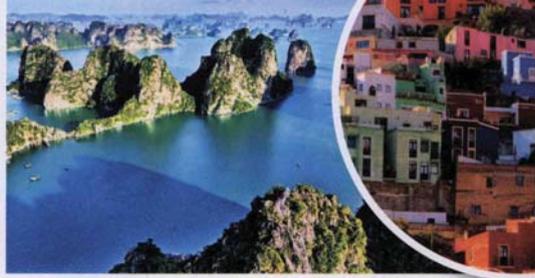




THE GLOBETROTTER

Ha Long Bay, Vietnam
(pictured); Casas de
Guanajuato, Mexico (inset)



WONDERFUL WINTER SUN

Swap cold, dull and wet Blighty for some of these sunny locations, says Melonie Clarke

Mexico

Best time to go: November-March (Atlantic Coast); December-April (Pacific Coast)

There is so much to see and do in Mexico that you'll be spoilt for choice. For city lights, try Mexico City, which is near the main airport, so it could be a great place to start your trip. Here you'll find some great attractions, such as the National Museum of Anthropology. Mexico City also has walking tours and bus tours that can give you an insight into the historic city.

With almost 6,000 miles of coastline here, visiting the beach should definitely be on your list. To enjoy some peace and quiet and escape the crowds, try Isla Holbox in

Yucatán, Rincón de Guayabitos in Riviera Nayarit, or Xcalak in Costa Maya, which lies within the National Reef Park.

If you're keen to see some ancient sites, Mexico is a fabulous destination. You can see evidence of some of the world's great civilisations that made Mexico their home: the Olmecs, Zapotecs, Maya and Aztecs. Some incredible sites include Templo Mayor, Tulum, Cobá and Monte Albán.

Cyprus

Best time to go: March-May; October-November

As well as the sunshine, Cyprus is great if you want to explore ancient history. In the capital, Nicosia, you'll find the Cyprus Museum, housing the best





A tropical beach resort in the Maldives (pictured);
 a picturesque street in Limassol, Cyprus (below)

archaeological collections on the island – indeed, one of the best in the world. You'll find artefacts on display from the Stone Age to the Byzantine era. Head to Kourion, near Limassol, to see fine examples of floor mosaics. Paphos is also renowned for its fabulous floor mosaics.

Also near Limassol, you can visit the painted Troödos churches. These frescoed late-Byzantine churches are a sight to behold. To see some of the oldest frescoes on the island, head to Ágios Andónios church in Kelliá.

Wine lovers should explore a number of the vineyards that can be found here. The Limassol region once again is the best place to base yourself for this, as the foothills are home to many vineyards with on-site microwineries. Some popular options include Domaine Vlassides, the Argyrides and Tsiakkas Winery.

Vietnam

Best time to go:
November-February

By opting for winter sun in Vietnam, you get the chance to enjoy *Tet*, Vietnamese New Year (in 2019 it will fall on 5 February). Hoi An holds a lantern festival that lasts seven days and the roads are adorned with thousands of colourful lanterns. There are plenty of workshops that take place over the course of the event,

where you can make your own lantern and then hang it. Smaller lantern festivals are held every full moon if you cannot make New Year.

A trip to Ha Long Bay is likely to be on most visitors' hit lists, but Bai Tu Long Bay, which is just a few miles away, is just as beautiful and has much smaller crowds.

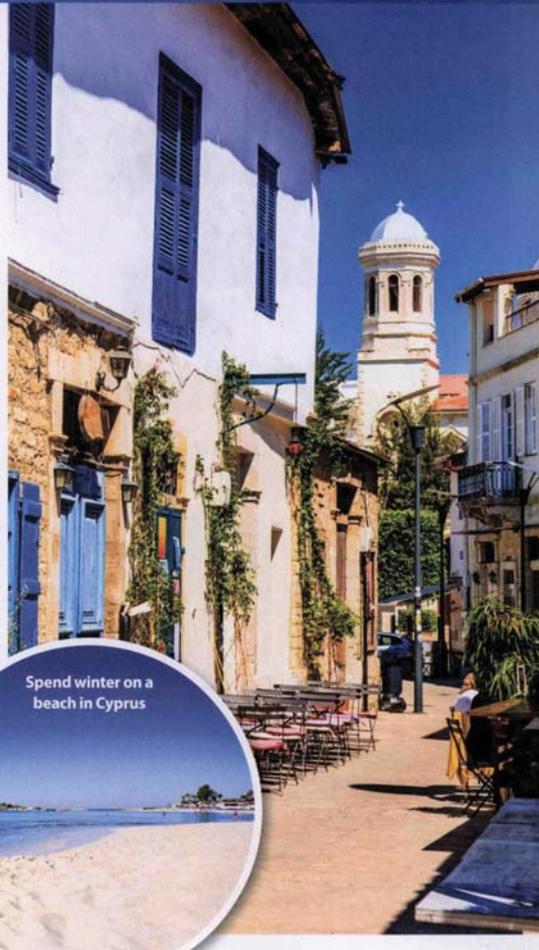
Foodies should head to Hanoi and sample *pho*, which is a Vietnamese classic. You'll find it served all over, but try at Pho Thin on Lo Duc in the historic French Quarter, which is said to be the best around. Coffee lovers should visit Buon Ma Thuot at the heart of the country's coffee industry. Try the 'weasel coffee' while here – animals called civets eat the coffee berries and pass them quickly, leaving them with a particular flavour that is said to be what makes the coffee so great.

