Avoid the heatwaves with these 15 great ideas for a coolcation

Be it a breezy family break in Scandinavia or an active retreat in Austria, these trips are your chance to avoid the sunburn and, literally, chill

The Wolfgangsee in Salzkammergut, the Austrian lake district
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Sean Newsom Saturday July 05 2025, 5.00pm, The Sunday Times

Stay cool everyone — it won't be 46C in Spain all summer, as it was last weekend in the Andalusian town of El Granado. The recent incendiary temperatures across southern Europe are not yet the norm and temperatures have dropped back down in most places since alarming records were set last week.

Even so, having to worry about weather that is frankly dangerous is not the ideal prelude to a holiday. So if, like me, you'd rather not have that stress, can I suggest you look elsewhere for your summer holidays? The Med is magnificent in April, May and early June, and can be blissful in late September and October too, but for July and August how about looking north or into the Alps instead?

Here, I've suggested 15 holidays that do just that. Some plunge into sparkling Alpine lakes; others dig their toes into the soft-sand beaches of Denmark and Sweden. There are even one or two that embrace the wilds of Iceland and Norway. All still have availability this summer and, while I can't guarantee that the sun will be shining while you're there, each offers magnificent landscapes or serene seascapes worth exploring whatever the weather.

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1. Combloux, Haute Savoie, France

The new Biotope in Combloux in the Alps is a great choice for families
MARINE MARTIN

Family fun in France's first eco-pool
Everyone loves the new Biotope in Combloux, in the Alps south of Geneva. The first eco-swimming lake in France is lined with a membrane (so no one gets muddy toes) and filtered by the surrounding plants. And with gently shelving play areas and surrounding lawns for picnics, it'll keep your kids entertained for hours. Use in conjunction with the local pump track for wannabe mountain bikers, as well as an Alpine rollercoaster in neighbouring Megève, and you have the makings of a multifaceted mountain holiday, with sensational views of Mont Blanc to boot. Nearby, the modern apartments at Les Fermes du Mont Blanc offer a convenient base.
Details Seven nights' room only from £195pp, including ferry crossing (peakretreats.co.uk)

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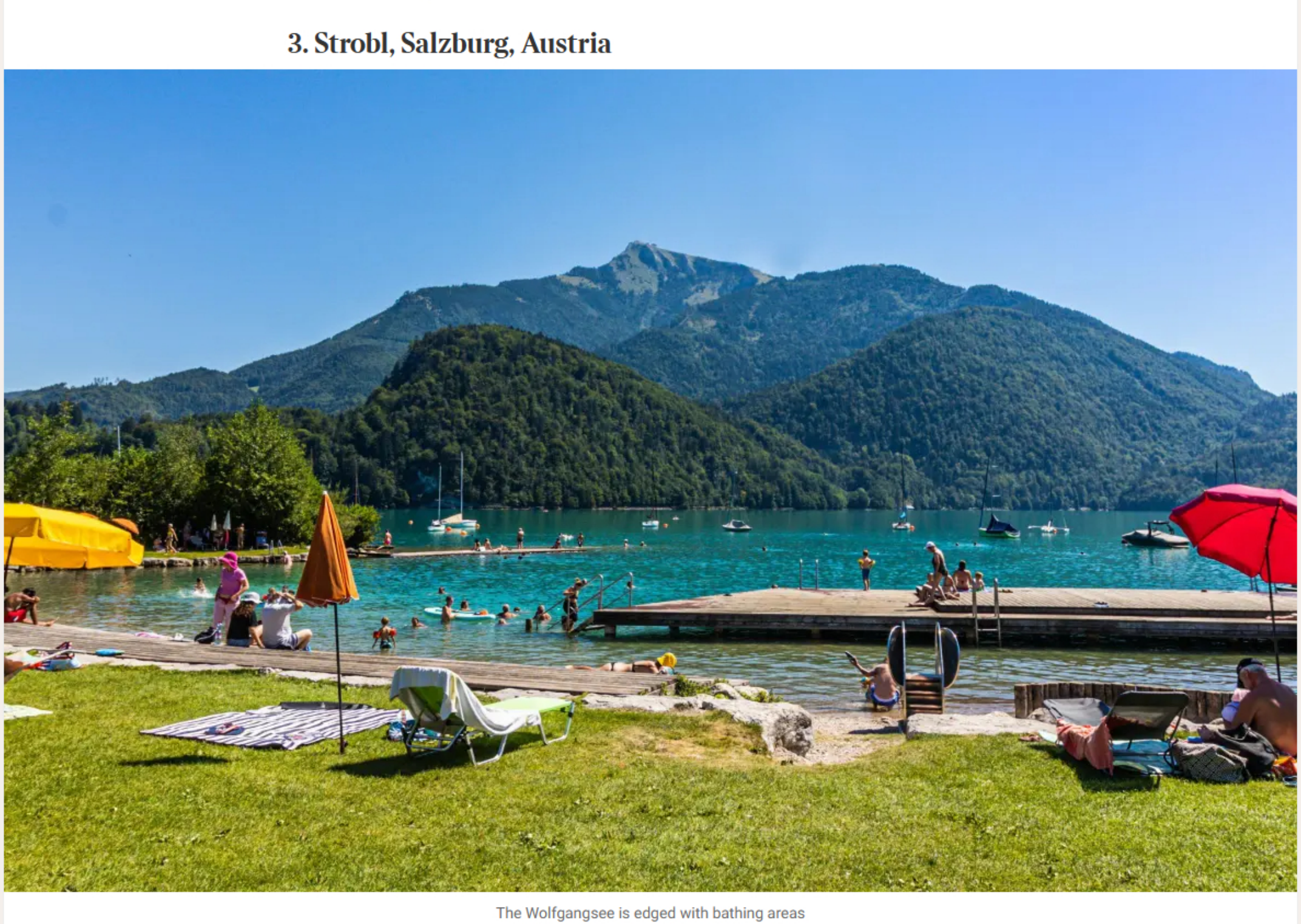
2. Ljugarn, Gotland, Sweden

