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Where to go when: Winter season

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November 27, 2013 Updated: November 27, 2013 03:39 PM



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Taking place inside the purpose-built Chapiteau de Fontvieille, the shows in the first half of the festival are essentially highlights packages from the competing performers. Later shows are a showcase for the winner of the Clown d'Or (Golden Clown) trophy.

Emirates (www.emirates.com) flies direct from Dubai to nearby Nice from Dh3,825. Prime seats at the festival (www.montecarlofestival.mc) cost from €91 (Dh450)

Jawai Leopard Camp

Of all the big cats, leopards are notoriously tricky to spot. But the new Jawai Leopard Camp in India has been specifically set up with seeing them in mind. Near Rajasthan's Jawai Bandh reservoir – a haven for geese and flamingos – the camp isn't inside a national park, allowing for greater freedom of movement. The jeeps are customised for prime viewing, and largely untravelled locations mean leopard numbers are high. Winter's low humidity helps, too. Jawai is aiming for small-scale and sustainable, with just eight luxury tents that have the stainless steel-and-leather sleekness of upscale hotels. Each has a private deck with views of the craggy wilderness. Separate spa and dining tents are also on-site.

Twice daily game drives with trained trackers are part of the all-inclusive package, which costs from 40,000 rupees (Dh2,405) a night (sujanluxury.com/jawaileopard-camp)

February

A taste of Taiwan

Emirates launches its new route to the Taiwanese capital, Taipei, on February 10. Highlights include Taipei 101 – the Burj Khalifa's predecessor as the world's tallest building – and the National Palace Museum. Counterintuitively, the latter has a far more impressive Chinese history collection than any museum in China. After sundown, numerous night markets bring the city to life, and hot spring complexes provide relief from the intensity just outside the centre. But the island's real charm lies out of the city – in the Oolong tea plantations in the mountains, the marble-lined Taroko Gorge within the Taroko National Park and the spa resorts around the majestically photogenic Sun Moon Lake. February's great timing, too – safely away from the unbearably humid and typhoon-wracked summer months.

Absolute Travel (www.absolutetravel.com) offers tailor-made, nine-day highlights tours of the island, staying in top-end accommodation, from \$5,370 (Dh19,725) per person. Return Emirates (www.emirates.com) flights to Taipei from Dubai cost from Dh3,245

Grace Marrakech

The snow doesn't stay on Morocco's Atlas Mountains for long, but February tends to be the best time of year to see the white-capped makeover. And few places have better views of the mountains than the Grace Marrakech. Formerly the Les Terres M'Barka, the Grace reopens on February 14 following an extensive eight-month refurbishment. The emphasis is on an idyllic tranquillity far removed from the city's frenetic medina. Set amongst 15 hectares of lush countryside, the retreat has its own horse stables and vegetable garden, plus sprawling olive groves. The suites have traditional Berber comfort in mind rather than flashy exuberance – fireplaces, one-off wooden furniture, carefully sourced textiles and natural material bed linen give a luxuriously homely feel. After a day of intense sensorial bombardment in the souqs, the Grace aims to offer the diametric opposite.

Deluxe suites at the Grace Marrakech (www.gracehotels.com/marrakech) cost from €384 (Dh1,896) per night

Venice Carnival

If anywhere is best visited out of season, Venice is it. Summer can turn into a sweaty, crowded torture as the cruise ships flood the city with tourists. In February, there's more room to explore and the mists whipped up off the lagoon make strolling along the canal-side paths tremendously atmospheric. February also plays host to the most melodramatic of Europe's great festivals, the Venice Carnival (www.carnevale.venezia.it). This year's runs from February 15 to March 4. The city's theatres fill up with special international productions, squares become stages for concerts that range from baroque classical to reggae, and St Mark's Square becomes a focal point for lavish dance productions. It is the masked balls that are most readily associated with the carnival, however. The pageantry-packed events take over banqueting rooms in numerous palaces, backed by orchestral music from the Venetian Republic's glory days.