

Easy Trips

for spring



including

- ▶ Explore Norway's Bergen
- ▶ Hike in the Tuscan hills
- ▶ Sleep in a Welsh treehouse
- ▶ Cycle and sail the Aegean



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Cypress and olive trees surround a secluded farmhouse in the rolling hills of Val d'Orcia, Tuscany

Take in Tuscany at a slower pace

Walking holidays don't get much more civilised than this: six days tracing the contours of Tuscany, between hilltop towns and medieval abbeys, with every guarantee of a good glass of wine at the end of each hike. Head to the country south of Siena before the summer heat gets oppressive, to start out on a self-guided tour, where your luggage is forwarded to each new stopover while you walk. The route begins at the fresco-covered monastery of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, which

perches on a wooded spur, a mile's walk from the first lunch stop in the quiet village of Chiusure. Each day's trundle covers 7 to 12 miles, or anything between 3½ and 6 hours, much of it in the Val d'Orcia region, whose hills seem sculpted to an artistic degree of perfection. It's definitely thanks to human hands that walkers can appreciate the austere beauty of Sant'Antimo abbey and the Renaissance perfection of San Biagio church, as well as the wines of Montalcino and Montepulciano.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

✦ On Foot Holidays' seven-night self-guided Southern Tuscany itinerary is priced at £705, including b&b accommodation, luggage transfers and some local transport (onfootholidays.co.uk). Breaks of four, five or six nights are also available (£490–£630).

📍 The closest airports to Siena are Florence (50 miles away) and Pisa (85 miles away). Airlines such as BA, CityJet, easyJet, Jet2, Ryanair,

Thomson and Vueling fly direct from the UK, with Pisa offering a larger choice of routes (from £70; ryanair.com). Rental cars are unnecessary for most of the week, so it's best to transfer from either airport to Siena by public transport. Several buses a day leave Pisa Airport for Florence, with a second bus continuing to Siena (£22 return; autostradale.it). There are also direct trains from Florence to Siena (from £14; trenitalia.com).

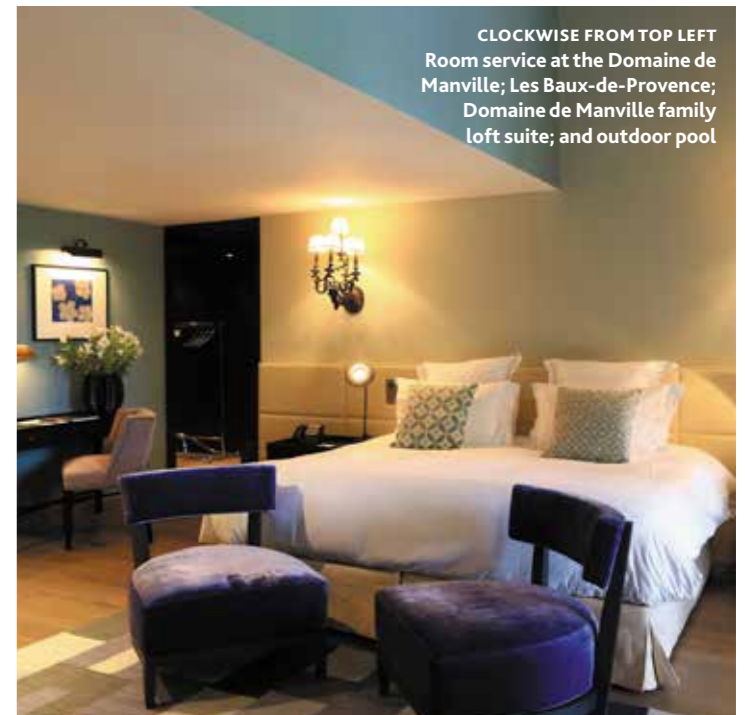
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Seasonal dining in Les Baux-de-Provence