The Smakrike Krog & Logi guesthouse frees up from mid-August

Beach holiday on a Swedish island
Low-key, leafy and quietly upmarket, the seaside village of Ljugarn is peppered with refurbished villas and home to a beach. Accommodation is in short supply in July but frees up in August, especially from the middle of the month, when Swedish schools reopen. And with sea temperatures near their late-summer peak (about 19C), it's a great time for a week of carefree, sand-between-your-toes serenity on Sweden's favourite holiday island. Family groups will be tempted by Airbnbs such as the neat, four-bedroom villa from £269 a night (airbnb.co.uk/rooms/34055883); couples might prefer one of the simple but pretty rooms at the Smakrike Krog & Logi guesthouse.
Details B&B doubles from £150 (smakrike.se). Fly to Stockholm and take the ferry from Nynashamn

- **Read our full guide to Sweden**

3. Strobl, Salzburg, Austria


The Wolfgangsee is edged with bathing areas
ALAMY

Cycling and swimming in the Salzkammergut
This self-guided Austrian Lakes Activities holiday is focused primarily on gentle bike rides, with a week's cycle hire included in the price. It has wisely chosen the celebrated Austrian lake district (aka the Salzkammergut) as its base, so you can take the plunge whenever it gets toasty. The Wolfgangsee is the lake nearest your base at the chic, four-star Bergrose Hideaway, and it is edged with bathing areas, as well as a circular cycle track. This year the water temperature in its shallower areas has already hit 26C.
Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,169pp, including flights

Book a stay

- 13 of the best Alpine resorts for a summer holiday

4. Narsarsuaq, Greenland

Icebergs, mountains and Viking history
Surprise, surprise: bookings are up sharply for Greenland holidays this year, with most programmes sold out — but not this eight-day, self-guided Explore South Greenland tour, which combines majestic landscapes with a fascinating insight into Viking history. En route you'll stay at hotels in Narsarsuaq, Qaqortoq and Narsaq, as well as having the chance to explore fjords filled with icebergs, hike mountains and (at extra cost) visit the retreating ice cap. Meanwhile, with the help of local museums and archaeological remains, you'll learn why the Vikings vanished from Greenland after 450 years of settlement.
Details Seven nights' B&B from £2,495pp, including flights (regent-holidays.co.uk)

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5. Arosa, Graubünden, Switzerland

