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The best short-haul city breaks for guaranteed spring sun

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THESE ARE THE SUNNIEST PLACES TO VISIT IN EUROPE BETWEEN MARCH AND MAY

Winter is dragging; summer is still months away. Time to start looking into city breaks for spring sun then. If those Vitamin D pills just aren't cutting it, and you're craving the rejuvenating effects of actual sunshine, then good news. You don't have to jump on a plane to **Dubai** or **the Maldives** to bask under cloudless blue skies. Summer starts early in southern Europe, meaning that uninterrupted sun and mild temperatures are just a short-haul flight away.

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With temperatures soon to be nudging the early 20s, spring breaks to Europe's southern cities offer the best of both worlds: sun-drenched attractions without the crowds. Typically, flights and accommodation options are also more affordable. Win, win, win. These short-haul city destinations promise both a sun tan and a culturally-rich mini spring holiday. We could be wrong, but we doubt you'll locate any Caravaggios in Florida.

BARCELONA, SPAIN

2026 is going to be a big year for Barcelona as the city celebrates several historic cultural moments, with major milestones linked to Antoni Gaudí, the Sagrada Família, and its designation as UNESCO World Capital of Architecture. This makes it the perfect time to experience the Catalan capital, with the tallest church in the world set for completion in June after 144 years in construction. Elsewhere, discover 4.5km of golden coastline, shop 'til you drop at La Rambla – one of Barcelona's most famous streets lined be an array of shops and eateries – and don't miss the Picasso Museum, La Boqueria Market and Casa Milà for plenty of tapas, sangria and vistas to boot.

WHERE TO STAY: EL PALACE BARCELONA

Since opening in 1919, **El Palace Barcelona**, the city's first five-star luxury hotel, has hosted many big names, from Josephine Baker, who graced the stage several times at what was then known as the 'Parrilla del Ritz', to *Rolling Stone* guitarist Ronnie Wood, who was actively involved in designing his eponymous suite, and Salvador Dalí, who stayed for extended periods at the hotel. It houses six gorgeous restaurants, including a rooftop dining space with views across to the newly finished basilica. Throughout 2026, El Palace Barcelona will be celebrating the city's biggest moments with a series of Gaudí-inspired experiences.

From £798 per night.

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TUSCANY, ITALY

April is a fantastic time to visit Tuscany, where you can experience the charm of spring with pleasant weather, and warm days balanced by cool nights. Witness the vibrant awakening of nature as the Tuscan landscape transforms with lush greenery replacing winter barrenness, fruit trees burst into bloom, and wildflowers paint the fields. Plus, by avoiding the tourist crowds later in the year, you'll be able to fully enjoy the serene and peaceful landscape.

WHERE TO STAY: BORGO PIGNANO

Borgo Pignano is set in the heart of a picturesque 750-acre organic estate in Tuscany that dates back to the 12th century. Just a short drive from the medieval hill towns of Volterra and San Gimignano, and only an hour from Florence and Pisa, Borgo Pignano prides itself on serving authentic Italian food with fine dining flair, with Villa Pignano recently awarded a Michelin Green star. Accommodation is split between an 18th-century house and beautifully restored rustic apartments, cottages and luxury villas dotted around the estate. Don't miss the gorgeous outdoor pool offering uninterrupted views of Tuscany's rolling hills, alongside an art school and endless gardens which create a picture-perfect backdrop for sundowners or al fresco picnics.

From £375 per night.

BOOK NOW

ST TROPEZ, FRANCE

Image: Shutterstock

St Tropez in spring is a no-brainer – especially as the glamorous French enclave welcomes roughly 80,000 tourists during the summer months. Escape the chaos and be rewarded with balmy 21°C temperatures in April and May, while experiencing the town's relaxed, sleepier side which made it famous in the 1950s. Saunter along the uncrowded coastal trails, such as the Sentier du Littoral, and weave along St Tropez's cliffs and white sand beaches in peace, before frequenting Place des Lices to make the most of the weekly markets. A must while in the Côte d'Azur, head to vineyards such as Domaine Tropez and Château De Saint-Martin to enjoy guided tours and plenty of glasses of the region's signature pink drink.

