

Travel



50 BEST VILLAS

THE Sunday LIST

Sorting a sunshine stay still on your to-do list?

Strike it off – *Jeremy Lazell* has the top picks, all available this summer

GREECE

CEPHALONIA SLEEPS 2

Take one Cephalonian stone cottage, add a patio and pool, stick a table-for-two under a corn-blue awning, and you have Aeletta. Beautifully decorated – a velvet chaise longue and sea-blue bedspread offset the understated palette – the one-bedroom villa lies just below busy Maganos village, while Fiskardo's seafront taverna scene is a 10-minute cross-island drive away.

€600 to €2,300; vintagetravel.co.uk

PAXOS SLEEPS 4

Double-height, open-plan interiors create a spacious, easy-going vibe, but Poseidon's Nest is all about al fresco living. Built into the cliffs of southern Paxos, the villa has a large terrace and pool, with

NATURAL BEAUTY Ai Trulli in Puglia, above

belting views across the Ionian to Antipaxos. It's only sold as part of a package – good news if you hate sorting flights and car hire.

€940pp to €1,546pp, including flights from Gatwick, return ferry to Corfu and car hire; gicthevillacollection.com

ITHACA SLEEPS 5

There's no air-conditioning here, but if any Greek villa can get away with it, it's Hilltop House. High above the seafront village of Kioni – a footpath through pine forests and olive groves is a pretty 10-minutes down but sweaty 15-minutes up – the handsome three-bedroom villa is cooled by sea breezes, has grapevines shading the terrace, and unusually for round here, a pool.

€1,094 to €2,625; ionian-villas.co.uk

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LEFKAS SLEEPS 6

Five-star in your soul but four-star in your pocket? Allegra is a fantasy of wraparound glass and modern lines, from a team who specialise in dished but doable design villas. Split over three levels in four hillside acres near Aghios Ioannis Beach, the villa has a cinema and gym, gleaming kitchen and pool, and a cantilevered terrace gazing out to sea.

€2,104 to €4,810; prettygreekvillas.com

CEPHALONIA SLEEPS 6

Location is everything at Villa Roberta. New to the rental market in 2019, the pretty two-storey new-build sits at the tip of Liakas peninsula, leading via a footpath to a rock platform with ladder-access to the snorkel-tastic waters below. Sandy beaches are less than five minutes by car; the pretty fishing village of Spartia is five minutes further on.

€1,397 to €3,815; airbnb.com/rooms/29527065

WEST COAST, MAINLAND SLEEPS 8

It's called Dream House, and that's underselling it. Bang on the beach, with full-length sliding bedroom doors, you can go from your bed to dipping your toes in the Ionian in 10 steps flat. Backed by pines, the villa is wonderfully private, with crisp interiors, a 40ft infinity pool and squishy beanbag loungers on a long timber deck. The vistas across the bay to Paleros are dreamy in the extreme.

€1,727 to €6,859; scottwilliams.co.uk

PELION SLEEPS 12

Loved by Athenians but barely known to anyone else, Pelion Peninsula is a still-wild land of mule tracks, mountain villages – and villa bargains such as The Architect's House. Thirty minutes' hike from Damouhari (star of Mamma Mia!) and five minutes' drive from spectacular Fakistra Beach, the villa has been lovingly restored by its architect owner; a two-bedroom

annexe is just the job for grannies and mixed groups.

€1,765 to €2,048; i-escape.com

ZAKYNTHOS SLEEPS 8

In the wild, undeveloped north of Zakynthos, Maistrali is 10 minutes drive from Peligoni Club, the Brit-run beach bar and watersports centre with a Sharky & George Kids Club, tennis court, pool and teen-only watersports sessions. In other words, you can keep everyone entertained. Built around a cooling central "wind tower", the villa opens from four pale blue-shuttered bedrooms onto a generous poolside terrace looking on to Cephalonia. Fire up the pizza oven and get stuck in.

€3,167 to €5,700; peligoni.com

FRANCE

CORSICA SLEEPS 4

A 8m horizon pool is the headliner at Villa Fiorella, jutting out dramatically from a cliff above the forests near Ospedale. Not for nothing is this place off-limits to children under 12. Owned by a chef, the two-bedroom villa has a large, contemporary kitchen packed with gadgets, and a barbecue-dining area for soaking up the distant views over Porto Vecchio.

€2,052 to €4,873; simpsonstravel.com

COTE D'AZUR SLEEPS 6

The Riviera doesn't come cheap, but Villa Miramar in Le Trayas village is a snip considering every room looks down over La Figuerette bay. Two minutes' drive from the beach, and a skip from Esterel National Park, the recently refurbished villa has panoramic, well-furnished terraces running the length of both floors, bougainvillea-scented garden and pool.

