

Real Holidays Portfolio 2011



Real Holidays

Creating real travel experiences



PHILIP'S INTRODUCTION



It's been a long time since we sent out a newsletter and recessions have come and gone, I hope! One lesson I've learnt from being a travel agent all this time - three recessions and a few wars on, is that there is always another potential disaster round the corner, whether it be strikes, volcanic ash, snowbound Heathrow or civil strife in the Middle East. We know that one of the reasons we are busier than ever again is that we've been able to help so many of our clients when serious disruptions like these occur, and the fact that we are a bonded travel agent and bonded tour operator has become all the more important when legal protection and beyond-the-call-of-duty assistance is needed.

"The whole holiday was a great success and a big tribute to you personally and to the values which Real Holidays embodies."

But this is a big 21st birthday thank you to all of you who have continued to book your holidays and travel arrangements with us through tricky times, and as styles of holidays and booking methods have changed. We like to believe that it is because the expertise and knowledge of the staff here allows us to offer an unrivalled service. But it is also because of our flexibility, which means that we can always offer the holiday that is right for you. That may mean a package holiday, and it may mean a totally tailor-made itinerary booked with the agents we now have in different parts of the world. It may be booking those individual properties that have risen to the top of the pile as we try and test old and new favourites. It's pretty competitive here as the staff try to outdo each other in discovering a new, stylish hotel, a particularly exciting holiday experience, or an unusual destination. And often the greatest help is from you, the client, when you take considerable trouble to let us know how you got on - our own and much more reliable REAL 'tripadvisor'

That's really how our Italian and Indian tour operations have developed, involving a lot of getting lost in Umbria, or sampling Keralan cuisine on your behalf. We now apply those same investigatory methods and enthusiasm for developing exciting new relationships to an ever increasing range of countries and properties, and the aim of this brochure is for the staff here to introduce you to some of their favourites, and to entice you and a whole new following of like minded, interesting people to join the Real Holidays road show.

SOME REAL HOLIDAYS FAVOURITES

Pelion - and a Philip Favourite

I can only go eighteen months without a fix of Greek light and colour and so my favourite holiday spot is the Pelion, where I do very little but sit at a taverna with a glass of chilled Mythos beer and watch fishing boats in the harbour. Not that there isn't much to explore and discover in the peninsula, from the traditional stone villages of the more mountainous north with wonderful walking and the Aegean in the distance, to the softer coastline of the south with its attractive seaside villages and hidden beaches. It is here that we have built up a carefully chosen collection of villas and apartments that allow me to share my enthusiasm with you. And I once saw a centaur...



Laos

Still relatively untouched by mass tourism, Laos is one of southern Asia's last bastions of a slower, simpler life. Now is the time to discover this land of misty mountains, orange robed monks, flowing waterfalls and traditional hill tribes. Explore temples in the ancient spiritual centre of Luang Prabang, trek undiscovered forests, and laze along the Mekong River to the lodge retreats and islands of the south. The remoteness of a country which until recently didn't even have ATMs, is something you have to experience firsthand. Working with our local ground agent, we can tailor an itinerary to be as adventurous or leisurely as you like. (Chris's recommended reading - The Coroner's Lunch featuring Dr Siri Paiboun.)



New York Girl Kate

New York is a city that seems to feature high up everyone's must see list and, once you've been, it's always going to be sitting pretty near the top of your 'favourite places' file. And for good reason - there's just so much to see: famous buildings like the Chrysler, wonderful museums like the MOMA, and perfect people-watching places like Central Park. And it is the people of New York with their restless energy that make it for me. Every time I go it seems to have evolved - with more bars, restaurants, shops, music, and galleries to explore. And you change with it - I've moved on from tiny dark blues bars in Greenwich village to sipping cocktails at the Gansevoort in the Meatpacking District, from shopping at Abercrombie & Fitch to checking out Chelsea Market, from staying at budget Hotel Thirty, Thirty, to the Uptown luxury and incredibly comfortable beds of the Surrey. Think I might take a little passive recreation on the restored High Line this summer.



Northern Norway

If you want something more unusual than Chamonix or Val D'Isere have to offer, then Northern Norway offers fresh new scenery to even the most seasoned skier. Where else in the world can you ski from a mountain peak with views of snow covered islands and glaciers en route to a snowy beach, before catching a boat along the Fjords back to your hotel? Stay at the remote and stylish Lyngen Lodge, two hours east of Tromso, where in the evening you can escape the conventional overcrowded Après Ski to enjoy their cake waffles, relax in the Jacuzzi and hopefully catch a glimpse of the Northern Lights, which are at their peak in 2011/12, so this winter is the time to visit.



Umbria - Annabel's Addiction

My annual forays to Umbria are always rewarded with new surprises, be they wonderful new villas to add to our growing portfolio of properties or simply the discovery of a delightful hill town which has thus far escaped antennae. During the spring and summer months the region comes alive with enthusiastic displays of the local heritage, medieval jousting in Gubbio sitting side by side with the jazz festival in Perugia. I often visit Umbria in the autumn when the change in seasons is reflected not just in the landscapes and the light, but also in the hearty cuisine: rich truffles, beans, lentils and wonderful Sagrantino wines!

"Thank you for helping to arrange what turned out to be our best ever trip to Italy. It was heaven, and we can't thank you enough."

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

St Nicolas Bay- Crete

Crete is always a good choice for a family holiday. You have that fantastic combination of beaches, culture and scary stories about minotaurs that appeal to children everywhere, with regular convenient flights from all over the UK, and a wide range of accommodation to suit the adults. The Small Luxury Hotel group St Nicolas Bay is one of our favourite hotels on the island, located right on the beach, and just outside the smart resort of Aghios Nikolaos, where you'll find a good range of restaurants. We particularly recommend taking one of the villas with a private pool, as that way you can get all the advantages and privacy of a villa holiday whilst being able to use all the resort facilities. With a great spa and three very good restaurants to choose from, it's really got everything you need for your summer holiday.

For the last week of the school summer holidays when it isn't quite so hot and the sea is a perfect temperature, still warm and when for a family for 4, in a family suite, prices start at £1125.00 per person.



