

# Big Sun and

At these off-the-beaten-path winter vacation destinations, you'll find unique



View from the Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse

## WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE JUPITER, FLORIDA

Average high temperatures: upper 60s–70s in January and February; 70s in March



**DON'T LET** the lavish mansions or surrounding golf courses fool you. Jupiter, some 90 miles north of bustling Miami, is a laid-back beach town. "Until I-95 bisected Jupiter in the 1980s, it was a quaint little coastal seaside town with a freshwater river that was filled with freshwater animals like alligators and otters," says Rick Clegg, 66, a Jupiter resident since 1979. "Now it's a lot more accessible but still has a small-town feel."

Sitting at the confluence of the Intracoastal Waterway, the Atlantic Ocean and the Loxahatchee River, Jupiter begs to be explored by boat or paddleboard. Talk about serene: One 7-mile stretch of the river is off-limits to motorized craft. "You're almost

entirely in the shade of the grand cypress canopy," Clegg says. "It feels prehistoric."

But we all know that the beach is one of Florida's main draws. Jupiter has nearly 3½ miles of beaches, some ADA accessible and others dog-friendly. "At every high tide, aquamarine water floods into the Jupiter Inlet and is simply rapturous," says Clegg. While there, check out the 108-foot-tall Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse. Hardy travelers can climb to the top, but you don't have to go all the way up to appreciate the views.

When you need to dry out, catch a spring training game, starting in February 2024, at Roger Dean Chevrolet Stadium, where the St. Louis Cardinals and Miami Marlins play.

**Don't miss:** Learn about sea turtles and participate in their recovery at the nearby Loggerhead Marinelife Center in Juno Beach. It includes an outdoor "hospital," several aquariums and a beach from which healthy turtles return to the ocean.



Crowds at the Peter Anderson Arts & Crafts Festival

## A SMALL TOWN THAT'S BIG ON ART OCEAN SPRINGS, MISSISSIPPI

Average high temperatures: 50–60s in January and February; 60s in March



**THE SECRET COAST:** Even locals call it that. Mississippi's Gulf Coast is a 62-mile stretch of scenic shoreline that includes 29 miles of white sand beaches, and Ocean Springs serves as a great home base, especially if you like art. The late, famed painter Walter Inglis Anderson, a preeminent 20th-

# Small Crowds

experiences while avoiding packed beaches and overpriced hotels *By Rachel Walker*



century Southern artist, lived in Ocean Springs. See his work at the Walter Anderson Museum of Art. Walter's brother Peter was a renowned potter, and the annual Peter Anderson Arts & Crafts Festival is a major Gulf Coast event, says Anthony DiFatta, director of education at the museum. "We're like Mayberry with culture," he says.

When you're ready to enjoy the outdoors, take an 11-mile ferry trip to Ship Island in the Gulf of Mexico. Offering only day-use facilities (restrooms, showers, a pavilion and a concession stand) and no overnight resort hotels, Ship Island feels secluded, with pristine waters. Ocean Springs, by contrast, is more built up, with restaurants, boutiques and brick enclosures on the beach for bonfires. Mature oak and magnolia trees line the sidewalks of this charming town.

**Don't miss:** The legendary Ruskin Oak measures more than 28 feet in diameter and sits in a suburban lawn. To see this sprawling tree is to experience the lush landscape of the South.

## A TINY ISLAND WITH A LOW-KEY LIFESTYLE

**SABA**

*Average high temperatures:  
80s in January through March*



**THIS CARIBBEAN ISLAND**, a Dutch territory, is only 5 square miles, and **days** revolve around hiking, diving and art. "There are people who come here and after three to four days are completely bored," says local artist Anna Keene, 71. "And then other people feel like they have discovered paradise."

Though Saba's shoreline can be treacherous, a harbor provides safe haven for boats, and a breakwater at Cove Bay creates a safe ocean swimming area. But to truly appreciate Saba's pristine waters and vibrant sea life requires a boat ride into the Saba National Marine Park, which protects sea life and coral reefs. Exploration requires a guide from one of Saba's

dive shops, and divers will encounter healthier reefs than in other parts of the Caribbean, says Otto de Vries, 56, a scuba instructor.

There is one other way that Saba is different: The island—an active volcano—has no groundwater source, requiring locals to collect rainfall and desalinate seawater. "We don't take long showers or luxurious baths on Saba," Keene says. "Travelers should know that in advance."

