

PLUS: 34 SPAS FOR EVERY NEED—FROM ITALY TO INDIA

Condé Nast Traveler

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TRUTH IN TRAVEL

JULY 2009

SPECIAL

ISLANDS ON SALE!

WORLDWIDE GUIDE TO **14** GREATEST DEALS EVER

Greece, Thailand, Jamaica, Maldives, Fiji, Iceland, Seychelles, and more

CARIBBEAN
BARBADOS'S
EURO CHARMS

JAPAN'S
WINTER
WONDERLAND

**INSIDER'S
HAWAII**
WHERE TO STAY,
SWIM, EAT, PLAY

AFRICA'S
MAGIC ISLES

EXTRA
**AMERICAN
BEAUTIES**
OUR LAST
WILD PLACES
(AND HOW TO SEE THEM)



THE WORLD ON SALE

(Islands Edition)

Is there an upside to the down economy? If you're an island-goer, the answer is an unqualified yes. Places that were once prohibitive for many are now more accessible than ever before (hello, Seychelles!), and even old favorites are seeing their prices chopped (this is the summer for Fiji). We hunted down 14 of the best island bargains around the globe, from the Seychelles to Jamaica, Hawaii to Sicily. Even better, prices will be falling further throughout the summer, and many of these deals are good through December. So grab your bikini and get going—you won't see prices like these again anytime soon.

By Brook Wilkinson and Eimear Lynch



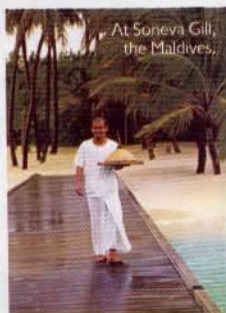
Blue lagoon: You could be here—the Seychelles is up to 30 percent cheaper than last year.

SOMETIMES GREAT TRIPS ARE EASILY BOOKED ON YOUR own, but sometimes it helps to have a destination specialist who really knows the region inside and out, and whose connections can secure upgrades and even better deals than you could find solo. We've listed the names of travel agents from Wendy Perrin's annual "World's Top Travel Specialists" list wherever we think having one would enhance your experience (go to cntraveler.com/travelagents).

AFRICA

Seychelles

Hotels here are discounting by as much as a third. Labriz, on lush Silhouette Island, has slashed prices by 25 percent. Taking into account the better exchange rate, you'll pay 30 percent less than last year (doubles, \$570). Getting there is cheaper, too: Air Seychelles is offering a second ticket from London to Mahé for 50 percent off starting in mid-August. Book through: Astrid Breuer of Island Splendor Vacations (818-707-0091; astrid@gotoseychelles.com).



At Soneva Gili, the Maldives.

ASIA

Maldives

The flight here will never be a bargain (it's about \$1,000 from London on Sri Lankan Airlines), but once you land, great deals (and beaches) abound. Rates at the Anantara Dhigu are down

44 percent, netting you a deluxe beach villa for only \$345 a night. The cost of an overwater bungalow at Anantara Veli has been slashed by 27 percent, to \$350 a night. And at Soneva Gili, the "seven nights, pay for four" package means a villa

costs 45 percent less this year than it did last. Book through: Lindsey Wallace of Linara Travel (800-335-6033; lindsey@linaratravel.com).

Phuket, Thailand

We never thought we'd see an \$800 summer fare to Bangkok (that's the price from L.A. and San Francisco; rates start at about \$900 from N.Y.C.), but it's arrived, and once you've made the \$150-or-so hop to Phuket, you'll find many a steal. Go by July 31 and stay in a private pool villa at the new Anantara Phuket Resort (on this year's Hot List) for \$286; the rack rate is \$401 (66-76-336-100; phuket.anantara.com). Or choose the beautiful, villagelike Banyan Tree, where you'll get 20 percent off if you book six weeks in advance (66-76-324-374; banyantree.com).

