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Weekend

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châteaux**

Autumn breaks in
the Rhône Valley



Empty nest?
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The superfit sixties
Can you keep up?

Liz Earle on the cover of
the October issue of
Women's Health magazine

Late deals

Shop and spa in Antwerp or sail the Med

UK

A hip Highland hotel

Dun Aluinn is an airy, uncluttered hotel with nine bedrooms, a taste for modern design and fluffy sheepskin throws. You'd expect to find such a place in one of the fancier districts of Edinburgh, but here you're on the edge of Aberfeldy looking straight across the River Tay deep into the Highlands. The hotel is offering three nights' B&B for the price of two, from £459pp (dunaluinn.com). This should leave you with a budget for one of the chef John Christie's mouthwatering seasonal menus, which draw heavily on Perthshire produce. Autumn's fare includes pan-roasted grouse with caramelised pear.

A half-term cottage in Ceredigion

If you want to give your family on taste of the great outdoors before October half-term is your moment. A holiday let somewhere rural is a launchpad, such as four-bedroom Pantglas near Llandysul, ten miles from the Ceredigion coast. It's a bright, modern conversion with deep far roots at the end of a private lane and one barn for company. It's one of more than 6,000 half-term properties available on chooseacottage.co.uk for the half-term weeks, and there is a 30 per cent discount. From October 17 seven-night self-catering for eight starts at £700.

Chic hotel on the edge of the Cotswolds

The Cotswolds are pretty almost everywhere you look, but it's only their plunging western edge that they turn truly spectacular. This is where you'll find the Fish Hotel, one of three hotels on a 500-acre estate that freewheels down the Cotswolds Scarp, serving up far-reaching views en route. The style is loose and relaxed, just like the layout, with restaurants on two separate sites and accommodation spread through shepherds' huts, treehouses and low-slung, garden-facing rooms. From October 4 to February 28 you can stay three nights' B&B for the price of two, from £245pp (thefishhotel.co.uk).

EUROPE

An expert's view of Pompeii

Pompeii can be an enigmatic and frustrating place if you haven't spent a couple of weeks prepping for your visit. So why not skip the homework and join this one-week tour with the operator Andante, led by Tony Wilmott? Recently retired from English Heritage, he's an

accomplished Roman archaeologist and is sure to bring wit and insight to your wanderings — not just through Pompeii but in neighbouring Herculaneum too. For Romanists a blissful week awaits, as

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Crystal, it has a £335pp discount. From December 19 seven nights' half-board starts at £1,331pp, including flights (crystalski.co.uk).

Follow fashion with an Antwerp break

Here's an easy way to glam up your autumn. Head to the Flemish city of



HUGO THOMASSEN PHOTOGRAPHY

Antwerp and take advantage of Kirker's three nights for the price of two offer at the Botanic Sanctuary — from £1,079pp B&B, including the Eurostar during the low season (kirkerholidays.com). It's not just the five-star luxury of this former monastery that'll revive you. It's the chance to sample the city's vibrant fashion scene, where exhibitions at the MoMu fashion museum set the tone and Dries Van Noten rubs shoulders with brand-new boutiques. Mix with art from Rubens and a diamond museum called Diva and your weekend is sure to sparkle.

Cruising from Barcelona to Lisbon via the Canaries

With Christmas ahead, early December is usually a time when our horizons narrow. That won't be the case for passengers on this mind-expanding cruise aboard the all-suite Explora III. Leaving Barcelona on December 9, it calls at Gibraltar and Casablanca before island-hopping through the Canaries and then on to Madeira. The final port of call is Lisbon, at the end of a journey that mixes balmy breezes, big ocean skies and dramatic island landscapes. Prices are down by 34 per cent, with 13 days' all-inclusive from £4,445pp (explorajourneys.com). Fly into Barcelona and out of Lisbon.

A luxurious early-summer stay in Mallorca

May and early June are the sweet spot for Mediterranean holidays — when the bright sun and blue sea are most welcome and the lack of crowds deepens the sense of bliss. It's also when you can take advantage of a 15 per cent discount at the luxurious Ikos Porto Petro resort, courtesy of Elegant Resorts. The all-inclusive hotel wraps around a sheltered cove on the southwest coast of Mallorca and has five swimming pools to sample when you're done with the private beach. The offer runs all season next year, with seven nights' all-inclusive from June 12 starting at £4,995pp, including flights (elegantresorts.co.uk).

LONG HAUL

A first-time tour of China

No country offers a richer mix of the ancient and the ultramodern than China. But if holidaying there seems a daunting prospect, this carefully paced guided tour from Newmarket could be just the ticket. The Forbidden City, the Great Wall and Shanghai's dazzling skyline feature, but with a Yangtze River cruise and plenty of rail travel in between there's time to catch your breath too. Book by September 30 and 13 nights' B&B departing on June 13, 2027 is down 15 per cent to £3,480pp, including flights and some extra meals (thetimes.com/holidays). Times+ members get an extra £100 off per booking.

Five-star Phuket, Thailand

The rainy season in Phuket peters out in November, and on selected dates in the month there's a 40 per cent discount on the five-star Kalima Resort & Villas Khao Lak with British Airways. Close to Khao Lak's national park, this leafy riverside resort sits around a lagoon-style pool a few minutes' walk from the beach. From October 3 seven nights' B&B starts at £826pp, including flights (britishairways.com). Just be quick if you fancy it: the offer ends on September 29.

Eat your way across Mexico

Intrepid's globetrotting holiday portfolio is brimming with discounts, with a 15 per cent sale alongside its usual late-booking deals. Among the latter is the October 17 edition of its mouth-watering Mexican Food Tour — down 25 per cent to £1,174pp, including breakfasts and lunches. En route you'll take a seat at one of Mexico City's best seafood stands, eat vegetable tortillas with a Nahuatl farmer and snack on spicy, deep-fried chulupas (boat-shaped stuffed corn pastries) on a street food tour of Puebla. Freshness and immediacy are paramount — so too is a willingness to taste everything. Fly into Mexico City and out of Oaxaca (intrepidtravel.com). Sean Newsom