



The life aquatic

Fascinated by life beneath the waves, but want something a bit more unusual than a snorkelling holiday? There's so much more down there! How about an underwater hotel or subaquatic caravan, says **Ellie Ross**

Where to splash the cash
Clockwise from above:
Green Lake, Utter Inn
Hotel, Udang House

There's a good reason Bond villains build themselves elaborate undersea bases from which to conduct their nefariousness. Who doesn't love the idea of being down there among the fish, the dappled light and the quiet? Problem is, traditional diving holidays can be a bit – well – *divey*. All that slapping round the place in your flippers applying aftersun and getting baby crabs out of your whatsit. A more civilised alternative is the underwater hotel. From

Dubai to Texas to North Korea (yep: North Korea, honeymooners), the smart holiday money is all about the deep. The Maldives even has an underwater nightclub, Subsix. Whatever your tastes, here are five fantastic watery getaways, whether you scuba do or scuba don't.

1 Sleep with the fishes in a Swedish lake

The **Utter Inn** is Sweden's only underwater hotel and consists of a traditional cabin topsides, and

a bedroom below the surface of Lake Mälaren. Guests are rowed out 1km to a small floating deck, given instructions and an inflatable boat and left there. A helpful local will ferry meals out to you and at bedtime a ladder takes you ten feet below the surface to your bedroom, with stunning views of the fish doing whatever fish do at night in Sweden. **Lake Mälaren**, 722 12 Västerås. (0046) 21 39 01 00. www.visitvasteras.se. One night's self-catering from 2,400 SEK (£186)

for two people. *Deluxe package (breakfast and dinner delivered) from 3,200 SEK (£249) for two people.*

2 Scuba to your sunken suite in Florida

Want to visit the world's oldest underwater hotel? Then don your diving suit. Guests booked into **Jules' Undersea Lodge** plunge 21ft beneath a lagoon in Key Largo, where they discover what looks like a sunken static caravan – actually a former 1970s marine lab. The vibe

GETTY IMAGES/ALISTAIR WILSON

is aqua-hippy: you enter through a 'moon pool' in the floor of the lodge, and towel off before heading into the main area of a living room, kitchen, shower room and two bedrooms. Through porthole windows you can watch tropical angelfish, barracuda, sponges and feather-duster worms. It's for well-heeled sandal-wearers only: a single-person overnight stay starts at \$675 (£457). **51 Shoreland Drive, Key Largo, FL 33037**. (001) 305 451 2353. www.jul.com.

3 Nest among the Balinese fishing nets

Found at the **Bambu Indah Hotel** in Ubud, Bali, **Udang House** offers the 'authentic fishing village experience' without the smell of cods heads. Formerly a Javanese bridal home, and built over a freshwater pool, the 100-year-old house is kitted out with shrimping pots, paddles and fishing nets. Chill out while glass floor panels reveal the teeming aquatic activity beneath your much-Instagrammed feet. **Bambu Indah, Banjar Baung, Desa Sayan, Ubud, Gianyar 80571**. (0062) 361 977 922. www.bambuindah.com/houses/udang-house. One night's B&B from \$195 (£132) for two people.

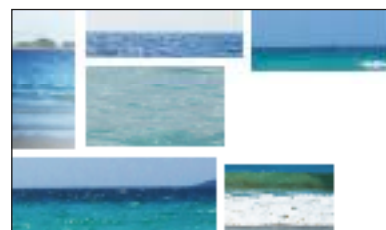


4 Dive into a vanishing alpine lake in Austria

In winter, **Tragöss country park** echoes to the sound of walkers clomping around it. Then in spring, there's a magical JG Ballard transformation, as millions of gallons of melted alpine snow fill it with chilly emerald-green water. The **Green Lake** reaches a maximum depth of 40ft in June before disappearing until the following year. Divers pay €10 to see everything from trout to submerged bridges, trees and park benches. Are they looking at the possible future of Western Europe? **Tourismusverband Tragöss**, 8612 Tragöss. (0043) 3868-8330. www.tragoess-gruenersee.at (in German).

