



When you've found the perfect weather, don't waste it lying by the pool. Vincent Crump has 10 ways to flee winter and have real fun in the sun

BRRR. As the fangs of winter begin to sink in, it's time to plan a fast getaway to the sun. But don't assume your only choice is a pool, a parasol and a pitcher of piña colada. We've found 10 hot destinations that offer sporty adventure or the chance to sharpen a new skill — these are sun holidays, but on stimulants.

Unless stated, packages include flights from London and transfers. Ask the tour operator about regional departure options

RIDING WITH GAUCHOS Argentina

Take care when selecting your mount at Estancia Los Potreros: you wouldn't want your canter across the pampas to turn into a rodeo ride. High in the Sierras Chicas, 3,000ft above sea level, in the grasslands of Cordoba, this 6,000-acre cattle ranch has been in the same Anglo-Argentine family for four generations. Your ranch-house lodgings are charming, decorated with relics of the region's early Jesuit settlers. Only 80 of the estate's 140 criollo and Peruvian paso horses are broken, so best leave the feisty ones to the resident gauchos, who cut a picturesque dash in their neckerchiefs and berets. You can spend the mornings helping them to herd, round up and brand the steers, or mosey out on streamside trots to waterfalls and swimming holes. Walks, wine tastings and church tours are also available, and there's even polo, followed by a traditional asado barbecue pitchside. When you've dusted off your chaps, Los Potreros has a pool where you can soak up an afternoon siesta.

Last Frontiers (01296 653000, lastfrontiers.com) has seven nights from £3,150pp, full-board, including drinks and all riding.

KAYAK SAFARI Costa Rica

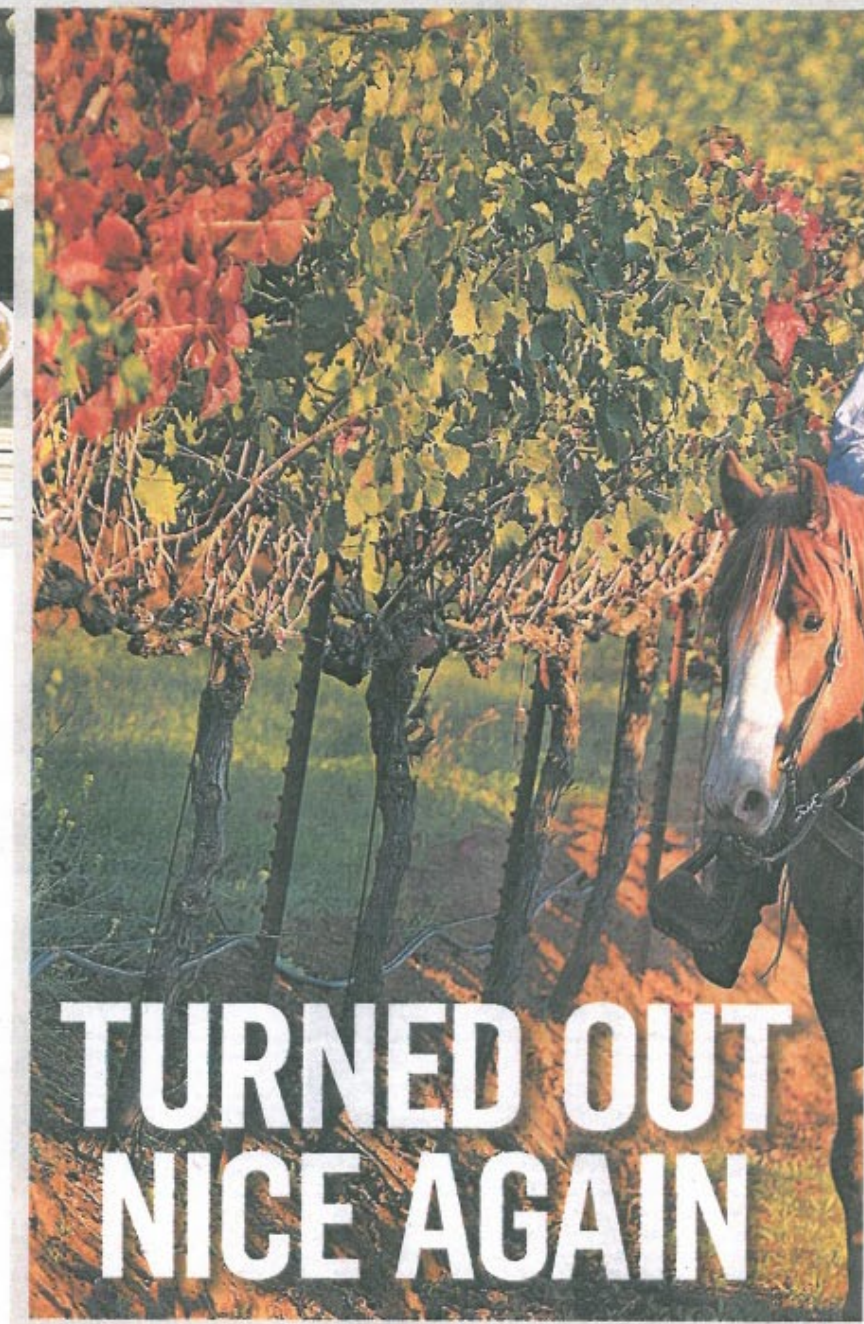
When holidaying in the jungle, do as the locals do. And in Costa Rica, the locals include white-faced monkeys swinging through the forest canopy,

