

THE SUNDAY TIMES SECTION 8 | JANUARY 18, 2009

travel

WHAT'S HOT
2009

This year's coolest islands, resorts, hotels, bars and beaches – and yes, you can afford them all P20

I'M
IF YOU

Can you have the most activity holiday in the world?

HERE COME
SUPERJUMPS

The total package from the A3





WHAT'S HOT 2009

New. Stylish. Cutting-edge. Not necessarily expensive.
In a swanky year in travel with Susan d'Arcy's 50 hot tips

MAKING WAVES ON THE SOUTH COAST

This Easter, **Bournemouth** pledges it will become our coolest stretch of coast, when it unveils "the best beach huts in the world". Designed by Wayne and Geraldine Hemingway, founders of the fashion brand Red or Dead, the 59 individually styled retro sheds, aka surf pods (0845 055 0968, bournemouth.co.uk; price to be decided), have kitsch murals, mains electricity and hot and cold running water. There's even a penthouse version. They overlook Boscombe's award-winning beaches.

The area's other big claim to fame will be Europe's first artificial surf reef. The £2.7m project is set to open in September and promises grade-five breakers (when the swell's strong) for would-be Kelly Slatters.

There's a new wave of chic places to stay in and around Bournemouth, from the breezy Urban Beach Hotel

(01202 301509, urbanbeachhotel.co.uk; from £95) to the sophisticated Hotel du Vin (01202 785570, hotelduvin.com; from £170) in nearby **Poole**. And there's also a liberal sprinkling of celebrity chefs, including Gary Rhodes at Rhodes South (01202 483434, rhodes-south.co.uk) in **Christchurch**; where three delicious courses are about £20 cheaper than in his London restaurants — and the views are infinitely better.

Mark Hix, the former Le Caprice chef and a critics' favourite, has an Oyster & Fish House (01297 446910, hixoysterandfishhouse.co.uk; set menu £21 for three courses) a seagull's flap from the Cobb in **Lyme Regis**.

CITY SLICKERS

Edinburgh will welcome this country's first example of "haute couture" when Hotel Missoni (hotelmissoni.com) opens in spring, bringing the Italian fashion label's

trademark multicoloured stripes to the board-and-lodging business.

Leeds is further enhancing its reputation as a foodie destination, with local boy Marco Pierre White and Jamie Oliver stepping up to the plate alongside Michelin-star winners Raymond Blanc, Albert Roux and Vineet Bhatia, who have all opened restaurants there recently. For the perfect postprandial perch, the UK's original boutique hotel, 42 The Calls (0113 244 0099, theetoncollection.com; £130), is having a much-needed spruce-up, which will be unveiled later this year.

Meanwhile, **Birmingham** has just gained its first AA-five-star accommodation. The honour went not to a hotel, but to Staying Cool (0161 832 4060, stayingcool.com; from £110), serviced flats kitted out with bespoke designer pieces.

Staying Cool, which also has flats in Manchester and Devon, is probably

the UK's hippest self-catering outfit, but others are taking up the challenge. In **Brighton**, Unique Home Stays (01637 881942, uniquehomestays.com) has some stunning properties, including the Den, a contemporary pad in Brighton's old town, which sleeps six for £725 for a week — try getting a hotel room as stylish for that sort of money.

This year's most well-connected renter, however, will be the Prince of Wales. He is offering two sustainably built barn conversions in **Carmarthenshire**, one sleeping four, the other six. Dogs are welcome. With Premier Cottages (01579 346473, premiercottages.co.uk), a week starts at £137pp.

THE INN CROWD

A new breed of boutique pubs is revolutionising the traditional weekend away, bringing upmarket

Continued on page 22 ▶

NEW BROCHURE

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22 travel COVER STORY

►► Continued from page 21
design values to the cosy
informality of the village pub.
Forerunners include the
Kingham Plough (01608 658327,
thekinghamplough.co.uk; £85),
in the Cotswolds, which is
run by Heston Blumenthal's
former sous chef, and the
Gurnard's Head (01736 796928,
gurnardshead.co.uk; £72), on
a pristine cove near Zennor,
in Cornwall.