Late spring is an ideal time to experience Les Baux-de-Provence in all its glory. It's already warm, the northwesterly mistral wind is little more than a breeze and you'll beat the summer crowds. A good base for exploring the hilly region is the Domaine de Manville, a magnificently converted farmhouse renowned for its seasonally inspired menus. Spring highlights in its restaurant include rabbit, asparagus and peas, using produce gathered from the hotel gardens, local markets

and surrounding terroir. Borrow the hotel's electric bikes for a scenic ride up to the nearby medieval village of Les Baux. Once you've had your fill of panoramic views and boutique shops, cycle downhill to the village of Paradou. Le Bistrot du Paradou, with its single set menu of simple Provençal dishes is a local institution and featured in Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence*. Luckily there's no need to exert yourself after a meal – your power-aided bicycle will see you comfortably to the hotel door.



2
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Room service at the Domaine de Manville; Les Baux-de-Provence; Domaine de Manville family loft suite; and outdoor pool

MAKE IT HAPPEN

✦ The Domaine de Manville lies within the Alpilles regional park, beneath Les Baux. The 100-acre estate includes 30 luxury rooms and nine villas set around a pretty courtyard, most with balconies over the pool, a spa and cinema. Gastronomic dinner at La Table restaurant starts from £65 for four courses, and rooms from £210 (domainedemanville.fr). ✕ Bistrot du Paradou's set menu is

£35 for three courses, wine, coffee and cheeseboard (00 33 4 90 54 32 70). A visit to Château d'Estoublon is also well worth a bike trip. Just 10 minutes from the hotel, the organic vineyard offers regular tastings and makes its own olive oil (estoublon.com).

📍 BA, easyJet and Ryanair fly direct from London and Edinburgh to Marseille, a 45-minute drive from the Domaine de Manville (from £70; ryanair.com).

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The harbour town of Symi, on the Dodecanese island of the same name

Greek odyssey

Odysseus took 10 years to journey back to Ithaca from Troy, in what is now modern-day Turkey. A sail through the Aegean Sea's palette of blues, hopping between the Dodecanese, a Greek island chain hugging the Turkish mainland, reveals why he was keen to linger. This is Greece at its sunniest (so much so that the sun god Helios was said to live on Rhodes, the biggest of the islands) and is best explored in late spring, before the thermostat jumps to scorching. Utracks' eight-day Southern Aegean Bike and Sail cruise takes in the millennia-old temples and acropolises, crusader churches and bougainvillea-draped Byzantine arches in Rhodes and Kos, as well as lesser-visited islands such as Symi, with its dainty Italianate harbour, and Nisyros, with its gurgling volcano.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

✈ The eight-day Southern Aegean Bike and Sail trip has regular departures from 30 April to 29 October (from £1,065; utracks.com). Prices include accommodation in an en suite double cabin below deck, as well as breakfast and some lunches and dinners, bike hire and entry to museums and archaeological sites (excludes flights). Trips set sail from either Bodrum or Marmaris in Turkey.

📍 EasyJet flies to Bodrum from Bristol, Edinburgh, Gatwick, Liverpool, Luton and Stansted (from £100, easyjet.com).

See the South Downs spring into life

There's nothing quite like the English countryside in springtime – trees so green that they have an almost picture-book quality, streams swelled up to Poohsticks levels and smatterings of flowering bulbs popping up everywhere like hedgerow bouquets. The Hampshire South Downs is an ideal place to embrace the new season. Spend a day exploring Queen Elizabeth Country Park's mountain bike trails or footpaths: catch viewpoint Butser Hill – the highest spot on the South Downs – on a clear day and you can see all the way to the Isle of Wight. Any spring showers can be dodged with a visit

to Gilbert White's House, a charming museum devoted to a pioneering 18th-century naturalist, which also features exhibits on Antarctic explorer Captain Oates (£9.50; gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk). Alternatively, try pub-hopping in one of the region's many idyllic villages – both Selborne and East Meon (pictured) are replete with red brick and thatched roofs. Close by, in Priors Dean, is The Pub With No Name. Friendly and cosy, this traditional pub is full of wood and ephemera, serving top fish and chips and other pub classics (mains from £11.50; pubwithaname.co.uk).