5 Relax on a remote Aussie reef

Not great if you're scared of water or big open spaces, **ReefSleep** on the Great Barrier Reef is an isolated diving pontoon, 40 nautical miles off Australia's Whitsunday Coast, which accommodates just six guests at a time. If you're cool with all that, though, it's magical. As the sun sets, you climb into your 'swag' – a cosy, low tent on deck with clear viewing panels and snug beds – and catch some kip beneath the stars. You can spend the days diving to the depths of the world-famous reef, before being rocked to sleep by the waves and waking up amid the great blue nothing beneath the infinite arch of the cerulean empyrean. It's bloody bliss, mate! **Cruise Whitsundays Reefsleep, The Whitsundays, Queensland**. (0061) 7 4846 7000. www.cruisewhitsundays.com/gbra-reefsleep.aspx. All meals, travel and accommodation included, from \$399 (£183) per person.

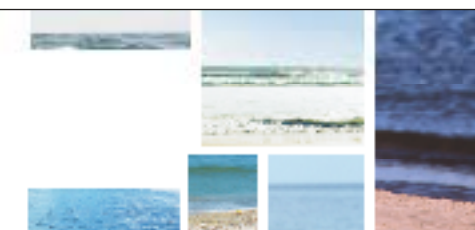


Use your phone **abroad at no extra cost.**

Use your inclusive allowances to call and text back home and use data in 18 destinations.

It's really that easy.

Pay As You Go customers need an Add-on. See three.co.uk/feeathome.





Vine divine
Starchitect
Frank Gehry's
City of Wine at
the Marqués de
Riscal winery



FIVE RIOJA MUST-DOS

LIVE IT UP AT HARVEST TIME
During Logroño's Rioja Wine Harvest Festival (Sep 20-27) the streets, bars and cafés buzz with live music, dancing and parades of marching bands and people wearing giant papier maché heads.

TRY VINO THERAPY
At Rioja's luxury spas (like Vinotherapie Caudalie Marqués de Riscal) you can indulge in grape-based treatments that cleanse, soothe and invigorate the skin.
www.spamarquesderiscal.com

SIP FAME AT ITS SOURCE
At Campo Viejo (www.campoviejo.com), one of the most famous Rioja wineries, you can wander through lush vineyards and meet the passionate winemaking team.
Oh, and drink some booze.

EXPLORE ULTRA-MODERN ARCHITECTURE
The region throngs with cutting-edge building design and it's easy to stumble upon wonders like the curvaceous Zaha Hadid creation used as a wine shop for the Rafael López de Heredia Tondonia Winery.
www.lopezdeheredia.com

WINE AND DINE AT DINASTÍA VIVANCO
A working bodega, wine museum, art gallery, restaurant and bar, all in one location. A wander around its Gardens of Bacchus offers insight into more than 220 grape varieties from all over the world.
www.vivancoculturadevino.es

The grape escape

Does sipping Spanish wine on your sofa make you dream of sunshine and fiestas? Stop dreaming, says **Catherine O'Dolan**, and get going

London has its fair share of high-class tapas bars and we love them for their relaxed Iberian vibe, great food and excellent wines. But instead of a night in Fitzrovia, why not make a week of it, complete with rugged landscapes, warmer weather and friendly locals?

There are hundreds of wineries dotted around the Rioja region in the north of the Iberian peninsula, ranging from traditional bodegas and medieval caves to state-of-the-art cellars. Some are an amazing mash-up of tradition and modernity. Marqués de Riscal, for example, is one of the area's oldest wineries, but when Frank Gehry

designed its City of Wine in 2006 (all eccentric flowing sheets of pink and gold titanium) the landscape turned twenty-first century overnight.

Many of the wineries are open to the public, with winemakers offering the inside track on viticulture and the vine-to-wine processes. Let your senses take their own trip – the air is filled with the scents of oak casks and fragrant bouquets. Heady stuff.

Of course a robust wine deserves sustenance to match, and here Rioja excels at authentic street food. Make like the locals and try a tapas crawl. Calle Laurel and Calle

San Juan in the medieval town of Logroño are famous for their rows of bars serving pinxtos – tasty small plates washed down with

a glass of rioja or a 'corta' (small beer). Each bar specialises in one or two dishes – garlic mushrooms at one place, matrimonio (a 'marriage' of green peppers and anchovies) at the next, a cheeky cojo nudo (bread with fried egg, red pepper and chorizo) after that – so diners stop for a nibble then move on. It's the foodie answer to speed dating and the perfect way to round off any day.

Getting there

Bilbao is the closest airport, with BA flights from Heathrow (www.britishairways.com), easyJet from Stansted (www.easyjet.com). Theuniquetraveller.com offers a five-day Rioja Gourmet Wine Festival Tour (Sep 23-27, from £730pp excluding flights) and bespoke trips of any duration.



