

# Stuff of legends

Britain is shrouded in myth and lore, giving agents the building blocks on which to craft an adventure straight out of the storybooks, writes **Rhodri Andrews**



Britain's landscapes are peppered with tales of shadowy beasts, savage sea monsters, heroic outlaws and ancient kings. They have charged the imaginations of writers and artists for centuries and now, they can do the same for your clients, offering a storytelling spin on itineraries across the UK.

From mythical monsters to fairytale figures, here's how you can tap into the UK's rich heritage – both real and imagined – to sell a stay closer to home.

#### LEGENDARY LANDMARKS

**Stonehenge:** Few historic sites have attracted as much speculation as Stonehenge, with its origins sparking centuries of debate. Folk tales claim that legendary wizard Merlin transported the enormous stones

from Ireland and had them assembled by giants. Other theories have declared it an ancient Roman temple, a Viking creation, a giant symbol of fertility or even an alien spacecraft landing area.

These days, it's thought Stonehenge was a Neolithic temple, built in line with the movements of the sun. But the case isn't completely closed and its mysteries can still forge a thought-provoking adventure for your clients, especially when pairing it with nearby sights such as the magnificent Cheddar Gorge and the Georgian grandeur of Bath. **Book it:** Just Go Holidays' five-day Beautiful Bath and Mythical Stonehenge itinerary costs from £479 per person, based on two sharing. Dates are dependent on regional pick-up location. Price includes return coach travel, accommodation, breakfast and dinner, plus excursions to Bath and Stonehenge. [justgoholidays.com](https://www.justgoholidays.com) ➤

# DESTINATIONS

## UK & IRELAND | MYTHS & LEGENDS



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland; the Callanish Stones, Isle of Lewis; Ruthin Castle Hotel, Wales PICTURES: Conor McCarthy; Phil Sproson Photography; Shutterstock/Michael Dewsbury



### ASK THE expert

"Scotland's breathtaking landscapes have inspired many of our supernatural myths and legends. From Nessie to kelpies and witches to selkies, our myths and legends are a great way of understanding Scotland's culture, history and heritage. Almost half (48%) of visitors mentioned history and culture as a reason to visit in our Scotland Visitor Survey 2023. Because we know that Scotland's myths and legends are something our visitors love, travel agents and tour operators can capitalise on that interest by creating bespoke itineraries for their clients to dive deeper into these stories and explore the areas in which they are set."

**Leanne Mallon,**  
head of marketing,  
VisitScotland



**Giant's Causeway:** As the name suggests, the legend behind Northern Ireland's rocky icon is colossal in size. It's said to have been built by an Irish giant named Finn McCool so he could cross the Irish Sea to fight his Scottish counterpart, Benandonner. When McCool realised how much larger his rival was, his inventive wife Oonagh disguised him as a 'giant baby', which tricked the Scot into thinking that if McCool's child was so large, his father must be even more terrifying. Benandonner fled back to Scotland, tearing up the stones behind him as he ran.

The reality is more scientific – the causeway was formed 60 million years ago by volcanic activity, cooling into the hexagonal basalt columns we know today – but there's still no denying its spellbinding natural drama. It's a popular spot for clients to visit on any trip to Northern Ireland, but encourage them to take in more of the region's ancient landmarks, including the court tomb of Creevykeel in Sligo and Iron Age stone fort of Grianán of Aileach in Donegal.

**Book it:** Wilderness Ireland's seven-day Legends of Northern Ireland itinerary costs from £3,169 per person, based on two sharing. Price includes accommodation, all meals, transport throughout the trip and specified excursions. [wildernessireland.com](http://wildernessireland.com)

**Callanish Stones:** Sweeping moorlands and wind-blasted beaches might dominate Isle of Lewis postcards, but this island in the Outer Hebrides also harbours Neolithic history – most notably the Callanish Stones, a

rocky circle that predates Stonehenge. Theories abound on its exact purpose, with one suggesting it might be an astronomical observatory. But local folklore depicts each standing stone as a former giant, petrified following their refusal to convert to Christianity, while a mysterious figure known as the 'Shining One' strolls through during the Midsummer sunrise.

The Isle of Lewis takes some effort to get to, either via ferry from Ullapool or a flight into Stornoway from a number of Scottish hubs, but therein lies its appeal. Suggest it as part of a larger cruise adventure so clients can sail to more of Scotland's wondrous isles, such as Shetland, Orkney and the Small Isles.