MAKE IT HAPPEN

🏠 Langrish House Hotel occupies a 17th-century manor, home to seven generations of the Talbot-Ponsonby family (current incumbents Nigel and Robina make very genial hosts). Set within 14 acres of landscaped gardens, guests can expect a carpeting of daffodils, plus simple rooms and excellent cream teas (from £119; langrishhouse.co.uk).

📍 Langrish House is just off the A272 Petersfield to Winchester Road – you'll need a car to explore the surrounding area.
📍 Find more on Queen Elizabeth Country Park at hants.gov.uk/qecp.



The picturesque Hampshire village of East Meon featured in the Domesday Survey of 1086, and its layout has remained unchanged since

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PHOTOGRAPHS: KRYS BAILEY/ALAMY, FIGURATIVE SPEECH/GETTY IMAGES

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The 86-mile, glacial Soča River continues across the Italian border, and is known as the 'Emerald Beauty'

Alpine adventures through Slovenia

Just over the border from Italy and Austria, Triglav National Park is Slovenia's perfectly preserved slice of the Julian Alps. Now is the time to see this mountainous region waking from its icy slumber and become one giant outdoor adventure playground. Cycling and rambling trails are accessible once more, and melting snows swell the park's rivers, unleashing endless rafting and kayaking possibilities. A textbook karst landscape – in fact, the word originates from Slovenia – Triglav is

a patchwork of limestone caves, arches and deep ravines. Highlights include the mountain-encircled Lake Bohinj, the mist-shrouded Savica Waterfall and the Soča River, which runs such a vivid cyan, it appears Photoshopped. Come late spring, the views here become all the more idyllic, as wild blooms, including rare Alpine orchids, run riot over the park's meadows – easy enough to explore on your own or on guided botanical walks during Triglav's International Wild Flower Festival.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

📍 For general information on Triglav National Park, take a look at tnp.si and slovenia.info. The International Wild Flower Festival runs 21 May–5 June; for details of this event, visit bohinj.si.

✈ EasyJet and Wizz Air fly to Ljubljana from London airports (from £80; wizzair.com). From Slovenia's capital to Triglav, trains and buses take 1–2 hours, depending on which part of the

park is visited; see slo-zeleznice.si for timetables. Or consider hiring a car; Slovenian roads are easy to negotiate and well signposted.

🏠 Set in a historic village that's a 20-minute walk from Lake Bohinj, Rustic-house 13 is an eco-friendly guesthouse with bucolic touches, including timber cladding and duck-egg blue window frames (from £45 for a double, or £80 for four in a two-room suite; bike hire from £4; studor13.si).



free
bottle of wine
and nibbles

The Living Room Treehouses are made from sustainably sourced wood from the local area – much of it collected from the woodland floor

Go off-grid in a Welsh treehouse

The bluebell season is all too brief, usually peaking in the last week of April and first week of May. What a luxury it would be then, to have a woodland full of them right outside your front door. Six treehouses in the hills of north-central Wales provide just that experience, their wooden decks giving a vantage point to see and smell the flowers at all times of day (mid-morning is often best). Even if you're too early or late for the bluebells, the natural setting of the Living Room Treehouses, perched

among oak trees, larch and Scots pine, makes for a memorable stay. Beyond the wooded dell, a variety of walks lead through the sheep-dotted uplands of Powys, with views north towards the mountains of Snowdonia. Inside the slightly Tolkienesque treehouses, tea lights, lanterns and a wood-burning stove replace electricity, and facilities are rustic if still well-equipped. Each of the six cabins is set a discreet distance from the next, with a deck outside to survey its woodland domain.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

📍 The Living Room Treehouses sleep two, plus two children in bunk beds. The accommodation is self-catered, with gas hob and kitchen utensils. Guests must bring their own food. Quote Lonely Planet June when booking by phone or enter the code online for a bottle of organic wine and nibbles on arrival. Offer valid on bookings made before 30 June 2016 (from £127; canopyandstars.co.uk).