The pool at Valsana Hotel overlooks the Alps

A chic new hotel with lake views
Arosa has a lovely new summer base, the four-star superior Valsana Hotel, which overlooks the Obersee lake in the middle of town. Inside, the hotel's double rooms are huge by Alpine standards, and feature industrial lighting, vintage vinyl and a mix of Swiss and North American design motifs. Outside, Arosa's other lake, the Untersee, is the place for swimming, while free mountain bike hire allows you to explore the region's vast network of waymarked trails. The hotel also offers a range of guided mountain experiences, including sunrise hiking, fire-building and fishing.
Details B&B doubles from £233 (tschuggencollection.ch). Fly to Zurich

- 10 of the most beautiful places in Switzerland

6. Tisvilde, North Zealand, Denmark

Tisvilde has lots of lovely hotels near the beach
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Beach days and biking on the Danish Riviera
Thirty miles northwest of Copenhagen, the island of Zealand meets the sea in a sweep of forested bluffs, cute second homes and long sand-and-pebble beaches. This is the Danish Riviera, and the resort town of Tisvilde gives you the best of it, with a mix of bike rides, beach days, forest walks and a buzzing restaurant scene. One of its elegant seaside hostelries, the Tisvildeleje Strandhotel, still has summer availability too, especially in August, so you can sink gratefully into the embrace of its beach-toned bedrooms once you've dusted the sand off your feet.
Details B&B doubles from £121. Fly to Copenhagen

Book a stay

7. Senja, Troms, Norway

A spectacular landscape of white sand beaches and jagged peaks
On a clear day, the soft-sand beaches of Senja seem to glow as white as those in the Caribbean. But even so, this is not a place for sunbathing — more than 150 miles north of the Arctic Circle, the second-largest Norwegian island is a place of cool midsummer temperatures, variable weather and jagged peaks that rise straight out of the sea, and it begs to be explored. This one-week, self-guided walking tour sticks to the north coast and offers short but spectacular coastal walks from three bases, two of which are in converted fisherman's cottages.
Details Seven nights' half-board from £2,375pp (inntravel.co.uk). Fly to Tromso

- 10 of the best places to visit in Norway

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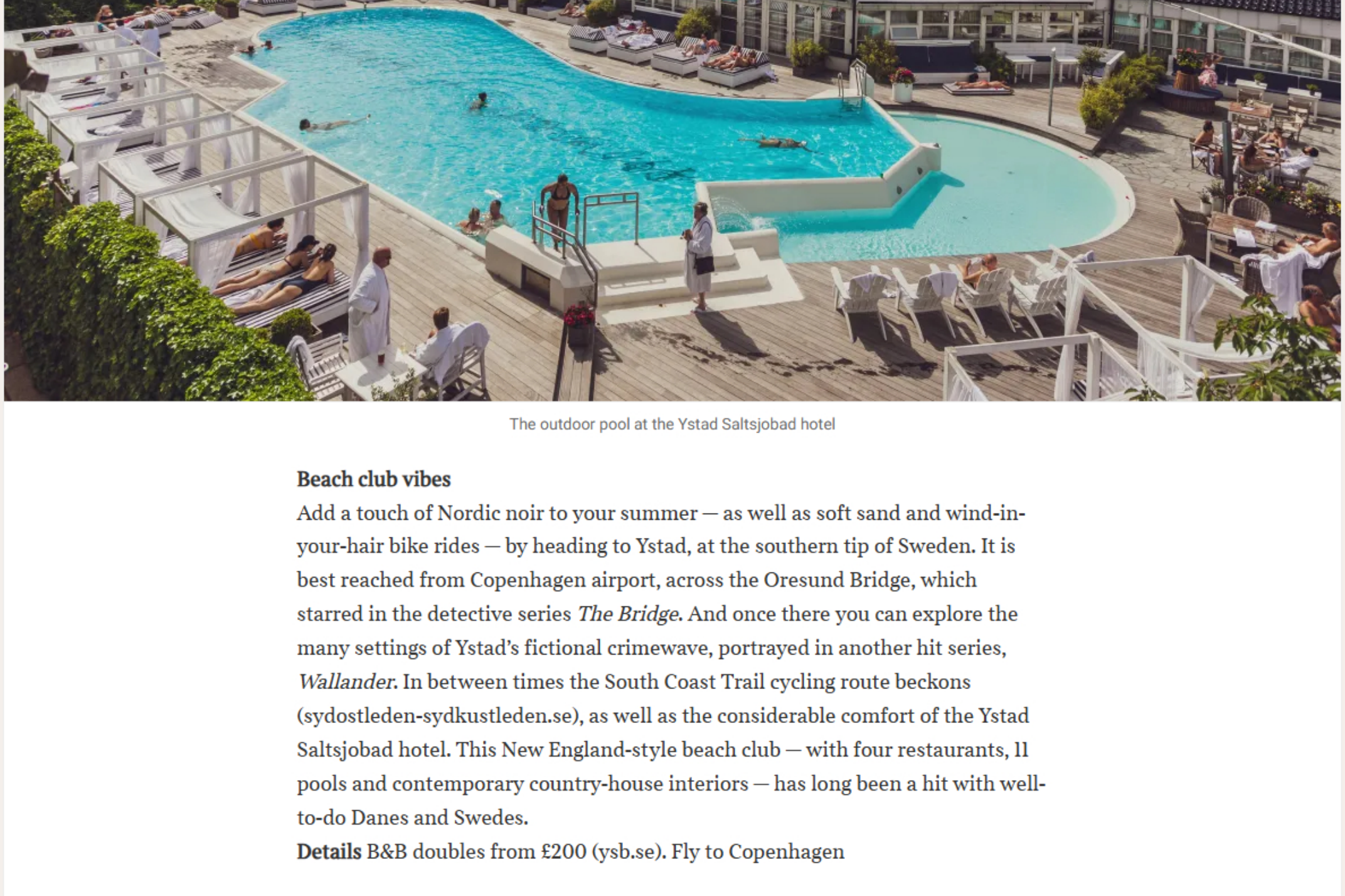
8. Ötztal, Tyrol, Austria

