



CHEAP AND CHIC



The credit crunch needn't dampen your wanderlust - with a bit of insider know-how you can still have the holiday of your dreams without hurting your purse. Try out these five stylish stays



The city apartment **Barcelona**

What's the deal? While we don't need any convincing about Spain's cool, cultured and sexy edge, a stay in a European city doesn't come cheap. Our hot tip? Forgo the pricey hotel and opt for a Chic & Basic apartment. The group - whose portfolio also includes up-market budget hotels and hostels in Madrid and Amsterdam - has reinvented the notion of travelling on a shoestring with a collection of 30 perfectly placed

apartments. The spaces vary in size from a compact attic to one-and two-bedroomed residences big enough for four, but each is airy, has been furnished in a clean, contemporary style and features a kitted-out kitchen, air conditioning and TV. Fresh linen is provided, some apartments also have washer-dryers and dishwashers, and all have free WiFi internet access.

Saving graces The apartments are within walking distance of loads of must-see attractions, saving you transport costs. The local tapas bars present an opportunity to eat well and cheaply, but you'll also be able to save money by shopping at the markets and eating in.

Need to know Rates start from €85 (R967) to €125 (R1 423) per apartment per night for two people, depending on its size and location. There's a supplement of €20 (R228) per additional person. The required minimum stay is one night from Mondays to Thursdays; two nights over a weekend. Special offers are regularly featured on their website.

Chic & Basic, Chicandbasic.com, +34-93-295-4652

The yacht cruise **Turkey**

What's the deal? A holiday at sea is an altogether different proposition. And a heavenly one at that, particularly when it's on the extraordinarily beautiful Aegean. It's essential to pick a reputable company for this sort of getaway, and we can vouch for SCIC Sailing. The company - which specializes in super-comfortable, all-inclusive cruises along the Turkish southwest coast as well as to several Greek islands - has been afloat for 20 years and boasts a fleet of charming classic sailing yachts. SCIC Sailing currently offers 17 different itineraries, from a leisurely voyage to themed culinary tours and meditation programmes. It's also possible to arrange a bespoke cruise for a group of friends or family. This truly is a carefree vacation: each well-appointed vessel comes with an experienced crew (including a chef) so the only rigging you'll have to worry about is doing up the overcomplicated bikini that seemed like such a fabulous idea at the time...

Saving graces Your fee covers accommodation, breakfast, lunch, five dinners and all snacks and drinks - a real steal when compared to a holiday on dry land (just calculate what a hotel, meals and transport would cost you over the same duration). Off-peak season (May, June, September, October) is generally cheaper even though the weather is still lovely. Land excursions are part of the deal, each yacht has a canoe and most have windsurfing equipment that can be used free of charge. And unlike most hotels and resorts, SCIC Sailing does not charge a single supplement.

Need to know Cruises start from €765 (R8 700) per person per week. Prices do not include flights or airport transfers. Themed cruises carry a surcharge. *Marie Claire* readers who book their 2010 cruise before 1 November 2009 will get the cruise at this year's price (meals and drinks will, however, be costed at 2010 prices). This offer is applicable to South Africans only. **SCIC Sailing, Scicsailing.eu, +44-208-510-9292**

The perfect package **Mauritius**

What's the deal? There was a time when an all-in-one deal to Mauritius was considered a clichéd getaway. But the tide has turned, and how could it not when the package is so attractive? Apart from the cost-saving aspects - the price usually includes flights, transfers, accommodation, meals and the use of resort facilities - we're talking heaven on earth: azure waters, blue skies and icing-sugar beaches. And with a flying time of just less than five hours from Jo'burg, it's ideal for time-poor South Africans.

Our tropiscope is focused on the four-star Prékil Beach Resort, positioned on a private peninsula on the southeast coast. Its design is tasteful, the spa is an oasis of luxurious treatments and both action junkies and foodies will find more than enough to sate their appetites.

Saving graces South Africans don't need visas for Mauritius and, aside from a spot of sightseeing and shopping, you'll generally be staying put at your resort - both cash savers.

Need to know *Marie Claire* readers can take advantage of Flight Centre's 'Pay for Eight Nights, Stay for Ten' deal to Prékil Beach (visit Lepreskil.com). From R14 699, the package includes return flights from Jo'burg, transfers, meals, all drinks up until midnight and limited minibar. Accommodation is in a standard garden room, but we recommend the R550 per person upgrade to a lagoon room. (Offer valid for travel between 1 November and 11 December 2009 and open to SA residents only. Travel insurance not included and conditions apply.) **Flight Centre, Flightcentre.co.za, 0860-400-727**



AROUND THE WORLD ON A BUDGET

Clockwise from opposite Take a cruise in the Aegean; experience city living in Barcelona; get a slice of heaven in Mauritius.

