



HIT DECK & DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY...

MANY are struggling with the glittery void that the end of BBC smash Strictly Come Dancing has left on their Saturday nights

But now dancing devotees can head to the high seas for their fill of sequins and samba.

Fans can don their dancing shoes and shimmy their way across the floor on a P&O Cruises 2019 Strictly Come Dancing holidays.

Featuring the show's professional dancers, this year's line-up includes love to hate judge Craig Revel Horwood, pictured, dancers Giovanni Pernice, Janette Manrara, Aljaž Skorjanec, Oli Mabuse and many more fan favourites. Guests will not only be dazzled by the slick dance displays but will also have the chance to

perfect their own moves with private one-to-one dance lessons with one of the pro dancers. With four different ships and destinations on the strictly programme to choose from there is a holiday to suit all ballroom or Latin lovers.

Try 13 nights' sailing under the sun at the helm of The Britannia. Departing from Southampton it stops in Madeira, Le Palma, Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote and Lisbon.

When guests aren't exploring the Canaries, they can get their jive on with the dancers all under the watchful eye of Mr Horwood.

The Canary and Portugal cruise costs from £999pp, departing April 7. Details at pocruises.com

hot spot

IT'S 26°C IN ANTIGUA — a week at the 3★ Hawksbill by Rex Resorts is from £1,198pp with Travel Republic. The price is based on all-inclusive with flights from Gatwick on February 26. See travelrepublic.co.uk or call 020 8974 7200.

hot spot

IT'S 21°C IN FUERTEVENTURA — seven nights at the 3★ Globales Costa Tropical in Costa Antigua is from £279pp with Icelolly. The price is based on all-inclusive with flights from Edinburgh on February 19. See icelolly.co.uk



ALICANTE TRIP IS FLIGHT ON MONEY

HEAD off to the sunnier climes of Spain next month on a £399pp return flight from Glasgow to Alicante, above, on February 5. Price is based on two adults travelling together. Book at tui.co.uk or visit your local TUI holiday store.

PHILIPPINE Airlines has launched new routes from London to Phnom Penh in Cambodia and Hanoi in Vietnam via its Manila hub. Sale prices right now start from £429pp return, if you book by February 28 for travel between March 31-December 6.

If you want to push the boat out then they also have premium economy seats from £879 and business class fares from £1,699pp.

Air news

to plan a new adventure around the globe taking advantage of Emirates' special fares from Glasgow and Edinburgh. Book by January 31 for discounts on a huge choice of routes for travel until November 30. How about Dubai from £409pp or Bangkok from £489pp. There's also Dohi from £409pp and Perth, Australia from £749. For these and more see emirates.com/UK

FAMILY ATMOSPHERE IS GREAT FOR SOLO TRAVELLERS



BLISS... spa, pool and bedroom at the Mistral, Kevin second right, with new pals, Chania old town, main pic, & Elafonissi beach

YOU know you have stumbled upon something special when someone tells you this is their 13th visit to this hotel in Greece...and they live in Australia.

Or someone else tells you it's the fifth year in a row and she lives in LA.

Then there are others from the UK who have been coming for eight years, six years and four years and they are coming back next year.

But that is the effect the Mistral Hotel in Maleme has and after an amazing week it's easy to see why so many visitors like Aussie Phil and Californian Becky keep travelling to the other side of the world to spend a week in the place they call paradise.

The concept is simple, the Mistral is designed exclusively for the solo traveller.

I've been on singles holidays before, but they don't compare to the Mistral experience.

From the moment you arrive you are made to feel special and there's none of the awkwardness or unease at arriving somewhere on your own.

Share stories

Within 20 minutes I was sat having dinner beside other guests who were keen to introduce themselves and make me feel part of the group.

The Mistral is owned and run by brothers Vassilis and Adonis and their small and incredibly hard-working team headed by Donna and Yanni.

Vassilis, who studied at Strathclyde University, took over the running of the hotel in the mid 90s and his passion for the Mistral and everything Cretan is infectious. The brothers even drive the minibuses on the excursions.

