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escapism

THE UK'S BIGGEST TRAVEL MAGAZINE

THE BEACHES SPECIAL

SUNKISSED SHORES: [clockwise from here] Myrtos Beach, Kefalonia; Jolly Beach in Antigua; Avila Beach in San Luis Obispo

a post office boutique-hotel conversion) and new rides coming to the Pleasure Beach. In the meantime, you can spend your dosh on the slot machines in Funland, and if music's your thing, the city has become a pilgrimage destination for punks (you might want to check out **Rebellion Festival** from 3-6 August for Pennywise, Bad Religion and more). Beyond the great hair and leather jackets, the city has a great local music scene – why not go and check it out yourself?

HOW: Try the central Best Western for good value. **bestwestern.com**; book trains through Trainline from £40 return. **thetrainline.com**

Growing out of Holidays in the Sun – a Blackpool-based festival from 1996 – Rebellion sees classic punk rockers, and the best of the new breed, play the city each summer.

Kefalonia, Greece

Nothing quite prepares you for Myrtos beach, not even the thousands of Instagram posts you're sure to ogle before your visit. Set on the Greek island of Kefalonia, the long, deep white-stone beach is one of the best-looking you'll see, and puts other Greek beaches (which let's face it, are pretty special) to shame. You'll approach it by a steep back road, and arrive to see turquoise water with white cliffs leading into the sand. Beyond that, though, this island is a beachy treat. Don't just stick to the resorts of the south; instead drive along goat-dotted roads to Fiskardo, a cute fishing village in the north. It's the jumping off point for tiny boats that you can hire and motor around to bays that are only accessible by water.

HOW: F Zeen is a gorgeous boutique hotel set on the coast in Lourdas. Nightly rates from £80. **fzeenretreat.com**; EasyJet offers return flights from £120. **easyjet.com**

Antigua, Caribbean

It was would be remiss for us to write about beaches and not mention Antigua. No, not because of the white sand, crystal clear water and all that jazz, but because of the stats. Yes, stats; numbers – all 365 beaches in fact, from the remote Half Moon Bay to the peaceful stretch at English Harbour. Of course, you're bound to get thirsty, which is handy because the good folk at the island have recently put together a beach bar trail, helping you choose which beaches to visit based on how much rum and beer you want to drink. It's not all Carib beers and cocktails though – the bars are a great chance to soak up the island's culture. Whether it's **conch fritters** at Turner, seeing local art at Ana's on Dickenson Bay or listening to music at Castaways.

HOW: Handily, the island's also produced a guesthouse guide, meaning you don't have to fork out for a plush resort. If you do though, try Carlisle Bay. Seven nights from £2,713, including flights. **classic-collection.co.uk**

SURE, BLACKPOOL MIGHT NOT BE BIARRITZ, BUT IT'S A FUN LITTLE BEACH BREAK

Maldives

If your idea of a beach break is a lazy combo of white sand, turquoise water and cocktails, then we can't say we blame you. The Maldives is one of those 'see it to believe it' places, and the best bit is there's something to keep every type of beach lover occupied. So if your heart is in water sports and classes, try the likes of Niyama, with its bright and bold interiors and a never-ending selection of things to do. For parties, check out Finolhu with its beach-club inspired roster of themed nights and DJ sets (and food choices ranging from fish shacks to grills, too). To just kick back, churn through books and work on that tan, head to the celebrity's favourite, Huvafen Fushi. The tiny island is one where you're really forced to relax – although if you start to get itchy feet, check out the coral regeneration programme (including a fun snorkelling session with the resident marine biologist), or book yourself in for a facial at the underwater spa. It's a tough life.

The meat that's found inside the spiral-shaped conch shell is a delicacy all across the Caribbean, where it's used in salads, burgers, chowders and fritters.

