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2009 Travel Trends Report

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Overview

Despite a gloomy outlook, there is plenty to be positive about when it comes to travel in 2009. For many years the British public has seen holidays as more of a necessity than a luxury, and this will still be the case this year. The recession will not dampen people's enthusiasm for travel and many believe that families will safeguard at least one main holiday.

The travel industry has been cushioned from the harsh realities of the first phase of the economic downturn. Summer 08 performed well, and Winter 08/09 is looking OK. Many experts believe travel lags about six months behind the rest of the economy. Holidays are one of the last things consumers will cut when it comes to discretionary spend, but no-one in the travel industry is under any illusion that 2009 is going to be anything other than challenging.

Tour operators, travel agents and airlines have been taking sensible cautionary measures. The mergers of the 'big four' into two were well timed and their consolidation has meant that there has been a great deal of streamlining and capacity cutting. The days where the big companies competed for market share, with no regard to price have gone. Now the focus is very much on ensuring that businesses are successful. This strict business model can only serve businesses well during tough times, but what it meant for 2008 was that there were fewer cheap last minute deals. This will be the same for 2009, but tour operators will be providing irresistible early deals, so booking early looks like the ideal way to bag the best prices.

If there could be a silver lining to the failure of the UK's third biggest tour operator, XL, then it has been to re-focus the Government's collective mind into thinking more about the importance of financial protection and the gaping holes in the current system. This will be the big issue going into next year, with the industry continuing to lobby hard.

We will also continue to see growth in the mid and long haul destinations such as Turkey, Egypt, and the Spanish Caribbean – which are good value destinations anyway. Last summer, according to Ascent-MI, Mexico saw an increase of 23 per cent from British visitors, Turkey saw a 32 per cent increase and Egypt a 38 per cent increase.

Value for money will be a key theme in 2009, but so will 'added value'. ABTA Members with their commitment to quality, service and choice can also provide financial protection. High end operators are also telling us that their customers are wanting more for their money, so rather than trading down, they want free room upgrades, free child places and lounge access.

If currency holds as it is, nations such as South Africa, New Zealand and Australia will also look like good options, especially if fuel prices remain low. Although some predict that there will be further fluctuations in this area.

A lot has been said about the dollar exchange rate, but although we have recently seen a dramatic fall in the pound, the last time there had been two dollars to the pound was back in 1981. Now, the price of living in the US is falling, and shops are also providing heavy discounts.

The rate of the euro is also providing anxiety, but Spain, France, Italy and Greece are destinations will continue to provide reasons to go. They are so popular that even decreases will see them remain at the top of the charts.

People who don't want to give up their holidays, but want to take a cheaper option, will certainly be considering visiting friends and family this year.

The dramatic increase in popularity of all-inclusives last year has permeated to all destinations, and because of the benefits of knowing exactly how much a holiday is going to cost from beginning to end, they are certain to be a sure fire winner again in 09.

Similarly, the new fad for 'posh camping,' in tepees or semi-permanent structures with built in bathrooms, and pot-bellied stoves – have captured the zeitgeist for frugality and outside living. Camping and caravanning Members have reported an unprecedented increase in popularity, both for the UK and in Europe, which again, is bound to continue into 2009.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) deals with about 3 million consular enquiries and supports 75,000 Brits in difficulty abroad each year, from visiting those who have been hospitalised or arrested, to rescuing British

citizens from forced marriages. The FCO has provided destination-specific information throughout this report and also commissioned consumer research into the attitudes of British holidaymakers which can be found on pages 53-54.

Before Britons travel abroad, the FCO advises the following preparation steps:

Get a travel insurance policy that covers you for anything you might do while you're away. Read the small print to check exactly what is covered, for example, any dangerous sports, all your luggage and equipment, personal injury as a result of terrorist activity, and legal costs.

Take your European Health Insurance Card (EHIC - used to be called E111) when visiting the European Economic Area and Switzerland. The EHIC entitles you to low cost or free healthcare in most European countries in an emergency. But it won't cover things like lost luggage or a flight home in an air ambulance - so you need travel insurance too. You can apply for an EHIC at www.nhs.uk/healthcareabroad. Make sure you check the expiry date.

Visit your GP well in advance of your trip to ask about any vaccinations or medication you might need. If you need to take prescription medication with you, pack enough for your whole trip plus a few days extra in case you are delayed returning home.

It's never advisable to hire a moped or quad bike, but if you do want to, check the small print of your insurance to make sure you're covered - and always wear a helmet.

Check your passport is valid (for certain countries your passport must be valid for 6 months after the date you travel) and has next of kin details filled in – and that you have all necessary visas. Make copies of important travel documents – leave copies with family or friends at home and take a copy with you (keep copies separate from your original documents).

Take enough money for your trip and some back up funds in a mix of cash and travellers cheques. Make a note of the cheque numbers before you go. Don't keep all your money and back up funds in the same place.

If you plan to drive abroad, make sure your licence is current and valid. Make sure you are aware of the driving laws in the country you are visiting.

Keep your family and friends informed of your plans and leave emergency contact details with them. The FCO's LOCATE service helps the FCO staff to track down British nationals in a crisis or when things go wrong. Register before you travel at www.fco.gov.uk/locate

Find out where the nearest British Embassy will be. Check the Embassy website to find out what services they offer and their opening times. Research local laws and customs of the country you are travelling to before you go. Visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel or call 0845 850 2829 for the latest information. Sign up for email alerts and you'll get the latest updates for the country you are visiting. **For specific travel advice by country visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel and click on your destination.**

The top holiday destinations (including package holidays) 2008 as provided by the Office of National Statistics.

Destination	Nos of hols
1. Spain	12,029,325
2. France	7,581,688
3. Italy	2,560,515
4. USA	2,375,778
5. Greece	2,293,624
6. Portugal	1,863,311
7. Irish Republic	1,521,503
8. Turkey	1,288,701
9. Netherlands	1,111,802
10. Belgium	1,005,310
11. Cyprus EU	997,114

Ascent-MI produces Leisure Travel Monitor, which has been monitoring bookings taken so far for 2009. The top performing destinations so far in terms of bookings taken through travel agents and tour operators are:

1. Spain
Canary Islands
Balearic Islands
Mainland Spain
2. Greece
3. USA
4. Turkey
5. Caribbean
6. Egypt
7. Cyprus
8. Mexico
9. France
10. Portugal

The top performing destinations so far for Summer 09 according to Ascent-MI are:

1. Spain
Balearic Islands
Canary Islands
Mainland Spain
2. Greece
3. Turkey
4. USA
5. Cyprus
6. Caribbean
7. Egypt
8. Bulgaria
9. Mexico
10. Portugal

1. Spain

Despite the strength of the euro, Brits will continue to find new reasons to return to Spain in 2009 - as over 90 per cent of British visitors have already been before! It is a destination with so much variety that its attractions appeal to a wide range of travellers, whether it's adventure or culture seekers, families or pilgrims. While its countryside, language and culture are quite different from our own, Brits really do feel at home in Spain. They are reassured by its excellent infrastructure and facilities, and are warmly welcomed.

With holidaymakers beginning to look for reassurance in every aspect of their lives, there was an increase in all-inclusives and a 10-15% rise in package holidays in 2008.

2009 is the 70th anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War - a three-year struggle by Republicans to stop General Franco's nationalists coming to power. They failed and the fall of Madrid in 1939 marked the start of 36 years of dictatorship. People making the pilgrimage to Madrid to mark the anniversary will find a thriving capital city, buzzing with life, tapas bars, palaces and museums. Top sights include the Palacio Real, the official residence of the king; Plaza Mayor, a huge square once used for bullfights, inquisitions and festivals but now packed with cafés and market stalls; and the Prado, which houses Picasso's *Guernica*, condemning the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica during the Civil War.

Spain may no longer be able to compete on price compared with some other destinations, but it is certainly, much more than a beach destination. Spain is a great place for sport, with outstanding football, tennis and of course Formula 1. The northern regions – or Green Spain - are also largely unexplored, and have some of the best conserved ecological areas in Europe, while no-one can fail to be fulfilled by the world-class gastronomy.