📍 The treehouses are about a mile uphill from the village of Cemmaes, in northwestern Powys. The village is on the A470, 45 minutes' drive from Aberystwyth and 1½ hours from Shrewsbury. Machynlleth train station is eight miles away, with bus links to Cemmaes; the treehouse operators can arrange pick-ups. Machynlleth is on the Aberystwyth–Shrewsbury line, with direct trains from Birmingham (from £14; arrivatrainswales.co.uk).

Visit Norway's city of seven mountains

Bergen may be Norway's second city, but when it comes to plain good looks, it can give anywhere in Europe a run for its money. Cradled within seven hills that slope down to seven fjords, it's a picturesque tumble of wooden houses huddled around a medieval wharf known as the Bryggen. Take a spring trip to the city to explore it in the sunshine, beginning in this Unesco-listed quarter. With its uniquely well-preserved complex of rickety buildings and narrow passages, it's a timewarp that today houses the shops and studios of local craftspeople and artists. Elsewhere, Bergen has a wealth of museums

and galleries to explore, from the contemporary art of KODE to the reconstructed house of a merchant sailor at the Hanseatic Museum, and a buzzing food and drink scene that's an excellent respite after a day treading the cobbles. A highlight of any trip is the funicular, which chugs to a lookout point high above the city, with views for miles over the hills and fjords. Come May, there are two more spectacles to behold – Norway's national day, when locals celebrate in the streets in bunader, the colourful national dress; and the Bergen International Festival, a globe-spanning showcase of music, art and theatre talent.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

✈️ BA and Norwegian fly direct to Bergen from London (from £90; norwegian.com).
 📍 For more ideas for what to do in the city, see visitbergen.com. Round-trip tickets for the Floyen funicular are £7.50 (floyen.no). Constitution Day is 17 May, and the Bergen International Festival is from 25 May–8 June (fib.no).
 📍 Located in the city centre, a 10-minute walk from the harbour, Scandic Ørnen has modern, spacious rooms, many with floor-to-ceiling windows. There are even better views from the skybar (from £95; scandichotels.com).

Bergen's Bryggen is a row of commercial buildings built by the Hanseatic League – a historic confederation of merchant guilds



PHOTOGRAPHS: JUSTIN FOULKES, ANDREW RAY/ALAMY



The Caledonian Sleeper passes Loch Alvie in Cairngorms National Park

Great Glen Way to go

Spring is the optimum time to explore the Scottish Highlands – a hiatus between blustery winter months and hazy summer days when the Glens are busy with hikers and the billions of hungry midges who come to feed on their flesh. Those south of the border can make a timely escape by boarding the Caledonian Sleeper's newly revamped overnight service. Passengers fall asleep at Euston, waking hours later to breakfast, watching the snowy Cairngorms slip by while en route to Inverness. From here, set out along the Great Glen Way – the epic long-distance coast-to-coast footpath that heads southward to Fort William, but also suits a shorter amble: it's just a day's easy walking along heathery slopes and rolling farmland to the shores of Loch Ness.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

✈️ The Caledonian Sleeper has nightly departures from London Euston to Inverness and Fort William, as well as shorter trips to Edinburgh and Glasgow. Passengers can choose between reclining seats, shared or solo-use cabins (from £130 for 1st-class single bed cabin for London–Inverness; sleeper.scot).
 📍 Once a home to Bonnie Prince Charlie, Culloden House has rooms overlooking leafy grounds in Inverness (from £270; cullodenhouse.co.uk).
 📍 A good resource for the Great Glen Way is walkhighlands.co.uk.

