The 20 best autumn escapes

From cycling in Spain to foodie breaks in Italy, Annabelle Thorpe has the pick of the trips in Europe

1 Cycling in Andalucia
   The riding in Spain is still pleasantly warm in autumn, but not too hot, and the cycling becomes a real treat with a pleasant, Hauswirth's new tour option in the foothills of Sierra Nevada, about 45 miles from Granada. Head west along the Camino de la Plana de Granada, past wind farms, through almond groves, olive trees, and vineyards until you reach the charming village of Villanueva de la Reina. Stay at the historic Palacio de los Guzmanes and enjoy a meal of hearty Spanish cuisine.

2 Late summer sun in Turkey
   Surrounded by olive trees and on a lovely beach in Turkey, the new Vaua Resort offers luxurious accommodations in the style of a traditional Turkish house, which dates back to 18th century, but blends modern comforts. Stay at the Antalya resort, with its private pool, spa, and indoor/outdoor dining. Enjoy a day trip to the ancient city of Ephesus or visit the nearby city of Antalya.

3 See Sweden's autumn aurora
   Waking up early is recommended to catch a glimpse of the northern lights, or the aurora borealis. Stay at the NH Collection Copenhagen or the Radisson Blu Hotel in Stockholm. Enjoy a day trip to the Stockholm Archipelago or visit the ABBA Museum in Stockholm.

4 Budapest Fest
   The largest of its kind in Europe, the Budapest Fest brings a bohemian atmosphere to the Hungarian capital. The festival runs from October 20 to November 4, featuring music, dance, and street performances. Stay at the Hotel Boulevard or the Aria Hotel, both located in the heart of Budapest. Enjoy a day trip to the Szentendre Open Air Museum or visit the Budapest City Park.
5 Gourmet trip to Dubrovnik

The four-night break at the Sun Gardens hotel in Dubrovnik proves that Croatia has much to offer in the culinary stakes. Excursions include a private boat trip to the Pelješac peninsula, a vineyard tour, a tasting at one of the country’s finest wines, and a visit to an island in the Adriatic Sea. Meals from the hotel’s restaurants are included in the price of the trip, which starts from £61 per person on a bed-and-breakfast basis. A one-night stay starts from £134 per person. Visit sunhotels.eu.

6 Wine festival in Italy

The Emilia-Romagna region in northern Italy is a trip destination for foodies who come in autumn for its famous wine celebrations. The Grappa and Lambrusco Carnival in Modena on September 27, with a parade of trolley-themed floats, tastings and live music. Truffle lovers should head to the petty town of San Giuseppe Polesine in October, which holds the National Truffle Fair. Every Sunday, stop at Cermi di Mezzate, a charming agriturismo, with a renowned restaurant.

7 Amsterdam for art (and beer) lovers

The shimmering canals and tree-lined walks of the Vondelpark are at their most beautiful when dusted with autumn leaves, and this year you have the chance to see a unique collection of sculptures by Juan Munoz in the gardens of the Rijksmuseum, until October 31. If you’re after a more peaceful weekend, Piny Bakker of Amsterdam reveals his secret spots. A one-night stay starts from £125 per person on a self-catering basis. Visit dubrovnikdmc.com. EasyJet has flights to Dubrovnik.

8 Movies and more in Vienna

The Austrian capital is easier to reach this autumn, with new direct flights from Gatwick (starting on Thursday) and easyJet from London (from October 27) and Manchester (from November 5) and flights from Edinburgh from November 11. There’s a busy line-up, with autumn launches on this year of Mozart, restaurants, and exhibitions at various venues.

9 Bright lights in Berlin

See Berlin in a whole new light from October 1 to 15, when dozens of the city’s most iconic buildings are lit up for the annual Lichterfest (festival of lights.de). There are guided walking tours, daily at 6pm and noon, as well as tours of the Berlin Wall, the Brandenburg Gate, and the Reichstag. Stay at the well-located and newly-opened budget boutique Cremers Boutique Hotel, a short walk from Gendarmenmarkt.

10 Tuscany in style

Autumn weekends don’t come more indulgent than at the gorgeous Villa Le Barone in Florence, which offers a getaway to the region’s best wineries, as well as wine tastings and cooking classes. The Villa Le Barone Resort includes a two-night stay from £565 per person on a bed-and-breakfast basis. Visit villalebarone.com.

11 Make your own wine in the Douro Valley

The scenic Douro valley comes alive in September and October when the fields are full of workers harvesting the vine. Quinta do Noval, the new Six Senses Douro Valley, has the chance to join in with the festivities. As well as treating the grapes, there are wine-tasting tours by helicopter as well as the chance to become a sommelier for a day, and wine and dine courses that show off the region’s beauty. Visit sixsensesdourovalley.com.

