

Simon Calder: why Ryanair
is my favourite airline P.28

TRAVEL



The greatest Mediterranean islands

Chris Leadbeater ranks and rates these sun-kissed holiday favourites, from their Michelin stars to their magical beaches

It is the sort of statement that can be filed under "screamingly obvious", but the Mediterranean Sea is a very large thing indeed. There it is, enormous on the map, spreading out as a holiday playground that we all know and love. But the precise statistics of its largeness are often lost in the haze of a Greek sunset or a Côte d'Azur cocktail hour.

So here are a few: in total, the Med stretches to a remarkable 970,000 square miles of water. In doing so, it touches the shores of three continents – Europe, Asia, Africa – and 22 countries. It contains 15 "smaller seas" – of which the Adriatic, the Tyrrhenian, the Ionian and the Aegean are perhaps

the most celebrated. And is home to more than 3,000 islands and islets of various shapes and sizes, all generally offering hot summer weather.

How, if you were to attempt it, would you arrange those islands into a logical order? An unnecessary task, you might say – but equally, a conversation point. Can you compare Sicily to Rhodes, or Mallorca to Kefalonia? And if so, how would that comparison work?

Well, you would start by pruning the list of islands from 3,000 to a more manageable 50 – the key outcrops of Spain, Italy, Greece, France et al – and then begin to rank them via

▲ French fancy: the medieval citadel of Calvi looms on the coast of Corsica

the factors that make places like Crete, Corsica and Menorca such fine destinations. Such as the cleanliness of their beaches, the beauty of their geography, the excellence of their restaurants, the quality of their hotels, and the range and importance of their historic sites. Then you would boil it all down into a top 10. A little like the top 10 laid out here, in fact.

Of course, the main point is that, whatever their position in our little league table, each of these islands will be a glorious option for a getaway in the coming months. Happy trails...

Continued on page 2

Where to stay

Imperial Hotel Kyoto

Japan

Sleek and refined, this transformed former geisha theatre sits at the cultural heart of Japan, discovers Leandra Beabout

The Imperial Hotel Kyoto may have just opened, but its history runs deep. The 55-room luxury hotel breathes new life into a storied, geisha-owned theatre. Kyoto is packed with top-shelf hotels, but the Imperial is singular: a bookable chapter of Gion history, with impeccable design and service.

Location

10/10

The cultural heart of Kyoto. The hotel is in Gion, Japan's geisha district, on the grounds of the Gion Kobu Kaburenjo theatre. From the rooftop I had a birds-eye view of a maze of wooden machiya teahouses, while from the front entrance I could hear the *geiko* (Kyoto geishas) and *maiko* (apprentice geishas) practising for their annual spring show.

Style and character

9/10

The 90-year-old building is a former geiko theatre called Yasaka Kaikan. While the structure is still owned by the local geiko, the Imperial was tasked with transforming the landmark into a luxury hotel. The façade remains unchanged, but the interior has been redrawn entirely. From the lobby to the lounge and hallways, the new arrangement weaves preserved details (original stone pillars and salvaged artwork) into a decidedly Frank Lloyd Wright-esque aesthetic.

Stepping inside, I was struck by the sense of refined intimacy. Every material, from the 1,000-year-old zelkova wood entrance sign to the restored terracotta reliefs, was carefully considered by architect Tomoyuki Sakakida. I spent afternoons in the sumptuous guest-only lounge, enjoying complimentary pastries and sparkling wine beside a glass wall overlooking a stone-and-moss garden.



Service and facilities

8/10

Imperial hotels are known for embodying Japanese *omotenashi* hospitality, so service was predictably polished. In the lounge, staff stand quietly at attention until needed. The concierge helped arrange my private maiko performance and dinner at one of Gion's tiny Michelin-starred restaurants. I always found someone nearby to translate if needed.

The gym and thermal baths are small, but the 17.5-metre pool is a showpiece, all clean blue lines framed by rugged stone walls. I felt like I'd stepped into a luxurious underwater cave. Surprisingly, the

Telegraph expert rating

8/10

289 570
Gionmachi
Minamigawa,
Higashiyama
Ward, Kyoto,
Japan
(0081 75 531 0111;
imperialhotel.co.jp)

spa is stocked with British Oskia products instead of anything local. At least my massage featured Kyoto incense and shrine bells to start the treatment.