The Balearic Islands including Mallorca, Ibiza and Menorca are the most popular area of Spain in the summer months. Mallorca and Menorca traditionally attract family visitors, while San Antonio, Ibiza is still the number one name in club chic and so appeals to a younger audience. The Canary Islands of Tenerife, Lanzarote, Gran Canaria and Fuertaventura - situated just off the North Western coast of Africa - are

volcanic and have a sub-tropical dry and warm climate. This means that they are popular during summer and also the most popular destination for sun seekers during the winter months. Many hotels have been upgraded recently to meet British tourists' more exacting standards.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- In Spain you are considered a minor until the age of 18. A 17 year old having a holiday without parents could be picked up by the Spanish local authorities and taken into a Minors' centre for their protection – read up on the local laws and customs of the destination you're visiting
- Drivers in Spain should be wary of approaches by bogus police officers, in plain clothes and travelling in unmarked cars. In all traffic-related matters police officers will be in uniform. Motorists should be on the look out for "highway pirates" who target foreign registered and hire cars, especially those towing caravans. If you decide to stop to check the condition of your vehicle, you should be extremely wary of anyone offering help
- The FCO recorded 1,591 deaths of British nationals in 2006/07. Many older expats die alone in Spain and the FCO has a problem tracing family members back in the UK. It's therefore important to fill out the next of kin details in your passport
- Many British nationals buy property in Spain and some encounter problems when doing so - visit <http://ukinspain.fco.gov.uk/en> for useful information on living in Spain.

For up to date travel information for Spain visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

2. France.

There were over 11 million UK visits to France in 2008, which is comparable to 2007. With its exquisite cuisine and wine, weather, and proximity to the UK, France has an enduring appeal. Paris is, after all, the most visited city on earth. Eurostar's UK move to St Pancras has proved to be a resounding success and the company reported that the move had resulted in a 25 per cent increase in ticket sales for the first half of 2008. Proceedings slowed down somewhat after the fire in September, but full resumption of service is expected in the Spring of 09.

France is, of course, very easy to get to. Holidaymakers can travel by air, rail or sea and travel to north-eastern regions of France (including the cities of Strasbourg, Metz & Nancy) from Paris have been made much quicker via the recently opened high speed rail lines (TGV East). Both trains and ferries, which were losing the competition against the airlines, have fought back strongly, emphasising green credentials and the inconvenience often experienced at airports with long queues at check-in and additional security.

The French tourist office is registering an increased interest in green/responsible travel and France is well placed for consumers looking for ways to limit the carbon footprint of their travels. It is close to the UK, it has 'green transport' options such as high speed rail, while local produce is also strong in all regions of France.

Skiers can also access a variety of top resorts – namely the three valleys - via Eurostar and get themselves an extra day skiing into the bargain. From the reports we have so far, bookings for the 08/09 winter sports season are looking very promising with most specialist companies reporting advance bookings stable or ahead of this time last year. Most in demand dates of the season are selling out fast.

Tour operators are also combining train journeys though some of the most stunning landscapes of France – including the Upper Jura, which nestles between Burgundy and Switzerland.

France is also well-known for its campsites, which for families often offer the best value for money, especially around France's varied and often beautiful coastline. Last year, camping and caravanning holidays were at least 10 per cent up for both in the UK and in Europe and this trend is bound to continue in 2009. France boasts

Europe's highest sand dune, great surfing and windsurfing on the Atlantic coast, while the Riviera is renowned for its beautiful coastline of sandy beaches, mountains deep rocky inlets, little coves and beautiful people.

Highlights for 2009

The Centre Pompidou-Metz, in Lorraine, north-east France will open its doors in 2009. It will be a key international cultural centre. www.centrepompidou-metz.fr

Picasso-Cezanne, Le soleil en face (“With the sun in their eyes”), Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence

25 May – 27 September 2009

This exceptional exhibition is part of the region's celebration of Picasso in 2009. Provence and the Cote d'Azur played an essential role in Picasso's tumultuous life. www.aixenprovencetourism.com/uk/aix-picasso-cezanne.htm

Laws and customs – ‘Did You Know’ facts & FCO advice

- Many people think of France as being a familiar destination – perhaps not even a different country – and do not prepare adequately before they travel
- It's important to take out travel insurance even for a day trip to Calais - if you fall ill or injure yourself and require medical treatment it can be extremely costly if you aren't covered
- A lot of road accidents in Northern France are caused by fatigue. Drivers often travel through the night or very early in the morning to get cheaper ferry or Channel Tunnel tickets. It's important to plan your journey beforehand including regular stop-offs at service stations throughout your journey or take the driving in shifts
- On-the-spot fines are imposed for speeding and in some cases cars can be confiscated
- When driving in France it is compulsory to carry a warning triangle and reflective jacket in all vehicles

For up to date travel information for France visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

3. USA

Will there be an Obamaboom?

There are several destinations apart from the US that can claim a link to Barack Obama – and many believe that the historical significance of his election will mean that these destinations will benefit from an *Obama Effect*.

Visitor numbers from the UK in 2008 to the US rose significantly, and this was largely due to the fantastic exchange rate. Unfortunately, for travellers, the pound plummeted significantly in the autumn and this is bound to have a slight impact on demand. However, it has to be remembered that the pound had not been as strong against the dollar since 1981, and the weak economy means that prices, and the cost of living in the US are beginning to fall. Fuel prices are also low again, so flight prices are again reasonable – for the time being!

The US always attracts a high percentage of repeat visitors as one trip is never enough to take in its rich diversity.

Shoppers can also rest assured that heavy discounts are appearing throughout New York, and it is still possible to eat and enjoy yourself in the Big Apple on a budget, see the new website www.nycgo.com for lots of new hip tips.

2009 will mark the 400th anniversary of the discovery of New York City, by the Dutch ship Halve Maen commanded by Henry Hudson. To celebrate this momentous occasion and this City's historic Dutch ties, New York City will be alive with a number of exciting and unique events scheduled to take place along the shores of the Hudson River and at historic sites throughout the City. Further details will be posted on www.ny400.org.

2009 is also the 40th Anniversary of the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village when the New York gay community rose up in riots that are frequently cited as the first instance in American history when gays and lesbians fought back against a government-sponsored system that persecuted homosexuals. They have become the defining event that marked the start of the gay rights movement in the United States and around the world. Numerous celebratory festivities are planned for 2009 including a large event during NYC Pride from June 20-28, 2009.

Significant hotel development will continue into 2009 in New York City, with a considerable amount of growth in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn.

UK visitors count the Grand Canyon as one of their “must-see” sites, and there has been an added connection from Las Vegas direct to Flagstaff, the gateway to the Grand Canyon National Park.

Native American developments: The VIEW Hotel in Monument Valley Tribal Park, Arizona is scheduled to open in December 2008 and has breathtaking views of the kind seen in John Wayne westerns and TV commercials. This will be big news for the Navajo Nation as it is the first hotel ever built on Navajo Tribal Park land.

The Hopi Indians are also working on the development of the first hotel to be built in the Hopi in 50 years, opening in August 2009. The hotel will be built in the Upper Village of Moenkopi which is next to the Navajo community of Tuba City where the new Navajo Interactive Museum is located (south of Monument Valley and northeast of the Grand Canyon).

Florida: After New York, Florida, is the most popular destination for Brits, with 1.4 million visitors.

Universal Orlando Resort - ***Hollywood Rip, Ride, Rockit*** will stake its claim as the most technologically advanced, multi-sensory roller coaster in the world. Opening in 2009, the coaster will combine audio and special effects engineering, sophisticated on- and off-board video and one-of-a-kind guest personalization. It will tout six near-miss moments and first-ever thrills including a record-breaking loop.

SeaWorld Orlando has announced the next generation of SeaWorld thrills with Manta -- a new mega-attraction which will seamlessly transition guests from the awe of watching rays in underwater flight...into the sensation of actually being one.

Las Vegas: Las Vegas has seen the number of UK visitors in 2008 increase, but the number of domestic visitors decrease. Hotel prices could drop. But despite this, the desert resort is undergoing its largest construction boom since the 1950s – some 32,000 rooms are being added by 2011, at a cost of more than \$32 billion.

