

VOTE FOR YOUR No1 IN TRAVEL

IT'S election time! For the second year running, The Sun is proud to be a sponsor of the British Travel awards. And you - our loyal band of readers - will be choosing the best large tour operator. These are the big firms that send the majority of us on holiday each year, be it a Costa Brava beach break or a South American adventure. We work hard all year to afford our brief stays in paradise - those holidays that recharge the batteries and make us happy to be alive. They're often the biggest expense of the year and one of our most important purchases. So who do you trust most to organise yours? The award will be presented by Sun Travel Editor LISA MINOT at a London ceremony later this year. To vote, see thesun.co.uk/travel.



Oh Carolina MOUNTAIN TRIP'S AN AMERICAN DREAM

AFTER Flora MacDonald saved Bonnie Prince Charlie, she moved to the US state of North Carolina - and didn't return to her homeland for nearly 30 years.

I spent a week following in her footsteps in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and I wasn't surprised she stayed for so long. While most Scots holiday-makers go to Florida, just a few hours north is a state where the fantastic scenery and quaint villages combine with a warm climate to give a wonderful destination. I stayed in the western side of the state and sampled the best of what America's most visited park, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, has to offer. While not as well known as Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon parks to us, this year it's celebrating its 75th anniversary.

Activities

The park, which also straddles neighbouring Tennessee, is so vast it can accommodate nine million visitors a year with plenty of room to spare and is packed full of outdoor activities for the thrill-seeker and the more sedate traveller alike. After spending my days exploring the park, there was nothing better than returning to my home from home - the Watershed Cabin. The timber lodges boast hot tubs, pool tables and plasma screens along with luxurious bedrooms and a spacious living area. For the travellers with peace and quiet on their mind, the Snowbird Mountain Lodge near Robbinsville is a rustic yet elegant mountain retreat set among 100 acres. In the mornings, you can see the valleys below cloaked in mist as the sun rises - what a peaceful way to start the day. For those on a budget, the Smoky Falls Lodge in



PARK AND RIDE... Thrill-seekers will love Ghost Town

Maggie Valley is a great value-for-money hotel. There are loads of ways to explore the park - I spent one chilled-out afternoon kayaking along Lake Calderwood on a guided nature tour with Paddlefish Kayaking. After seeing beavers, otters and even hearing a bear in the woods, we went for a swim at the base of a water-

fall before quenching our thirst with a cold beer. The lake was bracing but with temperatures above 80°F it was a brilliant way to cool down. Spin We stepped up a gear by going for a spin on a jet boat ride around stunning Lake Fontana with Smoky Mountain Jetboats. Adults can ride for \$28 (£16) and kids under 12 for \$15 (£9). At the Nantahala

Outdoor Centre all sorts of watersports, including white-water rafting, canoeing and tubing (floating down the river on a giant rubber ring), can be arranged. The centre has three restaurants, including the River's End where I enjoyed a lovely meal in relaxed surroundings watching kayakers drift by. Mountain biking and hiking are also very popular activities in the region while you can also try your hand at fly-fishing. Despite the



HOME FROM HOME... Luxurious Watershed Cabin. You might even spot a bear



GO North Carolina

SIX night Smoky Mountains Fly-Drive is from £879pp, including flights on US Airways from London Gatwick to Asheville, car hire, two nights' full-board at the Snowbird Lodge, two nights' room-only in a one bedroom cabin at Watershed Cabins and two nights' room-only at the Smoky Falls Lodge. Call 020 8742 8299 or visit americas.youlikeit.com. For info on North Carolina visit uk.visitnc.com or call 0207 367 0937. For Paddlefish Kayaking, go to paddlefishkayaking.com; Nantahala Outdoor Centre, noc.com; Waynesville Fly Shop, waynesvilleflyshop.com; Cataloochee Ranch, cataloocheeranch.com; Museum of the Cherokee, cherokee-nc.com; Ghost Town in Maggie Valley, ghosttowninthesky.com; the Watershed Cabin, watershedcabins.com; Snowbird Mountain Lodge, snowbirdlodge.com

fact I had never cast into a river in my life, I managed to hook a trout under the watchful eye of the guides from the Waynesville Fly Shop. If you'd rather explore on horseback, go trekking at the Cataloochee Ranch. Or work up an appetite by taking part in "clogging", a dance which harks back to the Scottish influence of the state. Thousands of Scots moved to this area in the mid 1700s and names of towns such as Clyde and Scotland County keep the cultural link alive. It's no sur-

prise, then, that golf is a big draw for tourists with the Smoky Mountain Country Club and Waynesville Inn golf resort and Spa just two of the exceptional courses on offer. Tribe Another culture thriving in the area is that of the Cherokee Indians. The Museum of the Cherokee and Oconaluftee Indian village show you the fascinating history of this tribe with their own customs and traditions. Meanwhile, go to Ghost Town in Maggie Valley for a kids' day out. The Wild West theme park includes staged gunfights outside the saloon mixed with rollercoasters and thrill rides for big kids. There really is something for all ages at the Smoky Mountains National Park. A holiday here suits anyone from single travellers to families who love the great outdoors. Flora MacDonald went over the sea to Skye before she made it here - if you go over the sea to North Carolina you'll love it. GORDON TAIT

DEALS FROM flyglobespan.com

SEVEN nights' all inclusive at Samba Hotel, LLORET DE MAR, is from £224pp, leaving Glasgow on August 11. Seven nights' all inc at Molinos Park Hotel, SALOU, is from £360pp, leaving Glasgow on August 18. Seven nights' self-catering at Benalmadena Apts, BENALMADENA, is from £362pp, leaving Edinburgh on August 7. Fourteen nights' sc at Buenavista Apts, BENIDORM, is from £336pp, leaving Glasgow on August 11. Seven nights' sc at Mirachoro II Apts, ALGARVE, is from £316pp, leaving Glasgow on August 14. Seven nights' sc at Los Alisios Apts, TENERIFE, is from £262pp, leaving Glasgow on August 13. Fourteen nights' half board at Sultana Beach Resort, EGYPT, is from £416pp, leaving Glasgow on August 12. Eight nights' B&B flydrive at Days Inn Maingate hotel, FLORIDA, is from £439pp, leaving Glasgow on August 20. To book visit www.flyglobespan.com, call 0871 987 1689. Deals correct at time of publication, subject to change.