€2,703 to €4,505 (two-week minimum stay July-Aug); oneoffplaces.co.uk

DORDOGNE SLEEPS 6

Right at the centre of a ring of famous medieval market towns – Sarlat, Périgeux, Bergerac and Monpazier – La Grange is a classic, honey-coloured, Perigord stone cottage with a pool and attractive gardens in the hamlet of Calès. New to the rental market, after a thoroughly modern makeover, La Grange is now lighter, airier, but still with original beams and exposed stone walls.

€1,275 to €1,576; simply-perigord.com

AQUITAINE SLEEPS 6

Maison Katalina is just 20 minutes by bike from downtown Biarritz, but this is way more beach retreat than city break. Only available in summer, this contemporary



reworking of a 1920s Basque fisherman's cottage in Bidart village is a 10-minute walk from a surf school at Plage d'Ilbarritz, where Blue Cargo is a hipster beach bar with tables on the sand.

€3,595 to €3,965; alternative-aquitaine.co.uk

PROVENCE SLEEPS 8

The owners of La Vigne run an art gallery in London, and *mon dieu*, it shows. Built into the cliff-face in the spectacular hilltop village of Gordes, this three-floor villa is packed with arresting sculptures and exquisite artwork. The views aren't bad, either, looking out across the Luberon from the top-floor terrace and an olive-shaded pool area.

€7,510 to €10,015; shavillarentals.co.uk

ARDECHE SLEEPS 8

Get back to nature at this 400-year-old fruit farm in the southern Ardèche. Here, in rambling, wild-rose gardens, Mas de Saribou mixes antique chic and stylish Scandi design, with bedheads made from barn beams, sinks fashioned from fallen chestnut trees, and bright, cosy sofas cheering a modern, open-plan kitchen-lounge. A stream-fed pool is bliss after hiking and biking the surrounding canyons.

€1,402 to €1,998; i-escape.com

BRITTANY SLEEPS 8

An indoor heated pool and hot tub may sound de trop for France in summer, but Brittany can be bracing. Less than 200 yards from the one-mile Plage Lividic in Kervillo, newly built Villa Toullou is a brilliant family option, with an enclosed garden and lawn that's just right for four-a-side footie. A shaded decking area is great for lunch *en plein air*; French windows fill the kitchen-lounge with light.

€1,550 to €3,856; vintagetravel.co.uk

LOIRE SLEEPS 10

Rambling, 18th-century Manoir d'Anjou, in the winelands outside Saumur, is a beautiful two-family villa, with six bedrooms, five bathrooms, a billiards room, 12m solar-heated gated pool, and extensive grounds. Owned by an antique dealer, it's crammed with old-money charm, from its vaulted ceilings and heavy beams to its oak armoires and faded Oriental rugs.

€2,100 to €4,300; purefrance.com

Above left, Allegra, Lefkas; Villa Rosmarino in Sicily, above; and Hilltop House, Ithaca, below

ITALY

SICILY SLEEPS 4

It's got a pool, it's two minutes' walk from gently shelving San Lorenzo Beach, it's 20 minutes in-and-out drive for selfies and gelato at the baroque town of Noto – in other words, the ideal family beach retreat. Except Villa Rosmarino cries out for couples, too, with crisp white lines inside and out, a wraparound terrace for sofa siestas, and a rooftop hob tub and dinner table.

€2,135 to €4,931; freelance-holidays.co.uk

MAREMMA SLEEPS 4

The Maremma is a cut-price Tuscany with beaches, and has some of the best wine in Italy. Here, 30 minutes from the coast in the pine forests above medieval Massa Marittima, Campo Chinandoli is a solid, wood-and-stone farmhouse cooled by high ceilings and terracotta tiles. A long terrace overlooks a 10m pool, and is made for warm summer nights accompanied by red wine and fireflies.

€1,458 to €2,798; tuscanynowandmore.com

PUGLIA SLEEPS 6

The Thinking Traveller's villas can only be rented through them which, they say, guarantees quality control. They are on to something. At least, if Ai Trulli, near Ostuni, is anything to go by. Made up of a pair of classic, cone-roofed trulli set beside a 13m pool and lush, olive-shaded garden, this is one of the finest trullo conversions in Puglia. Beautiful art, Sky TV, vine-covered dining areas – *bellissima*.

€4,138 to €6,640; thethinkingtraveller.com

UMBRIA SLEEPS 6

Strictly speaking this is not a villa, and you'll share a pool, but the design is so vibrant we couldn't leave it out. One of four apartments in a sprawling manor house south of Lake Trasimeno, Mazzo pairs solid Tuscan hardwoods and limewashed rafters with reclaimed Skoda factory lamps, 1920s armchairs, and upcycled steel filing cabinets. Great location, too, with breakfast brioche a short walk away in Piegara village.

€1,502 to €2,310; specialumbria.com

AMALFI SLEEPS 6

Amalfi postcodes are famously upmarket, but Villa San Luca is cracking value. It's a

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