After dinner I was up at the bar enjoying a few beers, meeting more new faces and having a laugh and a dance with my new friends. Dining together is a huge part of the experience and every night no matter whether you have been lying at one of two beautiful pools, or out on of their many excursions, EVERYONE meets for dinner at 8pm.

There are two huge tables in the outdoor dining area and people rarely sit in the same place so it's a great way to share stories and help new arrivals settle in. Other solo trips I've been on have seen cliques form, but not at the Mistral. Nothing was forced, we all got on really well.

The location is perfect, you are only a 10-minute walk from the beach and the small fishing village of Maleme, and only 30 minutes from Chania



GO: CRETE

GETTING THERE: For the best prices on flights to Crete, see skyscanner.net

STAYING THERE: The Mistral Hotel is open from April to mid-October and offers a range of excursions.

Prices start from £802 for a week, on a half-board basis, flights not included. See singlesincrete.com

MORE INFO: For more on holidays to Greece, see visitgreece.gr

and other big tourist resorts.

For evening meals the food is served meze style — with the emphasis on sharing plates — and there is plenty of vino to go round and it's included in the price.

The Mistral specialises in Cretan food with fish, seafood, lamb, fresh veg from their own garden, olive oil, honey, cheese, lentils and herbs also from their own garden.

Every night brings a different feast. My highlights were the delicious fish and octopus cooked Cretan-style plus local specialities Boureki (a dish unique to Chania with pota-

toes, courgettes, goat's cheese and wrapped in pastry), Papoutsakia (roast aubergines in olive oil and spicy tomato sauce stuffed with vegetables) and Yiouvetsi (goat meat with tomato sauce, olive oil and herbs).

The kitchen staff get Sundays off, but one of the many excellent excursions is the 'Sunday night Chania Harbour Evening Meal'.

You can explore the captivating city, visit the old town, lose yourself in the narrow streets with plenty of shops and bars, or visit the lighthouse before arriving in the stunning har-

bour flanked on both sides by bars, cafes, restaurants and rooftop bars.

Dinner at Mihalis Restaurant in the old harbour was exceptional.

I lost count of the courses served in a meze style with fish and seafood the main components but also a mouth-watering selection of salads, meat dishes, vegetables, cheese dishes, pastries and desserts and fantastic local wine.

Three-hour feast

The atmosphere during the three-hour feast was great and the party carried on until the small hours when we got back to the bar at the Mistral.

At night the bar is the focus of entertainment because the nearest bars are about 20 minutes away. There is a dance-floor with the bar staff doubling as DJs and the music stays on for as long as you like. It is really lively — typified by the Greek night which gets everyone involved. With professional dancers and tradi-

tional Greek music it felt more authentic than others I've experienced in the past.

With two pools and lounging areas it's tempting not to leave during the day but the excursions are excellent. A must-do trip is the Palasarna Beach/Sfinari Fish Lunch on Thursdays. It's a full day and another ideal way to get to know your new friends.

Palasarna beach is a glorious hidden sandy paradise. Once there you have a couple of hours to sunbathe or swim and snorkel in the turquoise waters. We were also able to squeeze in a visit to the nearby Palasarna archaeological site where the city and old port date back to 300BC. They are now being excavated and look incredible.

Then it was a short trip south past breathtaking scenery before arriving at the seaside village of Sfinari and a truly epic lunch at Sunset Fish Restaurant, owned by the Baladakis family.

The setting right on the beach is just magical and entering the unspoiled village is

like taking a trip back in time where little has changed since they filmed the famous dancing scenes for classic Anthony Quinn movie Zorba The Greek in 1964.

It's not so much a lunch as a banquet with salad, fish dishes, octopus stew, calamari, fresh vegetables and their speciality — a fish soup known as Kakavia — all washed down with plenty of village wine called Marouvas.

Before you know it almost four hours have passed.

Another must-do trip is the whole-day excursion to Elafonissi Beach — rated one of the best in

Europe, with distinctive pink sand and turquoise water.

Or you could spend the week lazing at the Mistral's pools because the hotel does lunch every day apart from Sunday.

However, as you are half-board you have to pay for lunch. There is also a high-quality on site spa with a huge selection of treatments. And every room is stunning.

