

Travel

Page

24

'Sometimes the train runs so close to the coast that you could scoop sand from the beaches'

Stephen McClarence on a grand tour of Scotland

2 Etosha National Park, Namibia



20 dream family holidays in 2017

From a safari in Namibia to hiking in Transylvania and sailing in Greece, **Julia Brookes** picks the best trips

1 Visit Ferrari Land in Spain

Ferrari Land opens at the PortAventura World theme park in Salou, Catalonia in April and the star attraction will be the vertical accelerator, the highest (112m) and fastest (0-112 mph in five seconds) rollercoaster in Europe. Next to it will be the racetrack and the chance to experience a wheel change at the pitstop. **Details** Travel Republic (020 8974 7200,

travelrepublic.co.uk) has seven nights' half board at the four-star Palas Pineda Hotel from £305pp, based on two adults and two children sharing. This includes Ryanair flights to Barcelona, transfers and a two-day pass to PortAventura World over Easter

2 Safari in Namibia

The reboot of *The Mummy* (starring Tom Cruise and Russell Crowe) was shot in

Namibia, and with a currency linked to the weak rand rather than the dollar and malaria-free national parks, the southern African republic is probably 2017's best family safari destination. Expert Africa's 15-day Sandgrouse fly-drive itinerary includes NamibRand Nature Reserve, Sossusvlei, Swakopmund, Damaraland, Etosha National Park and the rock formations amid the Erongo Mountains. The country is probably at its best at Easter and October half-term. **Details** For a family with two children aged 12 or over, prices start at £2,480pp, excluding international flights which cost about £1,200 with British Airways (020 8232 9777, expertafrica.com)

3 Tikal ruins, Guatemala



3 Jungle and temples in Belize and Guatemala

Belize could be the next big thing in family travel after the launch of American Airlines flights via Miami. Canoeing at dawn in the jungle, a night safari to find crocodiles, climbing the temple ruins at Tikal in Guatemala, snorkelling in Shark Ray Alley and spotting black howler monkeys, peccary and coati-mundi can all be on the agenda, as well as a few days relaxing on Caribbean beaches.

Details Stubborn Mule (01728 752751, stubbornmuletravel.co.uk) has a 15-day Belize Adventure Highlights tour starting at £2,000pp, plus flights from £550pp ▶

22 Travel



9

4 Greece with tots

For a hassle-free holiday with pre-schoolers, a stay at the new Eagles Villas, opening in Halkidiki in April, will be hard to beat. All of the swish whitewashed villas have sea views and private pools and the gently sloping golden, sandy beach is perfect for babies and toddlers. Guests have exclusive access to the Explorers Kids Club and if you can drag yourself away from the sunbed, watersports, tennis, volleyball and excursions to nearby Mount Athos are all on tap. Mercifully, there's no need to cook — two restaurants and in-villa dining are available, although each villa does have a kitchenette with a big fridge. **Details** Scott Dunn (020 8682 5014, scottdunn.com) has seven nights at Eagles Villas from £1,850pp for a family of four sharing an ocean-facing one-bedroom villa, including flights, transfers and two kids' club spaces

5 Biggest cruise ship in the world

The high-tech MSC *Meraviglia*, the biggest cruise ship in the world (with 5,700 passengers), is due to launch in June. Expect all manner of extravagance, including a double-height indoor promenade with an enormous LED dome and an amusement area connected to a water park. The facilities for families, children and teens will be clustered in one place, but should the nippers run amok, you will be able to track them down using near-field communication (NFC) technology on your cruise wristband. Other cruising firsts include augmented reality mirrors in the shops so you can see how you would look in different clothes in 3D, twice-nightly shows by Cirque du Soleil and a TV studio that will broadcast live games, quizzes and talent contests. **Details** Meraviglia (020 3426 3010, mscmeraviglia.com) will cruise the western Mediterranean. A seven-night trip from Genoa, calling at Naples, Messina, Valletta, Marseilles and