Martinhal Beach Resort

Located in the unspoilt western Algarve, Martinhal Beach Resort distinguishes itself with genuine hospitality and understated luxury. This excellent family resort has everything you could wish for, with a great selection of accommodation from a luxury hotel to 1, 2 and 3 bedroom self-catering houses. There are six bars and restaurants, several swimming pools, two tennis courts, two paddle tennis courts and a watersports centre where you can learn to kitesurf, windsurf, or go for a gentle kayak. There is also a kids' club and the 'Blue Room', for older children. For adults, there is the indulgent Finisterra Spa. The fishing village of Sagres with its history as a launch pad for early Atlantic navigators is a stroll along the beach, and there are bicycles for guests to explore the neighbouring national park.

Prices start from £895 per person for a family of four and staying in a 2 bedroom garden house including flights and car hire.



Anantara - Chiang Rai

If you'd like to take the children somewhere different this year then why not go to an Elephant Camp in Northern Thailand? At the Anantara in the Golden Triangle you can learn to be a mahout and spend time getting to know these gentle giants. There is the chance to meet the Akha and Karen hill tribes and visit their villages, to go kayaking or experience the Mekong by longtail boat, and to trek through and learn how to survive in the jungle. The whole family can get involved at the cookery school and take home the knowledge of how to recreate the tastes of Thailand. If you would like to end your holiday on one of Thailand's many pristine beaches, secluded for relaxation or busier for watersports, then we can suggest the perfect island for you.

For 5 nights at the Anantara including flights and transfers, prices start at £1,250pp.



Family holiday in Italy Palazzo Belmonte - Campania

Our favourite hotel in southern Italy offers the perfect mix to keep all members of the family happy. Well, there aren't too many Palazzo hotels set on an all important sandy beach and this one has a range of beautifully appointed rooms and suites. Guests can walk into the local town of Santa Maria di Castellabate for shops and restaurants or hop in the car to nearby Paestum for a slice of Greek history if driving to Roman Pompeii looks a little too far. Add to this a selection of water sports in the next village and boat trips to the Bay of Naples and you can see why the Palazzo Belmonte remains at the top of our list for repeat family holidays in Italy.

Seven nights in two interconnecting rooms at the Palazzo Belmonte in July starts from £1268 per person including flights, accommodation and car hire.



Movenpick El Quesir on the Red Sea

Finding a sunny, winter family destination that doesn't break the bank but isn't packed with people is a tricky task. One place we've found that suits our customers very well over the years is the Movenpick El Quesir on Egypt's southern Red Sea coast. It's a low rise property with bungalows spread along its own perfect beach, a good range of facilities and an excellent kids' club. As usual with the Red Sea, there is plenty of multi-coloured entertainment under the water as it's one of the best places in the world for diving and snorkelling, both of which can be arranged by the hotel while you are there. With regular charter flights now operating to the nearby airport of Marsa Alam, this area probably won't remain quiet and remote for much longer but for the moment you'll be sure to have a great family holiday here.

For travel in February, prices for a family of 4 in 2 interconnecting rooms start at £688pp.



Costa Rican Adventure

Costa Rica is a wonderful destination for families who are looking for adventure and an opportunity to see wildlife close at hand. With long sandy beaches, tropical rainforest and towering volcanoes, there is sufficient variety to keep all ages excited. Spot colourful frogs, nesting turtles, brightly coloured quetzals and howling monkeys in any number of wonderful national parks. A night hike to see lava spewing from the still active Arenal Volcano will hold everyone's attention before the reward of luxuriating in the nearby hot springs. Adrenaline seekers are well served by great breaks for surfing or white water rafting, and you can even ride one of the ubiquitous ziplines through the canopy of Monteverde Cloud Forest. We suggest you spend a few days at the beach to recover from all this exertion - made easier with two coastlines to choose from, and miles of golden sand from Tamarindo in the north to Playa Tortuga in the south. With a good road network in

place, self-driving is a great way to discover this idyllic and varied country.

For an 11 night self-drive family exploration of Costa Rica, prices start at £1,950 per person, based on a family of 4, with accommodation, car hire, flights, and even a few excursions.

"You seem to have what families like us do so taped we even ran into some friends of ours with matching age children."

California

California is a great place to visit all year round due to its consistently sunny climate, and there's nothing quite like good clean American fun to make a family holiday. Children of all ages will love Los Angeles with its theme parks, Hollywood Boulevard and the iconic Hollywood sign. All down the coast to San Diego there are fantastic beaches to explore and the Hyatt at Huntingdon is a great choice for families. The only hotel with direct beach access also has firepits for roasting marshmallows so you can sit round the fire and enjoy the warm evenings.

For the active and nature lovers, combine the Big Sur coast with Yosemite where you can hike and ride (2 wheels and 4 legs) through the high-country meadows and hopefully spot a black bear in the distance! For those with older children, visit vibrant San Francisco to see Alcatraz, make the most of the music and art scene and then take a trip up to Napa Valley to explore the vineyards for some adult indulgence.

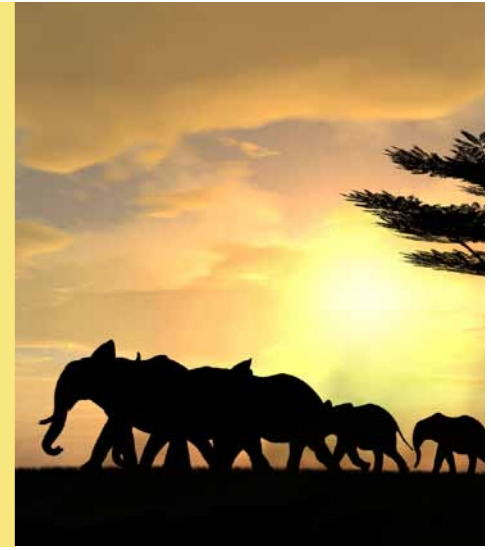
For 12 nights exploring sunny California as a self-drive, with flights, car hire and accommodation for a family of four, prices start at £1,600 per person.



IT'S A WILD WORLD

Kenya

Why is it that so many of our regular Africa hands return to Kenya? It is because the game viewing is so dramatic, and though the Masa Mara is one of the continent's greatest wildlife reserves, there are so many other vast areas to explore. It is still possible to be far from the crowds and see the Big Five in the northern regions of Laikipia and Lewa, northwest of Mt. Kenya. These areas offer visitors diverse habitats and a range of activities such as bush walking, cultural visits, camel treks, horse riding and of course, game drives. Along with the Big Five, you will also have the opportunity to see species not found further south, such as the reticulated giraffe, grevies, zebra, oryx and gerenuk. We can tailor an itinerary to your requirements to make the most of a safari trip to Kenya.



