



12 Travel resolutions for 2012

Wherever you go this year, make sure you get the best from your holiday. **Chris Leadbeater** has dozens of ideas

Stop right here. We all know that January is a bleak enough time without the spectre of a New Year Resolutions list. Denying yourself *this* particular enjoyable habit, doing away with *that* little luxury ... if the sound of rain beating against the window pane isn't enough to have you feeling downbeat, a regime of self-imposed restraint will

surely do the trick. So this year why not adopt a different set of resolutions - ones that do away with miserable mid-winter weather and cling to the bright, optimistic world of travel? Over the following pages, the best of travel in 2012 is laid out in 12 simple steps - all of them more exciting than yet another unused gym membership. Let *The Independent on Sunday* be your guide.



MICHAEL GRIMM



ROSEWOOD HOTELS

1

Shake off the Christmas lethargy

At this frost-glazed time of year, the opportunities to rediscover the fitter, happier you – the one that reputedly existed before the festive season came along and ruined everything – are myriad.

Vamizi Island (vamizi.com) offers a sun-kissed chance for recalibration. Set on an island off the coast of Mozambique, its next detox stints (21-27 January, 6-11 March) place their faith in yoga and relaxation. The full package, including five nights' accommodation and flights, costs from £3,225 per person via Scott Dunn (020-8682 5070; scottdunn.com).

Similarly, the Rosewood Little Dix Bay resort (above; littledixbay.com), in the **British Virgin Islands**, has "Revitalise, Refresh, Renew" programmes – set for 15-17 and 19-21 January – from £2,050 per person, with a week's half-board, flights and yoga classes, through Elegant Resorts (01244 897 516; elegantresorts.co.uk).

Closer to home, consider the everything-must-go detox breaks run by **Karuna Detox Retreat** (0800 112 3033; karunadetox.com). This farmhouse hideaway, lost in remote north Devon countryside near the village of Winkleigh, specialises in treatments for those determined to rebalance their bodies. Sessions last for one week, and feature such extreme measures as colonic irrigation and a strict diet of organic vegetable juices – but the sacrifice may see you shed up to a stone. Retreats are slated for 13-20 January and 9-16

March and cost from £790 per person (based on two sharing a double room).

Alternatively, Black Tomato (020-7426 9888; blacktomato.co.uk) is currently offering an oh-so-21st-century style of detox – a "de-tech" week where you can wean yourself off of technology with the help of a life coach in two television-free resorts in **St Vincent and the Grenadines**. It coasts from £2,967 per person, based on two sharing, and includes flights, transfers, and full-board accommodation.



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2

Get cultured

Europe's cities are brimming with opportunities for cultured weekends in 2012 – although the Continent's official flag-bearer for all issues artistic lies somewhat off the beaten track. Forty miles north-east of Porto, **Guimaraes** is the more accessible of this year's European Capitals of Culture (the other, the Slovenian city of **Maribor**, is even trickier to reach by air from the UK). Guimaraes will enjoy its big year via showcases that tick off photography, music, art, theatre and cinema (guimaraes2012.pt).

A three-night stay at the five-star Pousada de Guimaraes costs £298 a head (two sharing) via Expedia (020-3027 8682; expedia.co.uk), flying to Porto from Gatwick with easyJet on 12 April. The price includes breakfast and car rental.

Helsinki (left) will brandish the title of World Design Capital in 2012, underlining its creative credentials through a year-long programme (wdchelsinki2012.fi) – the centrepoint of which will be Design Week (6-16 September), a riot of fashion shows, workshops and open-studio sessions. A three-night break at

the three-star Helka Hotel costs d £302 per person (based on two sharing) through British Airways (0844 493 0787; ba.com/holidays), flying from Heathrow on 13 September and including breakfast.

Elsewhere, **Vienna** (vienna.info) will celebrate the 150th birthday of the painter Gustav Klimt, including a display of more than 400 of his works at the Wien Museum (wienmuseum.at).

