

SOLO TRAVEL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

Cruise the West Indies to New Orleans

25 Let the Caribbean's captivating beat carry you to the soulful sounds of America's Deep South on this voyage where stops include the castaway beauty of the British Virgin Islands, the upmarket chic of St Barts, and reggae rhythms of Jamaica.

- Crystal Cruises (020 7399 7601, crystalcruises.co.uk) employs hosts and hostesses to dance, dine and socialise with guests. It also arranges solo events and hosted solo dining. This 14-night cruise from Fort Lauderdale to New Orleans costs from £5,109 per person, including flights, drinks and gratuities. Departs November 8 2016.

Christmas treats in Belgium

26 Enjoy a festive treat on this Christmas markets cruise to the pretty Belgian cities of Antwerp and Bruges where their town squares are filled with yuletide market stalls. In the Dutch town of Valkenburg, the market is held in a labyrinth of caves beneath the town.

- River Cruise Line (0844 544 6437; rivercruise.co.uk) is not charging single supplements on 2016 Christmas market cruises. A four-night sailing from Rotterdam to Brussels costs from £349 per person, based on return coach and ferry travel. Departs December 7, 10 and 13 2016.

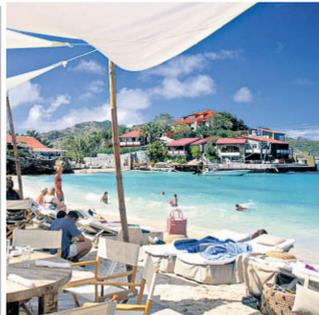
Norway's natural wonders

27 The dramatic scenery of the Norwegian fjords takes centre stage on this voyage, which delves into the rugged heart of this coastline to Flam, Geirangerfjord and Andalsnes, and a scenic backdrop of remote villages, precipitous granite cliffs and spectacular waterfalls.

- Cruise & Maritime Voyages (0844 998 3805; cruiseandmaritime.com) has single supplements of 25 per cent and on sailings of more than five nights offers a programme of solo passenger events. This eight-night round-trip voyage from Tilbury costs from £1,159 per person. Departs May 20 2017.

Historic passage along the Danube

28 Wine-tasting at the historic Nikolaihof Estate in Austria's Wachau Valley, a farm visit in Linz, and a private concert in a Viennese palace are some of the highlights of a Danube river cruise which cuts



Discover the upmarket chic of St Barts, above

SAFETY TIPS
WOMEN TRAVELLERS

DO

- Book hotels ahead. Even small guesthouses now list on booking.com or agoda.com. As the rate is often quoted per room, book it for two people as you often get a better room that way.
- Dress conservatively in loose clothes. Outside Europe and North America, shorts are for the beach, leggings for yoga, and see-through shifts for the bedroom. Women should cover shoulders and thighs, in particular, to gain respect and avoid attracting unwanted attention.
- Pack a door wedge to stop people gaining access to rooms in cheap hotels.
- Buy a cheap smartphone and install a local SIM card. It's a good way to access local mapping, show taxi drivers your destination in the local language, and phone for help. Even making a fake call as soon as you start feeling uncomfortable can head off trouble.
- Book a travel safety course with Objective Travel Safety (01788 899029; objectiveasafety.com) if you are a novice traveller. They offer advice for travelling as a solo female. The one-day courses, held in London, cost £160.

DON'T

- Walk alone after dark in developing countries. Local women don't do it, so you shouldn't either. Grab a rickshaw or a taxi, preferably one called by the restaurant or hotel.
- Display signs of wealth. Leave expensive jewellery, designer trainers and iPhones at home.
- Accept alcoholic drinks or sweets from strangers, be too friendly with men who approach you at tourist sites, or banter in an overfamiliar way with hotel staff who may misread the signals.
- Rely on a guidebook for up-to-date information on staying safe; instead ask for advice from locals and other travellers.
- Wear earphones while out and about. You need to have all your senses engaged to pick up the signals that something might not be quite right.

A taste of Caledonia

This voyage showcases the cultural riches of Edinburgh and the heritage of Dundee, plus Invergordon, the gateway to the Scottish Highlands – a landscape famous for its castles and the enduring mystery of Loch Ness.

- Fred Olsen (0800 035 5242; fredolscruises.com) has single cabins on all four of its ships, along with dance hosts, solo traveller gatherings and shared tables at dinner. This six-night round-trip voyage from Tilbury costs from £699 per person. Departs December 1 2017.

Caribbean cocktail

This sailing is full of tropical temptations, from the unsullied appeal of the Honduran island of Roatan to the cultural treasures of Belize and Mexico, along with the Caribbean.

- Norwegian Cruise Line (0333 241 2319; ncl.co.uk) offers a dedicated complex for solo travellers on its newer ships comprising bjuou "Studio" cabins and a dedicated lounge and bar. This seven-night fly-cruise is based on a round-trip sailing from Miami, costing from £1,974 per person. Departs May 13 2017.

