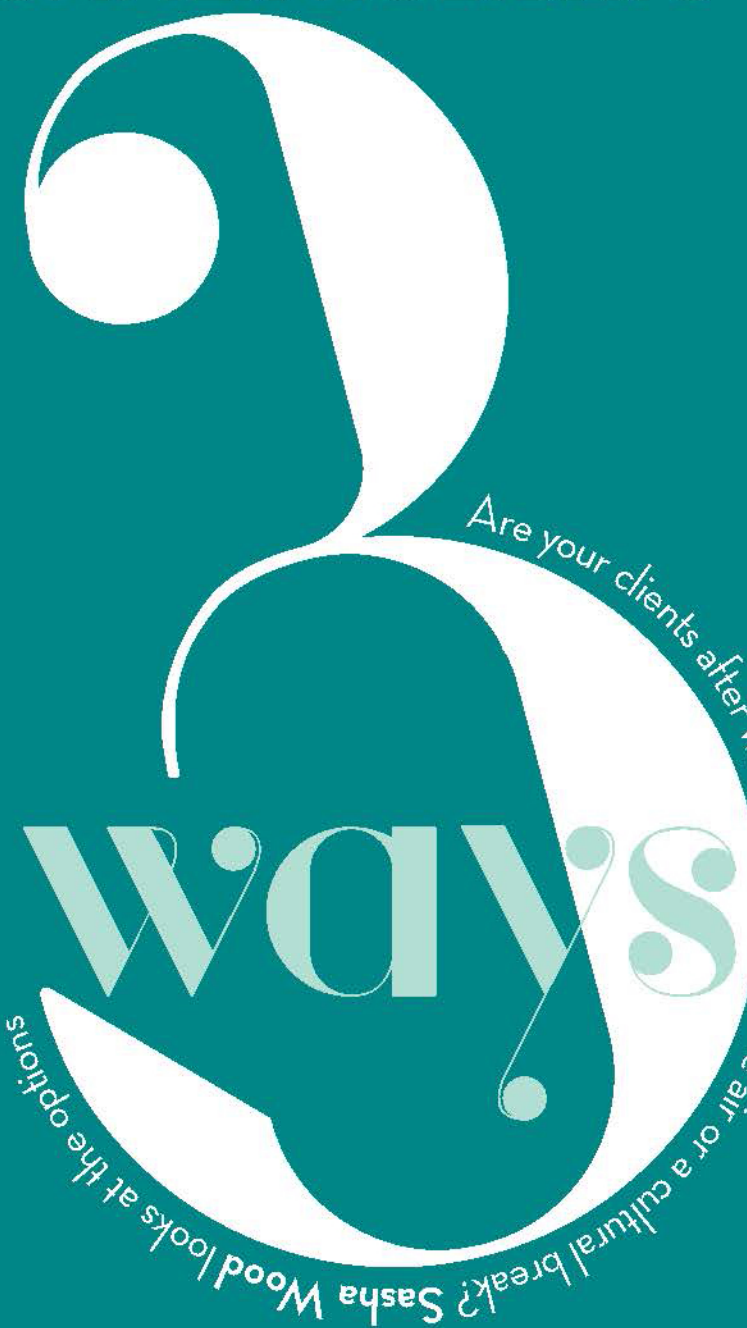


SUMMER HOLIDAYS



Summer's not just about sun, sea and sand – it's also the perfect time to get immersed in the natural beauty of Europe's lakes and mountains, and to see its cities at their brightest and best.

Before winter sports and seaside holidays became popular, Europe's alpine resorts and lakeside towns were the luxury summer retreats of Europe's elite where they built mountain homes and waterside villas. Today they are just as enticing as they were a century ago and there are plenty of scenic destinations to tempt tourists for a relaxing or active holiday – whether that's poolside around Italy's stunning northern lakes or hiking in a flower-filled Swiss Alpine valley.

There are also plenty of options for a fun and cultural city break. For clients who've done Lisbon, Berlin and Rome, new cities on the travel radar include Warsaw, Porto and Palermo. Here are some alternatives to the beach this summer.



Lake Bled, Slovenia

Lakes

LUXURY LAKE BLEĐ BALKAN HOLIDAYS

It came in at number five in Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2022, but Slovenia has been quietly gathering fans for some time and its capital city Ljubljana is easily reached via regular Wizz Air and easyJet flights from the UK. Lake Bled, in particular, is an idyllic summer retreat in the shadow of the Julian Alps that offers romantic vistas, freshwater swimming and outdoor adventures, including treks to rushing waterfalls and hidden grottoes. The lakeshore is lined with upscale guesthouses and hotels with direct access to the water. The elegant Grand Hotel Toplice boasts a waterside terrace, beach and decking area complete with chic sunloungers.

