

6 August 2, 2026 The Sunday Times

Travel Inspiration

There are many benefits to a short break compared with a longer holiday. They're more affordable and don't require as much time off work. A long weekend is also easier to pull off at the eleventh hour, which is handy as we seem to be booking at the last minute more than ever.

Short breaks also increase the pace of your holiday. As they're only a few days long, holiday complacency doesn't have time to set in, so you're more inclined to turn them into a mega weekend. That could mean packing the day with sightseeing, seeing a hot new art gallery or exploring different neighbourhoods, then booking the best restaurants and bars.

And this is shaping up to be the age of the mega weekend, whether you're going on a city break, a cruise or an adventure holiday. In its 2025 Vacation Confidence Index, the insurer Allianz Partners reported that 73 per cent of Americans planned to take such a holiday, while when it comes to UK staycations Sykes Holiday Cottages found that half of its bookings in 2025 were for less

Short and sweet

Cathy Adams on why four-night getaways as far afield as Mexico and Bermuda are the latest holiday trend, plus how to do it

than six nights. Some go even further: flight search data from Booking.com shows that searches for same-day international return flights have risen 62 per cent, year on year.

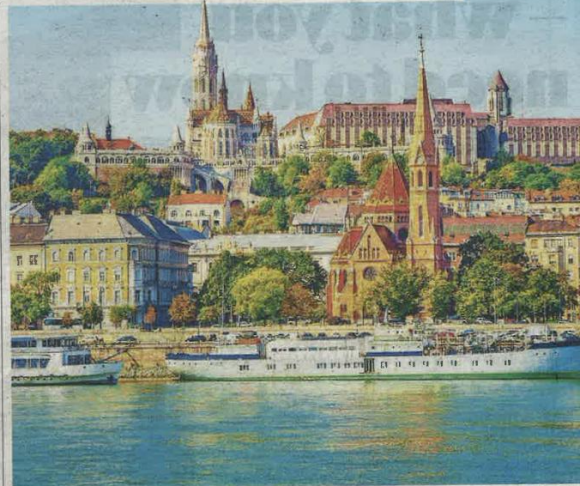
It's a trend. But what exactly are we doing? I spoke to tour operators and agents about how we're holidaying now.

Since the spring the tour operator First Choice has seen a spike in four-night breaks, with Ibiza and Lanzarote in Spain, and the Greek islands of Rhodes and Crete, the most-booked destinations, suggesting we want a quick sunny beach getaway.

"Shorter trips offer flexibility at a time when

holidays are a big financial decision," says Kevin Nelson, First Choice's managing director. "They allow customers to respond to the weather and manage costs. For many, a four-day break is the perfect taste of summer without committing to a longer holiday."

Last year Intrepid Travel launched Short Breaks, appealing to those who want to get the absolute most out of holidays of between four and six days, with no time for idling. And we're not just talking about short-haul – there are trips to Guatemala to hike volcanoes, to Chichen Itza in Mexico, and to Prague to enjoy its hot springs.



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Likewise, the travel company WeRoad, which aims itself at Gen Zers, has weekend trips for between two and four nights to destinations including Athens, Budapest and Riga.

The short breaks people are booking aren't always city breaks, says Ashley Quint, the travel director at TravelTime World in Hertfordshire. He reports that people are even booking short beach holidays, adding: "We've found that some families split their main holiday and maybe have a long weekend to avoid the worst of the half-term flight prices to some of the popular beach resorts, such as Mallorca, Tenerife and the Algarve."

Mini-cruises are also rising

in popularity. If they start and end in the UK, cruises are exempt from the EU's Entry/Exit System checks, which have caused long queues at some European borders since being formally introduced in April. The cruises have started to take off in the UK, Quint says, especially those for the Christmas markets in cities such as Bruges and Amsterdam.

Holidaymakers are also making use of the European rail network to see as much as possible in a short space of time. The short break specialist Kikker says travellers are using a long weekend to pair cities such as Paris and Bordeaux, Madrid and Seville, and Florence and Rome. It also notes that "second tier"

city break destinations, such as Munich, Seville and Verona, are surging in popularity at the expense of cities such as Barcelona, Amsterdam and Rome.

Patrick Millar, the head of marketing for Kikker, sums it up: "The travel part itself is so much less exciting nowadays so why not make the most of the destination while you are there?"

GOURMET TRIP TO CROATIA

Expect all-out indulgence on a food-focused stay at the Meneghetti Estate, an elegant Relais & Châteaux property surrounded by vineyards and olive groves in the Istrian countryside. A gourmet five-course dinner and guided tastings of the estate's wines and olive oils are included, and there's a swish spa, a tennis court, a golf driving range and a free shuttle to the estate's nearby beach club on the Adriatic coast. The hilltop towns of Vizinada and Pula, with its Roman amphitheatre, are an easy drive away.