Notable newcomers include
the Crown, in Amersham (01494
721541, dhillonhotels.co.uk;
£109). It already had plenty
going for it — Elizabethan
beams, inglenook fires and the
cachet of starring alongside
Hugh Grant's fringe in *Four
Weddings* — but now Ilse
Crawford, whose portfolio
includes Babington House,
has updated it with Roberts
radios and rocking chairs.

Likewise, the new Crazy Bear
(01494 673086, crazybeargroup.
co.uk; £215), in Beaconsfield,
is offering the same perks as
the poshest country-house
hotels — right down to
freestanding copper baths
at the end of your bed.

LONDON CALLING
A hop south of Covent Garden,
the Savoy (0845 071 0153,
fairmont.com; £350) is
undergoing the most expensive
restoration in British hotel
history. After an 18-month,
£100m refit (with design dazzle
supplied by Pierre-Yves Rochon,
the brains behind the George V,
in Paris), it will emerge in
the summer to give Claridge's
and the Dorchester a run for
their money.

Out east, Terence Conran's
latest project, the Boundary (020
7729 1051, theboundary.co.uk;
£200), is a converted warehouse
in artsy Shoreditch, with 17
rooms devoted to particular
styles such as Bauhaus and Le
Corbusier. It even has its own
artist in residence, Javald Alvi.

Von Essen Hotels, owner
of national treasures such as
Cliveden, reveals Verta (01761
301001, vonessenhotels.com;
£255), on the banks of the
Thames at Battersea, in
September. It will offer prime
people-watching from the bar,
which overlooks the London
heliport, the Rich List's version
of a taxi rank.

Another one to watch is
the Dean Street Town House
(sohouse.com; rates
unavailable), where B&B stands
for bed and brasserie, promising
a good-value option in the
centre of Soho. It should open
by the summer.



could offer customers meals at
realistic prices? Doubles start
at just £70 a night — that's a
bottle of Evian from some
design-hotel minibars. Better
still, it's the first of a planned
chain of seven.

Right now, the Chateau
d'Armac, in Dordogne, offers a
good-value romantic interlude
beyond the capital. The
riverside castle has huge ornate
rooms, furnished with 16th-
century antiques and vast open
fires, with gourmet meals
served at a 15ft refectory table in
the great hall. Black Tomato
(020 7610 9008, blacktomato.
co.uk) has two nights, £455pp
full-board, including flights and
car hire.

Le Couvent d'Hérépian was
one of the classiest boutiques
we visited last year, so we're
looking forward to checking
out its more ambitious sister
development, Les Jardins de
Saint Benoît, in the Languedoc
(0871 218 7066, garrigaeresorts.
com). From June, it will feature
171 traditional wooden-shuttered
houses built in a 20-acre
riverside estate around a

restorations, into this prehistoric
movie set and Fred Flintstone
gets spruced right up. When
it opens in June, the 18-room
Sassi di Matera will have
centuries-old animal troughs
doubling as bathroom sinks,
and will forsake art in favour
of the fossilised seashells
embedded in the walls. Though
every piece of the stone floor
was painstakingly lifted
to install underfloor heating,
the builder was instructed to
replace it as unevenly as before.
Other lip-smacking Italian
jobs include Rocco Forte's

Sicilian super-resort, Verdura,
which opens in May; and, in
June, the arrival in Tuscan
Forto Village, probably the
best family-holiday operation
with the Castel Monastero.
Exsus (020 7292 5050, exsus.
has Sassi di Matera for £1,580
half-board, Verdura for £1,600
and Castel Monastero for £1,600

DODECANESE TEASER
What would you say to a well-
half-board, in a brand-new
five-star suite in the Med, with
private terrace and plunge pool
complimentary champagne

