

On solid ground

Rail, sail and road are increasingly popular ways for clients to explore the Continent, discovers **Alice Barnes-Brown**

Sometimes, doing things the old-fashioned way has its charms. When it comes to travelling to Europe, UK holidaymakers are increasingly keen to forgo flights: a survey of 2,000 people by flight-free operator Byway in September found that 42% wanted to find alternative modes of transport in 2024 – be that by car, boat or train.

Though the environmental footprint of travel is on clients' minds, the other benefits of overland adventures in Europe sell themselves: the ability to take more luggage, avoid airport stress and enjoy a slower-paced journey to destinations that can be harder to reach by air.

Trains, ferries and roads connect Britain to Europe in a matter of hours – and with more transport innovations coming to the Continent this year, now is an exciting time to sell no-fly holidays.

RAIL

The main rail routes to Europe from the UK offer two different trip types. Clients can use the vehicle-

transporting Eurotunnel to start a self-drive trip or door-to-door coach holiday, or take the Eurostar to the heart of Paris, Brussels or Amsterdam to start a European rail adventure.

Gareth Jones, director of product development at Railbookers, explains the upsides of travelling by train. "It's great to be able to sit back and enjoy a drink and excellent onboard catering," he says. "My favourite is Germany's ICE, where you can get a draught beer and some goulash or currywurst on the way to Berlin. Plus, when clients do get to the destination, they arrive in the middle of a city centre; they can often walk to their hotel."

"Last year, Vienna city breaks were really popular. Clients take a late-afternoon Eurostar to Amsterdam or Brussels, and then the direct sleeper to Vienna. They can enjoy three nights there, then take the train back, perhaps with a night in Cologne on the way."

Railbookers says train-based holidays to the Spanish coast, with an overnight stop in Lyon, are also stacking up well against low-cost airline routes. ➤



Cinque Terre, Italy

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Julia Lav

DESTINATIONS

EUROPE | FLIGHT-FREE HOLIDAYS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Venice Simplon-Orient-Express; Irish Ferries' *Isle of Inishmore*; Amalfi Coast, Italy

PICTURES: Railbookers; Shutterstock/canadastock; David Ecker

A host of exciting new sleeper trains across Europe will be accessible to UK holidaymakers this year. Jones says: "There's a romance around sleeper trains and it's an experience everybody should try at least once. We're also excited about luxury trains such as the Orient Express La Dolce Vita, which is finally coming on to the market this year for trips around Italy".

Some ski operators, meanwhile, are now offering sustainable ways to reach the slopes. Tui's 'ski express' service from the Netherlands to the Austrian Alps began in winter 2022, while this season, Eurostar launched a service from Lille to Bourg-Saint-Maurice. Inghams has 10 allocated seats every week for its customers.

Or try: Newmarket Holidays' Royal Caledonian itinerary offers the chance to travel to Scotland in style on board the plush Caledonian Sleeper. Prices start at £1,161. newmarketholidays.co.uk

“Ferries offer a budget-friendly way for families to explore countries such as France

SAIL

Ferries offer a budget-friendly way for families to explore nearby countries such as France and Ireland while driving their own vehicle. Plus, they can pack as much as they can carry.

Marie McCarthy, Irish Ferries' passenger sales manager for the UK and Ireland, says: "Clients don't have to worry about teeny toiletry requirements. And if they are off to play sport, they can take large sports items on to the ferry, avoiding pesky in-destination surcharges and pre-used rental gear."

Besides France and Ireland, the UK's ferry network also serves

destinations farther afield, such as Spain. Journeys to the coastal Basque cities of Santander and Bilbao on Brittany Ferries take about 20 hours, departing from either Portsmouth or Plymouth. While lengthy, these journeys can appeal to those keen on a mini-cruise; on board the *Pont-Aven* – Brittany Ferries' flagship, which sails the Santander routes – cruise-style facilities are on offer, from spa treatment rooms and an indoor swimming pool to live entertainment.

McCarthy adds: "It's that time of year when customers are starting to plan their summer holidays and even mid-term breaks. Since we began operating on the Dover-Calais route in 2021, we've seen real interest from our travel trade partners in our current saving of 20% off for those travelling between Dover and Calais, alongside other offers to Ireland."

Ferry companies are also increasingly utilising greener ➤

NEW SLEEPER ROUTES

2023

- 🌟 **Hamburg to Innsbruck** (via Vienna), Nightjet, launched December 10
- 🌟 **Graz to Berlin** (via Dresden), Nightjet, launched December 10
- 🌟 **Munich to Warsaw** (via Krakow), Nightjet, launched December 10
- 🌟 **Brussels to Vienna** Nightjet, launched December 10
- 🌟 **Paris to Aurillac** SNCF, launched December 10
- 🌟 **Paris to Berlin** (via Brussels), Nightjet, launched December 11

2024

- 🌟 **Brussels to Prague** European Sleeper, launching March 25
- 🌟 **Bratislava to Split** (via Vienna), Nightjet, launching May 3
- 🌟 **Paris to Madrid** (via Barcelona), Trenitalia, launching late 2024
- 🌟 **Zürich to Barcelona** Nightjet, launching in December



DESTINATIONS

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vessels; P&O Ferries introduced its first hybrid vessel last June, while Brittany Ferries will replace the oldest vessels in its fleet with two hybrid electric/LNG-powered ships by spring 2025.

Or try: P&O Ferries operates a year-round overnight service from Hull to Rotterdam, connecting the UK with the buzzing Dutch port city in less than 12 hours. One-way fares start at £175, based on two people travelling in a car.

poferries.com

ROAD

A road-based holiday offers the ultimate ease on a multi-stop trip. Claire Dutton, trade sales manager at Just Go Holidays, says: "Our core demographic loves the hassle-free elements of travelling by coach, with more than 450 pick-up points, taking away the need to navigate busy airports. Plus, excursions ensure everyone gets to see the main attractions without having to

organise it themselves. This could be boat trips, rail journeys, visits to historic and scenic locations, guided city tours and much more."

Rising sales highlight the growth in interest for this style of travel. Dutton adds: "Passenger numbers on our European tours booked via travel agents were up 30% in 2023, compared with the previous year. We get a lot of repeat business, which is great news for agents. We offer price parity and with a portfolio of tours from four to 29 days, there is something to suit all tastes and budgets."

Any concerns clients may have about being bored or uncomfortable on a long road trip are easy to allay. Leger Holidays offers three classes of coach including comfort range Luxuria, which has rear lounges that allow passengers to mingle. In May, Just Go will launch a luxury coach category, the JG Explorer class, which has 44 spacious seats,



ABOVE: Just Go's JG Explorer coach

boredom-busting amenities such as free Wi-Fi and digital quizzes, and creature comforts including a Nespresso machine.

Destinations such as France, the Benelux countries, Denmark, Germany, Italy and Spain can typically be reached with just one overnight stop, meaning clients don't have to factor in too much additional travel time. Dutton says: "Italy is always hugely popular, and our tours visit a wealth of different

regions, from the beautiful areas of the Italian lakes and magnificent cities to our new-for-2024 Sorrento & the Amalfi Coast itinerary.

Customers fall in love with this beautiful country and want to go back time and time again."

Or try: Leger Holidays' new Splendours of Calabria tour visits southern Italy on board its Silver Service coaches. The two-week trip start at £1,999 per person.

leger.co.uk

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