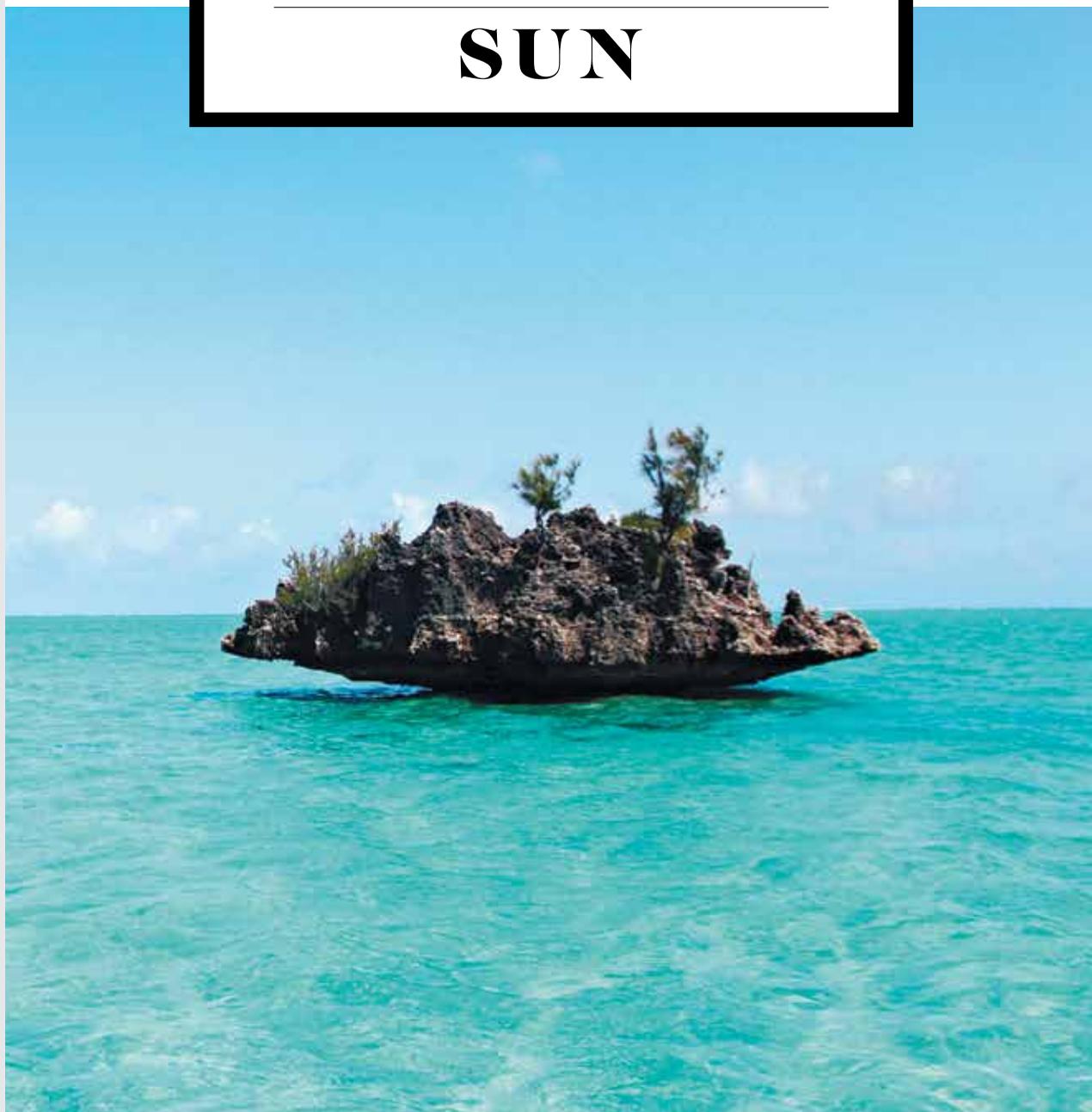


ULTIMATE

WINTER

SUN



DREAMING OF WARMER CLIMES, BUT NOT SURE WHERE TO START?
GEMMA ASKHAM IS YOUR GUIDE FOR THE BEST SUN-DRENCHED DESTINATIONS
FROM DECEMBER THROUGH TO MARCH. ALL FLYING FROM LONDON GATWICK