South Africa

For your family's fix of winter sun this year South Africa is the ideal choice and all ages will be captivated by a safari. Whether you choose the wild Kruger in the north or the malaria free Eastern Cape, there's nothing quite like a lion basking in the morning sun to start your day. The Garden Route has a number of small, stylish and family friendly properties as bases for enjoying time trekking, cycling, kayaking, and spotting wildlife. If you'd rather find a nice beach - there are plenty to choose from - and just relax for a few days pottering about in one of the pretty beachfront towns like Plettenberg Bay. For the adventurous, head inland to the Karoo and the Bavianskloof. You'll marvel at the vast landscapes as you brave mountainous terrain in a 4x4, and navigate single lane winding mountain passes. Visit ostrich farms, explore rural towns, enjoy the biltong (ugh! - says editor), look out for kudu and springbok and squeeze yourself through some tight

spots on the adventure tour at the Cango Caves. As you pass through the Winelands, sample some of South Africa's finest, stop in Hermanas to catch a glance of the migrating humpback whales and finish off in awe of Table Mountain in picturesque Cape Town.

A ten night family holiday visiting Cape Town, the Garden Route and an Eastern Cape Safari, with flights, accommodation, car hire and game drives, will cost from £2,500 per person.

Australia - Family Goes Down Under

There is never a bad time of year to visit Australia. Somewhere on this vast and diverse continent the sun will be shining. The trouble with Australia is deciding where to go. You could drive along the east, west and south coasts and find a new beach every day, claiming it as your latest favourite. With the country geared to the outdoor life, there



is never a shortage of activities to take part in; kite surfing, kayaking, cycling, surfing, trekking, riding, you name it. And then there's the food - fresh seafood, delicious wines, lean meat, and free BBQ's at the side of the road should you get peckish en route. We know how difficult it is to plan the perfect holiday when you want to fit in coral reefs, dramatic outback landscapes and world class cities and that's where we come in - it's a long way to go without some expert advice.

14 nights in Australia with flights, car hire, accommodation, and armed with plenty of Real Holidays' insider knowledge, itineraries start at £2,300 pp for a family of 4.

Where should we stopover you will ask? Singapore, Hong Kong and Bangkok are all fascinating choices where you can enjoy a few days break from your long flight, in vibrant surroundings. Also in the region, and on the way to New Zealand, are Kuala Lumpur, Brunei, Taipei, Seoul, Osaka, and Tokyo. A popular newcomer to the route is Emirates, which lets you stop in Dubai.



Vancouver Island - Go West Young Man

No trip to British Columbia is complete without a visit to North America's largest populated island, which is a true nature lover's paradise. Jetting out from Victoria harbour in a Zodiac or luxury yacht to spot orcas and humpback whales is an exhilarating and memorable experience. The best time to go is between April and September, and you can also see sea lions, seals, porpoises and majestic seabirds. Make sure you don't miss the sight of grizzly bears plucking fresh salmon from the river at the remote Knight Inlet Lodge, before retreating to the safety and comfort of your floating home. If possible, and the budget allows, end up near Tofino at the acclaimed eco-resort, the Wickaninnish Inn, where you will be amazed by the waves, wind, and wonderful scenery at this Relais & Chateaux lodge set on a craggy point directly facing the mighty Pacific Ocean.



Borneo - Not Just the Wild Man

Borneo offers a truly memorable wildlife experience made all the more poignant by the disappearing rainforest and the endangered orangutan. Now is the time to visit to support the nature reserves that look after orphaned and injured orangutans, and to boost tourism to ease reliance on the income brought in by palm oil. Not that you need a political reason to visit Borneo, the scenery alone is enough. Deep lush tropical rainforests and a list of natural attractions as long as your arm, hot springs, hornbills, a variety of monkeys, a mountain to climb and pygmy elephants; this area is dense with wildlife and natural beauty. It boasts azure waters, and some of the best diving spots in the world with the chance to swim with turtles and dive with whale sharks.



Ecuador

Ecuador, rich in culture, landscape and wildlife, is a beautiful and fascinating country. Amidst the landscape dotted with volcanoes and well preserved colonial towns, there are also great wildlife opportunities in the vast Amazon jungle, the cloud forests on the lower slopes of the volcanoes with their huge variety of birds, and finally, the magnificent Galapagos Islands. These islands are home to such a diverse range of animals, from marine iguanas, playful sea lions, bluefooted boobies to giant tortoises, that a visit there will be a truly unforgettable experience. It certainly was for one of our more eloquent clients who found himself, 'Knee deep in marine iguanas of various hues; swimming with the naughty sea-lions; even the nurse sharks at the back of the boat put on a kind of synchronised swimming performance at night following the phosphorescence - think Esther Williams moving to the Goldberg Variations.'

THE BIG ADVENTURE

Discover Peru

Peru is filled with interesting cultural wonders and dramatic landscapes. Manmade archaeological sites range from the famous ancient citadel at Machu Picchu and the Sacred Valley with its Inca capital of Cusco – ideally visiting in June to witness the spectacular Inti Raymi Festival of the Sun, to a wealth of pre-Inca archaeological sites and lost cities in the less well known northern region of Peru where the distance from the crowds gives you a real sense of discovery. For the more adventurous, the 4 day classic Inca Trail is a must, allowing you to gaze at the scenic peaks and admire the terraced valley slopes of the Andes. These terraces are seen more dramatically where the Colca Canyon cuts through the mountainous landscape and the Condor flies, a world away from the southern Peruvian rainforest where wildlife enthusiasts can experience their first encounter with the Amazon.

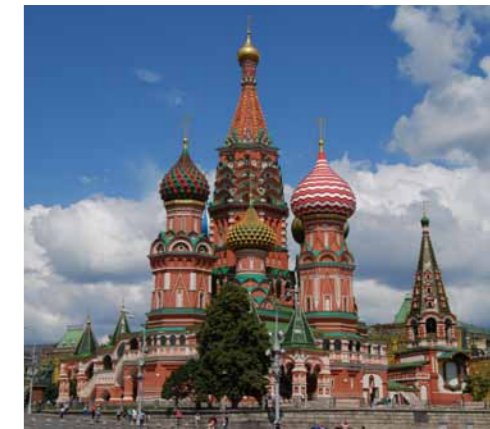


A SENSE OF CULTURE

Syria - Damascene Conversion

Any trip to Syria takes you back in time to the beginning of civilization, and archaeological and cultural riches from Roman, Medieval and Biblical worlds. Allow us to design an eight day tour with you to incorporate the timeless city of Damascus with its contrast of Islamic and Christian sites in the Old City, the amazing archaeological remains of Palmyra, the museums, mosques and markets of ancient Aleppo, and the 12th century Crusader castle of Krak de Chevaliers. Those are just the most obvious sites of interest in this treasure trove of history and fails to mention the considerable welcome you will be given by the Syrian people, often in charming, converted palace hotels.

