

Sun travel

Edited by LISA MINOT



GRAND... Hoar Cross Hall

DON'T GO FAR FOR SUPER SPA

HOAR CROSS HALL SPA HOTEL, STAFFS

WHAT'S IT LIKE? This stunning Grade II-listed stately home has the wow factor. Inside there are plush furnishings, breathtaking Victorian architecture and historic paintings on the upstairs floors, while downstairs there's a fantastic spa. I loved the fact you can walk around the entire hotel in your dressing gown.

ROOMS ANY GOOD? Amazing. Our room had recently been modernised with stunning turquoise and orange velvet touches. There are dressing gowns, Espa products in the bathroom, slippers and mineral water. It overlooked the lovely gardens. **EAT HERE OR GRAB A PIZZA?** Definitely eat at the

hotel. Breakfast is hearty and at dinner we had steak and a great cheeseboard. You can have the stunning afternoon tea in your dressing gown, sitting on one of the plush sofas in the oak-panelled hallway next to one of the many fires. **WHAT ELSE?** Don't miss the spa – there's a 26m salt water vitality pool, a Nordic suite with aroma and salt-inhalation rooms, an ice cave and a sauna. Hoar Cross has had a significant refurbishment recently and there's also now a state-of-the-art gym and a stunning relaxation room. **SO YOU'D GO BACK?** Most definitely. **WHAT'S THE DAMAGE?** Spa breaks start from £149pppn. See hoarcross.co.uk or call 01283 575671. **JANE ATKINSON**

check in, check it out

hot spot

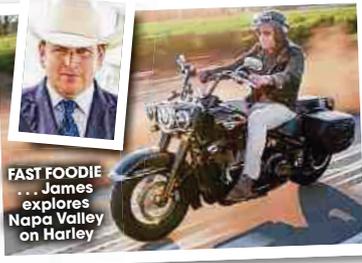
IT'S 28C in BALI – seven nights' B&B at the 5* Novotel Bali

Benoa costs from £736pp, including flights from Manchester on March 13. See travelrepublic.co.uk or call 020 8974 7200.

hot spot

BERMUDA is 24C – seven nights' room-only at the 4* Grotto Bay Beach Resort

costs from £1,149pp, including flights from Gatwick on selected dates in March. Book by February 22. See ba.com or call 0344 493 0120.



FAST FOODIE... James explores Napa Valley on Harley

JAMES' AMERICA TRIP ON THE MENU

JAMES MARTIN has been cooking up a storm in California in his ITV show.

The chef's American Adventure series explored some of the best foodie gems in California this week, covering farmers' markets, vineyards and restaurants.

From the Raymond Winery in Napa Valley to the Ghirardelli Chocolate Festival in San Francisco, James takes in the very best of the state's culinary highlights, finishing with a steak at Wolfgang Puck's CUT in Los Angeles.

And if you're keen to do the same, America As You Like It

has a ten-night trip to California. It includes Virgin Atlantic flights from London to San Francisco, returning from Los Angeles. Priced from £1,259pp, it includes two nights at the Whitcomb in San Francisco; two nights at Best Western Plus Garden Inn in Santa Rosa; two nights at Discovery Inn in Napa; two nights at Holiday Inn Express in Santa Cruz and two nights at Dunes Inn Wilshire in Los Angeles as well as car hire. See americaasyoulikeit.com or call 020 8742 8299.

stay with the stars

MARVEL AT COASTER MAKEOVER

AVENGERS fans assemble. Disneyland Paris's Rock 'n' Roller Coaster is getting a Marvel makeover for 2018.

Out goes the rock soundtrack and Aerosmith backstory and in come Iron Man and his fellow superheroes.

The onsite Hotel New York will also get a new design, with a

totally Tony Stark look from lobby to restaurants and rooms.

Work is expected to begin in late 2018 or early 2019.

You won't have to wait that long for a chance to see your favourites in France, though.

The resort's Marvel Summer of Superheroes in June will see Captain America, Spider-Man,

Star-Lord and Black Widow take to the stage in a live-action show.

Spokeswoman Catherine Powell said: "These ambitious Marvel developments across the park will create brand new immersive superhero experiences for our guests and will enhance the overall appeal of our resort."



STARK CONTRAST... new room design

SEIZE THE DAY WITH STUNNING GREEK ISLAND



Santorini's a bit of all white

THE anticipation of an event can often evoke greater emotion than the event itself.

The end result doesn't always live up to the expectation – fish and chips, for example, are always best before you've eaten them.

However, our visit to Santorini gives the lie to this idea as our bonding family holiday – dad, mum and son – exceeded what we ever imagined.