8 Cycling past Château de Sully-sur-Loire, France

Barcelona departing July 30 costs from £3,556 for a family of four in a balcony cabin, including flights from Gatwick and transfers. There are also Super Family cabins that sleep up to six

6 Arctic adventures in Finland

Finland's new Arctic TreeHouse Hotel near Rovaniemi in Lapland is the perfect base for a February half-term adventure. Strap on a pair of skis or snowshoes to explore the area and hunt down a view of the northern lights, zip across frozen lakes and rivers on a snowmobile safari, drive a team of dogs on a husky-mushing trip through the Arctic wilderness and take a reindeer sleigh ride. Set into the hillside of a snowy forest, the hotel has Arctic Glass Houses for families, with cosy Nordic-chic wooden interiors, a sauna, two double bedrooms, a sitting room and picture window with spectacular views. **Details** Regent Holidays (020 7666 1290, regent-holidays.co.uk) has three nights' half board at the Arctic TreeHouse Hotel from £5,720, based on two adults and two children, including flights, transfers and excursions

7 Activities in Portugal

Portugal is excellent value for money so resorts on the Algarve are bound to be heaving next summer. Avoid the crowds by heading to one of its quietest, yet wildest, spots — the Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park. KE Adventures' new small-group trip is based at a family-run farmhouse surrounded by cork forests. Activities range from kayaking and surfing to rock climbing, along with a boat ride to the dramatic Cabo San Vicente headland. There's swimming every day (so everyone must be able to manage at least 25 metres) but also plenty of downtime, and chances to relax with a glass of chilled white port in a hammock. **Details** A week's full board including activities costs £745 for adults, £645 for

children, minimum age 8 (keadventure.com). There are departures from May to October and the maximum group size is 16

8 Cycle between châteaux in the Loire

Finding a holiday that everyone from grandparents to toddlers will enjoy can be tricky but BSpoke Tours' new Châteaux of the Loire self-guided cycling trip has been set up with multi-generational groups in mind. Fairytale castles are dotted along the Loire à Vélo cycle path. There are pretty riverside towns and vineyards, too. **Details** Prices for a four-night, five-day tour start at £835 per adult and £785 per child from May to September, including flights, transfers, B&B, bike and equipment hire and luggage transfers (bspoketours.com). A range of bikes are available, including electric bikes

9 Surfing and yoga in Sri Lanka

Soul & Surf's new retreat on Sri Lanka's south coast is perfect for laid-back families looking for a reasonably priced surfing and yoga week. There's no pressure to do both — you can just chill out if you like. However, sunset yoga lessons and massages sound hard to resist and children (as long as they are over six and confident swimmers) can learn to surf and notch up some serious cool points back at school. **Details** A week's retreat at Soul & Surf (soulandsurf.com) starts at £675pp, all inclusive. It costs £350 for children sharing the adults' room and taking part in activities, or it's full price if they have their own room. Non-stop flights to Colombo in April start at about £800

10 Bears and whales in Canada

For the family holiday of a lifetime, an expedition to track down polar, black and grizzly bears, with beluga whale-



16 Riverside Boutique Resort, Vang Vieng, Laos

spotting too, takes some beating. Start in Hudson Bay, Manitoba — famous for its polar bears which hunt along the shoreline while they wait for the ice to form, and where thousands of beluga whales congregate. Move on to Vancouver and Campbell River for a stay in Knight Inlet Lodge, one of the best places to view grizzly bears: dozens congregate in the peak autumn season when salmon return. Watching black bears feasting on berries, grass and barnacles in their natural habitat is another highlight, along with seaplane rides from Campbell River. **Details** Prices start at £4,276pp in July with 11 nights' accommodation (based on a family of four sharing one room), all flights (including a seaplane trip), transfers and wildlife excursions, through Prestige Holidays (01502 567222, prestigeholidays.co.uk)