At this time we are not arranging any tours to this wonderful country until we are sure it is safe to do so.



On the Road in Namibia

Many countries lend themselves well to the "road trip" experience and Namibia stands out as one of the best. The roads are well maintained, they wind through spectacular scenery, and there is little traffic. Do not underestimate the hours of driving involved here but rest assured you will be rewarded with beautiful, undulating landscapes rich in colour. Fellow travellers are often few and far between so at the end of a dusty day on the road the warm welcome you receive at the wonderful camps and lodges we will have prearranged for you is particularly heartwarming. By far my favourite was Doro Nawas Camp with its incredible star gazing and spectacular views over the stark, rugged landscape of Damaraland.

"Thanks for all your help over the last few years - you really have sorted us some amazing holidays."

Head South - South Island New Zealand

New Zealand's South Island is the adventurer's perfect playground. Home to one of the world's highest bungee jumps and canyon swings, it is also a popular destination for sky-diving. The Franz Josef and Fox Glacier are perfect for an introduction to ice climbing and you can choose between mountains for trekking and hills for walking. Explore Doubtful Sound by boat, the remote and imposing fjord at the southern end of the island where hovering mists and magical silence will linger in your dreams. Regardless of how adventurous you like to be, the scenery is immense and the experiences unforgettable, and after all that outdoor stimulus you will surely deserve to sample some of New Zealand's gastronomic delights and famous vineyards. The northern Marlborough region produces some of the world's finest sauvignon blancs, and deserves its reputation as a foodie haven.

Island Hop in Indonesia

With over 20,000 islands making up the Indonesian archipelago, it's difficult to know where to begin. Each is beautifully diverse and offers unique experiences. Bali's appeal is well documented but many people do not realise how much of the island is untouched by tourism. On the east coast, stay at the beachside Alila Manggis near Candidasa, visit traditional markets and laugh with the locals at your attempts at Balinese. Venture on to Suluwesi for a Toraja funeral and experience one of Indonesia's most famous ceremonies, best avoided by the squeamish, as they sacrifice buffalos and pigs. Sail on to the Flores Islands and see giant komodos parade on the beach. Enjoy Lombok with its pristine white sand beaches and the laid back Gili Isles a short boat hop away. Travel on to Java and visit Mount Ljen for the spectacular salt lakes, or take a pony trek at sunrise on Mount Bromo before ending your holiday with a once in a lifetime visit to the ancient Buddhist temple complex of Borobudur.

Cambodia - Angkor Wat and Beyond

Cambodia is a holiday destination in its own right, with plenty to inspire and awe the intrepid traveller. Siem Reap is the gateway to the temples of Angkor Wat, where you can explore the mysterious faces of Bayon, the jungle covered Ta Phrom, and it is worth that early alarm call to take in an evocative sunrise over the ancient ruins. Siem Reap is a lovely city to spend a few days indulging in local café culture and markets. Frenetic Phnom Penh should also not be missed, and visits to the Killing Fields and S-21 are a sobering reminder of the country's not too distant past, although despite this, the friendly nature of the local people is always apparent to the visitor. We can organise guides for you to explore traditional Khmer villages as well as an escape to the relatively untouched beaches and islands of the south coast.

A 10 night trip including flights, hotels and transport costs from £1,880pp.

Cuban Heels

When Real Holidays first started sending our more inquisitive customers to Cuba in the early 90's it was at their and our risk. Key elements like hotel reservations and fully functioning cars were notably unreliable. Whether it is the hotels in Havana, roads throughout the country (ok, sign posting is dreadful), or improving beach resorts and restaurants, the tourist infrastructure is going from strength to strength and there has never been a better time to visit. While for many tourists the quintessential Caribbean beaches and lush countryside will be the draw, most people we send are just as interested in the fabulous, if faded, architecture, the revolutionary heritage, picturesque colonial towns and legendary music. Twenty years of planning itineraries across the island allows us to boast that we can put together one of the best feel-good trips you'll ever take.

A 7 night exploration of Western Cuba will cost from £1,480 per person.

Russia - A City Introduction

We believe that Russia is one of the great undiscovered destinations, awaiting the more intrepid travellers amongst you. But to begin to get to grips with the social, political and geographical reality of the country we suggest you start by exploring the historic cities of Moscow and St Petersburg. In Moscow visit the well known sites of the Red Square with St Basil's Cathedral and Lenin's tomb, see the modern masterpieces in the Pushkin Museum and spend a final evening at the Bolshoi ballet. St Petersburg brings the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries back to life, the stories of the rich and powerful become real as you gaze upon the remains of Tsarist opulence, the Peter and Paul Fortress, summer houses and winter palaces, the vast display of art in the Hermitage, and enjoy an opera at the famed Marinsky.

An itinerary combining 3 nights in Moscow and 3 nights in St Petersburg, taking the new fast train twixt the two costs from £985pp.

EUROPEAN ESCAPES

Pelion

Philip isn't the only Grecophile in town - many of our clients are too, which might explain why some have ended up buying restored houses in the Pelion along the western shore of the Pagasitic Gulf. We represent these and several other villas and hotels that we have been working with for the last six years. For those of you wanting a top of the range villa with four comfortable bedrooms, large pool, panoramic views, and a small beach below, Daphne Villa will meet all your expectations, while if the idea of sitting in the garden of a tastefully converted village house in a traditional Pelion village is more likely to suit you, then Metochi is the perfect place.



LIFE'S A BEACH

Annabel's Ocean Paradise: Turquoise Bay, Western Australia

It is not so much the beach itself in this little visited corner of north-west Australia that is the main draw for me, but what lies just a few steps away in the waters of Ningaloo Reef. Highlights included a leopard shark snoozing on the seabed and an abundance of vivid corals and fish which I have yet to see elsewhere. Not far from here, the highlight of my visit to the region was undoubtedly a breathtaking swim with a bus-sized whale shark, an experience I have yet to top! I haven't had the chance to go back but I will as the accommodation has stepped up a grade with Sal Salis leading the way in luxury beachfront tents.

