

**Client:** River Cruise Line  
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2 A boat trip from Pacific Resort Aitutaki Nui

# 30 lazy tropical getaways

Kick back in Kenya, mellow out in Mexico, or indulge in Indonesia.

**Richard Mellor** has the best trips for recharging your batteries this winter

## 1 Beach and city in Cuba

TravelLocal has a slow-paced highlights tour of western Cuba. You'll start in the charismatic capital, Havana, learning salsa steps and touring the city in an American old-timer car, before moving on to green Viñales, two and a half hours' drive west, and visiting a tobacco farm. The clincher is two days beside a dreamy beach in Varadero, with water sports, including snorkelling and sailing, available. You'll stay in a resort here, but before that it's *casas particulares* — private homes turned guesthouses.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,523pp, including flights, transfers, excursions and four other meals (0117 325 7898, [travellocal.com](http://travellocal.com))

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## 2 Polynesian perfection

With commercial activity prohibited in a 50-nautical-mile perimeter around each of the Cook Islands, nature thrives. As well as dives to see the beaked whales and reef sharks now protected here, other reasons to make the lengthy trek to these South Pacific specks include bathing in cave pools, sailing across turquoise lagoons and days devoted to absurdly perfect beaches. Base is a thatch-and-wood beachfront bungalow at Pacific Resort Aitutaki Nui.

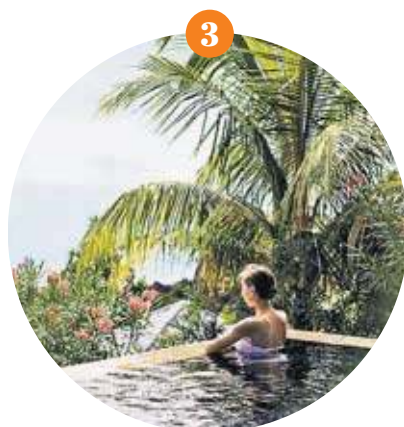
**Details** Five nights' B&B from £2,850pp, including flights via Los Angeles and transfers (01494 678400, [turquoiseolidays.co.uk](http://turquoiseolidays.co.uk))

## 3 Swim the Seychelles

One of the world's great hotel pools awaits at Raffles Seychelles, the upmarket hotel chain's sumptuous base on Praslin island. It's nearly 150ft long, and its indigo waters contrast with the surrounding jungly slopes and the lighter blue Indian Ocean below. The 86 villas — each with a plunge pool and a sea-facing terrace — cascade down to white-sand Anse Takamaka.

Praslin is also home to Vallée de Mai, where rare coco de mer palms grow.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £3,500pp, including flights and private transfers (01242 547708, [abercrombiekent.co.uk](http://abercrombiekent.co.uk)) ▶





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#### 4 Mix it up in Mexico

Fancy having a dip with dolphins? Scheduled to open today, Mexico's Kasa Hotel Riviera Maya offers that treat courtesy of its Dolphin Discovery programme. Thrill-seeking guests can also dive into cenotes (natural sinkholes), take skin-detoxifying clay baths and dine at the modern Mexican restaurant Kocina. Set in a marina and leafy golf enclave that's segregated from Riviera Maya's crowds, the 37-room hotel also has an infinity pool for when you tire of the Caribbean Sea beach, and can arrange cycle trips to Mayan ruins. **Details** B&B doubles from £128 (0800 0482314, slh.com). Fly to Cancun with Tui or British Airways

#### 5 Stars align in the Dominican Republic

If tackling the Caribbean's highest-rated golf course, playing tennis or polo, or even learning pottery sound too much like hard work, you can always just wallow on Casa de Campo's powdery private beach. Beyond the swanky resort's 7,000 swanky acres, daily boat rides deliver you to uninhabited Isla Catalina for hours of snorkelling or diving. High-profile visitors have included Richard Branson and Justin Bieber, while David Guetta and Elton John have performed here. **Details** Seven nights' all-inclusive from £1,900pp in March, including flights from Gatwick and transfers (0344 4930787, britishairways.com)