Lens comes into focus

While plans for an outlet of the Louvre in Abu Dhabi (due in 2014) have seen the raising of Gallic eyebrows, the launch of a satellite of the great gallery in the northern French town of **Lens** should arouse general acclaim. Expected to open on 4 December 2012, this steel-and-glass structure (louvrelens.fr) will ink this industrial city (90 miles north of Paris) on to the art map. It will sit within day-trip range of London St Pancras and will house works from the core collection. The train trip, taking a little more than three hours with a change in Lille, costs from £83 through Rail Europe (08448 484 064; raileurope.co.uk).

Dertour (020-3131 0527; dertour.co.uk) asks £332 per person, based on two sharing, for a three-night sojourn at the four-star Hotel Am Konzerthaus, including breakfast and BMI flights from Heathrow on 14 June.

Football's European Championships will throw a spotlight on **Poland** and **Ukraine** (8 June to 1 July) – but there is much to be enjoyed here beyond the three weeks of the tournament.

Warsaw (warsawtour.pl) has a Unesco-listed centre and a museum dedicated to Frederic Chopin (chopin.museum), with a three-night room-only stay at the five-star Rialto hotel costing £267 a head (two sharing) through Lastminute.com (0800 083 4000; lastminute.com), including BA flights from Heathrow on 19 April.

Kiev (traveltoukraine.org) comes equipped with a grand main avenue in Khreschatyk and dark memories in its Chernobyl Museum (chornobylmuseum.kiev.ua). A three-night stay for two at the four-star Radisson Blu Hotel with breakfast costs from £1,499 per person via Kirker Holidays (020-7593 1899; kirkerholidays.com), flying with British Airways from Heathrow.



3

Look after the pennies

Were Benjamin Franklin able to update his much-used comment on the inevitability of death and taxes, he might also muse that misfortune in a country during one year will inescapably lead to bargains on its beaches in the year after. So it is that many a member of 2011's "To Be Avoided" club rank highly on 2012's "Going Cheap" list.

Thailand – mired in monsoon floods in 2011 – falls neatly into this category. A week (between 16 April and 30 June) at the newly renovated four-star Boathouse on the Beach, at Kata Beach in Phuket (an island untroubled by the deluge), costs £989 a head based on two sharing, including transfers, breakfast and flights from Heathrow with Thai Airways, via Tropical Sky (0844 3329349; tropicalsky.co.uk).



Closer to home, **Tunisia** was the catalyst for the Arab Spring revolutions, but for the most part has been calm since March. A week's half-board at the four-star Nesrine Hotel in Hammamet, flying from Gatwick to Tunis on 16 March with British Airways, costs from £415 a head, including transfers, with Cosmos Holidays (0871 423 8422; cosmos.co.uk).

Equally, **Egypt** is an inexpensive prospect, not least on the Red Sea (above), where resorts remain unaffected by the political strife still troubling Cairo. Longwood Holidays (0844 770 4877; longwoodholidays.co.uk) sells low-cost escapes to Taba Heights, with a week's half-board at the five-star Hyatt Regency complex, flying from Gatwick with Monarch on 10 March, costing from £596 per person based on two sharing, including transfers.

In fact, for all the turmoil of the past 12 months, parts of the Middle East are fertile terrain for savings. **Jordan** will toast a big anniversary in 2012 – the 200th anniversary of the "discovery" of Petra. However, the ancient Nabataean citadel can be seen without the payment of a big fee. Encounters Travel (0800 088 6002; encounterstravel.com) runs an eight-day, three-star "Jordan Encounters" tour that starts at £999 per person, including flights and transfers.

Despite the financial chaos within, the eurozone remains poor value for UK tourists. However, the countries on its fringes lend respite. Still relatively unvisited, **Serbia** is a budget-friendly option. Regent Holidays (0117 921 1711; regent-holidays.co.uk) offers a week's itinerary that includes three nights in Belgrade, three in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, and the epic train ride between. Prices start at £655 per person, including flights from London, airport transfers and three-star hotel accommodation with breakfast.