A trip to Western Australia with flights and 4 nights at Sal Salis starts at £3,275 per person.



Italian City Secrets

Although Italy's cities are filled with the most wonderful museums and art galleries, we know our clients are increasingly drawn to the simple pleasures of city life; discovering a hidden canal-side bar for a post dinner drink in Venice, a memorable meal in Rome's Trastevere district, a morning stroll on Naples' Chiaia seafront, a picnic in Florence's Boboli Gardens. And given courage with an early evening aperitivo you may be ready to flaunt your glad rags for Perugia's ritualistic passeggiata when local people of all ages merge with the students and tourists on Corso Vabucci.

Our preferred guides for anyone booking an Italian City break with us are the American 'City Secrets' series which present the magnificent art, architecture, antiquities and hidden eateries through the eyes of the people who know them best.



On the Road in Spain

Twenty one years ago Spanish Paradors were all the rage amongst the travelling cognoscenti and we cut our teeth on how to tailor-make interesting holidays by incorporating these heritage hotels into fly-drive itineraries. Since then the number of characterful, independently owned hotels in the country has blossomed, which together with the increased number of airports served from the UK, mean a great variety of two and three centre holidays are possible. One of the best ways to discover the essence of this diverse country is to follow a few days in a city with an exploration of the surrounding area - Madrid and then the treasures of Castille; Santiago and the Atlantic coast of Galicia with its delightful seafood; or more obviously Seville and the Andalusian countryside, characterised by the warmth of the people as well as its climate. What better way to take in such a spectrum of landscapes and culture.



Kate Chills Out at the Icehotel

The Icehotel is the kind of place where you will walk around with your mouth open for most of your stay. You'll marvel as you enter through the Narnia-esque reindeer skin covered doors into the lobby of the first hotel in the world made completely of ice. Inside the Icehotel, it's a work of art within a work of art. The interior changes yearly. For 2011 regal clear glass columns and tropical ice carvings of elephants decorated the lobby. The Art Suites are innovative and diverse, with one room playing on the conceit of staying in a giant fridge; oversized cheese, milk cartons and eggs in your room. I felt safe in my room with three life size polar bears on guard around my bed. Activities include snowmobile rides over frozen lakes, moose safaris on horseback, and learning how to sculpt ice. In 2011/12 the Northern Lights cycle peaks, making it the ideal time to travel.

The price starts at £1,083pp for flights, transfers and 3 nights' accommodation.



Jamaica Inn

Deciding your favourite beach in the world is hard. You want no one else on it for a start - well a bar adds to the ambience, and to be able to swim in the sea and retreat to your room for a siesta when you feel like it. A friendly member of staff to take you out on a boat is a nice touch too. Ticking all these boxes is Jamaica Inn, located on its own private 700ft beach covered with champagne coloured soft sand, and often ranked as one of the best in the Caribbean. Relax in your lounge chair under your very own palapa and enjoy the serenity of this uncrowded gem. Ok, it's a close call with Carlisle Bay on Antigua, where the sand is pinker, and the greys and blues of the interiors feel more contemporary, but a somewhat unscientific survey of Real Holidays' guests reveals that Jamaica Inn's old world colonial elegance and unflinching good service wins the day.

Prices for a week start at £1,469 per adult including flights and transfers to Montego Bay.



Do something different: Combine a stay here with a shopping trip to New York. With direct flights between the Big Apple and Montego Bay it is easy to buy your swimwear in Macys and then head to Jamaica for that perfect beach!

"Your consultant was absolutely fantastic. Nothing was too much trouble - she was polite, efficient and extremely helpful. In this day and age it is rare to find someone so dedicated to her job and with such a friendly manner."

Kavos Naxos

When people dream of idyllic beaches they often think of exotic far flung places. However, closer to home on the island of Naxos is one of the best beaches in all of Greece. The combined bays of Agios

Prokopios and Agia Anna form one stretch of sand that is lapped by crystal clear, warm Mediterranean sea. Kick back with a Kindle, take advantage of the watersports and, when lunch time arrives, retreat to the shade of your taverna for a cold beer and a Greek salad.

All you need now is somewhere stylish to rest your lazy head... Well you are in luck. Situated within easy reach of the village is Kavos Naxos, in our opinion the best hotel on the island. With sea views, an infinity pool, a pool side cafe-bar and an excellent bistro, Kavos Naxos makes a perfect escape for couples or families who are looking for a quiet island escape with a perfect Greek beach on your doorstep.

Prices for a week start at £590 per adult including flights to Athens, ferry to Naxos and a transfer from the port.

Do something different: Discover magical parts of the island on a Self-Guided walking holiday arranged by our friends on the island.

HONEYMOON DREAMS

The Mexican Wave

Mexico is an immensely diverse country with a rich cultural heritage and a fascinating history which, combined with fantastic beaches, makes it an ideal honeymoon destination. Visit bustling colonial cities such as Merida, San Miguel de Allende and Oaxaca, the archaeological sites of Uxmal, Palenque, and Chichen Itza, the Aztec ruins of Teotihuacan and fantastic beaches near Tulum with its turquoise sea and fresh water cenotes. Or try our new favourite, the traffic free, laid back island of Holbox where you can go fishing and swimming with whale sharks.



BABYMOON



Italy Has the Romance

It is always a tricky task putting together a honeymoon in Italy as there are so many places to choose from. The Amalfi Coast is quite rightly a romantic choice but I try to steer our clients towards the less visited parts of the country too. For a retreat away from the madding crowd, charming Le Silve, in the midst of Umbrian hills and forests near Assisi, is hard to beat for views, although the Hotel Emilia, perched on the cliffs of the Connerio National Park in the Marche presents a wonderfully romantic seascape from its green terraced lawn. And while the Aeolian Islands may offer the more secret honeymoon escape, the delightful Foresteria Planeta Estate in south west Sicily, where vineyards meet the sea, provides serious wine and food appreciation for the epicurean lover. We'll even provide some Italian love songs to sing together on the road. Ciao Amore!

Maldives - Where Two of the Staff Have Honeymooned

The Maldives offer the embodiment of escapist dreams - breathtaking crystalline waters, swaying palms and powdery sand which glistens in the tropical sun. The islands continue to enchant visitors, who fall in love with the tranquillity and the Robinson Crusoe remoteness. The terrific diversity within Maldivian waters provides some of the most spectacular diving and snorkelling in the world, and it is one of the top destinations for swimming with whale sharks and manta rays.

