

A CHEAPER WAY TO GET TO ROAM

MOBILE phone roaming charges are slowly getting less ridiculous.

Customers of Three can now get online and, when in a "Feel At Home" country, can call and text the UK using their current plan as if they are still at home.

That means they can use their UK price plan instead of incurring international roaming charges.

Initially, the scheme is available in the Republic of Ireland, Australia, Italy, Austria, Hong Kong, Sweden and Denmark.

"Feel At Home" will automatically activate as soon as the plane touches down in one of the listed countries and you can start using your phone immediately.

They are all lovely countries but a strange selection – apart from Ireland and Italy, not destinations that people from the UK visit very often.

But it is a start. And for that we are grateful.

● THE Champions League group stage draw was on Thursday and it looks like Manchester United fans face the longest journey times to travel to away matches.

Chelsea fans have the shortest, according to travel search engine GoEuro.

To get to Donetsk (Ukraine), Leverkusen (Germany) and San Sebastian (Spain), United fans face a total journey time of 24 hours and two minutes by train and plane, and a whopping 62 hours and 33 minutes by car.

They will also have to pay the most – £723.17 according to GoEuro.

Chelsea and Arsenal fans have come off better from the draw. Chelsea fans will have to pay the least to reach their away matches – in Gelsenkirchen (Germany), Basel (Switzerland) and Bucharest (Romania) – paying £283.81 for their travel.

They will also have the shortest journey time if they travel by car – a total of 42 hours and 43 minutes.

Arsenal fans will have the shortest total journey time by train and plane – to reach Marseille (France), Dortmund (Germany) and Naples (Italy), travelling 14 hours and 44 minutes.

IT'S 28°C IN MALLORCA where all-inclusive at the 4* Aparthotel Aicudia Pins is from £579 with Thomson – saving £203 per person. Get in quick – flights are from Doncaster Sheffield on September 4. See thomson.co.uk or call 0871 230 2555.

CORFU IS 33°C and seven nights' all-inclusive at the 4* Aquis Sandy Beach Resort in Agios Georgios, in northern Corfu, costs from £279 with Qwerty Travel. Book now for selected dates during October. See qwertytravel.com or call 020 8588 9943.

Sun+
CODES T+Cs

BARCLAYS Premier League Goals are only available in the UK and on Apple iOS 6 and above, and Android Jellybean and later – not currently available on native applications for Kindle, BlackBerry or Windows 8. Open to UK, Channel Islands and ROI residents aged 18+ only. One Trial Period and one Sun+ Membership per customer only.

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HIT THE BACLAVA

TRAIL ON GREEK CYCLE BREAK

BIG BLUE... Vassiliki offers the biker sparkling views

Am liking the biking

IT'S not until our bike guide, James, says he is carrying a defibrillator that I begin to wonder what I am letting myself in for.

"I've also got a phone in my bag," he beams. "If anything happens to me, call ICE and you'll get through to an English-speaking person."

ICE means In Case of Emergency. Not what you might expect to hear at the start of a morning bike ride. And this is supposed to be the easy route.

I'm staying in Greece with activity specialist Neilson. They are better known for their beach clubs and sailing lessons but I am planning on spending plenty of time on land and two wheels.

Neilson's motto is: "Relax as hard as you like." I am going to test this to the max with a week at their Retreat in Sivota, before moving 150km south to the Cosmos centre in Vassiliki. At 8am it is already a scorcher. Our group of ten huddles in the shade as James

explains the route we are about to take. Dubbed The Road To Perdika, he describes it as "undulating". I suspect that this is code for "steep and hilly".

Neilson centres are kitted out with brand new bikes every year. Helmets and gloves are also provided and, despite the blistering heat, there is not even the faintest whiff of stale sweat on the gear.

Guided rides range from gentle meanders through olive groves to an 80km road trip at the end of the week for the hardcore.

Following James, we roll down from the hotel through to Sivota, where taverna tables line the waterfront. We push on and, as the road snakes up and down, I take in the view.

To my left is mountainous scrubland dotted with lemon trees that burst with bright yellow fruit. To my right, the rugged landscape falls to a sheer drop and the sparkling sea below.

No room for dodgy steering here. Dozens of lime-green and electric-yellow butterflies flit around my bike and the shimmering Mediterranean affords a cooling breeze, a welcome

relief during the uphill sections. I find I am more aware of my surroundings in the plus-30°C heat. Crickets and lizards lurk on the road, death-defyingly close to my tyres.