THE PERFECT HOLIDAY STARTS HERE

Right and below
House swap with someone in Umbria, Italy; escape with friends to the village of Cabrera, Spain.

The house swap **Umbria**

What's the deal? We like to think of a house swap as the ultimate vacation hook up... For grown-ups, that is. A small annual fee gives you membership of the US-based Home Exchange group, a network of over 28 000 residential listings by like-minded people all over the world who are keen to find a home-from-home in which to holiday. The duration and terms of the staycation is between homeowners, but an exchange typically includes a straightforward house swap with no extra costs, at a time that suits all parties.

The scene of our dream exchange is Umbria; the object of our affection listed as a restored 17th-century farmhouse known as Podere Fontegallo. With its golden rolling hills and irresistible charm, the region is the less touristy counterpart to neighbouring Tuscany and presents opportunities for exploration including regular food and antique markets, year-round festivals and hidden-away villages. It's also located within reasonable driving time of both Rome and Florence airports.



Saving graces Apart from flights and day-to-day living expenses, there are typically no extra costs. Many members also choose to exchange cars, eliminating the need for rentals, and staying in a real home makes this a kid-friendly option too. It's estimated that by swapping homes you cut the average cost of a holiday by 50 to 70 per cent, which to us sounds like a good enough reason to join.

Need to know A basic membership starts at US\$99 (R789) for one year. Should you not have a successful house swap within the first year of listing your property, the second year is free. **Home Exchange, Homeexchange.com, +1-310-798-3864**

The shared villa **Cabrera**

What's the deal? Think of it as a holiday digs - you split the cost of a gorgeous villa with a few mates, and live the high life on the cheap. And if you scout out accommodation in an area that's a bit off the beaten track, you'll get yourself a really great deal. Our favourite option? Cortijo Cabrera in Andalusia, Spain. Tucked away in the folds of the Sierra Cabrera mountain range, this picturesque village is dotted

with friendly goats and Moroccan-style villas. Villa Cabrera, a typical example of the holiday houses on offer here, has three *en suite* bedrooms that open onto a courtyard with an orange tree and a shock of pink flowers creeping up the wall. It's fully equipped with standard linen, kitchen appliances and aircon.

Saving graces When all you're doing is relaxing around the pool and lazing on the beach, food is your main indulgence and expense. You should get by on a few hundred rand per person per week if you self-cater. For an evening out, trot up the hill to Los Pastores restaurant and eat lamb shank and butterfish - you'll pay about R110 to R160 for a main meal. You can also explore nearby towns such as Garruch and eat fresh fish at one of the many pubs that line the beach for about R55, then spend time browsing the local fleamarkets.

Need to know Villa Cabrera costs £495 (R6 585) per week between June and September. Divide that six ways? It's a steal - and it's only £395 (R5 260) per week if you book out of season. To find a villa visit Ownersdirect.co.uk (type in reference number S10926 to find Villa Cabrera). Make sure the accommodation you book is situated on top of the mountain in Cabrera - you don't want to get stuck in a hotel in the more touristy area along the beachfront. We recommend flying via Gatwick, London to Almeria, Spain - about R2 000 on Easyjet. If you wait till the last minute to book, you can knock 50 per cent off this price too. ■

BUDGET-SAVVY TRAVEL RULES

* WORK ON YOUR HAGGLING

Ask your travel agent if you can upgrade your package deal to be all-inclusive - meals, drinks and activities. Also, 'advise your agent of special occasions such as a birthday or honeymoon as

discounted rates may apply,' says Julia Hellman, managing director of Blue Moon Travel.

* GET IN THERE FIRST

'New hotels often have fabulous offers. Register for newsletters from travel sites so you'll hear about the specials,' says Michelle Snaddon of Justtheplanet.com.

* TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Travel at the beginning or tail end of high season. 'Besides saving money, you'll be able to enjoy a holiday without the crowds - not to mention the fashion sales,' says Snaddon. You can also take advantage of special deals if you pay in advance of your trip.

* LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

'Ensure that your hotel is close to places of interest to save money on taxis,' suggests John Riddler, media and PR executive at Thompsons Holidays. Try to avoid staying in too many different areas as you will incur extra transport costs and lose out on any 'stay for longer' specials.