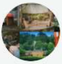
GET THE BEST TRAVEL STORIES DELIVERED STRAIGHT TO YOUR INBOX SIGN UP

SPA BREAKS
Lefay Resort & SPA Dolomiti, Italy – spa review

DESTINATIONS
Things to do in the Lake District

INSPIRATION
12 of the prettiest villages in Greece


STYLE & CULTU
The best places new skill in the

FAMILY HOLIDAYS

FAMILY-FRIENDLY EUROPEAN BREAKS

Vila Monte

Where to go during the school holidays, including Cyprus, France, Wales and Denmark

CRAVEIRAL FARMHOUSE

Alentejo, Portugal

Eight years in the making, this project – a self-sustaining quinta set in the dusty hills of Odemira in the Alentejo – has finally come to fruition. The founding trio, lawyer Pedro Franca Pinto, and João Canilho and Luís Capinha, owners of gorgeous Casa Amora guesthouse in Lisbon, became fixated with the idea of communal living; of forging a place where families could get up close to nature and experience the workings of a modern-day farm – and their rambling, village-like set-up offers exactly that. Whitewashed houses are clustered around courtyards, with simple wooden terraces for watching fiery sunsets; inside, they're light and bright, with jolts of colour (a mustard armchair, a navy Hästens bedframe) and slate kitchens for stashing eggs fresh from the hen coop. Rooms are just a bicycle-pedal from the main house, with its curving walls that offer shelter from the Atlantic breeze and a huge pool where children can splash and parents can snooze on loungers. Interiors are cool and contemporary: beneath undulating ceilings are Nordic-style tables, on which breakfasts of charcuterie and soft cheeses, lemon cake and sun-sweetened nectarines are served next to the open fireplace. The buttery suede sofas are less forgiving of sticky fingers, but once the kids are in bed, it's a great spot for a nightcap, in reach of the help-yourself bar and some very drinkable honey liqueur. Supper is pulled straight from the vegetable patch and whipped up by Portuguese grandmothers: chilled melon and garlic soup, black pork with tangy tomato bread, rice pudding sprinkled with cinnamon. Even the Vicentino Alvarinho, from the nearby winery, is a love affair with local living. As is the cork that lines the sauna – the sleek concrete spa is a beauty, with a hammam lit by burnished copper lanterns – and the logs that carpet the entrance. Sustainability runs through Craveiral's veins: rainwater is collected and filtered; old trees become fuel for wood-burning stoves. A stay here is delightful – a place where children can ride horses by day, and then sleep with nothing but an open door and a billowing curtain between them and the great outdoors.

INSIDER TIP Even in the summer school holidays, rooms are generally less than about £180 per night, and flying to Lisbon rather than Faro cuts the airfare down, too – which makes this a seriously savvy call.

Address: Craveiral Farmhouse, E.M. 501, Km 4, 7630-658 São Teotónio Odemira , Portugal
Telephone: +351 968671531
Price: Studios from about £120, including breakfast.
Website: craveiral.pt

Published in Condé Nast Traveller June 2019.

CREDIT: MARTIN KAUFMANN

BEACH HOUSE

Antiparos, Greece

Greece is a shoo-in when it comes to a sure-fire, happiness-through-the-ranks holiday. Turbo hotels, with kids' clubs, a clutch of restaurants and private beaches, are dotted across the direct-flight islands and throughout Halkidiki on the mainland; unsurprisingly they come with crowds of repeat guests. For those seeking a slower pace, a simpler barefoot offering in the harder-to-reach parts of the Aegean scratches a more adventurous itch. Antiparos is barely more than a dusty islet, half an hour by ferry from Paros. It's the antithesis of Crete's package trips, Mykonos's party-hard beach clubs, or the teenage rite-of-passage scene in Corfu's Kassiopi. In fact, there's very little going on. Opened six years ago, Beach House is a Cycladic villa right on a sheltered bay on the south-east coast – a rustic set-up where good vibes rule. The nine rooms are simple, with blue shutters and bougainvillaea-framed terraces, and the three family suites are the ones to book. Mornings on the beach are especially lovely. Breakfast on wooden tables, cats weaving in and out of chair legs, is a feast of any-way eggs, thick yogurt, honey and spanakopita. Kids can mess about in the playground, where activities are laid on during most of July and August, while grown-ups stay horizontal on sunbeds. The beachfront bar plays trip hop, and the rosé is ice cold. Lunches and suppers showcase authentic food with a deft hand: catch of the day, octopus risotto, seafood spaghetti, plus a marginally less fishy children's menu. Yoga sessions and boat rides are available; the clear sea is great for swimming and snorkelling (there's no pool). It feels like a mini Formentera. Supremely low-key but nails all you really need: good food and good wine, lots of fussing over the children, charming staff and comfortable beds.

