Travel

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'The lack of tourists is blissful; no selfie-stick-wielding hordes, no coaches clogging the roads'
Ben Clatworthy enjoys a quieter Lanzarote

DIDIER DELMAS

30 romantic hotels in the Med

Sultry Italian island retreats, chic French castles and cosy Cretan cottages — Susan d'Arcy picks the most loved-up places to stay

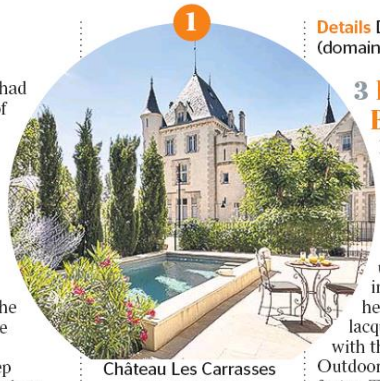
FRANCE

1 Château Les Carrasses Languedoc

This turreted 19th-century castle sets the right tone for romance. As do its luscious suites: whitewashed beams, dinosaur-egg baths, original fireplaces and elaborate chandeliers. Explore Narbonne and its wide-open coastline (good for windsurfing), or bob about in the hotel's infinity pool overlooking vine-clad hills and let afternoons drift by in its winter-garden library, thought to have been designed by Gustave Eiffel.
Details Doubles from £125, room only (lescarrasses.com). Fly to Perpignan or Montpellier

2 Domaine de Biar Montpellier

This wedding-cake château has had a whimsical makeover, worthy of its belle époque architecture. Rooms are named after significant characters in the building's history. The scarlet shades of Henriette are in honour of a former owner's daughter who established the Red Cross in Montpellier, while Taison's lean muscular design was inspired by a stallion from the estate's stable of Camargue white horses. Explore the 125 acres of grounds in the saddle or go a step further with a horse-whispering class.
Details Doubles from £125, B&B (domainedebiar.com). Fly to Montpellier



Château Les Carrasses in Languedoc

3 Hotel Les Roches Blanches Cassis

In its 1930s heyday this seafront mansion was a favourite hideaway of Édith Piaf, and after a recent meticulous renovation, you will regret *rien* about a stay here. The updated art deco bedrooms are indecently decadent: eye-catching headboards with brass and black lacquer geometric panels contrast with the tactile taupe velvet furniture. Outdoors is also loaded with wow factor. Terraced gardens studded with ▶

swanky furniture and rainforest showers add welcome 21st-century gloss. The far-reaching views through the olive groves down to the sea are a bonus.
Details Doubles from £145, B&B (kapsalianavillage.gr). Fly to Heraklion or Chania

22 Andronis Luxury Suites Santorini

Oia's dramatic sunken volcano is the backdrop to this boutique hotel, which occupies the peachiest location to capture the caldera in all its glory. Its setting is so head-turning, in fact, that there is a marriage proposal on its terraces every other day. And you will swoon at the 29 white-on-white rooms carved into the cliffside too. They are the last word in sophistication, with hot tubs or pools, private balconies and admirable attention to detail. For example, you can choose your bathroom amenities: Apivita, Molton Brown or Chopard.
Details Doubles from £450, B&B (andronis-suites.com). Fly to Santorini

23 Kinsterna Hotel Peloponnese

This 600-year-old mansion's natural spring fills the glass-topped reflecting pool on which its dining tables "float" before flowing down into a freshwater swimming pool tucked into the lemon groves. Bedrooms mix original vaulted ceilings and Ottoman fireplaces with mid-century furniture and wall coverings made from local antique lace. Most look on to the medieval castle town of Monemvasia, the kind of heartwarming view that could put marriage counsellors out of business.
Details Doubles from £130, B&B (kinsternahotel.gr). Fly to Athens or Kalamata

24 Orloff Hotel Hydra

No beaches and no cars means that those with children in tow won't be so keen on this island. Its reputation as Greece's artiest island also helps to ensure a stylishly adult ambience for its impressive summer exhibitions. The Orloff occupies one of its grandest 18th-century mansions, with eight perfectly judged rooms featuring classic sugar-cube architecture offset by blasts of blue as bright as the Aegean beyond. There are also plenty of patios, courtyards and verandas for quiet, quality time.
Details Doubles from £129, B&B (orloff.gr). Fly to Athens