WHERE TO STAY: AREV

Opened in March 2024, Arev St Tropez is an intimate 35-room property designed by Luis Bustamante with nautical elegance and vintage 1970s charm, situated just five minutes from the village centre. Alongside a serene outdoor pool and world-class dining at the Strand restaurant, there's plenty to entertain pre-season visitors. A wellness retreat in partnership with Artur Zolkiewicz, taking place from from 16-19 April, will feature a curated selection of yoga, padel and bespoke fitness sessions, complemented by a healthy dose of *art-de-vivre*. Spend the rest of your time making the most of guided gourmet tours around the famous St Tropez market, trying something different at ceramics workshops and olive oil tastings with local artisans, and enjoying sundowners at cocktail masterclasses with Arev's team of talented mixologists. A weekend at Arev is a weekend well spent.

From £590 per night.

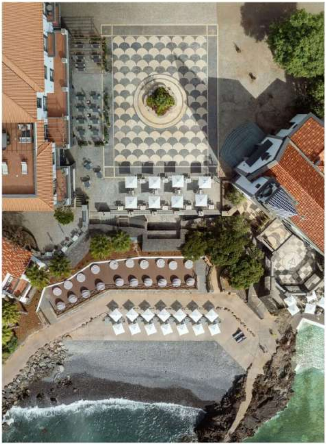
BOOK NOW

MADEIRA, PORTUGAL

Images: Shutterstock

This autonomous region of Portugal is a volcanic archipelago comprising four islands off the north coast of Africa. Famous for its namesake wine and cake, and its year-round subtropical climate, there's much more to Madeira than just culinary delicacies and weather, thanks to its rugged landscape smattered with high cliffs, black sand beaches and lush green forests. The capital city of Funchal – the birthplace of footballer Cristiano Ronaldo – is home to botanic gardens, colourful streets filled with traditional tavernas and a cable car that traverses Madeira's peaks to reach the village of Monte. With a collection of easy hiking trails, saltwater pools and delectable local food markets, it really is something of a hidden gem.

WHERE TO STAY: DREAMS MADEIRA RESORT



Located in the picturesque region of Caniçal and just 30 minutes from the island's capital, **Dreams Madeira Resort** has been fully refurbished to offer modern and elegant facilities surrounded by the natural beauty of the Atlantic. Its 366 rooms and suites feature warm, bright and fresh décor reminiscent of a picturesque coastal villa, while four pools, a private marina and seven gourmet restaurants should keep the whole family occupied. Don't miss the 900 square metre Dreams Spa – a serene escape offering a variety of treatments and amenities, such as a heated indoor pool, jacuzzi, hammam, sauna, cold water plunge pool, diathermic showers, and seven treatment cabins.

From £200 per night.

BOOK NOW

PAPHOS, CYPRUS

Images: Shutterstock

Just four hours via plane, the small but mighty island of Cyprus has plenty to offer fly-and-flop travellers looking for a healthy dose of vitamin D this spring. Dating back to Neolithic times, Paphos, one of Cyprus' largest cities, is rooted in history, home to several archaeological marvels in honour of the goddess Aphrodite, whose mythical birthplace was Old Paphos (Kouklia). The city has a cosmopolitan side too, featuring a modern, bustling harbour, UNESCO World Heritage sites including ancient ruins of tombs and fortresses at Paphos Archaeological Park, and several beautiful beaches such as Coral Bay and Alykes Beach. Don't miss a day trip to the pine-fringed Troodos Mountains – home to the famous Mount Olympus – for guaranteed panoramic views and easy hiking trails.