INSIDER TIP The season is short. The hotel stays open until October, but even early September can start to feel a bit shuttered up. Those not constrained by school holidays should come in June.

Address: Apantima beach, Antiparos, Cyclades, 84007
Andíparos, Kikladhes, Greece
Telephone: +30 2284 0 64000
Price: Doubles from about £85.
Website: beachhouseantiparos.com

Published in Condé Nast Traveller June 2019.

CREDIT: CHATZIASLANIS YIANNIS

LE BARN

Bonnelles, France

French country hotels have traditionally tended to be stand-on-ceremony château-grand or heavily upholstered floral-chintz classics. Not places, really, for those prone to tantrums. Which is why this laid-back spot – a cluster of reimagined old barns, like a stripped-back Soho Farmhouse or countrified Hoxton, on the 200-hectare Le Haras de La Cense equestrian estate 40 minutes outside Paris – was such an exciting opening. It seems the boho Marais folk agree: on weekends it's packed out with couples in matching Ray-Bans soaking in the Nordic baths and Carven-clad parents with artful tattoos chasing toddlers around the lobby. Franco-American owner William Kriegel teamed up with two clever collaborators to make Le Barn's studied ease so on point: Edouard Daehn of the Marugal hotel group (Cap Rocat, Mallorca; Gecko, Formentera) and Paris design agency Be-Pôles, which had a hand in The NoMad hotels in New York and LA, and the Côte d'Azur's Les Roches Rouges. Rooms have a Shakerist, functional minimalist design: Barbour-fabric curtains, enamel mugs and plates, retro camping chairs. Activities are an all-get-stuck-in affair: bikes with child seats already installed are propped outside the front door, guarded by hotel dog Clark. There's a rowing boat on the little lake, mini orange life jackets flung over the bench next to it, plus a pirate-and-princess-filled dressing-up box and plenty of paths for rambles through the surrounding forest. Saturdays see more planned events, from mural workshops to archery trials. Naturally, horses are a big part of the action: the smallest riders (from age three) bob along on mini Shetland ponies, and graceful shire horses take the whole gang out for a carriage ride before supper at La Serre greenhouse restaurant. This is the rural good life, with a hefty dose of nonchalant Parisian cool.

INSIDER TIP Babysitting can be arranged, but no one bats an eyelid
at kids doing sticker books under the table past 10pm.

Address: Le Barn, Le Moulin de Brétigny, 78830 Bonnelles, France
Telephone: +33 1 86 38 00 00
Price: Doubles from about £125, including breakfast.
Website: lebarnhotel.com

Published in Condé Nast Traveller June 2019.

VILA MONTE FARM HOUSE

Algarve, Portugal

Most people flying to Faro rush straight to the coast, to the clipped golf courses of Quinta do Lago, the wide beaches of Vale do Lobo, the hit of dark, chilly Atlantic blue on the horizon of any of the seaside sunspots. It's a well-trodden path. More interesting, though, is to look the other way, back at the hills, to the farmland, where the manicured lawns and indentikit villas make way for scrubby olive groves and crumbling villages. Moncarapacho is less than half an hour from the airport but a million miles away in essence. Vila Monte has somehow managed to remain a bit of a secret, a mini estate of whitewashed buildings that blend Moorish architecture with Andalusian hacienda style. The grounds are exquisitely pretty: lush gardens, aromatic cypress trees, thick herbaceous borders, orange and fig trees, ripe fruit weighing down the branches. Inside, the look is Comporta-cool, thanks to Portuguese design maven Vera Iachia: rattan headboards, sisal rugs on stone floors, pergola-shaded terraces casting shadows on day beds. It's a big enough place that staying put is perfectly possible – there are terrapin-filled ponds, a chef's table set in the kitchen garden, two pools, a tennis court, a kids' club and film nights with popcorn. But there are also trips with a local fisherman to harvest razor clams and oysters (eaten straight away on the boat, washed down with chilled white wine), and adventures exploring the wilder beaches east of Tavira, with their white sand dunes and warm water. At night, after wood-fired thin-crust pizzas and chocolate mousse served from a giant sharing bowl, children run wild across the fairy-lit lawn, collecting carob pods. Back in the room, a plate of freshly baked warm cookies awaits by the bed – a gesture that defines the place rather well.

INSIDER TIP The hotel has a strong wellbeing focus – address frazzled energy levels with sound-healing treatments, yoga and meditation.

