

The Telegraph

The winter-sun paradises still waiting to be discovered

These obscure but beautiful long-haul options are ready to hit the mainstream. Head there now before the masses catch on

By Sarah Marshall

20 September 2023 • 1:00pm

A few years ago, a bored hotel manager invited me to join him in a conspiratorial game designed to while away dull hosted dinners with guests. The aim was to identify as many instances of one-upmanship as possible; those cringey moments when travellers attempt to trump one another by casually dropping – often unnecessarily – obscure destinations into conversation.

One guest: “This scarf? Oh, I bought that from a yak herder in the high Himalaya of Bhutan.”

Another: “Yes, we’ve been there but I much prefer the light at 4,500 metres in the Bolivian altiplano.”

And so it went on.

To be honest, we’re all guilty of gloating about the unusual places we’ve visited. An expedition to [Guinea-Bissau’s Bissagos Islands](#) sounds far more interesting than a week in [Corfu](#), after all.

Fortuitously, as Europe [snuggles into cooler temperatures](#), many exciting long-haul destinations are blossoming, with warm weather making them contenders for proper sun-soaked escapes. More than making memories, holidays are about the stories you bring home – and these winter-sun destinations will no doubt generate a few.

Sian Ka’an, Mexico

Thick jungle and Mayan ruins run along the Yucatan Peninsula, making beaches feel more like castaway escapes. Once a bohemian enclave, Tulum has been taken over by luxury resorts, but a little further south is a spot that remains blissfully untouched.

Meaning ‘where the sky is born’ in the Mayan language, the Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve is the largest protected area on Mexico’s Caribbean coast. A mix of tropical forest, savannahs, blue lagoons, mangroves and coral reefs, it’s also a place to find petenes (tree islands in swamps) and cenotes (freshwater sinkholes).



Just south of Tulum, Sian Ka'an remains blissfully untouched | CREDIT: Alamy

Opened at the beginning of this year, beachfront Casa Chablé is the only hotel inside the reserve. Kayak or paddle board in search of turtles and dolphins and take a boat tour along an ancient Mayan canal system packed with manatees.

A nine-day trip twinned with Chablé Maroma on the Riviera Maya costs from £5,928pp, including excursions and flights (020 87478315; journeylatinamerica.com).