These developments include:

- The Silverton Casino Lodge a \$130 million expansion project expected to be completed by early 2009. The resort will increase its public space by 35,000 square feet; add 800 slot machines, a high-limit gaming salon, a race & sports book and a poker lounge.
- The Fontainebleau Las Vegas is scheduled for an autumn debut with a \$2.9 billion, 63-story resort and condo-hotel with approximately 3,800 rooms.
- The MGM MIRAGE will debut a 76-acre, \$9.2 billion dollar "urban metropolis" called CityCenter.
- Harrah's Entertainment has announced a \$1 billion expansion of Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. The centrepiece of the expansion is the luxurious new 665-room hotel tower – the Octavius Tower.
- Approximately 10 miles to the south of the famous Strip, M Resort will have a spring 2009 opening. This \$1 billion property will include 390 rooms and suites, as well as a unique, 100,000 square foot canyon-feature pool area.
- The Grand Hyatt Las Vegas at the Cosmopolitan Resort and Casino is a \$3.5 billion project scheduled for completion in late 2009. The resort is expected to have two full-service high-rise hotel and condo towers with 2,998 luxury hotel rooms, suites, penthouses and condo units.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- Laws vary from state to state, including driving speed limits and the age of consent. Read up on the local laws of the specific states you are visiting
- The US Visa Waiver Programme (VWP) allows most, but not all, British passport holders to visit the USA for up to 90 days without a visa. **New measures requiring all travellers to provide details online 72 hours prior to travel** are now operating on a voluntary registration basis for all VWP travellers. **After 12 January 2009 registration is expected to become compulsory. This is known as an Electronic Travel System (ESTA).** Make sure you're clear on the entry regulations before you travel – if you overstay and violate the restrictions you could be deported. **For more information about the VWP and your eligibility to enter the US visit www.usembassy.org.uk**
- Some Britons assume they are covered by the NHS in the US! There are no

special medical arrangements for British visitors and if you require medical treatment this could be very expensive. You should ensure that you have comprehensive medical insurance, which includes hospital treatment and medical evacuation to the UK

- The hurricane season normally runs from June to November, and can affect the whole of the southern USA. Pay close attention to local media outlets and keep important contact numbers handy such as airlines, tour operators, travel insurance providers and the nearest British embassy or consulate. Share your itinerary with friends or family and let them know of your plans if a hurricane moves into the area in which you are staying. Register your details on www.fco.gov.uk/locate

For up to date travel information for the USA visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

4. Italy

Lovers of art, music and architecture flock to the cultural centres of Rome, Venice, Verona and Florence. Italy has, according to UNESCO – two-thirds of the world's historical artistic heritage - and as if this wasn't enough, Italy also showcases its globally adored cuisine among beautiful countryside, mountains and lakes.

Italy is home to some spectacular lakes and mountains and is the third most popular snow destination for British skiers and snowboarders.

Rome is the number one city and has enough historical monuments to last a lifetime. Venice – the world's only city suspended entirely on water – has been saved from the waters by the tourist euro, but, is currently in danger of being a shell of its former self – existing only for tourists. And Italy lovers can appreciate that Italians would never put up with the price or standard of food that is regularly doled out to unsuspecting tourists.

The islands of Sicily and Sardinia are currently enjoying a tourist boom, thanks to an increase in direct flights, great beaches, and in Sicily's case, the fascinating volcano of Mt Etna. Puglia and Calabria are also becoming more popular.

Naples and its bay is home to Vesuvius, Pompeii and the Amalfi Coast with the upmarket islands of Capri and Ischia adding to this region's charms.

There is no one like 007 to put a destination on the map, as Italy's Lake Garda and the town of Siena are about to find out. Both places had more than their fair share of Bond moments in Quantum of Solace, which kicks off with Daniel Craig locked in a car chase around the treacherous bends that circle the lake. He is going so fast in his Aston Martin he probably missed the scenery, but we saw enough to encourage visitors, who can hire a less-charged car and do it all much more sedately. The action then moves to Siena, south of Florence, where scenes of the annual Palio, a fast-and-furious bareback horse race around the Piazza del Campo, and the town's narrow streets and rooftops, should get the short-break market drooling. Visits can be timed to coincide with the Palio - July 2 and August 16 in 2009 – but book fast as it is popular.

Top ten destinations for Italy

- **Venice**, the city on the water has major wow factor appeal
- **Milan**, shopping for fashionistas, trendy bars and culture
- **Sicily**, more than just the mafia. Mt Etna is a major draw along with archaeological ruins
- **The Lakes**. The grandeur with baroque castles and stunning scenery can be coupled with musical interludes
- **Tuscany**. Rolling countryside, vineyards, Florence, Siena, Lucca and Pisa. What more do you want?
- **The Dolomites**. The classiest ski area in Europe.
- **Pompeii**. A truly amazing archaeological phenomenon after it was buried by ash from Vesuvius in AD 79.
- **Rome**. St Peter's Basilica, the Vatican City, the Spanish Steps, the Trevi Fountain the Pantheon. Rome is a must-see European city.
- **Cinque Terre**, or the five villages, hugs the Ligurian coastline and has is a national park and protected marine area.
- **The stunning Amalfi coast and Neapolitan Riviera**. The dramatic coastline that is home of Sorrento, Capri, Positano and Ravello contrasts dramatically with the faded grandeur and filth of Naples.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- Travellers driving in Italy should be aware that private cars and hire cars are not permitted to enter the historic centre of many Italian cities without an official pass
- In Venice and Florence you should observe public notices about conduct. For example, you may be fined if you drop litter. It is also an offence to sit on steps/courtyards or to eat and drink in the immediate vicinity of the main churches and public buildings in Florence
- Italian authorities are engaged in a major effort to stamp out the illegal production and sale of counterfeit goods. If you buy goods from illegal street traders you run the risk of being stopped by the local police and incurring a large fine

For up to date travel information for Italy visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

5. Greece

Greece has much to offer and tour operators have been revamping holiday itineraries to include adventure travel, spa breaks, island hopping, city breaks and wedding packages to prove that there is a great deal more to Greece than the beach.

The nation boasts over 3,000 islands, of which only around 160 are permanently inhabited and an interior largely unexplored by tourists. There is still much evidence of the ancient Greek civilisation, and Athens is culturally one of the most impressive cities in the world, with the main sites now, since the 2004 Olympic Games, unified by a pedestrianised zone. Public transport and infrastructure have also been totally updated with the result that congestion and pollution have been greatly reduced. Upgrading has also attracted top-notch hotels, great cafés, restaurants and bars, which have all helped Athens in its transformation into a vibrant and hip capital city.

The long awaited New Acropolis Museum is scheduled to open in December 08. The £94 million, three storey museum was designed by Swiss-born architect Bernard Tschumi and will display the archaeological findings of the Acropolis Hill, replacing the old museum, which has been in place since 1874. www.newacropolismuseum.gr

Recently there has also been investment to ensure that Greek ferries are state of the art and this has cut journey times considerably.

But many still visit Greece for a beach holiday and as it ranks among the top three countries for the number of EU Blue Flag beaches, few are disappointed. Water sports including sailing, diving, water skiing and windsurfing can all be found around most islands.

Crete – the largest Greek island is a perfect choice for families with ancient sites and impressive hikes.

The Cyclades, including the popular islands of Mykonos, Ios and Santorini– are rocky and windswept, with fort towns full of winding streets and whitewashed houses. Mykonos's liberal reputation stems from the 60's when it was a hippy colony and is now a classy, party hotspot with designer boutiques, hip clubs and fantastic, out of the way beaches. The stunning island of Santorini lies around the caldera of a dormant volcano. Its blue-domed churches cling to the sides of the volcanic crater

and its medieval fortress town contrasts with the unusual black volcanic sands of Perissa.

The Ionian islands – including Corfu, Cephalonia, and Zakynthos (also known as Zante) - off the west coast are greener, with cypress and olive trees. As well as being a home for turtles, Zante is also become a well-known party island.

The Dodecanese, including Rhodes, are likely to be popular with those who enjoy island-hopping. Rhodes is a popular island (300,000 visitors from the UK alone) and has retained some idyllic villages, and has changed its offering to tourists. A few years back it was a popular haunt for youngsters, but now Rhodes is keen to emphasise its cultural heritage as well as its convivial nightlife. Rhodes Town itself is charmingly encased in medieval walls. Lindos in the south is similarly steeped in history. The future for Rhodes lies in part with the new generation of resorts such as Kolibia and Pefkos, both seeing a boom in smaller boutique hotels.

The Peloponnese. The mountainous peninsula on the southernmost part of mainland Greece, which is popular with Athenians is also packed with fascinating sites from Ancient Greece, including Corinth and Olympia, site of the original Olympic Games.

Laws and customs – ‘Did You Know’ facts & FCO advice

- If you're riding a quad bike in Greece, you are required by Greek law to wear a full-face helmet (or non-full-face helmet plus goggles). Check the small print of your insurance policy to ensure you're covered to ride a moped or quad bike abroad
- Indecent behaviour, such as mooning, is not tolerated and could result in being arrested. You should be aware that the courts impose heavy fines or prison sentences on people who behave indecently
- Many arrests in Greece are due to behaviour caused by excessive drinking - know your limits. Be aware that alcohol measures are often larger or stronger in Greece than in the UK. Stay in control and watch how much you drink. Your travel insurance may not cover you if you have an accident whilst under the influence of alcohol
- If you are looking for employment in bars or night clubs in Greece, you are required to have a health certificate/licence issued by the local authorities. If

you don't have a certificate you could face a fine or even imprisonment

- Under Greek law you should ensure that you receive a receipt when you buy goods. If you buy pirate CDs or DVDs in Greece you could be imprisoned

For up to date travel information for Greece visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

6. Ireland

Ireland offers a quiet and relaxed pace of life amongst friendly, hospitable people. The types of accommodation available are wide-ranging and the standard is high. Dublin has a rich history and diverse cultural attractions which together with the increased number of competitively priced flights and the appeal of Temple Bar has made it the number one city-break destination for those wanting to sample Ireland's "craic." Dublin has also become a shopping capital and can now boast a Harvey Nichols, the home of Primark – or Penneys, as it is known there, as well as a host of Michelin-starred restaurants. The Westbury Hotel is in the midst of a multi-million euro refurbishment.

