

LATE DEALS
KENYA—£729, seven nights all-inclusive at 4-sun Severin Sea Lodge, from Gatwick, Jan 18. See www.firstchoice.co.uk or call 0871 200 4455.
PAPHOS—£454, seven nights all-inclusive at 4T Riu Cypria Resort, from Birmingham, Jan 27. See www.thomson.co.uk or 0871 231 5595.
ELVIS LAND—£989, eight-day tour of Memphis, Graceland and Nashville for the King's 75th birthday year, from Heathrow or Gatwick, Feb 10. See www.archersdirect.co.uk or 0871 423 8638.
JAMAICA—£879, seven nights all-inclusive at 4V Sunset Jamaica Grande Resort & Spa, from Gatwick, Jan 20-30. See www.virginholidays.co.uk or call 0844 557 3870.

RATED > TRAVEL

Compiled by Trisha Harbord

Big sail on top cruises

CRUISE companies are enticing holidaymakers with a treasure trove of offers.
 White Star Cruises has free kids' places, onboard spending money and state-room upgrades on its Round UK cruise on Crystal Symphony from £2,116 in June.
 Free flights and transfers on Seabourn Legend Monte Carlo to Rome cruises, from £1,799 in May and August.
 Free flights and transfers plus \$250 onboard credit on Silversea's Silver Cloud seven-night all-inclusive Caribbean cruise from £1,799, departs Puerto Rico in March.
 Visit www.whitestarcrises.com or 0800 612 3354.
 P&O Cruises has up to £1,000 off per couple for bookings before Jan 31, up to £1,000 off per couple on some Azura and Ventura staterooms, up to £150pp onboard spending on selected departures April to June, an extra 5% discount if paid in full when booking, and an extra 2.5% online booking discount on selected departures between April and June.
 See www.pocruises.co.uk or 0845 355 5333.

A corker in Yorks

GORGEOUS Weekend is a new online service offering luxury holiday experiences in North Yorkshire.
 Choose a cottage in the Dales, chic apartment in the city or grand Victorian country house by the Moors.
 Getaways are tailored to your needs—from romantic retreats in a five-star hideaway to luxurious girls' weekends complete with spas and Michelin-star restaurants. Hampers can also be booked for your arrival.
 More information at www.gorgeousweekend.com



BEACH DELIGHT: Quiet Nai Yang is perfect for couples

>GETTING THERE

JANE travelled to Thailand with long-haul specialist Hayes & Jarvis (0871 664 0246, www.hayesandjarvis.com) and stayed four nights at Indigo Pearl, Phuket, two nights at Elephant Hills Camp, Khao Sok, and six nights at La Flora, Khao Lak.
 Departing on March 13, a 12-night package based on the same trip costs from £1,599 per person (based on two sharing) including return Thai Airways flights from Heathrow, transfers, B&B accommodation at Indigo Pearl and La Flora, and full board at Elephant Hills Camp. Book by January 31.

Pack your trunk for paradise

Ride an elephant - then a sun-lounger - in beautiful Thailand



ME AND MY NEW PAL: Jane meets elephant Puki



LUXURY CAMP: Comfy tent at Elephant Hills



NEW START: La Flora resort was rebuilt after tsunami



THAI LOVE IT! Pool at Indigo Pearl hotel

WATCHING Puki the elephant dancing backwards and forwards as he waited for his dinner was a bit like looking at an excited puppy—apart from the size difference!

BY JANE ATKINSON

While I sat in a princess-style carriage on his back, swaying from side to side, the mahout squatted on his neck with his bare toes wedged behind Puki's ears.
Every tiny movement or quietly spoken instruction made the elephant go in the exact direction he wanted.
 After a 90-minute trek watching monkeys swinging through the forest it was back to the resort... and to my tent.
 I have never been the camping sort but this had a taste of luxury with a proper bed, electricity and hot running water.
 The camp cares for the environment as well as the local community and has a project to help local schools.
 Every night pupils perform a dance show for the guests, who sit together tucking into an amazing Thai buffet.
 The following day I went on a speedboat trip through waterways that form the mangrove forest, and saw snakes and monitor lizards.
 But there are two sides to Thailand and after my jungle experience I was keen to hit the relaxation part!
 Just an hour away is Khao Lak, a coastal resort about 100km north of Phuket.
 I stayed at the beautiful La Flora resort which sits on a pristine sandy beach. I was welcomed with a cold towel, a cocktail and a huge smile from the friendliest hotel staff I have ever encountered.
 La Flora was hit hard by the 2004 tsunami but has recovered after being painstakingly rebuilt in traditional design with lush plants throughout the grounds.
 It boasts 138 contemporary rooms with

many having direct access to a free-form pool that snakes through the resort.
 There are plenty of activities including watersports and tennis but my first destination was the spa.
 I love a good pampering and have travelled far and wide to find the perfect masseur who can unravel the knots in my shoulders.
 Here, I found perfection with therapist Rattna. She barely spoke a word of English and I only know a handful of Thai words but she performed a minor miracle.
 Khao Lak is a wonderful place to explore numerous art galleries and gift shops.
 Just a two-minute walk from the hotel I found the wonderful Smile Bar where owner Nana welcomes each customer like a long-lost friend.