CROATIA

25 Adriana Hvar Spa Hotel Croatia

If music be the food of love, glamorous Hvar island is playing it just right. It hosts an annual open-air summer festival from June to September, with jazz, classical and folk on the schedule. And this design hotel is in the thick of the action, presiding over the glittering waterfront, with playfully zingy bedrooms, one of the country's best spas and a chilled rooftop pool and bar.
Details Doubles from £105, B&B (suncanihvar.com). Fly to Split

TURKEY

26 Avalon Kabak Beach Lycian Coast

Oludeniz is probably Turkey's most famous beach. A few miles along the coast, Kabak is just as magnificent, but with its white-sand cove guarded by the gnarly fingers of the pine-carpeted Taurus Mountains, is quieter. Wisely, Avalon's 11 bungalow bedrooms, perched above Kabak, don't try to compete with that setting. They stick to stripped-back simplicity, with locally crafted four-poster beds, planter chairs and French doors that open on to Mother Nature's finest work. The resort is also adults-only, which helps to preserve its pin-drop peace and quiet.
Details Doubles from £100, room only (kabakbeach.com). Fly to Izmir

23 Kinsterna Hotel in the Peloponnese

27 Sabrina's Haus Bozburun peninsula

This section of Turkey's Turquoise Coast, 30 miles from Marmaris, remains blissfully sleepy. There's no vehicle access to this gorgeous hideaway, so you arrive by speedboat, and water is a constant theme thereafter. Fourteen of the 17 breezy white rooms and suites have hot tubs; Miss Sabrina, the hotel's custom-made speedboat, can whizz you to empty bays for Crusoe days à deux, and each evening one lucky couple get to dine on the candlelit floating pontoon.
Details Doubles from £412, half-board (sabrinashaus.com). Fly to Dalaman

28 Hotel Villa Mahal Kalkan Bay

This boutique is small but perfectly formed, as you will appreciate from the first sight of its 17m infinity pool, cantilevered over a forested hill and appearing to cascade into the deep blue sea beyond. Its beach club also plays with your senses, with lounging platforms built over a section of coastline fed by freshwater underground springs, so the water tastes sweet rather than salty. Rooms are soothing cream cocoons, pepped up by the occasional splash of zesty colour, and all have private terraces. Kalkan, a 20-minute walk away, offers a change of pace.
Details Doubles from £255, B&B (villamahal.com). Fly to Dalaman

28 Hotel Villa Mahal on Kalkan Bay

29 Macakizi Bodrum peninsula

Turkbuku village is home to Turkey's most glamorous beach scene, and this boutique resort is where the interiors are pale and the action is interesting, especially when celebrities such as Mick Jagger and Kate Moss check in. The bougainvillea-festooned suites are an ode to stealth wealth, with designer furnishings by Rifat Ozbek and paintings by local artisans. The palm-shaded pool is laid-back, food is by Aret Sahakyan, one of the country's star chefs, and the hotel has its own boat that is perfect for exploring deserted coves and enjoying on-deck wine-tasting workshops.
Details Doubles from £330, half-board (macakizi.com). Fly to Bodrum

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Adriana Hvar Spa Hotel in Croatia

CYPRUS

30 Casale Panayiotis Kalopanagiotis

In the slow-paced mountain village of Kalopanagiotis eight cottages have been transformed into pampering lairs for the loved-up, with contemporary furniture, modern art and wood-burning stoves bringing warmth to the exposed stone walls, thick wooden doors and beamed ceilings. Outside are spectacular mountain hikes, or you could repair to the spa with its rasul mud chamber, hydrotherapy pool and excellent massages. You're spoilt for choice at mealtimes with four restaurants, including Kava, a subterranean dining room, for that extra-special occasion.
Details Doubles from £80, B&B (casalepanayiotis.com). Fly to Paphos