



HOLIDAY IS HIT OR MYSTERY

IMAGINATIVE Traveller have taken the Mystery Tour to its ultimate level for next year. Sign up, hand over £2,099 and you'll be told simply what airport you're leaving from on June 20 and what to pack for a 14-night tour. Call 0845 077 8803 or see imaginative-traveller.co.uk.

MOTORISTS beware - from this week it is compulsory to carry a warning triangle in your car in France.

Avis provide triangles and high-vis vests free with all French car rentals. And they have linked with British Airways to provide driving guides for popular tourist destinations worldwide. See avisba.com.

IN the aftermath of the XL collapse, the Civil Aviation Authority set up 222 flights from 40 destinations to bring home 83,000 people.

Following the failure on September 12, ATOL-protected customers of XL and other tour operators that shared XL flights were able to travel free, together with flight-only customers of XL Airways who paid a "reasonable fee".

The focus now turns to the 70,000 passengers who need refunds on ATOL-protected bookings on future holidays. A spokesman said: "We ask claimants to bear with us."

NEARLY a quarter of British travellers believe we could take holidays on the MOON in the next 25 years, says a study from Holiday Extras.

SHARE A GOLDEN GETAWAY

... CYPRUS SIZZLER: Seven nights' half-board at the four-star Atlantica Golden in Paphos are £589 from Gatwick on October 30. See thomson.co.uk or call 0871 231 5595.

... BALMY BARBADOS: Seven nights' room-only at the three-star Discovery Bay Hotel on St James Beach start at £499, from Gatwick until October 23. 0871 208 1250, letsgo2.com.

... VIVA ESPANA: Seven nights' B&B at the four-star El Paso on the Costa Dorada start at £376 from Newcastle on October 21. 0871 231 5595, thomson.co.uk.

... CHEEP CANARIES: Seven nights' half-board at the three-star Apartments Rio Club Maspalomas in Gran Canaria are £579 from Gatwick on October 27. 0871 423 8642, monarchholidays.co.uk.

... MENORCA CORKER: Seven nights' half-board at the three-star Victoria Playa in Santo Tomas are £281 from Luton next Saturday. 08712 313 237, portlanddirect.co.uk.



GO India

GETTING/STAYING THERE: A week B&B starts at £399 per person this winter not including flights and transfers. Call Kerala Travel Centre on 0808 178 9799 or see keralatravelcentre.com.

FAST FACTS: Flights take around 11 hours. You will need a tourist visa, costing about £30. The best time is between December and May. Monsoon season is June to September.

Pictures: DAN KENNEDY

Star of India

STUNNING KERALA IS JEWEL IN CROWN



EYE CATCHING ... 700-year-old mechanised fishing nets near Brunton Boatyard Hotel and, top, a backwater boat tour and spices and food on display in a restaurant

AT 30, I'm too old to go backpacking (I need air con and somewhere to plug in my hair-straighteners).

But I'm not too old to want to explore new places.

India has always been on my list and when it was recently voted the No1 country to visit, the shameless fashion victim in me knew the time had come.

My idea of a perfect getaway is a foodie haven featuring five-star hotels and lazy beaches. My husband is more of a culture vulture who loves to indulge in a sexy spa.

So we opted for Kerala in south India where we hoped to find a bit of everything.

Knowing nothing about India, we decided to put our hard-earned free time in the hands of specialists at

the Kerala Travel Centre (KTC). The result was a trip that blew away every preconception we had about India and now is at the top of our Best Ever Holiday list.

Kerala is a lush state famous for its sun-drenched beaches and lazy backwaters. It's a place of extremes: bustling towns and lazy villages, boutique hotels and shacks on riverbanks, cheap street food and award-winning cuisine.

From the moment we were welcomed off the plane with fresh jasmine garlands we were constantly surprised and delighted by the place and its people.

One day we would be breakfasting on the balcony of our five-star hotel and 24 hours later drinking tea from metal mugs at a truck stop in the hills.

Our itinerary was created around us and what we wanted to get out

of our holidays. (KTC offer off-the-peg Romantic, Activity and Family packages as well as bespoke holidays.)

The extras in our itinerary, including ayurvedic massages, Spice Village walks, cookery classes and a backwater boat tour, meant we got to see parts many tourists miss, and fell in love with them as a result.

Dancing

The accommodation choices were spot on, especially the CGH Earth eco resorts where comfort doesn't have to cost the earth (literally).

We loved Marari Beach for chilling in hammocks, Spice Village for its outstanding food and the Brunton Boatyard for a taste of the colonial life.

Our driver, Prakash, acted as a guide and historian as we meandered our way around the

state via tea plantations, cattle sales, fish markets and riverside villages.

We soon learnt that Kerala is famous - even in India - for its cuisine. Though spicy, it is flavoursome with coconut as a predominant ingredient. We loved the curried paneer.

On our first night walking around Trivandrum, the capital, we came upon a small procession of dancers.

Within minutes my husband had been swept up with them and was being handed home-made snacks and colourful flowers.

Being cynical Londoners, we checked for our wallets the second the procession had passed, but we soon learnt that people in Kerala are happy to meet strangers.

Kerala is the perfect place to experience something new in comfort and style.

TONI JONES

SOLO ON THE SOLSTICE

I WAS the only journalist allowed on the new **CELEBRITY SOLSTICE** when she sailed out of the shipyard in Germany for the first time this week.

She made a 22-mile trip down the River Ems, watched by tens of thousands. The ship, with a lawn of real grass, looks great. She sails from Fort Lauderdale on November 23 on seven-night Caribbean cruises. Fares for nine-night fly/cruise are from £1,229, including Gatwick flights. Call 0845 456 0523 or see celebritycruises.co.uk.



OPERA babe Katherine Jenkins sings on **SAGA RUBY** in Cadiz, Spain, on November 21. The ship will be three days in to a 29-night round-trip from Southampton via Palermo, Heraklion, Alexandria, Port Said, through the Suez Canal to Sharm el Sheik, Safaga and Aqaba, then Libya, Valletta and Lisbon. Fares are from £3,604. See saga.co.uk or 0800 096 0083.

STEVE READ

See cruise news at thesun.co.uk/travel

HOT IT'S 37°C in FUJAIRAH in the UAE. Five nights' B&B at the 5★ Miramar Al Aqah are £499 on October 13. See hayesandjarvis.com or call 0871 664 0246.

OPO-GO FOR CHEAPER

ONLINE flights specialists Opodo.co.uk are to sell low-cost fares for the first time because of demand for cheaper options.

The site will now sell flights from easyJet, Monarch, Jet2, Sterling and Wizz Air. More carriers are expected to sign up in coming months.

Opodo's Andrew Wilson says: "We have noticed more people want to save money on their flights so they will have more cash to spend at their holiday destination." See

opodo.co.uk or call 0871 277 0090. **MONARCH** have added 12,000 seats to their flying programme this Christmas as they continue to fill the shortfall following the collapse of XL.

The 64 extra flights, operating between Saturday, December 20, and Sunday, January 4, are from Gatwick, Luton, Birmingham and Manchester to key winter hotspots in Spain, the Spanish Islands, Portugal and Cyprus. Visit monarch.co.uk to book.



SKI SPECIAL - NEXT PAGES