

hot IN THE City

Europe's historic capitals offer myriad opportunities for exploration, shopping and dining. An inspired **Jane Hayward** chooses the best places to indulge

ROME FOR ROMANCE

Early morning is the time to explore the Italian capital. Let a taxi whisk you off to the city's medieval heart to watch market holders peeling artichokes in Campo dei Fiori, sip espressos at a café in Piazza Navona and, as the sun starts to climb, marvel at a Caravaggio in the frescoed church, Sant'Agostino.

Opt for a resort-style hotel such as

the five-star Rome Cavalieri, which sits in hillside parkland beyond the Vatican. It's just far enough away to provide dreamy views of the city from the terrace of its three-Michelin-starred restaurant (pictured). Glamorous baroque interiors raise the romantic temperature and you can spend the hottest part of the day lying by the pool at the Cavalieri Grand Spa Club.

Doubles from £170 B&B; romecavalieri.com



STOCKHOLM FOR FRESH-AIR FANS

The Swedish capital's fortunate residents don't need a summer escape. Living in a city that stands on 14 bridge-linked islands and peeks out to the Baltic archipelago, they have fresh, salty air and watery vistas all around. As the days grow balmy, hipsters drift out of cool coffee bars in SoFo (South of Folkungagatan) to channel their inner hiker, cyclist or swimmer (you can dive in right by the City Hall). On a tiny island, Hotel Skeppsholmen (pictured) is an unfussy but luxurious conversion of two 17th-century buildings that were made to house Sweden's Royal Marines. Natural light complements the waterfront views, and it offers a three-day bike pass for around £15.

Right next door is the Museum of Modern Art with its glass-walled, harbour-view restaurant. A breezy 15-minute stroll across the island's bridge brings you to Gamla Stan's brightly painted shops and cafes.

Doubles from £260 B&B; hotelskeppsholmen.com

EDINBURGH FOR ENTERTAINMENT

A-list comedians, kilted bagpipe players, Polish opera singers – everyone turns up in the Scottish capital during festival season. From the Fringe Festival and the Edinburgh International Festival to the Royal Military Tattoo, each imprints the medieval and Georgian streets with their distinctive character. If you can't wait, hit town earlier for community-based events such as the waterfront Leith Festival, the Edinburgh Canal Festival (complete with an eccentric raft race), or the Old Town Festival, held from June onwards.

For a room with personality, try Ardmor House, the city's most stylish B&B (which also has apartments). Meanwhile, the five-star hotel, The Scotsman, once the home of Scotland's most successful newspaper, has a fabulous Thalgo spa to soothe away the after-effects of uproarious nights out.

Doubles at Ardmor House from £85 B&B; ardmorhouse.com. Doubles at The Scotsman from £175 B&B; thescozmanhotel.co.uk



LISBON FOR BEACH LOVERS

Spectacular white-sand beaches and cultural must-sees make the Portuguese capital the top choice for those who want to chill out. Hop on the coastal train that stretches down to Cascais' palm-lined promenade and well-heeled Estoril, where Ian Fleming was inspired to write *Casino Royale*. For something more energetic, climb (or catch a 19th-century tram) up one of Lisbon's seven hills, targeting Chiado for smart shopping, Alfama for cobbled, twisting Moorish passageways, and for fantastic views of São Jorge castle.

A restored 18th-century building, the Bairro Alto Hotel offers the chance to stay in Lisbon's most vibrant quarter. At dusk, try a cherry-flavoured Ginjinha cocktail in the terrace bar (pictured), but you won't want to linger. The sardine-scented streets are where the action is, promising bar-hopping and mournful fado music until the early hours.

Doubles from £156 a night B&B; bairroaltohotel.com



MONACO FOR GLAMOUR

High rollin' in the Côte d'Azur's wealthiest city is an extravagant experience. Designer-clad visitors are as likely to have arrived in one of the luxury yachts moored in the harbour as via easyJet from Nice.