leatherback turtles sunning themselves on Caribbean beaches, and Jesus lizards high-tailing it along the swampy creeks — they can walk on water, you know. Kayaking through the mangrove-tangled backwaters of Tortuguero National Park is the best way to meet all this teeming wildlife, and your guided paddles here will feel intrepid but safe — the scenery is the point, not the sweat. You'll spend three nights in a jungle lodge in Tortuguero ("Land of Turtles"), a languid village stranded on a sand bar, then move on to La Fortuna, beneath the Arenal volcano. There, try lake kayaking, whitewater rafting and monkey-spotting on the four-mile treetop "hanging bridges" trail — then play the sloth with a wallow in the Baldi Hot Springs, while a kaleidoscope of bird species careens around you.

An eight-night trip starts at £449pp, including some meals, but not flights, with G Adventures (0844 272 2060, gadventures.co.uk). Transfers for the kayaking trip cost about £40pp. Airlines flying from London to San Jose include US Airways (0845 600 3300, usairways.com), via Charlotte, and United Airlines (0845 607 6760, united.com), via New York; returns from about £550.

CARIBBEAN COOKERY Grenada

They call Grenada the spice island, and nobody is more seasoned in its culinary traditions than Janice Edwards, head cook at the Mount Cinnamon resort. Raised on her mother's callaloo soup, macaroni pie and rice and peas, she laces her menu with island produce — queen conch ceviche, organic goat's cheese — and will share her wisdom during home-style cookery lessons at your private villa. Ask her to teach you "oil down", which is one of her all-time favourites — a breadfruit concoction spiked with coconut milk and saffron. Provenance is king at Mount Cinnamon: the fruit and vegetables are picked from its own plantation, 18th-century Mount Edgecombe, and you can take a tour of the gardens, along pathways scented with nutmeg, ginger and allspice. The hotel is well placed for post-prandial relaxation, right beside Grand Anse



Beach — the island's biggest and, arguably, its best — and at home time, Janice's spice goody bag, which includes recipes, will set you up nicely for your next Caribbean-themed dinner party.

Seven nights start at £1,708pp, B&B, including cookery lessons and tours, but not flights; book direct on 0808 234 2497 or at mountcinnamongrenadahotel.com. Virgin Atlantic (0844 209 7777, virgin-atlantic.com) and British Airways (0844 493 0787, ba.com) fly from Gatwick; returns from about £600.

BOUTIQUE BOATING Canary Islands

Seen from the right angle, Lanzarote is a place of picturesque strangeness, where contorted lava fields bubble down to the sea, and red and yellow boulders loom out of long, untrodden

beaches of wind-blown Saharan sand. The right angle, by the way, is from the ocean, aboard your 50ft Beneteau Oceanis yacht, which offers a privileged pass to the parts of the island that mass tourism can't reach. That's the thinking behind Essential Sailing's new base here: the company launches its first charters from the pretty marina in Puerto Calero on February 2. Sea conditions are sublime in winter, temperatures tip into the twenties, and your boat comes with a skipper and crew to pull all the strings, although you're welcome to muck in with as much sailing as you wish. The itinerary is flexible, but we strongly suggest a desert-island snorkel at the "Isle of Seals", a volcano hike in the Fire Mountains and a stretch out on the immaculate sands of Punta de Papagayo, accessible only by boat or dirt track.

A week's private charter starts at £1,349pp, based on six people sharing three cabins and including most meals, but not flights (0845 653 0126, essentialsailing.com). Airlines flying to Lanzarote include Monarch (0871 940 5040, monarch.co.uk) and Ryanair (0871 246 0000, ryanair.com).

PHOTO TOUR Morocco

Everywhere you look in Marrakesh, there is a scene waiting to be captured — and on a photography holiday with the professional lensman Karoki Lew you'll learn how. Your base couldn't be more inspiring: Vanessa Branson's art-filled Riad El Fenn, a five-minute walk from Djemaa el Fna, the city's whirling dervish of a main square, an just steps from the sensory avalanche of the souks. The riad is lined with