Fare deals in the skies

As ever, the New Year will see increased air traffic and, with it, renewed competition on prices as carriers launch new routes. The UK's leading low-cost airline, easyJet (easyjet.com) will fuel a dash for the beach with five fresh options between March and May: Southend to **Jersey**; Luton to **Corfu**; Bristol to **Naples**; and services to **Dalaman** and **Naples** from Edinburgh. In June, Virgin Atlantic (virginatlantic.com) introduces a twice-weekly service to **Cancun** from Gatwick. Elsewhere, Lufthansa (lufthansa.com) will bring in links to **Berlin** from Birmingham and Manchester.

4

Spend time with the family

A key institution in the realm of family holidays

chalks up a landmark birthday in 2012, when Center Parcs celebrates 25 years in business. The woodland accommodation giant will mark its quarter-century with the arrival of three new luxury treehouses at its **Longleat Forest** (above) site in Wiltshire – swish elevated hideaways, each with four ensuite bedrooms, hot-tub and separate games den (reached via a timber walkway). Each is ideal for two families who fancy a shared getaway, and open in January. A week's stay, commencing on 23 April, costs £4,598 (08448 267 723; centerparcs.co.uk).

Those who can't shake the frustration of missing out on Olympic Games tickets can find mild consolation in a break with Al Fresco Holidays (0871 971 0600; thomsonalfresco.co.uk). The company is to stage "Sum-

mer Games" at eight of its parks across **Spain, France** and **Italy** this summer, with families able to compete at everything from assault courses to egg-and-spoon races. A week-long stay for a family of four (two kids under 12), in a six-berth "Rossini" mobile home at the Château des Ormes site in **Brittany**, starting on 21 July, costs £1,192, or £1,792 with a Portsmouth-St Malo return ferry.