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Over the centuries, the Alcázar of Segovia has variously served as a royal palace, prison, military academy and, today, as a museum



Fairytale towers and fine food in central Spain

According to ancient lore, Segovia was founded by the Roman god Hercules, and the Unesco-listed city has all the makings of a legendary weekend away. Framed by the rolling hills of central Spain – which welcome wildflowers and balmy spring weather this month – it's packed with scene-stealing landmarks in an abundance most cities its size can only dream of. Its crowning glory is the aqueduct that towers 30 metres above its terracotta rooftops in a series of 167

arches. The Rapunzel towers and witch-hat turrets of the Alcázar fort, meanwhile, are said to have inspired Walt Disney – and offer soul-stirring views over the Castilian countryside. Segovia's Gothic cathedral is another marvel, but its medieval streets also conceal more humble pleasures. Its citizens are known for their love of pork, making it one of the best places in the land to try specialities like *jámon* and *cochinillo asado* (roast suckling pig), plus the local *ponche segoviano* (marzipan cake).

MAKE IT HAPPEN

✈ Airlines including BA, easyJet, Iberia and Ryanair fly to Madrid from UK cities such as London, Manchester and Edinburgh (from £80; ryanair.com). From Madrid, there are 30-minute and two-hour train services to Segovia (from £6).

📍 Find more ideas for a visit at visitsegovia.turismodesegovia.com. Entrance to the Alcázar, including admission to the lofty Juan II tower, is £6 (alcazardesegovia.com).

🏨 Set in a carefully restored complex of medieval buildings, La Casa Mudéjar Hotel Spa preserves historic features like 15th-century Mudéjar-carved wooden ceilings within rooms that might feature hardwood floors, four-poster beds and views over the rooftops of Segovia's Jewish quarter to the Sierra de Guadarrama mountains beyond. There's also a good restaurant and a small spa (from £40; lacasamudejar.com).



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Kelmscott Manor, which dates
from 1570; the Oxfordshire
village of Kelmscott;
The Plough Inn's restaurant;
a double room at the pub



Relax in William Morris's Oxfordshire

When the designer, poet and novelist William Morris first clapped eyes on Kelmscott Manor, he declared it the 'loveliest haunt of ancient peace', and promptly made it his family retreat from 1871 until his death 25 years later. The house and gardens reopen to the public for the summer in April, and remain as they did in his day. An equally lovely haunt is The Plough Inn, a stroll away down a quiet country lane, and very much adhering to Morris's motto: 'Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be

useful or believe to be beautiful.' The 17th-century inn, refurbished last year, is the perfect country pub, with creaking wooden furniture and flagstone floors in the bar and restaurant, picnic tables in the charming garden, and understated bedrooms, with wood panelling and wool throws, upstairs. The daily-changing menu makes fine use of seasonal produce in dishes such as lamb rump and smoked mackerel. (Top tip: don't miss the Kelmscott pigs in blankets with Oxford sauce.)

MAKE IT HAPPEN

📍 Kelmscott Manor opens every Wednesday and Saturday from the beginning of April to the end of October (£10.50; sal.org.uk/kelmscott-manor).

🍴 The Plough Inn at Kelmscott has eight en suite rooms (from £90; theploughinnkelmscott.com). The restaurant is open for lunch and dinner, with mains starting at £12.50. The pub area also serves bar snacks (sandwiches from £5).

📍 The village of Kelmscott is in Oxfordshire, a few miles south of the A40. Oxford is approximately 24 miles away and the nearest train station is in Swindon, 14 miles away, with services from London Paddington, Cheltenham, Bristol, Swansea and Carmarthen (nationalrail.co.uk).

🚶 Part of the Thames Path runs nearby, just beyond the manor, and makes for a bucolic and easy wander (thames-path.org.uk).

PHOTOGRAPH: MARTYN FERRY/GETTY IMAGES