

The Telegraph

The 20 best European hotels for autumn

Autumn minibreaks often mean a staycation – but there are lots of options on the Continent for tapping into hygge, harvest and more



Situated in Languedoc, one of the world's most diverse wine regions, Chateau les Carasses sits amid rolling vines

For some people this is a tricky time of year. Any Indian summer days (not that we had many of them this September) are a distant memory as October is upon us. As the nights draw in, winter begins to loom on the horizon like a malevolent spirit. For others though, the reverse is true. The French call this period “*la rentrée*”: an all-ages embracing of the back-to-school mentality and the opportunities for new beginnings it affords. With it comes a giddy sense of anticipation for the most beautiful months of the year, when hills, woodland and forest discard their uniform of green and explode into pockets of auburn and gold, carpeting the ground with piles of buttery-russet foliage.

There's such an energy, a last-gasp joy to autumn; crisp, blue-skied mornings with days that are never too hot to hike or cycle, sunsets that drench the countryside with a light that has a depth and sinuosity never seen on the overexposed days of summer. It's the time when the year's work gives up its rewards; olive and grape harvests, crops pulled from the soil, the earth put to bed, a few months to rest and restore before the cycle begins again.



Hotels like Andronis Concept Wellness Resort in Greece are at their best in Autumn

It's a wonderful time to travel in Europe, when the Mediterranean settles back to a normal pace; the beaches free of crowds, the fields alive with olive pickers and vineyard workers, the air filled with the rhythmic snip of scissors on vine or, more common now, the rumble of mechanical grape harvesters. In regions such as Provence and Istria, tourist coaches are replaced by trucks heaped with fruit and vegetables; in Portugal the skies are filled with migrating birds, heading off to keep up with the sun. And there's no better time to visit the mountains: catch the Dolomites between the last of the summer sun and the first snowfalls of winter, and you'll find the mountains glowing in extraordinary shades unmatched at any other time of the year.

While not everyone will be convinced that an autumn holiday wins out over summer, a stay in any one of the places below guarantees a blissfully tranquil, quietly reflective break. These last weeks of sunlight and warmth on the Continent are a tonic for the soul; one last, flame-hued dance before winter truly sweeps in.

Andronis Concept Wellness Resort, Imerovigli, Santorini

Santorini's sunset over the island's extraordinary volcanic caldera is one of the world's most extraordinary, best seen when the autumn sun is at a lower angle and some of the cruise crowds that have blighted the island this summer have disappeared. Andronis's 28 suites and villas, some with private pools, have blistering sea views, with muted décor, abstract art and contemporary wooden furniture. This autumn, the hotel is offering a "harvest haven" experience, with time in the hotel's vegetable and herb gardens, egg-collecting from the eco-friendly henhouse, cookery lessons and wine tastings. Guided walks can also be arranged, including the famous Caldera hike, which reveals much of Santorini's extraordinary geology and biodiversity.

Doubles from £590, B&B (0030 2286 036738; andronis.com)