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20

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FIONA PHILLIPS Embracing change fingers crossed

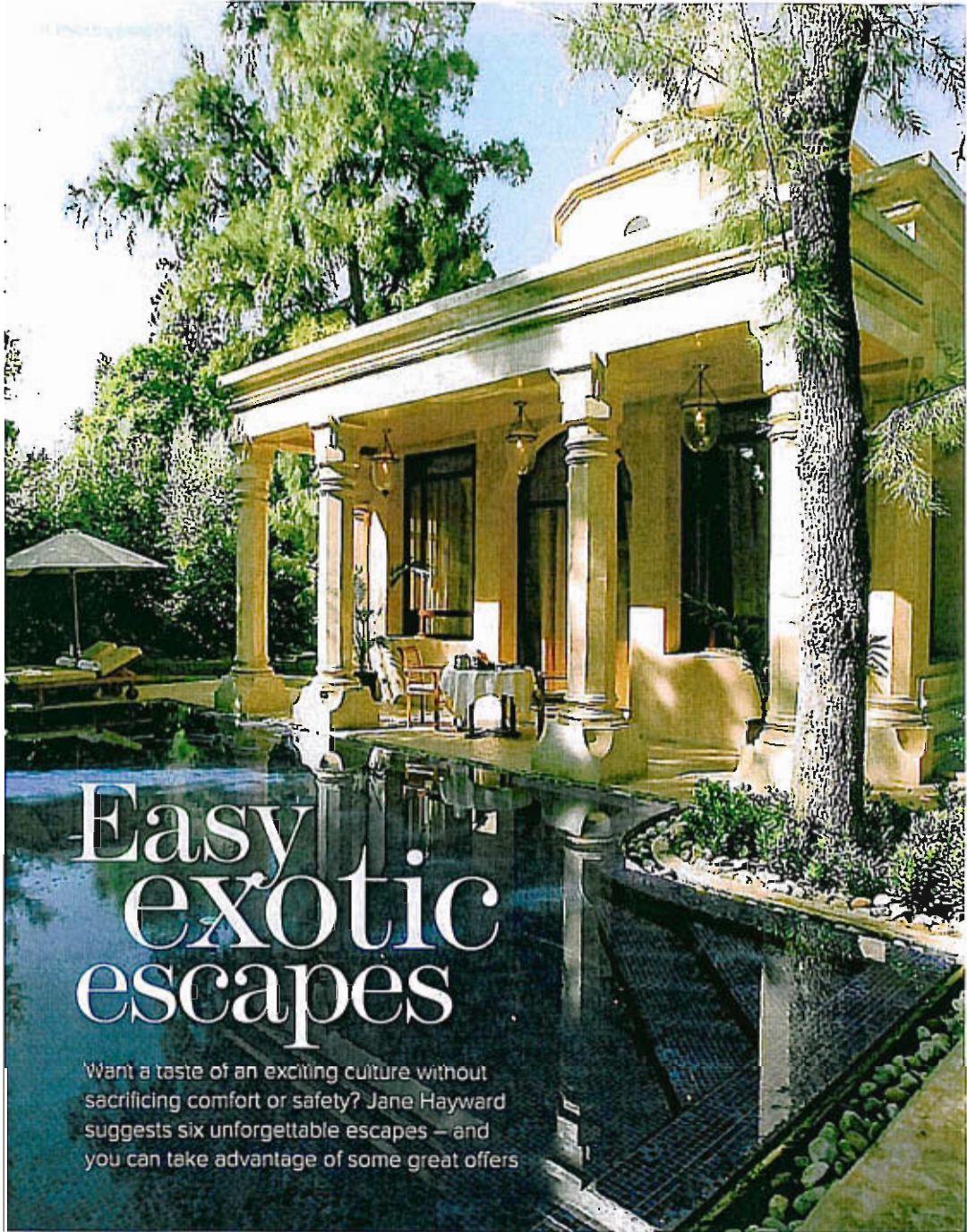
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Real strategies for tricky times



Easy exotic escapes

Want a taste of an exciting culture without sacrificing comfort or safety? Jane Hayward suggests six unforgettable escapes – and you can take advantage of some great offers



A taste of the exotic at Es Saadi Gardens & Resort

Mesmerising Morocco

FLIGHT TIME: 3½ hours

Vibrant, fascinating Marrakech is the glamorous star of weekend breaks.

WHERE TO STAY: Martin Scorsese and Matt Dillon have both checked into the new palace wing of Es Saadi Gardens & Resort. Set among orange-scented gardens in the Ville Nouvelle, this vintage charmer has been run by the same family for three generations. But it's now acquired A-list status via 90 luxurious new suites boasting French Colonial style, and ten villas with private pools that are pure Arabian fantasy.