WHERE TO STAY: ANASSA

Anassa is Cyprus' Grand Dame, making it an ideal locale to soak up guaranteed sunshine from March to October, with temperatures around 22°C early in March and 27°C in October. Since opening in 1998, the hotel has become world-renowned, with rooms, suites and residences designed by Parisian interior designer Joelle Pleot laid out like a traditional Cypriot village, while boasting beautiful views of the Mediterranean Sea. Elsewhere, discover the award-winning Thalassa Spa, based on a Roman-style health retreat, and offering an extensive range of therapies from one-off treatments to immersive 10-day detox programmes.

From £326 per night.

BOOK NOW

ATHENS, GREECE

Athens, Greece. Image: Shutterstock

A gateway to the country's famously sun-drenched islands, Greece's capital blossoms into life in spring. A variety of native and non-native trees burst into colour as temperatures pick up and winter fades into memory. With so many of the city's streets lined with orange trees, parts of **Athens** swim in a cloud of citrus perfume in April. To make the most of the spring blossom, hike up Mount Lycabettus, where, among blooming wildflowers, you'll be rewarded with breathtaking views of ancient Athens. For vibrant bougainvillea, make for the picturesque neighbourhood of Anafiotika, in the shadow of the Acropolis.

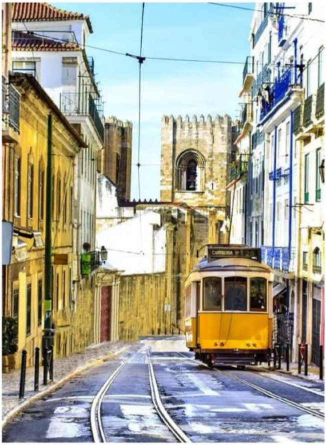
WHERE TO STAY: THE DOLLI AT ACROPOLIS

The Dolli at Acropolis, situated in Athens' historic Plaka district, stands as the jewel in the crown of Grecotel's portfolio, a family-run hospitality group in Greece. Housed in a meticulously-restored neoclassical building, The Dolli offers beautifully designed rooms and suites, many with the city's best views of the Acropolis. Relax at the rooftop infinity pool, enjoy gourmet cuisine in the conservatory restaurant, and delight in an enviable art collection including pieces by Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau, Lucio Fontana and Amedeo Modigliani. The Dolli also promises an unrivalled array of immersive activities, ranging from private sea kayaking in the Athenian Riviera and bespoke art tours to off-the-beaten-track rock climbing. *Yamas!*

From £475 per night.

BOOK NOW

LISBON, PORTUGAL



Lisbon, Portugal. Image: Shutterstock

Summers in **Lisbon** are hot. From late June until early September temperatures regularly exceed 35°C (and average temperatures are taken in the shade, remember, so things will feel even hotter in the sun). The city receives most of its rain in November and December, and basks in more than 300 days of sunshine across the year. However, you don't travel to Lisbon for its beaches (unless you're a surfer). Lisbon is all about exploring its castles, churches, squares and markets – making spring the ideal time to visit.

WHERE TO STAY: EPIC SANA MARQUÊS HOTEL

Perched among the picture-perfect hills of Lisbon, **Epic Sana Marquês Hotel** is located just a short walk from the region's parks, squares, markets, and museums – and is therefore the perfect choice for your next city break. Inside, discover 369 serene rooms, six restaurants – ranging from traditional Portuguese to Italian cuisine and Japanese dishes – and a rooftop pool, where you can take in panoramas extending across the city and Tagus River with a cocktail in hand. No city break is complete without a touch of wellness, and the gorgeous Sayanna Wellness and Spa is the ultimate destination for holistic relaxation. Featuring a sauna and vitality pool, we'd recommend booking a treatment tapping into Aromatherapy and Natura Bissé products to leave feeling thoroughly pampered. Plus, book your trip with ***I Prefer* Hotel Rewards** for special members discounts, complimentary upgrades and points towards your next holiday. Win win.

From £166 per night.