The hardest decision to be made is which of the luxurious resorts you should stay at. We have a few favourites, such as the intimate Cocoa Island and the high tech elegance of Huvafen Fushi, but you may prefer the more rustic Soneva Fushi - the founding member of the no news no shoes club!

The truth is that no matter what your requirements, be it a post honeymoon family holiday with child care, an active holiday with sailing, sea kayaking and tennis, a spa retreat or a gourmet paradise - there is an island for you.

Do something different: *If the idea of spending two weeks confined to a paradise island makes you anxious then consider bolting the Maldives on to a cultural experience in Sri Lanka or India - both only a short flight away.*

Singapore & Langkawi

A combination of beach and city makes a great honeymoon. We recommend you shake off all that pre-wedding stress and fly to Langkawi to be pampered for your first week of wedded bliss at the stylish Datai. In Langkawi the best days consist of stretching out on a pristine beach and enjoying a lazy lunch. Then maybe spend the afternoon reclining by the pool before indulging in a cocktail or two. To vary your days a little, enjoy a spa treatment, explore the surrounding tropical rainforest on foot or bike, and take a romantic evening boat with the local fishing fleet. Suitably revitalized you'll be ready to make the most of Singapore. Ok, it's impossibly clean and scarily organized, but that makes it easy to navigate and discover its multitude of pleasures. The medley of cultural influences means it's a mecca for foodies and shoppers. Taste some of the best Indian food out of India in Little India and wander through

Chinatown with its maze of red lanterns and cobbled streets looking beautiful at night. Head for the waterfront which is buzzing most evenings and if you have just one meal in Singapore then make sure it's the Malay Chilli Crab.

"We wanted to contact you to say a big thank you. We honestly can say that we had the time of our lives on honeymoon."

...It really was a dream honeymoon thanks to the way you customised it to suit us. Thank you again for your help in organising things. We are always so pleased with the service we get from Real Holidays."

Sandpiper Barbados

OK, it's not as popular yet as the honeymoon, but the Babymoon is a recent trend among expectant parents wanting to get away for some romance and relaxation before the new baby arrives. This is when you want to be looked after, have every desire catered for, access a spa, and a beach paradise where you can work on tanning that baby bump. Our favourite babymoon hotel is the intimate and stylish Sandpiper on a beautiful Barbados beach, a member of Small Luxury Hotels, where the atmosphere is totally relaxed, yet each guest is made to feel special. You may end up putting on a few extra pounds as the cuisine at the romantic terrace restaurant has won several awards, but we think a little indulgence is allowed at such a precious time of life. Warning - you may come back with the baby, as other babymooners have!

Prices from £1,635 pp in low season to £2,750 in high, based on a Garden Room and BA or Virgin flights.

REAL HOLIDAYS & THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT



Matt's Famous Five

- Sipping a cold beer on the roof terrace at Bundi Vilas - watching the monkeys take over the world
- Scooting around Goa
- Waking up on the train with a view of Jaisalmer emerging out of the desert landscape
- Watching a religious ceremony above the ghats at Mahweshwar
- Enjoying a fierce Thali in the backstreets of Chennai...

The Indian Subcontinent is at once a fascinating, intense, chaotic and colourful region, and when a holiday there is planned with care and expert knowledge we believe that you will be rewarded as we have been. With over 10 years experience of arranging tailor-made holidays to the region, Real Holidays is a specialist tour operator to India and Sri Lanka and our aim is to offer every guest, be they first time visitors or seasoned travellers, a unique and unforgettable holiday, a seamless journey, in comfort and style, arranged with imagination and thorough professionalism.



The next few pages are intended to give you a taste of what is possible but please contact us to discuss your requirements, as each enquiry is dealt with on an entirely individual basis and there are always new properties and new destinations we are keen for you to sample.

When to Go

October to April is generally the best time to visit India whilst December to April is the best time for Sri Lanka. However there are regional variations within both countries. North and Central India remain dry until the monsoon arrives in July and Sri Lanka has a tropical climate and is subject to two monsoons - the south west rains occur between May and the end of July, whilst the north and north-east rains occur between October and January. This does mean that August and the summer holidays are a great time to travel to Sri Lanka.

First Time Rajasthan

If you have never been to India before then your starting point should be Rajasthan, the most majestic and romantic of all the Indian states. Take in the dramatic fortress cities of Jodhpur and Jaisalmer and experience a camel trek into the Thar Desert, where the only flashes of colour are the bright saris worn by the village women. Visit the magnificent palaces in Jaipur and Udaipur and enjoy searching for tigers in the dense forest of the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve. Stay in royal castles, where you will encounter stories of the chivalry, romance and bravery of the Rajput warriors, or beautifully converted havelis and palaces.

Rajasthan is a myriad of bustling markets and colourful festivals and, despite its popularity, cannot be missed. And for anyone longing for a return visit there are always opportunities to find the road less travelled. Two week itineraries start at £2,100 including flights to Delhi.

Do something different: Combine your visit to Rajasthan with a stay in the Kumaon Hills, an ideal place to view the Himalayan range and accessible by overnight train from Delhi.

"We are sitting in the splendour of the Maharana's suite in the Taj Lake Palace... The Lake is brimful of water, the service is beyond description and our guide yesterday was quite excellent."

Temples, Forts & Palaces.

If you are interested in the spiritual heart of India, ancient temples, forts and palaces, then this is the trip for you. Begin your journey in Varanasi, the holiest city of learning and pilgrimage, located on the banks of the sacred River Ganges. A short flight takes you on to Khajuraho where you can wander freely around the erotic temples, or hire bikes and venture further afield to



local villages. Continue by road to Gwalior, not forgetting a day of relaxation in the peaceful village of Orchha where you can visit the formidable fort rising up from the plains. Stay at the beautifully restored Usha Kiran, once a Maharaja's palace and now a great base to explore a city still relatively unvisited by foreign tourists. Catch a train to Agra and enjoy sunrise and sunset over the Taj Mahal and visits to Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri before ending up in Delhi for your flight home

A fortnight's trip travelling by train, plane and automobile costs from £2,750

Do something different: Avoid an overnight in Agra and enjoy a few nights at Chambal Safari Lodge, at the heart of the Chambal Wildlife Reserve. The area is known for its birdlife but also the Bateshwar Temples which, every November, play host to an annual cattle fair which brings thousands of pilgrims as well as traders - a colourful spectacle completely untouched by modern commercialism.