The Maldives

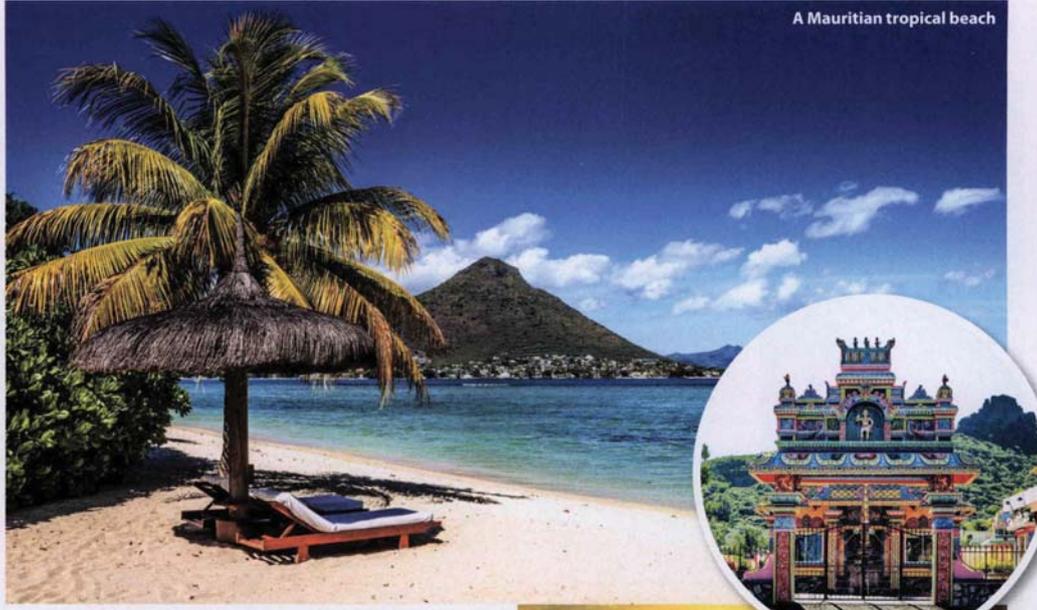
Best time to go:
December-April

The Maldives is made up of around 1,200 beautiful islands, one of which is sure to be ideal for your perfect winter getaway.

Some great things to do while here include visiting the world's first underwater restaurant, Ithaa, ▶



Spend winter on a beach in Cyprus



A Mauritian tropical beach

which is at the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island resort. The glass dining room is five metres under the sea, so you can enjoy your meal while observing the sea life.

A trip here is the ultimate in getting back to nature. Go snorkelling and see the reef fish, turtles and small sharks. A number of resorts have their own reefs but there are plenty of places to choose from, so wander from your resort if you wish. If you enjoy water sports, you could use this trip as an excuse to get a PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) certification, as many resorts have qualified trainers who run classes. Once you're qualified (or if you already are), a water safari is a great way to take in marine life. If your chosen resort does not run its own, it will be able to suggest a suitable one.

Mauritius

Best time to go: May-December

Another Indian Ocean option is Mauritius. In the capital, Port Louis, you can see French colonial buildings, St James Cathedral, Chinatown, and the China Heritage Museum, the Blue Penny Museum, which focuses on Mauritius' fascinating history, and the

Natural History Museum. You'll also find the Champ de Mars Racecourse – the oldest racecourse in the Southern Hemisphere and second-oldest in the world. Another interesting historical visit is Eureka House, now a museum. Built in the 1830s, it is one of only a few such houses in Mauritius.

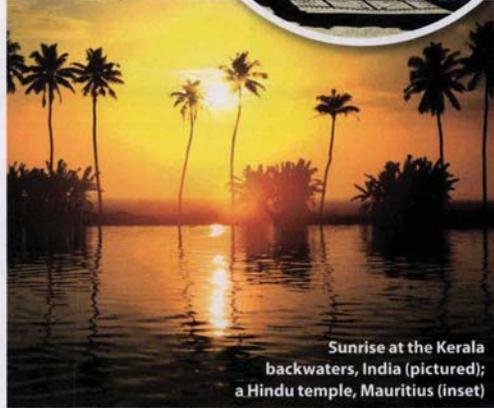
To enjoy the beach and sea, head to Grand Baie. Here you can soak up the sun or enjoy activities such as sailing, snorkelling and diving.

The Frédérica Nature Reserve near Bel Ombre is a great way to discover the island's flora and fauna. There are guided tours which you can go on to see some of the fascinating animals, such as deer, boar and birds – including the endangered Mauritian parakeet – and bats. For golf lovers, there are plenty of opportunities to get on the links. The Bernhard Langer-designed golf course at Ile aux Cerfs is said to be one of the most spectacular, but Anahita and Heritage Awali are also fantastic options.

Kerala

Best time to go: November-March

Kerala is not so hot on the tourist radar, making it an ideal



Sunrise at the Kerala backwaters, India (pictured); a Hindu temple, Mauritius (inset)

choice for a trip to India, as you can avoid crowds.

In Munnar, the mountain region, it's all about tea. You can visit a number of the plantations, but with some of them being a five-hour drive from the airport, hire a driver. The roads can be a tad hairy, so a driver who is familiar with them would be ideal. Many of the plantations offer guided tours or hikes where you can see the women picking the tea. There is also a tea museum in Munnar, which is well worth a visit.

Cochin in Kerala takes in the waterfront, and the port city is an important spice-trading centre. Walking tours of the city

are available and are a great way to find out about the area. Must-see locations here include Santa Cruz Cathedral – the first Portuguese church built in Cochin, dating from 1505, and the Paradesi Synagogue, built in 1568.

Touring the backwaters of Kerala, a stunning network of rivers, is a great way to see the subcontinent. How about renting a houseboat with crew and gliding along the waterways? If you don't want to spend your holiday entirely on the water, one must-do trip is from Cochin to Vembanad Lake – it's a 10-hour trip so will take up a whole day, but is certainly worth it. ■