

SPAIN

The secret villas in Spain's most underrated regions

Forget the Costas — put these out-of-the-ordinary stays in northern Spain at the top of your list



Pyrenees House, La Cerdanya

[Katie Bowman](#) Saturday June 03 2023, 12.01am BST, The Times

Ponder a villa holiday in Spain and you might instantly think of Andalusia or Alicante in the sunny south. Yet the country's lesser-known northern regions, such as Asturias, La Rioja, Galicia and Cantabria shouldn't be overlooked if one of the country's more off-the-beaten-track corners sounds like an appealing proposition.

Each of these holiday homes is special — whether an amazing feat of engineering with glass walls, infinity pools-on-sea or angular terraces, or because they showcase traditional Spanish design with terracotta rooftops and hand-painted tiles in fabulous locations. Galicia is probably the most famous northern region thanks to the pilgrimage city of Santiago de Compostela, with its cathedral and crinkle-cut coastline and islands. Asturias and Cantabria are green and verdant, with national parks and mountainous panoramas. The Basque region is where you'll find seaside stunner San Sebastian, the town most famous for its gastronomy, to be paired with La Rioja next door for a matching bottle of red.

All are wonderful areas for a holiday, even if you choose a home you might not want to leave for your week's stay. Should that be the case, these properties will still immerse you entirely in the landscape, bringing the destination to your door. You'll recognise some established villa agencies here, but if you're a fan of distinctive architecture, you should familiarise yourself with smaller, specialist rental sites: Boutique Homes, Hotel Haiku, One Off Places, Host Unusual, and Urlaub Architektur.

What's for sure is that finding these homes isn't as easy as it is to live in them, so I've done the sifting and searching for you. Here are 24 villas in northern Spain that would be a thrill to sleep in. Buenas noches.

This article contains affiliate links.

[Show more](#)

ADVERTISEMENT



Galicia

Wild shores and wondrous seafood in the far northwest



Dezanove House, A Coruña

1. Dezanove House, A Coruña

Galicia is sometimes called the Wales of Spain, but if the principality looked like this we'd all be heading over the Severn Bridge each summer. Overlooking a cove where, out at sea, surfers and fishermen gather in equal numbers, this beach house is extraordinary. Even the rock face behind, from which the villa has been hewn, is incorporated into your view, making up the back wall of some rooms, or framed in glass in others. Where there isn't glass there are salvaged timber boards, so you have a home that is hip and historic.

Details Sleeps up to eight. Seven nights from £2,873 (dezanovehouse.com). Fly to Santiago de Compostela or Vigo



Rias Baixas, Pontevedra

2. Rias Baixas, Pontevedra

Rustical Travel is a small agency that offers some of the lesser-known regions of Spain. This house in the city of Pontevedra has sea views and lies less than a mile from Bueu beach, yet is located among forested hills with hiking trails setting off from your back garden gate. It's a traditional stone house with exposed timberwork, but it has been restored with modern travellers in mind and includes a contemporary kitchen and skylights.

Details Sleeps up to ten. One night from £374 (rusticaltravel.com). Fly to Vigo or Santiago de Compostela



Pazo de Ceilan, Negreira

IAN BARR

3. Pazo de Ceilan, Negreira

ADVERTISEMENT



This is a 200-year-old *pazo* (manor house) with orchards, a private swimming pool, antique furniture and galleried reading room, yet it costs under £2,800 for a week (about £215 each), even during peak summer season. Now, do you understand the appeal of Galicia? Guests can live like aristocrats then walk like locals to the nearby village. Santiago de Compostela, the Galician capital, is an easy day trip and Ria de Noia's sandy (riverside) beaches are a 30-minute drive away.

Details Sleeps up to 13. [Seven nights](#) from £1,198 (vintagetravel.co.uk). Fly to Santiago de Compostela or Vigo



Pedriña do Barral, Mondariz-Balneario

4. Pedriña do Barral, Mondariz-Balneario

If you've not already heard of the spa town Mondariz, you'll soon recognise its retro glass bottles of mineral water sold across northern Spain. And Mondariz is only a ten-minute drive from this garden cottage with a pool, so dedicate at least one day to its water palace where thermal pools, jets, waterfalls and whirlpool baths bubble in anticipation. Our favourite bit of this house are the stone-framed recessed windows, like picture frames revealing Galicia beyond.