#### 6 Flavour of St Barths

After twin closures — first to repair Hurricane Irma damage, then to absorb a neighbouring beach hotel — oh-so-swanky Cheval Blanc St-Barth reopens on the French-owned isle in December, and with a new youthful, glamorous chef. Jean Imbert, who already oversees Swan in Miami with the rapper Pharrell Williams, plus three starry Parisian bistros, has promised to recreate local West Indian flavours as he takes charge of La Case. There's also a Guerlain spa, a pool, direct beach access and 19 blue-white suites. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £3,985pp, including flights, transfers and

UK airport lounge passes (01244 897271, elegantresorts.co.uk)

#### 7 Cocoons in Thailand

Amid jungle on Phuket, the eight Keemala Bird's Nest Pool Villas are thatched, wood-hewn pods suspended from the jungle canopy. Each has a pool and terrace from which the Andaman Sea can be spied, while a superking-size bed and a freestanding bathtub offer similar views. All of which makes them ideal for honeymooners. Cuisine fusing eastern and western styles and a spa await at ground level. There are hourly shuttles to Kamala beach. **Details** B&B doubles from £457 (0330 1003180, mrandmrsmith.com). Fly to Phuket with Thai Airways or Emirates

#### 8 Costa Rica glamping

When it opens early next year, the Nayara Tented Camp will bring African safari style to Costa Rica. That's thanks to its 29 canvas-crowned tents, with tropical murals and jungly palettes. There are four-poster beds and air conditioning, but the highlight awaits outside: each features a hot spring-fed plunge pool facing the Arenal Volcano. You can also expect canopy walks to birdwatch and strolls through Nayara's sloth sanctuary. Life here is slow-paced. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £4,475pp, including flights and transfers (020 3993 5593, scottdunn.com)

#### 9 Off-grid Panama

There's a whiff of Jurassic Park about Islas Secas, which relaunches this winter with a spa. Not because a puddle-shaking T. rex stalks this privately owned Pacific coast archipelago, but due to the 14 islands' virgin feel. Off-grid and 38 miles from the nearest town, Islas Secas has only four luxury villas and three new tented casitas — with outdoor bathtubs. Activities include diving, rainforest hikes and counting coconuts on sandy beaches. **Details** Seven nights' all-inclusive from £8,385pp, including flights, transfers, a night in Panama City at La Concordia and most activities (020 7993 6930, plansouthamerica.com)

#### 10 Colombia for couples

Original Travel has devised a 12-day itinerary combining sightseeing and sandy shores specifically with couples in

mind. It begins in the capital, Bogota, with a city tour and some Amazonian-style fine dining. After the subterranean Salt Cathedral and a farmhouse stay amid the hilly "coffee region" — hiking and horse riding optional — comes colourful Cartagena. Explore its blossom-dusted streets before 24 hours among the coral reefs of the Rosario Islands. A candlelit Cartagena dinner in Lobo de Mar rounds things off nicely. **Details** 11 nights' B&B from £4,100pp, including flights, all transfers and UK airport lounge access (020 7978 7333, originaltravel.co.uk)

#### 11 Galapagos island hop

Ranked among the world's greatest wildlife destinations, the Galapagos islands have inspired everyone from Charles Darwin to David Attenborough. You can tour them by boat, yet island-hopping trips based at beach lodges give you more freedom. The South American specialist Real World Holidays suggests stays on Floreana, Isabela and Santa Cruz during a private itinerary that includes snorkelling with sea lions and giant tortoise spotting. **Details** Seven nights' full board from £3,317pp, including all flights, transfers from Quito, guiding and park fees (0113 262 5329, realworldholidays.co.uk)

#### 12 Caribbean villa

In the north of St Lucia, where the flawless shores give way to old plantations, jungly waterfalls, zip wires and the Pitons mountains, you'll find glamorous three-storey Wild Orchid. Sea views stretching to neighbouring Martinique can be enjoyed from its heated pool and veranda. You also get mature tropical gardens busy with butterflies, while inside are a top-notch kitchen and three bedrooms. **Details** A week's self-catering for six from £3,973, or from £2,751 for two (0800 1337999, oliverstravels.com). Fly to St Lucia with Virgin Atlantic or British Airways