Use your phone in **Spain at no extra cost.**
It's really that easy.





The Big Easy rebooted

Ten years ago this summer, Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans. **Dutch Godshalk** finds out how the magic, music and heritage is back in the USA's most charismatic city

This city won't wash away; this city will never drown,' Steve Earle once sang about New Orleans. And indeed the city has never washed away, although about 80 percent of it was flooded when the levees broke during Hurricane Katrina, the catastrophic storm of August 2005. A decade on, the city has dried out, cleaned up and repopulated. But has it also revived its magic?

Keep it cultural

Miraculously, the French Quarter was mostly untouched by Katrina, and the oldest part of one of America's oldest cities survived intact. While that does mean the raucous pageantry of Bourbon Street remains a night-time tourist trap of revellers in search of strip

clubs and hard-drinking hedonism, it also means that the Vieux Carré's ornate architecture still stands. The prospect of America losing New Orleans was compared to Italy losing Venice, but in the jazz haunts of Frenchman Street in the Seventh Ward, the old city is still thriving.

New Orleans in the now

This city is one enormous muse. Its streets and districts have been immortalised in classic works of literature and on film, most recently in the HBO series 'Treme', which took an unflinching look at life in the impoverished neighbourhood that

was a cradle of African-American and Creole culture, picking up its story three months after Katrina. Today, still far from gentrified, the Tremé neighbourhood feels like it reflects the real New Orleans.

Tour New Orleans (www.tourneworleans.com) visits locations from the TV show and the New Orleans African American Museum. The company's Hurricane Katrina Rebirth Tour takes in the still-empty lots of the Lower Ninth Ward, but it's not all about dwelling on disaster; the tour also visits new projects like the sustainable homes built by Brad Pitt's Make It Right Foundation.

New Orleans is a perennial survivor. It's a town of buskers and travellers, happy to flow in to replace and rediscover the good things that were swept away in 2005. Take their lead and get stuck in.

When to visit

There's always a party going on, but **Mardi Gras** is every February (www.mardigrasneworleans.com) and the **Jazz Festival** happens in spring (www.nojazzfest.com). On **August 29 2015**, the anniversary of Katrina, there are events around the city including a second line parade in the Ninth Ward.

FIVE MUST-DOS IN THE NEW NEW ORLEANS

TIPITINA'S

New Orleans has its fair share of off-the-beaten-path venues, but Tipitina's has a rich history of hosting some of America's greatest musical acts. www.tipitinas.com.

CAFÉ DU MONDE

More than a century old, the Café is home to the city's classic pastry, the beignet. Order three with a café au lait for breakfast. You'll feel right at home. www.cafedumonde.com.

GW FINS

For formal dining, GW Fins is the place to go. The freshest seasonal seafood from the Gulf Coast and catches from around the world. Worth every penny. www.gwfins.com.

NEW ORLEANS HISTORIC VOODOO MUSEUM

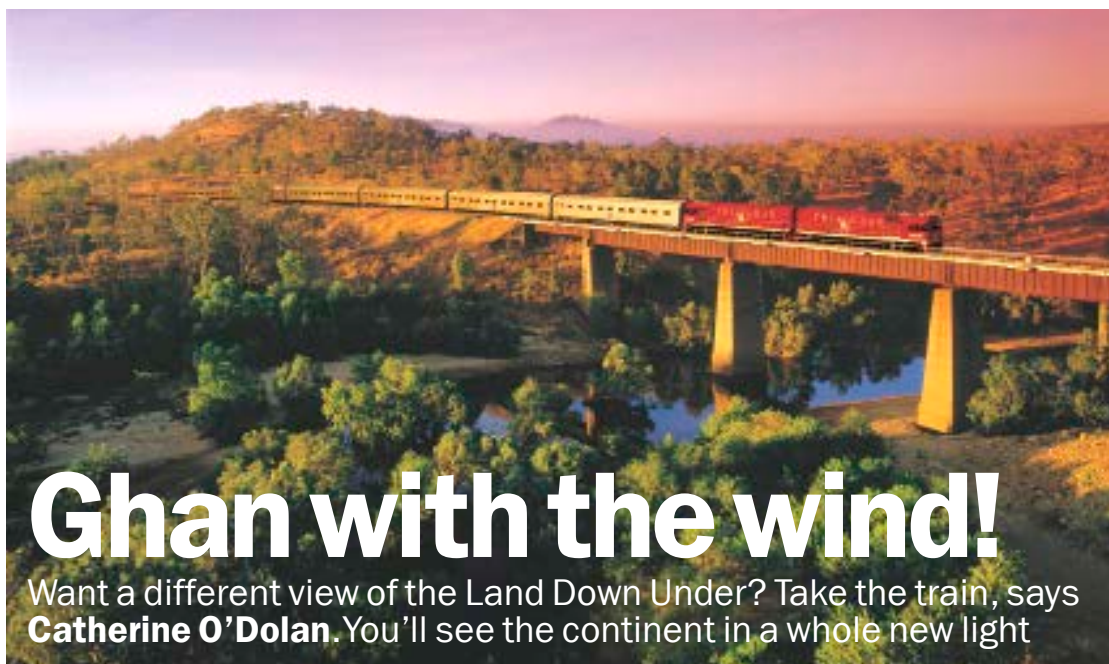
In the French Quarter, this fascinating museum honours the region's voodoo traditions. Eerie stuff. (504) 680 0128.

