

# Staying Still

Is it really an escorted tour if it's all based in one place? Katie McGonagle finds out why the latest touring trend is staying put

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**E**scorted tours come in all shapes and sizes. They go to different countries, appeal to any age group, and can last anywhere from a few days to several months - but one thing they all have in common is touring from one place to another with a guide to lead the way, right? Well, not necessarily.

While that classic touring formula is going strong, one of the biggest areas of growth in the past few years has been a more relaxed style of touring, often staying in just one or two places.

All the upsides of a classic escorted option remain - organised excursions, the services of a local tour leader, and extras such as portage, home pick-ups and meals - making strong selling points. But instead of packing up each night ready to move on in the morning, clients stay in one well-chosen spot and take on all their sightseeing from there.

If that sounds more like a mainstream package holiday, you're not far off - these trips blur the boundaries of the

escorted sector, so much so you might even question whether they count as a guided group trip.

That, however, is their secret weapon. These trips draw in new clients who might hear the words 'escorted tour' and assume it's not for them, offer a more in-depth experience of a destination, or allow a slower pace for those who aren't keen on switching hotels each night.

From G Adventures' Local Living to Saga's Stay & Explore ranges, we find out why the concept of a single-centre tour

isn't an oxymoron after all, and get the lowdown on how to sell them.

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Most single-centre tours are concentrated in the UK, Europe and the US, where clients are happy to take the time to explore rather than trying to squeeze every highlight into a single trip.

Unsurprisingly, 'slow travel' favourite Italy features prominently: half of G Adventures' Local Living trips are [→](#)



Florence



**ASK THE EXPERT**



Simon Grove,  
head of product,  
Explore

These trips are ideal if you want to control the pace of your holiday and explore one region in more depth. The accommodation base itself is often a highlight, chosen for its character and close to activities and experiences. Explore then organises walks and other activities from the base, allowing clients to discover all the region has to offer. One advantage is flexibility for the client – although activities are included on most days, they can opt in or opt out as they please. If a customer wants to explore the area independently for a day, or just relax at the hotel, the format of a centre-based holiday makes this easy to arrange as there isn't the worry of having to move on to another location.



**LEFT:**  
Montenegro

**RIGHT:**  
Italian  
cooking with  
G Adventures

**BELOW:**  
Madeira



based in Italian agriturismos – though the range also goes as far afield as Ecuador, Mongolia and, new this year, Nepal – while Italy is the best-represented destination in Titan's Stay & Explore range, with bookings especially buoyant in Sicily.

Riviera Travel's 23 single-centre tours make up half its European collection, and the number has been growing steadily with Madeira, northern Cyprus and Slovenia added this year.

These destinations lend themselves well to this touring style, according to Shearings' Europe product manager, Kathryn Morris. She says: "Most of our volume is in coastal or scenic destinations such as Lake Como or Lloret de Mar, as we have a good base and likely an all-inclusive-style package, so customers know that as well as taking our included excursions, they will also have the opportunity to relax in the resort, enjoy good weather and not need to budget for additional expenses."



**As well as taking our excursions, customers can relax in the resort and enjoy good weather**

If clients do want to head farther afield, Just You offers single-centre tours in places as far-flung as an Arizona ranch, Caribbean island Saint Lucia, and the Blue Marlin Hotel in Scottburgh Beach, South Africa.

**▶ CATCHING ON**

So what's with the sudden spike in interest for easy-going escapes? Rob Goodwin, head of product and commercial for Cosmos Tours, says: "Over the past few years, to meet demand, we have broadened our product range to offer more leisurely

single or twin-centre Relax & Explore holidays. This type of holiday appeals to a younger age range, offering the relaxation of being based in just one or two hotels, but with all the benefits of a tour director's expert knowledge on included sightseeing to bring the destination to life."

That means guests will be guided around ancient ruins in Italy and Croatia, or take part in specialised activities such as cooking (and eating) like the locals on Cosmos's new Gourmet Tuscany tour, based in Montecatini.

Tuscany is also the best-seller from Collette's 15-strong list of Spotlight tours, where guests stay in one hotel – usually a city-centre property – for the entire tour. Madrid, Paris, Washington DC and San Francisco all feature, and trips can be tailored: Spotlight on New York, for instance, lets guests choose which two Broadway shows they want to see, and where to eat their included meals.



▶ TAKE IT SLOW

That flexibility applies to activity levels too, as guests choose how much – or how little – to do each day. Many are slower-paced itineraries with rest days between organised sightseeing, and there’s no issue with skipping the occasional activity when everyone returns to the same hotel at night.

Harold Burke, sales director at Grand UK Holidays, says: “The main benefit of a single-destination holiday is a fixed base, ideally closer to home, where you can relax and unwind each day without the need to live out of a suitcase. With carefully planned excursions from the hotel, the holiday is a more leisurely and enjoyable experience. That is important to our customers, especially those who no longer wish to travel great distances.”

Don’t assume this applies only to the older generation: sporty types on an active tour might still want the odd morning by the pool, and families find staying in one place less of a logistical hassle. Intrepid Travel has active tours to Croatia, Slovenia and Andorra, where passengers can devote their energy to packing in activities rather than packing up suitcases.

Managing director Michael Edwards says: “Some of our Family Adventure Company trips, including our new active tours to Croatia and Slovenia and best-selling Summer Pyrenees Family Holiday, are also centre-



Single-centre tours are a perfect way to ease first-time tourers into the experience

based for the same reasons. We find these are popular with larger or multigenerational families, as some family members can relax at the hotel while others take part in the activities.”

▶ SHOW AND TELL

Even if a tour is based in one spot, that doesn’t mean it’s any less action-packed. Trafalgar’s new Amsterdam Explorer ticks off eight cities in just six days, with excursions to Haarlem, The Hague, Rotterdam, Gouda and the Keukenhof Gardens.

Over in the US, Funway Holidays’ South Dakota & the Badlands tour goes deep into the wild west from its base in Rapid City, visiting Mount Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial, Badlands National Park, western town Deadwood and the Black Hills.

Some itineraries also have good reason for staying put: Tauck Events are one-off itineraries, so it would be a shame to get up and go when the




party’s just getting started. This year, the programme includes The Tauck Jazz Event in New Orleans and Run for the Roses: The Kentucky Derby.

▶ TARGET AUDIENCE

As well as previous touring clients, a more relaxed itinerary can bring in new markets who wouldn’t have considered an escorted tour in the past. They might be cruise clients who like the convenience of unpacking once but still seeing the sights; first-timers reluctant to try a group tour but persuaded by the promise of greater flexibility; or solo travellers who want a bit of camaraderie while enjoying a hotel-based holiday.

Richard Forde, head of trade sales for Newmarket Holidays, says: “Single-centre tours appeal to customers who want a more relaxed holiday, rather than a sightseeing-focused tour. It’s also a perfect way of easing first-time tourers into the experience, rather than a full-blown multi-centre break.”

Titan recommends looking at customers who have previously booked more-traditional tours or cruise holidays, since these single-centre options are often just a week long – or five days for the UK – making an excellent second or third holiday of the year. 



HOW TO SELL

Don’t pigeonhole escorted tours as a niche product – single-centre tours have a wide appeal and can challenge clients’ misconceptions about the touring market.



PICTURES: COLLETTE, G ADVENTURES; INTREPID TRAVEL; RIVIERA TRAVEL / JAN WLODARCZYK; SAGA/NOVIK MAR; TRAFALGAR/EUROPHOTOS.EU

ABOVE: Cycling in Croatia

LEFT: Amsterdam