



THE SUNDAY TIMES

The 100 best holidays of 2015

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21 Temples in Cambodia

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Angkor Wat is not only the largest religious structure on Earth, it's one of the busiest, with more than 2m visitors every year. Andy Booth, chief executive of the not-for-profit tour operator About Asia, is a scientist by training and he can't help measuring things. He stationed observers at the temple complex for months to create a detailed record of the tidal movements of tourists. This showed the peak periods and quiet times, then Booth used the data to schedule his own tours — which pretty much guarantee that you'll have the temples to yourself. After sunset, join him for an extraordinary fine-dining experience in a lamp-lit paddy field in the shadows of the ancient buildings. The 10-day City to Coast itinerary takes in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap (for Angkor), ending with a relaxing two days on the beach at Kep. Prices start at £1,945pp, B&B, including private guides (01285 880980, steppestravel.co.uk).

CULTURE

ART, MUSIC, ARCHITECTURE



19 HAVANA BIENNIAL

If Cuba is on your wish list, make this the year you visit. Official recognition of the Caribbean republic by America is the first stage of a cultural revolution many fear will turn it into the 51st state. For now, however, US tourists and investors are being held back, so seize the moment. Go for the Havana Biennial, a showcase for artists from Latin America, Africa and Asia that tries to be all Marxist and intellectual – the programme notes are as turgid as an East German agricultural forecast – but ends up being a month-long arty party, with exhibitions in bars, restaurants and public spaces.

Steppes Travel has linked up with the local art crowd to offer a view of the event from the inside – you'll be at the opening ceremony, you'll drink with the artists and you'll meet the photographer of the revolution, Roberto Salas. The nine-day trip departs on May 21 and costs £2,595pp, including breakfast and some other meals (01285 880980, steppes-travel.co.uk).

Unless stated, prices for holidays outside the UK include flights and transfers



20 ART SCHOOL IN FLORENCE

The cultural equivalent of a pub football team playing at Wembley, this one-week course takes amateur painters and sculptors to the birthplace of Renaissance art, where two alumni of the Florence Academy of Art, Frank Rekrut and Laura Thompson, will be running classes in their

studio. But there's more to the trip than the disciplines of painting and sculpting: optional activities beyond the studio include masterclasses in ceramics and paper marbling, private tours of the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno and the Vasari Corridor, a lecture on the Renaissance, followed by tea, at the British Institute, and a guided tour of the Uffizi.

You'll be staying at the charming Hotel della Signoria, a five-minute stroll from the studio and a stone's throw from the Ponte Vecchio. The courses run on March 22, October 18 and November 29, and start at £1,599pp, half-board, including tuition and excursions, but not flights (paintinginitaly.com). Fly to Pisa with easyJet, then take the train to Florence.

TRENDING The Venice Biennale

Every other year, the art world gets a beatific look on its face and says: "It's a biennale year..." I came late to this party, but am now hooked. It's the biggest assemblage of international contemporary art, in the most beautiful setting in the world. What's not to like?

Yes, Venice is crowded – this year, the biennale's start date has moved forward to May, but there will still be hordes of tourists trailing behind a guide with an umbrella aloft. The art pack will be just another tribe

jostling for space in the mad day-round *passaggiata*, although they tend to move between the Giardini (site of the national pavilions) and the Arsenale (another mini city of art shows), with side visits to some of the further-flung places where the art is setting up its stall.

The grotesquely huge superyachts of the super-rich provide another kind of sightseeing – yes, that guy under the baseball cap, surrounded by minders, really was Leonardo DiCaprio. When

it all gets too much, wind back the clock a century and visit Peggy Guggenheim's exquisite canal-side home, filled with the modern art she championed (guggenheim-venice.it). Better still, breathe in the peace of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco and see the mighty Tintoretto there (scuolagrandesanrocco.it). Even the super-rich can't buy that experience.

The Biennale is open to the public from May 9 to November 22 (labiennale.org)



HELEN HAWKINS



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22 SET-JETTING IN INDIA

Remember The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, a tale of disillusioned baby-boomers finding peace and love in a Jaipur boarding house? This March sees the release of the sequel, The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, promising much the same whimsy, but with added Richard Gere. The first hotel was played by Ravla Khempur, a converted palace on the edge of the city, and the second by the Pearl Palace Heritage guesthouse – and both are favourites of Wild Frontiers clients. It has an 11-day trip, visiting Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Pushkar and Udaipur, for £1,345pp, including all meals and guiding, but not flights (020 7736 3968, wildfrontierstravel.com). Jet Airways has returns to Delhi from £521.