In addition the lush green countryside of County Kerry and the West Coast with the relaxed pace of life are a great attraction. However, a third of all visits to the Republic are for the purpose of visiting friends and family.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- Ireland is a member of the Common Travel Area and British Citizens do not require a passport to visit Ireland. However, Irish immigration officers will check the IDs of all passengers arriving by air from the UK and most airlines will not carry passengers to and from Ireland unless they have seen satisfactory photographic ID before boarding. Travellers to Ireland are therefore strongly advised to take their British passports with them
- Remember to pack your EHIC, which entitles the holder to free or reduced cost medical treatment in EU countries. Note that your EHIC won't cover things like lost luggage or a flight home in an air ambulance - so you need travel insurance too

For up to date travel information for Ireland visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

7. Portugal

Investment into Portugal's accommodation has boosted its attraction to the UK market. The UK currently provides the highest tourism revenues to Portugal. In 2007 the government presented a plan for the development of six new tourist regions. Those of greatest interest to British tourists are the West (the area surrounding Lisbon), the Alentejo coast and Porto Santo in the Madeira archipelago. Most travellers are interested in visiting the Algarve, but there is an increasing interest in rural Portugal in areas such as the Douro Valley and Alentejo.

The 'golden island' of Porto Santo, in the Madeira archipelago, could be a hotspot in 2009, as there are now weekly direct flights from London Gatwick and a series of luxury hotel openings in 2008, with another – the Colombo Resort & Spa expected to open in early 2009.

Over the past 200 years, Portugal has been a favourite haunt for British tourists. Northern Portugal is a mountainous, rainy region. The central coast consists of dunes and pine forests, while the Algarve is famous for its dry climate and spectacular beaches. From the middle of the 19th century, many British visitors have been drawn to Madeira on the advice of their doctors, while in the 1960s Portugal saw a boom in British holidaymakers, starting in the southern coastal region of the Algarve.

The UK is still the number one market for the Algarve and it will continue to be a popular choice for UK holidaymakers in 2009. The region saw over 1,234,459 UK visitors land in Faro airport from January to September 2008 and the UK accounted for a staggering 3,344,418 bednights in hotels between January to August. The Algarve is also the region with the highest revenue from tourism in Portugal, with over €4million profit from January to August 2008. It is still an extremely popular destination amongst golfers as 820,210 rounds of golf were played from January to September 2008.

The Algarve is seeing a number of new developments in the region up until 2012. It will see the first 6-star hotel in the region, The Conrad Hilton in Qunita do Lago, and there are plans for an Olympic style sports village, 20 new Spas, 18 new 5-star hotels, nine new 4-star hotels and 18 new golf courses. The 2009 Golf Masters will be held at Oceanico Golf, Vilamoura, in October 2009, which will reinforce Portugal

as a major golfing destination. Portugal currently has 75 golf courses, 33 of which are located in the Algarve.

Laws and customs – ‘Did You Know’ facts & FCO advice

- It’s a legal requirement to be able to show some form of identification if requested by the police or judicial authorities. This requirement is rigorously enforced on people driving cars in Portugal, so it’s a good idea to keep your passport with you at all times
- If you drive a car you must carry a red warning triangle to place behind the vehicle in case of accident or breakdown and a reflective vest for use if you have to get out of your car
- Buying a property in Portugal can be more complicated than you’d expect – so do your research before you make the move. You’ll need to read up on local land laws and read a wide range of information to help you ensure the move goes smoothly. Visit www.uk-embassy.pt for more information on living in Portugal

For up to date travel information for Portugal visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

8. Netherlands & Belgium

Amsterdam remains one of the most frequently visited cities in Europe due to its laid-back attitudes and great art.

The appeal of other cities in the Netherlands such as Rotterdam, The Hague and Eindhoven is also enduring – due to their accessibility and culture. The country is also sold as a great destination for a short holiday, which can be combined with a visit to its neighbour Belgium and the medieval cities of Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp.

Laws and customs – ‘Did You Know’ facts & FCO advice

- Everyone over the age of 14 is required to show a valid identity document to police officers and other law enforcement authorities on their request – keep a copy of your passport with you
- Don't carry or use drugs. The Netherlands has a reputation for being tolerant on the use of 'soft drugs'. In reality drugs are prohibited and tolerance exists only for designated premises in the major cities. Possession of illegal substances or the purchase of them outside these designated areas can carry a prison sentence

For up to date travel information for the Netherlands or Belgium visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

9. Turkey

Turkey has had an excellent year in 2008 and is aiming to broaden its appeal. Yes, it is a destination for bargain hunters looking to escape the soaring cost of holidaying in the eurozone, but the beach resorts such as Bodrum, Fethiye and Ölüdeniz which are great for families looking for sun, sea and sand, have all invested in five star hotels to appeal to an upmarket crowd. For those who want a cultural experience without breaking the bank, a city break in Istanbul, where top sights include the Topkapi Palace, the Blue Mosque, Aya Sofya and the Grand Bazaar is a great option. If visitors go in June, they can cheer on Britain's Formula 1 champion Lewis Hamilton during the sixth fixture in the 2009 Grand Prix season. Istanbul will be the Capital of Culture in 2010 and there will be a number of run up musical and artistic events in 2009 in preparation. The Pera Palace Hotel, one of Istanbul's most famous hotels, with famous guests such as Agatha Christie and Mustafa Ataturk, and built in the 1890s, will reopen in 2009 after a major renovation. Other off the beaten track options include a few nights in Cappadocia National Park, famous for its volcanic landscape, or a gulet cruise, meandering around the coast on a wooden sailing boat, stopping here and there to go ashore or take a dip. Club 18-30 are also growing their programme in Gumbet in Turkey. Charter flight options are plentiful, while scheduled airlines have also recently increased the number of their routes and frequencies. With this sort of competition, deals are a certainty.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- Before you travel, familiarise yourself with the local laws and customs of Turkey – what might be perfectly appropriate behaviour or dress in one country might not be acceptable here. Get a travel guide and visit the FCO website for advice
- It is an offence to insult the Turkish nation or the national flag, or to deface or tear up currency
- Be aware that road conditions can be poor in Turkey and road traffic accidents are common - mainly due to either poor or reckless driving, particularly at night
- It is illegal not to carry some form of photographic ID in Turkey – keep your passport with you

For up to date travel information for Turkey visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

10. Cyprus

Cyprus remains popular as a year round destination, and many have attributed this popularity to familiarity, and the long historical ties with the island. The island has a large expat community, a Greek-Cypriot population that speaks good English and driving is on the left. Obviously the good weather and easy accessibility (flight time just over four hours) also helps.

But Cyprus has a much broader appeal, and this is why it still perennially remains at the top of the holiday charts. Inland from the culturally barren beaches, the more discerning traveller can find traditional Greek-Cypriot villages, Byzantine churches and beautiful mountainous countryside. While it embraced the euro at the beginning of 08, geographically, Cyprus is closer to Turkey and Syria than Greece and as such mosques sit side-by-side with Greek Orthodox churches. As a result of the 1974 Turkish invasion, the northern half of the island, which is still divided by the green line, speaks Turkish. Added to this mix is a strong Greek mythological heritage and it is claimed that Aphrodite cavorted, bathed and even been created on the island's beaches.

Traditional beach holidays still dominate the market in Cyprus, but over recent years, there has been a fair bit of diversification. In order to sustain rural communities, green initiatives have become very successful in attracting more environmentally-minded holidaymakers, while weddings and honeymoons have become increasingly popular thanks to the burgeoning number of five star and boutique hotels. In fact, Cyprus has been named by the main operators as being the number one destination to attract couples who want to marry abroad.

Limassol is Cyprus' key economic centre and second biggest city. But it is more than just beaches, restaurants and beach shops. The old town has cobbled streets and a 14th century fort as well as traditional and contemporary museums and trendy cafes. A smart new marina complex is due for completion in 09. Most hotels are based here including the Amathus and high end boutique hotels like the Londa. Since joining the EU, many hotels have undergone renovation.

