10 holidays in Europe for people who hate the heat

As the second heatwave of the summer hits parts of Britain, our expert selects where to go if you'd rather stay cool instead

Sophie Butler
Destination expert

Sophie Butler is a specialist in travel consumer affairs, and started her career working for The Consumers' Association's Holiday Which? Magazine (now Which? Travel).
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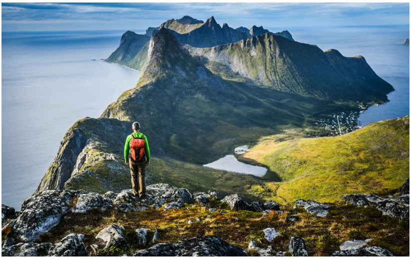

Senja is perfect for hiking in the summer with temperatures averaging around 15C

The traditional sun-soaked summer getaway is losing its shine – a trend has gained momentum in response to the heatwaves that have gripped large parts of the UK and Europe in summer in recent years. Sizzling sights and sun-baked beaches may be fine for those who like their holidays hot, but many are opting to seek out a less sweltering corner of the continent.

Predictions for this year's peak months, taking into account this weather pattern combined with the potential effects of the developing El Niño, is that periods of intense heat are likely to sweep southern Europe and the Med once again.

So where to go when planning your summer holiday? The obvious answer is to head north to explore the scenic shores and lakes of Scandinavia, the glacial landscapes of Iceland or the intriguing Baltic cities. The alternative is to head high, perhaps to the Spanish Picos or the French Alps, where there'll be plenty of high-altitude sunshine but none of the enervating heat and humidity.

Whether you are looking for an active, cultural or fly-and-flop break, here's a selection of 10 great ways to avoid the worst of the heat in Europe and at home.

The French Alps

Best for outdoor activities

Ski resorts turn into adventure playgrounds in summer, complete with kayaking, hiking and swimming Credit: iStockphoto

Lifts serving the Grande Motte Glacier, which rises to a lofty 11,995ft above the mountain resort of Tignes, stay open for summer skiing until July 20. Lower down, in the resort, peak temperatures hover at around 17C and among the cooling activities are kayaking, paddleboarding and visits to the Acroland waterpark (reopening June 27), where adults and children aged 10 years and over can plunge down slides into the icy lake water below.

How to do it: Peak Retreats offers a seven-night stay in Le Nevada, Tignes Val Claret, from £212 per person, self-catering, based on four staying in a two-bedroom apartment, including ferry crossing for car and passengers. Departures between June and August 2026.

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Denmark

Best for cycling

A summer cycling holiday in Denmark takes in Copenhagen, Roskilde and quiet sandy beaches Credit: Alexander Spatari/Getty Images

Zealand, Denmark's largest island, offers peaceful backroads and uncrowded cycle paths, long hours of daylight and gentle sunshine. Relaxing itineraries loop through shady woodland, past sandy beaches and scenic fjords, and through small fishing villages, with a foray into the coastal city of Roskilde.

How to do it: Freedom Treks offers a seven-night, self-guided Zealand Bike Tour from £960, including luggage transfer, maps and route information. Excludes bike hire (£92 for a hybrid with pannier; £219 for an e-bike), flights to Copenhagen and rail transfers. Departs weekly from mid-May to mid-September 2026.

Normandy

Best for being by the seaside

Visiting Mont-Saint-Michel is a highlight on a holiday in Normandy Credit: Westend61/Getty Images

The Côte d'Azur can see summer temperatures nudge 30C or more in July and August, but northern France enjoys a more temperate 20-22C. Hop across the Channel to stay near the sandy beaches of Normandy, with the chance to tour the wartime sights, sample the seafood and explore the rocky island of Mont-Saint-Michel.

How to do it: Brittany Ferries offers summer stays at four-star Hotel Thalazur Ouistreham, on the D-Day Landing Beach of Sword in Ouistreham, from £801, self-drive, excluding return Portsmouth to Caen ferry crossing.

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The perfect holiday in Normandy

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Finland

Best for family adventure

Temperatures at Finland's lakeside resorts reach 21C Credit: Javier Guevara /Getty Images

The lakes, rivers and forests of eastern Finland offer a vast playground for active families who want a sunny outdoor holiday without excessive heat. Temperatures rise to a pleasant 21C in child-friendly lakeside resorts, which lie within a two-hour drive of Helsinki and offer canoeing, swimming, paddleboarding, fishing and local trails.

