

COVER STORY



KEEP ON RUNNING
A woman on a boardwalk in Yosemite, main; the Col de Turini, below; and Cotopaxi National Park, below left

'It's your turn to take to the field, saddle, court or driver's seat'

We are - you may have noticed - in the midst of a sporting summer of considerable excitement.

England face New Zealand in the final of the Cricket World Cup today, the women's football team made exhilarating (if ultimately unsuccessful) progress through their World Cup, and Wimbledon has offered its yearly parade of established stars and new talents. Then there is the Tour de France, which will dance with the Pyrenees as soon as Thursday - and the mechanical blur of the Formula One circuit, which will fill the North-

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amptonshire countryside with noise this afternoon - while the near-future promises the fire and the thud of the Rugby World Cup.

Inspired? Inspired enough to make your chosen sport the focal point of a holiday in the next couple of months? Why not? If you want to take to the field, or the saddle, or the court, or the driver's seat, or the deck of a yacht - or just watch appreciatively from the stands - before the autumn is upon us, the following 25 breaks should show you the way.



CYCLING

THE ALPS (FRANCE)

With the Tour de France flitting across our screens throughout July, the idea of a cycling holiday can be wholly persuasive in summer. Even - or perhaps especially - if you want to tackle some of the great rock titans that test the professionals to the limit. Marmot Tours (01373 830409; marmot-tours.co.uk) still has space on the Sept 7 edition of its "Classic Cols of the Southern Alps" odyssey - a six-day guided itinerary that rides up (and down) Tour alumni such as the Col de Turini and Col de la Lombarde. From £1,540 per person, including all lodging and bike hire; flights to the start and end point (Nice) extra.

AUSTIN HEALEY

Ex-England scrum-half, coaching rugby at Fortevillageresort.com

Can you really play rugby in the Sardinian sun?

Absolutely. I hate the cold.

What can children expect? A good grounding in the basics, plus a few tricks, while having fun in a safe environment.

Do you focus on any particular aspect of rugby? We cover all the skills, from handling and kicking to tackling and footwork co-ordination.

Do you have time to enjoy the beach yourself? Yes! Every afternoon. We love a good game of Waboba (a ball that bounces on water). You often find the rugby kids sticking together after sessions.



SARDINIA (ITALY)

The Mediterranean's second-largest island is rarely eulogised as one of Europe's top-table cycling destinations, but it lends itself to family cycling breaks due to the presence of the Perdepera Beach Resort, on its east flank. Guests at this Mark Warner (0333 331 5016; markwarner.co.uk) property can make use of a fleet of road bikes that is included in the price (as is access to other sports, such as kayaking, sailing and tennis), either rolling along flat coastal highways or fighting up mountain gradients. A seven-night full-board stay for a family of four, flying out of Heathrow on Aug 17, costs from £5,316 in total.

LANGUEDOC (FRANCE)

If cycling in France sounds tempting, but also the sort of activity best served with ample doses of relaxation, the ideal solution may be the Chateau St Pierre de Serjac (0345 686 6505; serjac.com). This luxury hotel, set in the fields of Languedoc near

Pouzolles, has a large swimming pool and its own winery - but breaks sweat as well by selling three-night cycling getaways (available in September and October) from £960 per person. This price includes bike hire and guided rides - plus breakfast, nightly dinners (with estate wines) and a massage (though not flights). Montpellier, 50 miles north-east, is the closest airport.

TENNIS

ISTRIA (CROATIA)

From Coco Gauff to Nick Kyrgios, this year's Wimbledon has been a gripping affair - so much so, in fact, that you may feel like a few days on court yourself. If so, Croatia in the fading embers of summer should be a fine context for working on your first serve. Roger Walker Tennis Holidays (01962 713330; tennisholidays.co.uk) has a



hosted break set to take place in Istria in the week of Sept 8-15. This will mix five days of coaching at a training academy in Umag with a night in Pula (whose huge amphitheatre is still a jewel of the Roman world). From £1,075 a head with half-board accommodation (flights extra).

ANTIGUA

The Caribbean may sound an overly warm location for dashing about behind the baseline. However, Curtain Bluff resort (curtainbluff.com), on the south coast of Antigua, has long prided itself on being a tennis oasis. It boasts four state-of-the-art championship hard courts - staffed by a team of professionals ever ready to offer advice (private lessons are US\$90/£72 an hour). A seven-night stay at this all-inclusive five-star, flying from Gatwick on Aug 3, starts at £3,433 per person via Kuoni (0800 422 0761; kuoni.co.uk).

HORSE RIDING

THE ANDES (ECUADOR)

A break on horseback can be the perfect combination of sporting excitement and far-flung exploration. This is certainly the case if you opt for the "Ecuador Horse Riding Tour" sold by Andean Trails (0131 467 7086; andeantrails.co.uk). This regular eight-day group odyssey trots along a circular route in and out of Quito, taking Andean paths past the Cayambe volcano and through Cotopaxi

National Park. Participants must be reasonably experienced and confident at a canter. From £3,060 per person including accommodation. Flights to Quito are extra, but can be arranged. Next tours on Aug 10 and Sept 7.

COLORADO (US)

The cowboy life is rarely less than appealing, and those who want to saddle up without venturing too far from the stables can find a fine alliance of easy riding and soft comforts at Smith Fork Ranch (smithforkranch.com), near Crawford, in south-west Colorado. As well as equine endeavours, guests can try their hands at clay shooting, mountain biking, fly-fishing and archery, all amid the sky-clawing vistas of the Rockies. A seven-night stay starts at £5,600 a head, with flights, through Scott Dunn (020 3811 5265; scottdunn.com).

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

A more Anglocentric style of equine activity is currently on offer at Ellenborough Park (01242 545454; ellenboroughpark.com). This country-house retreat near Cheltenham has forged a partnership with its near-ish neighbour, Longdole Polo Club in Gloucester, which lets guests - parents and children alike - learn the basics of the society sport. After two hours of tuition, including a

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YOUR SEPTEMBER GETAWAY AWAITS

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