



AUTUMN'S HOTTEST SHORT BREAKS

Take a clutch of cool new hotels, add a series of tempting events, and you have five cracking weekends in Europe. By Susan d'Arcy

TRUFFLES IN TUSCANY AT LA BANDITA

Stay here: John Voigtman, a former Sony music mogul, opened La Bandita, a country-house bolt hole just south of Siena, in 2007, and it's been an A-list chillout zone ever since. In March, he unveiled La Bandita Townhouse, in Pienza, a tiny hilltop town crammed full of Merchant Ivory backdrops and artisan workshops down cobbled alleyways. Where once a poorly tended window box may have been the main talking point, the Townhouse injects a dose of Manhattan loft living into this ultra-cute corner of Chiantishire. The palazzo's former inhabitants (it was a convent for 500 years) wouldn't recognise it now: their cells have been reconfigured to create a dozen cool rooms with decadent egg-shaped baths and bespoke furniture, while style mavens may raise an eyebrow at a colour scheme that employs yellow and orange, but the results are spectacular.

Do this: summer is for wimps — harvest is when mealtimes become serious business in Tuscany. It's truffle season, and every chef worth his or her salt has a speciality dish involving the famous fungus. In Pienza, stroll around

the piazza to Latte di Luna (00 39 0578 748606; mains from £8), where bread soup and noodles with truffles make for particularly classy comfort food. Or try La Porta (osteriaporta.it; mains £8.50), in nearby medieval Monticchiello, where you can try crusted pork and truffle mash with a choice of more than 200 wines, mostly local. For fancier fare, there's Oreade (monteverdituscany.com; mains from £18.50), in Castiglione. Its chef, Paolo Coluccio, trained at the renowned Locanda Locatelli, in London.

Wherever you eat, you'll need to keep space for other seasonal goodies, including wild boar sauce, hazelnut semifreddo and wine. Voigtman's favourite place to taste is the Cupano vineyard (cupano.it), in Montalcino, which produces outstanding dark red Brunello. With nature's larder at its most generous, we suggest packing clothes with elasticated waistbands.

Get there: doubles at La Bandita Townhouse start at £165, B&B, with i-escape.com. Fly to Florence with British Airways or Vueling; Pienza is two hours on by car.



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Issue date	: 20 October 2013	
Circulation	: "	
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La Bandita, the best base for an autumn forage

Andrey Artykov/ Marta Nardini/Matthew Dixon/Getty; Alamy

CHRISTMAS MARKETS IN BUDAPEST AT BALTAZAR

Stay here: ever wondered who still buys swirly carpets? Quite a few Budapest hoteliers, for starters. Happily, the new Baltazar hotel doesn't just break that trend, it buries it. The rooms are dramatic and decadent, with eye-catching vintage furniture, art inspired by Vivienne Westwood and Andy Warhol, music systems that link into guests' smartphones — and not a doily in sight. Downstairs is equally exciting. The restaurant has lush red-leather chairs, graffiti-emblazoned walls, sharing plates of gourmet street food and one of the best wine cellars in Hungary. Fortunately, Baltazar remains fabulously quaint in one vital aspect: its setting. It is down a cobbled street in the Unesco-protected centre, within nodding distance of the castle.

Do this: from November 15, one of Europe's most traditional Christmas markets descends on

Vorosmarty Square, which will be festooned with fairy lights. The 150 or so wooden stalls are piled high with exquisite examples of local arts and crafts, from delicately embroidered tablecloths to hand-painted porcelain. There's no danger of "Made in China" stickers lurking anywhere, as all the products are selected and approved by a jury of national folk-art experts. On top of that, you'll find a huge range of indecently sugary delicacies, as well

as charming festive concerts, puppet shows and dance performances on the square's central stage.

Budapest is also the capital of post-retail relaxation, with 70m litres of warm spring water bubbling forth daily into its historic spas. The top place to tend tired limbs is the Gellert Hotel (00 36 1889 5500, danubiushotels.com), where a soak in the art-nouveau baths does the job for about £15.

Get there: Baltazar (baltazarbudapest.com) has doubles from £70. Fly to Budapest with Wizz Air, Ryanair, easyJet or Jet2.



Hip and guaranteed tat-free: the Baltazar and Budapest's Christmas markets

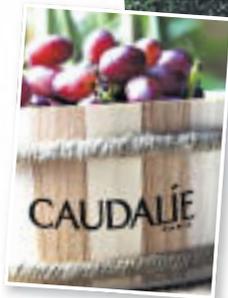


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SOAK UP BORDEAUX AT CHATEAU LE THIL

Stay here: the destination spa Les Sources de Caudalie is the embodiment of the French paradox, a phrase coined after studies suggested that the diet in southwest France is conducive to good health, despite being high in saturated fat and often accompanied by a bottle or three of wine. Its restaurant is Michelin-starred and surrounded by its own Château Smith Haut Lafitte vineyards, and the spa positively wallows in the red stuff, offering a range of wine-based treatments that includes a merlot wrap, a crushed-cabernet body scrub and a *premier cru* anti-ageing facial.

Les Sources has just opened a chic, and more affordable, satellite property a mile down the road. The 18th-century Château Le Thil has nine rooms, furnished with



Pick them, press them, drink them, have a facial with them at Les Sources de Caudalie

flair using flea-market finds such as Chantilly chandeliers and antique chairs. They have glorious views over a lake and parkland.

Do this: guests can join in the harvest, picking, pruning and lugging the grapes in to be sorted, racked and fermented. That sounds suspiciously like hard work, so you could opt



instead to watch the workers from the heated pool, glass in hand; or experience the *art de vivre à la Bordelaise* by ordering a Michelin-starred harvest picnic for a lazy afternoon. Studios types can sign up for a wine-tasting class, while the concierge can organise tours of other top labels in Saint-Emilion, the Médoc and the Ciron Valley.

