

The best long weekend getaways to use up the last of your annual leave

Don't let those last few days of holiday go to waste – brighten up the end of the year with a budget-friendly getaway

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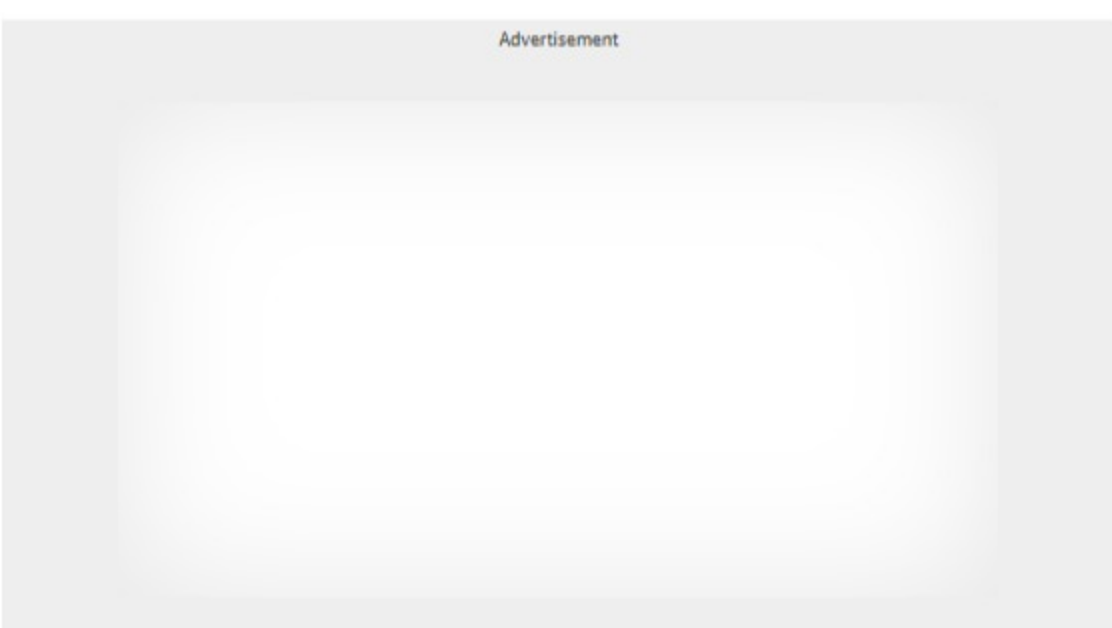
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From walking breaks to spa retreats, a long weekend holiday is a great way to use up those last annual leave days. Credit: Andy/Roland/Getty Images/Stockphoto

It's nearly the end of the year, when thoughts turn to present-buying, office parties and school holidays. Perhaps lower down the list is our annual leave allocation. This shouldn't be the case: many of us find that even after factoring in the Christmas period, there are often a few errant days remaining. In fact, in a 2023 survey by British Airways, it was revealed that more than half of Brits fail to take their full allocation, and some 42 per cent feel stress about work while they are away.

As the cost of living bites, of course, it can be all too easy to see a trip away as an indulgence. And yet they are, provably, good for us: a 40-year study by the European Society of Cardiology found that those who take regular holidays are likely to live longer than those who don't. A watertight excuse for a weekend away if ever there was one.



This year, then, ignore the guilt and use those final few days of holiday for a budget-friendly break. You could take the family on a gloriously chilly countryside foray; or lean into festive charm with a last-minute trip to the twinkling lights and spiced glühwein of a [European Christmas market](#). Even with only a couple of days to spare, the continent is your oyster – so seize the day, and get booking.

The market break

Keep it traditional with a European Christmas market break. [Berlin](#) might be too busy, [Munich](#) too manic, but [Vienna](#) manages its winter season in a somewhat calmer way. True, there are festive stalls galore, but also heaps of culture, meaning you can twin shopping with trips to the [Konzerthaus](#) or a gallery. Local traditions, like the folkloric Krampus Day on December 5, allow the Advent period to feel particularly special.



