

Flying solo

Dead Sea in Jordan



St Lucia



For the wildlife fan: For a one-off wildlife experience, head over to Borneo to look after the 'old man of the forest', the gentle orang-utan. On this trip, organised by Naturetrek, you can spend some time with once captive orangu-tans, learning about how they can be rehabilitated back into the wild. Explore river tributaries and hidden lakes, searching not only for wild orangs but also bizarre Proboscis monkeys, hornbills and flying squirrels. Keep your eyes open for the rare Storm's stork, or watch the bats at Gomantong Caves as they emerge at dusk and flit away into the night.

► Eleven days from £3,995 with single room supplement of £295. Flights are included, as is accommodation in comfortable eco-lodges. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk or call 01962 733051.

For the history lover: A mysterious land rich in history and glittering monuments, Jordan is a unique place for adventurous souls. Visit Madaba, the 'City of Mosaics', before descending to the lowest point on Earth, and enjoying the tranquil waters of the Dead Sea. Behold the beauty of the awe-inspiring Citadel, which towers above the city of Amman, before investigating the Roman amphitheatre that is set into the side of the mountain here. Explore Shobak Castle, built during the Crusades to guard the road from Damascus to Egypt, on your way to Petra. In the evening, almost 2,000 candles will light your way through a narrow gorge into this historic

city, where you can listen to the haunting music of the Bedouin. The following day, explore the desert wilderness of Wadi Rum, before you end your journey on the shores of the Red Sea. ► Eight days from £1,849, includes flights and transport. Every traveller gets their own room, with no single supplement to pay. Visit www.justyou.co.uk or call 0844 5678844.

For the health buff: For those who would rather turn their body into a temple than visit a temple during their time off, a health kick in the Caribbean may be the answer, and lovely St Lucia might be just the place to rejuvenate. The Body Holiday has created an all-inclusive resort based on the key principles of relaxation, restorative beauty, exercise and a nutritious

diet to ensure that their guests leave feeling recharged. Here you can practise yoga on a sandy beach, windsurf on the turquoise waters or cycle through the lush jungle. Alternatively, indulge with a spa treatment, such as the lime and ginger full-body scrub, a coconut milk wrap, or any of a variety of facials or muscle treatments. ► Seven nights all-inclusive from £3,415 for single occupancy. Price includes a tailored wellness programme, flights and transfers. Visit www.thebodyholiday.com or call 020 30961605.

For the foodie: It is a strong-willed person who can resist a bowl of steaming pasta or a creamy panna cotta, but very few of us can make perfect Italian fare at home. Soar through the skies to the Etruscan town of Cortona, and settle into your home for the next four days, a 4 star hotel in a former 15th century palace. You will have five days of cooking lessons, your kitchen in a converted monastery, and for each day you will be taught to cook a four-course meal from regional ingredients on a terrace that overlooks the Tuscan hills. ► Eight days for £1,401 per person, to include accommodation, breakfasts, and five cookery lessons with ingredients and equipment, plus two meals on non-cooking days. Flights are not included. No single room supplement. Visit www.golearnto.com or call 0208 1445990.

I would not hesitate going it alone again

Sharman Green reviews her trip to Crete

If you have decided to holiday alone and don't know where to start, a break at the Mistral Hotel in Marleme near Chania in Crete could be a perfect destination.

I had booked myself into the Mistral Hotel in Marleme to experience a solo break, and worries tumbled in during the flight. It had been decades since I'd travelled alone. Would anyone talk to me? Would the included meals be an uncomfortable trial? Would this be an older version of an 18 to 30s package holiday?

I needn't have worried. The Mistral is run by two Cretan brothers, Vassilis and Adonis. Vassilis had noticed a growing group of people who wanted to travel solo, and together with his family, worked hard to develop a safe, friendly and unique destination for those holidaying on their own. As Vassilis says, solo travelling can be a great thing to do but for some the experience, especially the evenings, can be daunting even for the most confident. The Mistral changes that.

During the day guests can choose



to join activities or excursions or do their own thing and some just like to chill out around the pool. While staying at the Mistral, a walk to the German cemetery up the hill above the hotel is a moving experience.

The cemetery is a peaceful place that tells many stories and from there you can see beautiful views across the bay. On the way up visit the ancient Minoan Tholos tomb, and have a chat to the local donkey at the top before nipping in to the café.

If you want to explore further afield, you can try The Little Train in Chania – there is a very good bus service which stops just outside the hotel, so getting to Chania is easy. The train offers a variety of destinations: old monasteries, vineyards, the Blue Lagoon, small

villages and more. The English hostess, Donna, will make reservations for you.

I took a hotel-organised trip to the local Botanical Gardens in the hills of Crete, where a micro-climate allows plants from all over the world to grow on the mountain sides. Walking round the gardens is a hilly two kilometre walk, ending in the welcome hilltop restaurant. This uses its own fruit and vegetables grown in the gardens and some of the more exotic fruits were ones I had never seen or tasted before. Putting the plant of the fruit to the taste was a great experience.

I also went on the hotel evening trip to Chania's Old Town, full of old picturesque winding streets and buildings and lots of shopping opportunities. This ended with a

meal overlooking the charming Venetian harbour, although I was not so keen on the snail dish which is considered a Cretan delicacy.

Most evenings, a convivial dinner is served at the hotel, at a long trestle table with lots of chat and laughter – lovely for those worried about eating alone. The four-course meal at the hotel is delicious and based on traditional Cretan cooking. Local ingredients are used, such as freshly caught fish, beautiful vegetables, goat's cheese and honey, all served with unlimited quantities of Cretan wine – much nicer than the snails!

Staying at the Mistral was an enjoyable few days and I would certainly recommend it as a friendly, unstressful destination for the solo traveller. You will almost certainly make friends and share stories and laughter. I came home with a sense of achievement and would certainly not hesitate to travel on my own again.

► Sharman flew with Ryan Air from Leeds Bradford airport, but flights are available from other major airports. If you arrive on a Tuesday the Mistral will arrange free transfers from the airport to the hotel. The Mistral charges from £560 for seven nights and their themed weeks start from a reasonable £160 extra. For further information, call the Mistral Hotel's UK line on 0871 9902070 or email info@singlesincrete.com

THE JOURNAL

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