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Spring has (nearly) sprung: the

World-class art in Venice, tulips in Amsterdam and Budapest's spring music festival — Helen Warwick has the pick of the trips

Marrakesh

The Moroccan borders have reopened in time for spring, with temperatures hovering in the mid-twenties, blissfully clear skies and orange blossom scenting the Red City's hidden gardens. Bougainvillea will be thriving in the Majorelle Garden, amid its tangle of shady palms, bamboo groves and banana trees, and crowds will still be thinner in the maze of souks. Stay at the recently spruced-up El Fenn to gaze over the city from its twinkly rooftop, where its eclectic rooms have outdoor showers and are scattered with original art. **Details** B&B doubles from £322 (el-fenn.com). Fly to Marrakesh

Manchester

You're in for a weekend of offbeat charm in the northern powerhouse. This spring the first buds will unfurl at the new RHS Garden Bridgewater in Salford, 154 acres of orchard and woodland. In the Northern Quarter, Band on the Wall reopens in March after a facelift with a packed calendar of gigs plus a new exhibition documenting the city's music history. Sample the local food scene and stay in the new design hotel Moxy Manchester City, which captures Manc's idiosyncratic streak. **Details** B&B doubles from £99 (marriott.co.uk)

Girona

Girona instantly charms with its jumble of museums, galleries and gothic churches — plus a food scene with 21 Michelin stars strung between its restaurants. Spring calls for an off-grid hike into one of the surrounding natural parks (there are eight in the region), from the rugged hills and tranquil coves of Cap de Creus to the smouldering peaks of La Garrotxa's volcanic zone. Check into the Hostal de la Gavina, where guests have included Elizabeth Taylor, Robert De Niro and Lady Gaga. **Details** B&B doubles from £241 (lagavina.com). Fly to Girona

Amsterdam

In April swathes of tulips unfold across Amsterdam's parks and gardens, so time your visit to catch the spectacle. The annual Tulip Festival plants one for every resident — that's 800,000 blooms in the city alone. April brings



St Davids Cathedral, Pembrokeshire

the start of the once-a-decade Floriade horticultural show too. If that's not enough, hire a bike and strike out to the tulip fields that sprawl all the way to the sea, before returning to the canal-side Dylan Hotel in the Nine Streets shopping quarter. If you're looking for a party, the King's Day celebrations on April 27 are a blast. **Details** B&B doubles from £293 (dylanamsterdam.com). Fly to Amsterdam

Chester

The diminutive racing town is small enough to explore in a couple of days, swallowing up visitors in its warren of streets in the shadow of the cathedral. There's a new trail of art installations, Spring Blooms, dotted around the city until March 31, and the Chester Food and Drink Festival returns on April 16 with celebrity chefs and masterclasses — you can pitch your tent on the Roodie Racecourse that weekend. Alternatively bag a room at the hip Oddfellows in a central Georgian townhouse. **Details** B&B doubles from £135 (oddfellowschester.com)

Venice

The floating city is wonderfully romantic come spring, when the crowds are thinner and mist swirls above the canals. The Venice Biennale is back on April 23, with a thoughtful line-up of exhibits, curated for the first time by an Italian woman, Cecilia Alemani, and underpinned by a theme of sustainability. Stay at the idyllic Aman Venice, where its new Cook the Lagoon-themed tasting menu will feed diners with produce gathered within city limits. **Details** B&B doubles from £882 (aman.com). Fly to Venice

Berlin

If you have energy to burn, sign up for the Berlin half marathon on April 3 — a breath-busting way to explore the city streets. Runners race from the Berliner Siegestaule victory column, passing the Schloss Charlottenburg palace, plus Checkpoint Charlie and the grand buildings of Gendarmenmarkt. You'll



Tulips in Amsterdam

wind up at the Brandenburg Gate, where (ideally) the sun will be shining and the beer flowing. Afterwards sample the city's unrivalled party scene, and take in a few avant-garde galleries by day. **Details** Three nights' B&B from £269, including race entry (destinationssport experiences.com). Fly to Berlin

Palma de Mallorca

Palma has nailed the weekend break: it has exceptional food, a growing arts scene and plenty of markets and historical corners to explore before the summer kicks in. You can walk along the Paseo Marítimo by the sea all the way to the boho village of Portixol. Or catch the bus to the dinky cove of Cas Catala, where you'll find a few bathers with the beach to themselves. In a city stacked with hotels, go for the minimalist Innside Palma Bosque, ten minutes' walk from the bohemian Santa Catalina district. **Details** Room-only doubles from £70 (metla.com). Fly to Palma

