

6 *of the best...* BARGAIN BREAKS

WORRIED HOW YOU'LL AFFORD A GREAT HOLIDAY THIS YEAR ON A SMALL BUDGET? YVONNE GORDON FINDS SIX BARGAIN-BUSTING WAYS TO HOLIDAY WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK



01

CAMPING IN FRANCE

Camping or caravanning is another way to save money on a holiday. Camping specialists such as Canvas Holidays offer family camping holidays in well-equipped campsites in France, Italy, Spain, Croatia, Austria, Switzerland, Holland and Germany and you can choose to camp or stay in a mobile home. There are often many free activities included in the price and many campsites have swimming pools, tennis courts and free children's' clubs. In addition, Canvas Holidays have special family-extra campsites which offer a huge range of free activities like canoeing and snorkelling, games, parties, picnics – and parents can also take part as well. Check camping websites for special offers. Canvas has regular special offers such as 'book one holiday, enjoy a second holiday half price', and families who book together each get an additional discount. In addition, customers who book a second and third holiday with Canvas can avail of a loyalty bonus. France has always been a popular destination for campers from Ireland and the French Holiday Centre also runs a range of special offers for camping holidays from Ireland. Keep an eye on the car ferry websites for special seasonal offers too.

Find out more: Check out campsites from Canvas Holidays (canvasholidays.ie) or call 01 2421901 or The French Holiday Centre (frenchholidaycentre.ie).

02

LAST-MINUTE HOLIDAYS

Whether it's a beach or ski holiday you're after, going the last-minute route can sometimes offer huge discounts, especially if you're flexible with dates. You could get a family holiday cheaper than the brochure price, and you can usually book right up until the day before departure. However leaving it until the last minute can have risks. If you have your heart set on a certain destination or have a large family, booking in advance might be a better and cheaper option. Most of the tour operators have early New Year sales for winter sun each year so it can pay to plan ahead. Tour operators encourage early booking by offering free extras with the first few bookings. Also with late bookings, if you have to buy your own flights, last minute ones can work out much more expensive. If you do decide to go the last-minute route, don't be too fussy about the exact location or accommodation type you want as you may not get it. Also, the tour operators still have reduced capacity so there may not be as many unsold seats as say two years ago. However if you do decide on a last minute break, as well as a huge saving you might get a nice surprise – and hey, your holiday adventure starts at home with the booking.

Find out more: Websites such as lastminute.ie have everything from city breaks to last minute flights, hotels, and holidays. Tour operators like Falcon Holidays (falconholidays.ie) and Sunway (sunway.ie) both offer last minute deals, keep an eye on their websites or press adverts.



03

SELF-CATERING BREAK

Self-catering can work out more cost effective than staying in a hotel, especially for large numbers – you can divide the cost of the property between the number of people staying, so it is perfect for a family or small group. You also save money on meals and other expenses and you have more privacy and independence than in a hotel or guesthouse. Irish company Holiday Homes Direct has a selection of every type of holiday property from apartments to cottages and villas, all around the world. If you're after an unusual self-catering property, current listings include a barn in Cornwall, a boat in Italy and a lighthouse in Cork. Because you deal directly with the owner of the holiday home you are booking, it's sometimes possible to negotiate on the price, especially for last minute deals or a longer stay. If you decide to stay in Ireland and choose self-catering, there can be both cost and time benefits too. You don't have to pay for flights and you can fill the car up without worrying about baggage charges or car hire. Irish Cottage Holiday Homes list over 300 cottages to rent around Ireland and there are often great special offers available. If you want to save money on self-catering, avoid peak season – July and August in Ireland. If you choose less popular times, or even shoulder season (May and June) you can make huge savings – a cottage that costs €700 or €800 in peak season can cost as little as €250 to rent off-season.

Find out more: Browse through the holiday properties online for Holiday Homes Direct (holidayhomesdirect.ie) or Irish Cottage Holiday Homes (irishcottageholidays.com).



02



04

SHARE A VILLA

Staying in a large villa can have huge advantages – you have lots of space, you can be independent and most villas have their own pool. By renting a villa, you have the place to yourself rather than having to fight the crowds for a sun lounger and they can suit large groups travelling together. However as villas can be expensive to rent, many families and friends are now choosing to share villas rather than booking separate apartments for holidays. You still have your own room and privacy but share the spacious communal areas and the cooking and more importantly, you can share the cost. Many villas sleep between 8 and 12 guests so can work out more cost effective when full. If you don't quite want to rent a villa independently, tour operators such as Falcon Holidays offer a small selection of villas and can arrange car hire (most of their villas include it), a welcome food pack or a baby-equipment pack with essentials like a highchair and buggy, and there are reps on hand to help with queries. You can also go direct to rent your own villa. There are a lot of international villa specialists such as James Villas which has over 50 destinations, and each country will also have their own villa experts – check with the local tourist office in the region you'd like to visit. Before booking, shop around and check out things like transport links, proximity to local shops and facilities like bars and restaurants, before you go so that you know what to bring.

Find out more: For private villa rentals, check out HolidayHomes Direct (holidayhomesdirect.ie) or specialists such as James Villas (jamesvillas.com) and privatevillas.ie. Falcon Holidays has a small selection of villas, see falconholidays.ie.



05

HOTEL SPECIAL OFFERS

Live like a king – but without the price tag. It has been hard not to notice some of the great hotel offers for Ireland advertised in recent months. At the time of writing, castle hotels such as Dromoland Castle and Ashford Castle were offering deals of €97.50 per person sharing per night, with an option of a third night free for those who stay two nights (Dromoland would normally cost €250pps). In Dublin, D4Hotels (former Jury's Ballsbridge) offer rooms from €39 per room (depending on dates) and some rooms can fit up to three adults (great value when you consider you can hardly park a car in the area for that price). So you can have quality accommodation in a central location without the hefty bill at the end. In Cork, the exclusive Castlemartyr Resort has packages for two nights bed and breakfast and one dinner, from €225 per person and in Galway, the G hotel has special offers from time to time, including a third night free with a two-night booking. If you don't mind when you go, midweek and off-peak stays are usually cheaper. And look around also for spa weekends which include spa treatments or special golf weekends.

Find out more: Shop around and keep an eye out for advertisements, especially in newspapers, with special offers. Some good websites which publish up to date offers are dealsoftheweek.ie and hoteldeals.ie. In addition, hotel booking engines such as Hotels.com or 180ohotels.ie are also good for last-minute hotel deals.



06

HOUSE SWAP

What if you could pick any country and location, select a lovely house from a selection of photographs and arrive to find everything you need – perhaps with a pool, tennis court and possibly even a car – all for your exclusive use. And all for free? With a house swap, you can do exactly that. The idea is that you sign up to a specialist house swap organisation, put photographs and a description of your own house online and off you go. You can specify what dates you'd like to swap for. You can then browse the listings, select houses that you'd like to swap with, and contact the owners to see if they are interested in a swap. Once it's all agreed, you go and stay in their house and they come and stay in yours. And you don't have to stop at a house swap – people have been known to swap their house for a 40-foot yacht and one couple swapped their house for an RV camper van so they could tour a state in the US. Two-man tent anyone?

Find out more: HomeExchange.com has 30,000 listings in 130 countries. It costs €7 per month to join and Ireland is one of their most popular destinations for swaps. Intervac International Home Exchange (intervac.ie) has been running house swaps for 50 years – a one-year membership is €100.