

# Q&A

Ask the experts



## Q Where can I take my daughter, 18, and mum, 80, for a special break?

Tina Rains, by email

**A** Italy's Lake Como possesses ageless style and appeal: far-off Alpine skylines, green shores speckled with pastel villas, and grand turreted hotels from the past, peering down into the pewter depths. Donning shades, sipping alfresco espresso and trying a few lengths in a floating lido before slipping into glad rags for dinner (say, baked lake perch) is a dream routine for fashion-faddy teens as well as jaded octogenarians. Getting there's easy (flight to Milan, 30-minute train ride to Como city, gateway to the lake) — and getting around's a leisurely pleasure, as Como has a cat's-cradle of boat routes, with little *battelli* putting into every port, and *aliscafi* (hydrofoils) speeding you south-north in 90 minutes, all for a

few pounds. Among its hotels, Villa d'Este ([villadeste.com](http://villadeste.com); doubles from £391, B&B; pictured) is a special-occasion affair of baronial furniture and oil paintings. Its operatic peaches-and-cream facade commands the shore, a jewel of a pool floats on the lake, and its grounds rise to folly lookouts. In direct contrast is new kid Il Sereno ([sereno-hotels.com](http://sereno-hotels.com); doubles from £640, B&B), a retro-futuristic cube full of splayed-leg tables, swivel wingbacks and white-Corrian freestanding tubs. Ready to head out? Go window-shopping in Bellagio, selfie-sticking in the fir-spiked gardens of the bizarre Villa Balbianello, and lazy lunching at a lake-view table in Varenna, a lovely village as quiet as a cat yawn. *Nick Redman*

### THE PANEL

Planning a trip? Get inside advice from the best in the business



**Nick Redman**  
Travel's deputy editor and Italophile



**Jill Starley-Grainger**  
Bargain-finding expert and former Travel staffer



**Mark Hodson**  
Smart travel expert and regular contributor



**Lucy Thackray**  
Travel's commissioning editor and Caribbean fan



**Andrew Day**  
Author of several Cool Camping books

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## Q Know a good campervan hire firm in the UK?

Derek Lynes, by email

**A** The key to success is choosing the model that best suits your needs. So consider your must-have facilities: built-in fridge? Cooker? Next, think about size: too big and you lose flexibility to explore, too small and you risk cabin fever. Now you'll want to find a supplier with expertise in that vehicle range and, crucially, a handy pick-up location.

Need all the mod-cons and plenty of space? Campervantastic.com has VW California T6s sleeping four with everything from heating for chilly nights to sat-nav (from £385 per weekend; London pick-up). For something more compact, yet big enough to sleep two adults and two children, try a Hyundai 'Hi-Top' from bigtreecampervans.com in Perthshire (four berths from £70 a day), which has a smartly designed kitchenette and (ideal for kids) extra sleeping space in the roof. Couples will get a better deal hiring a two-berth Toyota people-carrier from spaceshipsrentals.co.uk (Edinburgh or London pick-up). Compact and easy to drive, these fuel-efficient conversions can be had for as little as £19 per day.

Finally, do amenities matter less than that classic campervan look? Vintage VWs may lack facilities, space and speed (they can't go over 96kph), but their nostalgic vibe makes them popular nonetheless. Redhatchcampers.co.uk in Somerset offers six lovely vans, all painstakingly restored (weekends from £275; sleeping two adults and two kids). *Andrew Day*

## Q Should I get a currency card?

Maria Louis, Winchester

**A** Pre-paid currency cards are convenient and safe: by loading money onto the card, you can spend it and withdraw it from ATMs worldwide. Your funds are protected if the card is lost or stolen, and the exchange rate is fixed at the moment you load them.

The catch? Most have fees — up to £10 to apply for the card, for example, or up to £3 per ATM withdrawal. Some attract a fee with every use, and some charge an inactivity fee if you don't use them. Also, the exchange rate is not always as favourable as you'll get with a credit card — so shop around.

The best deal right now is with Revolut ([revolut.com](http://revolut.com)), a MasterCard operated with a smartphone app that gives you interbank rates — much better than you'll get from a credit card or bureau de change. You can use it in almost every country and switch your loaded funds between sterling, dollars and euros. It costs £5 to get the card delivered (£12 for express delivery), but there are no spending fees and no ATM charges on withdrawals up to £200 a month (anything above that attracts a two per cent fee). *Mark Hodson*



## Q Can I still snag a bank-holiday deal?

Rick Farrer, Cornwall

**A** The August bank holiday is great for bargain Euro city breaks — as families take their annual beach holidays and business trips grind to a halt, travellers can nab deals at pricey city five-stars that usually cater to the expense-account set. Start with the HotelTonight app (free), which sells last-minute discounted rooms in luxury hotels. You can book up to seven days in



## Q Is the Caribbean still pleasant in summer or will there be a lot of rain all the time?

Maria Stavros, Sussex

**A** The Caribbean gets a bad rap in summer, thanks to humidity, regular rain showers and the risk of hurricanes. But it's really not as bad as you may think. The hurricane season doesn't start until August (going until October), so in most cases in June and July your beach break should only be interrupted by brief (if regular) rain showers. You might miss the lighter breeze or lower humidity of winter if you plan to hike inland peaks and rainforests, but if you're there to eat, sleep and laze on the beach, a 10-minute downpour is no hardship when the weather is otherwise mid-20s and sunny.

YOU'LL GET SOME OF THE CHEAPEST PACKAGES AVAILABLE ALL YEAR

Even in August, you can still have an uncompromised beach break. Some islands, including Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, lie outside the hurricane belt; at worst, you may have to contend with a few seasonally closed hotels and restaurants.

And don't forget the big bonus of the Caribbean in summer: the price. You'll get some of the cheapest packages available all year. For example, a week at the five-star Fairmont in Barbados, with Gatwick flights, starts at £2,729pp in December, but £2,189pp in August, a saving of £540pp ([tropicalsky.co.uk](http://tropicalsky.co.uk)). *Lucy Thackray*

advance or minutes before check-in. Also look at [trivago.co.uk](http://trivago.co.uk), which pulls in deals from all the main hotel-booking sites, up to the 11th hour. For flights, there's no magic trick, so scour the likes of Google Flights, [kayak.com](http://kayak.com), [momondo.com](http://momondo.com) and [skyscanner.net](http://skyscanner.net).

Prefer a beach or villa holiday? Check [icelolly.com](http://icelolly.com), [travelsupermarket.com](http://travelsupermarket.com), [lastminute.com](http://lastminute.com), [late-deals.co.uk](http://late-deals.co.uk), [travelzoo.com](http://travelzoo.com) and [dealchecker.co.uk](http://dealchecker.co.uk). Before you book, do a quick internet search on the off-chance the same trip materialises elsewhere at a lower price. *Jill Starley-Grainger*