Details Three nights' B&B from £1,845pp, including flights, car hire, activities and some extra meals (regent-holidays.co.uk)



From main: Budapest on the Danube; a pool at the Meneghetti Estate in Croatia; downtown Toronto

HISTORIC BUDAPEST AND THE DANUBE

Combine Budapest with lesser-known towns along the Danube on a short break to Hungary. This escorted group trip includes a guided tour of Budapest's big-ticket sights, plus a coach trip to Esztergom, the country's former royal capital, and pretty Visegrad, with its 13th-century fortress and forested hiking trails. Optional extras on offer include a traditional folklore evening and a trip combining a visit to a lavender farm and Lake Balaton, before a final night sailing the Danube on a sunset cruise. Departures are available from several regional airports.

Details Four nights' B&B from £790pp, including flights, transfers, guiding and excursions (newmarket.holidays.co.uk)

CANADIAN CITY BREAK

Cram in Toronto's sights, shops and museums on a whistlestop weekend in the cool Canadian city. Staying at the four-star Chelsea Hotel, Continued on page 8 →

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Travel Inspiration

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you'll be within walking distance of the CN Tower, the Royal Ontario Museum and the foodie St Lawrence Market. Stroll to the harbour to hop on a 15-minute ferry to the Toronto Islands for lakefront beaches, kayaking and an amusement park. There's even time for the 90-minute trip to Niagara Falls, detouring to sample Canadian wines at the Niagara-on-the-Lake vineyards on the way back. **Details** Three nights' room only from £777pp, including flights (virginatlantic.com)

OUTDOORSY ADVENTURE IN THE FAROE ISLANDS

A remote North Atlantic archipelago between Scotland and Iceland, the Faroe Islands are a two-hour flight from the UK for an easily reached mini-adventure. A four-night small group tour with Intrepid starts in Torshavn, one of the world's smallest capital cities, and takes in hiking on Mount Slaettaratindur, a ferry ride



The village of Oia on the Greek island of Santorini; below right, dunes in the Sahara desert in Morocco

GREEK ISLAND-HOPPING CRUISE

Get the full island-hopping experience in three nights on a Celestyal cruise that packs in a staggering five ports and two countries. On a round trip from Athens, you'll spend the first evening in Mykonos before visiting the Turkish town of Kusadasi, with its bazaar, beaches and the chance to visit the ancient ruins of Ephesus, then it's on to the island of Patmos, and Heraklion on Crete. A final stop at Santorini is perfectly timed to watch the sunset from the island's famous caldera cliffs. If you have time, there's also a pool, spa and round-the-clock entertainment to enjoy on board. **Details** Three nights' full board from £349pp, including gratuities (celestyal.com). Fly to Athens

BERMUDA BEACH RESORT

White sands, subtropical temperatures and world-

class snorkelling on a jetlag-free weekend? It's doable in the North Atlantic archipelago of Bermuda, a seven-hour flight from London with a four-hour time difference. The four-star Grotto Bay Beach Resort & Spa has 21 acres of tropical gardens, two private beaches, a dock for boat trips and a spa in a 500,000-year-old cave. The Walsingham Nature Reserve with its walking trails and mangrove ponds is within kayaking distance and there's a sunken barge just off the beach for snorkelling on. Hamilton, the capital of Bermuda, is about eight miles away. **Details** Three nights' room only from £1,884pp, including flights (britishairways.com)

EXPLORE THE SAHARA DESERT

Get away from it all on a four-night bucket-list trip to the Sahara desert in Morocco. After arriving in Marrakesh, you'll join a small group to travel just over three hours to overnight in Ouarzazate before two nights sleeping under the stars at remote desert camps deep within the Sahara. Dinners round a blazing bonfire, 4x4 excursions and sand-dune hikes are all included. Screensaver sunsets are a given. **Details** Four nights' half-board - two in hotels, two in desert camps - from £412pp, including internal travel, activities and some extra meals (gadventures.com). Fly to Marrakesh

Trips by Siobhan Grogan

“Days can be spent pottering around the cobbled streets of Nice”

to Kalsoy and a visit to the 98ft-high Bosdalfossur Waterfall. You'll even get to know the locals over a traditional home-cooked Faroese meal in a cosy farmhouse. **Details** Four nights' B&B from £2,156pp, including internal travel, excursions and some extra meals (intrepidtravel.com). Fly to Sorvagur

THE FRENCH RIVIERA BY TRAIN

Hit the beach on the glamorous Côte d'Azur without setting foot in an

airport on this quick trip to Nice. Travelling by Eurostar from London via Paris, you'll arrive at your four-star hotel in Nice in time for a seafood dinner in the old town. Days can be spent pottering around the town's cobbled streets, markets and café-lined squares, climbing Castle Hill for panoramic sea views and visiting the renowned Musée Matisse art gallery (£10; musee-matisse-nice.org). Explore further along the coast by local train; Cannes and Monaco are both half an hour away. **Details** Three nights' B&B from £420pp, including rail travel from London (byway.travel)



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