How to do it: Discover the World offers a five-night Taste of Finnish Lakeland from £454 per person, including accommodation and car rental. Excludes flights to Helsinki. Departures from May until September 2026.

The Spanish Picos

Best for mountains

Well-marked paths and cool temperatures make the Picos de Europa a dream to explore in summer Credit: JLGutierrez/Getty Images

While temperatures sizzle in the Costas, the mountainous areas near the Cantabrian coast of northern Spain offer a welcome refuge from the summer heat. The Picos de Europa are best explored on foot with a network of well-marked paths through peaceful rural backwaters, the medieval town of Potes and the bucolic Valdeón valley.

How to do it: Pura Aventura offers an eight-night, self-guided Rural Life and Mountain Hikes tour from £1,750, including four lunches, six dinners and luggage transfers. Excludes travel to Bilbao. Departures May to October 2026 (excludes August).

Svalbard

Best for wildlife-watching

Temperatures barely top 7C in the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard Credit: Pam Susemiehl/Getty Images

In the northern Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard, temperatures barely reach 7C in July and August and nights can dip to 2C. These islands are home to walruses, whales and polar bears, which gather in the fjords near the capital Longyearbyen. Try dog-sledding on wheels for views of the glacier at Nordenskiöldbreen.

How to do it: Regent Holidays offers a five-night Svalbard Summer Break from £1,895, including four excursions. Departures throughout June and August 2026.

Iceland

Best for spectacular landscapes

Long summer days make July and August ideal months for exploring Iceland Credit: Paul Biris/Getty Images

Iceland's summer season is as short as it is cool. July and August see temperatures barely reaching 13C, but the long days (up to 20 hours of daylight), make this an ideal season to explore its unique inland and coastal scenery. From spectacular waterfalls to spouting geysers and from black-sand beaches to naturally heated lagoons, it's the perfect antidote to the muggy Mediterranean.

How to do it: Trailfinders offers a seven-night Southern Iceland's Geysers, Glaciers and Waterfalls package from £1,119, including car hire and entrance to the Blue Lagoon.

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The Baltics

Best for cruising

Swap the sultry Med for a Baltic Sea cruise that stops in Riga, Copenhagen and more Credit: mrs/Getty Images

A Baltic Sea cruise is a great alternative to the sultry Mediterranean in the summer months, and although you can expect plenty of sunny days, you may also need to pack a jumper for cooler days. Highlights include shore excursions to see the mix of medieval and modern architecture in the region's cities, and the variety of coastal scenery.

How to do it: MSC Cruises offers a seven-night Baltics and Scandinavia Cruise on MSC Magnifica, from £1,052, full board, including children's clubs, on-board entertainment and excursions to the Latvian capital of Riga, Stockholm and Copenhagen, based on an interior cabin. Excludes flights to Hamburg and transfers to the embarkation point at Warnemünde. Departs July 19, 2026.

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Switzerland

Best for a group tour

Spring comes late to the Upper Engadine Valley in Switzerland, meaning you can still expect to see flowers at their best Credit: ChrisRinckes/Getty Images

Snow-covered peaks and glaciers, which circle the Upper Engadine Valley in south-east Switzerland, provide an alluring backdrop to bucolic mountain pastures and larch woodlands, where mild conditions are ideal for a huge variety of alpine flowers. Spring comes late to this region and in July you can still expect to see orchids, primroses, glacier jasmine and foxgloves at their best.

How to do it: Naturetrek offers a seven-night Switzerland – Alpine Flowers of the Upper Engadine tour from £2,795, full board, departing July 1 and 8, 2026.

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Senja

Best for hiking

Temperatures in Senja hover around 15C in summer Credit: iStockphoto

The clear, azure-blue seawater and sandy beaches on this far-flung Norwegian island may look reminiscent of the Caribbean, but the temperatures are quite a contrast. Averaging around 15C in summer, its scenic landscapes of moorland and mountains offer a range of spectacular walking terrain, with comfortable accommodation in small fishing villages and long hours of daylight.

How to do it: Inntravel offers a seven-night Hike Senja – An Arctic Island from £2,378, half board, including car hire and walking notes. Excludes flights. Departures from May to September 2026.

Prices quoted are per person, based on a seven-night stay including breakfast, transfers and flights, unless otherwise stated, and are subject to availability.

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This story was first published in July 2025 and has been revised and updated.

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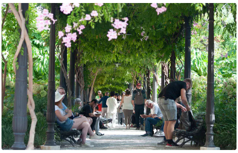

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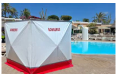

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