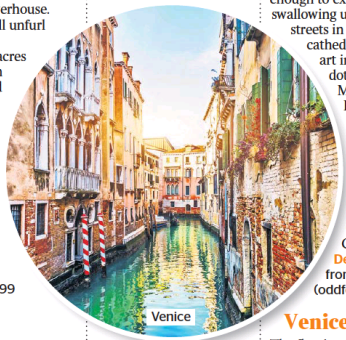
St Davids

St Davids is Britain's smallest city, with mooching potential for a day or so, but the true magic lies just beyond, towards

the wind-sculpted Pembrokeshire coast. Here, rough-and-tumble surf pounds beaches, and hikers can scramble along the wildflower-strewn Wales Coast Path. Spring signals the return of puffins to nearby Ramsey Island; daily boat trips will take visitors there from St Justinian's. After all that adventuring, hunker down at Twr y Felin, a contemporary art hotel in a reworked windmill. **Details** B&B doubles from £250 (twryfelinhotel.com)

St Helier

For a taste of the exotic that's tantalisingly close to home, Jersey's pint-sized capital has mastered the art of the long weekend. Thanks to a spectacular natural larder, its food scene is making waves: hand-dived scallops, crabs and earthy Jersey Royals are all plentiful in spring. For a blast of fresh air, stroll along the beach at St Ouen, where thousands of wild orchids will be unfurling. Then wash the sand from your toes at St Helier's Club Hotel & Spa before sampling the blow-out menu at its Michelin-starred Bohemia restaurant. **Details** B&B doubles from £159 (theclubjersey.com). Fly to Jersey



Venice



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top city breaks to book now



Florence

Fewer tourists and mellow temperatures make spring in this Renaissance city an enticing proposition — that and the hidden Iris Garden, open for a few weeks in April and May, when its hundreds of varieties of iris (the symbol of Florence since 1251) are in full bloom. The Giardino Bardini is especially beautiful in spring too: thick with woodland, orchards and wisteria-clad pergolas. Stay at the cool Gallery Hotel Art, close to the Arno and newly reopened. **Details** B&B doubles from £208 (lungarnocollection.com). Fly to Florence

Washington

A spring fling in DC might be just the thing if you're craving transatlantic adventure. And the cherry trees will be in full bloom, turning pockets of the city pink; head to the Tidal Basin for the loveliest view. Where to stay? It has to be Riggs Washington DC, which opened last year in a cavernous former bank. Expect globally inspired drinks at its Silver Lyan bar, bespoke artwork in guestrooms and great views of the buzzing Penn Quarter below.



Jefferson Memorial, Washington DC

Details Room-only doubles from £275 (riggsdc.com). Fly to Washington

Tel Aviv

No city conjures perpetual fun quite like Tel Aviv — you'll find yourself heading home from the clubs around the port as



A room at El Fenn in Marrakesh

the sun rises on another cloudless day. New to the city's hotel scene this spring is the all-frills David Kempinski on Tel Aviv Promenade, a lively strip where joggers, walkers and swimmers mingle by the Med. As at any Kempinski outpost, expect crisp and immaculate interiors with an underlying cool streak. **Details** B&B doubles from £461 (kempinski.com). Fly to Tel Aviv

Muscat

The desert sultanate of Oman is a sensuous spot. In Muscat you can follow the scent of frankincense through the maze of souks, drink rosewater coffee in the port, lined with dhows, and admire the jumble of ornate mosques under clear skies before the heat ratchets up for the summer. Strike out for one of the hazy beaches — Al Qurum and Qantab are the best — where turtles dive offshore. For a razzmatazz stay book a room at the seafront W Muscat. **Details** Room-only doubles from £176 (marriott.co.uk). Fly to Muscat

Copenhagen

For a beginner's guide to hygge — the philosophy of cosiness and the contented pause — head to its home. The Danish capital will be emerging from hibernation by March, and is compact and accessible. You can lose hours exploring its design stores, royal palaces and gardens; Tivoli reopens on April 8 too. Enjoy the city's hyper-local food movement with a hotdog at Harry's Place, and book a hotel at the heart of the action: citizenM Copenhagen Radhuspladsen is cheap and cheerful. **Details** Room-only doubles from £73 (citizenm.com). Fly to Copenhagen

New York

The Big Apple is starting to defrost and there's a flurry of optimism swirling through the streets. In Central Park and Brooklyn Botanic Garden New Yorkers perch beneath boughs drooping with cherry blossom, and you might be able to shrug off your coat for coffee in the sun. Book a room at the new Pendry

Manhattan West and have the High Line — the city's elevated park, thick with wild grasses — right on your doorstep, weaving all the way through Chelsea. **Details** Room-only doubles from £628 (pendry.com). Fly to New York

