GO ON A HOLIDAY WITH A DIFFERENCE

Brits are increasingly ditching the traditional beach holiday – but what's taking its place? Asks **Karen Evennett**

Knit your own retreat

A week of knitting is on offer at The Watermill at Posara, in Tuscany. Lessons cover techniques such as cable-stitching and Bohus knitting, and you'll also have five excursions thrown in: two trips to the mountains, and visits to a local convent, Fivizzano and either Cinque Terre or Lucca. The price (from £2,500 for single occupancy or £2,320 sharing in 2026) covers transfer from Pisa airport, accommodation, pre-dinner aperitifs, and all meals – including any meals out. **watermill.net**



HOLIDAYS THAT HONE OUR HOBBIES



Painting and pottery

Take artistic skills to a new level at Coombe Farm Studios in Devon. There's a range of three, four and five-day art and pottery courses for every level from complete beginner to advanced practitioner. Fees vary depending on the type of course but a three-day ceramic course in 2026 costs £792, which covers tuition, accommodation (not en-suite), and all meals. For the intrepid, there are also Mud & Water courses that combine pottery with wild swimming in the nearby River Dart. **coombefarmstudios.com**



Flower power

Channel 4's *Chateau DIY*-er Rebecca Jones loves flowers and has a beautiful cutting garden in the grounds of the property near Le Mans that she is doing up with her husband Tim. On her annual August flower retreat, you'll spend time with Rebecca, learning how to grow, cut, and arrange flowers. You'll also forage for foliage with botanical artist Kate Churchwell, and create a Bas Relief plaque as a memento of your stay. A three-night stay with tuition, all meals, house cocktails and wine, plus one country restaurant lunch, costs £2,000 (€2,250) for a single occupancy room or £1,500 (€1,650) if you're sharing. **chateaudelaruche.com**



Watch the birdie

Enhance your appreciation of birds with a small group UK tour. Birdwatching Trips' five-day Best of North Wales trip takes a maximum of six people with two guides (£1,975 for tours in 2027, to include accommodation, meals and use of telescopes. See **birdwatchingtrips.co.uk** Wildlife Worldwide's Northumberland in Autumn seven-person tour is a chance to see thousands of wildfowl and waders, as well as grey seals, otters and short-eared owls. Four days of tours with five nights' dinner, B&B in Bamburgh Castle Inn in Seahouses, is £995 in October 2026. See **wildlifeworldwide.com**



Fun for foodies

Try a cooking holiday in Tuscany, Puglia, Bologna, Venice, Sicily or Seville. Stay in a villa and spend time in its kitchen learning new skills, while making the most of local, ingredients. A three-night holiday in Venice costs from £1,199 and includes accommodation, all meals (with wine), three cooking lessons, and day trips to Venice and Conegliano. **flavoursholidays.co.uk**





A CHANCE TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW...

Parliamo Italiano!

L'Italiano Porticando language school in Turin offers courses for every level – and you can choose to learn in a group or one-to-one. There's also the option of combining your language lessons with a cultural interest such as Italian art or literature. Prices start at €260 for 15 hours of language learning. The school has links with local accommodation. **italianoporticando.com**



Find your focus

Put your holiday to use learning to take better pictures on your smart phone. These trips, organised by photographer Jet Black, will open your eyes to details while also teaching you to use colour and composition. Upcoming holidays in Kathmandu (November 2026) and Marrakech (March 2027) cost £2,950 and £2,475 respectively, excluding flights. If that's beyond your budget, there are day safaris costing £45 per person (or £150 for a family of four) across the UK as well as Sligo in Ireland, and Occitanie, South Western France. **jetblacksquares.com**

Bridge the gap

A Holiday Fellowship Bridge holiday is a chance to practise and play in the relaxed surroundings of a characterful Cotswold country house. With expert tuition from English Bridge Union-qualified directors, the holiday is suitable for beginners. It costs from £519 for three nights and includes a welcome cream tea, morning bridge sessions and evening competitions, accommodation and meals. **hfholidays.co.uk**





Become a wine connoisseur

Wine discovery holidays tend to be expensive – a luxe three-day Rioja tour with **vine-travel.com** from €1,750 a person, includes dinner one night and a Michelin-starred lunch – but a three-day Essential Sancerre tour with **grapeescapes.net** comes in at £674 a person for two nights including a tour of two vineyards.

