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Resources for single travellers



By Ian Packham

If you travel alone – whether by choice or necessity – you can use the web to hook up with other solos. There are numerous solo traveller clubs around the UK that organise regular group trips, ensuring company and friendly faces. [Meetup.com](#) is a good place to start – just search for 'single travel' to see groups in your area.

For those who choose to travel alone, safety is a concern, and the issue I'm asked about most often. Janice Waugh of [solotravelerblog.com](#) has collated recommendations to create a directory of 159 single-friendly hotels, inns and B&Bs. The [free guide](#) considers the sociability factor (how easy it is to meet others), location and security in each recommendation. It covers 51 countries, including holiday hotspots such as Malta and New Zealand, as well as up and coming destinations including Albania and the Philippines.

Another good way to be sociable is to find out the bar or café that's known as a travellers' gathering point – there tends to be one in every town. The Thorn Tree Café in Nairobi, Kenya, for instance, is one that has been going for decades. The best way to locate them is to check out a recent guidebook, or ask someone who interacts with travellers as part of their job (a hotel receptionist is ideal).

To interact with locals [couchsurfing.org](#) is a great resource. No longer solely the domain of backpackers, the site is steadily making its presence felt in mainstream travel circles. It allows holidaymakers to take advantage of local knowledge and hospitality to gain greater insight into destinations, be it through sharing a meal, a guided tour or even a bed for the night, all without any attached cost other than the 'promise' to do the same to a couchsurfer in your home city. I have heard many positive stories, and no negative ones about travelling in this way, though there are obvious safety concerns. To help, the site uses a reference system, and also has some great tips relevant for solo travel (simply scroll down to the bottom of the home page).

If sleeping in a stranger's house is a step too far, an extra layer of security can be added to the process by using a site like [FOF Travel](#). As well as having public communities akin to couchsurfing, you can limit contact to your friends abroad, which automatically includes their friends (hence "friends of friends" or FOF). You can invite a friend via the usual social media behemoths including Twitter and Facebook, which makes getting the ball rolling even easier.

Finally, if I was to take only one piece of kit with me when travelling alone, it would be my smartphone. Companies including [Go-Sim](#) provide cheaper international call and roaming rates than many contracts, while hotels, restaurants and public spaces will often have free wifi connections. Carrying a smartphone also gives solo travellers access to GPS mapping, and translation tools (of which I find Google Translate the most intuitive and easy to use), as well as remote access to many of the sites mentioned via their downloadable apps.



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Best time to visit Mexico



By Ian Packham

The majority of holidaymakers visit Mexico during the dry season (October to April), which coincides with high season and peak pricing. But the country's diversity and size (750,000 square miles versus the UK's 93,000) mean that in reality there is no wrong time to visit.

The Gulf and Caribbean Coasts

It's possible to holiday on Mexico's 1,750-mile Gulf Coast and Caribbean coast for most of the year. Destinations including Cancun, Cozumel, Merida and the Riviera Maya area have warm weather during the October-April dry season with temperatures at 26-32°C.

Humidity levels begin to rise in May. That is fine if you're on the beach, but it can make hard work of visits to Merida's Mercado Municipal market or Mayan ruins such as the UNESCO World Heritage Site Temple of Kukulcan the Plumed Serpent in Chichen Itza. The hurricane season officially runs from June to October, though you're more likely to encounter a storm in the season's latter two months.

May to November is the season to visit Mexico for the chance to swim with whale sharks, the largest of the world's fish species. Excursions are possible from many destinations on Mexico's Caribbean coastline.

Pacific Coast and Baja California

The popular Pacific coast resorts of Acapulco and Puerto Vallarta have warm to hot weather (around 30°C) year-round. Weather in Baja California is similar to that of the Pacific Coast. Like the rest of the country the rain falls between May and October, as short afternoon showers.

The Pacific Coast is known as the Mexican Riviera, and is the destination for relaxing on beaches by day and partying by night. As such, the region can become crowded during the Christmas and Spring Break/Easter periods, although February to April is also Baja California's main whale-watching season. Local fishermen run marine safaris to spot migrating grey whales, as well as other species including sperm whales, turtles, and dolphins.

The Interior

The climate of Mexico's interior is even more forgiving than the coasts, making the capital, Mexico City, pleasant at any time of year. Rafe Stone, product manager for [Journey Latin America](#), suggests visiting at the beginning of November to include the Day of the Dead festival. Honouring the dead, the festival is a fusion of traditional and Catholic beliefs celebrated with traditional food, ghoulish decoration, street processions, and candlelit vigils at cemeteries throughout the city.

November is also the start of the four-month period when hundreds of millions of monarch butterflies rest in Mexico having flown 2,000 miles south to escape the northern winter. The majority settle in the area covered by The Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, another UNESCO World Heritage Site, situated 130 miles from the capital. Visitors can take guided walks and horseback tours to witness the forest carpeted in the insects.

The quieter months are by no means a bad time to visit the interior. Rafe Stone says: "October and November can be a good time to go to Copper Canyon," despite it being the tail end of the wet season. He explained it makes for more visually interesting treks when "the rivers are high and the trees display autumnal colours".

Check out our recommended [family holidays in Mexico](#).



