

Hashtag travel

Laura French gets the
lowdown on selling tours
to younger travellers

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Whether it's exploring the most Instagram-worthy sights on the planet or seeking out authentic, eco-conscious experiences, millennials are redefining the world of travel.

And while independent, year-long backpackers continue to criss-cross the globe with nothing but a pair of flip flops to their name, there's a growing number of Gen Y travellers swayed by the ease, value, sociability and security that escorted tours bring - which is where you come in.

Those tours might once have been more associated with older folks piling on to giant buses than free-spirited twentysomethings looking to find themselves on far-off beaches, but there's now an ever-growing array of tours catering to the younger crowd. We've scoured the industry to find some of the best, and quizzed experts to find out how to go about selling them.

▶ **PERFECT MATCH**

It's all well and good knowing how to sell, but getting

millennials' attention in the first place can be half the battle. For that, there's social media. Tucan Travel sales manager Sam Dance says: "Using influencers is a great way to target millennials. Facebook is still very relevant, too, if the content is right, and Instagram is huge".

Richard Hanson, managing director at TrekAmerica, adds: "People buy from people. Being able to share testimonials and reviews of people who have already been on a tour, or using images and videos from past

passengers' travels, is a really good marketing tool."

Once you've got their attention, it's time to match the right product with the right client, so make sure you're wised up on what's what. G Adventures' 18-to-Thirtysomethings trips have young and fun as their forte with fast-paced, flexible itineraries, budget-friendly accommodation and fewer included meals, while Tucan Travel offers an Adventures for 20s & 30s category, targeted at young professionals and providing purse-friendly trips



PICTURE: TREKAMERICA

ASK THE EXPERT



Anna Biesty, head of land product trading, STA Travel:

“Millennials will have done a lot of research and taken advice from friends. They will be looking for quality guides who will provide support and be personable and knowledgeable about destinations. Understanding how much guidance a customer requires is key to selling the right tour – as is understanding the length of trip and how much a client wants to see.”

➔ in South America, Asia and Africa. By replacing higher-end accommodation with more basic hotels, hostels and campsites, younger clients have more to spend on optional activities and late-night antics, with greater choice in shaping their schedule.

There’s also plenty on the market for clients who want to combine the independence of solo travel with the safety blanket of tour guides and pre-arranged accommodation. Busabout offers a hop-on hop-off service across Europe, the US, Asia and Africa, allowing passengers to take things at their own pace and adapt the itinerary as they go. Contiki has its own answer in the form of the all-new Independent Insider range, which gives guests the flexibility to choose their own duration, as well as the start and end point, on a selection of itineraries – which span Greek Island Hopping to Berlin to Budapest – while tours, transport and accommodation are taken care of.

That independence is key when it comes to this market, according to

RIGHT: Lake Bled, Slovenia



Contiki’s UK and Europe sales and marketing director, Donna Jeavons, who says: “These travellers are seeking an increasing amount of autonomy, even when travelling in a group.”

It’s also worth highlighting the freedom they’ll have on tours with a more traditional, fully planned itinerary. Anna Biesty, head of land product trading at STA Travel, says: “Many

customers shy away from adventure tours, as they are under the impression they are a group experience from start to finish. This isn’t true, as every tour has free time so people can explore on their own.”

► CULTURAL IMMERSION

It’s not just autonomy that Gen Y is after, though. Research reveals time ➔

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RIGHT:
Iceland

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➔ and time again that immersive, cultural and authentic experiences are what sway this market, so emphasise the fact tours give clients a chance to delve into exactly these things. Insider knowledge from guides and hand-picked add-ons and inclusions mean guests often get to see things that those going it alone might not know about.

Take InsideAsia Tours' Insider Experiences, which include visiting Tokyo's video arcades with a gaming aficionado, and getting a behind-the-scenes peek at a sumo session, or Topdeck's Trans-Mongolian railway trip, which offers the chance to stay in a nomadic Mongolian ger camp. New for this year, the itinerary joins other more unusual trips offered by the operator to the likes of Israel, the Balkans, Alaska and Iceland, introduced in response to a demand for more off-the-beaten-track spots that escorted tours can make seem more accessible.

"Millennials are looking for something more than just the usual



Insider knowledge from guides means guests often get to see things that those going it alone might not know about

tourist attractions – they want experiences," says Vaivav Todi, director of Greener Pastures, which offers sustainable, bespoke tours in northeast India. "Adventures like trekking the Himalayas and visiting rural cultures appeal to millennials, so highlight these."

SEALING THE DEAL

Of course, one of the biggest selling points for an escorted tour is the sociability factor – especially for solo travellers who might be worried about going it alone and want to travel with likeminded people – so underline this element. Mark Henderson, senior product and commercial manager for touring at Travel 2, says: "Travel is as much a social experience as a chance to see a specific site, which often makes small-group touring a perfect fit."

Last but not least, there's the financial aspect. For budget-conscious youngsters who might shy away from tours, emphasise the inclusions and relatively good value for money they can provide – particularly for solo travellers who can avoid single supplements by sharing a room – and be honest about it, says Richard

Hanson of TrekAmerica. "Millennials appreciate the truth – they're savvy bookers," he says. "We are open on how much things cost versus doing it yourself and would actively encourage the comparison."

And if you manage to succeed in convincing them, it's not just your clients' pockets that will feel the benefit. **TW**



Tucan Travel's Inca Explorer trip from Lima to La Paz starts at £669 plus a local payment of \$390 including hotel, camping and hostel stays, with one night in a homestay, alongside transport, some meals and a tour leader.
tucantravel.com

Topdeck offers a 17-day Trans-Mongolian Railway trip from Moscow to Beijing. Prices start at £2,999 including accommodation (with six nights on the train), some meals, city tours, entrance fees and transport.
topdeck.travel



Destination trends

▶ Tucan Travel highlights South America – especially Peru – and southeast Asia as the most popular choices among millennials, while Topdeck says Japan is selling well.

▶ G Adventures says North America, Oceania and Indochina are the most popular choices for 18 to 24-year-olds, while southern Africa, Oceania, Central America, Buenos Aires and the Caribbean rank highest among 25 to 29-year-olds.

▶ STA Travel highlights Colombia (pictured), Mexico and Costa Rica as destinations on the rise.



PICTURES: ANDREY PAVLOV, SHUTTERSTOCK; SOPHIE WEGENER/BUSABOUT