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THE GETAWAY

Nothing but the Atlantic Stands in Your Way

Prices for flights and lodging are low enough to entice both first-timers and upgraders.

By MICHELLE HIGGINS

If you've ever dreamed of renting a villa in Tuscany, hiking under Iceland's midnight sun or vacationing practically anywhere else in Europe, the time is now. From Reykjavik to Rome, lower fares and a strong dollar are making for some of the best bargains in years for Americans.

Round-trip airfares from the United States to popular destinations, including Paris, Rome, Barcelona, Madrid and Prague, are down between 20 and 35 percent for travel from April through the start of September, compared with the same time last year, according to Kayak.com.

The decline is largely because of increased competition from budget carriers. Reykjavik, Iceland, where fares have come down nearly 27 percent, is a good example, said David Solomito, the vice president for North American marketing at Kayak.com. "In the last couple of years, Reykjavik has seen new flights open to several cities, including Boston, Baltimore and Newark, and continues to expand," he said. "This spring, nonstop routes to Philadelphia will be available."

Norwegian began flying to Paris from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Los Angeles and New York last year and plans to begin service in June to Barcelona from Fort Lauderdale; Los Angeles; Newark; and Oakland, Calif. In Reykjavik, the Icelandic low-cost carrier WOW Air has been expanding rapidly, contributing to lower fares. And Zurich-based Edelweiss announced that beginning in June it would be flying nonstop twice a week from San Diego to Zurich, where Kayak noted the biggest drop in fares, down 42 percent.

At the same time, the strong dollar, which has been hovering at near parity with the euro, means more buying power when you land. "Europe is the bargain of the decade," said Karen Malone, a travel agent with Travel Leaders in Woodbury, Minn. "I am encouraging all customers who are thinking about Europe or are on the fence to go now."

Rental prices are down 10 to 20 percent in Ibiza, Spain; Mykonos, Greece; and Tuscany, Italy, this summer, on Villaway.com, with about 1,000 rentals across Europe. A six-bedroom, six-bath villa with an infinity

pool overlooking the Aegean Sea in Mykonos, for example, is listed for \$1,509 a night this June, or \$246 a night less than last June.

Last year, Valerie Lederle, an agent at Travel Leaders in Colleyville, Tex., booked a deluxe room with breakfast at the Splendide Royal in Rome for some clients. "They paid 957 euros for two nights," she said. This year — thanks in part to a deal through her agency — she said she would be able to book it for her clients for 781 euros, or about \$838.

While Italy and England continue to be top destinations, travel agents say interest is growing in Germany, Ireland, Norway and Portugal, and tour operators are responding. This summer, Globus is offering a new nine-day tour from Dublin to Limerick, Ireland, from \$1,709 a person; Cosmos has a new eight-day tour of Andalusia, Spain, from \$939 a person; and Monograms has a four-day Lisbon getaway starting at \$657 a person.

Travelers on a budget will find plenty of options in Lisbon and Berlin, said Tom Meyers, the editor of EuroCheapo.com, which reviews inexpensive hotels in dozens of cities. "Lisbon offers sunshine, friendly locals, great food and the chance to stay in four-star hotels for the price you'd pay in a two-star hotel in other European capital cities," he said. "Meanwhile Berlin has recently experienced a flurry of construction of trendy hotels, nearly all of which offer rooms for under 125 euros a night." For example, Motel One, a stylish budget chain, just opened a hotel in western Berlin near the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church with rates as low as €83, or \$89 a night.

Copenhagen is also getting new hotels this year, including Hotel Danmark, an 88-room boutique hotel from Brochner Hotels, with a rooftop terrace scheduled to open in May. Rates will begin at 1,250 Danish krone per room per night, or about \$180, and will include organic breakfast, high-speed Wi-Fi and a glass of wine or port during a "wine hour."

The bargains seem to be outweighing the hesitancy that had grown over vacationing in Europe after a spate of terrorist attacks over the last 16 months, including a deadly one in London last month when a man driving a sport utility vehicle mowed down pedestrians on Westminster Bridge, then

stabbed and killed a police officer outside Parliament.

"Decreased demand for certain countries in Europe has meant dramatic growth for others," said Jean Fawcett, a spokeswoman for Abercrombie & Kent. "Interest in France is slightly lower, but Spain and Portugal are booming, as are Scandinavia and Germany. Turkey is down, but Greece has roared back."

The decision by British voters to leave the European Union and the resulting weakened pound have created renewed interest in travel to the United Kingdom, with some travelers taking advantage of the lower rates to splurge. While the pound rose after Prime Minister Theresa May called for a snap election on June 8, the value remains lower than last summer. "A room that cost \$750 last year is now approximately \$625 for the same room," said Philip Morris, the corporate director of revenue management at the Dorchester Collection. "Americans are astounded at the value their money currently has in the U.K."

"I have many clients who travel to London and other cities in Europe and this summer they are staying at more luxurious hotels, staying in suites and dining in finer restaurants," said Eric Hrubant, the president of CIRE Travel, a division of Tzell Travel Group in New York City. He noted that clients who stay at the Savoy Hotel in London every July upgraded from a king room to a suite with a view of the River Thames for \$1,991 a night — including a fourth-night-

free promotion for booking through Tzell — a saving of \$1,554 a night compared with last year's rates for the suite.

Travelers looking to upgrade will also find bargains in business class and first-class. La Compagnie, an all-business-class carrier that flies from Newark to Paris, is offering seats for \$1,300 round trip this summer. Meridiana, which flies nonstop from New York to Naples and Palermo, Sicily, is offering round-trip flights as low as \$575 in coach and \$1,550 in business class, with the best deals in April, May and October, said Joe Brancatelli, publisher of the travel site JoeSentMe.com, who alerts members to such sales. "Finnair is offering great deals in business class over its Helsinki hub to Russia and other European destinations," he wrote in a recent newsletter, pointing out that travelers must book 90 days in advance and stay at least 10 days to score the round-trip deals, which range from \$2,289 to Moscow to \$2,849 to Helsinki from New York.

But don't wait too long to make your booking. Some deals, like a flash sale to Iceland with flights as low as \$269 from Boston, have already expired. And as summer gets underway, the best bargains will dry up fast.

With airfares down 20 to 35 percent and the dollar strong, a Minnesota travel agent says, 'Europe is the bargain of the decade.'



SUSAN WRIGHT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The entrance to a Tuscan winery. Italy and England are top European destinations, but interest is growing in Germany, Ireland, Norway and Portugal.