

EARLY SPRING
BREAKSSix
of the
best

Wave goodbye to winter and slink off for some sunshine. Our European escapes are simple to sort, effortless to follow, and best of all, perfect *right now*



1 Palma, Mallorca

Chilling out and chic shops

Why spring wins: While it's still too early for the beach-or-bust brigade, Mallorca's neatly short-break-sized capital, Palma, is ripe for seafront strolls, alfresco lunches and chic shopping along cobble streets and tree-lined boulevards. Do visit the vast Gothic cathedral, with its over-altar canopy by Gaudí, and eerie Chapel of the Holy Sacrament (catedraldemallorca.org; £6.20). And get in some art. Find Picasso and Modigliani in a modern space within a 16th-century fortress (esbalaud.org; £5.30), and Miró at his former studios and gardens (miromallorca.com; £6.60). But you'll want plenty of time, too, for idle wandering, glimpsing leafy courtyards and Modernista flourishes in the Old Town streets.

Eat: Graze on grown-up *tapas* at Hotel Cort's alfresco tables (hotelcort.com; mains about £16), in the Old Town's loveliest square. Or fine-dine in the romantic courtyard of Quadrat (hotelsantfrancesc.com; mains about £21).

Sleep: Well-placed in the centre, stylish new Boutique Hotel Sant Jaume (boutiquehotelsantjaume.com; doubles from £142, room only) laps up the rays with its own fourth-floor terrace and pool (and sorts rare rainy days with a sauna).

Get me there: Flybe (flybe.com) begins Palma flights in late March from Exeter and Southampton, from £45 one way, and in late May from Doncaster-Sheffield. Norwegian (norwegian.com) flies from Gatwick, from £30 one way.



2 Porto, Portugal

Cobbles and river views

Why spring wins: Porto's charm is 80 per cent wandering along vertiginous alleys and 20 per cent sipping aperitifs riverside — so take advantage of Iberia's warm-again weather and pack your cobble-friendly shoes. Stretch your legs post-flight by browsing around the Old Town artery, Rua das Flores, climbing Rua do Ferraz to find lovely views from the secret viewpoint Miradouro do Vitoria. After lunch by the Douro river, take the water taxi (£2.60) over to the Gaia side for an intro to port. Taylor's winery has a to-the-point audio tour with tastings, for £10 (taylors.pt). At this time of year, you won't have to elbow for souvenir bottles; and April also sees the first boat trips into the lustrous wine country just upriver (indouro.com; from £55pp).

Eat: Indoor-outdoor options all over suit changeable weather — try the patio tables of capps on the riverside Ribeira Square (we like rustic Jimao; facebook.com/jimao tapasevinhos; *tapas* about £4), or gourmet port house restaurants. Barão Fladgate at Taylor's (barao fladgate.com; mains about £17) has sunny tables with killer views.

Sleep: With a destination spa, fancy restaurants, a panoramic terrace bar and outdoor pool, the Yeatman (the-yeatman-hotel.com; doubles from £292, B&B) is Porto's sole 'wow' hotel.

Get me there: BA (ba.com) flies from Gatwick, from £36 one way. Ryanair (ryanair.com) flies from Edinburgh, Liverpool and Birmingham, from £20 one way.



3 Lanzarote, Canary Islands

Groovy bars and starry skies

Why spring wins: You don't need us to tell you that the Canaries are steamy when GB is gloomy. But, for travellers, a spring trip beats even a winter hop because of rainfall: April and May are clear-sky corkers, and Lanzarote sees temperatures top 25°C. We chose Lanzarote as it's the least developed of the islands, shaped by the protective hand and stylish eye of local mid-century architect César Manrique. Go north to see his cool cave theatre complex (Los Jameos del Agua; pictured) or groovy viewpoint and bar (Mirador del Rio), but stay south for the starriest skies and best beaches in the Papagayo National Park (£2 car entry). Join the dots by driving the lesser-used LZ-30 through the volcanic vineyards of La Geria region.

Eat: La Era (laera.com; mains about £12) used to be a farmhouse, but now it's been converted into a typical Canarian restaurant. You can choose which pretty whitewashed outbuilding to dine in, or sit in the suntrap courtyard gobbling *papas arrugadas* (salted 'wrinkly potatoes') and goat stew.

Sleep: In Playa Blanca, botanically beautiful Princesa Yaiza hotel (princesayaiza.com; doubles from £149, B&B) makes the most of that sunshine, with huge sea-facing terraces for each room, a beach club, and outdoor heaters so that every gathering can be alfresco.

Get me there: TUI (tui.co.uk) flies from 14 UK airports, including Gatwick, Bournemouth, Glasgow and Cardiff, from £69 return. ▶