**Don't miss:** Dive spot Man O'War Shoals stands out for its vibrant sea life: sponges, black coral and lobsters.



Hiking Saba's tropical trails



Tasting wines at the Torre di Pietra Winery in central Texas

## WINE ON THE RANGE

### FREDERICKSBURG, TEXAS

Average high temperatures: upper 50s and 60s in January and February; 60s in March



**FRANCE HAS** the lavender fields of Provence. Texas has the wildflower meadows of Hill Country.

Spanning about 25 counties near the geographical center of Texas, Hill Country is a rolling, geographically complex region. At its heart is the small city of Fredericksburg, famous for its German heritage as well as its vineyards.

Susan Johnson, 68, is quite familiar with Fredericksburg's charms, having lived here since 2002. About a decade ago, after she retired from a corporate career, curiosity led her to plant some tempranillo vines and try to grow grapes. Now Johnson works seven days a week running Texas Heritage Vineyard and Winery. It's one of the region's more than 50 wineries, many of which have tasting rooms and are stops on local winery tours—reservations required.

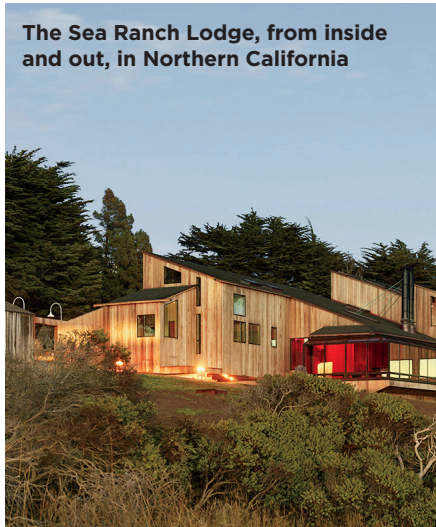
Although the limestone-rich soils can grow a range of varieties, Mediterranean species thrive in the strong Texas heat and the area's alkaline dirt. "We have to educate our customers because our wines aren't always the most well known," she says. "They're not the traditional cabernet, merlot or chardonnay. But

the wines themselves are delightful." Many of the wineries consider themselves "small batch," meaning they do not distribute through a wine broker and instead sell their libations directly to customers, bars and restaurants.

On that local dining scene, plenty of restaurants host live music at least once a week, which means that "a person can see bands and hear live music any night," Johnson says. After a few days of eating good food and drinking nice wine, move your body up nearby Enchanted Rock, a 1.6-mile out-and-back hike with about 435 feet of elevation gain. "It's absolutely beautiful there," Johnson says.

**Don't miss:** Fredericksburg is also home to the National Museum of the Pacific War, which houses World War II artifacts and pays homage to the life and career of local native Adm. Chester W. Nimitz.

The Sea Ranch Lodge, from inside and out, in Northern California



## ARCHITECTURE AND NATURE, WORKING TOGETHER

### SEA RANCH, CALIFORNIA

Average high temperatures: mid-50s in January; 60s in February and March



#### PLANNED COMMUNITIES

might not seem like tourist destinations. Then there's this oceanfront retreat, contained within a 10-mile stretch of magnificent coastline and intended as a second-home community for San Francisco residents in the 1960s.

The architects set out to build homes, a lodge and other community buildings that worked well with the landscape, says Donlyn Lyndon, 87, one of those architects and now a full-time resident. Design features that were innovative at the time include sloped roofs that work with the wind coming off the Pacific. Half of the 7,000-acre area was preserved as a commons, and hiking trails proliferate. "From the beginning it was very clear that there would be trails that would let you see the landscape without intruding into it," Lyndon says.

Today Sea Ranch draws visitors from around the world. In addition to hiking and eating, whale watching is a popular pastime, as is seeing the harbor seals in the rookery.

**Don't miss:** The Sea Ranch Chapel enlivens the senses with its stone floor, redwood interiors and colorful stained-glass windows.



# Less-Traveled Europe

Winter trips across the Atlantic often lead you to holiday markets, skiing and taking in the northern lights on the continent's upper reaches. But travelers looking for warmer weather and uncrowded escapes can find those too. Be sure to pack a sweater, though; in southern Europe, even mild climates can have a chilly day. *By Rachel Walker*



The Gilão River flows through Tavira along Portugal's rustic Algarve Coast.

