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This week's dream: watching grizzlies in Arctic Canada

Situated close to the Arctic Circle in the far north of Yukon territory, Bear Cave Mountain Lodge offers "the best bear-watching in Canada", says Brian Jackman in *The Sunday Telegraph*. At the heart of a mountainous "desolation" as big as Switzerland but home to only 350 people, it sits by a river where thousands of chum salmon spawn in autumn, attracting grizzly bears from miles around. The lodge's manager, Phil Timpany, is the region's most charismatic and experienced guide: his guests don't just see the animals, they learn to recognise them as individuals.

The lodge lies a two-hour helicopter ride from Dawson City. This was the home of the Klondike Gold Rush, and "its streets are still made of pay dirt and permafrost", while its wooden buildings are straight out of a "spaghetti western film set". Beyond lies "an emptiness of deep-frozen rivers, boreal forests and chaste white mountains" – and then snow-covered tundra "known only to caribou and the wolves that follow



Fishing Branch River, home to salmon and grizzlies

them". The lodge itself is "basic", with a single loo that's "open to the four winds", but its cabins are "snug" and have mercifully effective wood-fired stoves. Moose, caribou and wolverine wander nearby, and at night, when the aurora borealis "swirls and flickers" overhead, you can sometimes hear the "eerie harmonies of wolves in the spruce forests".

Even when no bears are in sight, their presence is "spine-tingling". And when one emerges from the mist, its dark coat armoured with icicles and frost, it can seem like "an apparition" – "the spirit of winter made flesh and bone". Timpany carries a gun for protection, but has never had to use it,

although bears sometimes pass within a few feet, or settle down so close by you can "hear the crunch of bones as they feast on the carcass of a freshly caught salmon". *Wildlife Worldwide* (0845-130 6982, www.wildlifeworldwide.com) has a 14-day trip from £10,950pp, incl. chartered helicopter, specialist clothes and flights.

Hotel of the week



Sands Hotel, Margate

Occupying a Victorian building close to the Turner Contemporary gallery on Margate's waterfront, the Sands is a "first-rate" modern hotel with "sleek" decor and sea views, says Tom Chesshyre in *The Times*. Opened just six months ago, it "sparkles" with mirrors, chandeliers and chrome lights, although there's nothing "fussy" in the guest rooms, which have muted (verging on "bland") decor. There's a lovely roof terrace with low-slung, Miami Beach-style wicker sofas, and the restaurant and cocktail bar are "airy" and "relaxed", with great food. Rooms 1-3 have balconies; rooms 20 and 21 are windowless.

Doubles from £120 b&b.
01843-228228, www.sandshotelmargate.co.uk

Getting the flavour of...

The slow train to Mandalay

After decades of stifling military rule, Burma is littered with remnants of its colonial past – few more "entrancing" than the Yangon-Mandalay railway, says Shawn Donnan in the FT. The overnight trip from the country's largest city to its second city takes 15 hours, in clapped-out carriages that are frequently derailed (the plane, by contrast, takes 90 minutes). But the ride is "magnificent", with views little changed since George Orwell's days as a policeman here in the 1920s. Children cheer as you pass through villages, white cranes watch from rice paddies, and there are gilded pagodas galore. In the dining car there's one chef, frying sparrows in a wok. Go now, before the country's modernising reforms sweep it away. *Ampersand* (020-7819 9770, www.ampersandtravel.com) can tailor-make a 12-day Burma trip from £2,595pp, incl. flights and train.

By the beach in Byron Shire

Perched at Australia's eastern tip, 100 miles south of Brisbane, Byron Bay is one of the country's most charming small beach towns, says Lydia Bell in *Condé Nast Traveller*. A farming village discovered by surfers in the 1960s, it drew hippies in droves in the 1970s. Today it is among Australia's "most exclusive property enclaves", but retains an "alternative cast" and a reputation as a place to

throw off "the shackles". Vast, often-empty beaches stretch away down the coast; inland lie "rippling" valleys filled with banana and coffee plantations. There are regular music, arts and literary festivals, and plenty of interesting small shops, both in the town and in the nearby villages collectively known as "Byron Shire". *Scott Dunn* (020-8682 5060, www.scottdunn.com) has a seven-night trip from £2,680pp, incl. car hire and flights.

An idyllic Sicilian archipelago

The "Armani set" has pushed up prices on other Sicilian islands such as Lipari and Pantelleria, but the tiny Egadi archipelago remains relatively "sleepy" and "unaffected", says Tim Jepson in *The Daily Telegraph*. Yet its beaches and mountains are "glorious". Favignana, the biggest island at eight square miles, has restaurants serving "simple harbour-front meals", and magnificent bays. Levanzo has "even more in the way of remote island charm", with an "austere" rocky interior and delightful coves to swim in. But Marettimo is perhaps the pick of the three, a near-perfect 1950s throwback with its pretty whitewashed main village, black-clad old ladies and fishermen mending nets. Its coast is also "sublime", and its landscape is criss-crossed by ancient footpaths with "superb" views. *Inntravel* (01653-617000, www.inntravel.co.uk) offers rental apartments from £798pw (excl. flights).

Last-minute offers from top travel companies

Art in the New Forest

Two-day courses with artist Mal Philips, incl. materials and tuition in landscapes at £80pp. B&B available for £45pppn (2 sharing). 01590-622296, www.cottagelodge.co.uk. 24/25 Feb and 18/19 Mar.

Walking the Lake District

Two can enjoy a 3-night guided break for £413, full-board, at Derwent Bank Country House. Must book by 14 Feb. 0845-470 7558, www.hfholidays.co.uk. Starting 28 Feb.

West Indies break

Ten-night trip to Jamaica from £899pp, incl. return flights to Gatwick with BA, transfers and b&b accommodation. 01293-735831, www.hayesandjarvis.co.uk. Depart 9 March.

Rhine Valley cruise

Save £650pp on an 8-day trip, departing 30 March. From £1,949 incl. flights, 7-night cruise, meals and drinks onboard and excursions. 0800-988 5867, www.titantravel.co.uk. Book by 28 Feb.