For a European Christmas market break with fewer crowds, swap Berlin for Vienna. Credit: ianm/IC/Getty

How to do it

[Newmarket Holidays](#) offers a Vienna Christmas Markets break from £783 per person, including return flights, transfers, three nights of accommodation on a bed and breakfast basis, and a guided tour of the city.

[Read our guide to Vienna →](#)

The island getaway

Jetting away to an island might sound like paradise – but if you have limited leave remaining, the Caribbean might be a stretch. No need to worry: upgrade your long weekend and head to the Channel Islands, for wintry walks and delicious dining. It's an ideal way to explore [Jersey](#) or [Guernsey](#) without the crowds, plus make the most of off-season pricing.



Head to the Channel Islands in the off season for lower prices and fewer crowds. Credit: David Chapp/Stone RF/Getty

How to do it

Book a three-night stay at The Duke of Richmond Hotel on Guernsey with [Kirkor Holidays](#) for £598 per person, based on two sharing. The package includes return flights, bed and breakfast, and private transfers.

[Read our guide to Guernsey →](#)

The hiking trip

Crisp, icy mornings might make you want to recoil into your duvet – or pull on your walking boots. If it's the latter, booking a long, walking weekend can be the perfect precursor to an indulgent December. Wander through pretty villages, take in the fresh air, and, best of all, spend the evenings by the fire in a Great British pub.



Take in the fresh air on a walking weekend in the Cotswolds. Credit: Cotswolds Photo Library Creative / Alamy Stock Photo

How to do it

Ramble Worldwide runs a four-day [Festive Cotswolds](#) trip over the new year from £819 per person, based on two sharing, with guided walks on the Cotswolds Way. The price also includes half-board accommodation and private transport to and from the trailheads.

[Read our guide to the Cotswolds →](#)

The countryside bolthole

The days are getting shorter and colder, and a roaring fire is sometimes the only solution. There are plenty of very cosy spots in the UK, from Highland cabins to south coast cottages, in which to enter a miniature hibernation. Go armed with plenty of good books and venture out only to gather supplies. In fact, a countryside bolthole can be the perfect way to iron out any Christmas visitation dilemmas. Book a larger property with the extended family or friends, and have an early celebration ahead of the big day.



Warm up this winter besides a roaring fire in a cosy countryside bolthole. Credit: ianm/IC/Getty

How to do it

Church Farm in Wilton, North Yorkshire, is a charming property (sleeps six) listed on [Yorkshire Hideaways](#). Prices start at £544 for three nights.

[Read our guide to Yorkshire →](#)

The spa weekend

It is, undoubtedly, a stressful time of year. And if you have plenty of leave to take, that means the stress has probably been compounding for months. The solution? A spa break. Swap work emails and Monday meetings for deep tissue massages and rejuvenating facials – at least for a weekend. The only thing you need to worry about is which slippers to take.



Enjoy pampering treatments during a spa stay at country house hotel Mallory Court

How to do it

[Mallory Court](#), a country house hotel near Leamington Spa, offers one-night breaks from £295 per person. Included in the price is a spa treatment, use of the spa facilities for two hours, plus a three-course dinner and breakfast.

The family holiday

A fairytale family break doesn't need Father Christmas and husky-sledding to be memorable. Some of the UK's most fantastical places to stay remain open throughout the winter break, so forget Lapland and head to somewhere closer to home. In fact, the much-coveted glamping spots are often much cheaper towards the end of the year, meaning that both adults and kids can have a bit of respite before the holiday bustle truly begins.

How to do it

[Blackberry Wood](#)'s Higgledy Treehouse in Sussex is straight out of a storybook. Its turrets and towers look particularly spectacular in the snow, as do the much-lauded play areas within the woodland. It sleeps four adults, or up to two adults and three children, and prices start at £190 per night.

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This story was first published in November 2023 and has been revised and updated.

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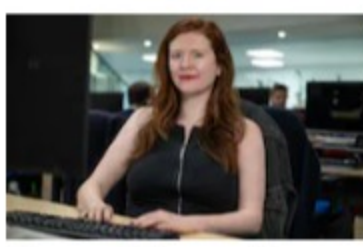
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