Ayia Napa. This once quiet fishing village became party central in recent years, but Cyprus wants to reclaim it for the quieter family market and the harbour area has

gone through a major face lift. The area has the best sandy beaches of the island and major water parks which also appeal to the family market. Wedding ceremonies are also popular at the town's beautiful and ancient monastery.

Paphos has its fair share of resort areas, but its harbour renovation is due for completion. The area has also become renowned for upmarket spa hotels. There are 30 dive sites in the area and Paphos Archaeological Park is a vast UNESCO-listed site with excavated villas and beautiful mosaic floors. It is also home to the oldest auditorium in Cyprus.

Troodos. In the summer, the rural heartland of Troodos Massif with its pine trees and Mount Olympus provides a welcome breather from the heat of the coast, with hiking, biking and riding popular activities. In winter, you can ski in the mountains and swim in the sea.

Larnaca is about to become a major cruise hub for the eastern Mediterranean thanks to the launch of a 2 billion euro project which will transform the marina and build two luxury hotels, self-catering apartments, a casino and new golf club. The airport is also expanding with completion due in 2009.

Nicosia is the only city still divided by the green line, but since the border restrictions were relaxed in 2003, holidaymakers have been visiting this culturally rich city. Byzantine museums and Turkish baths are all enclosed within ornate Venetian walls. There is also a thriving contemporary arts scene and a friendly, laid-back atmosphere.

New up and coming areas for Cyprus include Pissouri Bay, Pervolia where the new eco-friendly Hotele opened in 08, Polis and Coral Bay.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- The EHIC, which entitles the holder to free or reduced cost medical treatment in EU countries, is not valid in northern Cyprus, so it's doubly important to make sure you have comprehensive travel insurance
- When hiring a car, moped, boat, jet ski or other vehicle, you should check that it is road or sea worthy and that you have appropriate insurance cover

- Cyprus has a strictly enforced zero tolerance policy towards drugs. If you are caught in possession of any type of narcotic you will receive either a prison sentence or a hefty fine
- Before purchasing property anywhere in Cyprus seek independent qualified legal advice. For more information on buying a property in Cyprus visit www.ukincyprus.fco.gov.uk

For up to date travel information for Cyprus visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

HOTSPOTS - SHORT-HAUL

ICELAND

The country that was once legendary for its sky-high prices has become one of the bargain destinations of 2009 as the near-total collapse of its economy last autumn sent the cost of living spiralling downwards. From about £7, a beer is now about £2.50, while a restaurant meal is about a third of the price that it used to be. Add in the fact that low-cost carrier Iceland Express is switching its Stansted flights to a new eight-times-a-week service from Gatwick starting 1 May 2009, with fares from £69 one way, and the island becomes a bargain-seekers' paradise. It's a fine place for activity lovers, with snow-mobile excursions on glaciers, cycling, kayaking, hiking and horse-riding among the options, but there are plenty of sedate things to do as well, such as whale-watching, visiting the spouting geysers and national park and taking a dip in the warm geothermal waters at Blue Lagoon.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- If you plan to drive to the highland or more remote regions of the country, note that many highland tracks only open for a short part of the summer. Check with the Icelandic Road Administration before departure: www.vegagerdin.is/english
- Pack your EHIC which entitles you to emergency medical treatment on the same terms as Icelandic nationals. Note that the EHIC is not a substitute for medical and travel insurance and will not cover you for medical repatriation, on-going medical treatment or treatment of a non-urgent nature. You'll need to take out travel insurance too

For up to date travel information for Iceland visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

BULGARIA

For 2009, Bulgaria is bound to be a popular option. This country has always offered great value for money, and this will be its number one attraction this year, but it does offer great coastlines, good skiing and lively cities. Investment in new hotels and improved infrastructure over recent years means that it can compete with the Mediterranean countries on an even footing.

Laws and customs – ‘Did You Know’ facts & FCO advice

- Note that the majority of local authority officials and police officers do not speak English, even in tourist areas, so it's worth learning some basic phrases
- If you are planning on buying a property in Bulgaria seek comprehensive advice, including legal advice from a qualified, independent, Bulgarian property lawyer, before making any purchase. British nationals purchasing property in Bulgaria are strongly advised to deal only with established and reputable real estate agents or with other contacts whom they know to be reliable and genuine. For more information visit www.ukinbulgaria.fco.gov.uk

For up to date travel information for Bulgaria visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

POLAND

August 2009 will mark 70 years since the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 so where better to go than Gdansk, as it was just outside the city, at Westerplatte, that the first shot of the war was fired, from the battleship Schleswig-Holstein. Gdansk has a long and chequered history – annexed to Prussia in 1793, established as a Free City separated from Poland in 1919, destroyed in the war and where the Solidarity shipyard workers fought Communism – but it is now firmly on the tourist map, and also a popular stop for cruise lines sailing the Baltic, having been restored to its former glory. There are colourful merchants houses, lively street life and galleon-like boat trips up the Motlawa River to see the monument at Westerplatte in memory of the Polish soldiers who tried to defend the coast against Hitler's forces.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- There is a serious risk of robbery at main rail stations and on all train services, especially on overnight sleepers
- Polish police take a strict approach to public drunkenness and if found to be drunk in public you may be taken to a drying out clinic where you'll be medically assessed. You won't be released until you have sobered up - this may mean an overnight stay (for which you will have to pay)
- Jay walking is an offence and if caught by the police you will be fined

For up to date travel information for Poland visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

CROATIA

Croatia has been warm for some time, but as sterling collapses and Brits rush to find countries outside the eurozone that are not too far from home and easily accessible, this could be the country's seriously hot year. Tourism chiefs don't want a return to the millions of visitors that flocked to its high-rise hotels in the country's holiday heyday, when it was part of Yugoslavia, but they wouldn't say no to a few more tourists keen to savour "the Mediterranean as it once was", as their slogan claims the country to be. There are lots of reasons for visiting Croatia – for a short break in Dubrovnik, a family beach holiday or to go island-hopping between the 47 inhabited islands along the coast, either on a chartered yacht or on the ferries that sail between the islands and mainland.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- If you are considering sailing to Croatia, be aware of the rules on entry. There have been a number of cases of yacht/boat skippers being arrested and taken to court for entering a non-designated entry port without informing the authorities
- Croatia has a zero tolerance law on alcohol consumption by those in charge of yachts and other boats - the penalties for being caught drunk in charge of a boat are likely to be heavy
- A passport is the only officially recognised form of identification – it's advisable to carry your passport at all times

For up to date travel information for Croatia visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

HOTSPOTS - MID-HAUL

EGYPT

As recession bites in the UK and consumers look closely at their budgets, Egypt will keep popping up as a good bargain option. For the past few years, holidaymakers have been drawn to the country's Red Sea resorts – which now include Sharm el Sheikh (Club18-30 will start a programme here in 2009), Hurghada, El Gouna, Nuweiba, Dahab, Taba Heights, El Gouna, El Quseir, Marsa Alam, attracted by the promise of good weather within a five-hour flight of home, top-class hotels and bargain prices. Insiders believe that Egypt will be one of the few destinations which will grow in 2009. There are big and small resorts, but all offer top-class hotels where clients can laze around all day as well as some of the best scuba diving in the world, with courses for all, from beginner to expert level. There are also quad bike rides through the desert, classy spas, golf courses and good beaches.

But the traditional, cultural destinations remain a major draw.

Cairo: There is nothing like this city with its 17 million inhabitants. From the majestic pyramids and Sphinx at Giza, the Egyptian Museum, Islamic Cairo, Coptic Cairo, the Khan Al-Khalili souq with its many riches, café society and shopping, Cairo is on everyone's "must do" list.

Luxor: Thebes (as Luxor was once known) is the home of the Valley of the Kings, Queens, Nobles and their tombs, mighty Karnak Temple, Luxor Temple, Deir-Al-Bahri (Temple of Hatshepsut), Medinat Habu (Temple of Ramses III). Excavation work has started in the search for the hidden avenue of sphinxes which is expected to connect Luxor and Karnak Temples (a number of important structures have already been discovered) – completion anticipated in 2009. A new piazza with cafes and shops will open shortly in front of Karnak Temple.

Aswan: Standing at the head of the great Aswan High Dam is the great Isis Temple complex of Philae, the Unfinished Obelisk and beautiful Elephantine and Kitchener's islands. It was at the Old Cataract Hotel in Aswan that Agatha Christie wrote much of her novel "Death on the Nile".