HOW: Virgin Holidays offers seven nights all-inclusive at Finolhu from £2,599pp. **virginholidays.co.uk**

NOTHING PREPARES YOU FOR MYRTOS BEACH

San Luis Obispo, California

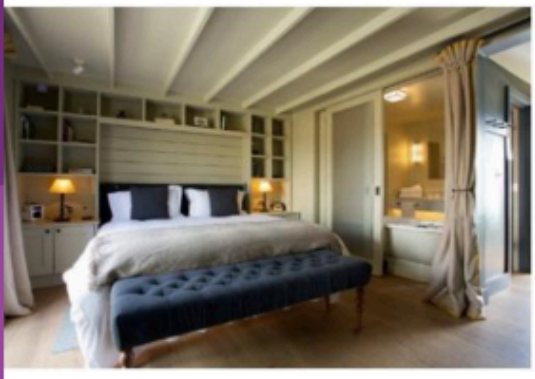
Surfing in the morning and tasting olive oil in the afternoon? That'll be a beach break in San Luis Obispo (or Slo Cal for short), California for you. The dramatic stretch of coast midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles shouldn't be ignored on your Cali road trip, and it's here that you can get a taste of California 50 years ago, soaking up the residents' chilled-out lifestyle. With 20 microclimates, there's sure to be sunshine somewhere. So spend your

Photograph by (Myrtos) Allen Parseghian/Getty; (Antigua) Robert Harding World Imagery/Getty

SURFING IN THE MORNING AND OLIVE OIL TASTING IN THE AFTERNOON? THAT'LL BE A BREAK IN SAN LUIS OBISPO

DIVE ON IN: When you're not sunning yourself around the pool, Marbella has great beaches to explore; (below) The Gallivant in Rye

mornings at the promenade of Pismo beach (where you can swim, take a kayak to caves and arches, or go surfing) or the Oceano Sand Dunes, the only California state park where you can drive a car on the beach. There are 12 farmers' markets that take place in the state, which should give you some idea of the local food focus here. In fact, this is a place where drive-thrus were banned, so the big players (McDonalds etc) soon went out of business. Instead, try Tognazzini's Dockside restaurant for barbecued garlicky oysters, then sample locally brewed beers at Barrel House Brewing Company. Evenings can be spent barbecuing on the beach, or checking out one of the last remaining drive-in movie theatres in the US, the 1950s-style Sunset Drive-In.



Photographs by (Marbella) Jeronimo Alba/Alamy; (The Gallivant) Jake Eastham

HOW: Tinker Tin Trailer Co is a colourful collection of kitsch caravans – hook one up to your rental car for a twist on the campervan holiday. **tinkertin.com**. Norwegian Air offers one-way flights to Oakland (outside of LA) from £373. **norwegian.com**

Marbella, Spain

You'd be forgiven for thinking that Marbella is still the stiletto-stomping ground of D-list celebs, but it turns out that's not the case. This beach resort shouldn't be ruled out for a spring, summer, or autumn weekend beach break (and it can be pretty warm in the winter, too). Base yourself at the adults-only Amare hotel for access to the beach, (they have big day beds on the sand that you will not want to leave) as well as the cobbled streets of the old town. Have a wander and indulge in some late-night churros, then retreat to your white-washed room before – yes, you guessed it – heading out the next day for more sunshine.

HOW: Classic Collection offers three nights at Amare from £768 with flights. **classic-collection.co.uk**

Rye and Camber, Sussex

You don't have to fly for hours to find the best beaches, not when Camber, the closest sandy beach to London, is just 90 minutes away. The dog-friendly stretch of sand is great for a paddle, but if you're looking for something more active, it's one of the best places on the coast to learn to kite surf, too. When you're not getting busy with this, check out the cute town of **Rye**, just five minutes inland. It's full of Georgian and medieval houses, boutique shops (no big brands are allowed) and best of all, pubs. Loads and loads of them. Although beach holidays are more common in the summer, there's something to be said for wrapping up for long walks on the beach, followed by evening sessions eating great gastro pub grub and drinking local ale. Try visiting during the Wild Boar Festival in October, or Rye Scallop Week in February.

While it's not directly on the coast, Rye feels like a seaside town because it's surrounded by two rivers full of boats heading out to the sea at Camber.

HOW: The Gallivant is one of the best beach-front boutique hotels going, and it'll gladly welcome your dog, too. Nightly rates from £110. **thegallivant.co.uk**; Southeastern offers return tickets from £20. **southeasternrailway.co.uk**

Goa, India

Whether you're travelling for fragrant fish curry, a week-long yoga retreat or colourful markets, there's no getting away from the fact that Goa's biggest draw is its uninterrupted stretch of golden beaches.