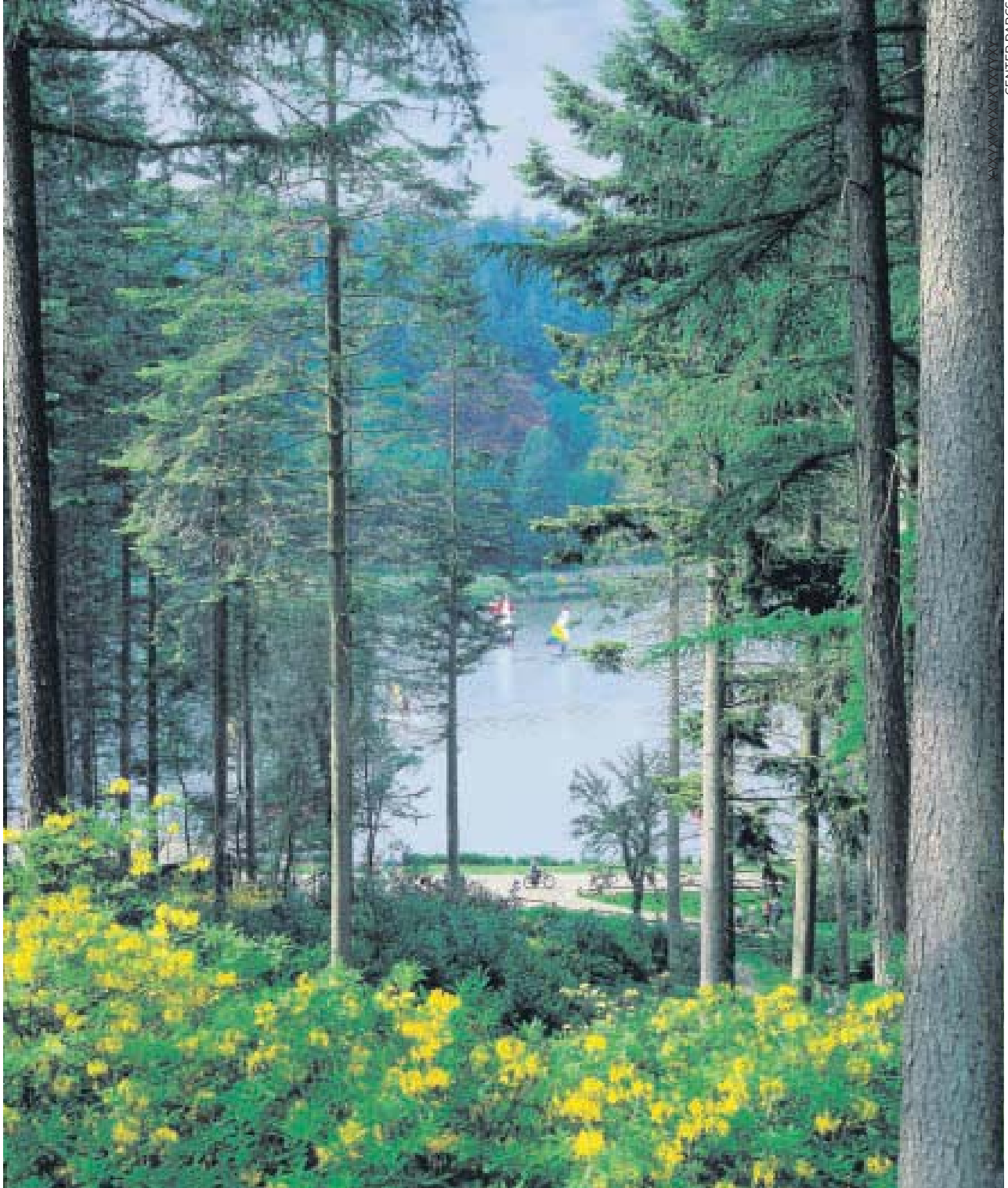
In hi-tech contrast, the Catalan theme park **PortAventura** (portaventura.co.uk), 50 miles south-west of Barcelona, will reach for the heavens this year when it unveils Shambhala, Europe's tallest rollercoaster. A full 250 feet high at its summit – and primed for speeds of up to 83mph – this mountain-themed "hypercoaster" will not be for the timid. Brave parents can prove they still have it via PortAventura Holidays (0800 091 3886; portaventuraholidays.co.uk).

A three-night stay for a family of four (children under 12) from 19 April, staying at the four-star Hotel PortAventura, is £971 in total, including breakfast, easyJet flights from Gatwick to Barcelona, transfers, and theme park admission.

If that sounds too nerve-wracking, adventure specialist Explore (0845 868 6286; explore.co.uk) is launching a new family break where co-operation and teamwork are crucial. On the "Timber Rafting Sweden" jaunt, families can build and learn to navigate their own rafts on the River Klaralven in central **Sweden**. The rustic theme goes as far as encouraging Huckleberry Finns to fish for dinner (breakfast and some meals are provided at other times). Prices start at £1,248 per adult and £1,223 per child, including flights to Stockholm, with the 11 August foray aimed squarely at families with teenagers.



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5

Broaden your horizons

The saying that "it's a small world" is, of course, nonsense.

We live on a vast planet festooned with wild regions that demand inspection. And 2012 will see many of them state their cases. **Canada** will have its moment in July when the Calgary Stampede (left) – a blaze of rodeo riding and Wild West bravado that takes over this Alberta city ever summer – celebrates its 100th anniversary (6-15 July; calgarystampede.com).

Archers Direct runs a regular "Heart of the Canadian Rockies" tour (0800 668 1892; archersdirect.com) that explores the main hot spots of Alberta and British Columbia. Its 7 July departure will be an 11-night special that includes a two-day pass for the equine extravaganza, from £2,299 a head, with flights.

Antarctica will witness a bleaker notch on the calendar on 17 January – the centenary of British explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott's doomed arrival at the South Pole. The frozen continent remains a place of fascination and is accessible via the 12-day "Antarctic Explorer" package run by Exodus (0845 805 5452; exodus.co.uk).