#### 13 Beachside in Brazil

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Jungle flanks three sides of Trancoso, a teeny town on Brazil's Discovery Coast in Bahia. The fourth is a fudge-coloured sandy beach extending for 15 miles. Once a fishing village, the town now offers boutiques and fine restaurants. Its best hotel, UXUA Casa, has a spa and pool villas converted from fishermen's houses. The furniture is hand-carved, and much of the fruit and veg is grown on site. *Pao de queijos* (baked cheese rolls) are served for breakfast while guitar music floats by on the breeze.  
**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £2,865pp, including flights and private transfers (01603 340680, [humboldttravel.co.uk](http://humboldttravel.co.uk))

#### 14 Principe luxe for less

Part of a two-island country (together with bigger Sao Tome) 140 miles west of mainland Africa, Principe is a beach

destination that provides affordable luxury. Set up camp at Bom Bom, the most authentic of three hotels funded by the philanthropist Mark Shuttleworth. It has 20 thatched bungalows, two palm-lined beaches and a pool. Boats will take you whale watching or there are visits to the capital, Santo Antonio.

**Details** Ten nights' half-board — six at Bom Bom and four on Sao Tome — from £2,745pp, including all flights (via Lisbon) and transfers (020 7666 1260, [rainbowtours.co.uk](http://rainbowtours.co.uk))

#### 15 Yoga in Thailand

Yoga in all forms takes place daily at Absolute Sanctuary, a wellness retreat with banana-coloured buildings backing on to forested hillside on the island of Koh Samui. Join as many sessions as you like with Healing Holidays' unlimited pass. The rest of the time is up to you: there's a large pool with sunloungers to chill out on, beaches to visit — regular shuttles run — a spa to sample and healthy food from, er, the Love Kitchen to gobble. Bedrooms are a hodgepodge of bright, bold pastel shades.

**Details** Seven nights' full board from £2,099pp, including flights, transfers, yoga tuition and unlimited yoga-class access (020 7135 2436, [healingholidays.com](http://healingholidays.com))

#### 16 Lie low in Fiji

Pacific Ocean hideaways needn't cost the earth — especially because getting to them will. While Bora Bora and the like are strictly for the oligarchs among us, Crusoe's Retreat, on Fiji's main isle, Viti Levu, is a comparative bargain. Based in traditional wood-and-straw *bures*, its guests have access to a white-sand Coral Coast beach, a pool, a spa and activities such as canoeing. Musicians perform at the regular oven-cooked *lovo* feasts.

**Details** Full-board seaside *bures* from £102 ([crusoesretreat.com](http://crusoesretreat.com)). Taxis cost about £10 an hour and return ferries start at £71. Flights via Los Angeles cost about £1,000 with Fiji Airways

#### 17 Authentic Cape Verde

There's more to this ten-island archipelago than year-round sunshine and pristine beaches. To uncover it, skip the larger resorts of touristy Sal and stay on Boa Vista at the ten-room Guest House Orquidea, where a secluded beach abuts hibiscus-scented, turtle-patrolled gardens and a courtyard of banana trees. Excursions to whale-watch, windsurf, snorkel over shipwrecks or quad-bike can be arranged.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,149pp, including flights, private transfers, taxes and UK airport lounge access (01489 866969, [capeverde.co.uk](http://capeverde.co.uk))

#### 18 A trip you can't refuse

Mafia Island is more affordable and empty than nearby Zanzibar. Typifying its barefoot vibe is Butiama Beach, where 15 bungalows line a sandy stretch. Each has a veranda with hammocks for sunset watching, plus wooden furniture assembled from old dhows. The thatched main area includes an open-sided restaurant and pool.