CARIBBEAN

Jamaica

A recent construction boom has left the island with too many rooms and

too few visitors. The result? A week-long trip here is about 25 percent cheaper than last year. The Ritz-Carlton Golf & Spa Resort, Rose Hall, is offering a five-nights-for-the-price-of-four deal for \$1,636, including meals (as opposed to the usual

\$2,045). Need more space? The bargains extend to villas. Linda Smith of Jamaica Villas by Linda Smith is offering a fourth night free at any of her properties, which

come with a full staff. Noble House, for example, a four-bedroom, six-bath beachfront estate, is now \$6,429 per week (it was \$9,000 last year). Book



WENDY WATCH For daily deals on travel bargains around the world—including many of the destinations covered here—check out Consumer News Editor Wendy Perrin's blog at perrinpost.com.

through: Linda Smith (301-229-4300; linda@jamaicavillas.com).

Turks and Caicos

An oceanfront suite for less than \$425 a night? Believe it: Jet to the T&C's Grace Bay Club, pay for two nights (from \$1,100 through October), and get an extra night free. If you book through Terry McCabe of Altour, the resort will throw in afternoon tea and a complimentary upgrade. Since summer's off-season, it's a cheap time to lounge on the Grace Bay Club's deserted white sand beach, and the 80-degree July and August temperatures mean you'll spend a good deal of time in the ocean.

Turtles, manta rays, and dolphins revel in warm underwater climes, and the diving here is some of the best in the world. An unbelievable airfare adds to the allure: It's forecast at \$400 for a July round-trip from New York. Book through: Terry McCabe (201-421-2905; terry.mccabe@altour.com).

Croatian cruise? Discounts on Hvar are as high as 73 percent.



adis Travel (800-542-3471; ronnie@liadis.com).

EUROPE

Hvar, Croatia

The next St-Tropez? It's in the Adriatic. You can sip a coffee in Hvar Town and watch the yachts pull up, or explore the Roman ruins around the island. Fly into Split, then take the 90-minute ferry to Hvar (pronounced *hwar*). The three top hotels on the island are all offering a third night free; combine that with the weakened euro and you've got savings of as much as 73 percent. The Riva is for hipsters who want to prowls the clubs (doubles, \$200-\$316), the Adriana for their elegant parents (doubles, \$387-\$523). Guests at both properties have access to the private beach at the Hotel Amfora, the best option for families (doubles, \$213-\$394). Book through: Greg Tepper of Exeter International (800-633-1008; greg@exeterinternational.com).

Greek Islands

It's no myth: The sales here are epic. Take one package offered exclusively by Christos Stergiou of TrueGreece: three nights each at the Petra Hotel on Patmos, Villa La Maltese on Santorini, and the Blue Palace on Crete for \$1,414—37 percent less than the same trip would have cost last year. Or book a seven-night stay at Crete's Elounda Gulf Villas & Suites through Ronnie Liadis of Liadis Travel and pay for just five. Included is a trip to Spinalonga, an uninhabited island where you can explore the remains of an old Venetian fort that was once a leper colony; the whole thing costs \$2,929, 40 percent less than in 2008. Book through: Christos Stergiou (800-817-7098; info@truegreece.com) or Ronnie Liadis of Li-

Iceland

The U.S. dollar will buy you about 60 percent more than it did in the summer of '08, so you can fill up on fresh Nordic seafood and rave in Reykjavik's crazy clubs for a fraction of last year's costs. After a discounted flight (check icelandair.com for deals, including a \$499 fare from New York), check into what was once one of Reykjavik's most expensive hotels, the Park Inn, for about \$190 a night (354-595-7000; parkinn.com), and dine at the formerly exorbitant Seafood Cellar, where a lavish dinner and drinks for two is less than \$200 (354-511-1212).