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31 On Solos Holidays' six-day Discover the Flavours of Spain tour to Andalusia, travellers learn about cooking classic Spanish dishes and tapas, take part in wine tasting in a vineyard and try local ham in the whitewashed pueblos blancos of Las Alpujarras. Or even go see what happens in a honey museum. There's plenty of culture, too, with various trips to the Moorish Alhambra Palace in Granada and the fascinating cave houses of Guadix, and even some flamenco dancing.

- October 30 2016 and February 19 2017, from £899, including accommodation, some meals, flights, tastings, cookery classes and excursions. Solos Holidays (0844 371 8860; solosholidays.co.uk).

32 Oxford-based ATG doesn't just cater for solo travellers, but the company has plenty of singles joining its house-party-style trips. Staying at the eighth-century Pieve a Castello in Tuscany (two single rooms available for an eight-day Walking and Cooking through History tour, visitors learn about various dishes from the paleolithic to the futuristic, cooking using vegetables from the estate's organic kitchen garden. There are walks to medieval hilltop towns and a trip to Siena, as well as wine tasting in a local vineyard.

- Departures between March and November 2017, from £2,195 full-board, including cookery demonstrations. Excludes flights. ATG (01865 315678; atg-oxford.co.uk).

33 Just You specialises in trips for solo travellers, and its Bordeaux holiday has a distinct foodie bent. It's based at Domaine de Fompierre, renowned

locally for its food, and within walking distance from the town of Bazas – famous for its beef – Rick Stein is a fan. The six-day holiday includes a gourmet tour of Bordeaux city, a visit to the wine cellars of St Emilion and an optional trip to Sauternes to try the sweet wine (from £415).

- Departures between April and September 2017, from £1,059 half-board, including flights and excursions. Just You (01858 898505; justyou.co.uk).

34 Puglia is one of the foodies' favourite bits of Italy, with a rustic cuisine based on fabulous ingredients. Singles experts One Traveller has a nine-day trip encompassing both Lecce, the baroque city on the heel-tip of Italy, and the ancient town of Conversano. There's plenty of excellent food along the way, including dinner in a sea cavern and a visit to a masseria, or farm, to see how olive oil is produced.

- Departures between April and October 2017, from £1,950 half-board, including tastings and flights. One Traveller (01760 72201; onetraveler.co.uk).

35 specialises in sustainable, ethical tours. The company has an increasing percentage of solo travellers, and this 15-day trip has no single supplement. Covering Bangkok, Chiang Mai in the north and Krabi in the south, this promises to get in depth on the regional variations of Thai food, with cookery lessons with locals, a night market visit, a trip to a floating market and even a picnic on a desert island.

- Departs October 29 2016 and February 11 2017, from £2,225, including accommodation, some meals, cooking, activities, transport and flights. Responsible Travel (01273 823700; responsibletavel.com).

36 Masterminded by Australian-born, Cambodia-based couple Lara Dunston and Terence Carter, Grantourismo covers street food, hands-on cookery sessions and market tours, staying in boutique hotels. There are no single supplements and they have welcomed solo travellers from 25 to 69 years old, mostly women. Dunston is a food and travel writer and Carter a photographer, so they are more than well equipped to lead this nine-day Cambodia Travel, Food Writing and Photography Retreat which visits Siem Reap and Battambang.

- October 1 and there are further departures in November 2016 and May 2017, from £1,955 (£1,466.38) full-board, including activities and cookery classes. Excludes flights. Grantourismo (info@grantourismotravels.com; grantourismotravels.com).

37 Explore doesn't charge single supplements for those who are happy to share a room with another solo traveller of the same sex. A nine-day cycling trip pottering around stunning Yucatan (mostly on the flat) includes visits to several historic sites as well as a tequila tasting, a pre-Columbian cooking

demonstration and a memorable seafood grill on the palm-fringed beach of San Crisanto.

- Departures between November 2016 and November 2017, from £1,650, including accommodation, some meals and flights. Explore (01252 883735; explore.co.uk).

38 Adagio runs leisurely walking tours of Europe. Over half of the company's participants are solo travellers, so single supplements are low or there's an option of being paired up with a traveller of the same sex if you don't mind sharing. An eight-day Tastes of Hidden Portugal trip, based in the medieval towns of Estremoz and Evora, includes two hands-on cooking sessions and a chance to try blending your own wine at a vineyard.

- Departures between April and October 2017, from £1,345 half-board, including cooking programme and flights. Adagio (01707 386700; adagio.co.uk).

39 The legendary Ballymaloe Cookery School in the Cork countryside is the alma mater of the likes of restaurateur Thomasina Miers and chef Stevie Parle, and single people are the norm on these courses. Book a room in the shared self-catering cottages and spend the day in the

school and the evenings socialising or sitting on the beach. Courses are year-round and range from half a day to 12 weeks.