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Best time to visit Thailand



By Ian Packham

Thailand's climate is complex, making trip planning tricky. When the sun is shining on the beaches of the west coast, it's likely to be pouring with rain on the east coast. The climate in the capital, Bangkok, is quite different, with a period of extreme heat and another of possible floods which you may want to avoid. The north is different again, with much cool winters.

If that sounds like bad news, don't be deterred, because Thailand is one of the world's most exciting and friendly destinations, and whenever you visit, you'll be able to find great weather somewhere.

The beaches

The islands of **Ko Samui**, Ko Phan Ghan and Ko Tao are on the east of the Thai peninsula in the Gulf of Thailand. They enjoy excellent weather with little likelihood of rain from January through to August. Temperatures average 30-35°C with a refreshing sea breeze. Perfect!

Nick Pulley, founder and managing director of **Selective Asia**, says: "I tend to suggest people focus on the shoulder months of June, July and August, when the weather is still good but the crowds have diminished." During this time you might experience a few short showers.

Rain and humidity increase from September to November during the southwest monsoon. As well as the obvious disadvantages, "the peak of the rains means higher sea levels and much less sand on the beaches limiting beach space in resorts," Nick continues. It's not a great time to visit these islands.

Weather in the Andaman Sea resorts of **Phuket**, Phi Phi, **Khao Lak** and Krabi on the west of the Thai peninsula is out of phase with the Gulf of Thailand despite being separated by only 80 miles. The region enjoys warm temperatures (26-32°C) and low humidity between November and March. April and May see an increase in both, with temperatures peaking at 36°C. The monsoon season lasts from June to October, with rainfall peaking in September.

So in short, go to the east coast between January and August. Go to the west coast between November and March.

Bangkok

Bangkok's dry season runs from November to May. A cooler period of little rain and temperatures around 26°C lasts until mid-January. Humidity is also at its lowest, making it a more comfortable time to wear clothing that covers shoulders and knees, appropriate for visiting religious sites in the capital and an hour's drive north in Ayutthaya.

Temperatures begin rising from mid-January, peaking during April and May when humidity reaches 80% and temperatures regularly rise over 40°C. If there is an advantage to visiting Bangkok at this time it is to experience [Songkran](#). The celebration of Thai New Year sees locals throwing water (and sometimes chalk) on passers-by as blessings. It's a lot of fun.

Although the wet season is designated as lasting from June to October, a shoulder period exists between June and July with temperatures between 28-34°C and short showers lasting no more than two hours. However, Bangkok is prone to flooding in August and September when the rain is almost constant. Try to avoid spending any time in the capital then.

The north

"Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai are the predominant destinations in the north. They sit in a mountain valley so temperatures are lower than in Bangkok," says Nick Pulley. The higher altitude keeps temperatures between 15°C and 25°C between November and March. Temperatures can be low enough in the evenings to require a light jacket.

Chiang Mai's Three Kings Monument and Thapae Gate host weekend night handicraft bazaars, and are also good locations to witness November's [Yi Peng](#) festival when thousands of Chinese lanterns are released to rid locals of bad luck. Within days is the Loi Krathong festival, an ancient appeasement of water spirits that sees 'crowns' decorated with flowers and candles floated on rivers and waterways.

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Best time to visit Peru



By Ian Packham

Peru is one of the world's most exciting travel destinations. Its climate is complicated by the fact that the country covers three distinct geographic regions: the Andes Mountains in the middle of the country, the Pacific Ocean coastline in the west, and the amazon rainforest to the east. There is no wrong time to visit Peru – but each region has an optimum time period that lasts for nearly half the year.

The Andes

The Andes are at their best during Peru's dry season from May to October. The months of June and July are the peak period for visits to Cuzco, trekking the Inca Trail and visiting Machu Picchu – the weather is ideal but it's a busy time for lots of tourists. Temperatures alter with increases in altitude, averaging 10°C during the day and falling to freezing at night. Sue Lyall, Latin America

product manager at [Exsus](#) says: "Though June and July are the peak holiday months and the time of the [Inti Raymi](#) festival, I personally prefer to visit in September, the Peruvian spring, when there aren't as many tourists and lots of flowers in bloom in the mountains."

The wet season, lasting from November to April, is not necessarily a time to avoid. With rain falling for less than half the day it gives plenty of time to experience the country. "But I do tell people to avoid February," says Sue. "The rainfall is very heavy, the paths muddy and potentially at risk from landslides. It's also important to note that if you're going to Machu Picchu you're going to want to see it, which can be difficult with the low cloud!"

Pacific coast

Peru's arid Pacific coast, home to the capital Lima and the ancient cities around Chan Chan and Sipán, is hottest between December and March, when temperatures peak at a comfortable 26°C and skies are clear. The winter months of June to November see daytime temperatures averaging 15°C. Skies are often overcast, and Lima and the southern Pacific coast often become covered in garúa, a coastal fog that makes the area less visually appealing. However, the beaches of the north Pacific coast still see sunshine at this time of year.

The Amazon

Tourists reach Peru's isolated Amazon region through its main city Iquitos to experience life in the rainforest and along the river. Like rainforest throughout the world, the region is hot, wet and humid all year round. Its driest months are between June and September, though it stops raining for long enough during the wettest months of December to May to make a visit thinkable even then.