Budapest

The Hungarian capital is one of Europe's most beautiful, split by the great Danube. As winter retreats its wild expanses — City Park, Margaret Island, the Buda Hills — surge with buds and blossoms (don't miss the bamboo forest and giant water lilies at the botanic garden of Fuvészert). For the city's annual Spring Festival (April 9 to 17) musicians and artists take the stage at various venues. Treat yourself to a stay at the Four Seasons Budapest, a grande dame in a meticulously restored art nouveau shell. **Details** Room-only doubles from £395 (fourseasons.com). Fly to Budapest

Paris

Who doesn't love Paris in the spring? The cherry trees around Notre Dame's Square Jean XXIII and the immaculately tended gardens of the Trocadero are in bloom, and the farmers' markets are full of asparagus and rhubarb. Even if it's still chilly, you can huddle under the heat lamps on one of the cool café terraces of the Canal St Martin. Of course you can spend a fortune at an all-frills hotel, but opt for the outpost of Mama Shelter East and you'll bag a cosy bed, Philippe Starck interiors and a rooftop pool. **Details** Room-only doubles from £101 (mamashelter.com). Fly or take the Eurostar to Paris

Valletta

The past is never far away in the Maltese capital, a sun-dappled city with a historic core. Wander its grand streets in search of St John's Co-Cathedral to enjoy Caravaggio's mammoth *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*; check out Grand Harbour, where sea planes take off; and enjoy works from local and international

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► artists at the innovative Valletta Contemporary gallery. If you aim for the last weekend of April you'll be in time for the Fireworks Festival.

Details Three nights' B&B from £1,015pp, including flights and transfers (originaltravel.co.uk)

Split

Dubrovnik hogs the headlines, but Split has an allure all of its own, with the Adriatic on one side and mountains on the other. Come before summer and have space to explore the walled complex of Diocletian's Palace, the city's cathedral and its enchanting cluster of squares and alleys, where bright young things gather at dusk over exceptional local wine. You won't have far to stumble if you book the Hotel Vestibul Palace, inside the Roman palace walls.

Details Room-only doubles from £117 (vestibulpalace.com). Fly to Split

Edinburgh

It's not time yet to hang up your winter coat in Edinburgh, but you should be able to leave your umbrella behind: spring is the driest time of year in the good-times Scottish city. Sunny days demand a visit to the green spaces of Princes Street; otherwise try the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art from April 9 for the sublime *Barbara Hepworth: Art & Life* show. Where to stay? The new urban outpost of Gleneagles is in the old Bank of Scotland HQ, where guests can take

A view of Edinburgh from Calton Hill



a wee dram in the grand banking hall. **Details** Room-only doubles from £495 (geneagles.com)

Bristol

An old boot factory in the creative quarter of St Paul's has been given a stylish makeover to become the latest Artist Residence hotel. Inside, rattan pendant lamps, mismatched rugs, distressed walls and splashy original art from local artists adorn its 23 rooms. New this spring will be a bar, café and kitchen addition to this buzzy neighbourhood hang-out. For a taste of the great outdoors, head for the country

park and mountain-bike trails of Ashton Court Estate. **Details** Room-only doubles from £125 (artistresidence.co.uk)

Valencia

The World Design Capital 2022 celebrates the change of seasons with its annual spring festival, Las Fallas. Until March 19 you'll be treated to spectacular firework displays, bonfires and riotous parades as the city heats up. There's no better way to spend an afternoon than in a back-to-basics pinxto bar with a cold glass of white wine and a plate of jamon. Or bury your toes in the sand at the

locals' favourite beach, Patacona. Stay in the heart of the old town at the elegant Palacio Vallier.

Details Room-only doubles from £60 (hotelpalaciovallier.com-hotel.com). Fly to Valencia

Lisbon

For some of the best pasteis de nata in the Portuguese capital, make a beeline for the Bairro Alto Hotel in the heart of the old city, where the superchef Nuno Mendes steers the kitchens — including the in-house pasteleria — and crafts these divine custard tarts. In spring the jasmine-scented gardens of Ajuda are a sensory delight; the city offers bike rides along the river and through the historic suburbs of Alfama and Mouraria; and you can dine on sardines in sunshine. **Details** Room-only doubles from £264 (bairroaltohotel.com). Fly to Lisbon

Istanbul

The mercury's rising, but the summer crowds haven't arrived — which makes this a wonderful time to explore the point at which Europe and Asia collide. It's not too hot for the extravagance of Hagia Sophia or the Ottoman Topkapi Palace; nor will it be stifling on the Bosphorus ferry. April heralds the return of the Tulip Festival, with startling displays in parks across the city. And for an opulent stay go for the Bosphorus-facing Six Senses Kocates Mansions.

Details Room-only doubles from £304 (sixsenses.com). Fly to Istanbul





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