

Going the extra miles

Picture: JEFF ZELEVANSKY/AP

A long weekend away used to mean a quick trip to the country or coast. But now with a few days – and pounds – at your disposal, there are more ambitious options for an intrepid getaway, as PHILIP WATSON discovers

HOLIDAY ON ICE

Iceland's so different it's more like visiting another planet than a country – especially during the summer, when it basks in up to 20 hours of spectral sunshine. Stay in Reykjavik – accommodation ranges from the simple two-star Hotel Cabin to the elegant Art Deco Hotel Borg – and hit the bars and nightlife of one of Europe's coolest party cities. Take a "Golden Circle" tour to the thunderous Gullfoss waterfall, Geysir's giant hot springs and Thingvellir national park. Best of all, head out to the Blue Lagoon, a hot, steaming, mineral-rich pool surrounded by black lava fields.

● From £291pp (two sharing), including three nights B&B at the Hotel Cabin, return flights from the UK and transfers, with Discover The World (01737 218 800/ www.discovertheworld.co.uk). The Golden Circle tour cost from £53pp; trips to the Blue Lagoon from £29pp.

are also possible. Best avoid the stiflingly hot city in July and August.

● From £360pp (two sharing), including four nights B&B at Riad Kaiss, a half-day city tour and transfers, but excluding flights, with Tribes (01728 685971/www.tribes.co.uk). Flights can be arranged upon request.

PASTA MASTERS

Why pay big bucks dining at some over-hyped London trattoria or for that achingly exclusive olive oil at your local deli when you could spend a long weekend learning the fine art of Italian cooking in a historic palazzo near Bologna? Cookery holiday specialist Flavours of Italy recently introduced four-day courses in Emilia-Romagna, a region renowned for its parmesan cheese, balsamic vinegar and Parma ham. Students spend mornings learning how to cook local dishes, which are then savoured over a long alfresco lunch. Afternoons are for trips

to food producers or medieval Bologna, evenings for wine tastings and dinners. Weekend courses are also available in Tuscany.

● From £699pp (two sharing), including three nights all-inclusive accommodation, five lessons, excursions, return flights

from the UK and transfers, with Flavours of Italy (0131 625 7002/ www.flavoursholidays.com).

REACH FOR THE SKI

Choose the right location, and the right travel company, and a long, exhilarating weekend on the slopes is easily achievable. Ski Weekend has been organising tailor-made, two to four-day ski breaks for 20 years; the company's maxim is "maximum time on the slopes, minimum time off work". Typical four-day trips to Chamonix fly in and out of Geneva (transfers take around an hour) and offer three full days on the French pistes. The town's charming cobbled streets and squares, fine restaurants, lively nightlife, and the imposing Mont Blanc Massif nearby provide further attractions. Trips to Swiss ski resorts such as Davos and Engelburg can also be arranged.

● Four-day weekends start from £399pp, including B&B accommodation at Hotel Richmond and transfers and resort services; flights, equipment and passes are extra. Ski Weekend (08700 600 615/ www.skiweekend.com). Flights can be arranged upon request.

DIAMOND GIZA

For the ultimate cultural weekend, fly to Cairo and visit the Pyramids – it's surreal to head to these ancient monuments located on the outskirts of the modern city. Visit one of Cairo's bazaars and the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, which houses the incomparable funerary treasures of the boy king Tutankhamun and the famous Royal Mummies. Then fly down to Luxor, and travel in caleshes (horse-drawn carriages) to the unmissable ancient masterpiece of The Karnak Temple, and don't miss the Valley Of The Kings. Trips down the Nile in a



HOT STUFF: The Blue Lagoon mineral-rich geothermal spa is one of Iceland's most-visited attractions

GAME ON

A weekend safari in Kenya may seem like travel madness or a recipe for exhaustion, but overnight flights and no jetlag mean that three days viewing the Big Five is more than possible. Fly to Nairobi and head south to the Mara or north to Meru.

In less than 24 hours you could be 6,000ft up on the edge of the Great Rift Valley viewing leopard dangling from baobab trees. For an unforgettable treat, take a sunrise balloon flight over the Masai Mara; go in July or August for the migration of the wildebeest.