12 Autumn colour in Oslo

It might be the most obvious choice for a weekend of flame-hued autumn walks, but Oslo is crammed with parks,
14 See the best of medieval Sicily
The atmospheric medieval town of Cefalú — right on the sea on Sicily’s sun-drenched northern coast — has seen its profile rise since its spectacular Norman cathedral was designated a Unesco World Heritage site in July; now — even until late autumn — it’s a great base for walkers, with the Madonie mountains running up behind the town, or for those with walking-while-reading needs. The average daily high temperature is 20°C in October and mid-November. Base yourself at the central La Pandion Hotel & Ristorante, and get a flavour of Cefalù Torreto’s Chicoo Paradise (rooms of which were filmed in the town) with an on-site eating experience and pool.

Details: B&B doubles cost from €60 (091) 208 64 80, www.lapandionhotel.it

15 Sound of Music in Salzburg
Salzburg takes a break in autumn, between the heavy days of the summer crowds and the crisp months of the ski season in Austria. It’s the perfect time to soak up celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the city’s film industry, the Sound of Music. The musical-film occasion returns to the city from September 25 to November 6, and there are many ways to get involved. One city tour by bike, foot, coach — or as a singalong. For more devoted music lovers, the Salzburg Concerts run throughout autumn — a series of concerts and recitals at various cultural sites throughout the city (concerts.net). The daily Hotel & Villa Morgen has just two minutes’ walk from the Old Town.

Details: B&B doubles cost from €60 (06) 4362 218 60, www.soustore.at

16 Sailing and boating in Bodrum
Simply staying on your feet on a paddleboard might seem more daunting than sailing, but the Kempsinski in Bodrum has actually upped the ante with brand new sup’s. Each class consists of a 10-minute warm-up followed by a 90-minute sup meditation. For sailing and yoga, benefit from Bodrum in October when the Bodrum Cup yachting festival, one of the biggest events in the country, takes place from October 19 to 24. The beach at Kusadasi’s Aydin Bay is perfect for a quiet private day with a gorgeous, soft-monitor beach. Dine during early autumn in October. The water is still warm enough to swim in without a wetsuit.

Details: B&B doubles cost from €70 (0252) 373 810, www.kempinski.com

17 Whales, dolphins and birds in Spain
The Straits of Gibraltar are a fantastic place to catch spectacular autumn bird migrations, but they also offer the chance to see fin and sperm whales and common dolphins heading south to warmer waters. Naturalists have a four-night break, departing on Thursday or September 21, which combines gentle walks to see raptors and shorebirds with boat trips into the Straits. It includes four nights at the local hotel Iberia Cumbre, just outside the town of Tarifa.

Details: A four-night break departing on Thursday or September 21 is from £295 including flights, all meals, accommodation and a naturalist tour guide (01422 73399, naturalist.co.uk)

18 Calvados in Normandy
Few areas of France are more synonymous with autumn than Normandy when the apple orchards give up their crop and the doorframes are full of ivy. A rustic Sunday has created two new initiatives, one four-day and one seven-day, mixing calvados and colour-tasting with stays at some of its finest places in the region, including Château de Coudon, the oldest Ecu in France, and the gorgeous, 18th-century Manor de la Ferté, with four acres of botanical gardens.

Details: Three nights’ £96 costs £270, including tastings and ferry crossing (01777 254 7810, sommiers.co.uk)

19 Painting and pampering in Venice
Immerse yourself in art at the Venice Biennale (International Art Biennale), which runs throughout the city until November 22. With the summer crowds gone, there’s more space to admire the works by 136 different artists at the Biennale’s largest show. All the World’s Futures, and the individual country’s stand at the Central Pavilion. For the culture with some chilling time at the city’s newest state-of-the-art spa hotel, the JW Marriott Venice Resort & Spa, tucked away in its own private island with spectacular views across to San Marco from the pool.

Details: B&B doubles cost from £376 (041 38 029 395, marriott.co.uk)

20 Food and music in Switzerland
Switzerland’s smallest city, town of Ascona — just 166m above sea level — is still pleasantly warm in autumn, when the streets throng with foodie events, including the Chestnut Festival (October 3), and the Autumn Festival (October 9), where food stalls spring up in the town center and there is an afternoon of live music. The Settimana Musica di Ascona — classical music festival — runs until October 16, with symphony orchestras and chamber ensembles playing venues and churches around the town. Stay at the Art Hotel Rivanus, on the shores of Lake Maggiore.

Details: B&B doubles cost from £114 (091 91 73 81 64, hotelrivinus.ch)