

# 6 of the BEST FESTIVALS

Tours that coincide with big-ticket events are booming, so where can you sell?  
**Laura French** gets ready to party



If there's one thing that seems to unite almost every culture and continent, it's our shared love of coming together to celebrate – whether through music, art, dance, food or other festivities.

From India's kaleidoscopically colourful Holi festival to Japan's blushing cherry blossom season, New Orleans' foot-tapping jazz fest to Europe's classical music concerts, there's never a dull moment when you look at the global calendar of events.

Fortunately it's easier than ever to reach them thanks to a roster of tours and itineraries that take culture-seeking travellers to the highlights.



## RIO CARNIVAL, BRAZIL

Glittering floats the size of buses, twirling samba dancers bedecked in outlandish feathers, bass-pumping drums blaring across a 90,000-capacity stadium – the Sambadrome parade at Rio Carnival is an experience like no other. Throw in the energy-fuelled blocos – samba-blasting street parties – the glitzy masked balls and the week-long parade of fancy dress, and you have 'the greatest party on Earth'.

**Book it:** For one of the most comprehensive tours, suggest Travelsphere's 15-day Chile, Argentina & Brazil Rio Carnival trip, which combines the spectacle with Chile's colourful capital plus Iguassu, Mendoza, Buenos Aires and beyond. Prices start at £4,149, departing February 17, 2020. [travelsphere.co.uk](http://travelsphere.co.uk)



## CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL, JAPAN

Japan turns into one pink-flushed painting come April, with carpets of blossom and a string of festivities taking place across the country – from geisha dances to evening illuminations and hanami picnics. Wendy Wu Tours has a new Cherry Blossom Tour taking in the best of it, with gold-splashed temples, cherry-coloured gardens and elaborate geisha houses among the options in Osaka, Kyoto, Mount Fuji and beyond.

**Book it:** Wendy Wu's two-week tour starts at £5,990, departing March 26. InsideJapan Tours' Spring Elegance tour offers an alternative route, with highlights including Tokyo, Matsumoto, Takayama and Kanazawa. Prices start at £4,375 for 13 nights (2020 is sold out, but 2021 bookings will be available from December). [insidejapantours.com](http://insidejapantours.com)



## DAY OF THE DEAD, MEXICO

That spectacular opening scene in Spectre put Mexico's Day of the Dead on the bucket list for thrill-seeking travellers across the globe, and plenty of operators, including G Adventures, Intrepid Travel and Journey Latin America, offer trips to experience it. Originally an Aztec ritual, the two-day holiday celebrates the dead as families decorate altars with colourful offerings, while masked parades, feasts, music and more take over the streets of Oaxaca.

**Book it:** Rainbow Tours offers an 11-day trip that combines the celebrations – including visits to Day of the Dead tombs, stops in ancient Zapotec towns and trips to local bazaars – with ancient archaeological sites, Oaxacan cooking classes and a night in vibrant Mexico City. Prices start at £2,895, including flights, for a departure on October 28, 2020. [rainbowtours.co.uk](http://rainbowtours.co.uk)



## NEW ORLEANS JAZZ FESTIVAL, THE US

For foot-tapping, music-loving souls, few places beat New Orleans and its famous French Quarter. At its heart is the annual Jazz Festival, where visitors from across the world flock for two long weekends in a celebration of all things southern. Blues, rock, African and other genres are all represented alongside the iconic sounds of the sax, with craft tents, folklore corners and hearty Louisiana food – think po-boys, jambalayas and smoky barbecue briskets – bringing a slice of local heritage to festival-goers wanting to dance the night (and day) away.

**Book it:** Intrepid Travel combines the revelry with stops in Atlanta, Savannah, Charleston, Nashville, Memphis and beyond on a 12-day Southern Comfort USA – New Orleans Jazz Festival trip, priced from £2,970. [intrepidtravel.com/uk](http://intrepidtravel.com/uk)





### BEST OF THE REST

🌟 **Sziget Festival, Budapest:** Foo Fighters, Ed Sheeran and Florence + The Machine are among the stars descending on Budapest in 2020. Topdeck will be combining it with explorations in Dubrovnik, Sarajevo and Belgrade on a five-night trip priced from £1,239, departing July 31.

🌟 **Beethoven Festival, Germany:** Bonn is celebrating 250 years since Beethoven's birth in the city with a series of symphonies next March; Kirker Holidays offers a six-night trip from £2,246, including flights on March 14.

🌟 **Venice Carnival:** It's not only Rio that goes all out for Mardi Gras: live music, masquerade balls and boat parades make up Venice's version. Shearings Holidays has a nine-day Lake Garda and Veneto's Carnevali tour from £719, departing February 15.

🌟 **Diwali:** Twinkling illuminations, fireworks and feasts transform India into a dazzling spectacle during the five-day festival of light. Trafalgar has a 13-night Colourful India – Celebrate Diwali trip taking it all in, featuring a Be My Guest dinner at a local family's home (from £4,075, excluding flights).

5



### HARBIN ICE FESTIVAL, CHINA

The world's largest celebration of all things ice descends on China's northernmost city, Harbin, every December until February, turning this former Russian settlement into a glittering winter wonderland. Folklore-influenced ice sculptures, ice lanterns, ice bars and more take over the surreal-looking Sun Island Park – where the Ice and Snow World fuses rainbow-lit, palatial snow creations with adrenaline-pumping winter sports. Beyond the park there's a whole host of activities to be witnessed, from winter swimming to dog-sledding and plenty more.

**Book it:** Explore takes in the highlights and combines it with Chinese New Year in Hong Kong on an 11-day trip via Beijing, the Great Wall and Xi'an. Prices start at £2,999, including flights, for a departure on January 17, 2020. [explore.co.uk](http://explore.co.uk)

6

### HOLI FESTIVAL, INDIA

India's most exuberant festival sees streets across the country turned into a giant rainbow as locals throw powdered colour bombs and water balloons as part of a Hindu tradition. These days, it signifies a time to come together while marking the start of spring with family festivities, dancing, folk music and Holi delicacies such as *gujiya* (sweet deep-fried dumplings), *malpua* (mini pancakes) and *thandai* (a drink made with cardamom, almonds, dried fruit and saffron).

**Book it:** On The Go Tours has an eight-day trip combining the celebrations in the fort city of Bharatpur with time in frenetic Delhi, Unesco-listed 'pink city' Jaipur, the Taj Mahal and beyond, with a discounted price of £418 based on two sharing, excluding flights, departing Delhi on March 6. [onthegotours.com](http://onthegotours.com)