Eight departures are scheduled between 20 January and 29 February, the itinerary split between a voyage from the Argentinian city of Ushuaia and time on the landmass, where you drop into a realm of penguins and blue icebergs. Prices to the end of the world start at a reasonable £4,270 per person, including flights from London.

Vietnam is rather less remote, not least since last month when Vietnam

Airlines (020-3263 2062; vietnamairlines.com) launched its first direct air links from Britain, instigating two new routes – to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City – from Gatwick. Returns to the former start at about £646 return. World Expeditions (0800 074 4135; worldexpeditions.co.uk) operates a "Bike, Hike and Kayak Northern Vietnam" group jaunt that ticks off the capital, the valleys of Cuc Phuong National Park and the limestone formations of Halong Bay. There are 21 tours in the diary for this year, costing from £1,090 per person, excluding flights.

The earthquake and tsunami that struck **Japan** on 11 March also caused a slump in tourists – so much so that in October last year, the Japanese government mooted the idea of giving away 10,000 free flights in 2012 to encourage visitors. The plan is still under consideration. (See the Japan National Tourism Organisation for updates – www.jnto.go.jp). Inside Japan Tours (0117-370 9730; insidejapantours.com) has a 13-night "Japan Unmasked" group tour that visits Tokyo, Hiroshima, Kyoto and Yokohama for £1,750 per person, excluding flights.

End of the world in Mexico

According to Mayan mythology – and depending on the interpretation you place on a pair of stone tablets found at the archaeological site at Tortuguero in southern **Mexico** – 2012 marks either the end of the world, the year of the return of the god Bolon Yokte' K'uh, or merely the closing of a 5,125-year cycle in the Mayan calendar. With the momentous day slated as 21 December, now may be the time to visit Mexico, just in case. Cox & Kings (0845 868 2885; coxandkings.co.uk) has a week-long "Merida and Mayan Riviera" tour that visits the key Mayan sites from £1,645 a head, with flights.





6

Learn a new skill

The concept of a holiday with an educational purpose is scarcely new – and opportunities to learn with passport in pocket are strewn across the fresh face of 2012. These range from the close-at-hand to the obscurely located.

Close to home, The Park Mawgan Porth (01637 860 322; mawganporth.co.uk) is a holiday enclave five miles from Newquay in **Cornwall** that has educational weekends throughout the year, including watercolour art retreats (20-23 and 27-30 April, from £350 per person) and a creative-writing workshop (12-14 October; from £450 a head). Prices include accommodation and tuition.

The Tatra photography workshop helps shutter-clickers to improve their landscape imagery in wild, mountainous corners of **Slovakia**, (above). Three-night breaks in May, June and October cost from £650 per person, full board, including flights to Krakow, transfers and daily lessons (0161 408 8988; tatraphotographyworkshop.com).

Then there are those 2012 events that come with an experience-widening edge. Held once every 10 years in the **Netherlands**, Floriade (5 April to 7 October; floriade2012.com; day tickets €25) is a horticultural bonanza where visitors can hone their gardening skills. This year's festival will be staged in the area around Venlo in the south-east. The River Cruise Line (0844 544 6581;

rivercruiseline.co.uk) is running six tie-in "Floriade and Bulbfields Spectacular" voyages through Dutch waterways in April from £399 per person, full board, including en-suite cabin and Channel ferry crossing.

In **Australia**, north Queensland and the tip of the Northern Territory will have a solar eclipse at 6.38am on 14 November. Explorers Tours (0845 868 3487; astronomytours.co.uk) offers a 15-day "Eclipse and Australian Highlights" trip that begins on 8 November and includes trips to Sydney, Uluru, the Great Barrier Reef and a prime position for the darkening of the sky with an astronomer present to provide analysis. The cost is from £3,459 per person, including flights and breakfast.



