

# The search for cheap deals, I

## WORD ON THE BEACH

### SALCOMBE



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If you can get in for the bank-holiday weekend, you'll be around for the **Hope Cove** festival, a four-day extravaganza of traditional English seaside entertainments, with activities ranging from sandcastle-building competitions and family sports days to raft races and puppet shows — see [kingsbridge.info/hopcoveweekend](http://kingsbridge.info/hopcoveweekend) for details.

Just up the coast, the **Dartmouth** Royal Regatta takes place from August 26 to 28, with a programme of events including waterborne treasure hunts (bring your own boat), a formal ball and an airshow involving freefall parachutists, an RAF Typhoon and the Red Arrows — see [dartmouthregatta.co.uk](http://dartmouthregatta.co.uk) for the full schedule.

Our beach of the week is the delightful **Blackpool Sands**, the award-winning, blue-flagged, eco-friendly, pine-fringed crescent of gold that's been owned by the Newman family for centuries and open to the public for the past 60 years ([blackpoolsands.co.uk](http://blackpoolsands.co.uk)). Despite the name, the beach is shingle, but sandpits are provided for castle builders — it's that kind of place.

Chris Haslam

### TRAVEL APP OF THE WEEK



**World Customs & Cultures (iPhone)**

Giving pointers on greetings, eye

## There are bargains out there — if you look hard

With Britain's two travel giants, TUI and Thomas Cook, announcing rather gloomy interim results last week, there's been a lot of excited talk of desperate tour operators off-loading “up to 1m unsold holidays” at bargain-basement prices. Beyond the hype, however, it's a slightly different picture. There's no great flood of bargains, more a smattering of carefully concealed cracking deals; if you're canny and flexible, you can save a fortune.

The key to finding a last-minute getaway is to move fast: destinations such as Turkey and Egypt, which are perceived to offer the best value for money, are all but sold out for August. Elsewhere, holidays are selling rapidly. For departures next weekend, Thomson, for example, had only 320 packages available at the time of going to press. These were mainly in Greece, the Canaries and the Balearics, where the best deal is a week in the Vista Blanes apartments on Minorca for £479pp, down from £929 — a saving of 48%. The Thomas Cook website had even fewer packages, with only 55 departures left to the same hot spots. Its biggest saving was £699 off a week in the luxury Elounda Mare hotel, in Crete — but it would still set you back £3,319pp.

If you can travel the following week, however — effectively the last week of the school summer holidays — the two

companies offer 1,279 and 259 holidays respectively for online bookings. The best saving: 35% off a week in the Hotel Star on Minorca, now £675pp, down from £1,043pp, with Thomson.

Predictably, prices will fall fast after the school holidays. “It's likely in the next few weeks we'll see bargains getting even better, with discounts of up to 70%,” said Bob Atkinson at [Travelsupermarket.com](http://Travelsupermarket.com).

There's also better availability of the smaller tour operators: Just (01202 484858, [justsardinia.co.uk](http://justsardinia.co.uk)) has up to £500 on villas in August and a child places on offer for September.

Ionian & Aegean Island Holidays (0777, [ionianislandholidays.com](http://ionianislandholidays.com)) has a last-minute self-catering deal for a week in the three-bedroom Villa in Cephalonia, which has a private pool. Departing on August 28, is now £799 from £969.

There are also savings to be had on long-haul travel: Kuoni (01306 747474, [kuoni.co.uk](http://kuoni.co.uk)) has eight nights in the luxury Orchid Pattaya for just £633pp — down from £887 — or a week in the Fairmont Southampton, in Bermuda, for £1,199, saving £905 — both departing on August 28.

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**D**isgruntled BAA employees are threatening to scupper the bank-holiday travel in a pay dispute that could cause the closure of six British airports. The threat is being taken seriously by the Unite union, including security guards, firemen and engineers, would potentially shut down Heathrow, Stansted, Southampton, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh airports, disrupting the travel plans of thousands. The Unite meets tomorrow to discuss the dates of any walkout — if it decides to go ahead, the earliest date for strike action would be August 23.

The Association of British Travel Agents says it won't be issuing advice to holidaymakers until strike dates are announced, but the veteran travel industry spokesman Paul Charles says a walkout is unlikely. “It won't go ahead,” he said. “The union is flexing their muscles ahead of one of the busiest weekends of the year, but BAA has some money up their sleeves to ensure a deal is made at the 11th hour.”

For the latest on the dispute, follow our updates at [thesundaytimes.co.uk/travel](http://thesundaytimes.co.uk/travel)

### OFF TO THE STATES IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS? READ THIS

Even if you have no immediate plans to travel to America, you should apply for an online travel authorisation now, say travel agents, and save money. Currently, the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) process is free, but from September 8, applicants will be charged \$14 (£9) for the service. “Each authorisation lasts for two years, so do it now, for free,” advised Alan Waddell, of Visit USA. “Even if you're not planning to go for some time, you can still sign up.”

### MOSCOW HEALTH WARNING

The Foreign Office is advising travellers who are pregnant, elderly or travelling with children to consult their doctors before going to Moscow and other areas affected by the pollution from forest fires. The

### WEB COWBOYS CAUGHT SELLING FREE HEALTH

The Office of Fair Trading has caught fraudsters selling free European Health Insurance Cards (EHICs). The EHICs allow UK residents with access to free or reduced-cost healthcare in European Union countries and the cards are available free of charge at [www.ehic.org.uk](http://www.ehic.org.uk), but rogue sites selling them on [ehic.org](http://ehic.org) were said to be charging up to £100 per application. “People should check carefully that they're on an official government website,” said Heather Blyth, the OFT consumer group director.

### TRIPS TO IRAN CANCELLED

The archaeological-tour operator Ancient Travels has cancelled its upcoming trip to Iran in protest at the treatment of the Iranian human rights activist, who was sentenced to be stoned to death for adultery.

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