



Chicago shooters

End dry January on a on a tour of prohibition-themed cocktail joints

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Beats and bumps

Hitting the decks and the slopes at a snowy Gilles Peterson festival

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Ski Yorkshire

A proper resort! With lifts and jumps and real white stuff and all!

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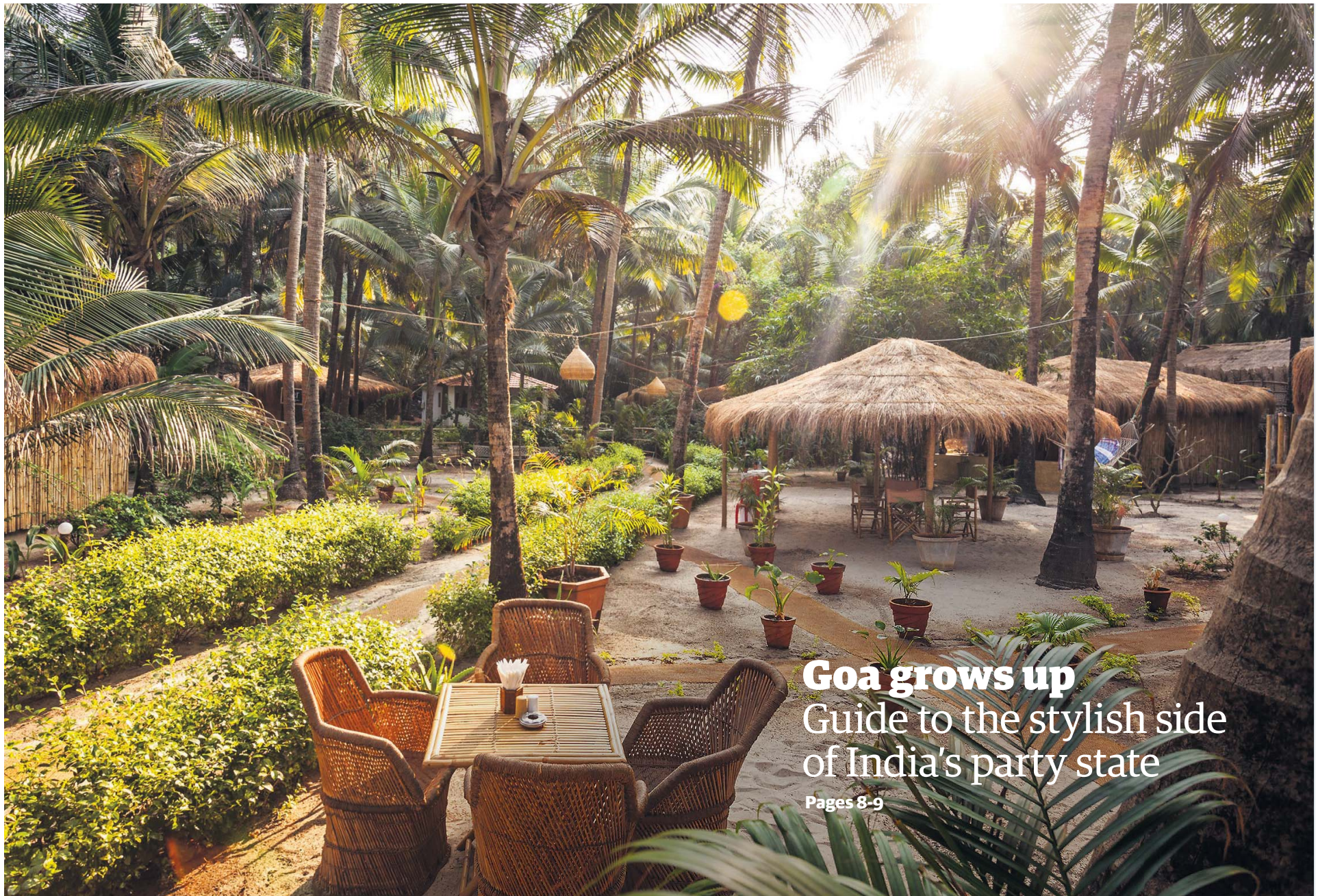


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PHOTOGRAPH OF PALM GROVE, MANDREM GOA, BY MATTHEW PARKER

Goa grows up

Guide to the stylish side of India's party state

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Can't log off?

Holidays that help digital travellers work, rest and play



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County fare

An influx of chefs, foodie hotels and restaurants ... Dorset just got really tasty

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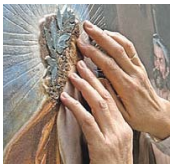
Sweet Sicily

Where a winter break means sunshine, no crowds and lots of fabulous places to eat



Art for the blind

The Prado in Madrid has opened an exhibition for blind people – Hoy toca el Prado (Do Touch the Prado) – with six famous artworks recreated using 3-D printing techniques, allowing visitors to explore them by hand. Until June 28, museodelprado.es



South-east Sicily loses nothing out of season but the crowds, finds Ed Cumming. It could just be the best time to enjoy its spectacular architecture, exquisite cuisine and ancient landscapes