**Details** Seven nights' half-board from £1,600pp, including flights, transfers and the use of kayaks (01822 600600, [ganeandmarshall.com](http://ganeandmarshall.com))

#### 19 Bucket-list Brazil

This three-stop luxury trip is paced to leave plenty of time for exploration. In Rio de Janeiro that could mean lolling on Ipanema Beach, visiting the Statue of Christ the Redeemer, attending samba shows or eating barbecue in a classic



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*churrascaria* restaurant. At Iguazu you can admire the world's largest waterfall from a helicopter flyover. And in the Amazon, based at a riverside lodge, there's scope for fishing, caiman safaris or jungle-inspired spa treatments.

**Details** 12 nights' B&B from £4,898pp, with flights, all transfers, all meals in the Amazon and excursions (020 3553 9647, [journeylatinamerica.co.uk](http://journeylatinamerica.co.uk))

## 20 Safari then seaside

Here's an eye-catching bush-and-beach break in Kenya: six nights in the country's three best parks, Amboseli, Laikipia and the Masai Mara. On 4x4 tours you should see enough lions, giraffes, elephants and hippos to exhaust multiple phone batteries. Edit those photos during five nights at a bijou resort on Diani Beach, where dives and spa treatments are on the menu.

**Details** 12 nights' B&B from £5,190pp, including flights, all transfers, all meals and activities on safari (020 8898 8533, [cedarberg-travel.com](http://cedarberg-travel.com))

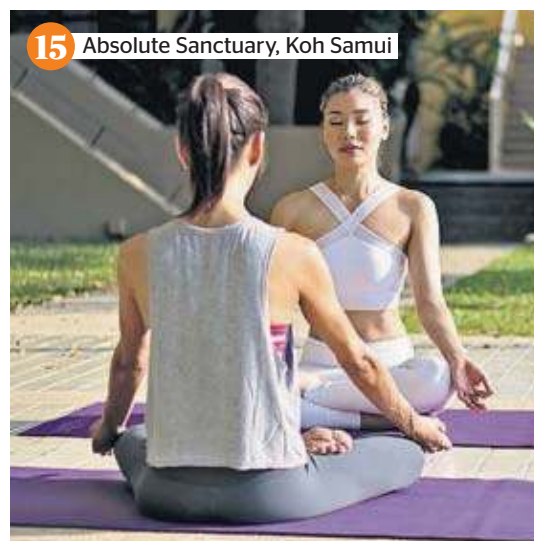
## 21 Paradise in Mauritius

At Paradise Beach in southern Mauritius families and groups can enjoy the best of both worlds: readily available water sports, chefs and babysitting services, with the freedom of self-catering. It's stylish too, with each apartment coming with sea-view terraces or balconies. There's also a shared pool, and you're steps from the sublime sand of Pointe d'Esny. Take a boat to the nature reserve on Île aux Aigrettes to see giant tortoises.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,219pp, including flights and private transfers (01204 474801, [destinology.co.uk](http://destinology.co.uk))

More escapes overleaf

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## 22 Slow-paced India

Real Holidays' slow-paced Kerala for Kids itinerary has been designed for families, but it works just as well for two adults. Fort Kochi is the first stop, a café-crammed place where fishermen use vast bamboo nets, and masked Kathakali dancers perform. After dolphin-spotting boat trips and time on the Periyar River there's a chance to make your own unique brew amid the tea-growing hills. Last stop is a luxury cottage beside the Backwaters, Kerala's canals.

**Details** Ten nights' B&B for a family of four from £2,490pp, with flights (020 7359 3938, realholidays.co.uk)

## 23 Maldives for less

Most Maldives retreats cost an arm and a leg, if not more. Others only appear cheaper because their quoted rates don't include meals — cheeky given they tend to have sole occupation of islets, meaning there's nowhere else to eat. Unusually affordable, however, is the Riu Atoll resort, which opened in May. On a private island fringed by the obligatory powdery beaches, its perks include a pool and swim-up bar, three restaurants and stilted suites above a lagoon. Diving and spa treatments can be arranged and there's nightly entertainment.

**Details** Seven nights' all-inclusive from £1,896pp with flights and all transfers (020 3636 1931, tui.co.uk)

## 24 Affordable Sri Lanka

The Amari Galle Sri Lanka resort on the island's southern coast has sea-facing rooms for a song this winter. It also has a swimming-pool deck, a private beach and the Breeze Spa. The only stress will be deciding which day trips to go on. Galle Fort and its lighthouse?

