



Escape

SCHOOLS' OUT FOR THE SUNSHINE



What's the attraction?

The school half-term holidays are almost upon us again, and there is still time to escape the country before the winter chill really sets in. This year, the mid-term break for schools spans anywhere from 20 October to 4 November. Temperatures in some corners of Europe are still respectably warm and there are lots of affordable options available throughout the United Kingdom – you could relax in a rural corner of France, travel to Morocco for some sunshine or introduce your family to the wonders of the desert in Oman. And – happily – a more favourable exchange rate also means that your pound will go 10 per cent further in the eurozone than it would have done a year ago.

A little luxe

The brand new Conrad Algarve (00 351 289 350 700; conradalgarve.com) is set in Quinta do Lago, a handy 20-minute drive from Portugal's Faro airport. Despite the obvious sophistication of its Gusto restaurant, overseen by Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck, and the contemporary chic decor, the 154-room hotel is family-friendly. Local children were enlisted to help to devise its Little C Palace children's club, which offers treasure hunts, baby yoga and "mocktail"-making classes. It opens from Wednesday to Sunday for three- to 12-year-olds and costs €29 per day. There's an indoor and three outdoor heated swimming pools – plus a regular shuttle to the beach. A suite sleeping two adults and two children costs €269 per night, with breakfast.

The half-term holidays are a chance to grab a burst of autumn warmth with your family – and there's still plenty of choice out there, from the Algarve to Marrakech, says **Aoife O'Riordain**

Arabian nights

With direct flights from the UK and October temperatures in the upper 20s, Oman is a good option. Explore the dramatic landscape of the country's Empty Quarter with KE Adventure Travel's Oman Adventure group trip (01768 773 966; keadventure.com). It includes the chance to see dolphins and turtles, and spend two days camel trekking, meeting Bedouins and sleeping under the stars. There is also a hike in Wadi Ghul – Oman's answer to the Grand Canyon. Departs on 27 October; £2,045 per adult and £1,670 per child; includes return flights from London to Muscat, accommodation, meals, transfers and activities.