Sri Lanka Family Adventure

We are sending increasing numbers of families to Sri Lanka in the August summer holidays. Mix culture and wildlife with a stay in the cultural triangle where you can climb the impressive rock outcrop of Sigiriya to view the remains of one of the former Buddhist capitals, and track herds of wild elephants in Minneriya National Park. Head off to the hill country where you can mountain bike through tea plantations and hike to World's End - which marks the point where the hill country's southern escarpment plunges a kilometre to the plains below.

Kids will love a camping safari in Yala National Park, where you can spot leopards, before enjoying some down time on the beach near to the historic fort town of Galle. Here they can learn to surf, visit turtle sanctuaries and go whale spotting. Add all this to the great variety of accommodation, from plantation house hotel to contemporary villa, and the ease of travelling between

destinations (we include a car and driver) and you have the makings of a wonderful family adventure.

Do something different: Rent a villa in Galle Fort where you can enjoy shopping for food with the in-house chef before spending the afternoon on the beach.

"This was one of the most memorable trips we have ever had, and we are most grateful for your wonderful itinerary and great relationships on the ground."

On the Trail of the Tiger

Wildlife enthusiasts can embark on an adventure to central India and to the tiger sanctuaries of Bandhavgarh, Kanha and Pench, which provided the backdrop and inspiration for Kipling's Jungle Book, and still remain some of the best places to see this majestic animal today.

Starting with Bandhavgarh, a relatively small park in terms of size, with dense sal and bamboo forests and stunning grasslands, you move on to its neighbour, Kanha. Although the density of tiger is less

than in Bandhavgarh, Kanha offers a much less congested safari experience and is one of the largest reserves in India, occupying a beautiful location on a plateau comprising a crescent of forested hills and undulating grasslands with many rivers and streams. A policy of careful wildlife management over the last 30 years has seen a steady increase in the numbers of tigers and leopards, as well as a resurgence of the rare barasingha. With over 200 species of birds it is also a birdlovers' paradise. The trio is completed

with a visit to Pench in the rolling Satpura Hills, where the game congregates around the water holes of the dried-up Pench River which meanders north to south through the reserve. In two weeks we can take you to all three, giving you maximum opportunity to see the tiger in its natural habitat, but also including stops in Agra to see the Taj Mahal, and the exciting cities of Delhi and Mumbai.



Do something different: Finish your trip with a flight south to Hyderabad, India's sixth largest city. The Nizams of Hyderabad built beautiful mosques and Islamic monuments, and it became India's Islamic art and cultural centre. Visit the Charminar, built in 1591 and consisting of four 56 metre minarets linked by intricately carved arches and a beautiful small mosque on the second floor. The impressive Golconda Fort is a short excursion from the city, and a fine example of a medieval Indian Fortress.



Rural Gems of India

Many of you may well have been to India before but there is always somewhere new to explore and for those seeking a little known slice of India we suggest you concentrate on off-the-beaten-track Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Witness towns and villages where you'll feel that time has stood still, and where, with any luck, you'll be the only foreigner for hundreds of miles! Take the Shatabdi Express from Delhi to Bhopal and begin your journey with a visit to Sanchi where some of the oldest and most interesting Buddhist structures in India remain. From here venture into the rarely visited Satpura National Park where, uniquely to India, visitors can explore the park by foot and boat, meaning you get to experience the wildlife and the jungle in ways you cannot by jeep.

A long drive takes you to Mahweshwar for a magical stay at Ahilya Fort, an extraordinary experience and one which is straight out of

the 18th century. The majestic 250 year old fort sits on the edge of a cliff, high above the sacred Narmada River. The views over the river and down to the ghats are exceptional at any time of the day.

Cross into Rajasthan by train and visit Bundi - a delightful town which has managed to maintain a very medieval feel, with narrow cobbled streets, pretty blue-painted Bhramin houses, friendly bazaars and temples galore. Bundi Palace, dating back to the 17th century, looms over the town and there is also a deserted fort to explore.

A trip encompassing rural Rajasthan would not be complete without a visit to the unhurried and picturesque village of Shahpura before ending your journey with a stay at the Udai Bilas in the tribal village of Dungapur. Founded in the 13th century, Dungarpur is a picturesque town set amongst the rugged peaks of the Aravalli Mountains and a great destination for those looking for a taste of rural India to end their trip.

Do something different: Continue your trip south and visit the state of Gujarat. India's most westerly state is blessed with a wild and deserted coastline, countless palaces and holy Jain temples which attract white-robed pilgrims in their thousands. The desolate wilderness of the Kutch region, home to the wild ass, has a rich tradition of tribal arts and crafts and the finest hand-made embroidered textiles are produced here.

"We had a great driver who, despite camels, tractors, cows and on coming traffic we all felt completely safe with."

Cultural Sri Lanka

When an overpowering need for a cultural fix strikes, you should head straight for Sri Lanka where the main cultural influence is early Buddhism, brought to the island by Mahinda, the son of the great Indian king Asoka, in the 3rd century BC. The archaeological sites at Anuradhapura, Sigiriya, Dambulla and Polonnaruwa are a record of a golden age of Buddhism covering fifteen centuries. Today the most sacred site is the well known Temple of the Tooth at the former capital, Kandy, where the Buddha tooth relic currently resides and where the colourful Esala Perehera festival takes place each summer.

Armed with your car and driver, who also acts as your guide, we can introduce you to all these cultural highlights in addition to spending some time surrounded by beautiful tea plantations in the heart of Sri Lankan hill country. It is experiences like these and a stay in the historic Galle Fort that make

one aware how influenced the country has been by the religion and colonization by the Dutch, the Portuguese and the British, while at the same time retaining its ancient cultural roots. While in the hills, enjoy a journey on the scenic country steam train, sample the delicious cuisine and, when cultural overload threatens, crash out at a spa hotel on a golden sandy beach. With direct flights on Sri Lankan Airlines and relatively short travelling distances between destinations, you can consider doing a trip here in 10 days.

A 10 night tailor made holiday taking in these key experiences costs from £1,900 per person.

Do something different: Add in a side trip to the beautiful beaches near Trincomalee on Sri Lanka's undiscovered East coast. Catch Philip there this August.



Beach Junkies

India and Sri Lanka share a combined coastline of over 8000kms which means that there are plenty of idyllic beaches on which to rest and unwind during your holiday. Often seen as an add-on to a more in depth itinerary, there is no reason not to consider either of these countries if you are seeking a beach escape.