Details Sleeps up to four. [Seven nights](#) from £1,090 (vintagetravel.co.uk). Fly to Vigo



Casa Berdillo, Panxon

5. Casa Berdillo, Panxon

Turrets, towers and an observation room — be prepared to star in your very own Spanish period drama at Casa Berdillo. The observation room offers views of Baiona Bay in one direction and the Atlantic Ocean in the other. Further down the tower you have lounges and reading rooms, while the bedrooms are in the adjoining house. Outside, there are terraced lawns for alfresco dining and there's a pool to remember. Despite the grandeur, this is a fantastic family holiday home with a beach, tennis courts, sailing school and cafés within walking distance.

Details Sleeps up to 12. [Seven nights](#) from £2,438 (oliverstravels.com). Fly to Santiago de Compostela or Vigo



Camino de Playa, Donon

CIRO FRANK SCIAPPA

6. Camino de Playa, Donon

ADVERTISEMENT

The “before” photo of Camino de Playa would show a dilapidated bodega, while the “after” photo would show a thoughtful conversion into a holiday house that sleeps eight and a little “cabana” nearby (for two adults and two children). You can still see the bodega walls and terracotta tiles, but what makes the place liveable are the replacement glass panels that allow light to flood in where there was once darkness. The houses share a gorgeous, raised pool, where loungers have elevated sunset views. Santiago de Compostela is one hour’s drive away.

Details Sleeps up to 12. Seven nights from £2,147 (urlaubsarchitektur.de). Fly to Santiago de Compostela or Vigo



Los Tendales, Rias Baixas

7. Los Tendales, Rias Baixas

Villas for two are hard to find and those with a private pool even harder, which makes the price of this one-up-one-down contemporary cottage only more astonishing. It overlooks the rolling meadows of Rias Baixas (which means low rivers). You have terraces, lawns, a tree-shaded dining area and henhouse to explore, not to mention the nearby Arcade fish market, O Viso village and Cesantes beach when you run out of superlatives to say to each other.

Details Sleeps two. [Seven nights](http://vintagetraavel.co.uk) from £598 (vintagetraavel.co.uk). Fly to Vigo



Villa Piloto, near Noia

8. Villa Piloto, near Noia

You're in the land of gothic and baroque cathedrals — Santiago de Compostela is only a 30-minute drive away — but if you're not a candle and queues type of traveller, it's nice to know you can sightsee from the swimming pool, where church spires fill your view. The villa is traditionally Galician, but the interior has modern touches such as polished concrete floors and a contemporary kitchen. The beach is less than a ten-minute drive away despite its position in farmland, which makes you feel as if you are miles from anywhere.

Details Sleeps up to eight. [Seven nights](#) from £2,398 (oliverstravels.com). Fly to Santiago de Compostela or Vigo

ADVERTISEMENT



Casa Tremuzo, near Freixo

9. Casa Tremuzo, near Freixo

You can almost still smell the fresh paint at this new-build beach house, which is light, bright and perfectly positioned for sea views. Praia de Broña beach is a short walk down the hill. Sunny angular terraces, a pool and a huge garden make Casa Tremuzo prime hermit territory (especially once you've stocked up your fridge). Santiago de Compostela makes an easy afternoon adventure.

Details Sleeps up to nine. [Seven nights](#) from £1,406 (oliverstravels.com). Fly to Santiago de Compostela

La Rioja

500 hilly wineries surround the lovely old town of Haro



Palacio Condes de Cirac, Villalba de Rioja

LUTTON GANT

10. Palacio Condes de Cirac, Villalba de Rioja

Rioja is something we Brits love to drink but isn't necessarily somewhere we could place on a map, hence holiday homes being a scarcity. So, this converted manor house, three miles from Haro is a real find. It's perfect big-group territory with eight bedrooms and eight bathrooms, and the option to have breakfast and other meals cooked for you. You can also rent bicycles and cycle to vineyards. The restoration is ingenious with aged stone walls and fireplaces for atmosphere, but stylishly modern concrete floors and sliding screens for that magazine spread look.