Abu Simbel: Site of the Great Temple of Ramses II and the Temple of Hathor, they were hewn from solid rock between 1274 and 1244 BC. They were hidden for many centuries under desert shifting sands and were removed, stone by stone, from their original site to the current higher location during the building of the Aswan dam.

The River Nile: There are now even more ways to enjoy this world's most famous river: 4 and 5 star cruise boats, luxury 5 star boutique style craft and the exclusive, traditional 'dahabiyas' which present the elegance of the bygone era of the 20th century – these normally have just six cabins

Alexandria: Just 2 hours from Cairo by comfortable express train, home to the Roman amphitheatre, Catacombs of Kom Ash-Shuqqafa and Biblioteca Alexandrina.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- Dress modestly, especially when visiting traditional areas like mosques and souqs (markets). Women's clothes should cover their legs and upper arms. Before you travel, check out the local laws and customs of Egypt – what might be perfectly appropriate behaviour or dress in one country might not be acceptable here
- Check whether you need a visa. British passport holders travelling to Egypt normally require one, however if travelling to Sharm El Sheikh, Dahab, Nuweiba and Taba resorts for up to 14 days, you will not require a visa. For further information visit: www.egyptianconsulate.co.uk
- Road accidents are very common mainly due to poor roads, dangerous driving and non-enforcement of traffic laws. If you have concerns over the safety of the vehicle don't get on and inform the tour rep or organiser. You should always wear a seatbelt if one is available and avoid travelling in overcrowded vehicles

For up to date travel information for Egypt visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

ISRAEL

After years in the doldrums, Israel is poised to make a full return to the tourism arena. It started last year when BMI and Thomsonfly launched flights from the UK to Tel Aviv, raising that city's profile as a short-break destination and helping UK visitor numbers reach 180,000. Now there is talk of a third new flight to Tel Aviv, as well as a direct service from the UK to Eilat, which would help to put the Red Sea back on the map. Visitors currently have to fly via Tel Aviv which adds time and hassle to the journey. Tel Aviv focuses heavily in the tourist board's plans to boost visitor numbers by positioning the city as a lifestyle destination, good for food, culture and nightlife, but without neglecting traditional tourists in search of sun, sea and sand in Eilat and the Mediterranean beach resorts.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- Israel is a country in which a number of religions and cultures mix. People feel strongly about their beliefs and way of life and you should be aware of this at all times. Read up on local laws and customs before you travel
- You should carry identification at all times in case the local authorities ask to see it. Make photocopies of the date and entry stamp pages of your passport (and carry this to avoid losing the original)
- You should expect lengthy personal questioning and baggage searches by security officials on arrival and departure from Israel

For up to date travel information for Israel visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The UAE's determination to diversify away from oil revenues, has seen these small states pump money into the development of their tourism infrastructure. The results of these nature-defying feats of engineering cannot fail to awe, amaze and enthrall.

Dubai boasts the world's tallest building, Burj Dubai, the Ski Dubai complex with five indoor ski runs, the just-opened Dubai Mall with more than 600 shops – it will grow to have 1,200 plus 160 places to eat and drink – and an ice rink. All these pale compared with the Palm Jumeirah – 96 cubic metres of sand and seven million tonnes of rock sculpted into the shape of a 560 hectare palm tree, which is home to thousands of luxury residential properties plus beachfront hotels and restaurants. In late 2008, Kylie Minogue opened the flagship Atlantis resort.

The Palm has been followed by a group of 300 reclaimed islands in the shape of a world map, and plans are in the pipeline for 'the Milky Way' and 'Waterfront City' - 1.4 billion square feet of empty desert and sea converted into a metropolis twice the size of Hong Kong, with a potential population of 1.5 million.

From 2009, the QE2 will be moored on the Palm and the first Tiger Woods-designed golf course opens in the Dubai entertainment complex this year.

- **Abu Dhabi**

Abu Dhabi will host its first Formula 1 Grand Prix this year on Yas Island.

New developments include the huge Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and the transformation of Saadiyat Island into a tourist centre.

- **Ras Al Khaimah**

This emirate has its own reclamation project in Al Majan Island, which will have some top class hotel openings.

- **Ajman**

The smallest emirate will boost its tourism offering by opening a new airport and Emirates City development. Fujairah, the new mixed use seafront resort will appeal to tourists looking for a desert property.

- **Sharjah**

The most conservative emirate includes many mosques and museums, plus a five star hotel.

- **QI Quwain**

The most sparsely populated emirate has long pristine beaches and is ideal for extreme sports and activities such as horse and camel riding.

Laws and customs – ‘Did You Know’ facts & FCO advice

- United Arab Emirates has a zero tolerance policy on drugs. Possession of even the smallest amount of illegal drugs can lead to a minimum four year jail sentence
- Some prescribed and over-the-counter medicines that are available in the UK are considered to be controlled substances in the UAE. For some medication you want to pack you may need permission from the UAE Ministry of Health. Find out more: www.moh.gov.ae/en/default.aspx
- Public displays of affection are frowned upon, and there have been several arrests for kissing in public. Sex outside of marriage is illegal, and problems will be encountered if an unmarried woman gives birth in the UAE
- Women should dress modestly and clothes should cover the tops of the arms and legs, and underwear should not be visible

For up to date travel information for the UAE visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

HOTSPOTS – LONG HAUL

AUSTRALIA

In the second half of the year the fuel surcharges have dropped slightly and the GBP£1 has strengthened against the AUD\$1 but now the financial crisis has hit UK bookings with tour operator reports of bookings being down during the traditionally strong months of September and October. However, the number of arrivals during the northern hemisphere's winter should hold up bookings well as these holidays will have been paid for up to 11 months prior and there are low levels of cancellations.

Niche operators, especially those targeting the luxury and backpacker markets, are more positive in terms of bookings for travel 2008 and 2009.

Qantas recently launched a 2-for-1 fare, which is unheard of in the Australian market: this may mean other airlines will follow suit with January (peak booking period for Australia) being the platform to launch these fares. This should re-invigorate the market and particularly attract the VFR market back.

Working holiday visa applications have increased in 2008, possibly owing to the limited graduate jobs available in the UK, so we would expect an increase in backpackers to Queensland.

2009 sees the introduction of a new service from Virgin Blue, linking Los Angeles and Sydney. For the UK visitor this will mean they will be able to fly RTW with Virgin (LON-HKG-SYD-LAX-LON), and possibly at more competitive prices.

The long awaited 'Australia' the movie, featuring Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman, was released in UK cinemas on Boxing Day 2008. It tells the story of an English aristocrat (Kidman) who inherits a ranch in Australia, falls in love and gets caught up in the bombing of Darwin by the Japanese during World War Two. Filmed mainly in the Kimberleys, but also in Sydney, Darwin and Bowen, it is full of magnificent scenery that can't help but inspire movie-goers to want to see it for themselves. Preparing for the influx, tour companies are bringing out packages based around key movie locations such as El Questro Wilderness Park, where you can go hiking, riding or take a 4x4 tour, Lake Argyle and Windjana Gorge National Park.

Laws and customs – ‘Did You Know’ facts & FCO advice

- British nationals do need visas for entry into Australia – this can be obtained electronically from a local travel agent; via the Australian High Commission or directly via the Department of Immigration & Citizenship (www.immi.gov.au/e_visa/index.htm)
- Take extra health precautions if travelling in the Northern Territory, parts of Western Australia, and parts of Queensland as Mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue and Ross River fever are common to these areas. Make sure you get the appropriate vaccinations and medication before you leave the UK
- You should plan your journeys carefully, particularly if travelling to remote areas and seek and follow local advice on what precautions to take. There are extremely remote outback areas, which can present unexpected hazards
- Travellers spending a gap year in Australia may like to visit www.gogapyear.com

For up to date travel information for Australia visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

MALAYSIA

In March 2009 Malaysia's long haul low cost carrier, AirAsia, will commence flights from the UK's Stansted airport to Kuala Lumpur from 11 March 2009.

The airline, backed by the larger Air Asia, will run five Airbus A340 flights a week between the Malaysian city and the British capital from 11 March.

Emphasis will be on no-frills flying, with the cheapest tickets expected to start at £99, although with taxes, fees and charges, lowest fares are expected to start around the £120 mark. Around 40 per cent of seats on each flight will fall into this lowest price band, although the overall average ticket cost is estimated at GBP150.

