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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Places

Value For Money Awards 2015!

The votes have been counted, the red carpet rolled out, and the world's best-value hotspots are now waiting anxiously in the wings. It's the Oscars of tour ops, the Emmys of airlines, the BAFTAs of B&Bs...

Kate Leahy

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This is just a taster. Read more from the Value For Money Awards in this month's issue of The Sunday Times Travel Magazine on sale now

Best-value European country

Winner: Spain

The Brit favourite for beaches and bites is still on top, where 'the cost of living stays low, even if you're treating yourself to outrageous food and seaside digs', always leaving our panel 'taken aback by how far your euro goes'. And it's far from a one-trip pony, thanks to the sheer range of regions. 'There's still more to discover,' says one devotee. 'Tapas bars on the outskirts of Madrid and beach shacks along the coast from Almeria are some of my favourite recent finds.' With 'endless beaches', 'months and months of sun to escape to every year', plus 'rich history and fast-paced cities', it's no wonder we're cheering 'Viva España!'

Runners-up

Poland is a favourite, not only because 'you get a lot for your zloty' — top-end hotel rooms can be yours for just £40 a night — but also for its 'hugely underrated food, transport and sights'. Fill up on delicious pierogi at Kraków's no-nonsense 'milk bars', such as Polakowski (polakowski.com.pl), where locals 'crowd around communal tables for £2 bellyfuls of steaming soup and dumplings'.

Portugal attracts value-for-money fans, particularly the Algarve and Lisbon ('every bit as good-looking as Barcelona, for less'). Its secret? 'Its lack of glam reputation works in its favour and keeps prices down.'

This year's newcomer is the 'insanely overlooked' Slovenia, with 'all the scenery, sunshine and skiing of Switzerland, minus the price tag'.

Wild card

Forget Croatia and its pricey tourist traps — you want Montenegro. ‘You’re getting Grade A seaside, Medieval walled villages, dramatic fjords and decent skiing — but not paying half as much for it.’

Word on the tweet

‘Ex-Communist central and eastern Europe is still good value. The same fabulous European culture and architecture, at much lower prices.’ @aerohaveno

Rip-off alert

‘Mobile-roaming charges are a nasty little surprise at the end of an already expensive trip. Spare 10 minutes before you go to do some research and buy a data ‘bundle’.

Best-value short-haul airline

Winner: British Airways

Timing is everything for BA (ba.com; fares from £36, one way), whose ‘flights seem to be at way more civilised times’ than its no-frills neighbours — which ‘makes all the difference’. ‘Surprisingly low returns’ within Europe can be snapped up online, and our short-haul scouts say they’re ‘always impressed’ with both service and punctuality.

Runners-up

EasyJet (easyjet.com; fares from £21 one way) is in hot pursuit of BA, with lots of love for its ‘efficient check-in, staff and overall experience without breaking the bank’.

Norwegian (norwegian.com; London-Barcelona fares from £30 one way) delights with its ‘amazingly cheap fares (even in high season), as well as free wi-fi on board, great service and few extra charges’.

Wild card

Stop the presses: we’re coming around to Ryanair (ryanair.com; fares from £20 one way). ‘Everyone moans, but the new cabin-baggage allowance gives it one big advantage over EasyJet (you’re now allowed a small bag and a bigger bag),’ points out one fan. Another feels it has ‘genuinely cleaned up its act, with good service, free assigned seats and a good mobile app’.

Word on the tweet

‘Turkish Airlines has the edge for great prices, service and reliability.’ @blossomxcat

Rip-off alert

‘Checking-in charges on Jet2 — they even charge for online check-in...’

Best-value UK hotel

Winner: The Pig, near Bath

This little piggy (thepighotel.com; doubles from £149, room only) seems almost universally loved. Our experts cooed over all four Pig properties, including Dorset’s Pig on the Beach (‘exactly what you want from a sexy, stylish seaside hotel’), but this cosy nest in the Mendip Hills has ‘amazing quality and style, given the price’ — and you’re more likely to get a room there than at the Dorset porker, which books up months ahead.

Runners-up

Glasgow’s Z Hotel (thezhotels.com; doubles from £70, room only) racks up points for its ‘super-friendly, very

Glaswegian welcome', 'views of George Square' and 'gorgeous breakfast, with bacon rolls cooked to order'.

Country pile Llangoed Hall (llangoedhall.co.uk; doubles from £99, B&B), in Brecon, is on to a winner with its 'spot-on service', 'stunning scenery' and 'lounges, billiards rooms and garden terraces that mean it's easy to find a private nook'.

Hotel du Vin (hotelduvin.com; doubles from £145, B&B), a former sugar factory in Bristol, has 'quality rooms, generous amenities' and a location near the city centre. 'We paid just £120 for a generous double last summer,' reveals one panel fan.

Wild card

Mhor84 (mhor.net; doubles from £80, room only). This Stirlingshire hideaway 'buzzes with the charismatic owner/chef's madcap energy, mismatched furniture and a restaurant with a huge central table, piled with locals and holidaymakers'.

Word on the tweet

'The Talbot Inn, Mells, Somerset (talbotinn.com; doubles from £95, B&B). One low price all-year-round — and a country pub on tap. Fab.' @phileastend

Rip-off alert

'Entry to Edinburgh Castle — £16 is just insane.'

This article is a taster from [The Sunday Times Travel Magazine](#), the glossy monthly sold separately from your Sunday Times subscription. To read more from the magazine, buy it at newsagents and supermarkets (priced £3.90) or [subscribe here](#)

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