Details Sleeps up to 24. [One night](#) from £522 (palaciocondesdecirac.es). Fly or take the ferry to Bilbao

Aragon

ADVERTISEMENT

Pyrenean peaks, lush river valleys and hopelessly pretty hill towns



Consolacion, Monroyo

AITOR ETXEBARRIA

II. Consolacion, Monroyo

If you're travelling solo or in a pair, a villa is rarely an option unless you're happy to pay for bedrooms that remain unused. Consolacion gives the villa experience to such travellers with its Kubes — mini but magnificently designed new-build houses that are satellites to the main building (a historic hotel with restaurant and communal pool). More spacious than a suite but less upkeep than a villa, a contemporary Kube offers a kitchenette, open fireplace, huge sunken bathtub, private gardens and picture windows over Teruel's rugged landscape. And because

the hotel has a local-loved restaurant serving a slow-food menu at night, plus sunny breakfasts each morning (included), you don't need to cook. That's something most villa-goers can't claim.

Details Sleeps up to three. [One night's B&B](#) from £198 (welcomebeyond.com). Fly to Valencia or Barcelona



El Caracol, Lledo

STUART SMITH

12. El Caracol, Lledo

Caracol means snail in Spanish, and that's what you have here: a cocoon-like home within a striking steel-and-wood shell, replete with everything you could ever need. Don't assume that "cocoon" means cramped, however; you have three bedrooms, two of which are en suite, and a light-flooded living area and kitchen, all of which look out to the mountains of Els Ports Natural Park owing to one half of your shell being made of glass. There's a circular swimming pool, vegetable garden and an indoor-outdoor lounge, as well as a pizza oven, so life at El Caracol is about immersing yourself in the local landscape — by hiking, cycling, river swimming, even simply viewing — rather than off-site day trips.

Details Sleeps up to eight. Seven nights from £1,317 (hostunusual.com). Fly to Reus (Tarragona)



Solo Circle, Cretas

13. Solo Circle, Cretas

What a backstory: creative young couple — he French, she Spanish — buy a huge plot of wilderness to indulge their passion of “collecting great modern architecture”. How do they do it? They build it! So, in time, this epic land of olives, oaks and red rocks on the Aragon-Catalonia border will house 15 holiday homes, each designed by an internationally acclaimed architect. Solo Circle is the second house, a 45m-diameter ring (like a mini version of Apple Campus, the Infinite Loop), with a courtyard and 20m pool in the centre, and the living spaces and bedrooms arranged around the periphery. Sliding walls made of glass can all be opened up, enabling total immersion in the landscape. We could tell you that Solo Circle is within day-tripping distance of Els Ports Natural Park, Costa Brava beaches and the city of Tarragona, but if you choose to leave this house during your stay, you’re missing the point. **Details** Sleeps up to six. One night from £752 (boutique-homes.com). Fly to Barcelona or Valencia



Basque country

Beyond foodie San Sebastian come craggy mountains, oak forests and waterfalls



Sliding Serenity, near San Sebastian

INAKI CAPEROCHIPI

14. Sliding Serenity, near San Sebastian

From the outside, this A-frame home's timber balcony, quoin stone edging and wooden shutters couldn't be more typically Basque. But inside is a different story, with a contemporary suspended wood-burner, glass balustrades, asymmetric ceilings and Scandi-sleek furniture. There's a heated pool (no small matter in these chillier Spanish climes), a home office, and you're a short drive from San Sebastian with its hip city beach and the highest concentration of Michelin stars in the world. Which makes this home the perfect dish, whether you're travelling with mature foodies or TikTok-hungry teenagers.

Details Sleeps up to seven. [One night](#) from £612, minimum five-night stay ([plumguide.com](#)). Fly or take the ferry to Bilbao



