

# The world's your oyster, find out what's hot for 2015

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*By Isabel Conway*

TRAVEL and how we experience that longed-for getaway, be it in the sun, snow, wilderness or a city break, changes faster than those enticing last-minute holiday package offers posted in your local travel agency shopfront.

The advance of cheaper and more accessible flights, ever smarter translation apps and click of a mouse destination, accommodation and restaurant recommendations from the likes of Trip Advisor (45 million visitors a month!) online travel guides and the rest is fast turning us into a global community of explorers, bolder and more curious than ever before.

Our increasing use of technology and social networks means the global travel industry will be matching our added knowledge of the best destinations, ones that offer great value for money, beautiful scenery, interesting festivals etc, Great holiday bargains for early 2015 booking were appearing pre-Christmas.

From the comfort of home and a roaring festive fire, Google street view is giving us a virtual eye on the world. Tourist boards, online travel guides and destination hotels and other tourism sectors, meanwhile, are clamouring to create virtual spaces to lure more visitors.

Not that long ago the cruise business was regarded as the domain of retired couples and rich widows. Now pleasing the whole family on a cruise — from grandparents to toddlers and teens — is main stream.



Cruise lines such as Carnival, Royal Caribbean, MSC, among the giants, vie to roll out the best of onboard activities for everyone and they go head-to-head with priced-down early booking offers.

For instance early booking with Topflight ( [www.topflight.ie](http://www.topflight.ie) ) will buy you a summer Med fly & Cruise inclusive package, onboard drinks included from as little as €1,039 aboard the luxury MSC Fantasia.

Fred Olsen ( [www.fredolsencruises.com](http://www.fredolsencruises.com) ) cruises offer wellness, creative writing and other themed cruises, pitching also to the solo traveller looking for some company and a memorable travel experience.

Tour operators attending the World Travel Market in London in November 2014 were urged to turn ‘wellness— in the past often expensive, too exclusive and cheerless — into affordable mainstream type holiday experiences.

Wellness for ‘ the man and woman in the street’ is tipped as the new cruise type market in a world where many of our lives are frantic and stressful, yet maintaining good health is essential because we will retire younger and hopefully stay active longer into the future.

“How often have you taken a holiday and returned home bloated and tired, shoulders still red and blistered from too much sun, worn out from late nights, depressed by all those extra inches around your waist? You often feel like you need another holiday after coming home,” one travel professional confessed during the WTM seminar I attended on the future of Wellness holidays.

A wellness holiday — nothing radical and above all accessible — can offer a life-changing experience, enabling us to calm down, chill out by controlling anxiety, begin and maintain sensible eating habits and moderate levels of exercise that can be carried on once the holidaymaker returns home healthier and more in control of their lives, we heard.

At this time of year the buzz of exploring a new place and learning a bit more about the world you don't see every day is enough to make us travel addicts trawl online compulsively in search of that trip of a lifetime.



If funds are short there is always somewhere affordable — think Greece (no less than 6,000 islands), hidden parts of Portugal and Spain (the State owned Spanish Paradors are in beautiful locations, as are Camino Ways Walks ( [www.caminoways.com](http://www.caminoways.com) ).

Tenerife is launching its first walking festival in March ( [www.webtenerife.com](http://www.webtenerife.com) and [www.tenerifewalkingfestival.com](http://www.tenerifewalkingfestival.com) ) so visitors can discover a wealth of natural wonders and diverse landscape, from volcanic lunar like paths to the island's lush interior and stunning coastline.

Last year Discovery Puglia ( [www.discoverypuglia.com](http://www.discoverypuglia.com) and 01 2544280), encouraged by the arrival of low-cost airline Ryanair who will resume their flights into Bari , the heel of Italy's boot, come April launched tailor made 'insider' trips highlighting wine and cooking, with stays in authentic fortified farms and grand mansions.

A new extra virgin olive oil tour for 2015 includes visits to oil mills, tastings, discovering how olive oil production as well as wine has shaped this beautiful less well- known region and its people.

Ireland's popular annual consumer travel showcase Holiday World (from January 23-25 at the RDS Dublin) sees a spate of new countries tourist boards and tour operators (they must have heard the news that austerity has eased off!) enticing Irish holidaymakers to discover their charms.

They include such a diverse bunch of places as North Cyprus, Jamaica, Ontario, Botswana, Santa Monica, Brazil, Lithuania, Tanzania and even Sudan and Ethiopia.

Ethiopian airlines will start a new route linking Dublin with Addis Ababa in mid-June and, according to Rough Guides top destinations for 2015, Ethiopia is one of the world's great undiscovered lands with an ancient history and culture, superb scenery and friendly people.

Other tipped destinations that will shine in 2015 includes Indonesia, South Africa (more affordable than it has been for many years due to the fall of the rand), Tunisia, providing that peace is holding of late with tempting prices to lure travellers back.

Sunway, the leading Irish tour operator for Tunisia, continued to offer brilliantly priced packages there before and after the Jasmine revolution.

The other previously favourite holiday destination in the region, Egypt, whose political turmoil spooked tourists in recent times, has satisfied the travel industry that it is safe again, especially in the tourist regions of the country such as Luxor, Sharm el Sheikh and Simbel, home to some of its most ancient monuments.

Ridley Scott's epic new movie Exodus God and Kings, starring Christian Bale, is giving Egypt badly needed new glamour.

Insight vacations ([www.insightvacations.com](http://www.insightvacations.com) or 01-7753803) recently announced a return to Egypt offering a luxury 5-star nine-day tour, including a cruise on the Nile from €1,675 pp, starting in January from Ireland

Too cool for school I thought, reading about the late ski season high altitude festival Snowboxx ( [www.snowboxx.com](http://www.snowboxx.com) and [www.alpedhuez.net](http://www.alpedhuez.net) ) a kind of partying Ibiza on skis attracting thrill seekers, karaoke ski cabins, adrenaline junkies and music lovers from all over the world to Alp d'Huez in the French Alps in late March.

Electronic soundtracks will echo through the mountains with performances by 2 Many DJ's and Blonde amongst others.

Back in the day old blue eyes Frank Sinatra would have been considered too cool for school such were his antics as leader of the infamous 'Rat Pack' in Palm Springs.

A year of celebration marks his 100th birthday and visitors to Palm Springs ([www.visitpalm Springs.com](http://www.visitpalm Springs.com) ) will be able to see some of the late Sinatra's most popular old haunts in the ethereal desert city famous for its mid-century modernist architecture.

See [www.americanholidays.com](http://www.americanholidays.com) or your local travel agent for tailor- made packages that combine a fly drive with a couple of nights in Palm Springs, less than two hours by road from Los Angeles and Hollywood.

Another big anniversary in 2015 focuses on Germany ([www.germany.travel](http://www.germany.travel)) and the collapse of the Berlin Wall and reunification. Celebrations and exhibitions will take place all over the country to mark the 25th anniversary of a peaceful revolution which led to one of the most significant politic events in history.

Finally a new year wish of mine... to visit Iceland, land of Fire and Ice, glimpse the elusive Aurora Borealis (or as it is better known the Northern Lights) go lava trekking, admire the gushing geysers in the Haukadalur valley, then relax in the blue lagoon geothermal spa.

Definitely too cool for school! You can do all of that, even visit Game of Thrones locations and more from €599, staying three nights in Reykjavik inclusive of return flights from Dublin (see [www.traveldepartment.ie](http://www.traveldepartment.ie) ).

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