7 Get fit – and stay sporty

With the Olympics and football's European Championships in the offing, this will be the year of sporting endeavour. And those who want to participate rather than merely watch can hone their footballing skills in a warmer setting than Poland or Ukraine by opting for one of the training camps on offer at Buccament Bay in

St Vincent (buccamentbay.com).

This Caribbean resort is staging coaching sessions throughout 2012, led by football players such as former Ireland internationals Steve Staunton (13-20 February) and Ronnie Whelan (8-15 April) and England's Gareth Southgate (28 October to 4 November). Tuition is aimed at adults, as well as children aged five and up. A week's break at the resort costs from £2,095 per person – with all-inclusive accommodation, transfers and flights – through Health And Fitness Travel (0845 544 1936; healthandfitnesstravel.com). If you prefer individual pursuits, the resort has a tennis academy. Pat Cash will be coaching in April, in the build-up to the 25th anniversary of his Wimbledon win.

England enter 2012 as the world's top-ranked Test cricket team and two of the players who were pivotal in ushering in this golden age are to share their expertise at the Forte Village Resort in **Sardinia** (fortevillageresort.com) later this year (from 14-21 April). Michael Vaughan and Matthew Hoggard – captain and bowler respectively in 2005 when England notched a first Ashes triumph over Australia in 18 years – will teach children aged five to 12 in two-hourly sessions over five days. A week's half-board for a family of four (children under 12) starts from £3,649 through Super Skills Travel (01858 545 918; superskills.com), excluding flights. You can fly from Stansted to Cagliari on easyJet (0905 8210905; easyjet.com).

The route of the 2012 **Tour de France** (above) which runs from 30 June to 22 July has an extra emphasis on brutal climbs, including the race's first ascent of the 4,925ft Col du Grand Colombier in the Jura range (11 July). Amateurs can sign up for the "Three Alpine Stages" break operated by Sports Tours International (0161 703 8161; www.sportingtours.co.uk) – a four-day trip (10-14 July) that lets cyclists see the most dramatic part of the Tour, or ride it themselves. From £749 per person, with transfers from Geneva, breakfast and accommodation in Annecy, but excluding flights or rail travel.



Watch out for the bunker

In golf, the idea is usually to steer clear of the sand. But this may prove trickier than usual for players at Shangri-La's Villingili resort in the **Maldives** (shangri-la.com/maldives). In March this luxury hideaway will open the island nation's first nine-hole golf course. A week's half-board before the end of April, with flights, costs from £3,250 a head based on two sharing, via Carrier (0161 492 1358; carrier.co.uk).



JASON ROBERTS/AP

8

Be kind to animals

The BBC's *Frozen Planet* series has aroused plenty of interest over the past two months – and 2012 will be a year to make good on our fascination with the **Arctic**.

Discover the World (01737 214251; discover-the-world.co.uk) runs a "Spitsbergen to East Greenland Cruise" that visits three great northern islands (Iceland is the third) and offers the possibility of encounters with polar bears, narwhal whales and Arctic foxes.

Three of these 13-night voyages are planned during August and September and cost from £3,469 per person, full-board, excluding flights.

If you prefer spotting large mammals in warmer climes you can watch whales, notably from the Kuri Bay property that is due to open in the Kimberley region of **Western Australia** in April. This luxury retreat, accessible only by seaplane or helicopter, offers a perspective on the calving grounds of humpback whales. Wexas (020-7838 5892; wexas.com) has a "Kimberley Complete" itinerary that unveils this most remote of Australian regions. Prices for Kuri Bay are not yet confirmed, but this 13-day jaunt currently costs from £5,860 per person (based on two sharing), including flights.

Another isolated area will come into focus in May with the opening of the twin Odzala Camps in the Odzala-Kokoua National Park, north **Congo**. These tiny boltholes (Lango Camp and Ngaga Camp) have six

rooms each, and are perfect bases for tracking gorillas amid thick rainforest. Rainbow Tours (020-7666 1250; rainbowntours.co.uk) can arrange a six-night holiday that features three nights at each camp. It costs from £4,695 per person (based on two sharing), including full-board accommodation, flights and expeditions.