DECEMBER
Average temperature in the UK
▼
5°C / 41°F

TAMPA

Average temperature:
19°C / 66°F
Flight time: nine hours,
25 minutes

December is the sweet spot when west-coast Florida's summer stickiness has gone, but ocean breezes are still the swimsuit-wearing side of fresh. Tampa's fame once peaked with Busch Gardens theme park, then hype spread for its pearly beaches and its arts scene – the noteworthy Salvador Dalí Museum in St Petersburg, plus Tampa Museum of Art, iconic for an exterior wall made entirely of LED lights. Today, 'Tampa' and 'hipster' could be synonyms: head to the Cuban-vibed Ybor City for cigars and streetcars, Seminole Heights for craft beer (try The Independent – a petrol-station-turned-pub) or Downtown for first-rate vegan cafés, such as Pharmacy.

Stay: The slick **GRAND HYATT TAMPA BAY**. You can set up poolside, watching the sunset over the ocean, in less than ten minutes from airport arrivals (there's even a free shuttle).



Explore Tampa and the Gulf Coast by hiring a car and see more of Florida on a fly-drive holiday. Book your flights and car hire at ba.com

Harrison's Cave and its maze of underground waterfalls. On land, expect fine colonial architecture (the capital, Bridgetown, is on Unesco's World Heritage List), lush parks (Hunte's Gardens is a treat) and rum distilleries, such as St Nicholas Abbey. With summer's hurricane threat gone, December is welcomingly cooler – travel before Christmas for the best travel rates.

BARBADOS

Average temperature:
29°C / 84°F
Flight time: eight hours,
30 minutes

The beaches may look Photoshopped, but that blue isn't a trick of the eye (or IT). Barbados is an ocean addict's fix – tranquil and glitzy on the west coast, surfable in the south, wild and wave-pummelled in the east. Board a submarine to spot hawksbill sea turtles, or tour

Stay: Once the beach house of a plantation owner, the all-suite **COBBLERS COVE** in Speightstown is a (pink!) waterfront retreat, buried among palm trees. A tip: don't miss oyster Fridays.



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MALDIVES

Average temperature:
28°C / 82°F
Flight time: ten hours,
20 minutes

Few coastlines are so staggeringly beautiful that even non-beach-bums would remortgage to go, but that's the Maldives for you. A surreal collection of 1,200 inhabited islands – grouped into coral reefs called atolls – formed above a vast underwater mountain range. Once the sole territory of cash-flash honeymooners, nowadays the Maldives' resort scene has opened up – from yoga retreats to excellent three-star hotels. December is a great month to go: May to October's monsoon season, whose rains and winds can scupper diving visibility, is a distant memory. Jump into your private pool, otherwise known as the Indian Ocean, to see parrotfish, manta rays and – cue *Jaws* music – whale sharks.

Stay: A 30-minute speedboat ride from Malé (just call us James Bond), **HUVAFEN FUSHI** is an award-scooping classic on Kaafu atoll. Home to both beach-top and ocean-top bungalows, it has the Maldives' first underground wine cellar, Vinum, and a below-sea spa.



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JANUARY
Average temperature in the UK
▼
3°C / 37°F

MAURITIUS

Average temperature:

26°C / 78°F

Flight time: 12 hours

An Indian Ocean sibling to the Maldives, Mauritius is the big sister who likes to do more than laze horizontally. Dust-soft sand means sunbathing is still essential (hello, postcard-pretty Flic-en-Flac beach) – but there's action, too. Take the Seven Coloured Earth geopark at Chamarel, where rain-washed lava has created multicoloured dunes that appear moon-like (and have resident giant tortoises). Or visit Champ de Mars for horse racing – a favourite Mauritian activity. Early January and December are a given for warmth: temperatures only slip below 24°C / 75°F once every ten days, usually soaring much higher. Earlier is better than later, though – February is cyclone season.