Weighing up all regional differences, we reckon the best time to visit Peru is between June and October.

Find our recommended [tours in Peru](#), including [Peru for families](#).



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Best time to visit Morocco



By Ian Packham

Only nine miles from mainland Europe and just over three hours flying time from London, Morocco is one of the most exotic of short-haul destinations, as well as being a gateway to Africa. The country's beaches, historic sites, atmospheric cities and natural wonders, as well as its rapidly improving infrastructure, have helped turn Morocco into a major tourist destination.

So when is the best time to visit? Max Lawrence, managing director of the specialist tour operator, [Lawrence of Morocco](#), says the country should be divided into four climatic zones: the Atlantic coast, Rif mountains, interior and desert (see the map below). "Whenever you plan to visit you'll find at least one region at its best, making Morocco a great year-round destination," he says.

Atlantic coast

Morocco's Atlantic coast – including the beach resorts of Agadir and Essaouira and the cities of Rabat and Casablanca – enjoys a mild winter, with temperatures averaging 16-19°C. However, there is a risk of rain during these months, ensuring the coast is lush and green from mid-March to May, when temperatures average around 24°C. "Summer is an ideal time to visit the coast," says Max. Sea breezes keep the beaches of Agadir and Essaouira at a comfortable 28°C even in the hottest months of July and August. The sunshine continues into well autumn, with temperatures around 24°C in October and into November.

The interior

The imperial cities of Fez, Meknès and Marrakesh experience Morocco's most extreme variations of temperature. Max says: "July and August are extremely hot in Marrakesh, the Atlas mountains and the desert." Over the next two years (2013 and 2014) summer also coincides with Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. As a result, tourist sites will have reduced opening hours; and cafés and restaurants may remain closed during daylight hours. This makes it a less appealing time to visit.

"The interior is really at its best just before summer between April and June and then again in autumn from September to November," says Max. Spring and autumn enjoy comfortable temperatures (25-28°C) and lower tourist numbers than in summer.

Winter is also a great time to visit, although temperatures can drop below zero after nightfall in the mountains and desert. The desert has similar weather to the interior, although temperatures are often several degrees higher, reaching over 40°C in summer.

Rif mountains

Close to southern Spain, the Rif mountain destinations of Chefchaouen and Tetouan, and north-coast cities such as Tangier, enjoy a typical Mediterranean climate. Between May and September there is almost constant sunshine and temperatures in the high twenties and higher. The months bookending this period remain sunny and warm, with temperatures rarely dropping below 20°C. "Come winter, the weather is less reliable, with a raised risk of rain, says Max. "However, plenty of people visit at this time of year, particularly for the Christmas and New Year festivities."

See our recommendations for [holidays in Morocco](#), plus [short breaks in Marrakech](#) and [honeymoons](#) in Morocco.

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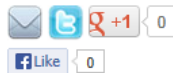
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Best time to visit Malta and Gozo



By Ian Packham

The islands of Malta and Gozo offer much more than sun, sand and sea. Located close to Sicily and Tunisia in the southern Mediterranean, they are packed with 2,000 years of turbulent history. Malta boasts historic castles, palaces and churches while neighbouring Gozo - 45 minutes away by ferry - has unspoilt countryside and some of the best dive sites in Europe.

Malta and Gozo enjoy a typical Mediterranean climate, with more than 300 days of sunshine every year. The islands are hottest between July and September, when rain is rare and temperatures regularly reach 29°C with 12 hours of daily sunshine. Andrew Farr of [Classic Collection Holidays](#), says: "The summer months are the main season for local feasts – or *festas* – that see towns honouring their patron saint with street parades and firework displays.

"But for me the best time to visit the Maltese islands are the shoulder seasons of May through to June, and then October to November. It's less busy in these months and cooler than the peak temperatures of summer".

Temperatures during both these shoulder seasons average 22°C. In May and June, the time of the annual wild flower bloom in Gozo, visitors are welcomed by 10 hours of daily sunshine. That dips to seven hours during October and there is an added chance of rain. Andrew points out that "though during October the weather can be stormy, with torrential downpours, they rarely last long; and sea temperatures – for water sports and diving – are still good as late as November, having had the whole of the summer sun".

The winter months of December to March offer better value flights and accommodation (outside of Christmas and New Year), with milder temperatures reaching 12-14°C. It can make the climate chilly in the wind and average hours of sunshine drops to 6 hours daily, broken by cloud and short heavy showers.

Malta and Gozo are more than the typical Mediterranean holiday destination. Their rich cultures make the Maltese islands an enigmatic destination whether the aim of visiting is relaxation on the beaches, water sports, or discovering their unique history.

See our [holiday ideas for Malta and Gozo](#).

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Best time to visit Egypt



By Ian Packham

Egypt has been welcoming visitors since the earliest days of tourism. Peel back 4,500 years of history at the Pyramids of Giza, sail on the Nile at Aswan, or soak up the sun on Sinai's Red Sea coast. Egypt won't let you down. But when is the best time to visit?

During the summer months, from the beginning of June to the end of August, destinations throughout Egypt enjoy 13 hours of sunshine, but are also very hot. Temperatures in the south, such as the cities of Luxor (for the Valley of the Kings) and Aswan, regularly top 40°C. In the slightly cooler north, temperatures peak at 35°C in **Cairo** and 30°C in Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast. Cairo's heat is accompanied by high humidity that can make visiting the pyramids of Giza, a short drive from the city, an uncomfortable experience.