Although **Kenya** is better known, it also has its out-on-a-limb patches. Kicheche Valley Camp, in the Naboisho Conservancy (in the Maasai Mara), had a soft launch in August, and is introducing a fly-camping option for 2012 that will take guests deeper into this wildlife-rich zone. Safari Consultants (01787 888 590; safariconsultants.co.uk) offers an all-inclusive week from £2,730 per person, including flights and transfers.



9

Take time to relax

Those seeking to cast off their recessionary concerns and bask in a little luxury will find new pockets of exclusivity in 2012 – notably Song Saa (songsaa.com), a retreat that will bring the five-star stylings of the Maldives to the Cambodian side of the **Gulf of Thailand** (an area where the accommodation, to date, has erred towards the rudimentary). Laid out over two islets in the Koh Rong archipelago, the resort offers 27 villas, a spa, gourmet food and a whiff of the jet set. A week's full-board stay costs from £3,736 per person with

ABOUTAsia Travel (020-7193 8561; aboutasiatravel.com), excluding flights.

Elsewhere in South-east Asia, the Gaya Island Resort (pulaugayaresort.com) will perform a similar makeover for the west coast of Malaysian **Borneo**. Set on the island of Pulau Gaya, this hideaway is due to open in April amid protected mangroves and coral reefs – and will come equipped with 121 villas. An eight-night stay here costs from £1,489 per person, including breakfast, return flights from Heathrow with Malaysia Airlines and transfers. See Destinology (0800 210 0422; destinology.co.uk) for details.

On the far side of the Pacific, a more established type of luxury destination will be marking 2012. Long a fixture on Sunset Boulevard, the **Los Angeles** institution that is the Beverly Hills Hotel (left) will raise the flag on its centenary on 12 May (001 310 276 2251; beverlyhills hotel.com).

Guests can check in from \$583 (£372) per double, excluding breakfast, knowing that the hotel's corridors have been stalked by Marlene Dietrich, Humphrey Bogart, Katharine Hepburn, John Wayne, Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe (although not all at the same time).





10 Care for the planet

There is one simple way to ensure that your carbon footprint does not expand this year: ignore the airport. But those who holiday in the UK in 2012 will be rewarded – Britain has red-letter days scrawled in its diary for the next 12 months.



The movies and books may be consigned to the past, but the cult of Harry Potter still has a way to run. On 31 March, **The Making of Harry Potter** – a tour that gives access to the film sets where the series was created – opens to the public at the Warner Bros Studios in Leavesden, Hertfordshire. This cinematic showcase (0845 084 0900; wbstudiotour.co.uk; adults £28, children £21) will bring the world of teenage wizards to life, with guests able to go inside “locations” such as the Great Hall at Hogwarts and Dumbledore’s office.

Another fixture of the British written word hits a milestone date this year, with the bicentenary of **Charles Dickens**’s birth on 7 February. (See pages 24-25 for our Dickens Quiz.) An array of events is planned (see dickens2012.org) including a Dickens and London exhibition at the Museum of London (020-7001 9844; museumoflondon.org.uk; until 10 June; £8).

Martin Randall Travel (020-8742 3355; martinrandall.com) is running a five-day Dickens bicentenary trip that features key scenes from his life and works (in London, Rochester, Broadstairs, above, and Portsmouth) with Professor Michael Slater, a Dickens specialist from the University of London. It departs on 31 March, starting at £1,880 a head, including hotels, transport and most meals.

London will witness a present-day celebration on the long weekend of 2-5 June, when the Queen’s **Diamond Jubilee** extravaganza takes over the capital (the highlight likely to be a regal parade of boats on the Thames on 3 June). A corresponding four-night stay at the Cumberland Hotel, Marble Arch costs £704 for a double room (excluding breakfast), via Travelocity (0871 472 5116; travelocity.co.uk). Alternatively, if royal pageantry – or the Olympics – leaves you cold, McKinlay Kidd (0844 804 0020; seescotlanddifferently.co.uk) can offer a six-night self-drive trip around the **Outer Hebrides**. A break in early August, during the Olympics, costs from £595 a head, including breakfast and ferries.