Stay: With interiors by Kelly Hoppen, **LUX* BELLE MARE** pairs style with lashings of personality – there's an on-site ice-cream parlour and a rum shack, with 112 varieties to sip through.



Travel to Mauritius is convenient with five direct weekly flights from November to March. Enjoy great value savings on package holidays when you book your flights and hotels together. See ba.com



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JANUARY
Average temperature in the UK
▼
3°C / 37°F

COSTA RICA
Average temperature:
27°C / 81°F
Flight time: ten hours,
50 minutes

The land of *pura vida* – ‘pure life’, the cheerful local greeting – is an eruption of biodiversity. Find national parks galore, such as Manuel Antonio, which is inhabited by rainforest-native sloths and toucans, and don’t miss Tortuguero, a mass of mangroves with nesting turtles. Hikes, bikes, zip-lines and rapids are all legit modes of transport.

Weather is equally as diverse – spilt by season (wet vs dry) and coastline (Pacific or Caribbean). January is the second month of the dry season, when even the famously rainy Corcovado National Park is shower-free and the fog over Poás Volcano lifts. The exception is the northern Caribbean side, when January means downpours.

Stay: Ideally situated on the Pacific Ocean area of Guanacaste, **EL MANGROOVE** is a minimalist haven of Manhattan-style design and pool beds worth bagging at 8am. There’s also a Michelin-starred chef (mahi mahi, please).



CANCUN

Average temperature:

28°C / 82°F

Flight time: eight hours, 30 minutes

Bath-warm sea (seriously) and a glitzy hotel scene are the obvious reasons to love Mexico's Cancun; lesser known is downtown's delicious hole-in-the-wall taco scene, plus rummagey flea markets, such as Mercado 28. With the dry season running from November to April, February is a top pick. Go early and you'll also miss spring break (late February to early April), when American students cotton onto Cancun's charms, too. Beyond the sand,

Chichen Itza's Mayan ruins are under three hours away; jump into cenotes – sinkholes filled with snorkel-friendly water; or sail to Isla Contoy – a bird-packed national park that only allows 200 visits a day.

Stay: The ultra-modern **LE BLANC SPA RESORT**

is a devastatingly glamorous all-inclusive. Think swim-up pool bars, butler service, bathtubs with ocean views, and even the option of lavender-filled pillows.

FEBRUARY

Average temperature in the UK



4°C / 39°F

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FORT LAUDERDALE

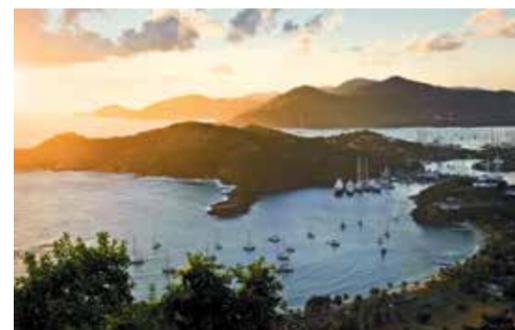
Average temperature:

25°C / 77°F

Flight time: nine hours, 20 minutes

Nicknamed the Venice of the USA, Fort Lauderdale is famed for its chic inland canals – as well as for being 40 minutes from pumping Miami. It's a quieter affair here, with water-taxi the preferred mode of getting about, and Las Olas Boulevard the Rodeo Drive that people flock to. Here, dig into soul-hugging mac 'n' cheese at American Social, or try Louie Bossi for top-notch Italian. The climate is subtropical, as the lush Flamingo Gardens Park proves, so it does get rainy – but February is the driest month. If it does rain, check out the art studios at FATVillage (an unflattering acronym for Flager Arts Technology) or shop at Sawgrass Mills – a truly epic outlet mall.