Amezti 58, San Sebastian

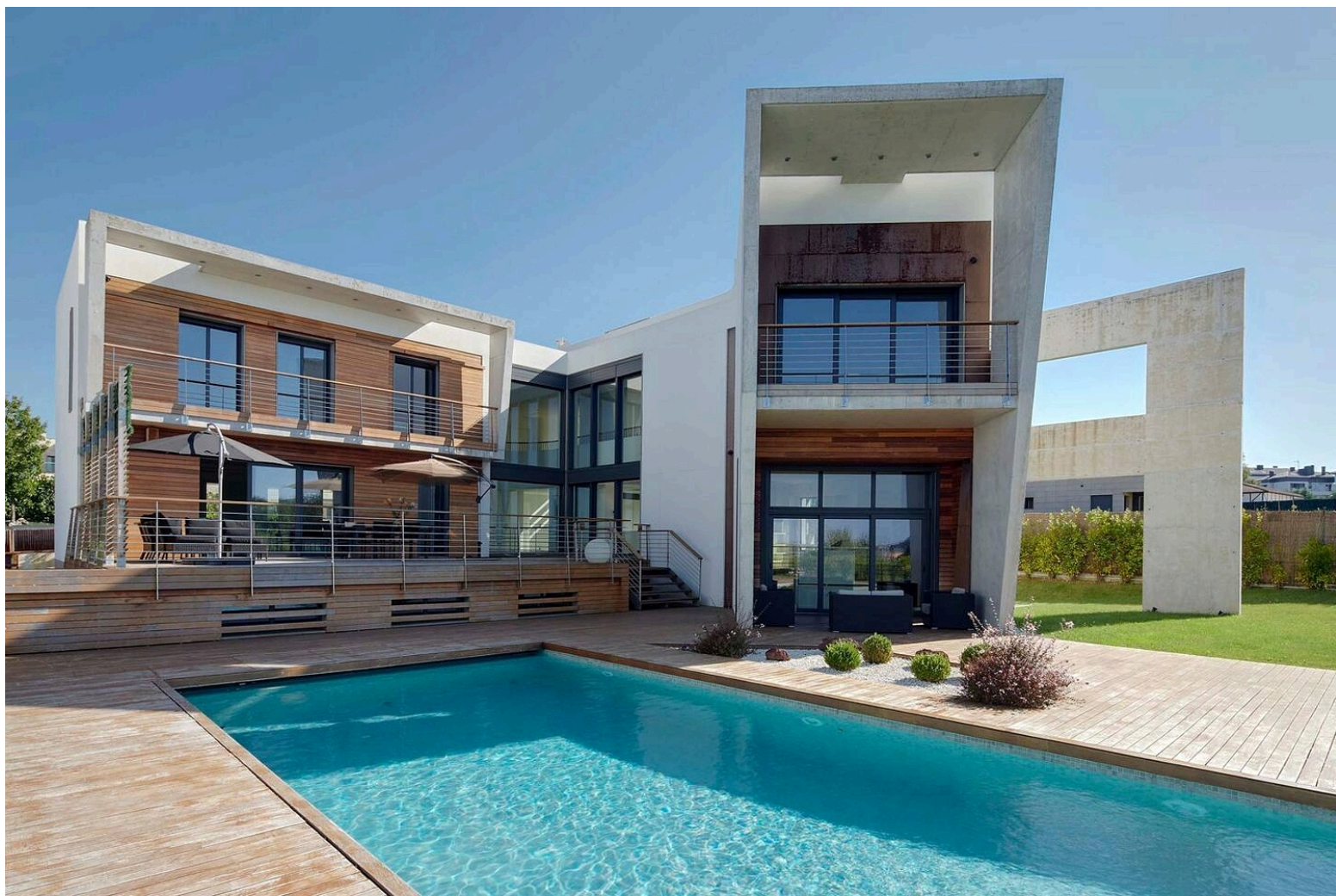
JOSE MANUEL BIELSA

15. Amezti 58, San Sebastian

On unearthing these astounding homes, I can't help but feel I'm doing a lot of hard work on behalf of movie location scouts. Certainly, this geometry puzzle of a house, looking out over the Bay of Biscay, could hold its own against the most famous of film stars. Constructed of concrete cubes, some asymmetrical, placed at angles atop each other, it's as much a sculpture as a place to stay. And just for larks, the hot tub is triangular, abutting the pool – which, by the way, is fitted with a counter current to swim against. Interior design lets this house down a little (coloured lighting and OTT velvet headboards), but which winning actor doesn't have their flaws? You're

also half an hour's walk from the renowned Ondarreta Beach.

