and have fun while you **save** money

It's a lot cheaper than Venice, and the canals don't flood. You won't get serenaded by a passing gondolier either.

The average cost for one week for a family of four is £465 for a room.

If you prefer beaches forego Biarritz in favour of Bournemouth.

Biarritz, with its blend of French, Spanish, and Basque cultures is one of the most stylish cities in Europe. Its mild climate, sandy beaches, golf courses and casinos give it wide international appeal and it was a favourite of Queen Victoria. But it's a very busy city where the average cost for one week for a family of four staying B&B in a three-star hotel (including flights) is £2,388 B&B.

But Bournemouth has all that Biarritz can offer — and more. It was also a favourite of Queen Victoria. But today there's a younger beach scene, big name rock concerts, and a growing student population.

The artificial surf reef which opens this autumn will give it international board appeal and it only costs about £504 for a family room for a week.

If you normally take the family to Benidorm, try Blackpool instead?

The capital of the Costas has undergone a major transformation and, like Blackpool, it has a theme park — Terra Mitica — with rides and shows.

But the architecture is still mainly ugly 1960s tower blocks and neon signs. Happy Hour is still the highlight of the day and the verage cost for one week for a family of four is £1,005 B&B (including flights)

You can have just as much fun in Blackpool as in Benidorm. Forget the Promenade, the tower and the lights and try the Blackpool Pleasure Beach theme park. The new seafront is taking shape with the Spanish Steps leading down to the beach and the average cost for one week for a family of four is £455 for a family room.

Ireland...

RIGHT DOWN TO THE SEA . . . The cliffs of Moher and (below) the Burren

vellous opportunity to, as, the Irish say, 'take a look at the day'.

Then dip into aptly named 'Durty Nellie's,' which legend says was named after a feisty woman who tended the bar in the 1600s.

It seems she had a way of getting back at folk who were nasty — by dunking a dead mouse in their ale a few times before serving them. None of that today, I can report...

But, just a short journey away, we were to share a drink at the Foynes Flying Boat Museum that has made the country world famous.

I am talking Irish coffee here: rich, creamy with a generous splash of the country's finest whiskey.

The coffee alleviated the suffering of cold and wet passengers during its aviation days in the 1930s and early 40s.

And the museum is a marvellous collection of memorabilia from that era, including the original radio and weather room and an astounding full-size replica flying boat, The Yankee Clipper.

Foynes, on the River Shannon, became the centre of the aviation world from 1939-45 and the original Yankee Clipper, then Pan-Am's luxury flying boat, landed as the first passenger flight direct from the USA to Europe.

In 1942, Eleanor Roosevelt arrived under the alias "Mrs. Smith" and later that year, Captain Charlie Blair, who became husband of actress Maureen O'Hara, made the first non-stop passenger flight from Foynes to New York in 25 hours 40 minutes.

But, for a holidays to Ireland at a more down to earth pace, most coach operators collect passengers from their homes or a convenient starting point nearby and cross the Irish Sea via ferry.

Although the journey time may be longer than travelling by air, passengers avoid the hassle of driving to the airport, parking, and spending time queueing for check-in and security.

Tours to Shannon start from just £389 a head for four-night, dinner, bed and breakfast break in Ennis and include visits to attractions such as Cliffs of Moher, the Burren and Bunratty with North Wales operator Arvonia (www.arvonia.co.uk).

National operators featuring tours to the West of Ireland include Shearings Holidays (www.shearings.com), with pick up points from across the UK and Grand UK Holidays. (www.theukholidaygroup.com).

Shearings offer a seven-day tour via Dublin highlighting West Clare, Ennis and the Flying Boat Museum on a Celtic Railways break for £509 or a Best of Ireland tour of 12 days which costs from £839 as head.

A useful booking site is: www.coachholidays.com which has late availability offers from more than 50 national and regional

LEAVING IT LATE

BEST OF BRITISH

■ CORNWALL: Cornish Traditional Cottages (01208 821 666) barn (sleeps 4) near Mylor Creek from Sept 26 from £354.

■ SUSSEX: Rural retreats (01386 701 177) seven nights' self-catering at Goldspur Hall near Rye, sleeping 12, for total £2,173.60 until Sept 4.

■ SURFING ON GOWER: Dragon Hotel, Swansea (01792 657 100) two nights' half-board £135, incl surf lesson on Gower Peninsula.

■ LEEDS: Visit Leeds (www.loveleedsmore.co.uk) 1,000 special hotel deals for August with rooms at £10 per night, and discounted admission to major attractions.

■ BATH BANK HOLIDAY: Von Essen Hotels (01225 823 333) minimum three-night break at Royal Crescent Hotel from Aug 28 or 29, from £10 per room per night, incl champers on arrival, one three-course dinner, full English breakfast, one afternoon tea and full use of Bath House Spa.

■ NEWCASTLE: Thistle County Hotel (0871 971 1840) two nights' B&B through Aug from £69 per night, with Discover Pass for reduced admission fees to attractions.

■ JERSEY: Modern Hotels (01534 735 511) three nights' B&B at Mayfair or Metropole Hotel through Aug from £209, incl Fastcat crossing ex-Poole or Weymouth.

