

HOL SCAMSTERS CAN TRIP YOU UP

HOLIDAY firms going bust makes buying breaks risky enough but now we have the added threat of sophisticated scams.

Laurence Hicks of holiday rentals company CLC Leisure said: "We are hearing about holidaymakers who have booked accommodation and arrived at the address only to find it has never been available."

"Fraudsters are producing stylish websites featuring photos of very attractive properties in desirable locations. They even have phone numbers you can call for verification."

"The fact is, however, that photos and details have been copied, probably from an estate agent's website, the telephone number is disposable and there is no property for rent."

So be careful. Protect yourself by paying with a credit card and only using reputable travel agents with

ABTA membership and ATOL protection.

■ **THERE'S** a new way to get a bargain hotel room – **BID** for it online.

Onlybidding.com allows hotels to sell off empty rooms without having to advertise lower prices.

■ **HOORAY** for Premier Inn – they have taken a step towards offering free WiFi. You can get free connection for the first half hour – then 24 hours will cost £3.

I wonder if clearing your cookies would enable you to log on for free after your half hour is up?

■ **PEOPLE** spent less on holidays last year than they did in 2010.

A study of more than 1,500 holidaymakers by sunshine.co.uk found the average outlay per person was £1,831.88 in 2011. In 2010 it was £2,198.87.



premierinn.com

■ **MS EUROPA** are offering **TWO** music festivals. The Ocean Sun Festival will feature classical stars playing on board, as well as concerts at historical sites ashore. The ship will travel the Norway fjords, with stops at Bergen and Oslo.

CRUISE NEWS

And the Stella Maris International Vocal Competition will bring together up-and-coming opera singers from around the world to perform on board. It has a Middle East and Africa itinerary. See hl-cruises.com.

■ **ROYAL Caribbean** have some bargains at the moment. A nine-night Orlando and Bahamas stay and cruise is from £709.

Stay five nights on International Drive in Florida, followed by a three-night cruise in the Bahamas on board Monarch Of The Seas from Port Canaveral to Nassau, Cococay and Port Canaveral. Flights leave Gatwick or Manchester on February 5.

Call 0800 916 6070 or go to cruisethomascook.com.



BUBBLING... hot springs at Furnas, left, and incredible view of the Azores from the sky



Dinner is served ... at 1,160°C

TIME TO EXPLORE AZORES

BRITS are increasingly going off the beaten track for holidays.

These days, it's all about impressing your pals with tales of unusual things you've seen and done on your hols.

So how about a destination where you can swim with dolphins, go whale-watching, bathe in hot springs and have your dinner cooked by a volcano?

And what will amaze your friends even more is when you tell them that you have been to the Azores.

This collection of nine volcanic islands is around 800 miles off the west coast of Portugal. The largest of the islands is Sao Miguel, known as the Green Island.

Catching the Gulf Stream, its climate is warm and humid year-round.

As to be expected for a Portuguese island, there is excellent golf, at two courses, one of which actually sits in the huge crater of the Furnas volcano.

The other course is at Batalha, and is of championship standard, recently hosting a Ladies European Tour event.

For those among you who like a long walk without chasing a little white ball, the hiking is spectacular. Mountains and lakes are in abundance and your stroll will not be interrupted by the sound of a jetski as motors are banned on the inland waterways.

Sao Miguel is a place that has been relatively unspoilt by progress – apart from the inevitable golden arches of a McDonald's that can be seen in the main town of Ponta Delgada.

Tea and pineapple plantations are still in operation and tourism is

important to the island. It attracts a lot of holidaymakers from North America and is a popular port for visiting cruise liners. One of the main attractions is the Furnas vol-

cano. It is vast, covering 80 square kilometres, and within its crater lies a wonderful village, a boating lake, hot springs and the Terra Nostra Gardens.

At the heart of the gardens is a huge swimming pool heated by the volcano's hot springs.

Another tourist hotspot within the volcano is on the banks of the large lake within the crater.

The air is filled with steam and the strong smell of sulphur, while the mud beneath your feet bubbles.

More than that, they use the 1,160°C provided by Mother Nature to cook their dinner.

Hoteliers and restaurateurs gather on the banks of the lake at the same time every day to pick up their special dish.

It is a collection of meats and vegetables placed on dry leaves in a big pot that is buried in a hole in the ground and left there for a few hours.

With the islands so deep in the Atlantic Ocean, marine tours are hugely popular, spotting whales, dolphins, loggerhead turtles, sharks and marlin. See whalewatchazores.com

The islands are a treasure. Four hours from London you can walk into a paradise that reminds you of Jurassic Park.

Only, a Jurassic Park incorporating the life-style of Portugal.

GRAHAM WARWICK



DISCOVERY COVE ORLANDO

A perfect day of dolphins, rays and white sand beaches

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All Discovery Cove packages include one full day at Discovery Cove with a dolphin interaction experience. *The Choice package includes unlimited admission to SeaWorld or Busch Gardens for 14 days from first use. †The Ultimate package includes unlimited admission to SeaWorld, Busch Gardens and Aquatica for 14 days from first use. Guests must be at least six years old to swim with dolphins. Children aged 6-12 must be accompanied by a paying adult who also is participating in the dolphin swim experience. Guests aged 3-5 must purchase the non-swim package. Prices shown are based on visits 3rd January - 11th February, 4th September - 30th September and 1st December - 16th December 2012. £162 offer applies to new bookings only and is subject to availability. ©2012 SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

GO: Azores

GETTING THERE: SATA International fly weekly to the Azores from Gatwick and Heathrow from April to October with prices from £312 return. Flights between the islands are from £47 one way. See sata.pt or call 0844 482 1678. STAYING THERE: Seven nights' B&B at the 4* Hotel do Colegio in Ponta Delgada is from £576pp including flights from Gatwick on April 7. Call 020 8758 4722 or visit sunvil.co.uk