Time for your Med

At the car rental desk I thought we were out of the bureaucratic woods, but then the man pushed across yet another piece of paper. “It’s a waiver,” he said. “It means if the car’s stolen in Catania, other insurance doesn’t apply.” “So we would pay the full amount?” “Yes. Just in Catania.” “Do many cars get stolen here?” His bottom lip slid out like a drawer and he shrugged and flapped his hand. I had hoped that the rumours of banditry were exaggerated; perhaps I was wrong. Still, I’d come, with my girlfriend Lara, to see what the south-eastern corner of Sicily was like when the summer tourist crowds had eased. Not having a car was not an option. I took a deep breath and signed. Nestled at the foot of Mount Etna, Catania is Sicily’s second city, but aside from an elegant piazza and duomo made from local slate-grey volcanic rock, it does not score highly on the Italian-city beauty scale. We walked past abandoned resort buildings and ugly car parks. Men in shell-suit tops sold chestnuts and potatoes from braziers as if we were in the depths of a Moscow snowstorm rather than a Mediterranean winter. While the locals were covered up, for easy-burning English like us the weather was perfect: clear blue skies and 21C. The next day, with the car reassuringly un-stolen, we went down the coast to Syracuse. This was much more like it. Syracuse is nearly 3,000 years old and during Ancient Greek times was one of the centres of the Mediterranean. The city was all but destroyed in 1693 by an earthquake that shook the bones of the whole island, but was rebuilt soon afterwards in glorious baroque style that remains mostly untouched. This is particularly



the case on Ortigia, Syracuse’s old town set on a teardrop-shaped island connected to the mainland by a couple of road bridges. In the summer the place must sweat and heave: its tiny cobbled streets and perfect square are the kind that make postcard-sellers plan a new kitchen. After a couple of days of drinking negronis and looking at churches, we drove an hour west to Il Granaio, an agriturismo just outside Modica where vast plates of local fruit, ham, ricotta, eggs and bread were laid out for us each morning. There was serious eating to be done nearby too. When chocolate was discovered in the new world it was first brought back to Modica, where it was made cold so that the sugar did not melt. Northern Europeans later added heat and milk to the process but the old technique is still used here. Once you get over

▲ Baroque masterpiece ... Ragusa Ibla, like many towns in south-east Sicily, was rebuilt after the 1693 earthquake

► Duomo restaurant, which has two Michelin stars - that they prefer not to talk about much

the initial graininess the chocolate has a rich, lingering flavour. I bought 10 bars from Antica Dolceria Bonajuto (bonajuto.it). Twenty minutes’ drive north west of Modica is baroque Ragusa Ibla. With few cars, stone streets and views over the hillside, the town looks like a film set and often serves as one – many scenes from the Inspector Montalbano series, Italy’s answer to Inspector Morse, were shot there. Down a side street behind the main church was a restaurant – called Duomo (cicciosultano.it) where we splashed out £35 each on a lunch of insouciant brilliance. An anchovy was presented with the skeleton fried to a crisp and perched on top of two fillets of silver flesh. Spaghetti with sardine had that thing that’s common to good seafood pasta (but somehow difficult to recreate in Finsbury Park) where

“While the locals were covered up, for easy-burning English the weather was perfect: clear blue skies and 21C”

each bit of pasta seems to be covered in a glossy sheath of umami. Then there was a hunk of mountain pork, purple and salty and rich as volcanic soil. Somewhere in the mix was a truffle ice-cream sandwich then a sweet creamy tube of canolo. At the next table I heard a couple compliment the manager and suggest the restaurant merited a visit from the Michelin boys. “Ah yes,” he replied. “We have two stars, in fact.” Two Michelin stars that they prefer not to talk about much. Our whole time was marked by memorable meals – we were surprised to find that most restaurants were open. Mountain soups slopping over with rich chunks of pork, islands of pizza with cracked black shorelines and bubbling mozzarella interiors. On the famous Sampieri beach we ate a €10 picnic of cheese, crimson tomatoes and salty fresh focaccia in our swimming costumes, while watching a local wearing waterproofs and a thick jumper drag in a shrimp pot. The endless campaign of road building in these parts meant that our satnav was often confused by new roundabouts or reversed one-way systems. Aside from that, this is a landscape that remains largely immune to modern Europe, the patchwork of olive trees, vines and rocky hills as it would have been when the area was part of the Carthaginian empire. Without tourists here there is just sleepy agriculture and a spattering of light industry; plenty to remind tired city-dwellers like us of the simpler pleasures, and make them fat. ● The trip was provided by Italy and Sicily specialist Sunvil Discovery (020-8758 4722, sunvil.co.uk) which offers tailor-made, multi-centre trips to eastern Sicily. Ed’s trip cost £760pp for seven nights (two sharing) including return flights from Gatwick to Catania, car hire and B&B accommodation



Readers' tips Winter breaks in Europe

★ Winning tip Baden-Baden, Germany Jump on a bargain flight to Baden-Baden and visit the town’s thermal spas. The oldest, Friedrichsbad, has various bathing stages including soap massages, steam rooms and hot thermal pools, culminating in a dreamy sleep room with warmed beds. Afterwards, join locals sipping hot chocolate in the numerous cake shops. carasana.de bowbank

Valencia, Spain Thanks to a microclimate, in winter Valencia basks in bright sunshine reflecting off an azure sea. Try the enourmous food market for fresh local products, visit the gothic cathedral, the aquarium for the kids and the interactive City of Arts and Sciences. Have a ball game or siesta on the city beach and eat real paella, which originates here, at the locals’ favourite Bodega de la Sarieta. bodegodelasarieta.com nicolletta

Tromsø, Norway Tromsø’s got it all – a perfect blend of exotic and comfort. There’s lots to do within walking distance – super museums of early life and art, Arctic Cathedral (with midnight concerts

in February and March), an aquatic centre and a sparkling waterfront. Then there are the excursions – dog-sledding was fantastic. We didn’t really mind not seeing the northern lights, we’ll just have to go back. CambWoman

Budapest, Hungary Budapest’s indoor and outdoor baths make a relaxing tonic to soothe the winter blues. They vary from the beautiful 16th-century Rudas and Kiraly Baths, which are Turkish in style to art-deco ones like the Gellért or Széchenyi. The steam from the 37C warm water gets so thick you can hardly see past your hands. visitbudapest.travel/activities/budapest-baths BrigadierCrispbread

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