The summer currently coincides with **Ramadan**, the Muslim month of fasting. Though a special time to visit – with a celebratory atmosphere that includes firework displays and street decorations – Ramadan can mean erratic opening times for restaurants and tourist sites. Outside of hotels, bars tend to remain closed for the whole month.

A more comfortable time to visit, ideal for sunbathing, exploring and Nile cruises are spring (March to May) and autumn (September to November). The skies remain clear during these months, with a minimum 10 hours of daily sunshine in both the north and south. Temperatures average 22°C in March and November and 28°C for the remaining months in the south. In the north, temperatures are a little lower, averaging 16°C in March and November and 22°C for the remaining period, with highs of 26°C.

The **Red Sea** resorts – including Sharm El Sheikh, Hurghada and Taba Heights – are at their best during the extended spring and autumn seasons. You'll find temperatures of 25°C in March, rising to 33°C in May. July and August can be a little too hot for some visitors (37°C) while the winter months of December and January see temperatures of 22°C, with negligible rain. At this time it's warm enough to sit out in the sun, though the sea will be decidedly chilly.

Even during the winter months of December to February, Aswan and Luxor sees temperatures of 26°C and 10 hours of sunshine, making these the south's peak months for tourism.

In comparison, the winter is considered low season in Alexandria and Cairo. The climate remains mild, with temperatures averaging 20°C, and dropping no lower than 10°C, but both Alexandria and Cairo are often overcast during the winter months, with limited sunshine. Alexandria also receives more rain than anywhere else in Egypt, with 10 rainy days per month in winter, which can result in local flooding.

Egypt is a unique destination, home to some of the world's cultural wonders. But it's also a great place for a beach holiday or a week of winter sun on the Nile. Overall, we think the best time to visit Egypt is between September and May.

See our [holiday ideas for Egypt](#), and our [honeymoon suggestions](#).



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Best time to visit Tunisia



By Ian Packham

The smallest country in North Africa, but with 800 miles of Mediterranean coastline, Tunisia offers visitors a wealth of experiences. In the north, Tunis – the country's cosmopolitan capital – is only a short distance from ancient Carthage and beach resorts, while the far south is home to the majestic Sahara Desert.

The north

Tunisia's north enjoys a typical Mediterranean climate with hot dry summers and mild winters. Alongside the 12 hours of sunshine each day during July and August come temperatures that reach 35°C. These temperatures can become debilitating for exploring [Tunis](#) or the Roman amphitheatre at El Djem (also spelt El Jem), and even for soaking up the sun in the resorts of Port El Kantaoui, Hammamet and Skanes. The summer months are also the tourist high season, seeing a rise in prices as well as visitor numbers.

A better time to visit Tunisia's north is spring or autumn. Between April and June the countryside is covered in beautiful wildflowers. Temperatures average 16°C in April in destinations including Sousse, with peaks of 21°C. Temperatures rise steadily to an average of 23°C in June, reaching a high of 29°C. Throughout these months the north enjoys 11 hours of sunshine, while rainfall is limited to an average of seven days each month.

The autumn months of September and October offer cooler temperatures after the heat of summer, with averages of 23°C and 10 hours of sunshine. The winter months (lasting from November to March) see temperatures average 12°C and drop no lower than 10°C. Levels of sunshine average seven hours a day, with rainy days limited to 13 per month at their height between November and January.

The south

Destinations including Gabès, Matmata, and the island of Djerba (or Jerba) have a similar, but warmer climate to the north. Temperatures on Djerba average 18°C in April, two degrees warmer than Tunis. By June temperatures average 24°C, while in July and August they peak at over 40°C, before dropping to a mild 15°C during the winter months.

The wettest months in this region are May to August, with an average of 10 rainy days. On either side of these months the chance of rain drops by half. The region enjoys around 10 hours of sunshine a day throughout the year, seeing a slight drop to nine hours during August and September. The best months for sunshine are April and May, which receive 12 hours on average each day.

The Sahara

Destinations in Tunisia's deep south – including the Sahara Desert around Douz and Tozeur – should also be avoided during the summer months. Between June and September temperatures vary little, with averages ranging from 29-32°C. However, temperatures regularly peak closer to 40°C.

Though the temperature remains fairly constant in the Sahara region between October and March, the sandstorms that develop from January mean the region is best visited between October and December. Temperatures at these times range from a high of 23°C in October, to 12°C in December and January (before rising again to reach 17°C in March). Levels of sunshine average 10 hours a day throughout the period, and there is little risk of rain, averaging only three days each month.

Tunisia provides visitors with a rich mix of cultures and natural environments, as well as the chance to relax on beaches, less than three hours by air from the UK.

See more on our [short breaks in Tunis](#) and [honeymoons in Tunisia](#).

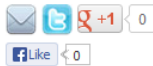
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Best time to visit Venice



By Ian Packham

Built across more than 100 islands, Venice is one of the world's most iconic cities. It can be overcrowded, it can be expensive, it can be too hot or too wet – but it never disappoints.

