

TRAVEL »

10 things kids tried to pack for a holiday flight when left to their own devices, according to Monarch Airlines:
1) Family pet 2) Wrestling belt 3) Fairy wings 4) Favourite stone 5) Bananas 6) Earplugs – dad snores
7) Photos of friend they will miss while away 8) Spaghetti hoops 9) Shark tooth 10) Tiara. monarch.co.uk



Mirror's action girl Joanne Friel heads to Portugal's Algarve for a beach holiday with a difference

MY holiday to the Algarve's countryside retreat near Salema turned out to be a real balancing act. From watching the perilously-perched nests of the famed storks of Faro on arrival, to the flows, postures and wipe-outs of the twice daily yoga and surf sessions, this was a trip with a difference.

No long, lazy hours on the sun lounger, no indulgent meals and cocktails and certainly no late night dancing in clubs.

As a fairly intermediate level yogi and a complete surfing novice – who's also a bit nervous in the sea might I add – this type of activity holiday was always going to be somewhat of a challenge. I went primarily for the yoga.

A week of twice-daily outdoor yoga practice in such a beautiful rural setting was definitely the main attraction.

As for the surfing, well I could always give it a shot and swap surf school for sun-bathing after a lesson or two.

And so, I headed for the charming Quinta das Pedras villa in the Western Algarve and joined a group of 10 other would-be yoga-surfers for a week of catching waves and acquainting with our "inner-selves". After

a warm welcome from hosts Diana and Jeanette our first evening was spent on a brief induction then a beautiful walk to a secluded beach.

The daily routine started at 7am when we were gently woken by the soft chimes of a Tibetan singing bowl.

That's if the local cockerel hadn't managed to rouse us first. We gathered for hot lemon water ahead of 90 minutes of energising yoga on a sunny outdoor platform under the expert guidance of our yoga guru Lauren.

After a deliciously healthy al fresco breakfast, it was time to pack up the wet-suits and beach bags and await pick up by the local Sagres Natura surf school.

Loading up boards on the first day filled me with as much excitement as fear.

A short drive from Salema to Sagres in the South West and we soon located the best surf around at Praia do Tonal.

Perfect waves for beginners I was assured. An hour later – after some beach-based theory – we were in the water.

On dry land it sounded like a lot to take in, but once in the water it all made sense – waiting for the right wave, getting the timing right, paddling hard – and getting into position. It all seemed manageable.

I found out how addictive learning to surf can be

TREE-MENDOUS
Yoga surf group on the Algarve, Portugal



CREST AND RELAXTION
Mirror girl Joanne on the surf



BOARD MEETING
Joanne set and ready for action

But then came the dreaded standing up. The dry-land practice seemed straightforward.

It was very like yoga and I could now see why Algarveyoga.com combined these seemingly very different activities in one trip.

Despite the similarities however, my few years of gentle physical yoga practice seemed quite redundant as soon as I tried to stand up on a wave. As I fell off at practically every attempt, it was time to dig deep and draw upon my inner-strength instead.

Despite frequent wipe-outs, I was determined to keep trying, every time thinking "this will be the one I stand up on" as I discovered how addictive learning to surf can be.

A well-earned power lunch was delivered to us on the beach each day – some much-needed sustenance to see us through the afternoon. To keep some in reserve for the following day, most of the group opted to relax after lunch.

Boards loaded up, it was a quick shower before an hour of relaxing evening yoga, perfect for stretching out our weary limbs.

Dinner was prepared by the very talented cooks and nutritionists on the Algarve yoga team. From Bircher muesli and quinoa porridge breakfasts to mushroom risottos, veggie packed

rice flour pastas, and barbecued bananas, meals were a real treat.

And all ingredients were locally sourced, mostly from the nearby farmer's market.

After-dinner treats came in the form of deep tissue or shiatsu massage, foot reflexology and even tarot card readings, all of which could be booked on arrival.

Needless to say, we were all tired come bedtime. An abundance of Europe's clearest sea air, fine food, relaxing yoga and chilled conversations were the perfect combination for the deepest, most restful sleeps ever.

Ready to do it all again the following day.

After four more days in the water, and many bruises later, I managed a few standing seconds from time to time.

While I never quite mastered the graceful one-legged balance of the storks that dominate Faro's skyline, on the surf board at least, I thoroughly enjoyed my yoga surfing retreat.

Lovely company, healthy food, gorgeous scenery and pushing my own limits and trying something new and scary alongside the comforting enjoyment of the most wonderful daily yoga practice proved to be the perfect holiday balance for me.