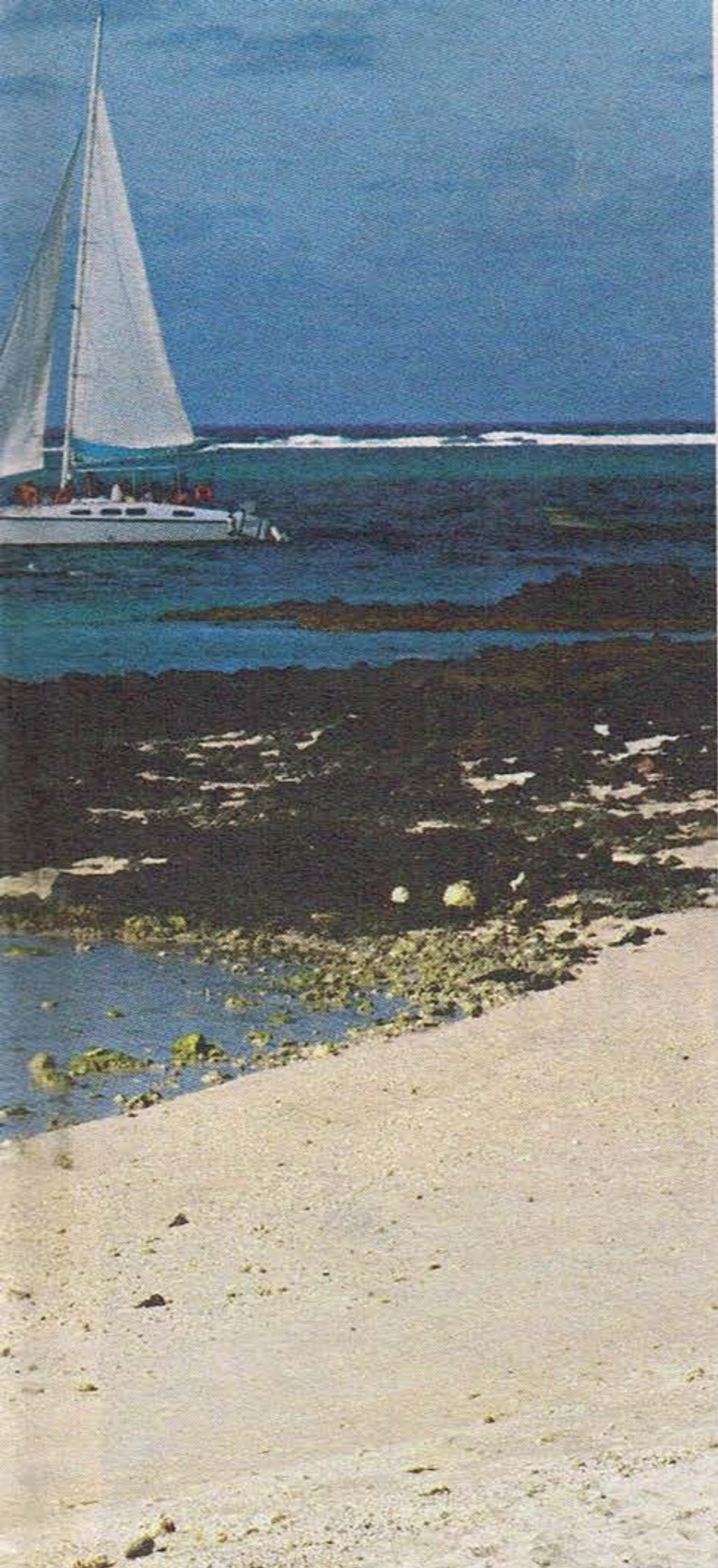


Pizza the action

October is a great time to visit Italy's Sorrento coast, when the weather is invariably balmy and the crowds have dispersed. Set in the hills is the Oasi Olimpia Relais, a small hotel and cookery school. Children can roll up their sleeves for pizza-making classes, using ingredients from the garden. It has 11 rooms and four cottages, each with a garden and the use of a pool and tennis court. Teenagers can gen up for term time with a visit to nearby Pompeii. ExpertItaly (020 7520 3100; expertitaly.com) offers a stay in a cottage sleeping up to four from 27 October to 2 November for £705 per week, room only. Flights to Naples are extra.

Rock the kasbah

Morocco is a popular half-term escape. The Kasbah Angour (00 212 524 484 121; kasbahangour.com) is a Berber castle in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains near Marrakech. As well as a large pool, it has lots of child-friendly activities such as donkey treks. A four-night B&B stay starts at €388 per person, based on a family of four, including transfers from the airport. Flights cost extra. EasyJet Holidays (0843 104 1000; holidays.easyjet.com) is offering a week closer to the action of Marrakech for £852 per person, including flights from Gatwick on 27 October and half-board at the Hotel El Andalou, just outside the medina walls.



Playtime: (clockwise from main) sandcastles in Mauritius; Château Les Carrasses; fun in the Algarve; Marrakech

Close to home

If you'd rather not stray too far, younger children will love a stay on a farm – Farm Stay UK (02476 696 909; farmstay.co.uk) offers more than 1,200 properties set on farms – Cyfie Farm Luxury Cottages in Powys has a cottage that sleeps four available from 25 October for £400 for seven nights. The Rosevine (01872 580 206; rosevine.co.uk) in Portscatho, Cornwall, has boutique-style self-catering apartments with hotel facilities available from £255 for up to four guests.

Two-, four- and seven-night Family Active Breaks are still available at several PGL (0844 371 2424; pgl.co.uk) properties. Families can enjoy everything from abseiling and fencing to climbing and kayaking. From £145 per adult and £129 per child for two nights at Caythorpe Court in Lincolnshire.

Budding David Beckham will enjoy a stay at the Lowry Hotel (0870 460 5040; roccoforte hotels.com) in Manchester, which is offering a Manchester Football Package: an overnight B&B stay and guided tour of the National Football Museum. £195 per double; £50 per extra child.



Who said that?

“One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things” – **Henry Miller**

“Travelling in the company of those we love is home in motion” – **Leigh Hunt**

“There is no such thing as fun for the whole family” – **Jerry Seinfeld**

French fancy

The Château Les Carrasses (0845 686 8067; lescarrasses.com) is a grand 19th-century mansion surrounded by vineyards in the rolling countryside of the Languedoc in France. The estate is home to 28 self-catering apartments and houses, all done in a chic and understated French style with all the mod cons. A brasserie, bar, tennis courts, boules, a heated pool and children’s HQ with toys, games, television, DVD player and a Wii, make it a good option for half-term getaways. There is still availability at the end of October with a three-bedroom house costing €1,652 for seven nights. Travel to France is not included; however, Ryanair (0871 246 0000; ryanair.com) flies to nearby Béziers.

Mauritian moment

A four-hour time difference and direct flights mean hitting the pristine beaches of Mauritius is a viable option. The Residence perches on a blissful, mile-long slice of powdery white sand. During half-term it will also be offering free swimming lessons for young guests, which beats chilly afternoons spent at the local pool. There is also a complimentary Planters Kids Club with a host of supervised activities for three- to 12-year-olds from morning until bedtime. Departing 20-31 October, Turquoise Holidays (01494 678 400; turquoiseholidays.com) is offering seven nights from £1,495 per person, based on a family of four sharing two interconnecting Garden View rooms. Includes flights from London, transfers and half-board.