From Kuala Lumpur, passengers will be able to connect to a number of destinations in the AirAsia X network as part of the airline's plan to provide a regional hub for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- Malaysia is a multicultural, but predominantly Muslim, country and you should respect local social conventions at all times. You should dress modestly in conservative and rural areas, and when visiting places of worship. Before you travel, check out the local laws and customs
- Credit card and ATM fraud is widespread. Take care when making payments by credit card and using ATMs as there have been cases of card duplication and skimming devices added to ATMs
- There are severe penalties for all drug offences in Malaysia. You could be asked to take a urine test on arrival in Malaysia if you are suspected of having used drugs before your visit. Should the test prove positive, you could be referred for rehabilitation treatment or be deported

For up to date travel information for Malaysia visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

SOUTH AFRICA

The pound is still quite strong against the rand, and as a result British visitors will be able to get even better value for money once they arrive. Visitors love Cape Town and the vineyards on the Garden route, as well as the stunning game parks and South Africa is becoming well-known for its fantastic culinary diversity and quality.

Laws and customs – ‘Did You Know’ facts & FCO advice

- Hospital treatment in large cities of South Africa is good but can be expensive. In remote areas, air evacuation is sometimes the only option for medical emergencies. Make sure your travel insurance policy covers you for any eventuality
- There is a high incidence of credit card fraud and fraud involving ATMs. If you use an ATM ensure your PIN number is not observed by others when withdrawing money. You should refuse offers of assistance from bystanders and do not change large sums of money in busy public areas
- The standard of driving in South Africa can vary greatly and there are many fatal accidents every year – familiarise yourself with local road laws before you drive a car
 - South Africa has a very high level of crime. However, most cases occur in the townships and in areas away from the main tourist destinations. Visitors should keep their luggage with them at all times, keep large amounts of money, expensive jewellery, cameras and mobile phones out of sight and do not change large sums of money in busy public areas.

For up to date travel information for South Africa visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

PERU

The number of UK visitors to Peru and its spectacular scenery, the Inca Trail, Macchu Pichu and the Condors increased by 11 per cent in 2007 and is expected to grow again by a similar amount in 2008. The UK is the largest European market for visitors to Peru. There should be increased airlift to Lima in 2009.

Laws and customs – ‘Did You Know’ facts & FCO advice

- Street demonstrations and protests are commonplace in Peru, frequently occurring suddenly and sometimes turning violent. You should take care to avoid any area in which large crowds are gathering and where you might be unintentionally caught up in trouble
- Street crime, including muggings and thefts, is a significant problem in major cities. You should take care when using web-cafes and similar services as thieves operate in places where people are easily distracted
- Drug trafficking is a serious crime in Peru and drug smugglers face severe penalties, usually receiving long terms of imprisonment

For up to date travel information for Peru visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

KENYA

Following the US elections, the Kenya Tourist Board anticipates that the “Obama Effect” will kick in, boosting knowledge and perceptions of Kenya and tourism arrivals by 10-15%. Barack Obama has strong family connections with Kenya.

Kenya is well on the road to recovery. With increased political stability, consumer confidence is returning and holidaymakers are taking advantage of some competitive packages and improved availability. Tourism is the number one industry in Kenya and every Kenyan that works in the tourism industry supports 10 people in turn. Not only has it never been a better or safer time to visit, but by visiting you will also help the wonderful, friendly and welcoming people of Kenya to get their tourism industry back on track.

Forward bookings for 2009 are looking positive especially the summer months and throughout the wildebeest migration. A strong focus will be placed on the shoulder seasons and 2009 will be a very competitive year.

Laws and customs – ‘Did You Know’ facts & FCO advice

- The coastal areas of Kenya are predominantly Muslim in tradition and you should dress conservatively away from the tourist resorts and hotels to avoid offending local sensitivities
- You must obtain a valid work permit before taking up any paid or volunteer work in Kenya; the penalties for not doing so can be a fine, jail or deportation depending on the nature of the offence
- It is illegal to destroy Kenyan currency whatever the denomination
- Situations can change from day to day, so stay up to date with the FCO travel advice

For up to date travel information for Kenya visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

The Caribbean Islands

The top islands by British Visitors:

1. Dominican Republic
2. Barbados
3. Jamaica
4. Antigua & Barbuda
5. Cuba
6. St Lucia
7. Mexico
8. Trinidad & Tobago
9. The Bahamas
10. Grenada

There are all sorts of reasons why people holiday in the Caribbean; the white beaches, a romantic and exotic destination for weddings and honeymoons, spa lovers go to be pampered, the diving is exceptional and yachtsmen are attracted by calm seas and safe harbours. It's becoming a foodie's haven. Many go to one island at a time, but cruise lovers have realised the benefits of their choices, as they can see more of the region this way than by any other means.

The Caribbean islands popular with British people tend to be those which have the best access from the UK, or those which have good internal links with the main islands. This is why Aruba is being tipped as an up and coming destination - from May, TUI will provide the only charter into the island. The Caribbean remains an aspirational destination, and as such those buying within the luxury market will not trade down, but will look for added value, such as free room upgrades, free nights and free kids' meals.

Highlights for 2009

St Lucia

With better flight connections from the UK, more accommodation and a key game in England's cricket tour lined up, St Lucia has got to be one hot destination for next year. The new flights will be from British Airways, flying non-stop between the UK and St Lucia instead of going via Antigua, which means journey time is two hours shorter. New accommodation is in the form of 'the Landings', an upmarket property that has

just opened a phase two development, namely 60 one, two and three-bedroom villa suites as well as a new restaurant, and the new boutique resort of Cap Maison, which opened at the end of 2008 with 49 rooms in 22 villas. And then there is the Barmy Army, which will be back on the island in April for the final match of England's tour of the Caribbean, a one-day international at Beausejour stadium in Gros Islet.

Laws and customs - 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- It is an offence for anyone, including children, to dress in camouflage clothing
- The hurricane season in St Lucia normally runs from June to November. You should monitor local and international weather updates before you travel
- If you wish to bring meat or plant products into Saint Lucia you must obtain a licence in advance from the Ministry of Agriculture: www.slumaffe.org
- Most airlines will allow passengers to check two pieces of luggage on transatlantic flights. However, local inter-island flights will generally only allow one piece at 20kg. You should confirm baggage entitlements with your airline if you are travelling between islands

For up to date travel information for St Lucia visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

Cuba

For years, operators have been urging us to visit to Cuba before Fidel Castro goes and the island reverts to being just another Caribbean country. Well, this might just be the time to start listening in earnest, because Castro handed the reins of power over to his ageing brother Raul in February 2008 so change is not far off. The island is already hugely popular with holidaymakers in search of all-inclusive beach breaks, but for a real taste of Cuba you have to get away from the sun, sea and sand, and spend time in the capital, Havana, famous for its old American chevies and cigar factories. In Trinidad, the fourth oldest town, visit Santa Clara, the final resting place of Che Guevara and stop off in Santiago de Cuba, the island's second-largest city, which offers a mix of Spanish, French and African cultures.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- American Express travellers' cheques are not accepted in Cuba (as well as travellers' cheques and/or credit cards drawn on all other American banks)
- Cuba prohibits the import of all meat products and bringing fruit into the country is normally banned too
- Electrical items with heavy power consumption such as travel irons and kettles may be confiscated upon entry to Cuba
- You must pay an airport departure tax of 25 Convertible Pesos (CUCs) per person when leaving Cuba. This must be paid in local currency.

For up to date travel information for Cuba visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

Aruba

Thomsonfly is launching direct weekly flights from Gatwick in May which will make the island easily accessible and much more affordable for Brits, as it will be the only charter flight into the island. Aruba, formerly Dutch, offers the usual Caribbean mix of sun, sea and sand on the coast, but has an unusual desert-like interior with giant cacti and aloe plants – a visit to the Aloe museum and factory is a favourite sightseeing trip. Arikok Park, a 12.5 square mile national park, is another top attraction and home to several indigenous species including the burrowing owls,

parakeets, rattlesnakes and whiptail donkeys. A visitor centre with a cinema showing educational films and displaying local art is opening in the park this year.

St Kitts

British Airways has also put on new direct flight from Gatwick.

Dominican Republic

Four Seasons is to open a 200 room, five-star resort at Casa de Campo, La Romana at the end of 2009. A family-friendly hotel, it will have a kids' club and a young adults' area.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- There are severe penalties for all drug offences in the Dominican Republic. If you are found guilty of being in possession of drugs you are likely to receive a long prison sentence plus a hefty fine. Arrests of British Nationals for being in possession of drugs when leaving the Dominican Republic have sharply increased since 2006
- All visitors require a tourist card, which can be obtained before travel through the Embassy of the Dominican Republic, or on arrival at the airport. The Embassy website provides more information:
www.dominicanembassy.org.uk
- If you intend to stay for up to two weeks departure tax is US\$20. Scheduled airlines sometimes include this charge in the price of the ticket so you should check with your tour operator or travel provider about this. If you intend to stay for more than two weeks, departure tax varies depending on length of stay and on nationality

For up to date travel information for the Dominican Republic visit

www.fco.gov.uk/travel

Mexico

The number of UK visitors to Mexico rose by 23 per cent in 2008, with nearly a quarter of a million visitors travelling to the destination. The good value and diverse range of all-inclusive hotels mean travellers can holiday in the Caribbean but budget effectively.

