



ASK JOAN

Your travel questions answered

Winter heat and Camino

I am taking early retirement at the end of the year. My partner and I would like to take the opportunity to spend some time in a warmer climate in January/February. Ideally we would like to rent an apartment, enjoy the beach, and also take in a bit of culture. We are open to hopping on a train or bus to explore new towns and cities.

– RG, Dublin

Being based in southern Europe would probably be a good option with the opportunity to use public transport and milder winter weather.

Last November I was in Almunecar, on the Costa Topical in Spain and it was lovely. A nice town, not too busy, a lovely beach and yet close to Malaga, Granada, Cordoba and other places of interest, see costatopical.net/almunecar. There was a good selection of hotels and apartments.

In the South of France, the small town of Villefranche is almost a suburb of Nice and the bus and train service is great. You could wander up and down coast and into Monaco and Italy very reasonably, villefranche-sur-mer.fr/tourism/.

Or at the westerly end of France, the lovely town of Collioure, close to Spain and with a Catalan feel, offers the Pyrenees to explore too, see collioure.com/en.

We are a family of five hoping to fly from Dublin to Orlando, next summer (end May/start June) – we have just recently looked at the prices of flights and they have jumped even in a couple of days – my question is: are we better booking the flights now, or would we get a better price if we waited a month or so? We

would prefer direct flights if possible but would be happy enough with one stop if needs be.

– CMM, Dublin

At present Aer Lingus is the only airline operating direct services to Orlando and the prices are about €700 return. Usually there are sporadic sales through the year which could mean €50 to €100 off the price, but it is still quite high for five seats. United Airlines is a bit less, just under €600 each, via Newark, see united.com.

If you are also going to need accommodation in Orlando then it may work out better value for you to book the holiday with a travel agent. I have seen holidays with flights, hotels and transfers from €650pps for a week.

The biggest operators to Orlando are touramerica.ie, sunway.ie and americanholidays.ie. An interesting hotel has opened this summer in Universal Studios, the Cabana Bay resort and they have family rooms that sleep up to six.

My mum will be 80 at the end of September. She would love to do a little of the Camino while she is reasonably agile. Long walks really wouldn't be an option. If we were to base ourselves in Santiago de Compostela could she experience a few days of short walks on the Camino? If you think this is feasible could you recommend any contacts to help plan it and maybe a moderately priced hotel?

– AM, Dublin

There's no reason why your mother can't enjoy some of the Camino. But officially she would have to walk the last 100km to get

the Pilgrim's Passport. Flights will operate three times a week until October 25th with Aer Lingus.

Accommodation along the route is a mixture of hostels, guesthouses and small hotels. There are several companies that arrange trips. Roland or Maria in camino-ways.com, 01-5252886, know their stuff; maptravel.ie, 01-6783111 does a relaxed trip that may suit. Send your travel queries to jscates@irishtimes.com