Return trip

Maleme beach is a ten-minute walk and there are plenty of villages and resorts you can easily explore by local bus.

My week just flew by and it was very easy to see why so many people keep coming back. You are made to feel part of the family and no one is left out — even the most shy solo traveller will leave knowing they have had a special holiday.

Every year hundreds of people make a return trip to the Mistral. Join them and you will become another one.

KEVIN KELLY



What costs what? A meal for two with wine is £25-£30 and a pint of lager is around £2.50. Do make sure that you visit Chania Old Town. Don't forget to book on the all-day Fish Lunch trip.

SAILING TRIPS ARE OZ-SOME

PRINCESS CRUISES has a ten-night winter trip in Queensland, Australia, from £848pp, sailing roundtrip from Sydney on board Majestic Princess on November 27. Ports of call are Brisbane, Airlie Beach, Yorkeys Knob, Port Douglas and Willis Island. Flights not included. See princess.com or call 0344 338 8663.

FRED Olsen's Boudicca has a nine-night cruise to Portugal from Dover on April 7. Calls at Lisbon, Portimao and Porto. See planetcruise.co.uk

ROYAL Caribbean will install the world's longest waterslide at sea on Navigator Of The Seas. The Blaster will propel a two-person raft through more than 800ft of hills and drops. The ship has undergone a \$155million makeover and re-launches on February 24. See royalcaribbean.co.uk

P&O Cruises is serving up new guest chefs on Britannia. Matt Tebbutt, Sabrina Ghayour, Paul A Young and Michelin-starred chef Robert Thompson will be on board on various cruises. Matt will join the seven-night The Netherlands, Belgium & Guernsey sailing departing March 29, with prices from £549pp. See pocruises.com or call 03453 555 111.

TAKE an Amadeus River Cruise from Paris taking in Normandy as you glide down the River Seine and enjoy ten per cent early booking discount if you book by

February 28. The cruise, on board Diamond, sets sail on April 3 and calls at Conflans, Rouen, Le Havre, Les Andelys, Vernon and Poissy. Prices from £1,339pp. See amadeus-rivercruises.co.uk

MSC CRUISES has a ten-night Mediterranean trip on board Sinfonia plus a free one-night stay in Barcelona from £599pp, including flights, to the Spanish city on March 26. Ports of call include Valencia, Mallorca, Malta, Sicily, Civitavecchia for Rome, Livorno, Genoa and Marseille. See cruisenation.com or call 0800 408 0757.

SAIL for over a month through the Far East and the Emirates on board P&O's Arcadia. The trip includes a two-night stay in Hong Kong, left, overnight on board in Singapore and Dubai and stop-offs in Chan May, Kuala Lumpur, Langkawi, Colombo, Mumbai, Muscat, Limassol, Haifa, Cadiz before docking in Southampton. The 38-day trip costs from £2,279pp including flights from London to Hong Kong on March 9. See planetcruise.co.uk or call 0808 278 8504.

DISCOVER Norway with Royal Caribbean during a nine-night Norwegian fjords holiday onboard Explorer of the Seas from May 31. Costs from £1,148pp leaving Southampton on June 9 and includes Bergen, Geiranger, Molde, Alesund and Stavanger. See royalcaribbean.co.uk



cruise news



Summertime Fjordland Cruise

Eight days WAS from £1,089pp NOW from £599pp Sailing from Rosyth on board Marco Polo, departs 23 Aug 2019

Board elegant Marco Polo to a trio of fjords. Call at some wonderful places that dot their pristine shorelines and take the opportunity, on shore excursions, to explore the beautiful countryside beyond.

Cruise highlights

- Flåm lies at the head of Sognefjord
- A call at Olden offers the chance to journey to the Briksdal Glacier
- Cruise into Geirangerfjord, with its waterfalls and fjord-side villages
- Call at historic Bergen
- Traditional British & International cuisine, stylish entertainment, guest lecturers & on-board leisure facilities
- Seven nights' full board accommodation on board Marco Polo

Call 0330 331 0519 quoting code TSU www.thesuntravel.co.uk/newmarket-fjordland

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