



6 OF THE Best DESTINATIONS FOR 2019

Must-visits for the wish list, by Katie McGonagle

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PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK/TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

No one likes to be the last to know. Whether it's the latest office gossip or the hottest celeb scandal, we all want to feel we're in the loop, and the same is true for up-and-coming travel trends.

After all, why would you want to follow the crowds when you could be the one setting the trend for everyone else?

Tip your clients off to next year's hottest destinations and they're bound to come home with envy-inducing tales of their adventures, and spread the word to their friends and family about how you're the one with your finger on the travel pulse.

To make sure you stay on top of what's hot, here's our pick of the destinations that everyone will be talking about in 2019.

1 JAPAN
International sports events are a sure-fire way to catch the world's attention, and Japan has not one but two on the horizon. The Rugby World Cup 2019 and Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics mean all eyes are fixed on the Far East, and with the Abta Travel Convention also taking place in Tokyo next October, the trade will be leading the way in catering to all that extra demand.

You've probably already noticed a gradual uptick in



RIGHT:
D-Resort Göcek, Turkey

BELOW:
Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe

bookings, and increasing attention for places outside the classic Golden Route (Tokyo, Kyoto and Mount Fuji), as travellers search for lesser-known regions such as northern island Hokkaido, the newly formed Diamond Route north of Tokyo, or up-and-coming southern region Setouchi.

Wendy Wu Tours' Japan product manager Reema Shah says: "Japan has grown rapidly in popularity over the past three years, due to media interest. Wendy Wu Tours has seen a massive spike in interest for the country, so much so that we are now the UK's largest escorted group tour operator to Japan.



"As host nation for the Rugby World Cup and Olympic Games, Japan has benefited from considerable investment in new infrastructure, including rail transport and new hotels. In my opinion, there has never been a better time to visit Japan."

2 TURKEY
It's been a tough few years for Turkey, once a mainstay of the British market, with political unrest in Istanbul and Ankara having a knock-on effect on the coast. But things are looking up for 2019 as adventure and package operators report strong forward sales.

Turkey has become the fastest-growing destination for Intrepid Travel, with a 215% increase in global bookings over the past year, while reservations with Explore have doubled in the same period. Intrepid, Explore and KE Adventure Travel have each added new Turkey tours for 2019, focusing on family trips to Cappadocia, active holidays and travel in winter.

There are positive signs for the package market too, with Jet2.com starting up to eight flights a week from UK regional airports to west coast city Izmir for summer 2019, for easy access to resorts including Kusadasi, Cesme, Ozdere and Seferihisar.

Alexander Regelmann, vice-president of D-Resorts, which has properties in Göcek and

Marmaris, says: "We are looking forward to a positive year. Our upcoming season is set to be the highest in years, mainly because as a destination we consistently offer outstanding quality, luxury and value for money."

Rates at D-Resort Göcek start at £320 per room on B&B.

3 ZIMBABWE
This African destination burst into the spotlight in November 2017 with the removal of leader Robert Mugabe. His successor, Emmerson Mnangagwa, has attracted his fair share of controversy, but there's no doubting the renewed sense of energy for tourism. Lonely Planet even picked it out as one of the countries primed to capture travellers' imaginations in its Best in Travel 2019 list.

Victoria Falls remains the greatest draw, particularly since the expansion of its airport opened the destination up to larger aircraft, meaning connections via Johannesburg or Addis Ababa are possible.

It's not the only highlight, though. National parks such as Hwange in the west and Mana Pools in the north offer spectacular wildlife, the medieval 'stone city' of Great Zimbabwe adds an interesting angle on African history, and clients who aren't put off by the hubbub will find Harare a city worth exploring.





4 UZBEKISTAN

The 'Stans have been gradually growing in popularity as adventure operators add more product, but the real seal of approval came in September when *Joanna Lumley's Silk Road Adventure* gave the region even more exposure, with a four-part series tracing the ancient trading route across 7,000 miles and through eight countries.

Add the introduction of an e-visa to Uzbekistan for UK citizens, and it helps explain why G Adventures has seen a 72% increase in travellers to that country in the past five years. The operator has added two new tours for 2019, including Best of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (from £1,449 for 13 days), which travels from Tashkent to Ashgabat via a city tour of Samarkand, the bazaars of Bukhara, and a guided visit to Unesco-listed Khiva.

Intrepid Travel has also introduced its first Uzbekistan-only itinerary, after a 300% jump in visits to its Uzbekistan web page in October following Lumley's series, and a 50% rise in bookings to central Asia overall.

Look out for itineraries to other Silk Road hotspots too, including Along the Pamir Highway with Explore, which starts in Tajikistan and travels through mountains and villages to Kazakhstan's largest city, Almaty.

5 AUSTRALIA

With so much buzz around the launch of the world's longest direct flight, the Qantas service from Heathrow to Perth that began in



Demand for destinations outside the eurozone remains strong and Croatia is at the forefront

March, it's no surprise to see Australia – and particularly Western Australia, chosen by Abta as a destination worth watching in 2019 – back on the bucket list for long-haul travellers.

It is remarkably diverse, whether you're catering to budget backpackers who want to spend their days swimming with whale sharks or trekking through the wilderness, or older clients who prefer ambling from one winery to the next on a slow-paced self-drive.

"The new direct Perth flight from Qantas is doing wonders for Western Australia," says Rachel McMurdo, assistant product manager for Oceania at Travel 2. "The novelty factor of doing the trip is attracting some clients, but we're also finding it has made people think about the state for the first time.

"Perth itself has undergone huge redevelopment and is a fast-growing city. It has new, world-class hotels such as the Crown Towers Perth, plus new entertainment districts and walkways."

Since 2012, 31 Perth hotels have opened or been refurbished, with another 10 to come by 2020. Rottnest Island also has new glamping-style resort Discovery Eco Village Rottnest

Island, with 83 en suite 'eco-tents', while nearby Hotel Rottnest will add 80 new rooms from March 1, 2019.

6 CROATIA

Demand for destinations outside the eurozone remains strong and Croatia is at the forefront, offering all the coastal scenery, good food and laid-back lifestyle you might associate with France or Italy – but at Croatian prices.

David Skillicorn, general manager of Prestige Holidays, says: "Croatia remains one of our most popular holiday destinations, and we are delighted to offer even more value in this stunning destination for 2019, with bespoke offers from our hotel partners throughout the season. An increase in ferry and fast catamaran services makes it easier for our twin or multi-centre clients to explore the islands and, with the addition of lots more hotels, the combinations are numerous."

Skillicorn is tipping Rijeka, soon to be European Capital of Culture 2020, for growth thanks to its intriguing history (it was part of Italy, Austria-Hungary and Yugoslavia in the 20th century alone), nearby beaches and good music scene – not to mention the addition of flights from Manchester and Gatwick between May and October. There's also a new Cardiff-Dubrovnik flight, and two new hotels at Plitvice Lakes, Croatia's most-visited attraction.

Elsewhere in the region, Newmarket Holidays has expanded its programme to offer Montenegro, Slovenia and Albania in response to growing demand. **TW**

ABOVE: Rijeka, Croatia

BELOW: Samarkand, Uzbekistan