■ NORTH DEVON: Woolacombe Bay Holiday Parks (01271 870 343) three nights' self-catering in caravan from £295 for family of four from Aug 28.

■ DORSET: Dorset Coastal Cottages (0800 980 4070) seven nights' self-catering from Aug 21 in cob cottage sleeping three in Broadmayne, near Dorchester for £720.

SHORT BREAKS

■ KRAKOW: Directline (020 8239 3399) three nights' B&B at three-star Regent Hotel from Aug 20 for £288, to catch Polish pop festival, ex-Luton.

■ PARIS: On the Beach (0871 911 0202) three nights' B&B at three-star hotel from £146, ex–Luton Aug 22.

■ BARCELONA: Hilton Diagonal Mar (www.hilton.co.uk) rooms from £90 until Aug 31.

■ NEW YORK: www.vhiphotels.co.uk (0844 573 2460) four nights' room-only from Sept 2 at the Hudson from £749, with private transfers and Virgin flights.

■ BELGIAN GRAND PRIX: Grandstand Motor Sports (0845 375 0300) three nights' accom in four-star hotel in Brussels from Aug 28 from £399, incl Eurostar returns, track transfers on Sat/Sun. Belgian Grand Prix ticket costs extra £135.

SHORT HAUL

■ CORFU: CV Travel (020 7401 1026) villa sleeping six, south of Kassiopi, from Aug 31 for £680pp, incl flights.

■ CYPRUS: Prestige (01425 480 400) seven nights' half-board at Le Meridien, Limassol for £1,129, ex-Gatwick Sept 1.

■ MALTA: Airtours (0844 871 6636) seven nights' half-board at three-star hotel in Qwara, ex-Birmingham Sept , £375.

■ MAJORCA: Style (0844 800 7002) seven nights' self-catering in Pollensa, ex-Manchester Sept 5 from £259 (six sharing), incl flights but not transfers.

■ COSTA BLANCA: www.traveldealsdirect.com (0844 855 4905) 14 nights' B&B at Cypriot Hotel in Hisaronu £295.

■ IBIZA: Portland Direct (08712 313 237) seven nights' all-incl at three-star hotel in Puerto San Miguel, £445, ex-Bournemouth Aug 29.

■ PROVENCE: CV Travel (020 7401 1044) house with private pool sleeping four from Aug 29 for £2,195. Flights extra.

■ TENERIFE: Thomson (0871 231 5595) seven nights' self-catering at four-star villa (two sharing) £345, ex-Gatwick Aug 28.

■ TURKEY: Jewel in Crown (0870 067 2352) 14 nights' self-catering at three-star apartments in Marmaris, £1,080 for family of four, ex-Manchester Aug 21.

■ CORSICA: Travel Counsellors (0800 195 8852) seven nights' half-board at San Lucianu from Aug 30 from £799, ex-Gatwick.

■ CROATIA: Inghams Lakes & Mountains (020 8780 4454) seven nights' half-board at five-star Hotel Palace in Dubrovnik from Sept 2 £972, ex-Gatwick.

■ SARDINIA: Kids in the Med (0845 277 3300) seven nights' half-board at Chia Laguna from £1,266 ex-Luton and transfers, Aug 29-Oct 4.

LONG HAUL

■ EGYPT: On The Beach (0871 911 0202) seven nights' B&B in Sharm el Sheikh, £406, ex-Gatwick Aug 27.

■ ST LUCIA: CV Travel (020 7401 1050) seven nights' self-catering from Aug 25 for total £3,500 for two adults and two under-16s, incl flights, transfers, daily cook.

■ MALDIVES: www.vhiphotels.co.uk (0844 573 2460) seven nights' half-board on Cocoa Island from Aug 24, £1,799, ex-Heathrow.

■ THAILAND: www.vhiphotels.co.uk (0844 573 2460) seven nights' room-only in Evason Hua Hin from Aug 24 from £859, ex-Heathrow.

■ MAURITIUS: Club Med (08453 676 767) seven-nights all-inclusive at Plantation d'Albion Resort from Aug 22 from £1,515 per adult and £1,228 per child. Leisure options incl spa, Turkish baths, scuba diving and sailing.

■ FLORIDA: On the Beach (0871 911 0202) seven nights' B&B from Aug 20 at four-star Ramada Orlando Celebration Resort in Kissimmee, a mile from Disney World, from £550, incl return flights.

■ EGYPT: First Choice (0871 664 9011) seven nights' all-inclusive at four-star Holiday Village Red Sea from £715, ex-Manchester Aug 31.

■ DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: First Choice (0871 664 9011) 14 nights' all-inclusive at three-star Holiday Village Golden Beach from £764, ex-Manchester Aug 28.

■ GRENADA: BA Holidays (0844 493 0758) seven nights' half-board at five-star Mount Cinnamon through Sept from £1,269, incl return flights e-Gatwick.

■ ST KITTS: BA Holidays (0844 493 0758) seven nights' room-only at five-star Marriott from £788, incl BA flights ex-Gatwick.