Easily reached by air or [rail](#) – including the luxurious [Venice Simplon-Orient-Express](#) – it lies close to the Alps on northern Italy's Adriatic coast.

There is no obvious best time to visit Venice. Spring and summer enjoy the best of the weather, though the city can be uncomfortable when temperatures soar. Winter can be especially beautiful, with the chance of crisp temperatures and clear skies combined with few tourists.

Festivals – both religious and cultural – are scattered across the calendar, making this a genuinely year-round destination.

Tourist numbers peak in spring and early summer, which can mean extended queuing times at the city's most popular sights. Temperatures range between 17-20°C in May and June, peaking in the low twenties.

The weather can be unpredictable at this time of year. You can expect an average 12 hours of sunshine a day, but up to 11 days a month affected by rain. Rainfall is fairly constant throughout the year, though May and June are notorious for showers.

Tourist numbers and hotel prices drop in July and August, at least until the annual [Venice Film Festival](#) begins in late August or early September. It's hot and sticky at this time of year, with peaks of 28°C. Mosquitoes can also become bothersome, and the canals a little smelly. The chance of rainfall drops slightly to nine days a month, while sunshine remains steady at 12 hours a day.

July is also the time of the [Redentore](#) festival, which ends with a massive fireworks display and the creation of a bridge of boats across Guidecca Canal.

Both summer and autumn span the [Biennale](#) festivals, of art (in odd years) and architecture (in even years), which last between June and November. The weather towards autumn sees temperatures drop from 20°C in September to 14°C in October, peaking at 18°C. Rainfall remains unchanged from the late summer, while sunshine dips to an average seven hours daily. However, between October and January there is an increased risk of street flooding, since it is the time of *acqua alta* – higher sea levels.

Winter continues to offer sunny days, though winds coming from the Alps can be harsh. Temperatures between December and February average 5°C, and peak only a couple of degrees higher. The amount of rainfall actually falls compared to the other seasons of the year, averaging eight days of rainfall per month. More importantly, sunshine drops to three hours a day.

Winter ends on a high, with Venice's annual [Carnivale](#), the city's biggest festival. Taking place in February or early March (the next is set for March 4 2014), it is the city's *mardi gras* celebration before the start of Lent. Tourists and locals alike enjoy 10 days of masked balls and costumed revelry. Easter, 40 days later, is also a festive time and the beginning of the tourist high season and spring's improved temperatures.

Unique in construction and hosting world-renowned sights, Venice has plenty to offer visitors, while the city's annual festivals provide a reason to visit at almost any time of year.

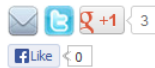
Find out more about our [short breaks](#) and [honeymoons](#) in Venice.



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Where to go on holiday in the Canary Islands



By Ian Packham

A thousand miles from mainland Spain, the Canary Islands have a distinct character that has developed over generations of isolation. Located in the Atlantic Ocean 80 miles west of Morocco, the Canaries are only four hours flying time from the UK and are easy to reach with many direct flights from regional airports.

The islands enjoy fine weather all year round with temperatures ranging from 17°C in winter to 27°C in summer. Sunshine varies between a minimum of six hours on winter days, to 12 hours in summer. Rain is almost unheard of, with as little as 15 cm a year.

The Canary Islands boast more than 150 miles of beach, many offering water sports such as windsurfing and scuba diving. But you don't have to be a beach fan to enjoy the islands. You'll find a wide variety of other attractions. During the day, you can visit traditional villages in exquisite landscapes or reach Spain's highest peak, while at night you can visit lively bars and restaurants or stargaze into clear, protected skies. All in all, the Canaries offer a wealth of holiday options for visitors.

Tenerife

Tenerife is the largest of the islands, and has more than 500 beaches. The southern resorts, including those around Costa del Silencio, have some of the best beaches and weather, and as a result receive the most tourists. The west coast is less developed, with plenty of **family-friendly** options. For frenetic nightlife, head to Los Christianos and the neighbouring Playa de las Américas.

Further north, Santa Cruz, the island's capital, has one of the island's most popular beaches; its fine golden sand imported from the Sahara Desert. The landscape of the north is lush with vegetation, and the climate is slightly more humid as a result. The north is also worth visiting for the UNESCO World Heritage Site of **San Cristóbal de La Laguna**. The city is one of the island's cultural highlights, its streets lined with colonial villas. Other destinations in the north include Puerto de la Cruz, a town with distinctive Canarian character.

Taking up much of the island's interior is Spain's highest peak, the 3,718m dormant volcano **Teide**, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is a five-hour hike along the La Rambleta path to the summit, or eight minutes by **cable car**. On a clear day it is possible to see Lanzarote and the other islands from its summit.

Lanzarote

Lanzarote is the closest island to the African mainland, and as such, is the hottest. It has an arid landscape, dotted with 300 volcanic cones, and the longest volcanic tunnel in the world. Despite the volcanic landscape there are several white beaches including Playa Blanca, Papagayo and Caletón Blanco, and strict regulation means Lanzarote has few of the high-rise hotels that can be found on Tenerife's southern coast. **Families** are well-catered for, while for visitors interested in water sports Famara is a regular surfing spot. Windsurfing lessons can be found around Costa Teguise. The island has some excellent **villas for rent**.