Address: Vila Monte, Sítio dos Caliços, Moncarapacho 8700-069, Portugal
Price: Doubles from about £160, including breakfast.
Website: designhotels.com

CREDIT: SIVAN ASKAYO

BASSIVIERE

Lot-et-Garonne, France

Just south of the Dordogne in the middle of rural France, this Dutch-owned bolthole is a fantastic find – a wildly elegant, Côté Sud magazine-esque hangout with apartments that offer a significantly more hassle-free option than renting a villa or gîte. Here guests get not only a deeply smart address, but also a terrific restaurant, plus a dangerously irresistible Petersham Nurseries-style interiors shop, and masses of room. The five lofts (each with its own balcony or terrace) are a design mash-up, respecting the architectural traditions of the 17th-century farmhouse and barns but reworking the spaces for a 21st-century crowd. Original stone walls are offset with industrial-cool kitchens, freestanding baths and built-in bunk beds under ancient oak beams or hidden in cupboards that the children will arm-wrestle over. For all its chicness, it remains properly comfortable, too. Cots and high chairs are provided without a sniff of snootiness, the forest play area has swings, a trampoline and a zip-line, as well as huge gardens for tearing around in. If you can drag the kids out of the heated swimming pool or away from the ping-pong table, family-friendly art workshops are held in the gallery, and for parents there's always a glass of wine within reach (it's not far from the Bordeaux vineyards). It can get busy if sightseers want to tick off the medieval town of Agen, Bonaguil Castle and the Saturday market in Villeréal. But you can also just stay here and go for massages, yoga or tastings at nearby châteaux. This kind of apartment living is really nailed in France – as seen at the hugely popular Château Saint Pierre de Serjac or Country Kids. But here's a smaller, cleverer, off-map spot where you are much less likely to bump into other parents from school.

INSIDER TIP The 15th-century pigeonnier turned two-bedroom retreat is the best option for those who prefer to keep slightly away from things.

Address: Ilse van de Meerakker, ld Bassiviere, 47210 St. Etienne de Villereal
Telephone: +33 6 80 76 36 63
Price: Apartments from about £860 per week.
Website: bassiviere.com

ANASSA

Cyprus

This is the European top dog: it has enough expanses of marble and bowls of lilies in the lobby to make you feel really glamorous, but not so much as to seem too far removed from the natural beauty of Cyprus. The main criticism of Anassa is how expensive it is, but with its riot of pools, lawns and sand - basically a huge amount of space - it is considered incredibly reliable by even the most difficult and demanding people you know. And of course, the weather is a huge bonus, with the sun usually shining from April through to the end of October.

Anassa does everything on a large, big-swinging scale. There are four restaurants, from the seriously grown-up to the sea-salty and relaxed, with special early sittings for families in two of them. The taverna Pelagos provides huge plates of local salads and barbecued meat, as well as bowls of pasta that pretty much all children love. In the evenings, there's a beach cookout down by the sea, where older kids can feast on fresh burgers and play volleyball while parents sit under the olive trees on the terrace at Amphora, tucking into grilled fish and a mass of pink wine.

There are swimming pools aplenty, including private ones attached to some of the rooms (number 73 is especially good, with wide-angle sea views), and two decent tennis courts. There's also a really fantastic - and really vast - spa, specialising in thalassotherapy (the Osea Sea of Life facial is incredible: a deep cleanse and a cranio-facial massage to perk up your jawline).

This is a family-owned hotel built in the style of a traditional Cypriot village, and an incredibly glamorous one at that. Acres of lavender and shocking-pink geraniums line the paths that wind down to the sunbeds on the large, fundamentally private sandy beach.

Children of all ages will be very, very happy here. The younger ones will love the Explorers club, run by Scott Dunn, where smiley English girls will amuse everyone from your infant of four months to your most reserved nine-year-old. There's a cosy playroom with painting, sticking, glittering and puzzles, as well as beach games, cooking clubs and graffiti art. Teenagers can march about doing their own thing, scuba-diving, jetskiing and playing table tennis with new friends.

Anassa opened 15 years ago and it is hard to think of a European hotel that matches it. This is the ultimate family place to stay, an ambitious hotel that set out to be a benchmark and continues to deliver.

INSIDER TIP Scott Dunn (www.scottdunn.com) offers seven nights' B&B at Anassa, including transfers, from £1,300 per person, based on two adults and two children in connecting studio suites

Address: Anassa, 40, Alekou Michailidi road Neo Chorio, 8852, Cyprus
Telephone: +357 26 888000
Price: Doubles from £410.
Website: anassa.com

By Clover Stroud. *Published in Condé Nast Traveller October 2013.*

LA BERGERIE DE TERRE BLANCHE

Provence, France

There are heaps of dinky boutique boltholes in Provence, but are seven- or 17-year-olds with Hannah Montana and Xbox games on the brain really welcome? A big-gun hotel would be a much better bet, but what if you want privacy, too, and perhaps - every mother's dream - a private chef? And even some golf to keep the boys happy?

This newly built thriller-villa, just a 40-minute hop from Nice airport, is of grandiose proportions, with a vast amount of space for kicking back. It's in the grounds of Terre Blanche hotel (formerly a Four Seasons), so you can expect full-throttle service and a flurry of add-ons: two pools, tennis courts, five restaurants, two challenging championship golf courses (grab a buggy and let the kids steer) with a mass of lakes and ponds, and a Sodashi spa.