## TAVIRA, PORTUGAL Beauty by the River

**THE ALGARVE** Coast in southern Portugal is known for its rugged coastline where massive cliffs drop into the warm Atlantic and white sandy beaches slip into aquamarine waters. The riverfront town of Tavira, about 16 miles from the Spanish border, is the ideal base camp for a winter vacation to this area because of its historical sites, gorgeous beaches and strategic location, says Betsy Ball, 60, cofounder and partner of Euro Travel Coach. "Plus, it's one of the prettiest towns in the Algarve." A critical port in ancient times, Tavira is renowned for Moorish architecture and cultural sites, including the still-intact, seven-arch Roman Bridge that spans the Gilão River. The small city also boasts

more than 30 churches, castle ruins, cobblestone streets and a picturesque old town. Hiking trails lead through forests and coastal routes. "The winter weather is really comfortable for hiking," Ball says.

Beyond Tavira, travelers will discover small beachside towns, islands accessible by ferries and superlative seafood, Ball notes. Because the majority of the Algarve's visitors come in the summer, winter travelers will have fewer hotel and restaurant options, but those that are open year-round are frequented by locals. "Portugal is absolutely wonderful for hospitality," Ball says. "The people are unique and friendly, and they love to share their culture."



Soft sandy beaches on the Atlantic



## JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA, SPAIN

### The Spot for Sherry

**ALSO KNOWN** simply as Jerez, this is Spain's sherry capital and a foodie's delight. "I didn't like sherry until I visited this area, and I left a convert," Ball says. Sherry is a Spanish fortified white wine, and it hails from this area of Spain ("sherry" derives from the English rendition of "Jerez"). Travelers can visit production sites and partake in sherry tastings. Jerez is equally famous

for its thriving flamenco tradition, centered on traditional Spanish music and dance; the town's winter flamenco festival offers two weeks of performances and classes. Jerez is also home to the Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art Foundation, a world-renowned horsemanship center.

Beyond the city's borders is Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park, known for its expansive mountain views and abundant hiking trails. Venture farther to visit several other "white hill towns," named for the white painted buildings designed to stay cooler in the scorching summer. "This is the part of the Andalusia region



where you can immerse yourself in the culture and visit places with more of an authentic, local feel," Ball says. "You could spend months here and still not see it all."



Bountiful food at an open market in Uzès; below, a nearly intact Roman aqueduct



## UZÈS, FRANCE First-Century Charm

**SOUTHERN FRANCE** is awash in olive groves, lavender fields and medieval towns. Add in the mild Mediterranean climate, and Provence—the coastal southeast region of France—is an ideal warm-weather destination. Uzès is a charming town northwest of Marseille but without that city’s hustle or the crowds. “The French do food and wine so well, and Uzès is no exception,” Ball says. Artisanal markets feature fresh vegetable and fruit sellers, cheesemongers and more. Narrow,

cobblestone streets and winding roads date back to the Roman occupation in the first century. Renowned for its preserved ancient monuments, architecture and art, Uzès was also the origination point of the Eure Valley’s 52-kilometer Roman aqueduct that ferried water from Uzès to Nîmes; visitors can marvel at the engineering prowess at the Pont du Gard, aqueduct ruins that transferred water for five centuries. While there, explore other nearby towns, including Nîmes, famous for its Roman amphitheater. Adventurous travelers might opt to cycle, as the picturesque roads are conducive to cycling year-round. And you need not worry about being fit enough to pedal. “Electric bikes are quite popular there,” Ball says, “which make the travel and the hills relatively easy.”

## OPATIJA, CROATIA A Playground of the Past

**THIS TOWN ON** the Adriatic Sea has drawn Europeans for its healthy air and waters for more than a century, says Wanda S. Radetti, founder of [visitcroatia.com](http://visitcroatia.com). “It was the playground for Europe before the French Riviera became so popu-

lar.” Stroll the Lungomare, a roughly 7-mile promenade connecting Opatija with other coastal fishing villages. Completed in 1911, the Lungomare represents Opatija’s renown as a late-19th-century retreat as it traverses lush groves of holm oaks and laurel. Throughout the year, the oils from magnolia and laurel trees perfume the air, says Radetti. Croatian pastry shops abound, and in the winter, oysters are a local specialty. In addition to the natural and man-made beauty, winter visitors to Opatija—and Croatia in general—will be astonished by the light reflecting off the water and cliffs. “We call it ‘illumination,’ and it is absolutely beautiful,” Radetti says. Although Croatia has seen an uptick in tourism in recent years, the numbers still lag behind other European destinations, which means that winter visitors will have ample opportunity to experience authentic Croatian hospitality.

