

This week's dream: Turkey's charming "riviera"

With new bars, shops and galleries springing up weekly, Istanbul is now one of Europe's trendiest cities. It's a great place to spend a few days – but when the heat, crowds and “£6 beers” get on top of you, the antidote is close to hand, says Martin Hemming in *The Sunday Times*. Just 80 minutes away by ferry in the Sea of Marmara, the Princes' Islands are a kind of “Turkish riviera” where, in the 19th century, Istanbul's well-to-do spent their summers. Today, they are “slightly faded” but no less lovely – a quaintly charming “Istanbul-on-Sea” which attract weekend trippers “and nobody much besides”.

Ramshackle ferries from the city commute between the nine islands, forested humps stacked with minarets, Orthodox churches and “whitewashed clapboard mansions that wouldn't look out of place in an episode of *Murder, She Wrote*”. The seafront at Heybeliada – the second largest island, at a single square mile – is lined with restaurants where “old timers” sit drinking tea and



Büyükkada and its “whitewashed clapboard mansions”

“squinting over cards”. Fig tree-lined streets snake up the hill behind, past antique emporia and junk shops. Cars are not allowed on the archipelago: people get around on donkeys and in horse-drawn open carriages. Days are whiled away “eating charcoal-grilled fish, drinking 45%-proof alcohol, swimming in the sea, riding bikes and mucking about in beautiful, big old boats”.

The sights here are not spectacular, but some are “eerily fascinating” – old monasteries, an abandoned 1920s TB sanatorium, a Greek Orthodox cemetery up against a Muslim one. On Büyükkada, the biggest island, a carriage ride from the dock takes you past amazing mansions to the bottom of a steep hill.

At the top is a blue-ceilinged chapel dedicated to St George, and, beside it, a little cliff-top kebab house where you can eat beef *koftas* and drink Efes beer overlooking the sea. *Anatolian Sky* (0844-571 9133, www.anatoliansky.co.uk) has three nights, b&b, on Büyükkada, and two in Istanbul, from £749pp, incl. flights.

B&B of the week



La Petite Folie, Honfleur

This five-room b&b is the ideal base for a weekend in Honfleur and neighbouring Deauville and Trouville, says Tatler. Situated at the heart of the pretty port town in a former doctor's practice, the guesthouse has been beautifully renovated and decorated by its owners, a couple with roots in New York and France. There are “proper antiques, clever lighting, Porthault sheets and Pierre Frey fabrics, fireplaces and books, fruit trees and a Moorish pavilion”. The result feels “historical” but “fresh”. There are croissants with local butter for breakfast, and “pear cognac and chocolates” by candlelight at night.

Doubles from €145, 0033 6 74 39 46 46, www.lapetitefolie-honfleur.com

Getting the flavour of...

A wild Caribbean island

Dominica is “the Caribbean at its purest”, says Francesca Syz in *Condé Nast Traveller* – “a wilderness of forest-carpeted valleys, jagged misty peaks and enormous trees drooping with ripe fruit”. It is the largest of the Windward Islands, at 750km², but receives few visitors, on account of the lack of white-sand beaches and short airstrip (the terrain is so rugged that Columbus “scrunched up a piece of paper” to evoke it for his royal sponsors). However, the hiking, scuba diving, and river and waterfall swimming here are unrivalled. Do not miss the Valley of Desolation, a “lunar landscape” pock-marked with hot springs in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park. *The Jungle Bay Resort & Spa* (001 767 446 1789, www.junglebaydominica.com) is a good “luxury eco-lobby” with doubles from £130.

Switzerland's beautiful capital

Bern makes for “an ideal weekend escape”, says Simon Calder in *The Independent*. Its old heart, contained in a loop of the Aare River, is “one of the most architecturally rich city centres in Europe”. Among its greatest sights are the Münster, the largest medieval church in Switzerland (currently under restoration), and the Zytglogge – a medieval tower with an “implausibly large” 15th century clock. The Bern Historical Museum offers “fascinating” insights into

the life of Albert Einstein, among other subjects – he formulated his theory of Special Relativity in 1905 while working in the Swiss Patent Office in the city. Finally, it's within easy reach of the excellent skiing at Adelboden, Grindelwald, Wengen and Mürren. *From 27 March, Skywork* (www.flyskywork.com) will fly from London City to Bern Belp airport from €59 each way.

A strange Kentish landscape

The headland of Dungeness in Kent is the largest expanse of shingle in Europe, an “alien” landscape of “mounds and hollows, and Wild West, scrub-flecked plains”. It's bleak, says Tom Gatti in *The Times*, but also “beautiful and far from barren” – home to 600 plant species and an enormous RSPB reserve. Walking north from the “hulking” nuclear power station at its tip, you pass an “array of makeshift dwellings”, from old train carriages to wooden shacks, that have sprouted amid the “sea kale, blackthorn and lichen-covered stone”. Among them is the beautiful garden created by film-maker Derek Jarman, a “mystical” place where broom and gorse grow in patterns around wiry sculptures and the shingle is combed into Zen shapes. *The nearby Romney Bay House Hotel* (01797-364747, www.romneybayhousehotel.co.uk), once home to American actress Hedda Hopper, has b&b doubles from £95.

Last-minute offers from top travel companies

Malaysian escape

A ten-night stay at the beach-front Mutiara Bureau Bay Hotel in Langkawi costs from £1,559pp room only incl. Heathrow flights. 0800-171 2152, www.travelzest.com. Depart 6 May.

Family break in Cornwall

A week's stay at Trerose Farm Cottage (sleeps 4), near Durgan beach on the Helford estuary, costs £379. 01647-434063, www.helpfulholidays.com (ref S5). Weeks commencing 15 or 22 April.

4-star on the Danube

Enjoy a 4-night stay at the Hilton Vienna Danube, the city's only waterfront hotel, at prices from £350pp b&b incl. flights from Gatwick. www.easyclicktravel.co.uk. Depart 1 April.

Ski Verbier discounts

Enjoy a 50% discount on any Ski Verbier catered chalet, sleeping between 4 and 12 people. 020-7401 1101, www.skiverbier.com. Book by 1 April for travel until 24 April.

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