La Palma

La Palma is one of the smallest islands, and relatively undeveloped compared to other islands in the archipelago. To the east, the black sands of Los Cancajos are the principle beach area for the island's capital, Santa Cruz de la Palma. However, Puerto Naos and Tazacorte, on the opposite side of the island, have the warmest weather, and it's there where you will find the main tourist areas, situated around attractive fishing villages.

More than 600 miles of marked paths make La Palma ideal for walking, cycling or horse riding. Paths lead to Teneguía volcano (dormant since 1971), and Caldera de Taburiente, the island's largest volcanic crater. More adventurous activities, such as paragliding, caving, and diving are also popular. The island is home to the El Roque de los Muchachos observatory and offers outstanding stargazing, particularly if you drive to the summit, which often sits above the clouds.

Fuertaventura

Fuertaventura's main attraction is the sand dunes of Corralejo National Park, named after the main resort on the island, a blend of traditional and tourist village. Water sports, including surfing and kite surfing, are easy to arrange in Costa Caleta further down the coast, while the Jandia peninsula in the south is home to a mix of protected beaches and duty-free shopping.

Gran Canaria

Gran Canaria, in the centre of the archipelago, is possibly the most diverse island, and not just when it comes to the six golf courses here. The dry south, around Maspalomas, has the best of the island's beaches and nightlife. Green pine forests cover the mountainous interior, where it is not unusual to see snow on the highest peaks while visitors bask in the sun on the beaches below. Further north still, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, the island's capital, dates back to the fifteenth century, and the attractive colonial architecture will be of interest to history lovers and photographers alike.

The seven islands and six islets that make up the Canary Islands offer a diverse array of holiday experiences that will keep a whole family entertained. A great year round climate and good value for money are only some of the reasons to visit the Canary Islands.



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Best time to visit Brazil



By Ian Packham

19 August 2013: As Brazil gears up to host the 2014 football World Cup, and with the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, there is no better time to sample Brazil's vibrancy, culture and natural beauty. However, its sheer size – Brazil is the fifth largest country on the planet – can make it difficult to decide exactly when and where to visit.

Dominating maps of South America, Brazil has 4,500 miles of Atlantic coastline stretching from the equator to south of the Tropic of Capricorn. The climate is generally tropical in the north with little seasonal variation. Temperatures are lower further south, particularly in the country's temperate zone around Rio, one of Brazil's biggest draws.

Rio de Janeiro

In line with the rest of Brazil, [Rio de Janeiro's](#) tourist high season runs from December to March, coinciding with the southern hemisphere's summer, as well as Christmas festivities and [Carnaval](#) (in February or early March). During the high season the cost of flights and accommodation rise significantly as local and foreign tourists visit the city's icons: Sugarloaf Mountain, the statue of Christ the Redeemer, and Copacabana and Ipanema beaches.

However, Rio's summers are very hot and humid. While temperatures average 27°C, they can reach peaks of 38°C. Humidity is high (at 80%) throughout the year, but can climb to 98% during the summer months. The high humidity brings with it plenty of rain, with over 100mm a month, spread over several days. December is by far the wettest month, receiving 170mm of rain.

If the Carnaval celebrations are not of interest a better time might be May-June and August-September, which are the cheapest and least-crowded months to visit Brazil. The winter months remain mild, with daytime temperatures averaging 21-24°C throughout the period, peaking at 30°C. Though skies can be overcast, there is less rain than during the summer high season. May and June see 70mm a month, while August and September are Rio's driest months with levels dropping to 50mm a month.

The north east

North eastern Brazil offers visitors splendid colonial cities and fantastic beaches. The region is hot, with average lows of 24°C and highs of 30°C year round. In contrast to other regions of Brazil, the north east receives most rain between the beginning of April and the end of September, though it generally manifests itself as short showers in the late afternoon which help lower the temperature before the sunshine returns.

Salvador, the largest colonial city in the Americas, is the home of *capoeira* (the dance-like martial art), and the *candomblé* religion that resulted from the trans-Atlantic slave trade. A World Heritage Site since 1982, Olinda is another colonial city, while across the bay the skyscrapers of Recife offer a view to Brazil's future.

Kite-surfers take advantage of cooling ocean breezes in picturesque villages such as Cumbuco, while it is possible to surf and ride dune-buggies in Jericoacoara and Genipabu. The dune desert of [Lençóis Maranhenses](#) National Park is also nearby, while the last major city before the River Amazon, São Luís, is worth visiting to witness its centre covered in colonial tiles.

The Amazon

The Amazon rainforest and river system dominates the north of Brazil. Destinations in the region, including Manaus and Belém, are hot and humid year-round, with temperatures averaging in the mid-30°Cs. High humidity levels make the temperature feel even higher. The region has a tropical two-season climate, in comparison to the four-season climate of Rio.

The dry season lasts from July to December, and is the best time to go in search of the region's wildlife. The wet season, when humidity is high, runs from January to June and tends to bring late afternoon downpours. Mornings and early afternoons are generally clear and sunny. However, there are distinct differences in weather even in the Amazon. Belém, particularly, can be regarded as having no true dry season, though the daily showers taper off towards October, the city's driest month.

