

ASK THE experts

With women, retirees and cruisers the most likely to travel solo, **Alice Barnes-Brown** finds out how to sell to first-timers

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PICTURE: Lebo Lukewam/Atropunk; Marsha Kargili

1 WOMEN

Jenny Gray started her career more than 20 years ago. Her roles at Intrepid Travel have seen her managing the entire range of trips in Africa and the Middle East, across three brands. She also launched Intrepid Travel’s Women’s Expeditions portfolio in 2018 – one of the most successful ranges in the operator’s history.



Jenny Gray
senior product manager, Women’s Expeditions, Intrepid Travel

Escorted tours are a great option for first-time solo travellers because they offer the balance of independence with the safety net of a group. You are guided by an expert local leader and have access to their insider knowledge, which is reassuring for those who may not feel confident navigating a new place alone. It’s perfect for anyone looking to experience the world with freedom, safety and a sense of community.

Our female solo travellers at Intrepid range from twentysomethings through to women in their 80s who want to connect with new people and learn from different perspectives. Our most popular destinations include Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Costa Rica and Morocco.

Women’s Expeditions are particularly popular for this type of client – 82% of customers booked on these tours in 2023 were travelling solo. They are led by amazing women and support female-driven businesses changing the face of tourism in their countries. As the trips are exclusively for female travellers, they open up experiences that would otherwise be off limits for regular departures in countries such as Pakistan, Morocco and India.

Not only do they help to empower women in destinations, but first-timers can feel empowered travelling with other women, have a safe space to try new experiences and can create friendships with people who have similar values.

2 RETIREES

Jason Kemp began his career as a holiday rep in 1999, working in a variety of travel retail roles before moving into business development for operators such as Balkan Holidays and Saga. He joined G Touring – the parent of Just You and Travelsphere – in March as a key account manager for Scotland and the north.



Jason Kemp
key account manager, Just You and Travelsphere

In my days as a travel agent, I sat with a lot of solo customers who were nervous as they had never travelled alone. Touring will open their eyes to a whole new world of adventure.

Agents might think customers have to be single to go on a solo holiday, but in 2023, about 22% of Just You’s clientele were married. And if they’re older or less mobile, reassure them that they only need to be able to walk a mile at a gentle pace to take part.

Touring also opens doors for customers who think they’re going to have to pay over the odds. With Just You, travellers always get a standard room of their own – we conducted a survey last year which revealed that 82% of customers ranked this as their most important factor in choosing us.

As soon as customers land, they’re met by their holiday director who will be great at reading the room – if the group is less independent, they’ll be available for extra coffees and dinners. But many who travel on one of our tours for their first solo trip tend to book again, often with people they met on a previous trip.

Be proactive in recommending tours – don’t wait for the customer to ask. We offer price parity, so agents don’t have to compete against a direct-booking discount.

3 CRUISE

Gary Anslow was promoted to vice-president and head of Norwegian Cruise Line in the UK and Ireland in January. In this role, he is responsible for expanding the line’s business and revenue in one of its key international source markets, with a focus on building brand presence and distribution across the region.



Gary Anslow
vice-president and head of UK and Ireland, Norwegian Cruise Line

Extolling the experience and value of a solo cruise is a great opportunity for agents to capitalise on growing demand. A recent study by Travelport suggests nearly 18% of global industry bookings are for solo travellers – and we are certainly seeing that growth at NCL.

Some of the questions commonly asked by solo travellers include ‘will there be other solo travellers I can meet if I want to?’, ‘will there be things for me to do?’ and ‘will travelling solo be good value?’. The good news is that the answer to all these questions is ‘yes’.

For those dipping their first toe into solo travel, a cruise is a great start. There are lively restaurants, shows, intimate nooks to enjoy reading and relaxing, luxurious spas, plus meet-ups with fellow solo travellers. NCL has classes to enjoy – wine tasting and painting are popular – and various quizzes and talks around the ship to encourage mingling.

NCL pioneered solo cruising with the first solo staterooms on *Norwegian Epic* in 2010 and, last year, we expanded single-occupancy staterooms to all 19 ships with the addition of Solo Inside, Solo Outside and Solo Balcony cabins. Solo travellers can expect to pay less than for a traditional double-occupancy and, on select ships, can enjoy access to our Studio Lounge – perfect for catching up with others.