BOOK NOW

SEVILLE, SPAIN

In 2023, Google revealed that sunny **Seville**, the Andalusian capital and Spain's fourth-largest metropolis, was its most searched-for flight-only destination. If you've visited during the summer, you'll know the city can get unbearably hot. So hot, that Seville has begun naming its heatwaves in the same way that the rest of the planet names hurricanes. The first, Zoe, arrived in July 2022, with temperatures peaking at 43°C. The second, Yago, landed in June 2023, nudging the mercury to 43.9°C, and now Seville is simply nicknamed 'the Iberian Oven'. Far better to visit Seville's 13th-century Islamic castles, 14th-century palaces and 15th-century squares during the spring, then. By the end of February, the city is already experiencing average highs of around 20°C.

WHERE TO STAY: HOTEL ALFONSO XIII

Commissioned in 1929 by the then King of Spain, Alfonso XIII, to play host to international heads of state, this **five-star hotel** remains one of the city's best. Boasting an enviable location in the central historic quarter, Santa Cruz, the hotel is just a stone's throw from sights including Reales Alcázares and the Seville Cathedral. Throughout the 148-key hotel, dicover resplendent Andalusian and Moorish design, from stunning mosaic-covered arches to a serene courtyard scented by orange blossom trees – the perfect spot to relax over cocktails. Talking of, don't miss Restaurante San Fernando for Spanish fare and flair, and the gorgeous Ena Sevilla to dine on tapas and signature cocktails.

From £480 per night.

BOOK NOW

MARBELLA, SPAIN

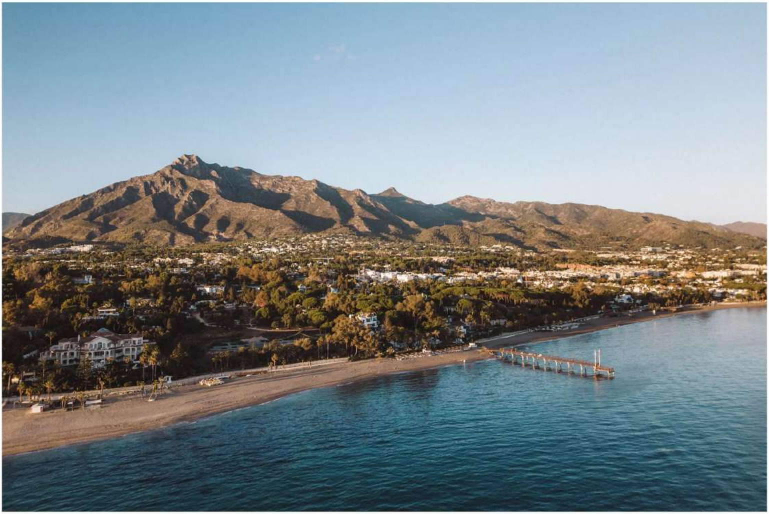


Image: Shutterstock

Averaging around nine hours of sunshine a day, and with average highs of around 20ºC, there's a lot to recommend Marbella between March and May. As well as sandy beaches, the area is home to some of Europe's most celebrated golf courses. Often overlooked, Marbella Old Town is home to 19th-century whitewashed buildings, flower-draped balconies, and a labyrinth of pretty winding streets. There's the scenic Paseo de La Alameda park, with a fountain that dates back to 1792, and the 15th-century Ermita de Santiago church. Ronda, with its famous bridge, is an hour away by car, while the fortresses of Granada are accessible in two hours.

WHERE TO STAY: THE MARBELLA CLUB

Poolside at Villa del Mar, The Marbella Club, Stuart Cantor Photography

Now in its 72nd year, **The Marbella Club** entered the European Hotel Hall of Fame decades ago. What began as a humble family home slowly evolved into a 132-room, year-round destination resort with a world-renowned golf course and iconic restaurant to boot – an institution, as much as a hotel. The club occupies an enviable beachfront location on Marbella's 'Golden Mile' and is surrounded by mature, tropical gardens. Seven decades on, the club remains committed to life's simple pleasures – good food, comfortable surroundings, and a slow and mindful way of doing things.