Like so many, a visit to the stunning Greek isle had been on our bucket list – but we wanted to avoid the tourist-trap part of the island and massive daily cruise ship crowds for a week of true peace and harmony.

So we seized the day and shunned the most popular destinations to stay at the award-winning Carpe Diem hotel, nestled beneath the medieval village of Pyrgos.

Occupying one of the highest points on Santorini and affording epic panoramic views, it is the largest preserved village on the island and the former capital.

A perfect day started with a walk up to

GO: SANTORINI

GETTING THERE: easyJet flies from London Gatwick to Santorini from £40.26pp one way. See easyjet.com.

STAYING THERE: One night's B&B in the Alba Suite at Carpe Diem starts from £180pp based on two sharing. See carpediemsantorini.com or call +3022 8603 4090. Carpe Diem is affiliated with Small Luxury Hotels of the World. See slh.com.

Pyrgos to see the stunning sunrise without being swamped by fellow tourists. Santorini treated us to six balmy, 30C, cloudless, windless days in an exceptionally well-appointed resort with exemplary in-house food and service.

Privacy and seclusion were top priority, including the first-class 270 Degrees restaurant and Althea boutique spa.

The huge rooms in the tiered complex are built into the hillside and offer cool and comfortable respite from the mid-afternoon sun if one ever tires of the view over the Aegean from the pool. With expansive rooms, including an open living

space, private outside area, separate shower and toilet and bathroom with a large spa bath, it's not hard to see why Carpe Diem was named Best Honeymoon Hideaway at the World Boutique Hotel Awards in 2017.

But what's great is that everything on Santorini is so compact, it's easy to see the more famous sights when you choose.

We were urged to look into an organised private tour with ex-Greek Special Services commando George, who now uses his Humvee for more peaceful sightseeing purposes. Who can argue with a paratrooper, after all?

What an outing George provided. The historical and archaeological commentary the breathtaking views and the timing of our visit to the beautiful town of Oia just before the 40 tourist buses arrived was a testament to his local knowledge.

The town offers a magnificent crater view, looking down on what is left of the volcano. It was formed about 3,000 years ago during the Minoan eruption, forming the little islands of Nea Kameni and Palea Kameni as a result.

Santorini is a dormant volcano and Oia is the manifestation of all we had imagined from a town on a Greek island

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Sun travel**hot spot**

MALDIVES is 31C at the moment – seven nights' half-board at the 4* Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu costs from £1,294pp, including return flights from Heathrow on February 27. For more information about the deal or to book, see southalltravel.co.uk or call on 020 8705 0086.

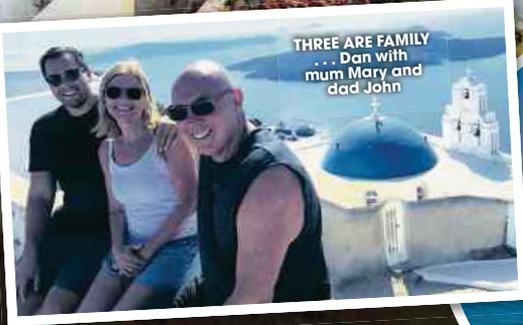
JET2 celebrated the 15th anniversary of its first flight this week – with Peter Andre. When the airline first flew from Leeds Bradford to Amsterdam on February 12, 2003, it had just two aircraft and served nine destinations. It is now the UK's third largest airline with 88 aircraft flying to 65 locations. To mark the airline's anniversary, Peter, right, sang Happy Birthday to customers and launched the 15 Seconds of Fame competition, where 15 return flights are up for grabs. See jet2.com for more.

**STAY FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWDS**

ON A HIGH . . . pastel splendour of Santorini. Right, inside Carpe Diem



THREE ARE FAMILY . . . Dan with mum Mary and dad John



RIPPLE WONDER . . . Infinity pool at Carpe Diem



hillside, with beautiful white-washed houses and blue domes.

Santorini's geology is awe-inspiring and its rich culture and history made this a most memorable day. Included in our tour was a visit to one of Santorini's few vineyards, Estate Argyros, where we tasted many beautiful wines and accompanying local cuisine.

We were also treated to a wonderful history tour, in which we learned about wine and cheese-making on the island.

World-beating views

The day ended at dusk with a drive up to the highest peak of Pyrgos where the view is second to none and something that no picture or video could ever really capture.

Another must-do outing is a visit to the beautiful black-sanded beach of Agios Giorgios where we were served seafood and drinks to our sun loungers and swam in the wonderfully warm sea.

