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10 holidays in Europe for people who hate the heat

From naturally heated lagoons in Iceland to dog-sledding in Svalbard, here's where to go if you're looking for cooler temperatures

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06 July 2025 12:00pm BST

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In the summer, Iceland has up to 20 hours of daylight and temperatures reach around 13C. Credit: Alamy

Sizzling sights and sunbaked beaches. A heatwave [gripped large parts of Europe this week](#). Spain was among the nations baking – where a record high of 46C was recorded in the town of El Granado on June 28.

If recent years are anything to go by, this won't be the last of it. It looks likely that we are in for another long, scorching summer in Europe. Fine, if you like your holidays hot. But if you'd prefer to seek out a cooler corner of the continent, where to go?

The obvious answer is to head north to explore the scenic shores and lakes of Scandinavia, the glacial landscapes of Iceland or the intriguing Baltic cities. The alternative is to head high, perhaps to the Spanish Picos or the French Alps, where there'll be plenty of high-altitude sunshine but none of the enervating heat and humidity.

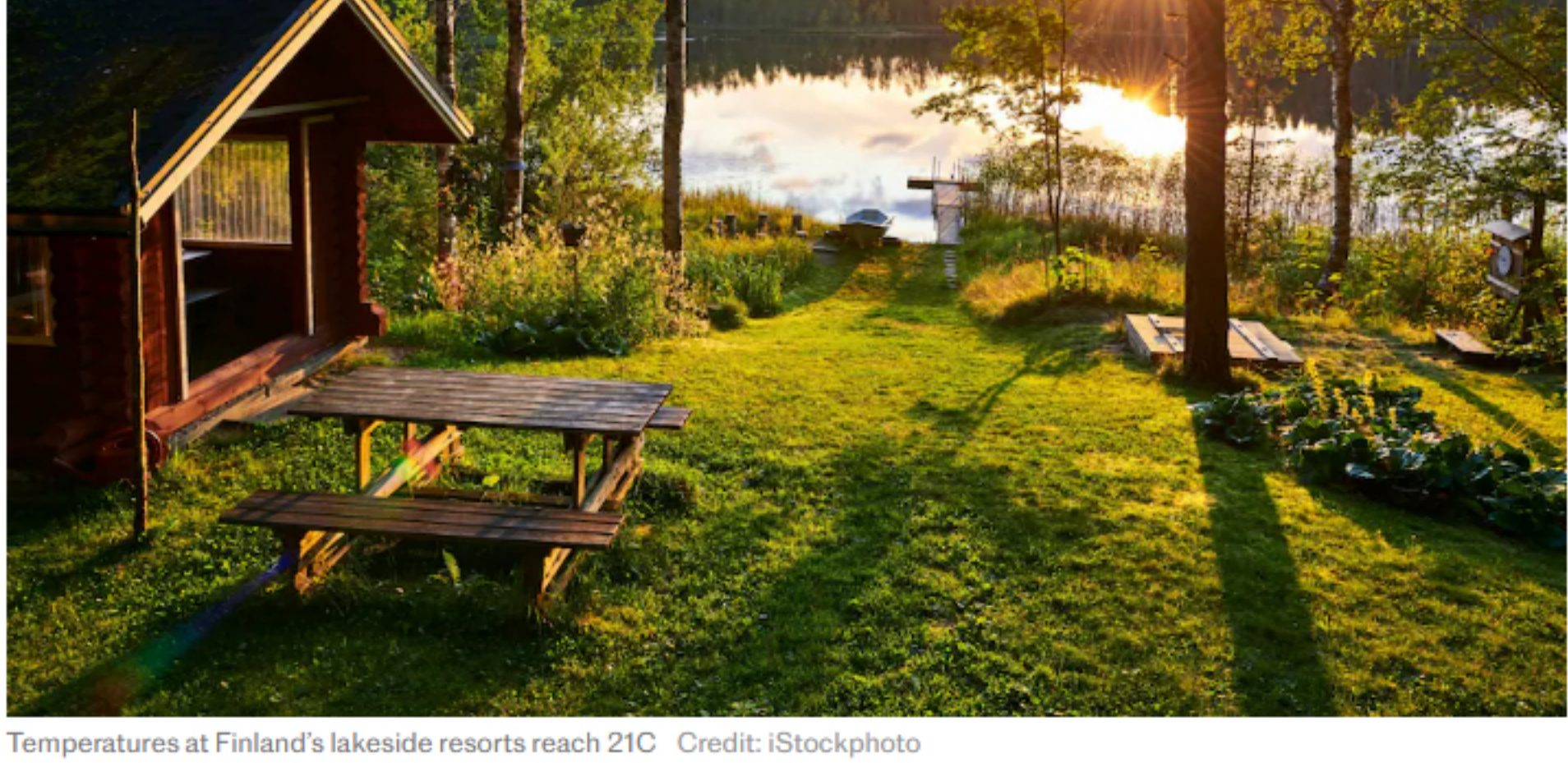
Whether you are looking for an active, cultural or fly-and-flop break, here's a selection of ten great ways to avoid the worst of the heat in Europe this summer.

The French Alps: best for outdoor activities

Lifts serving the Grande Motte glacier, which rises to a lofty 11,995ft above the mountain resort of [Tignes](#), stay open for summer skiing until July 20. Lower down, in the resort, peak temperatures hover at around 17C and among the cooling activities are kayaking, [paddle boarding](#) and visits to the Acroland water park, where adults and children aged 10 years and over can plunge down slides into the icy lake water below.

Peak Retreats (023 9283 9310) offers a seven-night stay in Le Nevada, Tignes Val Claret, from £317, self-catering, based on four staying in a two-bedroom apartment, including ferry crossing for car and passengers, departing July 12.