**Book it:** Fred Olsen Cruise Lines' eight-night Landscapes and Legends of the Scottish Isles, round-trip from Liverpool, costs from £2,379 per person, based on two sharing. Price includes all meals and entertainment. [fredolsencruises.com](http://fredolsencruises.com)

### FANTASTICAL FIGURES

**King Arthur:** The legend of King Arthur is so popular, you could be forgiven for thinking he was a real person. Countless names associated with his mythology feel familiar: Sir Lancelot, the magical sword Excalibur, the Lady of the Lake, the wizard Merlin and Queen Guinevere, among them. Yet because King Arthur's story has been continuously shaped over centuries by writers and artists – including poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson – it is difficult to pinpoint its origin. ➤



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Sherwood Forest; statue of Robin Hood at Nottingham Castle; Urquhart Castle and Loch Ness, Scotland **FACING PAGE:** Pony on Dartmoor, Devon **PICTURES:** Shutterstock/chrisdorney, Delpixel



Sites connected to the mythical king include Tintagel Castle in Cornwall, King Arthur's reputed birthplace, and the Round Table in Winchester, a medieval replica of Arthur's purported seat of government. But his real rise to fame is credited to Wales in writings by medieval monk Geoffrey of Monmouth, more recently revived for a younger generation by BBC TV series *Merlin*.

Today, Wales is dotted with more than 300 Arthurian landmarks, with a trail available on the travel trade website for Visit Wales [search for King Arthur at [traveltrade.visitwales.com](http://traveltrade.visitwales.com)]. If clients want to take it a step further and stay in their own regal Welsh retreat, consider cosy Ruthin Castle, close to the lakes of Eryri (Snowdonia), said to shelter Excalibur in their watery depths. **Book it:** Great Little Breaks' one-night Ruthin Castle Break in Wales costs from £75 per person, based on two sharing. Price includes accommodation,

“The modern fascination with the legend of the Loch Ness Monster is largely due to an alleged sighting in 1933

breakfast and £30 each towards dinner on the first night. [greatlittlebreaks.com](http://greatlittlebreaks.com)

**Robin Hood:** We all love a hero, and none has endured like the tale of Robin Hood. Ever since the bow-wielding outlaw was mentioned in 14th-century ballads, the classic Nottinghamshire yarn of stealing from the rich and giving to the poor has captured the imaginations of young and old alike.

Hood's legacy still draws visitors to Nottingham and its surroundings. Nottingham Castle has welcomed

many real-life monarchs across its history, but it was also the home of the Sheriff of Nottingham, King Richard and Prince John from Robin Hood lore. The chocolate-box village of Edwinstowe, an hour's drive north of the city, is where Robin Hood supposedly married Maid Marian. Plus, the sprawling wilds of Sherwood Forest were not only Robin Hood's stomping ground, where he clashed with the tyrannical sheriff, but are now also dotted with woodland lodges ready for families to live their own Robin Hood adventure. Kids won't be able to resist clambering up trees similar to the 1,000-year-old Major Oak – Robin Hood's infamous hiding spot.

**Book it:** A four-night stay at Hoseasons' Sherwood Forest Lodges, in a lodge that sleeps up to four people, starts from £1,510 in total based on a May 25 arrival. Some activities are included, while ranger-led walks and adventure experiences are available at extra cost. [hoseasons.co.uk](http://hoseasons.co.uk)

## COLOURFUL CREATURES

**Loch Ness Monster:** The legend of the Loch Ness Monster originated 1,500 years ago, but the modern fascination is largely owed to an alleged sighting in 1933 by hotel manager Aldie Mackay. Visitors have flocked to Loch Ness's inky black shores ever since, keen for their own glimpse of 'Nessie'. Evidence of its existence remains inconclusive, but boat cruises fitted with underwater sonar equipment offer visitors the chance to try their luck.

Clients can unpick the monster's mythology at the Loch Ness Centre – based in the same building as Aldie Mackay's former hotel. Or they can head up to Urquhart Castle for an ideal vantage point, not just of the loch but also to admire the wider beauty of the Scottish Highlands. That gives clients a taste of what lies beyond, with itineraries combining Loch Ness tours with other ways to explore Scotland's scenery, such as scenic rail journeys and visits to the Isle of Skye.

## DESTINATIONS

### MYTHS & LEGENDS | UK & IRELAND



**Book it:** McKinlay Kidd's six-night Loch Ness, The Jacobite & Skye Guided Rail Tour costs from £2,625 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes accommodation with breakfast, a welcome dinner, transport and listed tours. Departures between April and October. [mckinlaykidd.com](http://mckinlaykidd.com)

**Beast of Bodmin:** Devon and Cornwall have long been wrapped up in tales of ghastly beasts patrolling their wilds. Dartmoor National Park's misty moorlands are said to be guarded by huge black hounds, a legend born from the pages of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

But Cornwall also has its own fearsome creature to contend with: the Beast of Bodmin. Since the 1970s, there have been numerous reported sightings of this panther-like cat across heather-clad Bodmin Moor. Like the Loch Ness Monster, there are only rumours and eyewitness reports, but climbing the peaks of Brown Willy or Rough Tor means clients can scan the moor's scenery for the beast themselves. Many operators combine both Devon and Cornwall so clients can enjoy twice the mystery.

**Book it:** Trafalgar's six-day Best of Devon and Cornwall itinerary costs from £1,276 per person, based on two sharing. Prices include accommodation, breakfast, a travel director and driver, audio guides and selected experiences. [trafalgar.com](http://trafalgar.com) **TW**

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