11 Riding in Spain

If you have pony-mad children, take them to the new five-star Camiral Hotel near Girona on the Costa Brava. Primarily a golf hotel, it's wooing families with lessons for all ages at its riding school. For younger children who have not sat on a horse there are sessions showing them all the basics, including how to feed and groom the pony, and tack up for the ride. Instructors will take older kids on tours



6



Insider Travel

THE TIMES THE SUNDAY TIMES



RIVIERA TRAVEL

Seven days from

£579

per person

PRICE INCLUDES

Return flights plus six nights at excellent quality, centrally located three and four-star hotels, with breakfast

Experience unspoiled Andalucía, home of Flamenco

Guided tour of Granada's stunning Alhambra and Seville

Visit to Cordoba, with a guided tour of the Mezquita

The services of an experienced tour manager

Classical Spain

Andalucía is one of the most beautiful corners of Europe, where the excesses of modern life do not seem to have taken root and travellers are welcomed as honoured guests.

Selected departures from March to November, 2017.

Book now quoting KK547

0330 160 7424 thetimes.co.uk/deals



13 Torres del Paine, Chile

perfect opportunity to get away from the theme parks to explore some of Florida's other attractions. Tick off glam Miami and Key West before going out to the Dry Tortugas National Park to explore Fort Jefferson. Head up the Florida Keys to Islamorada, a great spot for cycling, and take a kayaking tour in the Everglades National Park.

Details A 16-day Florida tour with Audley Travel (01993 838 755, audleytravel.com) starts at £3,500pp based on a family of four in two rooms (with children aged 12 to 18), including flights, hotels, car hire and excursions

18 Mountain highs in Switzerland

Switzerland isn't just cuckoo clocks, chocolate and cheese — it's also the home of adrenaline-packed summer adventures, including the new Thrill Walk in the Jungfrau. Located at Birg, the mid-station of the Schilthorn cable car, its walkway clings to the side of the cliff with a 250m drop below. Its stomach-churning sections include reinforced glass, a cattle grid, a rope bridge and an 8m crawl-through tunnel for children. There's also the Klettersteig Via Ferrata to conquer and the chance to watch crazy base jumpers.

Details Stay at the Hotel Eiger (hoteleiger.com) in Mürren, which offers a seven-night summer package in a standard room for about £825pp including a Mürren-Schilthorn transport pass. Fly to Geneva or Zurich and take Swiss Rail to Mürren

19 Hiking in Transylvania

If there's a goth in the family who likes a long walk, Go Barefoot's new hike around southeast Transylvania next summer could appeal. One of the highlights is the six-hour trek over the hills to 14th-century Bran Castle, which has been linked to Count Dracula.

Details Prices start at £970pp (based on a family of four), including guesthouse and hotel stays, some meals, transport and a local guide through Go Barefoot (020 3290 9591, gobarefoot.travel). Flights to Bucharest cost extra

20 Sailing in Greece

After the launch of its three superyachts based in Corfu, Fleewinter is offering a new point-to-point route from Corfu to Kefalonia to maximise time pootling around the Ionian islands. This is holidaying like an oligarch; there's a skipper and chef included.

Details A week's half board costs from £1,305pp based on having two families of four on board. Flights and transfers are extra. EasyJet flies to Corfu and back from Kefalonia (fleewinter.com)



of the surrounding area. Mountain bikes are available for jaunts along the Costa Brava Greenway from Girona to Sant Feliu de Guixols. An orienteering challenge around the grounds with an ice-cream reward, as well as indoor and outdoor pools and tennis courts, should keep everyone busy.

