

# THE WEEK

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# The doctors' plot

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ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS



This week's dream: **Diu island, India**

The Indian island of Diu has been described as "Goa 20 years ago", says Jon Bentham in *The Guardian*. But that was probably just a "canny piece of marketing", because Diu, which lies off the coast of Gujarat, is nothing like the famous hippy hangout: there are no all-night raves, no bong shops and few hawkers. What it does have – "and what often keeps people there for weeks longer than they intended" – is a "gorgeous sense of calm". For those who have lived the chaotic rush of mainland India, "slamming on the brakes can come as a beautiful shock. Like sleeping in your own bed after months on the road."

Reaching Diu requires a gruelling journey by rickety state bus, or the perennially unpredictable rail network, but it's worth the journey. The north of the island is mostly marshland, while the south coast alternates between long stretches of sandy beach and jagged limestone cliffs. The sea is clean, clear and safe to swim in, and most people get around by moped, "wending



St Thomas's Church: now an impressive museum

curious spiky trees (*boka*) imported from Africa, for instance, or the Shell Museum, which boasts the world's largest collection of sea shells. Diu may not be "party central", but it does have a rich history and a subtle charm. *Virgin* (0870-574 7747; [www.virginatlantic.com](http://www.virginatlantic.com)) flies to Mumbai from £368 rtn. *Hotel São Tomé Retiro* (+2875 253137) has rooms for around Rs400.

their way between palm trees along wide, empty roads".

Diu's architecture is quite special too: there's a dramatic 16th century Portuguese fort, "full of rusty cannons and green parrots", while the town is made up of eccentric old colonial houses, laid out along narrow avenues. Down every side street is a "pleasant surprise" – a lively restaurant, or a kitsch ice cream parlour. Many churches have been converted into hotels – including the "atmospheric" *Hotel São Tomé Retiro* – or museums such as St Thomas's, which houses a huge collection of statues and carvings. The island also has its quirky side: the

## Rental of the week

Beacon House, *Whitstable*

This weather-beaten clapboard house wouldn't look out of place in New England, says Joanne O'Connor in *The Observer*. Fortunately, it is much closer to home, located on a prime stretch of seafront at Whitstable. Its wraparound veranda is furnished with comfy sofas, from which to enjoy uninterrupted views of the sea, while inside, the living room is decorated in an Arts & Crafts style. Bedrooms are "breezy, white and nautical", there's an open fire to ward against the chill of stormy evenings and a "fabulous" outdoor shower. At night, the sound of waves "sucking on the shingle" lulls you to sleep, while the lights of distant fishing boats "wink" on the horizon.

Contact:

From *per*  
night (sleeps eight to ten).

## Getting the flavour of...

## Impressionism's spiritual home

The beach at Etretat on the Normandy coast gives one a "sense of déjà vu", says Nick Trend in *The Daily Telegraph*. That's because most of us will have seen reproductions of its limestone rock arch – the Manneport – on "the walls of a dozen art galleries". It may be the most frequently painted landscape in the world; Monet came again and again to capture the changing light. Courbet also painted the beach, while Pissarro, Manet and Renoir worked nearby. Their seductive scenes helped to glamourise sea-bathing, and today, this part of France remains as alluring as ever. An "Impressionist Tour" of the coast might take in Honfleur, Rouen and Dieppe, but for those unable to get to France, a major exhibition, *Impressionists by the Sea*, has just opened at the Royal Academy (0870-848 8484). *LD Lines* (0870-428 4335; [www.ldlines.co.uk](http://www.ldlines.co.uk)) runs ferries from £115 per car. Contact the Tourist Board (09068-244123; [www.normandy-tourism.org](http://www.normandy-tourism.org)) for details.

## The scariest place on Earth?

South Korea's capital, Seoul, "glows and hums with industry and wealth", says Mark C. O'Flaherty in *The Independent*. Pyongyang in the isolated North, by contrast, is a mystery to the outside world. Korea's border is the most heavily armed in the world, and is known, "rather inappropriately", as the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). It might be an

unlikely tourist haunt, but that doesn't stop visitors flocking there for a day out that's "two parts white-knuckle ride, one part panto". The tours, taken under armed guard, have the air of a surreal school trip: instructions are barked and crowds shepherded. There are checkpoints to endure, and a dress code to observe ("no shorts, denim or unkempt hair"). Visitors tour escape tunnels and peer at the soldiers: the South Koreans are like "futuristic storm troopers", while the boys in the North look "a tad charity shop". It's as thrilling as it is dark: you're never quite sure if it's theatre, or if hell could break loose at any moment. Bill Clinton called it "the scariest place on Earth". *BA* ([www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) flies to Seoul from £608 rtn. *DMZ Tours* are organised by *USO* ([www.uso.org](http://www.uso.org)) from £22.

## English Heritage on download

English Heritage has more than 240 unmanned sites in the UK, says Iain Aitch in the *FT*, and with no one on hand to offer guidance, information can be hard to come by. Now, you can download free audio tours on to your iPod for three sites: Baconsthorpe Castle in Norfolk, Netley Abbey near Southampton, and the Iron Age Maiden Castle hill fort near Dorchester. Audio guides will also be available for some of the larger, staffed sites, such as Battle Abbey, which "takes you into the heat of combat in 1066". Visit [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk).

## Last-minute offers from top travel companies

## Bulgarian activity break

Families Worldwide (0845-051 4567; [www.familiesworldwide.co.uk](http://www.familiesworldwide.co.uk)) has eight days of activity in Bulgaria, including climbing, riding, caving and camping. From £679 (adult) and £459 (child), during July and August.

## A week on a working farm

Take the family to a working farm. Simmons Farm Cottage in Devon is available through Marsdens (01271-813777; [www.marsdens.co.uk](http://www.marsdens.co.uk)). It sleeps five (plus cot) and costs £572 for the week beginning 21 July.

## Canada by rail

Lakes & Mountains Holidays (01243-792442; [www.lakes-mountains.co.uk](http://www.lakes-mountains.co.uk)) has ten days touring Canada by train, taking in Toronto, Quebec and Niagara, from £1,157pp including flights and board.

## Andalucian villa offer

Save 40% on Villa Los Cristales in Gaucin with CV Travel (0870-062 3415; [www.cvtravel.co.uk](http://www.cvtravel.co.uk)). The villa, with pool and lovely views, is now only £1,770 a week in July and £1,730 in August (sleeps ten).