Most people are aware of the former Portugese colony of Goa, and possibly deterred from travelling there for being too well known on the tourist circuit since the long gone days of the hippy trail. But with sixty miles of coastline, there is more than

enough uninterrupted sand for the anti-social beachcomber, with hotels ranging in style from the Vivanta Taj resort to the charming Siolim House in north Goa. Further south you reach the more sedentary and tranquil northern Keralan coast where a week at the Relais & Chateaux retreat of the Neeleshwar Hermitage should satisfy even the most selective of beach fanatics.

In Sri Lanka the south, west and east coasts are lined with beaches, which means that at the right time of year you could almost travel around the whole island without being too far from your own patch of golden sand.

If you prefer to avoid too much moving around, then you can head straight for one of the lovely villa style hotels in Thalpe - Apa Villas and Frangipani Tree are two competing favourites of the staff here - where you will only be fifteen minutes from the fort town of Galle, with its growing number of restaurants and boutique shops.

Do something different: For a real Robinson Crusoe experience head to the idyllic Andaman Islands. Accessible by flight from Chennai or Kolkata, these islands are a diver's paradise and offer a sense of pure beach escapism.



SILVER FOX TRAVEL



Romantic Kerala

With its abundant greenery, rolling hills of the Western Ghats, wildlife sanctuaries, spice plantations and serene backwaters, Kerala is rightly referred to as "God's Own Country" and rivals Rajasthan as the most popular area of India for tourists to visit. The region follows a much gentler pace than its northern counterparts and has a fascinating mix of influences from the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs and Chinese, who came to trade spices and ivory to the Dutch, Portuguese and British - all of whom have left their mark. In a ten day trip you can easily take time to get to know the melting pot harbour of Cochin, with its famous Chinese fishing nets, before ascending to the spice plantations and wildlife sanctuary at Periyar. No trip to Kerala is complete without spending some time on the backwaters, an intricate maze of canals, rivers and lakes where the way of life has changed little throughout the centuries. The scenery is best witnessed aboard your own

private rice barge before enjoying at least a couple of nights relaxing on the beach. Those with more time can add in some trekking around the tea plantations near Munnar or venture into lesser visited areas such as Sultan's Battery and Tellicherry at the very north of the state.

Do something different: More so than any other Indian state, Kerala offers the visitor an opportunity to stay in a family home in one of numerous delightful homestay experiences. What better way to get to know a destination than to stay with local people sharing some of their daily experiences, and enjoying their wonderful home cooking?

"What can I say? Thanks for arranging the holiday of a lifetime! We were totally blown away by India."



Summer Trekking in Ladakh

Trekking in the Himalaya poses a problem in the summer because of the monsoon. Ladakh, however, a small corner in the far north of the country, offers perfect weather conditions for summer treks, located as it is on the Tibetan Plateau in the rain shadow. This high altitude trekking destination has a short season, with the weather allowing access only between late May and late September, but with some of the most dramatic landscapes on the planet, it's worth grabbing that limited opportunity to visit the wild remote kingdom. You will need at least 10 days in 'Little Tibet'; as it's known, to cope with the acclimatisation process. In this time you can visit the historic villages of Shey and Likhir, go rafting through the Zaskar Canyon and enjoy a three night trek along the northern side of the Indus Valley.

Accommodation in the villages is in renovated traditional houses which are for exclusive use, come with a chef and service

staff, and are used as your base for walking and cultural trips in the Indus Valley. Whilst trekking, you will stay in comfortable dome tents with the full support of guides and porters.

A ten night trip costs from £3,500 per person

Do something different: The monsoon season in Rajasthan is sharp but short, and by August most of Rajasthan remains free of rain, making it an ideal, and amazingly economical, time to visit this beautiful state as a fascinating balance to your adventure in Ladakh.

"The organisation was amazing from the minute we landed to the minute we got on the plane back home. Everybody was really great and so helpful. We didn't have to make any decision everything just happened and was done in the most thoughtful way."



I get fed up with all this '50 is the new 30' malarkey - I don't ever want to sleep in an Ibiza ditch again because you get woken up by a donkey and covered in mosquito bites, but I didn't mind then. Sometimes it may be difficult for the staff here (average age about 14) to appreciate the somewhat different priorities of the more mature traveller compared to the 'must have an experience' demands of their contemporaries.

I know that high up the list are:

- 'It must be quiet'
- 'The food needs to be interesting'
- 'I want stimulating culture'
- 'King size beds rather than antique brass beds for dwarves'
- 'Dream like views'
- 'Classy pool loungers'
- 'A city that energises'
- 'Walking not trekking'



We think we are pretty good at helping match those priorities to the right holiday, so come and talk to me if you like the sound of:

- The Tongariro Crossing - New Zealand
- Alonissos rather than Skiathos
- Boston's Freedom Trail
- Uncompromising local food and wine in Puglia
- La Folie Lodge on the banks of the Mekong in southern Laos
- John Fort as your guide in Rome
- Catching Eric Clapton at the Umbria Jazz Festival
- Drinking Pinot Noir by the Umpqua River
- Getting lost on the Lycian Way
- Looking at Greek goats through your binoculars.

All right, the last one's personal, but we are surprisingly sympathetic to the more idiosyncratic requests of the older traveller.

Recommend a Friend Offer

Recommend Real Holidays to a friend and get a £50 voucher to spend on your next holiday with us.

All they need to do is quote the code RHPF11 as well as your details when they make a booking and we'll send you a £50 voucher.*

That's £200.00 off your next holiday if you refer four friends!

*Terms and conditions apply. For full details contact one of our team.

Fashion designer Julien McDonald dubbed Philip Davies's team of travel experts the most dependable he had ever come across. All of the widely travelled advisors have a gift for organising exactly what their clients want whether you need two days off or two months travelling around the Himalayas. They offer perfectly arranged itineraries for independent travellers, spiced up business trips, honeymoons or family holidays. And the team has a little black book of secret recommendations garnered from their own travels and those clients - 75 per cent of who are repeat customers.
Evening Standard

"I cannot tell you how much of a relief it was to have someone at the end of the phone to help when the whole holiday seemed to be going pear shaped. We're telling all our friends about the enormous added-value we got by booking through Real Holidays."

"All the arrangements made by you went perfectly. Thank you for all your help. I will certainly recommend Real Holidays to friends"

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Creating real travel experiences