Get there



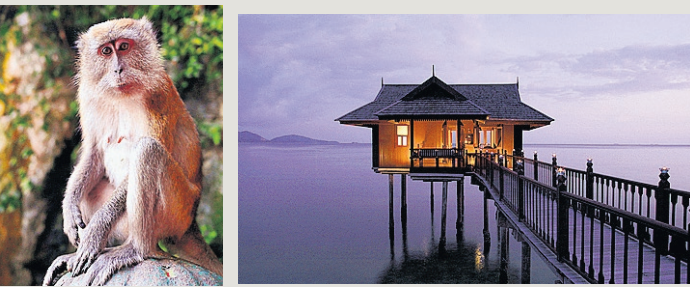
■ Yoga Surf Retreats run from July – September, as well as Yoga Delight and Yoga Detox retreats.

■ Single Room in surrounded area: €1,050, shared €890, double €990.

■ Includes: accommodation, yoga classes, surf lessons and meals. Visit www.algarveyoga.com.

■ Jet2, easyJet and Aer Lingus fly directly from Belfast International Airport to Faro. Prices from €280 return.

■ Regular flights from Dublin to Faro from €135 return.



PARADISE Left, a monkey at Batu Caves, right, accommodation on stilts

Out and about on the island of Pangkor Laut

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to visit, including one with resident bats, spiders and snakes (no thanks) and one with a series of tableaux of Hindu deities and, utterly bizarrely, a zoo at the very end with a collection of snakes, turtles and one rabbit.

Watch out for the monkeys at Batu, they may look cute but they are not friendly.

BA's new KL route will most likely be used by business travellers and holiday-makers seeking an entry point for trips to other parts of Malaysia for some tropical fly and flop.

Either way, it's well worth building in a stay for a night or two in the city before or after the beach.

Which was where I was heading to next... a four hour drive north west from KL brings you to a marina for a boat transfer to the Pangkor Laut resort on a private island. It's owned by YTL, the same firm that has the Majestic, and run to the same very high standards.

If your idea of tropical bliss is fabulous villas on stilts in the water or in wooded hills, gorgeous infinity pools, wonderful staff and seriously good food, then you're in the right place.

Throw in a sunset drinks cruise on a wooden junk, a highly rated spa and Emerald Bay, one of the world's best beaches, and you've got the perfect tropical escape.

There's a bit of history, too, as Pangkor Laut was where Second World War hero Col Spencer Chapman swam from Emerald Bay to a Royal Navy submarine after three and a half years fighting behind the lines of the occupying Japanese forces.

There's a nod to the courageous colonel in the form of the welcoming



Pulau nice...

Pangkor Laut is undeniably lovely but I'd recommend one of the resort's tours to the neighbouring island of Pulau Pangkor.

I joined guide Ahmad for a speedboat ride to this much larger island, which has a population of 25,000 and is very popular with day trippers from the mainland.

It's a taste of local Malaysian life and we explored the small town of Pangkor itself, including an anchovy processing factory (more interesting than it sounds) and an 1670 Dutch fort, though I was more interested in stalls nearby selling dried deadly puffer fish.

There are some bathing beaches, a little resort area, temples, snorkelling spots and wildlife including green turtles and sea otters, plus you get a view of Laut. And there are pink minibus taxis that Harriet Harman would love.

Ahmad also showed me a boatyard where traditional wooden fishing vessels are built and the island's most famous food store where you can see shark fins and anchovies by the bucket-load. Customers are encouraged to try before they buy.

Bye bye...

Chapman's Bar by the beach. And there's a nod to nature too as the resort runs guided walks through the jungle to see the island's flora and fauna.

Pangkor Laut is a very hard place to leave...

Perhaps next time in KL I should make time for the Mud show. Surely there's more potential for musicals about rivers in Southeast Asia and Seventies teddy boy pop bands...

Showaddy-Irrawaddy anyone?

Get there

■ British Airways Holidays has 4nts B&B at the 5* Hotel Majestic in Kuala Lumpur (www.majestickl.com) from £769pp for travel in Sept/Oct inc flights from Heathrow, 3nts from £719pp.

ba.com/malaysia

■ British Airways Holidays has 7nts B&B at the 5* Pangkor Laut Resort (pangkorlautresort.com) from £1,339pp for travel in Sept/Oct inc flights from Heathrow, road and boat transfers, 1nt free and 10% hotel discount. ba.com/malaysia, 0844 493 0758.

■ Return air fares: from £589, ba.com

■ Tourist info: tourism.gov.my

TIME ZONE +7hrs **CURRENCY** Ringgit €1 = 4.2

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