WHAT WILL YOU DISCOVER IN FLORIDA? 3 AMAZING PARKS FOR THE PRICE OF 2. For a limited time only, our popular 3-Park Ticket for SeaWorld, Busch Gardens and Aquatica is just £64! For this offer, call 0871 230 1052 or visit www.floridatix.co.uk/sun

CORNER KIDS

40% OFF BERMUDA

IS four your lucky number? It could be if this deal comes off. Bermuda is celebrating its 400th anniversary with a four-day sale, starting today, with up to 40 per cent off holidays booked with select operators. If you've never been there, now could be the time to sample a slice of British life in the tropical sun - the tiny island, 600 miles north of the Caribbean, is one of the few remaining British colonies. Six and a half hours from Heathrow, it's known as a financial centre and tax haven. But you don't have to be a big spending banker to enjoy its quiet pace and pink sandy beaches. Sale prices include seven nights at the Grotto Bay Beach Resort for £764 per person with Prestige Holidays (prestige.holidays.co.uk, 01425 480 400), or five nights at the Newstead Belmont Hills with Purely Bermuda for £809 per person (purelybermuda.co.uk, 08000 336 335). Both packages include flights and transfers.

HOLIDAY website On The Beach is secretly reducing its prices by ten per cent from midnight tonight until 7am - only for Sun readers. To get your discount, go to onthebeach.co.uk/sunoffer, pick the holiday that you want and type in the code: suntopsecret. Grab this discount and you could be jetting off to Turkey, hitting the beach on a Greek island, or discovering the ancient sights in Egypt. There are more than 70 destinations. On the Beach has also extended its "triple price match guarantee". During August any customer who has booked a break through the On the Beach website and finds the same one at a lower price will be refunded three times the difference. See onthebeach.co.uk or call 0871 911 02 02.



HIGH FASHION AT AIRPORT

PARIS, New York, Milan and... Gatwick - fashion is hitting a very different kind of runway this summer. London Gatwick Airport is hosting its own Fashion Week. From Thursday, August 6, to Sunday, August 9, stylists to the stars Gok Wan and Kirsty Drury will descend on the airport to provide this season's hottest style and fashion tips to passengers heading off on holiday. Take inspiration from the catwalk housed in the North Terminal as the Gatwick Fashion Week models showcase the best men's, women's and kids' summer holiday staples and get yourself a free makeover from the guys at MAC Cosmetics. Then find the must-have items in the airport's stores at up to 30 per cent off high street prices. Check out all the details at http://explore.gatwickairport.com. THE new Miss England was announced a couple of weeks ago with the title going to aspiring athlete and 2012 Olympics hopeful Rachel Christie. As well as the title, she also bagged a holiday to Thailand courtesy of Jetlife and Santhiya Resort & Spa, on Koh Phangan. You too can head to your own slice of island paradise with eight nights' B&B at Santhiya Resort & Spa from £999 per person, based on two sharing a supreme deluxe room. Price includes return Heathrow flights and resort transfers and is valid until December. Call Jetlife on 0871 902 7877 or visit jetlife.com.

HOT ITALY is 31°C - one week half-board at 3* Hotel Astoria, Malcesine, is from £515pp including Gatwick flights leaving on September 2. See thomascocok.com or call 0844 412 5970. SPOT HOT MAJORCA is 30°C - seven nights self-catering at the TRH Palma Nova Apartments in Palma Nova, is from £1399pp, including flights, based on four sharing. Call 0844 855 4905. SPOT

HOT IT'S 30°C in TOBAGO - seven nights' room only at the 3* Turtle Beach By Rex Resorts is from £639pp including flights on September 3. Call 0845 050 5871. SPOT HOT IT'S 34°C in THAILAND - one week room only at the 5* Evason Hua Hin is from £699pp, including flights. Call 0844 573 2460. SPOT

WEIGH UP HOLIDAY FLIGHTS

WATCH your weight! That's the message from one travel company if you don't want to get stung at the airport this summer. Airlines charge hefty excess baggage fees if your cases tip the scales - but canny travellers are doing their best to beat the system. Travelsupermarket.com surveyed 2,000 holidaymakers and found the most common tactics to cut back on baggage are flying in heavy shoes, buying toiletries abroad and wearing as many clothes as possible for the flight. Increasingly, women are more willing than men to pack fewer clothes - 54 per cent compared with 48 per cent. Baggage policies differ from airline to airline and travelsupermarket.com advises clients to check their allowance before travelling. The Air Operators Association say more clarity is needed on differing allowances. Executive chairman Ed Anderson said: "It's easy for consumers to be confused by how much they are allowed to take. The airlines make their own rules but it would be more helpful to standardise baggage policy. "Ryanair, for example, will charge if any duty free you buy at the airport won't fit into your hand luggage. That's just wrong." We couldn't agree more. PREPARE for a scramble for autumn air fares - easyJet is selling seats for travel between September 1 and November 30 from £2.99. The no-frills carrier is offering £10 off 500,000 seats until midnight on Wednesday - so be quick.