Stay: The nautical-toned **W FORT LAUDERDALE** has a glass-bottomed infinity pool, jellyfish aquarium and is one street away from sand. Its restaurant, Steak 954, is a must for carnivores.



ANTIGUA

Average temperature:

28°C / 82°F

Flight time: just over eight hours

This close to the equator, cold weather isn't really a thing in Antigua. There's more variation in beaches (one for every day of the year, no less) than climate. February wins the award for driest, but even the wetter months from May onwards soon dry up after short daily soaks of tropical rain. This warmth is echoed in the Caribbean culture: brightly painted buildings, a Brit's love of cricket and a Sunday soundtrack of steel drums and barbecue sizzle. Explore Fig Tree Drive – not for figs, but for coconut groves and banana plantations, or take a hike up Mount Obama – yep, named after Barack.

Stay: The magazine-glossy **HERMITAGE BAY** has bungalows with plunge pools and a skyline of neighbouring St Kitts and Nevis. Complimentary Pilates and yoga is thrown in, and we're yet to hear a bad word about the chef's legendary ceviche.





LAS VEGAS

Average temperature:

23°C / 73°F

Flight time: ten hours, 40 minutes

Nevada's flashiest native is more bonkers than a desert mirage: all neon lights, 24-hour casinos and the four-mile Strip with replicas of an Egyptian pyramid, the Eiffel Tower and an erupting volcano (that's the Mirage Casino). In summer, it's stiflingly hot – you'll race from air-con to air-con – which is why March, cooler and more manageable, stands out. For the ultimate spectacle, board the High Roller, the world's largest observation wheel. There's life beyond the slot machines and A-list shows, too: the Grand Canyon is a four-hour drive away, while, much closer, Red Rock Canyon – imagine Mars – is 30 minutes from the Strip.

Stay: A 40-foot waterfall, ceilings dripping with flowers, and a dining room with its own lagoon. That's a tiny snapshot of life inside **WYNN LAS VEGAS** – the benchmark of VIP service in Vegas.

MARCH
Average temperature in the UK
▼
9°C / 48°F

March is an ideal time to go – it averages just six rainy days, yet the first cool fronts of April are yet to hit. January and February also bring blue skies and hot sunny days, but both months can be windy (a perk for windsurfers).

Stay: It only has eight suites, but that's part of **KENSINGTON PLACE'S** boutique charm. Next to Table Mountain, with megawatt views, it brings hip design, a body-cooling pool and a chef who's always on duty. Walk ten minutes to cool Kloof Street for a fresh juice at Yours Truly, or after-dark cocktails at the smart, Asian-themed Asoka.

CAPE TOWN

Average temperature:

27°C / 81°F

Flight time: 11 hours, 40 minutes

Sitting below South Africa's staggering Table Mountain, Cape Town has no shortage of beautiful neighbours. An hour to the east, find the pretty vineyards of Stellenbosch and Franschhoek; look up to see the peaks of the Twelve Apostles – and go south to find Boulders Beach and its colony of shuffling penguins.



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DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Average temperature:

