Kalkan (although it's a steep hill), was completely refurbished last year. It's small (just 27 rooms and suites) and has a Turkish bath and sauna, private pool and fantastic views. A week in September costs from £529 (two sharing), including breakfast, flights and transfers, through Anatolian Sky Holidays (0845 365 1011; anatoliansky.co.uk). Exclusive Escapes (020 8605 3500; exclusiveescapes.co.uk) also offers a small collection of top-notch hotels in Kalkan, including the Kalkan Regency, while Simply Travel (0871 231 4050; simplytravel.co.uk) offers authentic apartments and villas.

Crete

The most southerly of Greece's main islands, Crete basks in warm sunshine late into September and even October, when many of the island's shops and tavernas are still open. One of the best advantages is that the island's well-known sights, such as the ancient Roman city of Aptera, are gloriously free of coach parties. The less scorching temperatures will also make hiking Europe's longest gorge, the Samaria, a pleasure rather than a trial. If, on the other hand, it's a party you're after, you can join in the Festival of the Holy Cross in the village of Megala Chorafia from 13 to 14 September, where there'll be live music, feasting and dancing.

Average max temperature: 26C

Direct flights until: 2 November with Easyjet from Gatwick. 25 October with Thomson (Gatwick and Birmingham).

Where to stay: Sleeping up to four, Metoche Penthouse is an 18th-century farmhouse with sweeping views over Souda Bay, a five-minute drive from Aptera. Stay with Pure Crete (0845 070 1571; purecrete.com) from £595pp including flights from Gatwick. Greek Islands Club (020 8232 9780; greekislandsclub.com) also has properties on the island, many available in September, including Villa Anastasia with pool near Kalives on the north coast (sleeps six), which costs from £649pp including flights from Gatwick on 22 September and car hire. Chic hotels are popping up all over Crete - try the Ammos Hotel, near Chania (00 30 28210 33003; amosshotel.com) offers rooms from €134.

Djerba

The island of Djerba off the coast of southern [Tunisia](#) offers a different experience from that of the cosmopolitan north of the country; it has the vibrant souks and narrow streets but all at a much slower pace - though in high summer the island teems with tourists. By autumn it's far less crowded, and the scorching heat of August has subsided (though it can still get up into the high 20s). So this time of year is great for touring Djerba by bicycle - the island, which is rich in palm and olive trees, is flat and very easy to navigate, and has little traffic. Most hotels hire bikes. Sea temperatures remain warm well into autumn, and with fewer tourists around, it can be a great time to try windsurfing and kitesurfing.

Average max temperature: 26C

Direct flights until: There are no direct flights to Djerba. Take either a British Airways ([ba.com](#)) or Tunis Air ([tunisair.com](#)) flight to Tunis, and then hop on a domestic flight with Seven Air ([sevenair.com.tn](#)) to Djerba. All routes run throughout the year.

Where to stay: There are some stunning hotels on Djerba. I-escape ([i-escape.com](#)) offers the Dar Dhiafa ([hoteldardhiafa.com](#)) a beautiful hotel down a narrow lane in the village of Er Riadh (doubles from €102), and Dar Bibine, which has a small indoor pool and four stylish bedrooms (doubles from €120). Or try Aspects of Tunisia (020 8994 1011; [aspectsoftunisia.co.uk](#)).

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