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Beach life: Europe's best beaches 2005

What do you want from your beach? Romance, glamour, solitude . . . even full-scale nudity? Whatever your taste, Jeremy Lazell has the strand to suit

It's not every day you get to feel superior to people much richer and more beautiful than yourself, so to the beach at Antibes I say, "Thank you." It was two years ago in July: suncream sparkled on the surf, Las Ketchup blared from a beatbox, Europe's pretty people packed the sand like bacon on a skillet. Ignore the 16th-century town walls and it could have been Benidorm. Frankly, I felt I could do better.



Patara beach in Turkey boasts fine white sand and 2,000-year-old ruins



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yourself popping the question. Nearby, Haukland Sands — a broad, silver sweep that regularly scoops Norway's best beach award — is a worthy daytime alternative, as are the stunning cliff walks towering above the Atlantic.

Not good for: nightlife — in winter there are some great Northern Lights, but that's as close as you'll get to a strobe.

Go independent: Trailfinders (0845 050 5940, www.trailfinders.com) has flights with SAS from Heathrow to Leknes, via Oslo and Bodo, from £390. Visit www.lofoten-tourist.no for fishermen's huts and hotels on the Lofotens.

Go packaged: Inntravel (01653 617974, www.inntravel.co.uk) has seven nights, self-catering, in a cottage on Vestvagoy from £938pp, including flights with SAS from Heathrow to Leknes, via Oslo and Bodo, plus transfers and three-days' car hire.

BEST FOR WATERSPORTS

Famara beach, Lanzarote

Buffeted by the Atlantic, this fantastically dramatic beach on Lanzarote's northwest coast is a four-mile slice of watersport heaven. Windsurfers, surfers, kitesurfers, they're here from every board-loving backwater of Europe. But don't be intimidated: blessed with a gently shelving sandy bottom to cushion the inevitable wipeout, Famara beach is the perfect place to learn, and board-virgins are as welcome here as gnarly pros. Water temperatures are equally friendly, averaging about 23C.