- A two-and-a-half day Festive Entertaining course with television cook Rachel Allen starts on December 13 2016 and costs £625 (£527), including demonstrations and hands-on sessions. Excludes flights and accommodation. Single rooms cost £65 per night, but if you don't mind sharing a twin it's £35 a night. Ballymaloe Cookery School (00353 21 4646785; cookingisfun.ie).

40 The Grange Cookery School has five-day courses staying in purpose-built accommodation next to the owner's 17th-century Somerset farmhouse. Most participants come on their own. The One Week Wonder is great for those with few kitchen skills, while the One Step On course is perfect for confident cooks, covering Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and Asian cuisines. There are a few single rooms at a £50 supplement, but most students share rooms. Courses in the first half of the year have a good mix of ages.

- One Week Wonder courses run on February 13 and April 3 2017, costing £715. One Step On runs April 24 2017 and costs £895. Both include all meals and tuition. The Grange Cookery School (01373 826099; cookeryatthegrange.co.uk).

41 You needn't fly to Asia to realise your chakra. Just a 40-minute drive from Málaga is Shanti-Som – a wellbeing retreat with a Far East influence. Perched on a hill overlooking the Sierra de las Nieves Natural Park, it is a quiet haven offering yoga, Pilates, detox and fitness retreats. But there are options for those who simply want a bit of rest and relaxation. If there's one thing you must try, it's the "foot healing" treatment by the gifted Lesley.

- From £800 half-board for a three-day Wellbeing Booster package including flights, classes and treatments. Wellbeing Escapes (020 3735 7555; wellbeingescapes.com).

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- From £2,295 full-board for a four-night Healthyarian programme, including classes and treatments. A 10 per cent discount is applied to those sharing a double or twin. Healthy Holiday Company (020 8868 0501; thehealthyholidaycompany.co.uk).

43 Situated on the edge of the New Forest National Park, surrounded by 130 acres of Hampshire countryside, and is a short walk from the sea. Take in the glorious surroundings before heading to the spa for a massage followed by a dip in the pool. Unlike Simply Healing, above, you won't be with a group – so this will be a truly solo experience. Escape from It all on a bike ride from the spa through a nature reserve towards the magnificent coast.

- From £1,705 for single occupancy for two nights, including all meals, treatments, guided activities and take-home gifts. ITC Luxury Travel (01244 355 527; itcluxurytravel.co.uk).

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- From £2,295 full-board for a four-night Healthyarian programme, including classes and treatments. A 10 per cent discount is applied to those sharing a double or twin. Healthy Holiday Company (020 8868 0501; thehealthyholidaycompany.co.uk).

71 Situated on the edge of the New Forest National Park, surrounded by 130 acres of Hampshire countryside, and is a short walk from the sea. Take in the glorious surroundings before heading to the spa for a massage followed by a dip in the pool. Unlike Simply Healing, above, you won't be with a group – so this will be a truly solo experience. Escape from It all on a bike ride from the spa through a nature reserve towards the magnificent coast.

- From £1,705 for single occupancy for two nights, including all meals, treatments, guided activities and take-home gifts. ITC Luxury Travel (01244 355 527; itcluxurytravel.co.uk).

72 Chewton Glen is situated on the edge of the New Forest National Park, surrounded by 130 acres of Hampshire countryside, and is a short walk from the sea. Take in the glorious surroundings before heading to the spa for a massage followed by a dip in the pool. Unlike Simply Healing, above, you won't be with a group – so this will be a truly solo experience. Escape from It all on a bike ride from the spa through a nature reserve towards the magnificent coast.

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73 Simply Healing is like visiting a favourite aunt at her cosy country home. In this instance, the aunt comes in the form of Vivien Kay, the retreat's motherly patron who will put you on a programme of juices and broths, colonic hydrotherapy sessions and supplements. Not to fret, there are daily rambles in the woods and evening meditation classes as well as some of the best treatments I've ever had (try the REN Wrap – a wrap, scrub, massage and facial all rolled into one). Humble as the place is (a sleek medspa it is not), it is still by far my favourite retreat and arguably the best in the UK.

- From £1,675 full-board for a five-day juice detox, including all treatments. Simply Healing (01403 822117; simplyhealingcentre.com).

FOOD AND DRINK TOURS

Learn to cook local dishes or just indulge in fine cuisine, says Xanthe Clay

Cookery and culture in Spain

31 On Solos Holidays' six-day Discover the Flavours of Spain tour to Andalusia, travellers learn about cooking classic Spanish dishes and tapas, take part in wine tasting in a vineyard and try local ham in the whitewashed pueblos blancos of Las Alpujarras. Or even go see what happens in a honey museum. There's plenty of culture, too, with various trips to the Moorish Alhambra Palace in Granada and the fascinating cave houses of Guadix, and even some flamenco dancing.

- October 30 2016 and February 19 2017, from £899, including accommodation, some meals, flights, tastings, cookery classes and excursions. Solos Holidays (0844 371 8860; solosholidays.co.uk).