We finished our day by dining at an open-air restaurant, Forty One –

one of the trendy new seafood eateries coming to the Greek islands that combines beach club and champagne during the day with gorgeous seafood dishes by night.

Had we not wanted to explore, we could easily have whiled away the six days at Carpe Diem. With its lovely main pool, our private pool, the stunning views, the availability of food and drink, and no kids, nothing can spoil the tranquility.

The hotel is particularly famous for its magnificent and massive breakfasts which are included in the price, with a huge range of food (and champagne) available in any quantity until 1pm.

After breakfast, the narrow cobbled streets of Pyrgos offered many hours of wonder and discovery, checking out cafes and bars with world-beating views and various markets, all the while banging into the local donkeys and listening to the bells from one or more of the eight churches.

Bortago restaurant was the scene of a beautiful evening meal outside as we watched the sunset. One of

the advantages of staying at Carpe Diem is benefitting from the knowledge of host Sotiris Kopatsaris, a Santorini native who has run the hotel since 2011.

On our final night, we were treated to freshly caught fish in a divine meal that needed to be ordered the day before to ensure a fresh catch. We ate outside and as with every other meal, the service was unobtrusive yet attentive – and the accompanying cocktails were perfect to say goodbye.

Santorini is not a big isle, luckily, as directions to the ferry port got lost in translation and we realised we were heading to the airport.

A few gesticulations to the taxi driver and a hair-raising drive to the boat with an almost Himalayan descent got us to the ferry on time to head to Mykonos, a couple of hours away, for a final Greek night.

But nothing would come close to our family week in Santorini, a tranquil and bonding experience we will never forget.

DAN, MARY & JOHN WOOTTON

OVERBOARD . . . £30k-a-week family suite

TONNES OF FUN ON THE WORLD'S BIGGEST LINER

THE largest cruise ship in the world is just five weeks away from its first sailing and this week, Sun Travel was given an exclusive sneak preview of the Symphony of the Seas.

With thousands of shipyard workers still crawling all over Royal Caribbean International's gargantuan Oasis-class liner, I can reveal it is a true stunner. The sister ship to last year's largest-ever Harmony of the Seas, it has been given a host of upgrades including more balcony cabins and a larger Boardwalk neighbourhood complete with fairground carousel, new shops, restaurants and bars.

Although at 1,188ft in length and 215.5ft wide, Symphony is the same size as its sister ship, it takes the title of largest ship in the world as it is 2,000 tonnes heavier – mainly thanks to glass panels replacing carvins in the adult-only Solarium space.

It means, at 228,021 gross register tonnes, the ship will be able to carry up to 6,680 passengers and 2,200 crew, spread across 18 decks.

But it's the two-level Ultimate Family Suite that has had the best reaction from cruisers. Despite costing from £30,000 a week it is already fully booked for the whole of 2018. Sleeping up to eight in two bedrooms, the suite includes a huge living area with floor-to-ceiling Lego wall, a dining table that converts into a pool or ice hockey table and TV nook complete with a huge 3D TV and popcorn machine. There is also a slide from the kids' bedroom to the lounge.

A ship this large needs tackling in handy sections and Royal Caribbean have created seven distinct neighbourhoods on board.

One of these neighbourhoods, Central Park, had 12,000 lush tropical trees and plants installed this week.

Symphony will have 20 restaurants, while the Royal Promenade will welcome back the Royal Caribbean's bionic bar, complete with robot bartenders. New entertainment features include Hairspray – the brand's first Broadway musical at sea. There is also a new escape-room challenge called

GO: CRUISING

GETTING / STAYING THERE: A seven-night full-board Western Med cruise on Symphony of the Seas is from £999pp, sailing April 21 from Barcelona. The cruise calls at Palma de Mallorca, Marseille, La Spezia for Florence/Pisa, Civitavecchia for Rome and Capri. Book before March 5 to buy one all-inclusive cruise fare and get 50 per cent off the second guest. 25 per cent off the third and fourth guests from only £75pp deposit. See royalcaribbean.co.uk or call 0844 493 4005.

CAPTAIN . . . Rob and Lisa



GIGANTIC . . . Symphony of the Seas

Puzzle Break. And there's one person even more eager than the passengers to get aboard – the ship's new captain, Rob Hempstead.

He said: "I'm very excited to start sea trials this week.

"Symphony is cleaner, faster and more efficient than any other ship thanks to huge advances in technology. But a ship of this size is also a challenge – manoeuvring is going to be tricky!"

LISA MINOT

CHALLENGE . . . Puzzle Break escape room