Chic
 He asks each new person to name their favourite song so he could find it on his computer and play it for them.
 With a bottle of beer costing less than £2 and a glass of wine just 50p more, many of them had become his friends.
 After four blissful days at La Flora I headed to the Indigo Pearl hotel perched on the edge of Nai Yang Beach on Phuket's north-west coast, 40 minutes from the centre and ten minutes from the airport.
 The beautiful boutique hotel is designed as a tribute to Phuket's history as a tin mining region—it's like walking into a pristine Thai factory of a century ago.
 It's modern, chic and truly indulgent. The rooms have polished concrete floors, wide walk-in rain showers and a bath on the

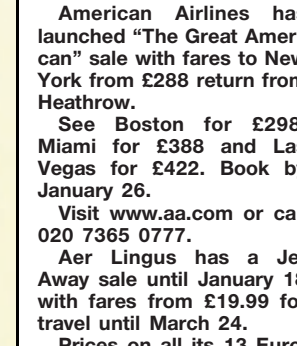
balcony. The sun loungers around the three beautiful pools were all draped with white fluffy towels and the adult-only pool had Jacuzzi areas, a rain shower in the centre and a sophisticated swim-up bar.
 The restaurants match the decor—trendy and classy. Rebar, an open-air bar with views of the gardens and a perfect place to see the sunsets, has exquisite Thai, Western and Japanese tapas.
 Indigo Pearl has a wonderfully spacious feel to it, too. Although there are more than 250 rooms, they are spread around the grounds with huge lush landscaped jungle gardens in between.
 The hotel lies just back from the nearly untouched Nai Yang Beach. It's a quieter and more intimate area than Khao Lak and perfect for couples.
 Just outside the resort, you can get traditional Thai food in a beach setting. I went to the Octopus restaurant to eat by candlelight. And what a bargain—green curry and rice for less than £3.
 I also tried a local massage—not in Rattna's class but for £5 for an hour I wasn't complaining.
 Indigo Pearl offers tennis lessons, a diving centre on site and cookery lessons.
 I had a private yoga class with friendly instructor Bao who taught me more in 90 minutes than I have learned in two years of practice.
 Free activities also include Thai boxing, circuit training and language classes—a perfect five-star sanctuary with an affordable price tag.
Just like an elephant, it was a holiday I'll never forget!



BIG DEAL: For Big Apple

Jumbo savings in 2010

THERE'S a massive January flight sale with major airlines offering deals.
 EasyJet has slashed fares on more than 22 million seats. There's up to a quarter off fares for travel between February 3 and July 14 with one-way to Faro from £19.99 and Sharm El Sheikh from £71.99.
 Book on easyJet.com before Tuesday.
 BA has worldwide destinations in its sale until January 26. Flights to New York from £299 return, Los Angeles £389, Orlando £399, Sydney £669 or Geneva from £39 (one-way). See www.ba.com or call 0844 493 0787.
 American Airlines has launched "The Great American" sale with fares to New York from £288 return from Heathrow.
 See Boston for £298, Miami for £388 and Las Vegas for £422. Book by January 26.
 Visit www.aa.com or call 020 7365 0777.
 Aer Lingus has a Jet Away sale until January 18 with fares from £19.99 for travel until March 24.
 Prices on all its 13 European destinations including Malaga, Lanzarote and Tenerife have been cut. Visit www.aerlingus.com
 Virgin Atlantic has cut its economy and premium fares until January 26.
 Fly to New York until March 31 for £299 in economy and just £542 in premium. Dubai is down to £324 and £599, and Hong Kong from £421 and £809. See www.virginatlantic.com or call 0844 209 4705.
 Malaysia Airlines' sale until January 18 includes fares to Malaysia and South East Asia from £559 return for travel until March 26. Visit www.malaysiaairlines.com



BA has worldwide destinations in its sale until January 26



Virgin Atlantic has cut its economy and premium fares until January 26



Malaysia Airlines' sale until January 18 includes fares to Malaysia and South East Asia from £559 return for travel until March 26

On trail of the Vaux!

A 15 PER cent early-booking discount for Great Yarmouth's five-star Vauxhall Holiday Park has been extended until tonight.
 A week in the Sandpiper holiday home sleeping four costs from £216. Visit www.vauxhall-holiday-park.co.uk or 01493 857231.

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*3 nights free offer applies only to selected Thomas Cook Summer Sun 2010 holidays as advertised in the 3 Nights Free Supplement brochure (available at Thomas Cook & Going Places stores). 14 night holidays are offered for the price of the equivalent 11 night holiday, based on the 11 night price current at time of booking. Offer applies to adult prices only. Valid for bookings made until 4 February 2010. Further conditions/restrictions apply - see in-store supplement brochure for full details. Calls cost 5p per minute from a BT landline. Call costs from other networks/mobiles will vary. Holidays operated by Thomas Cook Tour Operations Ltd, A51A V6396, ATOL protected 1173.