From £402 per night.

BOOK NOW

MARRAKECH, MOROCCO

Morocco regularly ranks as one of the world's most Googled destinations, with would-be visitors drawn to its exquisite mosques, vibrant culinary scene and famous souks. Marrakech, or the Red City, is a labyrinth of bustling markets, romantic riads, lush gardens, grand palaces and lively theatres. Temperatures pass 30°C from May to September, making spring the perfect time to visit. Expect the mercury to hover around the mid-20s in March and April, a time of year when the city receives an average of just three days of rain a month.

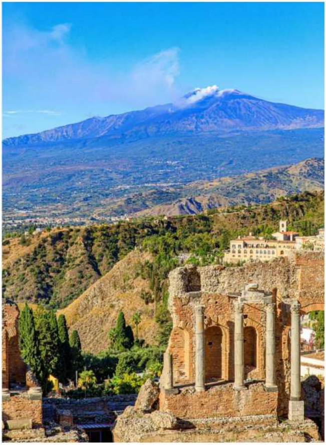
WHERE TO STAY: ROYAL MANSOUR MARRAKECH

Royal Mansour's reputation precedes it. In 2020, the palatial property was recognised by *Conde Nast Traveller's* Readers' Choice Awards as the number one hotel in Africa and it was ranked 13th in the **World's 50 Best Hotels 2025**. An opulent oasis crafted by more than 1,500 local artisans in an ode to traditional Moroccan architecture, the hotel provides a quiet retreat steps from Marrakech's historic medina. Guests are welcomed into an open-air courtyard before they are free to explore four acres of lush gardens, complete with their own garden kitchen. Private, multi-storey riads are dotted along petal-pink pathways. You'll find no carts or crowds at Royal Mansour, just quiet, time-defying comfort.

From £2,440 per night.

BOOK NOW

TAORMINA, SICILY



Images: Shutterstock

When German landscape artist Otto Geleng exhibited his paintings of Taormina at an art gallery in Berlin in the 1860s, critics refused to believe the scenes he depicted were real. "Come to Sicily," Geleng challenged his detractors. "If Taormina differs from my paintings, I'll pay for your journey and your accommodation. Otherwise, you will write of the town's beauty in your newspapers." You suspect Geleng wasn't left out of pocket. Taormina is Sicily's prettiest city, a Medieval village-on-a-cliff from which Ernest Hemingway wrote his first short story and D H Lawrence began *Lady Chatterley's Lover.*

WHERE TO STAY: MONACI DELLE TERRE NERE

With average daily temperatures reaching 22°C and dense summer crowds yet to descend on the island, there is no better time to visit the eastern region of Sicily than the spring months, especially those wanting to visit Mount Etna – the largest active volcano in Europe and a UNESCO heritage site. With views over the volcanic landscape and down to the glittering Mediterranean Sea, **Monaci delle Terre Nere** sits on an extensive 62-acre country estate planted with organic grapevines, native fruit orchards, and an abundant kitchen garden. This family-owned property, part of the Relais and Chateaux portfolio, includes a historic 18th-century manor house and 24 scattered villas, suites and signature rooms, and is the ideal base for families to explore Etna by hike, horse, or helicopter, remaining within easy reach of Taormina, Catania, and the eastern coast of Sicily.

From £507 per night.

BOOK NOW

VALLETTA, MALTA

Image: Shutterstock

Coming third in 2024's most Googled destinations, Malta is a small island packed with centuries of history. The capital, Valletta, takes up less than a square kilometre of land, making it the smallest capital city in the European Union. As of last year, the city had a permanent population of fewer than 6,000 residents, who get to live among 16th-century palaces and cathedrals; the baroque St. John's Co-Cathedral houses Caravaggio's masterpiece *The Beheading of Saint John*. Temperatures reach average highs of 20°C in April, still early enough in the year for affordable flights and out-of-season accommodation prices.

WHERE TO STAY: THE XARA PALACE