Book it: One week half-board at the five-star Grand Hotel Toplice in Lake Bled in June starts from £1,035, based on two sharing.
balkanholidays.co.uk

CLASSIC LAKE GARDA KUONI

Northern Italy's largest and arguably its most beautiful lake, Garda, offers a classic Italian escape to the waterside originally only enjoyed by Europe's elite – which explains all the stately villas and neoclassical palaces that skirt the shore. While the homes and hotels ooze old-world elegance and class, the backdrop of sheer green mountains pierced with high cypress trees makes the area truly picturesque. And for more than a century poets and writers including Joyce and Tennyson have sung its praises as a summer retreat. To stay in style, clients can opt for the Villa del Sogno. Knitted into a hillside, its rooms boast wonderful views over the water.

Book it: Five nights at Villa del Sogno starts from £1,099 per person including breakfast and one bonus night for selected departures in June, plus direct BA flights.
kuoni.co.uk

SCENIC LAKE ORTA TITAN TRAVEL

Italy's littlest and least-crowded lake is perfect for a holiday with a slower pace. Traditional trattorias and heritage hotels look out to cobbled lanes, wooded peaks and Isola San Giulio at the heart of the serene lake. Clients looking for an easy escape to the region can join Titan Travel's escorted Lake Orta tour to its enchanting villages and Unesco-listed hillside sanctuaries with an expert guide. The trip includes stops to sample Orta's fabulous food and wine and a boat ride to explore Isola San Giulio's Romanesque basilica, with the added bonus of a breathtaking train journey across the border into the Swiss Alps.

Book it: An eight-day Scenic Lake Orta tour starts from £1,449, including a rail excursion to the Matterhorn in neighbouring Switzerland.
titanagents.co.uk



Chris Rand,
sales and marketing
manager, Balkan Holidays

"We've seen sales increase since the change in travel testing regulations in early January and Slovenia is selling well for summer 2022. Slovenia, particularly Lake Bled, was becoming more popular pre-pandemic and we expect that it will recover now travel restrictions have changed. I would definitely recommend agents offer Lake Bled for a lakes and mountain holiday as an alternative to other more traditional destinations. It is a truly magical place with a castle built into the cliff overlooking the lake and a church set in the middle – real fairytale stuff. As a less well-known destination, customers may not have considered it, so agents are offering real value by suggesting a holiday there. Believe me, anyone visiting Lake Bled will have a wonderful time!"



Vardzia cave monastery in Georgia was built in the 12th century



"Grindelwald in Switzerland is great for summer mountain walks and amazing train journeys. These trips are ideal for anyone who loves to explore magnificent mountain landscapes by foot, take in fresh alpine air or appreciate the scenery. The train journey to Jungfrauoch is a must. Zip wires and toboggan runs make it perfect for families or couples looking for an experience-style holiday."

Julie Franklin,
head of agency sales, Inghams



Mountains

GETAWAY TO GRINDELWALD INGHAMS

Mountain specialist Inghams has seen a significant rise in interest in 2022 summer holidays to Europe's uplands since restrictions relaxed in early January, and for clients who missed out on their winter sports fix this season, the mountains still offer plenty of high-octane action in summertime. For scenic sightseeing and soul-soothing walks in full view of the Eiger's dramatic glaciers, the Swiss mountain village of Grindelwald is the ideal base. Places to stay include cute alpine chalets and cosy hotels with easy access by rail, cable car or gondola to both sides of the valley, encompassing the lion's share of the Jungfrau region's best hiking paths. Visitors shouldn't miss a chance to take one of the world's most famous railway journeys through the Eiger

to Europe's highest railway station, Jungfrauoch, at 3,454 metres above sea level.

