



Miracle cream? What beauty experts think
Plus 30 fabulous flight-free breaks

Weekend

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Dive in!

**The wild
swimming
guide**

Best places to get
close to nature



Where to see roe
deer and rabbits



Walks through
wildflower fields



Spot rare birds and
vibrant butterflies

Plus Bricks & Mortar: your property section

Travel

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'In 500 years Patagonia hasn't been developed, tamed or prettified'

Chris Moss journeys along the tip of South America

GETTY IMAGES

1 Vallon des Auffes port in Marseilles



Where to go
and where to stay
after lockdown

30 fabulous flight-free breaks

Hike the Swiss Alps, cycle in Provence or bask in the Basque Country. **Richard Mellor** has the best trips to take by car, ferry or train

1 French Riviera by rail

Swap the busy mainline train that whooshes from Paris to Nice in a six-hour blur for the less-used regional lines that meander through the country. Break the journey with overnight stops at Vichy, with its sulphurous hot springs, and volcano-circled Clermont-Ferrand before continuing on to Avignon and Marseilles, the vibrant port city. Once you reach the Côte d'Azur, stay at Les Roches Rouges, a shoreline boutique hotel near Le Dramont, before moving to the hilltop village of Mougins, which overlooks the Bay of Cannes. Here you're staying at Le Mas Candille. **Details** Eleven nights' B&B from £3,660pp, including all rail travel (originaltravel.co.uk)

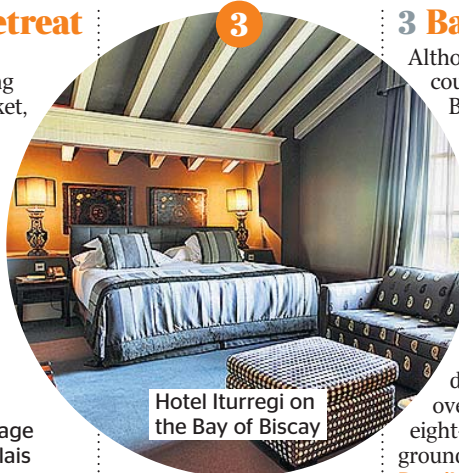
2 Austrian nature retreat

Four hundred years ago the Forsthofgut was a humble logging station; these days it's an upmarket, cool and calming "nature hotel". Its exterior blends glass and weathered wood, while the bedrooms feature bold blocks of colour. Stays are about ease and relaxation, with yoga mats and hiking rucksacks (with maps) in the rooms, a garden, a lake with daybeds and a huge spa. The menu focus on produce from the nearby Leogang Mountains. **Details** Seven nights' full board from £1,434pp, including a massage (forsthofgut.at). Driving from Calais takes 11 hours

3

3 Basque countryside

Although the cities of Spain's Basque country are well known — cultured Bilbao, foodie San Sebastian — its interior is far less visited. As the Cantabrian Mountains begin, you'll find Alpine-style chalets, tinkling cowbells and locals enjoying *pintxos* (Basque tapas) in squares dwarfed by stone cathedrals. On the coast it's all villages with bars sizzling seafood on outdoor grills and vineyards producing the region's dry txakoli white wine. Also overlooking the Bay of Biscay is the eight-room Hotel Iturregi, which has grounds with hammocks and a pool. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £683pp ▶



Hotel Iturregi on the Bay of Biscay

40 Travel

6 A church in the Black Forest



► (sawdays.co.uk). Brittany Ferries sails from Portsmouth to Bilbao in 23 hours. Driving from Calais takes 11 hours

4 Hike the Swiss Alps

Before the advent of trains, tunnels or cars, travel around the Swiss Alps often involved ox-pulled sledges and high trails over passes. Today many of the latter form long-distance walking networks; some are notoriously busy, but others, such as the Wildstrubel Circuit, are much less trodden. Linking German and French-speaking cantons, the Wildstrubel promises beautiful Rhône Valley views, regular sightings of chamois and other antelope, more than 3,000ft of daily ascents and nights staying in spa towns. Starting in Kandersteg, the self-guided loop is suitable for experienced hikers with a head for heights.

Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,280pp, including luggage transfers and walking notes (sherpaexpeditions.com). Trains from London to Kandersteg via Paris and Basle take ten hours. Driving from Calais takes nine hours

5 Discover Luxembourg

Little Luxembourg packs a punch, with steam trains and solar-powered boats navigating its craggy forests and lakes, plus 70 castles looming out of the trees. In the southeast's Moselle River valley prizewinning white wines and sparkling crémant are produced. And then there's Luxembourg City, its medieval fortress centre overlooking the futuristic Kirchberg quarter, which this year will welcome the youthful hotel chain Mama Shelter's latest outpost. A pink-marble cocktail bar and rooftop hammocks typify the laid-back, but flamboyant vibe.

Details B&B doubles from £145 (mamashelter.com). Trains from London to Luxembourg via Paris take five hours. Driving from Calais takes four and a half hours. See visitluxembourg.com for details of vineyards offering tastings

6 Black Forest train trip

Shady glades, gateaux and fairytale wooden farmhouses await in southwestern Germany's spectacular Black Forest. Take a rail holiday to the mountainous region, staying for five days in the affluent lakeside resort of Titisee, and you'll also have many scenic lines to ride — with a rail pass included for unlimited journeys. The return trip from Titisee takes in the no less picturesque Rhine Valley and includes a stop in Aachen, a handsome cathedral city.

Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,495pp, including rail travel from London and the rail pass (ffestiniogtravel.com)

7 Cinematic Angoulême

Wes Anderson's newest film, to be released in October, details life at the French bureau of a fictional American newspaper. Angoulême, a fortified city by the Charente River northeast of Bordeaux with old-world architecture, provides *The French Dispatch's* backdrop. Anderson pilgrims can visit the city's large comic-strip museum before exploring the wider Charente region's photogenic villages and cognac vineyards. Stay at Domaine des Etangs, a turreted 11th-century château set in 2,500 acres, with lakes, woods, a Michelin-starred restaurant and farmhouse cottages.

Details B&B doubles from £395 (domainedesetangs.com). Trains from London to Angoulême take six hours. Driving from Calais takes seven and a half hours

8 Dutch coast

Between Leiden and Haarlem, the Netherlands' small western "Dune

20 Château du Grand-Lucé in the Loire Valley



and Bulb Region" is celebrated for its sprawling flower fields and protected sandy shores. A good base for exploration is the well-to-do seaside resort of Noordwijk and its boutique Vesper hotel, which is perched on the promenade and has 27 striking bedrooms decorated with vintage furnishings. Step outside to the adjacent beach club, which has cabanas for hire, then chill in the hotel's brass-and-steel cocktail bar with aperitifs as the sunset turns the North Sea pink.

Details B&B doubles from £138 (vesperhotel.com). Stena Line sails from Harwich to the Hook of Holland in seven hours, and P&O Ferries from Hull to Rotterdam in eleven and a half hours. Driving from Calais takes four hours

9 Paddle the Dordogne

As much-needed changes of scenery go, the Dordogne River takes some beating, especially if you're on a canoeing tour. This self-guided itinerary covers the section from Thézel to Groléjac, a spellbinder of rose-coloured cliffs and walnut groves, meadows and vineyards, as well as strawberry fields and castles, in one of which you stay overnight. Before launching you'll visit the village of Rocamadour, built into sheer rocks, and en route there's a stop in medieval Sarlat-la-Canéda, the Dordogne's foodie capital, celebrated for its local specialty, duck confit.

Details Eight nights' B&B from £1,779pp, including trains from London and four dinners (responsibletravel.com)

10 Cycle Provence

More than 30 years after Peter Mayle's bestselling memoir *A Year in Provence*, how about a slow-paced pedal around France's best-smelling region? Embark on a self-guided bike tour through lavender-scented landscapes straight out of a Van Gogh painting — if not olive groves and hilltop hamlets, then Romanesque chapels or stone farmhouses. You'll cycle on quiet lanes throughout, and move south to the wilder, flatter Camargue, where white horses and flamingos patrol salt pans and rice fields. The four cycling days average 25 miles each and can be executed on hill-taming ebikes.

Details Six nights' B&B from £1,840pp, including transfers from Avignon and to Arles railway stations, luggage transfers and bike hire (the-carter-company.com). Driving from Calais takes nine and a half hours

11 Boating in Brittany

It's easy to hire a small boat and explore Brittany's expansive network of canals. From Messac, a route along the winding Villaine and Oust rivers takes in quaint towns such as Malestroit, all wonky medieval buildings, and La Gacilly before Josselin's pointy-turreted castle comes into view. The itinerary is flexible, with tuition provided and no experience required.