ADD SOME ADVENTURE: At the heart of the medina, the Djemaa El Fna marketplace is a natural theatre where snake-charmers, musicians and storytellers take centre stage. Arrive at dusk to soak up the atmosphere. Conserve your energy, though – you'll need it for shopping in sense-assaulting Souk Semmarine, where taggling is de rigueur. Recover in tranquil desert gardens – don't miss the late Yves Saint Laurent's Jardin Majorelle (jardinmajorelle.com).

AND A LITTLE LUXE: Chinese music therapy, from £17.50, at Es Saadi's Oriental Spa is sure to restore your serenity. The hotel's delicious food is organic and cooked with oil from the resort's olive groves – and don't miss Michael Winner's favourite haunt, Le Tobsil (+212 24 44 052), where a five-course Moroccan feast served to hypnotic gaawa music costs £42pp.

WHAT IT COSTS: From £361 per room per night (+212 24 44 88 11, essaadi.com). Flights from £29.99 one-way, easyJet (easyjet.com).

FIND OUT MORE: Wallpaper* City Guide: Marrakech (Phaidon Press, £4.95).

unforgettable breaks

Chills and thrills in Vilnius

FLIGHT TIME: 3 hours

Remnants of Soviet occupation lend an intriguing note to Lithuania's charming capital.

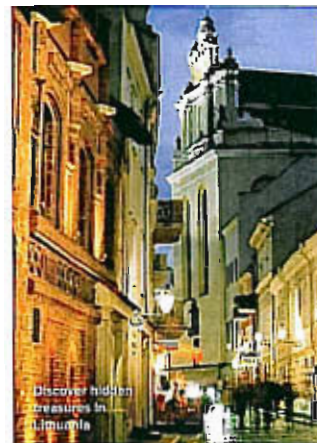
WHERE TO STAY: Overlooking Parliament, the sleek, modern Novotel once again shows why it's the chicest chain. Bedrooms have trademark huge beds and super-functional bathrooms.

ADD SOME ADVENTURE: The city's beautiful churches are still revealing treasures hidden from the Russians. Tramp between snowy spires on a walking tour; track down local guide Irena Balciuniene (mobile number +370 68 576 463; £40 per group) for fascinating tales of life behind the Iron Curtain. One of Europe's quirkier attractions lies south of Vilnius at Grutas Park (£3.40pp; grutopaikas.lt), where dozens of the country's discarded statues of Lenin and Stalin line a woodland trail.

AND A LITTLE LUXE: Just opened and already one of the Baltic's best restaurants, Domm (domm.lt) has a spectacular tasting menu for £71 pp. Or try Zemaicalai for roast goose and potato pancakes with curd (about £15pp; zemaicalai.lt). Boho bars on up-all-night Austros Vartu include Absento Fejos (No 11), which translates as Absinthe Fairies!

WHAT IT COSTS: B&B from approx £85 per night at the Novotel (+370 52 666 200; novotel.com). Flights from £46 one way, plus car hire around £25 a day, Lithuanian Airlines (lytal.com).

FIND OUT MORE: lithuaniantourism.co.uk



Discover hidden treasures in Lithuania

Arabian adventure in Oman

FLIGHT TIME: 6 hours

Unlike Dubai, itsbling-tastic neighbour, the sultanate of Oman offers an authentic Middle Eastern experience that's a bit like travelling back in time.

WHERE TO STAY: Don't just head for the capital – book a trip that takes in less-visited spots too. Original Travel's five-night desert safari begins at the five-star Chedi on the edge of Muscat. Then you travel up into the Hajar Mountains, where

the Falaj Doria Hotel is handy for Nizwa's famous fort, and to the Ras al Had, which stands on dramatic empty coastline.

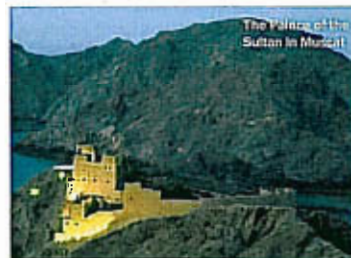
ADD SOME ADVENTURE: You'll be whisked between hotels by 4x4, surf 45-degree dunes at Wahiba Sands, swim in oasis wadis and take a camel ride. The highlight is dinner at a Bedouin camp.

AND A LITTLE LUXE: Join veiled women at Nizwa souk, famous for its beautiful crafts.

WHAT IT COSTS: From £950pp for five nights' B&B, flights and land transfers, (020 7978 7333; originaltravel.co.uk).

FIND OUT MORE: destinationoman.com

W&H EXCLUSIVE OFFER Get a bottle of Champagne, plus a 60-minute spa treatment when booking a seven-night stay in a Chedi Club Suite or a Club Deluxe room through Original Travel. For further details, visit www.womanandhome.com. >>



The Palace of the Sultan in Muscat