Details Double rooms start at £170 a night (hotelcamiral.com). Fly with Ryanair to Girona, a 15-minute drive away. Car hire is essential

12 Gourmet adventure in Bologna

Eataly, the popular Italian high-end grocery brand, is scheduled to open the world's first gourmet theme park outside Bologna in October, just in time for a half-term foodie escape. The vast, 20-acre Eataly World will include chocolate fountains, oil mills, a truffle area, six rides, greenhouses and workshops where families can rustle up their own creations. Admission will be free. There will also be 25 restaurants, none of which will be serving spaghetti bolognese (try ordering tagliatelle al ragu instead). Other Bolognese attractions include the medieval Asinelli Tower — climb its 498 steps for wonderful views of the Red City — and the nearby Ferrari museum.

Details A week's B&B at Al Cappello Rosso in October starts at £780pp, including flights from Gatwick (020 7359 3938, realholidays.co.uk)

13 See pumas in Patagonia

A family expedition to spectacular Patagonia gets easier with the start of British Airways' nonstop flights to Chile's capital, Santiago, from Heathrow on January 3. Travel between October and April for the best weather and combine it with Argentina, so you don't have to backtrack. Journey Latin America has a revamped Patagonia trip that includes a cycle tour around Santiago, hiking around lakes and volcanoes in Chile's Lake District, conquering granite peaks and glaciers in Patagonia's most famous national park, Torres del Paine, and

wildlife spotting. In Argentina there's the chance to see the Perito Moreno glacier and go on a foodie tour in Buenos Aires.

Details A two-week trip starts at £3,644pp based on two adults and two children aged 12-plus sharing two rooms. It includes BA flights, transfers, excursions and most meals (020 8600 1881, journeylatinamerica.co.uk). Children should be able to walk a reasonable distance

14 New attractions in Florida

July is a brilliant (albeit baking) month for a trip to Orlando to test its new theme park attractions. Don't miss Volcano Bay at Universal (opening in June), a 30-acre water park inspired by tropical islands whose star ride is a first-of-its-kind aqua coaster with four-person canoes that will zip about the volcano. Mercifully, you won't have to wait hours in the steamy Floridian heat for a ride because nifty smart wristbands will vibrate 15 minutes before your time slot. Over at Disney there's the World of AVATAR, with floating mountains and a Banshee flying attraction.

Details American Sky (01342 889501, americansky.co.uk) has seven nights in a villa at the Highlands Reserve Homes in Orlando from £6,218 a family (two adults and two children), departing between July 16 and August 20. This includes flights from Gatwick, car hire and four park passes for Walt Disney World, SeaWorld and Universal Studios

15 See glaciers and lava caves in Iceland

The new Hotel Husafell in western Iceland is 90 minutes from Reykjavik in Borgarfjordur. It has a playground, swimming pool, children's menu and geothermally heated hot tubs from which to watch the northern lights. Nearby trails lead to forests, lava formations, rivers and glaciers, and a 15-minute drive gets you to a walkway experience at the Vidgelmir Lava Caves.

Details Discover the World (01737 214291, discover-the-world.co.uk) has a

four-night fly-drive package starting at £2,284 (£571pp) based on two adults and two children, including three nights at Hotel Husafell, one night's B&B at the Frost & Fire Hotel in Hveragerdi, five days' car rental and flights

16 Explore Laos

Take your teenagers hiking in the Nam Et-Phou Louey protected area in northeastern Laos, and they can't fail to be impressed by one of the overnight accommodation options: nests (OK, cosy, spherical baskets) hanging from the trees. The new Nests Trek also includes a visit to a tower in the forest to spot sambar deer, then a climb in Forever Mountain. It's part of Inside Asia's Northern Laos Explorer trip, that also includes two nights at the Riverside Boutique Resort in a gorgeous setting in Vang Vieng.

Details The 14-day trip costs from £2,950pp B&B, including transfers and excursions (0117 244 3380, insideasiatours.com). There is a minimum age of 12. Singapore Airlines flies to Luang Prabang from £665pp

17 Florida away from the theme parks

The new BA nonstop flight to Fort Lauderdale from Gatwick starts in July, a



7



17 The lighthouse at Fort Jefferson, Florida