

travel

WINTER SUN

FOR LESS THAN £1,000

Clinging to the hope of some sunshine while the gales whip around your ears? Well, there's no need to throw money at the problem — Stephen Bleach has found the best-value winter warmers

The frigid weather might well be inspiring you to book a dash to the nearest sun lounger — but there's also the small matter of Christmas. The presents, the parties, that £200 trip to the supermarket... there's not much cash left to splash once you've ploughed through yuletide.

With that in mind, here are the best common-sense winter-sun holidays on the market right now, offering sun, relaxation, adventure and culture without leaving you asking Santa for a new credit card. They're all grand trips, all below a grand.

✦ *Unless stated, package prices are per person for a week in early December, based on two sharing, including flights from London and transfers. All were available at the time of going to press*

BARGAIN SEYCHELLES for £999.99

Really — the Seychelles for less than £1,000? Actually, no. But how does this sound? If you book a week at Lazare Picault, a small, simple but characterful hotel above a fine beach on Mahé, for £1,000 with Elite (01707 371000, seychelleselite.co.uk), I'll

personally refund you the penny to bring it under our limit. The price is for trips before December 15 — which is the best time to see turtles laying, and dolphins and whale sharks off shore.

You can expect rain at this time of year, but not trip-ruining stuff — it's usually short, sharp bursts.

CLASSIC MALDIVES for £999

It's also just about possible to do the Indian Ocean's textbook desert islands for less than £1,000. You won't have hot and cold running butlers, but you will get the obligatory swaying palms, white sands, azure water in a shallow lagoon, decent snorkelling and (unusually) good surfing outside the reef, at Chaaya Island Dhonveli. First Choice (0871 200 4455, firstchoice.co.uk) has a week for £999, flying from Manchester on November 30: what's more, the price is all-inclusive, so you're not a captive audience for overpriced food and drink.

CELEBRITY JAMAICA for £995

Here's one we really didn't expect to be bringing you for three figures. Kate Moss, Robbie Williams, Johnny

Depp, Jade Jagger: they've all been to Jake's, a chic, laid-back hideaway on Jamaica's less developed south coast. No televisions, no phones, but a deep-chilled bohemian vibe and the best rum punches on the island. The beach isn't enormous, but don't fret — you can swing in a hammock by the curvaceous saltwater pool, skank to the local reggae bands who turn up to play, and admire the mural. (Joni Mitchell painted it,

you know.) A week, departing on November 29, costs £995 with Caribtours (020 7751 0660, www.caribtours.co.uk).

WILD TENERIFE for £958

Contrary to popular belief, Tenerife is not all high-rise fringes and barren interior. Get away from the resorts and there's an otherworldly beauty here, which is best seen on foot. You'll get the full flavour on a twin-centre walking holiday with Headwater (01606 720199, headwater.com), hiking the ancient forests, vine-clad terraces and plunging valleys of Anaga National Park, and skirting crimson lava flows under snow-capped Mount Teide. You stay at a traditional finca (with a nice pool) inland, then a converted mansion on

the coast. The price is £958, including car hire, some meals, maps and notes.

CAMPING KENYA for £916

We're used to the idea of luxury safari camps inland, but this is a first for the coast: the Gazi Retreat has 10 simple but sweet tents, with four-posters, on a remote stretch of shoreline south of Mombasa. (Don't worry, you're not wild camping: they have showers and flush lavatories.) There's miles of untouched beach and mangrove to explore, and it has a good bar and pool. You can fish, snorkel, dive, bird-watch... and that's it. Bring a good book or, better still, a good partner — it's very romantic. Prices start at £916, including all meals, with Somak (020 8423 3000, somak.com).

HOLISTIC TOBAGO for £897

Chuck that word "holistic" at a resort and you can usually add 50% to the price. Kariwak Village, by contrast, keeps it simple and economical: yoga, t'ai chi and relaxation classes, a pool, lovely gardens and 24 neat and clean rooms. The beach is five minutes' walk and the restaurant, which