Elephant and leopard-seeking safaris at Udawalawe? Whale-watching cruises? Not bad conundrums to have.

**Details** Seven nights' half-board from £839pp, including flights and transfers (020 3993 4610, bestattravel.co.uk)

## 25 Truly all-inclusive

Open since September, the Pullman Maldives Maamutaa's all-inclusive offering really means that — even the premium alcohol brands are part of the price. You can dine in six restaurants across the island, on everything from Middle Eastern cuisine to vegetarian and vegan fare at Phat Chameleon. Guests can swim off dreamy beaches or in a lagoon, while divers might see up to 13 species of sharks in the surrounding waters. Choose from 122 over-water and beachside villas, including two with underwater bedrooms.

**Details** Five nights' all-inclusive from £2,373pp, including taxes (00 960 682 0909, accorhotels.com). Return transfers from Malé cost an extra £280pp for stays of five nights or longer. Fly to Malé with British Airways

## 26 The real Mauritius

Salt of Palmar, an innovative 59-room resort on the east coast of Mauritius, has been described as a "colour safari" thanks to the exotic shades by the French muralist Camille Walala.

Electric-blue rails line terracotta walls, and monochrome stripes are a theme. Rooms are calmer, but full of personality — and space. Other reasons to go include the sugar-white beach, Mauritius's first rooftop bar, a spa and cultural options, from sega concerts to basket-weaving classes. Open-top Mini Coopers, each packed with a guidebook written by locals, can be hired to explore.

**Details** Seven nights' self-catering for six from £1,765pp, including flights and transfers (020 7112 0019, fleewinter.com)

## 27 Tune out in Jamaica

In 1985 Jon Baker began Gee Street Records, going on to launch groups such as the Stereo MCs. A few decades later he also founded — with fellow music industry veteran Steve Beaver — the Geejam Hotel amid sea-facing rainforest on Jamaica. Here the pair promise to deliver some authentic Jamaican culture, via reggae concerts and DJ sets at weekends. Their other pledge is luxury: there's a new infinity pool, dreamy white cabins and a nearby private beach.

Swimmable waterfalls are close by.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £2,175pp, including flights and taxes (01752 880880, tropicbreeze.co.uk)

## 28 Angkor and relax

Jaya House River Park, a Siem Reap boutique hotel close to the temples of Angkor, is eco-friendly and local NGOs have contributed bright artworks. Good food and a chrome-tiled pool enable restful pauses between sightseeing. Book guided temple tours, such as sunrise at Angkor Wat, with AboutAsiaTravel

£1,745pp, including flights via Ho Chi Minh City, private transfers, a spa treatment, a city tour, laundry and a complimentary minibar (020 8741 7390; wildfrontierstravel.com)

## 29 Indulge in Indonesia

Sumba Island is twice the size of Bali, yet far less well known. Pleasingly, mass tourism has yet to intrude on its beaches and tropical forests. Stay at the private Nihi Sumba resort and you can go ultra-indulgent by bolting on a night at the new two-person Villa Rahasia, which has its own sandy cove. Indulge in unlimited spa treatments, plunge-pool swims and fire-cooked meals.

**Details** Four nights' full board, with one at Villa Rahasia, from £3,950pp, including all flights, private transfers, yoga and meditation classes, and selected activities (020 3993 5593, scottdunn.com)

## 30 Mellow Mozambique

Azura Banguerra is a 20-villa lodge in Mozambique's Bazaruto archipelago. The thatched beach villas come with pools and four-poster beds. They take their eco-credentials seriously here (there's a rainwater harvesting system) and staff can set up activities such as diving with dolphins, sunset dhow cruises, fly fishing or island-hopping. It's also acceptable to do precisely zilch.

**Details** Six nights' full board from £4,946pp, including flights, transfers, a dhow cruise and a massage (020 3405 6666, expertafrica.com)

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Villa Rahasia,  
Sumba Island

TANIA ARAUJO



27 Geejam Hotel, Jamaica