Finland: best for family adventure



Temperatures at Finland's lakeside resorts reach 21C. Credit: iStockphoto

The lakes, rivers and forests of eastern Finland offer a vast playground for active families who want a sunny outdoor holiday without excessive heat. Temperatures rise to a pleasant 21C in child-friendly lakeside resorts, which lie within a two-hour drive of Helsinki and offer canoeing, swimming, paddle boarding, fishing and local trails.

Discover the World (01737 428 406) offers a five-night Taste of Finnish Lakeland from £525, including car rental. Excludes flights to Helsinki, based on two adults and two children under 12 years. Departures until September.

Denmark: best for cycling

Zealand, [Denmark's largest island](#), offers peaceful backroads and uncrowded cycle paths, long hours of daylight and gentle sunshine. Relaxing itineraries loop through shady woodland, past sandy beaches and scenic fjords, and through small fishing villages, with a foray into the coastal city of Roskilde.

Freedom Treks (01273 977961) offer a seven-night, self-guided Zealand Bike Tour from £1,033, including luggage transfer, maps and route information. Excludes bike hire (£86 for a hybrid with pannier; £205 for an E-bike), flights to Copenhagen and rail transfers. Departs weekly through July and August.

Normandy: best for being by the seaside



Take in Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy. Credit: Getty

The Côte d'Azur can see summer temperatures nudge 30C or more in July and August, but northern France enjoys a more temperate 20 to 22C. Hop across the Channel to stay near the sandy beaches of [Normandy](#), the a chance to tour the wartime sights, sample the seafood and explore the rocky island of Mont-Saint-Michel.

Brittany Ferries (0330 162 5457) offers seven nights at four-star Hotel Le Grand Hard-Domaine Utah Beach from £1,266, self-drive, including return Portsmouth to Caen ferry crossing, departing August 5.

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The Spanish Picos: best for mountains

While temperatures sizzle in the [Costas](#), the mountainous areas near the Cantabrian coast of northern Spain offer a welcome refuge from the summer heat. The Picos de Europa are best explored on foot with a network of well-marked paths through peaceful rural backwaters, the medieval town of Potes and the bucolic Valdeón valley.

Pura Aventura (01273 676712) offers an eight-night, self-guided Rural Life and Mountain Hikes tour from £1,650, including four lunches, six dinners and luggage transfers. Excludes travel to Bilbao. Departures throughout July and August.

Svalbard: best for wildlife-watching



A team of huskies on Spitzbergen Island in Svalbard. Credit: Moment RF

In the northern Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard, temperatures barely reach 7C in July and August and nights can dip to 2C. These islands are home to walrus, whales and polar bears, which gather in the fjords near the capital Longyearbyen. Try dog-sledding on wheels for views of the glacier at Nordenskiöldbreen.

Regent Holidays (01174 537640; [regent-holidays.co.uk](#)) offers a five-night Svalbard Summer Break from £1,750, including four excursions. Departures throughout July and August.

Iceland: best for spectacular landscapes



Cool down by taking in Iceland's landscapes. Credit: Shutterstock

Iceland's summer season is as short as it is cool. July and August see temperatures barely reaching 13C, but the long days (up to 20 hours of daylight), make this an ideal season to explore its unique inland and coastal scenery. From spectacular waterfalls to spouting geysers and from black-sand beaches to naturally heated lagoons, it's the perfect antidote to the muggy Mediterranean.

Trailfinders (020 7368 1317) offers a seven-night Southern Iceland's Geysers, Glaciers and Waterfalls package from £1,899, including car hire and entrance to the Blue Lagoon, departing August 25.

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The Baltics: best for cruising

A [Baltic Sea cruise](#) is a great alternative to the sultry Mediterranean in the summer months, and although you can expect plenty of sunny days, you may also need to pack a jumper for cooler days. Highlights include shore excursions to see the mix of medieval and modern architecture in the region's cities, and the variety of coastal scenery.

MSC Cruises (020 3426 3010) offers a seven-night Baltics and Scandinavia Cruise on MSC Poesia, from £2,559, full board, including children's clubs, on-board entertainment and excursions to Klaipeda in Lithuania, the Latvian capital of Riga, Stockholm and Copenhagen, based on an interior cabin. Excludes flights to Hamburg and transfers to the embarkation point at Warnemünde. Departures on July 27 and August 10.

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Switzerland: best for a group tour

Snow-covered peaks and glaciers, which circle the Upper Engadine Valley in south-east Switzerland, provide an alluring backdrop to bucolic mountain pastures and larch woodlands, where mild conditions are ideal for a huge variety of alpine flowers. Spring comes late to this region and in July you can still expect to see orchids, primroses, glacier jasmine and foxgloves at their best.

Naturetrek (01962 733051; [naturetrek.co.uk](#)) offers a seven-night Switzerland - Alpine Flowers of the Upper Engadine from £2,595, full board, departing July 2 and 9.

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Senja: best for hiking



Senja is perfect for hiking in the summer with temperatures averaging around 15C

The clear, azure-blue seawater and sandy beaches on this far-flung Norwegian island may look reminiscent of the Caribbean, but the temperatures are quite a contrast. Averaging around 15C in summer, its scenic landscapes of moorland and mountains offer a range of spectacular walking terrain, with comfortable accommodation in small fishing villages and long hours of daylight.

Inttravel (01653 617000) offers a seven-night Hike Senja - An Arctic Island from £2,510, half board, including car hire and walking notes. Excludes flights. Departures throughout July and August.

Prices quoted are per person including breakfast, transfers and flights, unless otherwise stated, and are subject to availability.

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