There are two major developments in Mexico in 2009. Firstly Mexicana airlines (www.mexicana.com), launches its first European route in January 2009 with a twice-weekly service linking London Gatwick and Mexico City, growing to four departures each week by mid-February. Secondly, the Mexican tourist industry is 'launching' Riviera Nayarit on the Pacific Coast, following the success of establishing the Riviera Maya 15 years ago.

A number of resorts in the new Riviera will launch in 2009, opening up a stretch of breathtaking coastline to increasing numbers of visitors. Most of the region's current tourism facilities are located on Banderas Bay, one of the world's largest bays, which is also renowned for its extensive variety of water sports from diving and snorkelling to sailing and deep sea fishing.

Located in the state of Nayarit, just north of Puerto Vallarta, and extending north from Nuevo Vallarta to the colonial port of San Blas, key attractions include a rich cultural tradition with pre-Hispanic and pre-Columbian history; and abundant and exotic species of protected wildlife, including sea turtles, humpback whales and tropical birds. From the UK, Thomsonfly offers direct flights to Puerto Vallarta. Alternatively, flights operate from Mexico City connecting with British Airways scheduled direct flights from London Heathrow; from January 2009, Mexicana airlines will offer scheduled direct services from London Gatwick to Mexico City with excellent connections across Mexico and Central America.

Laws and customs – 'Did You Know' facts & FCO advice

- Street crime is on the increase – be particularly alert on public transport, at airports, bus stations and tourist sites
- Malaria is common in low-lying rural areas of Mexico and outbreaks can occur throughout the year – visit your GP well in advance of travel to get the

relevant vaccinations and medication

- English is not widely spoken outside the main cities – a knowledge of basic Spanish phrases is essential
- American dollar travellers' cheques and notes are more easily exchanged throughout Mexico than sterling equivalents
- Note that you are not allowed to take meat or dairy products into Mexico (importing these products from the EU is prohibited) – do some research before you go

For up to date travel information for Mexico visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

Galapagos Islands

This year is the 200th anniversary since the birth of Charles Darwin, and also marks 150 years since his work *On the Origin of Species* was published, so what better way to celebrate than with a trip to the islands that inspired his theory of evolution. The Galapagos Islands are some 600 miles west of Ecuador, South America, and rather small and scruffy, but that doesn't matter because the big attraction is being able to get up close to wildlife – dancing blue-footed boobies, lazy seals, the only marine iguanas in the world and those finches – which has lived so long without predators it has no fear of humans. There are a couple of hotels on San Cristobal Island, but the best way to tick off the Galapagos is on one of the small cruise ships that call at two or three islands a day so you can go ashore for guided hikes.

OTHER TIPS FOR THE TOP

- * Jersey: Can new TV programme Bloggers Banquet, to be aired in February, do a Bergerac for this Channel Island?
- * Vilnius: Lithuania's first city takes the European Capital of Culture mantle.
- * Rome: Da Vinci Code symbologist Robert Langdon is back in Angels and Demons, on the big screens in May, this time trying to stop a terrorist attack against the Vatican.
- * Brussels: Herve's Adventures of Tintin come to life as filming starts in the city on a new Steven Spielberg film featuring Belgium's most famous journalist.
- * Maldives: New direct flights operated by SriLankan Airlines between Heathrow and Male.

SECOND HOMES

No-frills airlines have reported that second home owners are being particularly organised in booking flights ahead of next year, which means that bookings for destinations such as Canary Islands, Cyprus and Malaga are all doing exceptionally well and out-performing the market.

WEDDINGS

According to market research company Mintel, 50,000 couples got married abroad in 2008. This is about double the number 10 years ago. It's easy to see what the attractions are – exotic location, warmer climes, and the bottom line – and it's considerably cheaper. A UK wedding on average, sets a couple back between £15,000-£20,000. Nuptials abroad however, are a comparatively meagre £6,000, which is why travel insiders believe that in a recession, the trend to marry abroad will continue.

While the number of leading tour operators which provide dedicated wedding and honeymoon brochures have increased over the years, so have the number of countries where, as a Brit, you can get married. To make things easier, the required red tape has decreased, or even in some instances been abolished altogether, which means that rather than having to be a 'resident' in the country sometime before the wedding, you can get hitched as soon as you arrive - or one or two days after.

Popular Mediterranean hotspots of Cyprus, Malta, Italy and Greece are now competing with the traditional long haul wedding favourites. Long haul operator Kuoni

has produced a rather exotic top ten, which is headed up by Sri Lanka, the US, and Kenya and followed by St Lucia, Mauritius, Thailand, Canada, Antigua, Zanzibar and Tobago.

New hotspots coming up through the ranks include Aruba, Costa Rica, The Cook Islands, Grenadines, Nevis, Bali and Vienna, while Canada, South Africa and New Zealand are becoming new destinations for civil partnerships, which are legally binding.

Foreign Office advice for overseas weddings and civil partnerships:

Planning your wedding

- Do some research on marriage in the country you are planning to hold your wedding in
- Find out what specific documents the local authorities require - these may take some months to prepare
- Check if you need visas to enter the country or if you need to provide proof of residency in the country
- If you are planning to marry in a tropical country visit your GP well in advance of travel to check what vaccinations and medication you'll need
- Buy adequate travel insurance - you may also want to buy specialist insurance which will cover the ceremony (and your wedding dress!)
- Get written quotes from wedding planners, venues or other services before you sign contracts
- Remember any guests you invite will need to obtain visas, get relevant vaccinations and purchase travel insurance too!

Visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel for more advice on preparing for a wedding abroad

CRUISING

The Passenger Shipping Association (PSA) estimates that 1.5 million British people took a cruise in 2008 and that is set to rise to two million by 2012.

A cruise, with its all inclusive offering, can offer value for money and as such, is, beating the credit crunch.

There are 44 new cruise ships on order through to 2012, ranging from mega ships to small intimate five star luxury vessels. The diversity means that there's a cruise and a destination for everyone.

Many cruise lines are pointing out what good prices they have on offer, which are comparable to 20 years ago, even though the quality of the experience is far superior.

Many ships these days have a great deal to offer families, with huge sections of some ships given over exclusively for children, where they offer non-stop activities to keep children entertained.

Innovation has been one of the keys to cruising's success, with cruise lines continually competing to offer the customer something different. Back in the 1980s no cabins had balconies, but these days they are the first cabins to sell, which has prompted Yachts of Seabourn to order new ships where 90% of cabins will have balconies. Other ships have facilities such as ice rinks, water slides, bowling alleys, rock-climbing walls, surf parks as well as major theatres.

CONSUMER RESEARCH

What are Britons saying about their holiday plans in 2009?

A consumer survey was commissioned by the FCO and carried out by YouGov Plc. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19th - 21st November 2008.

The following statistics are based on a sample size of 2108 British adults:

- One in five Brits are planning on getting a last minute bargain in summer 2009
- Three times as many 35-44 year olds will holiday in the UK than abroad compared with 18-24 year olds. 18-24 year olds are least likely to go on holiday in the UK
- 11% of Brits will only holiday in the UK in 2009
- 11% of 18-24 year olds don't care where they go on holiday as long as they get the same sun and sand as they would in the Mediterranean. This compares with 5% national average
- Going abroad is a luxury that 1 in 5 people said they may not be able to afford this year
- 13% of people are not planning on having a holiday in 2009
- 13% of Brits are more likely to visit the States now Barack Obama has been elected (rising to 21% in the 18-34 age group)
- 15% of Brits would want to attend Barack Obama's inauguration in Washington USA in Jan 09 if they could

The following statistics are based on a sample of 1311 British adults who plan to have a holiday abroad in 2009:

- Not having enough spending money on holiday is a real concern for 41% of people
- Tour operators going bust concerns 35% of the those surveyed
- 41% of respondents will reduce the number of holidays they go on in the year ahead

- 19% of Brits are worried that they or their partners might lose their jobs before they go on their next holiday
- 53% of Brits worry that the pound is going to get even weaker
- 28% of Brits plan to book their 2009 summer holiday less than two months in advance
- 34% of Brits think the economic situation will affect the destination they visit
- 36% of Brits think the economic situation will affect the type of holiday they will take next year
- 22% will go abroad for fewer nights in 2009