Whitewater rafting is just one of many activities to try on the Ötz River

Adrenaline-soaked adventure
In summer the long Alpine valley of the Ötz River is best known for its hell-for-leather mountain biking, courtesy of the swooping downhill trails of Bike Republic Sölden (soelden.com). But it's a treat for water-loving thrill-seekers too. Not only can you try canyoning and whitewater rafting here, but its Area 47 waterpark is awash with adrenaline; giant water slides, a water cannon, bouldering walls, high-diving — they're all here (£46; area47.at). Meanwhile, more serene swims are available at the Piburgersee, one of the warmest swimming lakes in the Tyrol, where the water temperature can reach 25C. In Sautens, the four-star Daniel hotel is near both and has a pool.
Details Half-board doubles from £274. Fly to Innsbruck or Zurich

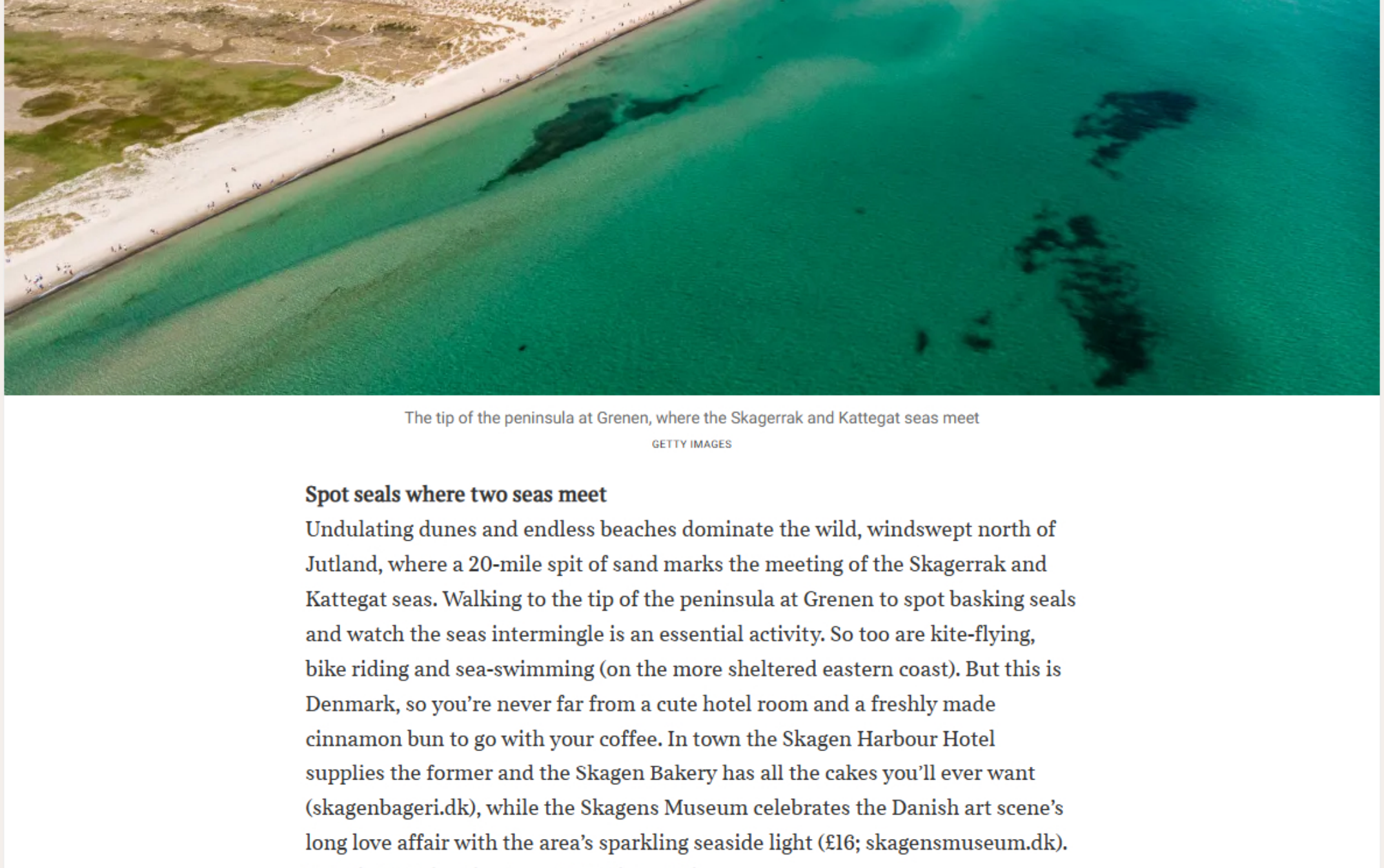
Book a stay

9. Ystad, Scania, Sweden


The outdoor pool at the Ystad Saltsjobad hotel

Beach club vibes
Add a touch of Nordic noir to your summer — as well as soft sand and wind-in-your-hair bike rides — by heading to Ystad, at the southern tip of Sweden. It is best reached from Copenhagen airport, across the Oresund Bridge, which starred in the detective series *The Bridge*. And once there you can explore the many settings of Ystad's fictional crimewave, portrayed in another hit series, *Wallander*. In between