Boats line a pier in Opatija along the Adriatic Sea.



### Before Traveling to Europe ...

→ **Complete your passport renewal early.** The rule of thumb is to renew if it’s set to expire less than six months *after* the return date of your trip, according to travel agents Mike Salvadore and Connie Antinopoulos. Allow about three months for the renewal process. For an additional \$60, you can choose expedited service; that’ll trim about a month.

→ **Apply for a travel authorization.** Starting in 2024, this will be required for Americans traveling to Europe. Tourists can apply for the \$8 authorization online through the

European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS). Authorization is valid for up to three years.

→ **Get your cards ready.** If you haven’t yet, upgrade your credit cards so you can pay via tapping; much of Europe has embraced cashless, no-touch transactions. When using a card, always pay in the local currency; that will get you the most favorable exchange rate. Do carry some euros for smaller transactions, like at street markets.

→ **English is widely spoken in Europe,** but you might want to download a translation app on your phone just in case. Practice using it before traveling so that you feel comfortable using it on the go. —Julie Goldenberg

The road into Jerome, where artists and locals have brought a mining town back to life



## HISTORY AND HIPPIES IN THE DESERT

JEROME, ARIZONA

Average high temperatures: 50s in January and February; low 60s in March



**IN ITS HEYDAY** as the home of one of the world's most lucrative copper mines, Jerome had a population of roughly 15,000 people.

But plummeting copper prices in the 1950s decimated the town, shrinking the population to around 50.

Jerome might well have disintegrated into Arizona's high desert landscape if not for resourceful renegades who made their way here in the 1960s and found an inexpensive refuge, says Judy Jaaskelainen, 78, a member of the Jerome Artists' Cooperative Gallery. "That's when the hippies and artists came in," she says. "Artists are not generally wealthy, but they are innovative."

These new residents found beauty and opportunity in the historic buildings, says artist Marjorie Claus, 76, also part of the Jerome Artists' Cooperative Gallery. "They're the business-people of today," she says, "contributing to the community and making a tight-knit place." The buildings are fixed up now, as Jerome's population has swelled—to about 500 residents.

Travelers can sate their thirst and hunger at saloons and restaurants located in the same places where miners drank and dined a hundred years

ago. From the hillside town's perch at an elevation of about 5,200 feet, visitors can find unimpeded views of the nearby Verde Valley and, farther north, the San Francisco peaks, Claus says. In 1966, Jerome was designated a National Historic Landmark District, which limits new development and retains its charm. "There are no gas stations in town, no Walmart," Claus says. "Jerome is small, and it will always be small. But there is still so much here to explore."

**Don't miss:** In a town as historically rich as Jerome, it's worth taking a tour to understand the storied past. Jerome Ghost Tours may not uncover actual ghosts, but they will deliver an extensive and entertaining history of the town and area.



## COWBOYS IN PARADISE

WAIMEA (ALSO CALLED KAMUELA), HAWAII

Average high temperatures: 50s in January through March

**SOME 40 MILES** northeast of the famed beaches of Kona on Hawai'i's Big Island is a picturesque ranch town where rolling hills nestle between two volcanoes. Renowned for clean mountain air, cool temperatures and lush forests, Waimea (pronounced WHY-may-uh) is "the most beautiful place on earth," says native artisan Micah Kamohoalii.

It's also the heart of Hawai'i's paniolo, or cowboy, culture and home to the state's largest working ranch. Waimea is a quiet and peaceful refuge, ideal for travelers who want to experience authentic Hawaiian culture, says Neil "Dutch" Kuyper, 56, president and CEO of the Parker Ranch. "If you need Bloomingdale's and Nordstrom, Neiman Marcus and Whole Foods, this is not the town for you," Kuyper says. "But if you want a couple of farmers markets where you can get good groceries, and you appreciate a good view, it's perfect."

Waimea also serves as a home base to explore the island's storied beaches without paying premium prices at oceanfront resorts.

**Don't miss:** At the Paniolo Preservation Society, visitors learn how the first cattle were gifted to Hawai'i in 1793 and how Mexican vaqueros mentored Hawaiians on ranching. ■

Rachel Walker has written about travel for *Outside* and *Sierra* magazines.

Sunset along the Pacific, west of Waimea; in the hills nearer to town, ranches prevail.