Details Sleeps up to eight. [Seven nights](#) from £4,759 (vrbo.com). Fly to Biarritz (France), or fly or take the ferry to Bilbao



Villa Ligera, San Sebastian

16. Villa Ligera, San Sebastian

Ligera means light in Spanish — not the bulb-type (that's *luz*), but the floaty, carefree type, as in a light-hearted person. And that's how you'll feel as soon as you kick off your sandals and submit to life at Villa Ligera. This might happen in the master-bedroom whirlpool-with-a-view, or the wraparound deck with sea vista, or the spectacular, architectural pool with its music-video vibes. Even kids get a piece of "ligera" in the sky-lit games room with table tennis and pool table. San Sebastian is close enough for dinner (a five-minute car journey) but far enough away that this still feels like a secluded coastal escape.

Details Sleeps up to eight. [One night](#) from £573, minimum three-night stay (plumguide.com). Fly or take the ferry to Bilbao

Asturias

Track bears, try ciders, tour beaches or hike gorges



Nature House, Siero

17. Nature House, Siero

This is the first of two “nature houses” featured in this list (see below). These are homes vetted and sourced by the Netherlands-agency Natuurhuisje, which specialises in rural vacation homes that enhance local biodiversity, and which donates two per cent of its turnover to local nature projects. This cottage is in a hamlet of just six homes and has astounding mountain views, framed artfully by low stone walls and wiggly country lanes. The owners recommend doing little more than “walking to pick chestnuts or blackberries”, but Gijon and Oviedo are also nearby.

Details Sleeps up to six. Seven nights from £518 (naturehouse.co.uk). Fly to Asturias-Oviedo or fly or take the ferry to Santander



The Cider House, Rodiles

ZVONIMIR STAMENOV

18. The Cider House, Rodiles

Surfers and swimmers come from afar to gorgeous Rodiles beach — often voted Spain's best, and without the crowds of the Costas. For you, it's a 3km walk down a rural lane, or a short drive if your rental car is laden with body boards and a picnic. Imagine an old terracotta-roof cottage with a modern extension and a long hydrangea-trimmed lawn; that's what you have at the Cider House, where the lounge (in the new bit) has high ceilings and a single window with cinema-screen views, while the kitchen is teeny with traditional tiles and ancient low beams. It's very pretty, wherever you're sitting, and happens also to be on the edge of Selorio, a hamlet with a butcher and restaurants.

Details Sleeps up to five. One night from £120 (rusticaltravel.com). Fly to Asturias-Oviedo or fly or take the ferry to Santander

Castile y Leon

Crags, castles and colossal plains, plus premier jamon



Refugio Cabin, Salamanca

19. Refugio Cabin, Salamanca

If all affordable housing looked like this, the world would be a better place. Designed by the Salamanca local and winner of a 2021 Architecture MasterPrize for small architecture, Alvaro Sanchez de Miguel, the clay-rendered one-storey units (there will be 84 eventually) are like futuristic rural refuges. Sure, they were built with Salamanca families in mind, with open-plan living to promote social unity, but for you, the holiday-maker, they are arty, affordable retreats set among olive groves and vineyards. The Unesco world heritage site Avila, with its medieval walls and cobbles, is just over an hour's drive away, and Salamanca, the gastronomic student town, is 20 minutes up the road.

Details Sleeps up to five. One night from £149 ([boutique-homes.com](https://www.boutique-homes.com)). Fly to Salamanca



Villamejil, near Astorga

20. Villamejil, near Astorga

We include this grand five-bedroom villa, another nature-immersed house, because it's so rare to find a place of such size that remains back-to-basics in style and is, therefore, affordable. With a cobbled courtyard trimmed by galleried walkways and painted in noble colours, it's as if you have your own estate for the week. Thick stone walls make for impressive window seats — and even better forest views — and original timber beams conclude the historic picture. Almost. The icing on the cake is a long rural driveway that keeps the real world at bay.

Details Sleeps up to 16. Seven nights from £1,480 (naturehouse.co.uk). Fly to Asturias-Oviedo

La Cerdanya

A mountainous, picturesque pocket on the French border



Pyrenees House, La Cerdanya

21. Pyrenees House, La Cerdanya

From one angle this could be a classic mountain holiday home with rough-hewn stone walls and exposed timber beams, and Christmas vibes year round. From another, it could be Frank Lloyd Wright's sunny Spanish escape with a sleek pool and pitched-roof rooms that jut away from the main house into the sky like sun rays. Guests can spend wintry days skiing, hiking or reading by a fire, and summer stays swimming, cycling or golfing at one of Spain's oldest courses next door. Whatever the season, you have the house's Mercedes classic convertible and a Mercedes ML320 at your disposal.