Details Seven nights' self-catering for three from £719 (leboat.co.uk). Brittany Ferries sails from Plymouth to Roscoff in six hours and from Portsmouth to St Malo in nine. Driving from Calais takes five and a half hours

16 Atelier Lachaert Dhanis in Tielrode



GETTY IMAGES



12 Opal Coast for kids

Le Touquet, in northern France, has been a favourite since moneyed Britons started visiting after the First World War, lapping up its art deco glamour and one of mainland Europe's closest beaches. It is also family-friendly — many restaurants offer children's menus, a little train crawls up leafy boulevards, and there are beach clubs with trampolines and soft-play areas on the four miles of sand. Inland, past pony stables and beside a Harry Colt-designed golf course, stands the red-brick house of Les Jumeaux, now two smart four-bedroom apartments that share a large garden. **Details** Seven nights' self-catering for nine from £2,321 (airbnb.co.uk). Driving from Calais takes an hour

13 Party in Champagne

That first post-pandemic holiday will surely be a cork-popping moment, so why not visit Champagne in northeastern France? The most prestigious bottles hail from the cellars of producers on L'Avenue de Champagne in the town of Épernay, not far from the Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa, an opulent hilltop haunt with vine-patterned views. There's a Michelin-starred restaurant, a vast "wellness temple" and 47 large suites. Private tastings at all the region's best houses, including Moët & Chandon, are easily arranged.

Details Three nights' B&B from £721pp (royalchampagne.com). Trains from London to Épernay take four and a half hours. Driving from Calais takes three hours

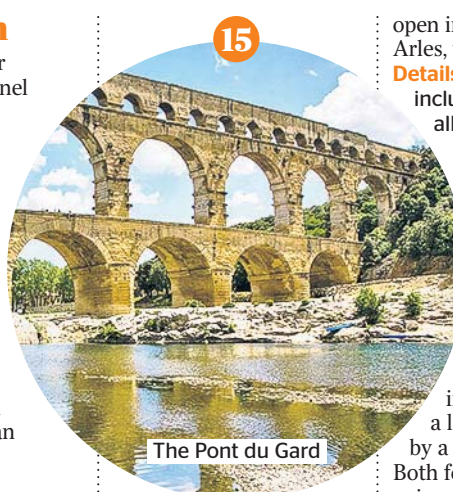
14 Hole up on Herm

With sandy beaches, and neither cars nor crowds, the small Channel Island of Herm is perfect for a low-key break close to home. A mere one and a half miles at its longest (you can ramble its beautiful coastline in about two hours), the island enjoys some of the UK's warmest weather and, thanks to a number of shipwrecks, intriguing scuba diving. Spend days fishing, admiring coastal gardens or joining seal-safari boat trips. Stay at the traditional White House Hotel, which has an outdoor pool and croquet lawn.

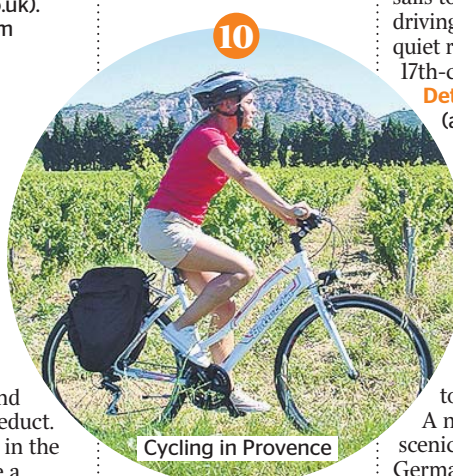
Details Three nights' B&B from £498pp, including a three-hour ferry from Poole to Guernsey and transfers (ukprestige-holidays.co.uk). The boat from Guernsey to Herm costs £28 return

15 On the trail of the Romans

A new self-guided rail tour allows history buffs to explore Gallia Narbonensis, or Provincia Nostra — the first Roman province north of the Alps. Surviving five centuries from 2BC, it covered a swathe of modern-day southeastern France and included the Via Domitia — a road to Spain — and the three-tier Pont du Gard aqueduct. You'll see both of these and stop in the former capital, Narbonne, where a mighty, relic-filled Roman museum is to



The Pont du Gard



Cycling in Provence

open in September, as well as Nîmes and Arles, which has an arena and a theatre.