A Greek woman, clad entirely in black, gives a toothless smile as she hurtles past in the back of an old pick-up truck.

After two hours' hard pedalling and a long final incline we make it to Perdika and, like any group of cyclists, head straight to a cake shop.

It is bum off seat and feet flat on pedals

It is called The House of Sweets and I am surprised to find it is run by an English woman.

Katie started working in a Corfu bakery 20 years ago, met her Greek husband Thanasis and never left.

Showing me around the shop, she leads me to her homemade olive oil and her "spoon sweets" – preserved fruits traditionally served to guests in a teaspoon as a gesture of hospitality.

Sitting on the terrace in the dappled shade, I also devour one of Katie's deliciously sticky baclavas and guzzle a frappé before freewheeling back down to the Retreat.

A few hours later, I am living up to the motto and relaxing as hard as I like in the resort's spa, having my aches worked out in a massage.

If you want a rest from biking, there are plenty of other activities on tap. I opted for daily tennis coaching, wake-boarding and pilates, all led by cheerful, encouraging instructors.

Of course, the best thing about exercise is that it requires copious amounts of fuel, and the buffet-style cuisine in Sivota didn't disappoint. Freshly cooked omelettes and fruit salad for breakfast, salads, fish and pasta for lunch and Greek specialities for dinner.

Thankfully, Vassiliki is just as good

for food, so for week two I swapped the road rides for mountain-biking. There are daily guided rides and you can pack swimwear and snorkels and stop off in one of the quiet coves for a refreshing dip and picnic.

Like Sivota, there are plenty of other distractions, so I take advantage of the great windsurfing conditions and stand-up paddleboards.

There are qualified instructors on hand and you can book lessons for some activities if you like, though some of the advice comes for free.

My mountain-bike guide, Tyson, shows me the "attack" position for downhill riding – bum off seat, feet flat on the pedals and straight arms – and by the end of the trip I am flying down hills.

After two weeks on two wheels, I reckon I am starting to crack it – and that is without a defib in sight.

ELLIE ROSS

GO: GREECE

Seven nights' B&B at the Cosmos Beachclub Vassiliki costs from £519 this month. Seven nights' club board at The Retreat Sivota is from £675. Prices include return flights, resort transfers, inclusive activities such as watersports, mountain-biking, yoga, tennis and children's clubs – although there are extra charges for one-on-one coaching and some equipment. For holiday details, see neilson.co.uk or call 0844 879 8155.

Pictures: JAY HAYSEY

BEN'S SHORE LEAVE

GLOBE-TROTTERING TV presenter Ben Fogle has just been appointed Destination Expert by Celebrity Cruises.

Ben has filmed a selection of destination guides for the company. They offer tips on where to go and what to do in a variety of cities visited by Celebrity Cruises. See celebrity-cruises.co.uk/BenFogle.

During 2014 Celebrity Cruises will launch a series of "Ben Fogle-inspired" shore excursions in various destinations worldwide.

RAISE a glass with wine expert Jilly Gooden on a ten-night cruise visiting France and Spain's renowned wine-producing regions.

Depart Dover on October 4 on board Fred Olsen's Braemar and attend wine tastings and talks hosted by the wine connoisseur.

This full-board cruise costs from £960 per person and ports of call include Nantes, La Pallice, Bordeaux, Bilbao, Aviles and La Coruna before returning to Dover.

Visit jetlinecruise.com or call 0800 082 2186.

GREAT British Bake-Off 2012 finalist Brendan Lynch will be joining Saga Sapphire's Western Med cruise departing Southampton on November 15.

He will be cooking up a treat with talks and demonstrations during an all-inclusive cruise.

Destinations on the 16-night cruise include Tunis (Tunisia), Valletta (Malta), Palermo (Sicily) and Algiers (Algeria).

Price from £1,899 per person includes all food and drinks plus UK door-to-door chauffeur service, gratuities and travel insurance.

Call 0800 051 3355 or visit saga.co.uk/cruises.

BARGAIN ahoy! Enjoy a 14-night Western Med cruise on board P&O Cruises Oceana, from £799 per person.

Departing September 27 from Southampton, ports of call include Cartagena, Barcelona, Monte Carlo, Rome, Ajaccio, Gibraltar and La Coruna.