Book it: Seven nights' B&B at the three-star Eiger Self-Catering Apartments in Grindelwald costs from £609, based on two adults sharing, including flights and transfers. Inghams is currently offering £100 off summer breaks per couple, or £50 per person. inghams.co.uk

WONDERFUL WALKS IN LEUTASCH VALLEY INNTRAVEL

"The perfect antidote and reward to enduring endless months of being cooped up on our overcrowded island has to be a summer walking holiday in the glorious Austrian Alps," says Inntravel's holiday development manager Alison Temple. "It offers unadulterated

fresh air, unspoilt alpine scenery and unassuming hosts who will be even more happy to see their guests than ever before." For a summer in the glorious Great Outdoors, slow holiday specialist Inntravel's walking tours tick all the boxes, with expertly mapped routes through the wilderness from charming hotel to charming hotel. Luggage is taken care of on Inntravel's walking holidays so there's nothing weighing travellers down as they set off into the Austrian Tyrol to discover secret valleys and soaring peaks. The itinerary includes a hike into the Leutasch gorge on walkways winding around the cliffs above the rushing torrent. "So good, it should be on prescription!" says Alison.

Book it: A seven-night Leutasch Valley walking tour costs from £935 this summer, not including flights. inntravel.co.uk

SUMMER HIKES IN GLORIOUS GEORGIA WILD FRONTIERS

A great alternative to the Alps, the stunning Caucasus mountains are best explored in summertime on an escorted tour showcasing Georgia's wild and untapped beauty.

Crisscrossing the Lesser and Greater Caucasus ranges, tour operator Wild Frontiers has an itinerary to wow even the most seasoned traveller, visiting hidden gems such as the 12th-century Vardzia cave monasteries carved into the mountainside. Highlights include a hike through wooded valleys to Gergeti Trinity Church and the drive through the Lower Caucasus to Akhalsikhe from Tbilisi.

Book it: The nine-day Georgia: Land of Myths and Mountains tour costs from £1,585 this July. wildfrontierstravel.com

HISTORICAL KRAKOW EASYJET HOLIDAYS

After dropping off during the pandemic, easyJet Holidays is reporting a huge uptick in city break bookings for 2022. Alongside old favourites such as Paris and Amsterdam, its best-selling city break destination for this year is Krakow. With a preserved medieval centre straight out of the pages of a storybook, Krakow's charm is in its art and architecture with dozens of historic buildings representing almost every major style and colourful murals adorning the walls of the old Jewish Quarter. The city has retained its traditions too, with a bugle call going out across the rooftops from gothic church St Mary's every hour on the hour for more than 600 years. The city also

offers a living history lesson as the main gateway for visitors to Second World War sites such as Schindler's Factory and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Book it: A three-night break to Krakow starts from £199, based on two adults travelling in the summer. easyjet.com

LUXURY PALERMO KUONI

No country in Europe can rival Italy for city break appeal. From Milan and Venice to Florence and Rome, the food culture and architecture are second to none. Clients who've had a taste of Italy but are looking for a slightly different flavour should head to the sizzling Sicilian capital Palermo for a summer city break. Named Italian capital of culture in 2018, its tourism star was on the rise


pre-pandemic and Kuoni has just expanded its collection of short-haul holidays to include the city's most exclusive hotels. "We're seeing more demand for luxury short-haul travel and people want more than just a beach stay. Our clients are looking for experiences, culture and places to stay on and off the beaten track," says Kuoni chief executive Derek Jones.

Book it: Five nights at the five-star Villa Igiea costs from £1,899 for selected departures in June, including BA flights. kuoni.co.uk

INDULGENT PORTO KIRKER HOLIDAYS

As a Portuguese seaside city and the home of port wine, Porto couldn't be more perfectly named.

Its cobbled squares, lofty castles and spires, and medieval waterfront give it an old-world ambience that hints at its history as one of Europe's earliest settlements. On the up in recent years as more visitors discover its charms, Kirker Holidays has noticed particular interest in the city for 2022, especially among wine lovers who can take a tour of its vintage port houses and visit the new World of Wine museum due to open this summer. Kirker has a handful of tailored packages for those wanting a short city break quaffing the finest ports and table wines, pacing the Unesco-listed centre and sampling mouth-watering treats from the many bakeries.

Book it: Three nights in Pestana Vintage Porto from £629. kirkerholidays.co.uk 



BEST OF THE Rest



Valletta, Malta

Balkan Holidays is offering a seven-night city-beach break to Dubrovnik from £447, at the three-star Hotel Splendid, including flights. balkanholidays.co.uk

Mercury Holidays has a week's holiday to the museum city of Valletta, Malta, staying at the five-star Grand Hotel Excelsior from £589. mercuryholidays.co.uk

Short breaks to the arty island capital of Palma, Majorca, staying at the four-star Saratoga Hotel, start from £403 with **Jet2Holidays**. jet2holidays.com

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Robert Fesus, Magdalena Paluchowska, Victor Kley, Krivinis