Rooms

9/10

Rooms, spread across the main building and the newly built north wing, feel spacious by Japanese standards. All feature complimentary minibars, Bluetooth speakers, Nespresso machines, and oh-so-silky Moonpearl skincare.

After a check-in treat of green tea and local confectionery, I was whisked to my

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north wing Grand Premier room and offered plush slippers (small detail, but I was relieved at the simplicity of a bedside master light switch). A wooden ceiling, tatami flooring and bamboo blinds featured, while a single flowering branch adorned the desk. Main building rooms have larger windows, moss-coloured carpets and cream-hued drapes.

Food and drink

8/10

The two options are Yasaka for all-day dining and Ren for French tasting menus. The hotel also has the Old Imperial Bar, an elegant instant classic, and a seasonal rooftop bar. As someone who prefers a plant-based diet, I'm accustomed to limited choices in Japan. Yasaka focuses on charcoal grilling, but I enjoyed a beautiful microseasonal omakase at Ren. Counter seating was an intimate affair as I enjoyed mugwort brioche and mushroom risotto.

For my last morning, I pre-ordered Yasaka's Japanese set breakfast, created in collaboration with Michelin-starred Kawakami. Opening a carved wooden box, I found tiny bowls of vegetables and intricate tofu preparations. Western breakfast is available at any time.

Value for money

7/10

Doubles from 164,500 yen (£765). Breakfast excluded (JPY15,000 (£70) for two).

ACCESS FOR DISABLED GUESTS? The hotel has one adapted room with an adjustable bed and bathroom grab rails. Lifts or ramps connect public areas.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY?

The quiet-luxury vibe might not suit boisterous little ones. There are interconnecting rooms, complimentary baby cots and extra beds for a fee (around £120).

EXCLUSIVE OFFER

Hotel Meudon, Cornwall

From £239 per person for a two-night stay

Two-night stay in a Garden View with Balcony room

Breakfast daily

Dinner credit £30pp per night

Bottle of house wine

Friday and Saturday supplements

Nestled in subtropical gardens and blessed with a private beach, this coastal haven is set in a refurbished red-brick manor near Falmouth. Rooms on offer have a classic country-house style with views across the gardens. The award-winning



SAVE UP TO 30%

restaurant serves excellent local produce, with an emphasis on fresh fish and seafood. The secret cove offers walkers direct access to the South West Coast Path. *Telegraph Travel* writer Rachel Buchanan says:

"Set in a beautiful subtropical valley opening out on to the sheltered Bream Cove, Hotel Meudon is a peaceful retreat with old-fashioned charm. Rooms are tasteful, spacious, light and comfortable."

Book by June 28, 2026. Valid for stays until June 30, 2026. Quote TEL2P006. Call 0330 162 9209 see online for full T&Cs, telegraph.co.uk/tt-meudon-hotel

HOTEL HAPPENINGS

OHam Yard Hotel's courtyard is a leafy pocket of shade and calm deep in ever-humming Soho. From June 29 until July 12, the space is being transformed into "Centre Court-Yard" in celebration of Wimbledon – expect big screen matches and plenty of summer cup cocktails. Elsewhere the

new Zetter Bloomsbury is also screening the tennis in its "secret" garden; grab a *frosé* (£18) and settle in.

With tennis, one requires strawberries and the Peninsula London has dedicated its entire afternoon tea to the summer favourite fruit (June 29 to

Sept 6). Find all the usual savouries and scones joined by a bevy of berry-based pastries including a strawberry choux, Timur pepper-spiked moussé and a strawberry and jasmine white chocolate tart. Whether or not it beats a good old-fashioned bowl with cream, you decide. £85.

In *Telegraph Travel's* last Hotel Awards we gave a nod to César Lanzarote, a design hotel that brought something genuinely new to the Canary Islands. The group behind that hotel, Annua, has just opened a new property in the Mallorcan cliffside enclave of Banyalbufar. Gran Hotel

Margalida is a cinematic beauty, with a sea-facing infinity pool and a chic colour palette of parchment and primrose. The hotel is also the first in the group to come with a full spa. *Doubles* from £820.

Patrick Hamilton Courtney