Raising the Titanic

The 100th anniversary of the sinking of the RMS **Titanic** on 15 April will be one of 2012’s more maudlin moments, but the liner will be remembered in happier times in Northern Ireland when the Titanic Belfast museum launches on 31 March (02890 766 399; titanicbelfast.com; £13.50). The date is deliberate, marking the centenary of the day the doomed vessel was completed at the Harland and Wolff shipyard – the site where this sleek new institution now stands.



PETER DUNPHY

11 Get out more

Some might say that fresh air and glorious scenery are all you need for a holiday. You can find both in **Les Calanques**, the untamed expanse

which is finally due to be ordained as France’s latest national park (and first since 1979) this year (parcsnationaux.fr). Rugged inlets cut into the limestone coast immediately south of Marseille, making this enclave ideal for active breaks. Headwater (01606 720 199; headwater.com) runs an eight-day “Cassis and Les Calanques” walking tour that traces a 40-mile southerly route, beginning in Aix-en-Provence. The jaunt heads out every week from March to June and September to October, priced at £1,179 per person based on two sharing, including flights and breakfast.

The Australian state of **Victoria** (above; visitvictoria.com) will also pull on its hiking boots. The new year means the advent of the Mornington Peninsula Coastal Walk, a 70-mile path along the lip of the promontory that juts out below Melbourne. Here is raw beauty galore, all wild shore and waves for surfing at Gunnamatta Beach. Trailfinders (020-7368 1200; trailfinders.com) offers a six-night Great Southern Touring Route through Victoria that can be tailored to visit the peninsula from £705 a head, with car hire, but excluding flights.

Then again, there is no need to rush to the Southern Hemisphere for al fresco thrills. Due to be officially opened in the spring, the Great Glen Canoe Trail will be **Scotland**’s first formal canoe route, cutting through 60 miles from Fort William to Inverness, and taking in Loch Ness en route (greatglencanoe.trail.info). Wilderness Scotland runs a five-day “Canoeing the Great Glen” guided trip (with four nights of wild camping). The first of four forays this year leaves on 20 May, priced £575 a head (0131 625 6635; wildernessscotland.com).



12

Give something back

Those keen to use their time off to help others will have plenty of opportunity in 2012. On home turf, active types can gain a taste of this summer's main event while raising cash for charity with a ride on the route of the **Olympic** cycling road race. This 90-mile loop



through London and into Surrey can be tackled via Discover Adventure (01722 718 444; discoveradventure.com), which has two "London Ride of Champions" days – complete with guides, route marking, mechanical support and lunch – planned for 10 June and 2 September. A fundraising target of £150 is suggested in addition to a £59 registration fee.

Figures from the *CIA World Factbook* currently put **Swaziland** (above) in the bottom five nations on Earth for life expectancy (an average age of 48.66 years). But this tiny African country is the subject of four new breaks run by i-to-i Volunteering (0113 205 4609; i-to-i.com). Aimed at those on a gap year (but open to anyone aged 18 to 65), these include teaching English to orphans left helpless by the HIV epidemic (£1,540 for four weeks), and coaching kids at football (from £1,029 for a fortnight). Both projects are based in the impoverished Ezulwini Valley. The price covers dormitory accommodation and meals, but excludes flights.

Back where we started in **Mozambique**, Inspired Breaks (0844 473 4101; inspiredbreaks.co.uk) arranges trips such as the "Mozambique Whale Shark Conservation" holiday, where volunteers monitor these huge animals (as well as loggerhead turtles and manta rays) at Tofo beach on the southern coast. A two-week placement costs from £1,124, with meals and stay in a beach cottage, but excluding flights.