

Travel doctor Solving your holiday dilemmas



Julia Brookes
Consumer expert

SOUFIANE ZAIDI/ALAMY

Q Do you have any suggestions for a large extended-family holiday for next year? We are a group of twenty-two adults and nine children, and want separate sleeping and cooking facilities for about nine family groups. We were thinking of somewhere in France or Portugal with guaranteed sunshine and activities for children aged from two to fourteen. Our budget for the week would be between £3,000 and £4,000 for each group.
Anne Pascall

A Stay near Narbonne in southern France at Château Les Carrasses, a hotel-villa hybrid on a wine estate close to the Canal du Midi that is run in partnership with Vignobles Bonfils, one of the top winemakers in the Languedoc. It may sound adult-oriented, but there is a huge communal pool and a kids' club as well as bikes, a tennis court, large grounds and gardens and trees to climb. There's a mixture of apartments and restored estate outbuildings, and all the latter have outdoor space, some with pools. An apartment sleeping four costs £2,415 for a week at the end of July, while an outbuilding sleeping four costs £2,893 (lescarrasses.com).



Château Les Carrasses in France and, below, Banana Beach on Principe

Q We usually head to the Caribbean for some winter sun but this December we'd like a trip somewhere a bit more exotic, ideally with some interesting wildlife and good walking. If the time difference from the UK is shorter that would be a bonus because I find it quite hard to cope with jet-lag. Any suggestions?
Millie Mitchell

A Try Sao Tome and Principe, two tiny rainforest-covered islands one degree above the Equator that comprise Africa's second-smallest country. The temperature hovers at about 25C year-round, there are extensive hiking trails and it's spectacularly bio-diverse; the density of endemic birdlife beats even the



Galapagos. The time difference is just an hour and flights are via Lisbon. The Africa specialist Rainbow Tours has an eight-night trip including a stay on Principe at the stylish Roca Belo Monte, a restored plantation house that's a short stroll from beaches, including the notably photogenic Banana Beach.

December is a great time to see the turtles hatch on both islands and there's excellent snorkelling and scuba diving too. It costs £3,115pp, including three nights' B&B on Sao Tome, five on Principe and all flights (rainbowtours.co.uk). Alternatively, a stay in the Roca Sundry hotel in Principe, where in 1919, the Cambridge astrophysicist Arthur Eddington observed a full eclipse of the sun that helped him to prove Einstein's theory of relativity, is one of the highlights of Reef and Rainforest's tailor-made 11-night trip. It starts at £2,595pp, including some meals but excluding international flights (reefandrainforest.co.uk).

Q My wife and I were scheduled to fly from Prestwick to Faro with Ryanair on February 18, but a member of staff at the bag-drop refused to allow me to travel because my passport was issued on March 28, 2012, and expired on December 28, 2022 (I believed that

this met the criteria of being less than ten years old and having more than six months' validity). As a result my wife was unable to travel on her own — she is 80, I'm 83 — and the distress caused to us was considerable. I was able to get a new passport within four days and rebooked, but I am now seeking denied-boarding compensation. Can you help?
Thomas Morton Dewar

A Ryanair has been turning away Europe-bound passengers unnecessarily — causing them huge upset and expense — because of how it interprets the rules on passport validity for British travellers (it's not entirely to blame because the government advice on this issue is less than clear). You should have been allowed to board the plane because your passport was less than ten years old on the day you travelled and valid for more than three months after your scheduled return date. However, Ryanair still insists that your passport needed to be less than nine years and nine months old when you travelled. You could contact the dispute-resolution service AviationADR to pursue compensation (aviationadr.org.uk), but it recently sided with Ryanair on a similar claim. Send a letter before making a court claim (gov.uk/make-court-claim-for-money).

Q A number of reports on queues at airports have said that passengers missed flights because they were unable to clear security in time. I was under the impression that once a bag had been checked in the plane wouldn't depart if the passenger wasn't on board. Have the rules changed?
David Smith

A Many travellers stuck in interminable security queues in the next few months will be hoping that their bags can't travel without them, but they could be disappointed, according to Peter Drissell, the director of security at the Civil Aviation Authority. "UK aviation security regulations require that if a passenger checks in a piece of hold baggage, the air carrier must ensure that the person who checked in the bag travels with that bag," he said. "However, the regulations do allow under certain circumstances for hold bags to fly without the linked passenger on board, in which case the hold bag would have been subject to additional security measures before it is permitted to travel."

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Don't put up with this Illness derails Rocky Mountaineer trip

In 2019 I booked a 20th wedding anniversary trip for my wife and me on the Rocky Mountaineer train in Canada the following May. No expense was spared and it cost £12,000 — we booked first-class air fares and GoldLeaf travel on

the train through our travel agent. Unfortunately, our holiday was postponed twice because of the pandemic, and a few days ago — a week before we were scheduled to fly to Vancouver for our rearranged dream trip — my wife was admitted to hospital with acute pancreatitis. I contacted my travel agent, who approached Rocky Mountaineer to check whether we could postpone our trip again, but it refused to let us do so because we were within 60 days of departure. This seems wholly unfair to me.
Martin Brindley

I was sorry to hear about your wife and hoped that, if Rocky Mountaineer wouldn't budge, you could claim on your insurance, but you told me that you had only £4,000 cancellation cover (for future trips try topupmycancellationcover.com). However, when I sent the train operator details of your case it was entirely sympathetic. "Our sales team is reaching out to the partners these guests booked their journey through to reschedule their travel for when they are well enough," it said. "Our team look forward to welcoming them on board when they are able to do so."