The price includes inside cabin, all meals and entertainment. See pccruises.co.uk.



EDUCATIONAL RETREAT WAS SO ILLUMINATING

CONFESSING you are off on a holiday to learn how to make lampshades is the equivalent of sticking a Post-it note on your head which says BEWARE.

I, too, would once have thought it a bit strange. But these days I no longer yearn to lounge on a beach for two weeks. So dipping my toe into the unknown, I chose the Handmade Tailored Lampshades course at West Dean College.

There is something truly magical about this place. Set in stunning West Sussex countryside near Chichester, you are greeted by a chorus of baa-ing sheep and a sense of calm.

I arrived on a balmy summer evening to an unexpected Red Arrows display, closing the nearby Goodwood Festival Of Speed.

The imposing architecture of this 19th-century manor house – turned college might be a little intimidating at first, but the staff are really welcoming.

You gather at the bar before being whisked off to dinner with your class and tutor.

As most people come on their own, their priority is making you feel at home so you can socialise and learn.

West Dean gets the mix right and their short courses really deliver.

It is the creative equivalent of a social spa retreat where you do not need to sneak in the biscuits or the alcohol.

The historic cathedral city of Chichester is worth a visit if you have time.

And if you wanted to extend your holiday, from here you could easily nip down to bustling Brighton or the Isle of Wight for a few days.

Whatever you want to learn at West Dean, they will lay on the experts. Courses range from photography, upholstery and jewellery-making – even your own wedding rings – to art (and how to frame it), guitar, cookery, gardening, bee-keeping and making Christmas decorations.

I spent three days being guided by lovely tutor Ruth and learning from other students' work, between tea breaks and relaxing lunches al fresco.

Our class was a mix of curious creatives and some more entrepreneurial types who wanted to put their new-found skills to work. These introductory courses certainly give you the basics and the confidence to set up a business from home.

I left with a beautiful lampshade, a great sense of achievement and, even better, phone numbers of a whole host of new people I hope to see again.

I have already been commissioned to make six more lampshades, so it really would not take you long to earn your course fees back.

Plus you will put your skills to good work in your own home. For less than £100, say, you could transform all your home lighting – revamping your boot fair and charity shop finds you can pick up for pennies.

If you need a challenge, an escape and a bit of cerebral "you" time, West Dean is perfect. So, go on, scratch that creative itch – you could find your holiday pays for itself.

LUCINDA DEICHES



SERENE... West Dean's accommodation and, below, our Lucinda



GO: WEST DEAN

West Dean Collge is in West Sussex, on the A286 between Chichester and Midhurst. Nearest railway station is Chichester. Course prices vary. Accommodation prices start from £50 per person per night full-board. See westdean.org.uk or call 01243 811 301.

SAVE WITH AN ECONOMY DRIVE

CAR hire company Holiday Autos is discounting holiday rental by 20 per cent in a nine-day series of sales starting on Monday.

You can get discounts in popular destinations for car hire across the world until December 15.

The first of the special offers kicks off at one minute past midnight on Monday, with 20 per cent off bookings made in the UK for the Canaries and Balearics. For the rest of the week you will get the chance to book your holiday cars in Italy, USA, Canada, Portugal and Madeira, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Greece, Malta, Spain and France at a discount.

HOT SPOT

CROATIA is 24°C so hop aboard a small ship at Split and tour the Makarska Riviera with Sail Croatia. Seven nights costs from £444, booking before September 30. Return flights with easyJet during September are from around £200. For details, see sail-croatia.com or easyjet.com.

FLIGHTS GO CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSAL

YOU can now fly from Cambridge Airport to AUSTRALIA thanks to a tie-in with Etihad Airways and Darwin Airline.

As long as you do not mind changing, the agreement will see Darwin Airline connecting its flights to Amsterdam, Paris, Geneva and Milan, through to Etihad Airways' hub at Abu Dhabi and beyond.

Destinations now on sale from Cambridge include Africa, Asia and the Far East. Flights launch from September 2 and, under the agreement, passengers and their baggage can be checked in at Cambridge all the way through to final destination.

HOT SPOT

IT'S 32°C IN MALAYSIA – book a twin-centre trip to Borneo and Kuala Lumpur. Premier Holidays has three nights at the 4* Park Royal in KL and seven at the 5* Shangri La in Sabah from £999 in November, saving £920 per couple. See premierholidays.co.uk or call 08444 927 542.