

Plus Cheap and chic hotel breaks in the UK 2 Buzzy Boston 24 James Middleton's favourite trips 26



he year 2025 is supposed to be one of caution in which economic, geopolitical and climate fears keep us close to home and playing it safe. but this list of the year's best holidays suggests otherwise, with 77 brand-new itineraries (plus even more online) ranging from the world's longest river cruise and a swim around the Galapagos to a new bordello in Paris and a balloon trip to the edge of space.

And our analysis shows that your 2025 holiday is likely to cost a little less than last year. In the 2024 calendar, the median price of a package (ie, a holiday with flights included) was £2,699pp. This The sundae vear it's down to £2,404pp.

Yes, there like a scene from are some wildly expensive trips Willy Wonka here - a week of pretending to be lames Bond for £125k in July – but we've found exciting new trips to suit all budgets, with 26 ideas for under a grand and 41 under £2,000.

The trend for cooler climes continues, with direct flights to Greenland and self-drives to Finland, and French camping companies moving away from the Med and into the mountains. Rail travel is accelerating, with itineraries in Bosnia, Sweden and along the Silk Road. Other lists of the best new holidays are available. But none is as tempting as this.

## DRLD'S LONGEST

For an epic start to the new year, pack a bag, book a flight to India and join the longest river cruise in the world: a 51-day yoyage along 27 river systems, through five states and two countries from Varanasi in India to Dibrugarh. via Dhaka in Bangladesh, aboard the new 18-suite rive boat the Ganga Vilas. The catch is that you have just over one week to join the ship in Varanasi for this year's January 8 departure. If that's cutting it too short, or seven weeks aboard ship is too long or the £20,333 ticket price is

too high - try the sevennight Artisans of Bengal cruise instead (which has departures from January to April) to explore the

temples, villages, crafts and weaving traditions along the Hooghly River upstream of Calcutta.

Details Seven nights' full board from £3,575pp, departing on 15 January (antaracruises.com). Fly to Calcutta

Within the next five years, Sri Lanka's little-known northernmost city will have become the most exciting destination on the island for its history, its legends, the magnificent countryside and, above all, its cuisine Jaffna's rich mutton curries;

gorgeous odiyal kool soups; secret thuna paha, or curry powders; dried fish and jaggery sugars pose a significant risk to your waistline. That's not helped by the city's passion for ice cream, as exemplified at the Rio parlour – near the enormous Nallur Kandaswamy temple where a production line churns out sundaes like a scene from Willy Wonka. This city is just the first stop on a new and slow-moving twoweek Sri Lanka food tour that involves cookery classes, home dining opportunities, farm visits, market tours, street food, tea tasting and twice-daily feasts in Dambulla, Kandy, Ambewela, Galle and Colombo, with all accommodation in luxury Jetwing hotels.

Details Thirteen nights' full board from £3,450pp (jetwingeco.com). Fly to Colombo

Climate change is sending the ski industry downhill in the Alps, with reduced snowfall and the season now effectively 36 days

shorter than

From top, Cheval Blanc Seychelles; monarch outterflies in Mexico; a Hindu temple near Jaffna, Sri Lanka

the historical average, so the further east you go, the better your chances of avoiding the mud. This new winter break is based at Tatranska Lomnica. a snow-sure resort ten miles from the Polish border in Slovakia's High Tatra mountains. It's a small resort amid spectacularly jagged summits and comes with activities included in the price such as dog-sledding, winter hikes, downhill and crosscountry skiing – and an overnight stay in a mountain hut by a frozen lake. Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,319pp, including transfers and activities (responsibletravel.com).

#### XICANMONA

Fly to Krakow

Every autumn, tens of millions of monarch butterflies migrate to Mexico from the US and Canada. None of those making the 2,500-mile journey have done it before, and yet these tiny creatures, weighing less than a gram each, fly up to 100 miles a day to

congregate in clouds of colour in the high-altitude fir forests of Michoacan. But the odds are against the monarchs, as climate

change, deforestation and industrialised agriculture threaten populations. Learn about one of nature's greates migrations on this new six-day trip from New Scientist, which takes you to the breeding grounds around Angangueo in Michoacan, offering research-level information through lectures, walking seminars and fireside chats Details Five nights' full board from £3,975pp (newscientist.com/tours). Fly to Mexico City

Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH) is in no rush to take over the world. Since the opening of the Maison in Courchevel in 2006, the French luxury group has cut the ribbon on just five new properties, each seeking to set a new benchmark in brand-obsessed indulgence. The latest, called the Cheval Blanc Seychelles, opened last month on Anse Intendance beach on the southwestern coast of Mahé. Designed by the Belgian architect Jean-Michel Gathy – the man who created the Aman look – the hotel, comprising 52 art-filled, private pool villas over a boulder-strewn white sand beach, is conceived as "a home". But not a home as most of us know it. And they're too posh to deal with tour operators so you'll have to book it direct. Details B&B water villas from

£2,300 (chevalblanc.com). Fly to Mahé

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#### M THE GALAPAGOS

Do you like wildlife and wild swimming? Then this new adventure from SwimTrek could be for you. While others view the archipelago's extraordinary biodiversity from cruise ships, yachts and Zodiacs, you're a little closer: swimming the coasts of five islands on an eight-day itinerary that brings you eye-to-eye with iguanas, sea lions, manta rays, hundreds of species of tropical fish and vast shoals of mahi-mahi. On day five you'll even swim across the equator on a trip that's graded moderate and suitable for anyone confident in open water. You'll stay aboard the Anahi catamaran yacht, and nonswimmers are welcome too.

Details Seven nights' full board from £10,930pp, departing on March 21 (swimtrek.com). Fly to Quito

#### BED(FORDSHIRE)

New for 2025 from Wellbeing Escapes is a two-night retreat at the 17th-century Tofte Manor, just outside Bedford. This taster is aimed at firsttimers, with two days dedicated to self-care with restorative yoga and qi gong classes and workshops

focused on stress management, seasonal eating, journaling and sound baths, which are an auditory therapy known to reduce pain and tension and to enable better sleep. **Details** Two nights' full board from £595pp, including all activities (wellbeingescapes.com)

## RAFTING THE FRANKLIN IN TASMANIA

The first time the explorer John Dean tried to descend Tasmania's Franklin River, in 1958, he lost his canoe and nearly lost his companion John Hawkins – who couldn't swim. Six years later the two Johns tried again. This time, despite a canoe being snapped like a matchstick and Dean spending hours stranded on a midstream boulder, they made it. Most rapids on the Franklin – the wildest in the Wild Rivers National Park – are grade two to four, but some, such as the Churn in the Great Ravine, are an unnavigable grade six, which is when you pick up the raft and carry it around. This 16-

day trip is one of eight new Pioneering tours from KE Adventure. Blurring the line between tourism and exploration, they require a little more fitness than other trips, and include nights spent wild camping.

Details Fourteen nights' full board from £7,095pp, including flights, departing on March 9 (keadventure.com)

# RESTORING FOREST IN BRAZIL'S PANTANAL In 2024 the worst forest fires

Above Tofte Manor, near

Bedford, Below

water lilles in the Pantanal, Brazil

in two decades devastated Brazil's Amazonas and Mato Grosso regions. In the

Pantanal alone more than 5,000 square miles have been destroyed, killing an estimated 15 per cent of wildlife, and for those that escaped the flames, life is tough. Loss of habitat, polluted water sources and the absence of the prey species or vegetation on which they feed compromises their chances of survival. but you can help. Caiman, the pioneering eco-lodge and home of the Onçafari jaguar project, is asking visitors to take part in the restoration of its 200-squaremile reserve. You'll be

working with conservationists to plant seeds, reintroduce bees, build fire shelters for animals and restock emergency wildlife feeding

stations.

Details Six nights' full board from £5,845pp, including flights (abercrombiekent.co.uk)

#### AFFORDABLE DUBAI

You could blow a lot of money on a hotel stay in Dubai – from the Four Seasons to the Burj Al Arab, rates can top £1,000 per night. But in addition to the big-hitting, big-bucks brands, the emirate is now drawing some of the next generation of boutique hoteliers that have been springing up across Europe in recent years. The Mama Shelter Dubai opened in December at Business Bay. Admittedly it's set back from the beaches, but this hotel is aimed firmly at city-breakers with an aversion to Scandi chic. The 197 rooms and 204 apartments are decorated in the maximalist style Mama Shelter's other properties - the bulk of which are in France – have become known

Details Room-only doubles from £186 (mamashelter.com). Fly to Dubai

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