Details Sleeps up to 16. One night from £3,947 (stayone.com). Fly to Perpignan (France), Girona or Barcelona

Cantabria

Cute fishing towns give way to bumpy, beautiful landscapes



Villa with Inspiring Views, Picos de Europa

ZVONIMIR STAMENOV

22. Villa with Inspiring Views, Picos de Europa

Hate to fly? Love to walk? This historic granite house on a hill works on both fronts — you can reach the area by ferry (either Portsmouth to Bilbao, or Plymouth to Santander) and then get everywhere on foot once you're here. Not only are the Picos de Europa so close you can smell the snow and pines (one guest said that “the views will take your breath away”), but you have village shops and restaurants within walking distance, as well as the swimming pool of the local campsite in summer. All this and the home feels private and rural, its walled garden filled with walnut, pear and apple trees and a river winding through the lawn.

Details Sleeps up to ten. One night from £246 (rusticaltravel.com). Take the ferry or fly to Santander



Villa Slow, La Pedrosa

23. Villa Slow, La Pedrosa

Using Cantabrian stone and traditional Basque building methods, the owner and architect Laura Alvarez has created a new home that looks as if it's centuries old. But then, inside, you appreciate its 21st-century sensibilities, such as two opposing glass walls giving equal importance to sunset and sunrise, or the glass-box shower cubicles that let light through, acting as internal windows. There's a timber hot tub with widescreen views of the Valles Pasiegos hills — it's wall-to-wall greenery in these parts with cows often feeding on the lawn. If you have a to-do list, Villa Slow isn't the place for you. Guests come here to relax and reboot. Slowly.

Details Sleeps up to four. One night from £198 (boutique-homes.com). Take the ferry or fly to Santander or Bilbao

Navarre

Running bulls, rangy sierras and sun-baked vineyards



Leciaga Rural Cottage, Goni

24. Leciaga Rural Cottage, Goni

This is the only Navarre property in this top 25 — owing only to lack of choice, not lack of beauty — which just goes to show how under-the-radar Navarre is. As well as being Brit-free, its anonymity delivers affordability, hence this 1792 converted manor house costing under £1,000 a week. You’ve no pool, but the location is about the landscape, either viewing it from your terrace, or hiking, biking and climbing among it. Bedrooms are traditional in style, with wood beams, open fireplaces and all the terracotta tiled floors you could wish for. Pamplona is less than ten miles from the villa.

Details Sleeps up to 14. [Seven nights](#) from £885 (vrbo.com). Fly or take the ferry to Bilbao

Sign up for our [Times Travel newsletter](#) and follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)

Related articles



SPAIN



VILLAS



BEACH SPECIAL

24 of the best villas in Andalusia

April 07 2023, 12.00am BST

Katie Bowman | Fiona Flores Watson

30 of the best villas for summer

January 12 2023, 5.00pm GMT

Jeremy Lazell

The villas where you walk directly from bedroom to beach

January 22 2023, 12.01am GMT

Emma Thomson

[BACK TO TOP](#)



Get in touch

[About us](#)

[Help](#)

[The Sunday Times Editorial Complaints](#)

[Classified advertising](#)

[The Times corrections](#)

[Careers](#)

[Contact us](#)

[The Times Editorial Complaints](#)

[Place an announcement](#)

[Display advertising](#)

[The Sunday Times corrections](#)

More from The Times and The Sunday Times

[The Times e-paper](#)

[The Sunday Times Wine Club](#)

[The Times Archive](#)

[Sunday Times Driving](#)

[The Sunday Times Rich List](#)

[Good University Guide](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Best Places to Stay](#)

[Podcasts](#)

[Times Luxury](#)

[Best Places to Work](#)

© Times Media Limited 2024.

Registered in England No. 894646.

Registered office: 1 London Bridge Street, SE1 9GF.

[Privacy & cookie policy](#)

[Site map](#)

[Puzzles Archive](#)

[Licensing](#)

[Topics](#)

[Authors](#)

