

Sandy stretches

As the staycation market shows no sign of slowing, Meera Dattani enjoys beach yoga and walking in north Cornwall on an Intrepid tour

Most of us know the drill for small-group tours. You arrive at the hotel, perhaps a little jet-lagged, there's a welcome meeting, the tour leader talks through the itinerary, and you meet back in the lobby for that first meal. But you're usually in Bangkok or Buenos Aires or Melbourne. This time we're in Newquay, Cornwall.

Our tour leader, Matty Dyas, is also used to being a little farther from home, most recently eastern Europe, but since the pandemic he's become something of a UK expert. Matty was the first to lead Intrepid Travel's tours of Hadrian's Wall, the Peak District and Cornwall – which he liked so much he moved here.

"When you're leading abroad, people have a natural sense of amazement," Matty says, "but in the UK, you're leading people who already live there."

One thing is clear, though: "People are constantly surprised to discover how beautiful their own doorstep is. It's taken a pandemic, but now people know they can enjoy a UK holiday. I feel that's here to stay."

As we head into summer 2022 amid a spate of flight cancellations, the staycations boom is showing no sign of slowing down. Sykes Holiday Cottages is anticipating its

"busiest summer on record", while coach tour company Leger Holidays and river cruise operator Riviera Travel both recently boosted their UK offering for 2022.

DOMESTIC RETREATS

Intrepid was quick to increase its UK escorted touring offering in 2020 and is still seeing healthy bookings for its domestic trips, with clients wanting to take both UK and foreign holidays this year.

Walk the Cornish Coast is one of several Intrepid Retreats in the UK (and the format is replicated abroad). Typically three to five days long, they are based in one location with trips to nearby places.

"We were already developing these, pre-pandemic, then Covid fast-forwarded it," says Carrie Day, Intrepid Group EMEA's industry sales manager.

She's also keen to emphasise price parity. "We want to highlight to agents that trips are the same price whether customers book with you or direct. We want to support local businesses; agents are the backbone of the industry."

The Newquay trip is a first for us all: a small-group, leader-led trip in the UK. Walking boots on, the first afternoon is spent getting familiar with this surfing mecca, walking into town, past the harbour, and along the South West

Fistral Beach, Newquay
PICTURE: Shutterstock/Ian Woolcock

DESTINATIONS

UK & IRELAND | CORNWALL



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: South West Coast Path near St Agnes; Trevoise Head Lighthouse; Padstow; yoga session, Newquay PICTURES: Shutterstock/Gordon Bell, Helen Holson, Neil Bussey; Intrepid Travel; Meera Dattani



Coast Path above Fistral Beach. "This is where we'll do yoga tomorrow, hopefully outside," Matty tells us. "Fingers crossed for the weather."

COASTAL DELIGHTS

The South West Coast Path stretches 630 miles, from Minehead in Somerset, along the Devon and Cornwall coastline, to Poole Harbour in Dorset. Whether surrounded by wind-bashed coastlines or bucolic rolling hills, it's a treat as Matty shares stories and trivia of Cornish coves, smugglers and the salt, fishing and mining industries. It's also a chance to talk about life in Cornwall and how the pandemic affected the area, delving beyond the *Poldark* and pasties stereotypes.

The weather is on-side. The second day begins with open-air yoga in the morning sun. Yoga instructor Stretch from Oceanflow Yoga has laid out mats on a flat grassy section overlooking Fistral Beach. It's instantly relaxing, with a deep-breathing tutorial,

a brief talk on wellness and, of course, a yoga class.

Stretched by Stretch, we're in good shape for the cliff-top walk from Harlyn Bay, west of Newquay, up to St Agnes Head, past wildflowers and remnants of Cornwall's mining industry, against a backdrop of Cornish hues and blues. Legend has it, Matty says, that the red stains on the cliffs mark where the child-eating giant Bolster was tricked to his death by local girl Agnes.

ALL ABOARD

Day two is giant-free and we hop on the Atlantic Coaster for a coastal bus ride. Fingers are crossed for an open-top bus — Matty's idea to walk to an earlier stop to beat the crowds pays off. Travelling on the top deck, alfresco, takes us to Trevoise Head, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty east of Newquay, from where we start the 12-mile walk. We pass a collapsed cave, see kites soaring overhead, and walk along the beach before entering the harbour town of

Padstow, in time for a drink, ice cream and seal-spotting, before catching the bus back to Newquay.

For many people, tours in their home country are usually for a sight or experience, rather than a multi-day trip. But when time's short and you want to maximise the experience, it's a good option as the guide knows bus times, reliable taxi firms, the top places to eat and the best bakeries.

Group dinners are optional, but the first meal at family-run Lost Brewing Co, a craft-beer-pub-meets-cafe-and-restaurant, is a winner. Another night, we head to The Boathouse, a streetfood market with indoor and outdoor seating, serving everything from Cornish crab to Mexican chilli.

Even the Cornish pasties are handpicked. Matty chooses Morris Pasties, made in the village of St Columb at Peter Morris butchers — the recipe is so secret it's kept with the family solicitor. Who says you can't be amazed by what you find on your doorstep? **TW**

ASK THE expert



Chris West,
sales consultant,
Travel Nation

"I know you can DIY these UK trips and

I've done a lot of independent travel, but travelling with a group is a big plus. It takes the pressure off — you don't need to know bus times because the tour leader does. And when you only have a few days, that can be the difference between doing a walk or missing a section. A tour also makes you do different things — I probably wouldn't have booked yoga but it's been one of my highlights."



Stacey Sharp,
founder,
Retreatmi

"It's been great to experience,

especially as a solo traveller — I'd never thought of doing a guided trip like this before Covid. I've been to Cornwall so many times but I've seen and learnt things on this trip I'd never know. I feel I've had a different type of travel experience. It could be a stand-alone trip or added to a longer trip with nights either side."

BOOK IT

Intrepid Travel's three-night 'Walk the Cornish Coast' costs from £570 per person sharing (single supplement from £295) based on a September 23 departure this year. The price includes accommodation in Newquay, all transport in Cornwall, local leader-led walks, three breakfasts, a two-hour private yoga and wellness session, and Cornish pasty tasting at a local bakery. intrepidtravel.com