Central Brazil

Central Brazil, nearly 10 times larger than the UK, is a region of grassland known as the *cerrado*. Rich in wildlife including macaws, jaguars and howler monkeys, the region is also the site of Brazil's modernist UNESCO World Heritage Site listed capital, Brasília, constructed in the 1950s to the designs of architect Oscar Niemeyer.

Throughout the year temperatures vary little, with average highs of 28-30°C and peak temperatures reaching 40°C. The region sees lows of 12°C in June and July, and 14-18°C for the rest of the year. As with other regions, rain is at its height between December and March, with around 140mm falling monthly, and most days seeing some rain. However, June and July receive almost no rain, and May and August see only 20mm compared to 150mm in December, its wettest month.

Away from the capital, the best time to trek and maximise the chance of wildlife encounters is the end of the driest months, around October, when temperatures are also lower and therefore better for physical exertion.

The south

The south, including destinations such as Iguaçu Falls and Florianópolis, has similar rainfall statistics to Rio, but wider temperature variations. Though temperatures still average 27°C in the summer months of December to March, they fall to 18-20°C from May to September, and can drop as low as 12°C. Spring and autumn temperatures average 20-22°C, but at higher altitudes, in destinations such as Petrópolis and the historic colonial towns of Ouro Preto and Tiradentes, it can get as cold as 5°C in winter. Around the beaches of Florianópolis, many restaurants and some *pousadas* (small independent guesthouses) close during winter months.

Home to world-class beaches, vibrant cities, and almost unequalled natural beauty including the Amazon rainforest, Brazil is already a South American holiday hotspot. With accommodation to suit all needs, from budget eco-lodges to luxury resorts, and preparing to host several major sporting events, Brazil really has something to offer every potential visitor.

Find out more about our [holiday](#) and [honeymoon](#) ideas in Brazil.

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Best time to visit India



By Ian Packham

India is one of the world's largest and most populous countries. This makes it an exciting destination, but also means the country experiences weather conditions that can vary significantly from one state to another.

Broadly speaking, India has a three-season climate comprising a hot summer between March and May, a comfortable winter between November and February, and the wet or monsoon period which lasts roughly from June to the end of October. However, the weather in India can vary dramatically between regions, perhaps no surprise for a country 14 times the size of the UK. The best time to visit India therefore depends on which of India's regions you plan to visit.

Delhi and Rajasthan

Many first time visitors to India base themselves around Delhi and Rajasthan, in India's north. New Delhi, the nation's capital, forms one point of the popular 'golden triangle' circuit. The other points are formed by Agra, site of the Taj Mahal, and Jaipur, Rajasthan's state capital. It has been known as the 'pink city' since it was painted in commemoration of a visit by the Prince of Wales in 1876.

Amrit Singh, founder and director of [Transindus](#) says "You can look at India as an all year round destination, provided you know where to go, when. For example, the north of India is ideal between November and February." At this time of year skies are clear and temperatures stabilise at 12°C, peaking in the mid-twenties Celsius. In comparison, summer (March to May) temperatures rise to highs of 35-40°C. Amrit continues "but there is a small window in mid-December to January when a fog develops. It's still perfect weather for a one centre holiday, but moving on can become difficult, because of delays to flights and other transport". This period also avoids the monsoon rains that start in late June and last until mid-September. Though the monsoon period doesn't see rain every day, temperatures remain high at 28-32°C, and humidity can also be high.

Kerala and Tamil Nadu

Fifteen hundred miles from Delhi, in the far south of India, the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu have been enticing visitors for decades. Their reputation as laidback tropical hideaways spotted with historic temples has made the region the predominant tourist destination in India's south. "Really they're an all year round destination, with temperatures stable at 28°C throughout the year" says Amrit. "It's even becoming popular to visit during the monsoons, between June and the end of July, to take advantage of Ayurvedic medical treatments." A traditional alternative medicine, [Ayurveda](#) combines diet, lifestyle, yoga and massage.

Another short period in the second half of October sees a return of the monsoon. Like elsewhere in the country, the rains can make travel more difficult and cities more congested as a result. "This short period is perhaps not the best time to visit because the south is a place of nature – of hill views – which you might miss in the rain" adds Amrit.

Our devoted [Kerala](#) page has more information on the best time to visit the state.

Goa

Goa is situated midway along India's west coast. It has an ambience all of its own, resulting from 450 years of Portuguese rule that only ended in 1961. One of the best places in Goa to experience the Portuguese influence is the city of Margao, which is home to mansions, churches, and municipal gardens all dating to the colonial period.

The most popular time to visit Goa is between November and March, when temperatures remain comfortable, averaging 27°C, and peaking no higher than 32°C. These months see almost no rain; and the Arabia Sea is calm enough for swimming. However, as the main tourist season, prices begin to rise from the end of October.

Average temperatures rise by a couple of degrees Celsius in April and May, along with an increase in humidity that precedes the monsoon. The rains are at their height from the beginning of June to the beginning of September. Turning the countryside lush with greenery, it is actually the cheapest time of year to visit Goa. Downpours occur every other day on average, though Amrit says "Goa is still good throughout April to the end of August, and remains a great location for relaxing on the beach. But it's best to avoid the heavy undercurrents that develop at sea around this time, and opt instead for one of the many cheap swimming pools".