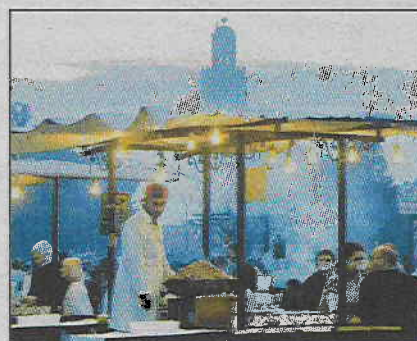
● From £1,260pp (two sharing), including three nights full-board at Kicheche Mara Camp, all game viewing, return flights from the UK and transfers, with Exsus Travel (020 7292 5050/www.exsus.com). Balloon rides: £199pp.

ROCK THE KASBAH

A little over four hours from Britain, Marrakech is the quickest way to get a taste of something very different. The Berber city offers an exotic mix of souks, kasbahs, mosques, palaces – and the ochre-coloured streets of the medieval medina – all dramatically lit by a radiant North African light. Head to the wonderfully chaotic Djemaa el Fna, the square at the centre of Marrakech, which at night turns into a playground filled with snake charmers, soothsayers and magicians. Stay at a stylish hotel or more traditional riad within the walled city. Trips and treks into the snowy High Atlas mountains



OUT OF AFRICA: Kenya game-spotting



EXOTIC: Dining at El-fna Square

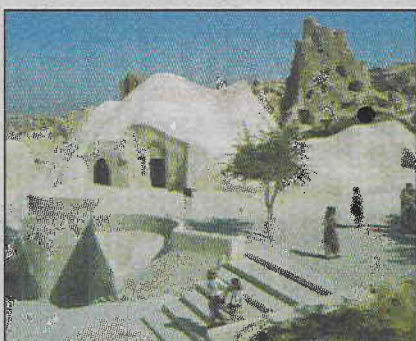
traditional felucca can also be arranged. Egypt boasts an 5,000-year-old culture that can make Rome seem as arriviste as Las Vegas.

● From £749pp (two sharing), including four nights B&B accommodation, guides and return flights from the UK, with small group adventure specialist Explore (0870 333 4001/www.explore.co.uk).

TURKEY TROT

The bizarre rock formations of the spectacular Cappadocia region provide a journey to another world. Over time, the elements have eroded and sculpted this lunar-like landscape into curious and unexpected shapes; most famous are the "fairy chimneys" of Goreme. Ancient civilisations have provided the rest, from giant caves – some of which now house cool hotels – to entire underground cities carved out of the soft volcanic rock. A trip to Cappadocia also allows time in one of the world's most captivating and romantic cities, Istanbul. It is an extraordinary crossroads of cultures, religions and history and boasts the Blue Mosque and the Topkapi Palace.

● From £890pp (two sharing), including four nights B&B at the Urgup Evi Cave Hotel in Cappadocia and Ciragan Palace Hotel in Istanbul, return flights from the UK and transfers, with Original Travel (020 7978 7333/www.originaltravel.co.uk).



ROCK ON: Cappadocia's magic caves

News in Transit

● **RESTRICTIONS** on the number of items UK airline passengers can carry on as hand luggage are to be lifted in the New Year. Travellers will be allowed to carry two items from January, assuming individual airports meet strict Department for Transport screening capacity requirements. A one-item rule was brought in after airport terrorist alerts in August last year, along with restrictions on carrying liquids, which will remain in 2008. More information: Department for Transport (020 7944 8300/ www.dft.gov.uk).

● **THE** over-50s are an intrepid bunch, as proven by the clamour for tickets to join the Saga Rose cruise departing Southampton this week. Despite the itinerary remaining secret, with none of the passengers knowing any of the eight destinations, the 14-night cruise has sold out. Another mystery cruise has been organised for next year on Saga Ruby, departing from Southampton on March 28. More information: Saga (0800 056 5880/ www.sagacruising.co.uk).

● **THE** average Briton is failing to take four-and-a-half days holiday a year – the equivalent of giving their boss £378 in free labour, a survey of 1,000 workers by Expedia.co.uk has found. Those earning between £48,000 and £55,000 were the worst offenders, having an average of 7.6 days remaining at the end of the year. More information: Expedia (0871 226 0808/ www.expedia.co.uk).

DUNCAN CRAIG

FESTIVE BREAKS

Xmas in ITALY
6 nights at Lake Garda
★★★ or ★★★★★ hotel

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