Details Six nights' B&B from £925pp, including rail travel from London and all transfers (inntravel.co.uk)

16 Arty break in Belgium

Tielrode is a small, leafy town beside the Durme River. In its old shipyards is the studio of Sofie Lachaert and Luc d'Hanis, artists specialising in unusual furniture. Their atelier also includes a micro-B&B comprising a large suite — accessed, excitingly, by a revolving staircase — and a flat. Both feature their work, and guests enjoy complimentary Belgian beers plus the use of two bikes. A waterbus sails to Antwerp, while Ghent is within driving distance. Or just enjoy the quiet riverscapes, the birdlife and the 17th-century chapel next door.

Details B&B doubles from £57 (atelierlachaertdhanis.com).

P&O Ferries sails from Hull to Zeebrugge in 13 hours. Driving from Calais takes two hours

17 Three-country road trip

The reassurance of being in your own personal space, in your car, means that road trips are set to boom once we can travel again.

A newly devised route combines scenic spots in France, Switzerland and Germany, with stops in Champagne for fizz tastings, and Alsace, where you'll

tour Colmar's multicoloured medieval buildings. Another stop is Lake Lucerne, for a ride on Europe's oldest cog railway, while the journey on to Andermatt and Ticino takes in zigzagging mountain roads and, if open, the 6,909ft St Gotthard Pass. Basle and foodie Freiburg are also on the tour.

Details Eleven nights' B&B from £3,370pp, including Eurotunnel tickets (originaltravel.co.uk)

18 Swiss Alps relaxation

Total rejuvenation awaits at the traditional Alpina Gstaad hotel, home to a huge spa and breathtaking walks from the door. New two-day Energy Sound Healing retreats are designed to relax, with reiki, yoga and sound baths (until September 13). Glitzy Gstaad, with its rarefied air, is calmer away from the winter season, with pretty lakes reached on gentle hikes. The timber-clad Alpina impresses with its Michelin-starred Swiss and Japanese restaurants.

Details Three nights' B&B from £2,210pp, including the Energy Sound Healing retreat (thealpinagstaad.ch). Trains from London to Gstaad via Paris, Lausanne and Montreux take ten hours. Driving from Calais takes nine hours

19 Calvados-country gîte

You needn't drive for days to find a classic French gîte. Half an hour from Caen's ferry port, charming Chez Caroline is a timber-framed cottage in Normandy's Calvados department, famed for its apple and pear brandies. Caroline is set in a tiny hamlet, with a modern kitchen beneath chunky beams and a private, barbecue-equipped garden. Attractions include market towns such as Dives-sur-Mer, D-Day beaches and Mont St Michel. Make time to inspect the Bayeux Tapestry and for tours and tastings at distilleries such as Domaine Dupont.

Details Seven nights' self-catering for five from £440 (gites.co.uk, ref 942). Guests get a 20 per cent discount from Brittany Ferries, which sails from Portsmouth to Caen in seven hours. Driving from Calais takes three hours

20 Loire in regal style

Poor Jacques Pineau de Viennay III. In 1764 the baron reputedly died from a heart attack on seeing his Château du Grand-Lucé completed. Today his summer palace is considered one of France's finest neoclassical buildings and has been recently restored. It opened last year as a hotel, its chinoiserie-painted lounges, panelled bedrooms and parterres now paired with mod cons such as air conditioning, Buly 1803 toiletries and a fine-dining restaurant. There are Loire Valley vineyards to the south, while Le Mans, renowned for its 24-hour motor race (postponed until September 19-20), is a short drive north.

Details B&B doubles from £422 (chateaugrandluce.com). Driving from Calais takes four and a half hours

21 Hike the Pyrenees

A long journey via Paris and Barcelona is required to begin this Spanish Pyrenees walking break, but it's worth going the extra mile. It's an "inn-to-inn" itinerary following ancient paths through the remote Ordesa and Monte Perdido national parks. The route takes in sun-speckled forests, waterfalls, abandoned villages and near-vertical

Continues overleaf