

10 best... Winter sun destinations



Koh Samui, Thailand

Nicola Brady – 02 October 2013

If you want to spend the festive season somewhere warm, it's time to get booking.

KENYA

December is the perfect time to visit Kenya. Temperatures are high, the sea is warm and the beaches are exactly what your winteraddled

bones are crying out for. If you'd rather not go down the safari route, take some time to explore the coastline.

The laid-back beach town of Watamu is a perfect choice. You can sample traditional Kenyan food in the shacks that line the main street, or simply relax on the pristine white sands. Thomas Cook currently has seven nights at the Jumbo Club Watamu Beach Hotel from €1,664pps all inclusive, with flights from Dublin on 19th December.

See: Thomas Cook Ireland. Tel: 01-514 0430; thomascook.ie.

BURMA

For a holiday that really gets you off the beaten track, Burma is the destination to beat. The crowds that flock to neighbouring Thailand have yet to plague the Burmese temples and beaches, which means more space for you.

Intrepid Travel has a nine-day sailing holiday, taking in the beauty of the remote Myeik Archipelago, where you will drift back in time and immerse yourself in the traditional culture of the islands.

The trip departs on December 21 and starts at €1,445pps, including flights from Bangkok, where the trip begins. Fly to Bangkok with Etihad (etihad.com).



Lanzarote is a safe bet for guaranteed sunshine

See: Intrepid Travel. Tel: 01-524 0071; intrepidtravel.com.

CAMBODIA

If you want some sun, but also crave a little adventure, a whirlwind tour of Southeast Asia will tick all your boxes. Tucan Travel has an eight-day trip departing December 21, taking in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, currently reduced by 15pc.

Most of the time is spent exploring Cambodia, with a visit to the awe-inspiring Angkor Wat, free time in Siem Reap, and two days in the bustling Phnom Penh. The trip winds up in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Prices start at €543.15pps, not including flights to Bangkok (fly with etihad.com).

See: Tucan Travel. Tel: 1800 553 559; tucantravel.com.

LANZAROTE

The Canary Islands are the perfect choice for a dose of sunshine closer to home. While temperatures may not be tropical, the climate is pretty fair all year round, with blue skies and sunshine. You don't have to resort to a lacklustre package holiday, either.

At Finca de Arrieta, you'll find a collection of luxurious yurts, converted farmhouse buildings and a chillout lounge. The sandy beach at Arrieta is just a few minutes away. There's currently availability in the Eco Chico Yurt (sleeps two) for seven nights from December 22, for €735. Fly to Lanzarote with Aer Lingus (aerlingus.com).

See: lanzaroteretreats.com.

MOROCCO

Agadir can seem like a tourist trap of concrete resorts and generic hotels, but the stretch of Moroccan coastline offers some fantastic surfing spots. The village of Taghazout is a mecca for surfers, with the variety along the shoreline creating waves that will keep surfers of all levels happy. Paradis Plage Surf & Yoga Hotel is located just outside the village, offering surf and yoga classes as well as spa treatments. Sunway has a package combining four nights in Paradis Plage with three nights in Marrakech, departing Dublin on December 21, for €1,169pps.

See: Sunway. Tel: 01-288 6828; sunway.ie.

THAILAND

Christmas is traditionally a time of overindulgence. So imagine how great (and smug) you'd feel to return home after a holiday devoted to health and wellbeing. While Thailand is home to full-moon parties and frenzied backpackers, it's also a great spot to unwind. GoLearnTo.com offers a 'Fitness and Wellness Holiday' on an exclusive resort on Koh Samui Island. You'll partake in a bespoke exercise programme, with unlimited access to yoga and fitness classes, before unwinding with massages and dips in the infinity pool. Eight nights cost from €1,447pps, excluding flights. Fly to Koh Samui with Etihad (Etihad.com).

See: GoLearnTo.com.

CUBA

Havana is one of the most spirited and vibrant cities in the Caribbean. Vintage cars line brightly painted streets, where steamy salsa rhythms will lure you into the next party.

The nightlife in the city is an endless array of buzzing bars and nightclubs, and during the day you can visit nearby beaches or explore the old town of Habana Vieja. In December, temperatures sit comfortably at around 23°C, with low levels of rainfall making it an ideal time to visit the island. GoHop currently has 15 nights in Havana from €1,024pps, departing Dublin on December 15.

See: GoHop. Tel: 01-241 2389; gohop.ie.

FLORIDA

Florida has long been an Irish favourite for winter sun, but Christmas in the theme parks can be expensive and crowded. So why not spend some time in the lesser known areas?

Bradenton is located on the west coast, an area with white-sand beaches and a string of unspoilt natural islands. Time has stood still on the pretty Anna Maria Island, with pastel-hued wooden houses and a relaxed and friendly vibe.

America As You Like It has a seven-night package with flights from Dublin on December 20 at the Beach Club at Anna Maria Island, from €1,522pps including car hire.

See: americaasyoulikeit.com.

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NEPAL AND INDIA

Instead of languishing on the sofa this Christmas, why not throw yourself into a cross-border adventure, starting in the foothills of the Himalayas? Trailfinders has a two-week trip, taking in the sights of Nepal and India, which is about as far from a traditional Christmas as you can get.

You'll spot rhinos and monkeys in the Chitwan National Park and see the birthplace of Buddha, before crossing over into India for a boat trip on the Ganges and a trip to the Taj Mahal. From €2,249pps, including flights from Dublin on December 20.

See: Trailfinders. Tel: 01-677 7888; trailfinders.ie.

EL HIERRO

The smallest of the Canary Islands, El Hierro has recently been declared a Unesco Biosphere Reserve. It may be missing the golden sands of some of its neighbouring islands, but it more than makes up for it with dramatic hillsides and friendly locals.

RusticRambles.com offers a unique walking holiday, leading you through 100km of lush and stunning countryside over eight days. The trip includes half-board accommodation and luggage transfers, from €742pps (flights not included). Fly to Tenerife South with Aer Lingus (aerlingus.com), and get the ferry to El Hierro from Los Cristianos.

See: RusticRambles.com; 01-525 2886