Starry, starry night

Learn about the sky at night on a Kirker Holidays' seven-night astronomy and volcano tour in La Palma and Tenerife (from £3,576 for flights, accommodation, meals and excursions). There are daily tours, talks and workshops. The first four nights are on La Palma, home to the world's largest optical telescope. You then move on to Tenerife for more stargazing. **kirkerholidays.com**



Can't decide?

For those who don't want to spend their holiday on one activity, holiday company Skyros's Atsitsa Bay centre has a great solution: choose your trip according to the timetable of subjects available – then dip in and out as you please. You'll find expert-led workshops in subjects like weaving, singing, painting, writing, dancing, kayaking, abseiling, astronomy, and even stand-up comedy. Prices range from £1,075 to £1,975 for accommodation, meals and classes. **skyros.com**





Pussy cat, pussy cat....

The Big Cat Sanctuary in Kent is a globally recognised centre, dedicated to the conservation and rescue of wild cats. The Sanctuary plays an essential role in saving some of the planet's most endangered and iconic species from extinction and, to help fund their work, they offer overnight stays that include an expert-led educational tour as well as an opportunity to feed one of the big cats by hand. Couples pay from £795 to stay in a lodge with dinner and breakfast included in the sanctuary's restaurant overlooking the lion reserve. **thebigcatsanctuary.org**





LEND A HELPING HAND...

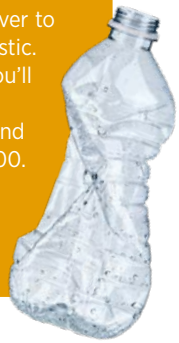
Caring for communities

Help small communities to thrive with a G Adventures holiday. The company's focus is on nurturing boutique hotels and businesses. It's a great way to enjoy an authentic travel experience while helping local people. Across seven days in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco (from £412 for six nights) you could be baking fresh bread, weaving, or hiking with a shepherd. **gadventures.com**



What a load of rubbish...

Discover what it takes to keep beach resorts looking their best by joining staff for clean-ups. Since finding take-away cartons from China while on a beach clean-up in Vietnam, travel counsellor Sorrel Ashton says she's tried never to buy single-use plastic. Closer to home, you'll find beach clean events in Greece and Majorca from £1,000. **travelcounsellors.co.uk/sorrel.ashton**



Holidays with benefits

Set up by Sheila Fitzgerald, a money advisor, EVA Travel runs holidays that are ten-14 days long but include some volunteering with a community or conservation project. Trips are aimed at over 50s who want to travel and give something back – you could be tiger tracking in Nepal, or supporting schools in Uganda. A 12-night Cambodia holiday (from £1,995) includes visits to temples as well as time looking after elephants. **evatravel.uk**



Use your eyes

Why not share your eyes with someone who has lost their sight but still wants to travel? Taking a holiday with Traveleyes, you'll guide a different blind traveller every day. No experience is needed, just a love of connecting with people. You'll get hands-on guidance at the start of the holiday. Trips range from walking in the Yorkshire Dales or hiking the Camino de Santiago to safaris in Africa, and sledging in Finland. As a sighted traveller your holiday will be discounted by up to 50%, with UK breaks starting around £895. **traveleyes-international.com**





"Walkies...!"

How about hiking in Portugal's Serra Da Estrela Mountain Range with Star Mountain Animal Sanctuary's 28 rescue dogs? For a donation of €295 towards the animals' welfare, you'll get a four-night stay in a seven-bedroomed guest house. Three meals are served daily and walks are from two to four hours each. **veganretreatportugal.com/hiking-with-dogs**