Ireland

The deals begin even before you land: Aer Lingus's fleeing sales have been known to drop fares to as low as \$238 round-trip from New York (versus \$850 last year), \$538 from Chicago, and \$738 from San Francisco. Once you're there, Ireland specialist Kathleen Sheridan of Altour has negotiated rates at hotels around the country that are approximately 25 percent less

than last year's, and she can also procure guaranteed upgrades at the time of booking from the Adare Manor in County Limerick (doubles, \$604) and Hayfield Manor in Cork (doubles, \$230). Or rent the entire eight-bedroom Prospect House in County Mayo from John Coldlough of Adams & Butler for just \$6,817 per week, a 50 percent savings over 2008's rates. Book through: Kathleen Sheridan of Altour (201-477-7002; kathi.sheridan@altour.com) or John Coldlough (800-894-5712; john@irishluxury.com).

Sicily

A number of low-fare European airlines fly into Palermo, the island's capital, so search for flights on skyscanner.net, which includes carriers you won't find on kayak.com. IC Bellagio is offering three nights at the Grand Hotel Villa Ignea, a day with a guide touring Sicily's ancient ruins, and a morning with one of the island's best chefs—all for \$2,700. If you bought this à la carte last year, it would have cost \$4,000. *Mamma mia!* Book through: Andrea Grisdale of IC Bellagio (39-031-952-059; andrea@icbellagio.com).

NORTH AMERICA

Alaska

Imagine a week of coasting past glaciers and the Pacific Northwest's loveliest islands on a cruise line luxe enough to make *Condé Nast Traveler's* Gold List 15 years in a row. Sound expensive? It's not: The July price tag, \$449, means you pay less than \$70 per all-inclusive day. Celebrity Cruises, itching to fill empty ships, has never dropped rates this low (competitors like Holland America are offering similarly slashed prices). And it's easy to get to Seward port, which is close to Anchor-



Ireland's Hayfield Manor, in Cork.

age: You shouldn't pay more than \$300 round-trip from Los Angeles. Even a ticket from Miami is about \$500. Book through: Margaret Propser of Brownell Travel (205-414-1656; margretp@brownelltravel.com).

Hawaii

While it may be the islands' fiftieth anniversary of statehood (see "Home at the End of the World," page 68), Hawaii has been especially hard-hit by the recession. Although summer is one of the islands' high seasons (another is Christmastime), flights on almost all major airlines have never been lower (tickets from Los Angeles hover around \$450), and hotels have had to get creative. On Maui, the Fairmont Kea Lani's Aloha Savers Promotion means \$340 a night rates (a 30 percent discount), and on Lanai, the Four Seasons Lodge at Koele (a golfer's favorite) is offering three nights for the price of two (a total of \$590 as opposed to \$885). Alternatively, an airfare-plus-hotel summer package from Pleasant Holidays can be up to 50 percent cheaper than last year's rates. Book through: Pleasant Holidays (800-742-9244; pleasantholidays.com).

SOUTH PACIFIC

French Polynesia

First, check Air Tahiti Nui for up-to-the-minute deals. Second, get ready for significant savings—some hotels are discounting by as much as 42 percent. InterContinental's Moorea property will charge you for only three nights when you stay for five (doubles, \$221); its Resort & Thalasso Spa on Bora Bora offers the same deal (doubles, \$771); and the Tahiti property has a three-night special for \$570 total, down 33 percent from last year. Book through: Kleon Howe of The Art of Travel (888-294-3598; kleon@theartoftravelonline.com).



Bora Bora Resort & Thalasso Spa.

Fiji

With Fijian resorts, "it's like *Let's Make a Deal*," says travel specialist Lynette Wilson of Destination World. While it would have cost \$6,500 to spend a week at a five-star resort last summer, Wilson can get you the same trip for about \$5,000 this summer. Nukubati Island Resort, a 2008 World Savers Award honoree, is charging \$4,993 for seven nights in its honeymoon bure, including all meals and drinks—that's 29 percent less than you would have paid last year. And in addition to the new Viva Island Resort's "stay seven, pay five" package, Wilson's clients get one 30-minute massage per person, a village trip, an introductory scuba class, and one dinner (doubles, \$335). Book through: Lynette Wilson (800-224-0220; world@silcom.com).