Focus on the riviera chic of Monte Carlo's 1920s heyday, which will lead you to the Relais and Châteaux Monte Carlo Beach hotel (pictured). An octogenarian that's undergone a rejuvenating facelift by designer India Mahdavi, its rooms have ocean-liner styling, and there's also an excellent watersports club.

Dipping between the waterfront and chi-chi shops on Avenue des Beaux-Arts takes care of daytime. Soak up the atmosphere at Alain Ducasse's Le Louis XV restaurant in the Hotel de Paris, then try your luck at the lavishly decorated casino. And a new Cipriani, which opened for this year's Grand Prix, has created a buzz.

Doubles from £506 room only; monte-carlo-beach.com



PALMA FOR COOL CATS

Even on the steamiest days, the Balearic Islands' largest city retains a sense of cool. Passeig des Born offers sophisticated hillside shopping with a Barcelona flavour, while the gothic cathedral's ornate wrought-iron canopy brings Gaudi to mind.

However, unlike its mainland cousin, Palma's pleasures come hassle-free. Try yacht-watching from Es Baluard's terrace café, attached to the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, or take the vintage train through pine-scented mountains to Sóller's Art Nouveau houses and Saturday craft market.

Convent de la Missio (pictured), a converted 17th-century convent hidden away in the old quarter, offers suitably chic digs, while its Simply Fosh restaurant whisks up delights such as vanilla panna cotta with fruit minestrone.

Doubles from £217 B&B; illesbalears.es

BERLIN FOR CULTURE

The urban beach is one of Europe's best summer inventions, and was pioneered here in the German capital. Sprinkled along the banks of the River Spree, more than 30 'beaches' offer cocktails at al fresco bars, volleyball and deckchairs. The original, Strandbar Mitte, makes for a relaxing break after a visit to Museum Island.

From there, easy bike hire means you can freewheel on a history tour from Brandenburg Gate (pictured) to Checkpoint Charlie. Festivals and events abound, from the Classic Open Air (when Gendarmenmarkt lays on opera, jazz and more) to August's Long Night of the Museums on which 100 museums party – sedately – 'til dawn.

The trendy Cosmo Hotel Berlin Mitte has a concierge service that can direct you to the best cultural events, plus a restaurant that specialises in cooking with wild herbs.

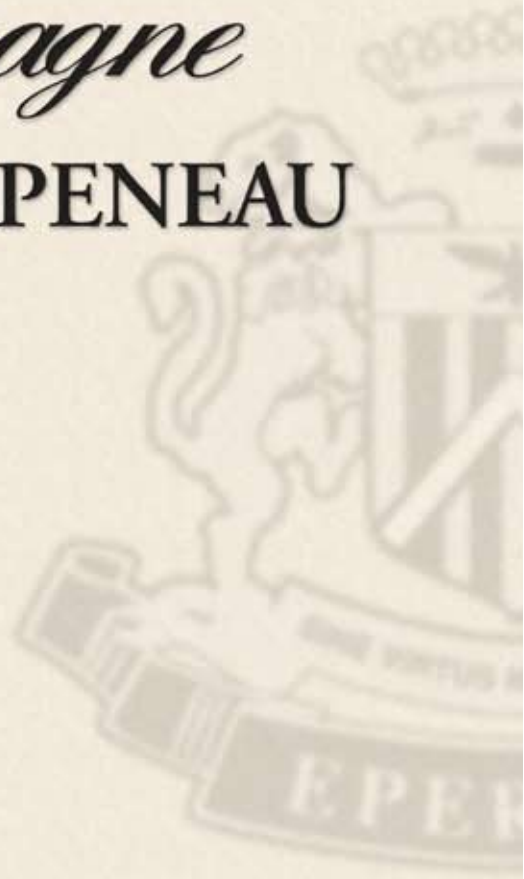
Doubles from £88 room only; designhotels.com



CONTRIBUTOR: THINKSTOCK



Champagne ERNEST RAPENEAU



armit®



armit®
know your wine