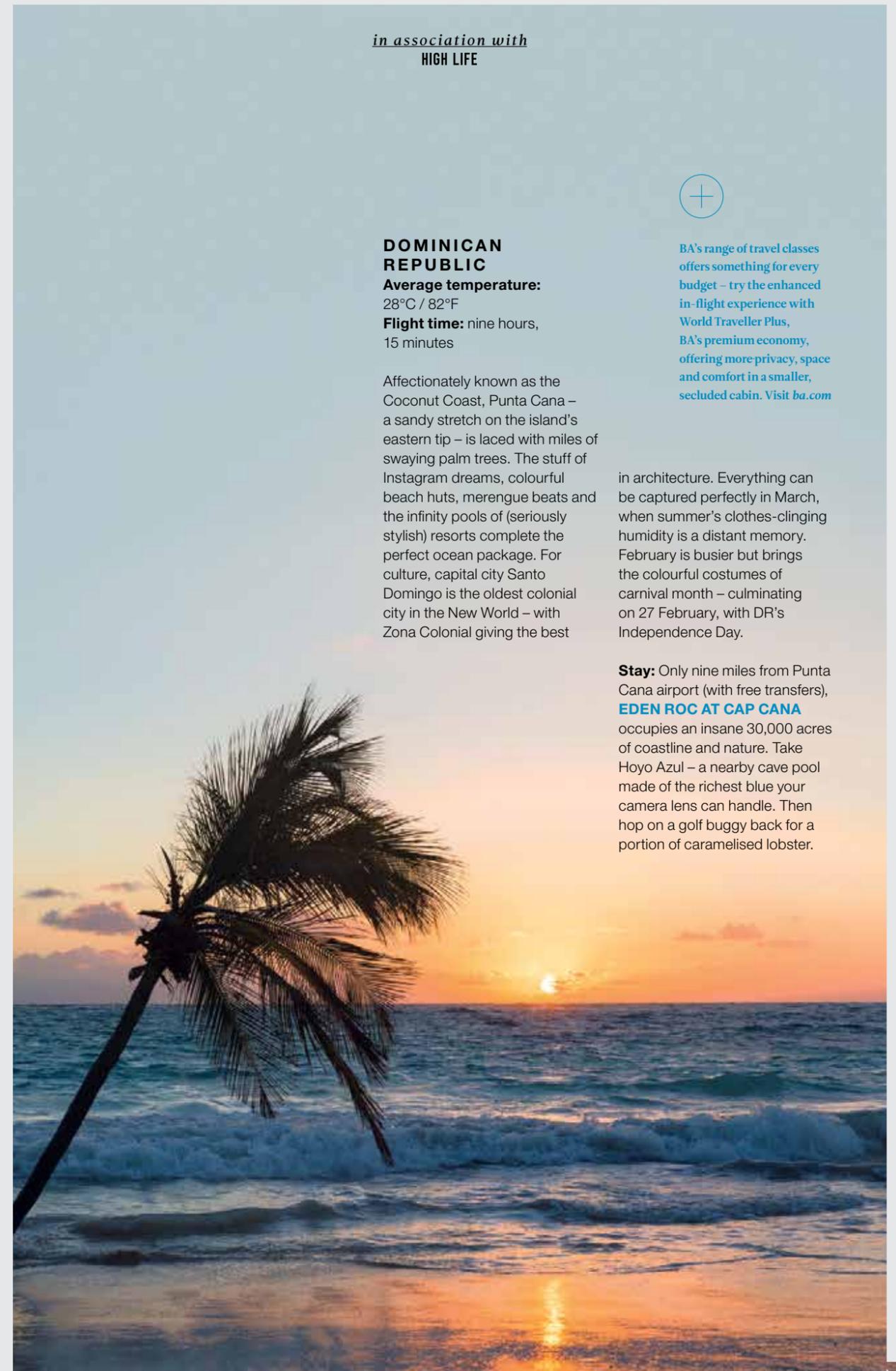
28°C / 82°F

Flight time: nine hours, 15 minutes

Affectionately known as the Coconut Coast, Punta Cana – a sandy stretch on the island's eastern tip – is laced with miles of swaying palm trees. The stuff of Instagram dreams, colourful beach huts, merengue beats and the infinity pools of (seriously stylish) resorts complete the perfect ocean package. For culture, capital city Santo Domingo is the oldest colonial city in the New World – with Zona Colonial giving the best

in architecture. Everything can be captured perfectly in March, when summer's clothes-clinging humidity is a distant memory. February is busier but brings the colourful costumes of carnival month – culminating on 27 February, with DR's Independence Day.

Stay: Only nine miles from Punta Cana airport (with free transfers), **EDEN ROC AT CAP CANA** occupies an insane 30,000 acres of coastline and nature. Take Hoyo Azul – a nearby cave pool made of the richest blue your camera lens can handle. Then hop on a golf buggy back for a portion of caramelised lobster.



BOOK YOUR BREAK

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and to book your next break, visit ba.com/wintersun

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