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Travel is Great Relief from Holiday Stress



The warm and sunny Caribbean is the destination of choice for many travelers in the winter months, particularly just after Christmas.

By Christine Smith

The trees are bare, the weather is turning colder, stores are festively decorated, and pumpkin spice lattes are back in the coffee shops. The holidays are definitely in full swing.

Among the shopping, the baking, the holiday parties and kids no longer occupied by the daily routine of school, the need for a relaxing escape becomes pressing, almost startling in its necessity. It is in the midst of

the holiday strains that, at the height of frenzy, thoughts of escaping it all come to the forefront.

But where to go for said escape? That is the best question of all! The options are

boundless and varied, but there are options that are particularly appealing at Christmas. It all depends on the experience you seek and the environment that meets your needs. Let us explore a bit, shall we?

The warm and sunny Caribbean, with its promise of fair weather, tropical landscapes and carefree experience, is the destination of choice for many travelers in the winter months, particularly just after Christmas. Families enjoy the gaiety of the holidays and all the joyful aspects that pertain thereto, but immediately depart for another happy place right after the big day, skipping the somewhat depressing aftereffects. While others are schlepping boxes of Christmas ornaments back to the basement or standing in long lines to return

merchandise at the mall, the escapees are lounging on pristine beaches, fruity drinks in hand, watching the waves roll in and getting their winter tan on.

Exotic locations with names like St. Vincent, Antigua, St. Lucia and Grenada seem to call to you, promising a warm deliverance from the cold grip of winter and the daily grind. Sailing through a jungle canopy on a zip line, rafting down a mountain stream, snorkeling a brilliantly colored coral reef, or basking in the sun by a pool – that could be you!

Or maybe you prefer to spend your winter days sailing smoothly down steep slopes on fresh, powdery snow rather than slathering on sunscreen from head to toe. Instead of lazily watching waves roll in, you

could be enjoying the crisp fresh air from the peaks with only the sound of the wind for company, curling up with hot chocolate by the fire with family and friends in the evenings. If you love to ski, nothing sounds better than pulling down your goggles, snapping in and heading for the lift lines for a full day on the slopes.

There are some joys that can only be experienced on a ski vacation—shouting to friends from your seat on the lift as they rush beneath you down the hill, taking that jump you’ve been eyeing for years after finally working up your nerve, and laughing around the fire at night about embarrassing falls and near-misses. As you finally succumb to swapping out your “fun” summer clothes for the “boring” winter



One of the most popular river cruises is on the Rhine River from Cologne to Basel. Each town along the way hosts a menagerie of stalls in its town square, all strung with brightly colored lights and decorations.



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If you love to ski, nothing sounds better than pulling down your goggles, snapping in and heading for the lift lines for a full day on the slopes.

ones, irritably shoving bulky coats into their proper place, you notice that the lift ticket from your last ski trip still hangs on the zipper pull of your warmest coat, left there as a fond memory. Instead of giving in to nostalgic wishful thinking, be proactive and start making plans to put a new lift ticket on that zipper!

Perhaps you don't fit neatly into either beach or ski category...and that's okay! Is your interest piqued by the thought of visiting historic sites, delving into other cultures, and sharing holiday joy with new friends in a totally new environment? At the top of the holiday travel trend today are river cruises that sail a specific itinerary to take advantage of holiday markets in Europe. The most popular sail the Rhine River from Cologne to Basel, venturing through western Germany and touching borders with France and Switzerland. This is castle country, and it is home to the most

festive markets in Europe. Each town along the way hosts a menagerie of stalls in its town square, all strung with brightly colored lights and decorations. The action really begins as the sun goes down, when locals leave work for the night and join their friends in the square. Walk the ancient cobble streets, a steaming mug of Gluhwein in your hand, and search for treasures for your loved ones amid the open-air stalls.

The popular ports of Rudesheim, Heidelberg and Strasbourg are well-known for their fine handcrafts, festive atmosphere and friendly locals. But don't be fooled – these river cruises are multi-faceted. Not only will you visit the festive markets and enjoy the holiday cheer, you'll also enjoy the rich history and culture of the region via optional tours in each port. Knowledgeable guides provide insight into each unique destination, making the experience personal and educational. Best of all, numer-

ous destinations can be explored in comfort, without the necessity of hauling your luggage from place to place and bothering with transportation services and expenses. Rather, your "hotel" moves with you as you sail downriver, always providing a place of rest and relaxation when it's needed most.

Ready to book tickets and head for the airport right away? Not so fast... Though these options sound appealing, there is a certain strategy that must be employed. There can be no harried last-minute bookings for this kind of travel. In order to join the privileged few without cashing in your 401(k), you've got to plan ahead of the crowd.

In order to secure your little piece of heaven, wherever it may be, during the holiday season, you need to plan months ahead. Many destinations sell out completely for the holiday season within the first quarter of every year, so confirming

reservations in January or February is highly recommended. And what better time to plan your next getaway than when you're experiencing the bleakness of winter? As an avid traveler, I can tell you that the best remedy for the after-vacation blues is to begin planning your next trip.

In addition to securing the perfect destination and experience by booking early, you'll also get the very best pricing. The idea of getting "last-minute deals" on travel is largely a myth, and this is never more true than when planning holiday travel. Once your plans are in place, you can actually look forward to the holiday season. You'll still have to live through the mania that ensues between Thanksgiving and Christmas, but there will be a beacon of hope on the horizon, shining just for you!



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