RIVERBOAT TOURS

There is an abundance of riverboats tours along the Mississippi river. Some offer music, some offer dinner – take your pick. www.neworleansonline.com

Use your phone in the USA at no extra cost. It's really that easy.





Ghan with the wind!

Want a different view of the Land Down Under? Take the train, says **Catherine O'Dolan**. You'll see the continent in a whole new light

Admit it, you didn't know there even were trains that travelled across Australia. Well, there are. The Ghan is kind of the country's answer to the Orient Express, only the

Orient Express like it used to be, when it romantically left Paris at one minute to midnight, and went all the way to Istanbul. This spectacular cross-country route runs between Adelaide and Darwin, and takes in

some amazing landscapes, from the pastoral South Australian plains around Adelaide, through the deep red heart of the Australian outback and the MacDonnell Ranges, and on to the tropical

greens of the northern 'Top End'.

Originally dubbed the 'Afghan Express', The Ghan was named after the pioneering camel drivers – thought to have been from Afghanistan but more probably from what is now Pakistan – who drove a trail across the Red Centre of Australia more than 150 years ago.

Before you get visions of one of those gothic Australian westerns – all dingo-mauled corpses, clouds of flies and Nick Cave – a trip on The Ghan these days is quite a luxurious affair, with fine dining, comfy sleeping cabins and the promise of stunning scenery from dawn till dusk. You can still get a taste of the old pioneer spirit with some stop-offs along the way – a gentle cruise on the Katherine River, exploring Alice Springs or a barbeque under the stars in the rugged outback. Really, though, it's simply the best way to get a true sense of the beauty and vastness of Australia.

Wexas Travel offers a three-night all-inclusive Ghan itinerary from £1,959 per person for Gold Service, including off-train touring, from Darwin to Adelaide between May 23 and Aug 23. www.wexas.com.

Promotional feature

THE WORLD AT YOUR

Spain and New Zealand are the latest destinations to join the party. You can now use your phone in 18 countries around the world, from France to Australia and the USA – at no extra cost



Now you can show off that tan line immediately without worrying that it will have faded by the time you get home. With Three offering their regular UK tariff abroad in key countries from the USA to Australia, data roaming and international calls are included, making it easier than ever to stay in touch. No more 'Wish you were here' – you can share everything, right here, right now.

IT'S #HOLIDAYSPAIN SEASON

This spring, you can bet your mabe on Three will be inundating you with Instagram sunset moments and selfies posing with exotic cocktails. Unlike any other UK network, Three now lets customers use their phones abroad, including data, at no extra cost across all plans. This means you can go online to look up maps or find places to eat, and stay in touch with friends back home by phone or email, without any extra costs on top of your usual monthly bill.

Stay in touch at no extra cost with three.co.uk/feelathome.

BOLA MAMÁ

New Zealand and Spain are the latest countries to be included in Three's Feel at Home offering, allowing you to call and text back home and use data in 18 countries worldwide, including France, Sweden, the USA and Australia. Go to www.three.co.uk to find out how you can roam abroad at no extra cost.



WIN A LUXURY TRIP TO SPAIN

To celebrate Three's growing list of Feel at Home destinations, we're giving away a six-night trip to Spain for two people, taking in Barcelona and Seville. The prize includes flights and four-star accommodation, plus cycling, horse riding, sailing, wine tasting and £500 spending money! For full Ts & Cs and to enter, go to www.timeout.com/threeinspain.

