

GETAWAY

LATE
BREAKSGREAT DEALS ON
LAST-MINUTE
HOLIDAYSFairmont
Ajman

FIVE-STAR TREATMENT IN AJMAN
ENJOY some winter sun in the United Arab Emirates. Three nights at the five-star Fairmont Ajman, in Ajman, costs from £625pp, based on two adults sharing a Fairmont View Room on a B&B basis and includes return economy flights from London Gatwick and London Stansted with Emirates.

Valued for travel on selected dates between January 12 to February 26, regional departures are available: London Heathrow from £655pp, Birmingham from £675pp, Manchester from £685pp, Newcastle from £685pp, Glasgow from £685pp and Edinburgh from £685pp. To book visit emiratesholidays.com or call 0208 972 8949.

For more hotel information visit fairmont.com/ajman

SAIL TO SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

P&O Cruises is offering a 14-night cruise on Oceana (E003N) from £799pp for an inside cabin. Departing February 2, the price includes kids' club, full board meals and entertainment on board. Departing from and returning to Southampton, ports of call are Vigo, Malaga, Barcelona, Valencia, Cadiz and Lisbon.

To book, visit pocruses.com, call 03453 555 111 or visit your local travel agent.

IT WON'T RAIN ON YOUR PARADE

JOIN the St Andrews' Mardi Gras Parade, the biggest event in the Panama City Beach calendar from £880 per person. This seven-night package includes flights from Heathrow to Panama City Airport on Virgin Atlantic, car hire with free additional driver and accommodation at the two star Beachbreak By The Sea in Panama City Beach.

Price based on two people sharing, on a room only basis. Book by January 31. Departing February 11.

Contact 020 8742 8299, sales@americaasyoulikeit.com or visit americaasyoulikeit.com

PARTY BOAT THAT
ROCKS THE 80sParty time in
the Star Lounge

COME on, I'm going to need your help with this," Nathan Moore announces, scanning the sea of neon in the packed-out Star Lounge. "I need you ALL up on your feet..."

It's 10pm. We're onboard Explorer of the Seas, Royal Caribbean International's Voyager class cruise ship, for Throwback's second 80s Floating Festival.

The sea is calm, but this ship is rocking!

Being a HUGE 80s music fan, spending three nights away – in luxurious accommodation, with a bunch of legendary 80s artists and 3,000 like-minded partygoers ...

Well, quite frankly, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven.

Throwback is a crazy mix of nostalgia and fun; some might say complete madness.

Where were we going? We'd set sail from Southampton and were en route to Le Havre. To be honest, the destination didn't matter. Most had no intention of disembarking; there was way too much fun onboard.

Apart from the amazing line-up of

HELEN BARNES
sails back in time on
a cruise like no other

artists with back-to-back shows, there were hot tubs, pools, a beauty salon, shops, a climbing wall, an impressive gym, a casino, a nightclub, a running track, a spectacular surf simulator (more about that later) and numerous bars and restaurants.

The cabins were spacious and impeccably clean. Ours had a balcony and walk-in wardrobe and resembled more a five-star hotel suite than what you might imagine on a ship.

So, what's with the fancy dress? Literally everyone was dressed up, some fully embracing it from breakfast onwards – and why not? With a 10-foot Hulk, Subbuteo players, Smurfs, retro tracksuits, 80s icons, Barbie dolls, and so on, it was an impressive sight.

"I'm really knocked out with all the effort on the costumes," Jay

Aston – she of The Fizz (formerly Bucks Fizz) fame – told me. "They're going to totally outshine ours!"

Attention to detail didn't go unnoticed. Every available space was emblazoned with 80s branding.

There were inflatable Rubik's cubes and spacehoppers hanging over the dance floors, awesome Ghostbusters flashmobs bursting out of bars, cocktails of the day – the 'Hadley Gold' was a tart and bubbly refresher of vodka, lemonade and a splash of Sprite! – and even chance to sit in a DeLorean time machine.

And then there was food, glorious food. It's easy to see how you could return several kilos heavier – food was plentiful, delicious and virtually 24/7. We dined in several restaurants and received fantastic service throughout.

Most guests purchased drinks packages – a sensible option. Unlimited alcoholic or soft drinks

NEED TO KNOW

■ **HELEN BARNES** was a guest of Floating Festivals. Throwback: the Ultimate Festival at Sea runs from October 1 to October 4 on Anthem of the Seas. Stars will include The Jacksons, Marc Almond, Jimmy Somerville, Sophie Ellis Bextor, Martin Kemp, Gok Wan, Whitney - Queen of the Night (a Whitney Houston tribute show) and What's Love Got to Do with It? (a celebration of Tina Turner).

■ Prices are from £599 per person. See floatingfestivals.co.uk for more information

(one might assume the former could lead to chaos, but that wasn't the case) were the order of the day.

But it was all surprisingly civilised. Everybody was just out to party day and night, and really live the magic of Throwback but in the friendliest of atmospheres.

There's plenty to do on the ship other than eat and drink, including FlowRider. On the top deck, this wet and slightly bonkers activity was honestly one of most exciting and thrilling I have ever tried.

Riders need bucketloads of determination and resilience to crack it, but it's so worth a go.

Although the instructors were amazing, quickly teaching the basics to empower the first-timer to stand up on the board, be prepared for some epic wipeouts. I had a few!

Designed with the latest technology, the ride surface absorbs impact brilliantly, so can be likened to falling on a huge sofa! Although, having numerous falls on a huge sofa – at speed – expect to ache a little the following day. That said, I can't wait to try it again.

But it really is all about the music – and it's very different to the usual festival. It's the artists who make it so special.

The choice of stars that director Jonathan Blackburn selected was perfect, not only for their quality and entertainment value, but also for their willingness to literally throw themselves in with 'us' fans.

It's unique for them too. As Nathan Moore of Brother Beyond explained to me: "You're constantly meeting the people you perform for – out in the restaurants or bars – so receiving feedback all the time."

Clearly enjoying being around his

Helen enjoys
the Flowrider