And don't miss out on Bordeaux — it is a born-again beauty, its facades carefully restored to their original glory and its riverside quays tarted up to provide an invigorating stroll. If the weather is mild, head to the Water Mirror, a vast granite rectangle next to the River Garonne, which shoots up clouds of mist that settle into an expanse of water an inch deep. It reflects the architecturally ornate crescent of Place de la Bourse, across the road.

Get there: Château Le Thil (00 33 5 57 83 83 83, chateau-le-thil.com) has doubles from £235, B&B, including a vineyard tour. That's about £45 cheaper than Les Sources de Caudalie. Fly to Bordeaux with easyJet or British Airways.



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MEET THE FREUDS IN VIENNA AT PALAIS HANSEN

Stay here: the Palais Hansen was built to accommodate the great and the good during the 1873 world exposition, but a cholera epidemic ravaged Vienna that year, wrecking its launch, and it eventually limped into life as a police station and government offices. In 2010, the upmarket Kempinski chain rescued the historic palace and, after a meticulous restoration, it finally opened its doors as a hotel in March. Just 140 years behind schedule, then, but the intervening period has seen some technological advances. The listed foyer still dazzles with columns, the marble-lined lobby is an ode to old-world elegance, and Palladian and art-nouveau influences abound — but you now get iPad check-in

and state-of-the-art gadgetry in the bedrooms. Some things don't change — its location, near the Danube and a 15-minute walk from St Stephen's Cathedral, is one of the best in town.

Do this: there's added poignancy to viewing Lucian Freud's work in the city where his grandfather, the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, studied and spent much of his life.

A newly opened exhibition at the Kunsthistorisches Museum (00 43-1 525240, khm.at; £12) covers the artist's entire career, and he was closely involved in the selection of paintings in the months before his death in July 2011. They include a wartime self-portrait and the final, unfinished piece that remained in his studio. It runs until January 6. On show until the same date at the Sigmund Freud Museum (1 319 1596, freud-museum.at; £7.50) is Lucian Freud: In Private, a

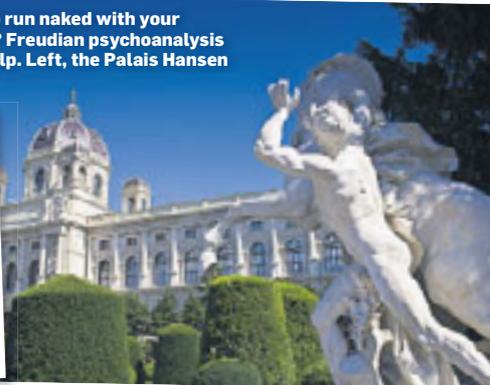
collection of photographs by Freud's assistant David Dawson, as well as documents and memorabilia revealing how Sigmund supported his grandson's talent from his formative years.

There's also the chance to visit the Kunstammer Wien, one of the world's most important cabinets of curiosities, housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Reopened in March after a 10-year renovation, it showcases more than 2,000 objects acquired by the Hapsburg dynasty since the Middle

Ages. Its most famous exhibit is an elaborate saltcellar, the only work in precious metal that can be reliably attributed to Benvenuto Cellini; its oldest is an ivory tablet dating from the 9th century.

Get there: Kirker (020 7593 2283, kirkerholidays.com) has three nights in a junior suite at the Palais Hansen Kempinski from £798pp, B&B, including flights, transfers and entry to the Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Leopold Museum.

Like to run naked with your horse? Freudian psychoanalysis can help. Left, the Palais Hansen





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SURF IN LISBON AT MEMMO ALFAMA

Stay here: Alfama is Lisbon at its most alluring. Its twisty alleyways, picturesque medieval architecture and imperious Sao Jorge castle are all heart-stoppingly romantic. But nobody wants their hotel plumbing to be as atmospheric as the architecture, and this ancient neighbourhood has always lacked a decent place to stay. It's an oversight corrected by Memmo Alfama, its first boutique property, which opened in September, stylishly introducing the Moorish to the modern. The 19th-century facade is adorned with street art by the renowned Alexandre Farto; the traditional reception desk is replaced by sofas in a living room, where guests can borrow a book or grab a



snack from the 24-hour loyalty fridge; and the neutral palette of the minimalist bedrooms is a smart contrast to the fussiness of most hotels in the area. Things get much livelier at its rooftop terrace pool and bar, which offers an impressive selection of Portuguese wines and

looks out over terracotta-tiled roofs and the River Tagus.

Do this: winds from the Sahara keep the city winningly warm through November, while the Atlantic throws up some mighty rollers, making the Estoril coast one of the best places to



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Memmo Alfama: bringing boutique minimalism to Lisbon

another top surf spot, and equally good for kitesurfing, while conditions off Ericeira, five miles of coastline with breaks such as Ribeira d'Ilhas and Coxos, are so good, it's been designated Europe's first World Surfing Reserve. Book a half-day class from £34pp for two, or rent a board and suit from £17, with Lisbon Surf Camp (lisbonsurfcamp.com).

Get there: Original Travel (020 7978 7333, originaltravel.co.uk) has two nights at Memmo Alfama from £360pp, B&B, including flights and transfers.

pretend it's still summer and take to the water. A short train ride from Lisbon is Carcavelos beach, a wide, flat stretch, guarded by the imposing Sao Juliao da Barra Fort, that caters for all levels and provides great photo opportunities. A little further on, Guincho is



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