Mumbai

North of Goa, but still on India's Arabian Sea coast, Mumbai (formerly Bombay) is India's most-populous city. "It's a heady mix of vibrancy, commerce, tradition, culture and colonial history, containing some of the best examples of Gothic architecture anywhere in India" says Amrit. She continues "this comes at a cost, with hotels matching prices in London and New York".

Despite its Gothic colonial architecture Mumbai offers visitors a view of modern India (it was the setting for *Slumdog Millionaire*), as well as attractive traditional fishing villages nearby, such as Worli, and sites including [Elephanta Caves](#).

The city's climate is similar to Goa's, with most people visiting between November and March, when temperatures average 30°C, humidity is low, and there is little rain. "An interesting time to visit the city is September for the Ganesh festival" says Amrit. "Locals head to Chowpatty Beach with homemade models of the Hindu elephant god which they give to the sea. Mumbai is also very lively during [Diwali](#), the 'festival of lights', in early November, but in general the city is not a place for those seeking nightlife."

North-East India

While high temperatures make travel to much of India uncomfortable during the summer months, April to September are good months to visit the hill stations of north-east India. Darjeeling, for instance, sees daily summer temperatures averaging 14-15°C and peaking no higher than 25°C. By contrast, from December to March temperatures can drop to 1°C, and are accompanied by fog, rain, and even snow.

Despite the heat, the early summer is also a good time to visit India in search of its wildlife. Animals, such as tigers in Simlipal National Park in Odisha, Indian rhinos in Kaziranga and elephants in Manas National Parks (both in Assam), leave the thick bush in search of water to cool down in. National parks remain open until the end of May, when temperatures average 27°C, but can peak at 38°C.

However, if the heat of summer is too much, Amrit points out "the national parks are also ideal between November and March, when temperatures reach the mid-twenties Celsius". The parks are closed between June and November. Visiting Odisha (formerly Orissa) or Assam at this time of year would also make trips to their temples, such as the Lingaraja temple in Bhubaneswar and Jagannath temple in Puri, a more comfortable experience.

India's vast size means that whatever the time of year you plan to visit, there is a region that has comfortable temperatures and clear skies. Generally speaking, the summer months of April and May are the months to visit India's North-East, while November to March are good months to visit both the north around Delhi and Rajasthan, and India's south. Though the monsoon rains arrive between June and September, it is still possible to plan a visit in these months. Not only are prices lower, but it is possible to take advantage of seasonal events such as Ayurvedic treatments in the southern states.

Check out our range of recommended [tours of India](#) with Transindus, plus [honeymoons in India](#) and [family adventures](#).

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Best time to visit Jamaica



By Ian Packham

Jamaica is home to stunning family-friendly beaches and equally vibrant towns. Situated just 100 miles south of Cuba, the home of reggae enjoys a typical Caribbean climate, making it a destination worth visiting at any time of year.

Jamaica's typical Caribbean climate means the island enjoys an average eight hours of sunshine a day throughout the year. Average temperatures vary little from 28°C, with peaks and lows just a few degrees either side of this figure. Temperatures are a little lower in the Blue Mountains, with a daytime low of 18°C. A great place for hiking, the Blue Mountains are just a two hour car journey from the capital, Kingston. A haven for endemic flora and fauna, the area has been added to the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage sites.

The Blue Mountains are best visited during the summer, lasting from June to September, when the region's untarred roads do not suffer from waterlogging. Peak temperatures and the lowest risk of rain come in July and August, and it is rare for the period's short-lived showers to alter holiday plans.

July and August are the perfect months to be out on the island's beaches or taking advantage of the warm waters – averaging 28°C – to try the various water sports. Snorkelling, scuba diving, para-sailing and jet-skiing are all on offer. Despite coinciding with Europe and North America's long school summer holidays, it is still not considered peak tourism season on the island.

That peak season comes during the winter months, making December to February the busiest and most expensive months to visit the island. This period sees temperatures average 24°C, only a few degrees lower than the July and August average.

The weather turns windy for the months of March and April, which can prevent water sports on northern coast resorts including Montego Bay. Kingston, on the island's southern coast has a more sheltered position, as do the resorts of Negril Beach on the east coast, where water sports are still possible during these months.

The beginning of June to the first of November is considered the hurricane season, with August and September its peak months. Jamaica is not as badly affected by the hurricane season as other Caribbean islands, and its tourist infrastructure remains open throughout the period. Many hotels offer hurricane guarantee schemes, pledging a free alternate holiday if a hurricane strikes.

The months of June to November also see the highest rainfall. Locally, rain is considered to be at its heaviest in October and November. Although rainfall ranges from 12-20 cm, even heavy showers are normally limited to half an hour in the late afternoon. The only exception is Portland Parish, on the island's north-east, and encompassing the Blue Mountains, where it can rain for days without stopping.

South coast towns including Kingston see very little rain at all, and June to November are the cheapest months to visit the island, with many hotels offering room prices half that of the December to February high season.

With daily temperatures averaging 28°C throughout the year, and sea temperatures not much lower, Jamaica is a true year round destination. Its combination of stunning beaches, rugged mountainous interior and vibrant towns make it a part of the Caribbean that shouldn't be missed.

Check out our Jamaica [family](#) and [luxury](#) holiday ideas. Plus our recommendations for honeymoons in Jamaica which include [Jamaica Inn](#) and [Sandals](#).