In other words, it's a villa with action on tap. And when you want to hunker down and hide, what a house: smart, swanky even, with everything from Sonos music tricks (Coldplay can croon in the dining room while Hoodie Allen raps on the terrace - a relief with teenagers) to a private cinema and its own wine cellar.

It's tastefully done, nothing too bling, with a laid-back atmosphere and a look that combines clean-cut contemporary sleekness with reclaimed furniture, pretty fabrics and French shades of grey and taupe. Three of the six en-suite rooms have balconies overlooking a lake with black (yes, black) swans, and there's a huge kitchen with the sort of mega-barbecue men can talk about for hours. The table is informally laid with beautiful artichokes, vine tomatoes and blood-red pomegranates. Local chef Helen Bate whips up roast chicken, salmon teriyaki, grilled prawns and the most sublime tarte tartin, while the two waiting staff, always at hand, will discreetly top up glasses. A sophisticated hideaway.

Telephone: +44 20 8878 4433
Price: SJ Villas offers a week at La Bergerie de Terre Blanche from about £1,760 per person, based on 12 sharing.
Website: bergerieterreblanche.com

By Pete Winterbottom. *Published in Condé Nast Traveller March 2013.*

CREDIT: CGP DESIGN

HAFOD CAE MAEN

Portmeirion, Wales

It'll be upon you before you know it, so be sure to book in for a week of bucket-and-spade summer fun at Hafod Cae Maen, the only private house to rent within the Portmeirion Conservation Area in Wales.

It's easy to forget how beautiful beaches close to home can be. In a truly magical setting, high above the village, this grand Edwardian villa has spectacular views over the Dwyryd Estuary and the remote Rhinogydd Mountains. When the tide is in, have picnics on gorgeous, deserted beaches; when it's out, you can literally walk across the sand from one headland village to the next. Explore the curious sub-tropical woodlands and, on sunny days, sit in the two acres of garden and eat alfresco, making as much noise as you like.

There are two spacious bedrooms (one with a four-poster and balcony), two twin bedrooms and two family bathrooms, as well as two sitting rooms, a piano and space for travel cots and masses of toys. Daily housekeeping can be arranged, and the chef will cook homely meals on request, from lasagnes to casseroles. Portmeirion itself is like a fairy-tale village for children, with its own train and a pirate ship.

Address: Hafod Cae Maen, Minffordd,
Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd, LL48
Telephone: 07776 259768
Price: Sleeps eight, from £1,300 a week
Website: historichouseretreats.com

Published in Condé Nast Traveller February 2013.

SKALLERUP KLIT

Denmark

Beside a remote, dune-backed beach in north-west Denmark, Skallerup Klit is where Boden meets Borgen. Spotlessly clean, with a pin-drop calm atmosphere, its clapboard holiday cottages are dotted across 200 acres of heather beside the North Sea and seem to be populated entirely by cheerful, sensible Danish families who get up early, play lots of sport and don't shriek at each other.

Skallerup is especially brilliant for those with children of different ages - partly because there is no childcare. Everyone is expected to holiday together. There are tables and chairs around the indoor play centre, so parents can check iPads while small offspring crash about and older children take themselves off to the bowling alley, the games room or even the gym.

But most of what's on offer has been designed to appeal to the whole crew: the giant pool area, with its 83-metre-long water chute; the tennis, squash and basketball courts; and riding sessions along miles of flat, Norfolk-esque sand on adorable Icelandic ponies. Family football matches are routine, and there's a nearby petting farm full of friendly goats. Even when the wind is blowing, an exhilarating, blustery walk hunched in a cagoule is almost obligatory.

The sense of space and remoteness here is deeply refreshing, and there's an astonishingly good spa to retreat to, its bare-brick walls convincingly designed along the lines of ancient Rome's Baths of Caracalla - and, of course, family sessions are available.

Address: Skallerup Seaside Resort A/S, Nordre Klitvej 21, Lønstrup, 9800 Hjørrin
Telephone: +45 99 24 84 00
Price: A week in a four-bed spa cottage costs from about £1,290
Website: skallerup.dk

By Adriane Pielou. *Published in Condé Nast Traveller July 2013.*

Like this? Now read:

Luxury beach hotels in Europe 2018

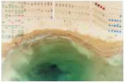
CONDÉ NAST TRAVELLER PARTNERSHIP

6 of the hottest summer escapes in Europe

PREFERRED HOTELS & RESORTS

CONTINUE READING

Best beach holidays in Europe



BEACHES

The best beaches in Europe for 2020

CONTINUE READING

FAMILY HOLIDAYS SUMMER HOLIDAYS SHORT BREAKS EUROPE GUIDES

SHARE THIS ARTICLE