

Soak up the winter sun

BY HUGH MORRIS

THE TURNING LEAVES, the crisp chill of a November morning and the romantic darkness that descends across our land every day before the clock strikes five – isn't winter a beautiful time of year? Unfortunately, our fair isle does not always want to play ball and five months of wind, rain and gloom with only rare sightings of the sun is much closer to reality. But there's no need to suffer in silence.

Winter sun holidays serve a very defined purpose: to get you and your family away from the dreary damp of Britain and boost your vitamin D levels in a location used to celebrating Christmas in shorts and T-shirts. They are also a great opportunity to break the mould of summer holidays and try something different, jetting off to countries and resorts that don't normally make the shortlist for traditional August getaways.

But first let's look at winter sun getaways for beginners. The Canary Islands is one of the most popular locations for Brits after some winter sun. According to hotel comparison site Trivago, six out of the 10 most sought-after winter destinations are in the Spanish archipelago off the coast of Africa – in Tenerife or Lanzarote, with trips to Fuerteventura and Gran Canaria just outside the top 10.

Denise Bartlett, spokesperson for Trivago, explains that the Canary Islands are always popular as they are only around four hours' flight away and offer warm temperatures all year round – Lanzarote has average February temperatures of 18°C – and caters for a range of budgets. Tenerife is one of the cheapest islands, she

says. "One night in Puerto de la Cruz will cost an average of £52 a night."

At the time of writing, a family of four could book a week-long break departing on Saturday 14 February 2015 to Diverhotel Tenerife Spa & Garden in Puerto de la Cruz, including flights, for less than £500 each. The deal from lowcostholidays.com, including flights from Nottingham (East Midlands) airport and a 10% online booking discount, totalled £1,944.92. Transfers and upgrading to half board would have added another £118 and £95.23 respectively, taking the total to £2,158.15.

The additional benefit of selecting a holiday in the eurozone is that the pound is currently experiencing a resurgence so drinks, food and other purchases made abroad will not cripple your wallet in the same way they might have done a few years ago.

For more ambitious sunseekers, destinations traditionally include long-haul flights to the likes of Costa Rica, Thailand, or Miami. A recent survey by the Post Office shows that holidaymakers can reap the rewards of pre-booking research as the cost of tourist staples fluctuate greatly year on-year and can amount to an enviable saving or an additional hit on the wallet.

The report highlights Bali and Cape Town as two of the best value destinations, with the Post Office's barometer made up of drinks, food, sunscreen and other essentials, coming in at £40 for Bali, less than a third of the cost of some of the most expensive resorts like Singapore and Dubai (see box on page 52).

Rianne Ojeh, spokesperson for Travelbag, which carried out the research for the Post Office, says the strength of the pound has a very real effect on where holidaymakers decide to go. "We have seen a big rise in demand for destinations such as Sri Lanka, Mauritius and St Lucia, where sterling is strong and the cost of living is low," she says.

"The biggest year-on-year increase is for Japan as consumers recognise that the country is now much better value than in recent years. Rising prices in Vietnam, Antigua and Dubai haven't yet impacted on demand as there are still great value packages available for these destinations," she adds.

One of the destinations that comes in mid-table in the Post Office report is Jamaica. Caribbean specialist Jakes has put together a December getaway designed for families, with accommodation in a cottage and activities including cooking workshops, fishing, pizza making and kids' clubs. The seven-night stay at Treasure Beach on the island's south coast is £1,785 for a family of four and includes flights on 31 December and transfers – that's almost £160 cheaper than the cost of the Tenerife trip.

Clearly, there are savings to be made when booking. Alistair Daly, of online travel agent On the Beach, says all-inclusive holidays are a great way to keep costs down. "The cost of the holiday may be slightly higher than going self-catering but you will not need to spend in resort so keeping costs down abroad will be much easier," he says. ●

How prices compare for typical holiday items in different parts of the world

ITEMS	INDONESIA	SOUTH AFRICA	THAILAND	JAPAN	MEXICO	USA	USA	JAMAICA	CANADA	AUSTRALIA	EGYPT	SINGAPORE	DUBAI
	Bali	Cape Town	Phuket	Tokyo	Cancun	Orlando	New York	Montego Bay	Vancouver	Darwin	Sharm-el-Sheikh	China Town	Jumeirah
Cup of filter coffee (café/bar)	£1.14	£0.97	£1.02	£2.15	£1.73	£1.27	£1.14	£1.91	£1.31	£2.45	£1.23	£3.09	£4.39
Bottle of local lager (café/bar)	£1.06	£1.17	£1.42	£3.17	£1.98	£3.18	£3.18	£2.21	£3.92	£4.03	£2.74	£6.44	£7.90
Bottle/can of Coca-Cola (café/bar)	0.51	£0.56	£0.55	£1.21	£1.48	£1.91	£1.27	£1.35	£1.13	£2.30	£0.95	£2.83	£2.63
Glass of wine (café/bar)	£2.29	£1.61	£3.05	£3.20	£4.94	£4.46	£5.73	£4.59	£4.79	£4.03	£3.78	£7.47	£8.78
Cocktail (café/bar)	£2.86	£2.20	£3.05	£4.62	£4.45	£3.82	£4.46	£4.39	£5.37	£8.35	£5.58	£8.76	£14.04
Small chocolate bar (58g Mars/Snickers)	£0.40	£0.53	£0.49	£0.92	£0.84	£0.64	£0.50	£0.88	£0.90	£1.73	£1.13	£1.19	£3.51
Bottle of mineral water (1.5l) supermarket	£0.29	£0.70	£0.39	£1.23	£0.44	£1.27	£0.69	£0.56	£1.54	£1.01	£0.66	£1.47	£2.63
Suncream (supermarket)	£4.00	£6.44	£2.54	£2.72	£6.92	£5.10	£5.09	£7.95	£5.22	£9.70	£8.04	£6.18	£8.78
Insect repellent (supermarket)	£0.57	£4.68	£1.68	£4.45	£2.72	£3.18	£2.86	£5.86	£5.02	£3.31	£1.23	£4.02	£8.78
Three-course evening meal for two incl. bottle of wine	£26.98	£27.81	£40.71	£42.31	£46.20	£50.96	£50.96	£55.61	£67.36	£72.56	£91.98	£113.89	£99.17
TOTAL COSTS	£40.10	£46.67	£54.90	£65.98	£71.70	£75.79	£75.88	£85.31	£96.56	£109.47	£117.32	£155.34	£160.61
% rise/fall over 2013 prices	-9%	-6%	1%	-36%	25%	14%	-4%	35%	-5%	-12%	n/a	29%	64%

Source: The Post Office