times the South Coast Trail cycling route beckons (sydostleden-sydkustleden.se), as well as the considerable comfort of the Ystad Saltsjobad hotel. This New England-style beach club — with four restaurants, 11 pools and contemporary country-house interiors — has long been a hit with well-to-do Danes and Swedes.
Details B&B doubles from £200 (ysb.se). Fly to Copenhagen

10. Skagen, North Jutland, Denmark


The tip of the peninsula at Grenen, where the Skagerrak and Kattegat seas meet
GETTY IMAGES

Spot seals where two seas meet
Undulating dunes and endless beaches dominate the wild, windswept north of Jutland, where a 20-mile spit of sand marks the meeting of the Skagerrak and Kattegat seas. Walking to the tip of the peninsula at Grenen to spot basking seals and watch the seas intermingle is an essential activity. So too are kite-flying, bike riding and sea-swimming (on the more sheltered eastern coast). But this is Denmark, so you're never far from a cute hotel room and a freshly made cinnamon bun to go with your coffee. In town the Skagen Harbour Hotel supplies the former and the Skagen Bakery has all the cakes you'll ever want (skagenbageri.dk), while the Skagens Museum celebrates the Danish art scene's long love affair with the area's sparkling seaside light (£16; skagensmuseum.dk).
Details B&B doubles from £173. Fly to Aalborg

Book a stay

11. Morzine, Haute Savoie, France