

of the
BEST



QUIRKY STAYS

From salt hotels to tranquil temples, escorted tours can offer some unusual accommodation, finds **Alice Barnes-Brown**

When a client books an escorted tour, what are they most excited about? Perhaps it's the once-in-a-lifetime adventure, meeting local people or making like-minded new friends, but rarely will clients focus on the accommodation. Yet that doesn't have to be the case.

Andrea Godfrey, head of Regent Holidays, says: "Accommodation on group tours is often quite standardised to ensure volume and consistency, but every now and again an unusual, standout gem is included. I recommend agents look out for these in the tour details and use them as key selling points – they are often cited as memorable highlights in guest feedback."

Ready to sell? Here's our pick of escorted tours that include some seriously quirky places to sleep.

1



YURT CAMPING

If clients are keen to experience the windswept wilds of central Asia like a true nomad, Intrepid Travel's new Premium Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan tour includes a one-night stay in a yurt camp on the shores of Issyk-Kul, one of the world's deepest lakes. Yurts hold a sacred place in nomadic culture. Clients won't find an en suite bathroom, but electric heaters keep these yurts feeling cosy, even in winter. They can also try their hand at assembling one in a workshop with a local craftsman, and discover how yurts are traditionally constructed with a wooden lattice frame then insulated with handmade layers of felt called *kiiz*.

Book it: Intrepid Travel's nine-day Premium Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan tour is priced from £2,490 per person, including breakfast, some meals, listed excursions and ground transport, but excluding international flights.
intrepidtravel.com

PICTURES: Kaori Kodama, Shutterstock/Mayyas Relak

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TEMPLE TIME

Japanese hotels are often a special experience – from hotels run by robots to traditional ryokan inns. But did you know many of Japan's Buddhist temples are also open to overnight guests? InsideJapan Tours' 12-night Hidden Japan focuses on a sleeper side of the country. Clients will spend one night at a temple lodging in the spiritual centre of Mount Koya (pictured), where futons placed on tatami mats make for a comfortable – yet portable – bed. Guests are free to slide back the paper door and explore the temple, before eating vegan meals with the monks. If they wake early, they can even join a morning Buddhist prayer service, with the wafts of incense and rhythmic chants setting them up for the day's adventures.

Book it: Hidden Japan costs from £4,975 per person for 12 nights, including accommodation, breakfast, some meals, ground transport and listed excursions.
insidejapantours.com

DESTINATIONS

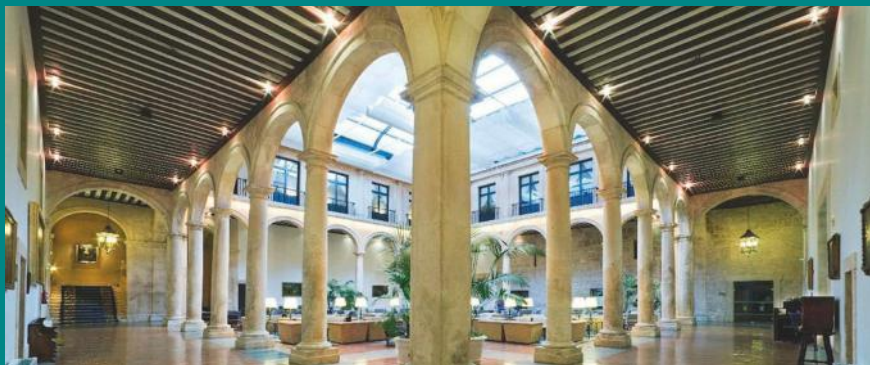
ESCORTED TOURS | QUIRKY STAYS

3

CAMINO CASTILLOS

Hotels set within historic houses might not seem like a novelty, but Spain's state-owned Paradores are all infused with interesting stories. On one Newmarket Holidays itinerary, clients will stay in three luxurious Paradores over the course of one week. Starting in Santander, clients then travel to Galicia, where they'll be based in the Parador de Vilalba – built on the site of a 15th-century castle along the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route. After a visit to Santiago de Compostela, the tour takes clients into Spain's sunny interior, where they'll stay in Parador de Lerma (*pictured*) – an opulent 17th-century palace where Napoleon once slept.

Book it: The eight-day Historic Paradores of Hidden Spain costs from £2,048 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast, four dinners, excursions, transfers and flights departing Southampton on October 19. newmarketholidays.co.uk



CAVE CAPERS

Cappadocia, famed for its 'fairy chimneys', is popular for its hot-air balloon tours – but the region is arguably better seen below ground. One Riviera Travel tour visits the subterranean city of Kaymakli; there are eight levels, and clients will have free time to discover churches, copper smelters, stables and more. Curiosity piqued, they'll check into the Utopia Cave hotel, with suites featuring whirlpool baths, sumptuous furniture and intricate doorway carvings, while in the spa, a circular pool adds a touch of Ottoman charm to a cavernous room.

Book it: Riviera Travel's 13-day Cappadocia, Istanbul, Ephesus and Troy tour starts from £2,999 per person, based on twin-share. Includes breakfast, most dinners, listed excursions, luggage and flights. rivieratravel.co.uk



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SALTY STAYS

Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni has bright-white salt stretching as far as the eye can see – and if your clients can't get enough, they can sleep in hotels built from salt bricks. Journey Latin America's escorted 17-day epic trip across the Andes features two nights in the Luna Salada salt hotel. Built from locally harvested blocks of salt, it's the ideal base for 4x4 trips and offers a serene place to sleep. Andean accents complement homely touches, such as fireplaces and hearty breakfasts. The spa features a steam room and – unsurprisingly – salt-scrub massages.

Book it: Journey Latin America's 17-day Andean Flamingo: Andes Laid Bare tour costs from £5,636 per person, including ground transport, excursions and breakfast, but excluding international flights. journeylatinamerica.com



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COSMIC COCOONS

Jordan's Wadi Rum, where sandstone mountains rise from red sand, is so otherworldly that it doubles as extraterrestrial terrain in films ranging from *Dune* to *Star Wars*. Exodus Adventure Travels' Kingdoms of Jordan – Premium Adventure tour makes the most of these unusual surroundings by checking in to the UFO Luxotel, where geodesic tents will transport clients straight to the fictional planet Tatooine. No luxury is spared, from the outdoor hammocks and large patios to en suite showers. After dark, clients can stargaze through windows at the top of the tent and enjoy a traditional Bedouin feast, cooked in an oven under the sun-sizzled sand.

Book it: Exodus's nine-day Kingdoms of Jordan – Premium Adventure tour is priced from £2,249 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast, some meals, excursions and ground transport, but excludes international flights. exodus.co.uk

