

Selling staycations

Domestic travel is well placed to be the first to rebound, so how can you make the most of the market for holidays at home? **Katie McGonagle** finds out



Malham,
Yorkshire Dales

While a recovery in travel abroad looks like it's off the cards this summer, holidays at home are likely to be the first to bounce back from the Covid-19 crisis.

Sure, social distancing remains key. Even as UK attractions and accommodation start to make their first, faltering steps towards reopening, they do so on the basis that guidelines can be enforced and coronavirus contained.

But even with those restrictions in place, the UK is the most realistic option for clients in search of a holiday once lockdown is fully lifted. With that in mind, we've canvassed the experts to help you get up to speed on the best of British breaks, so you can switch-sell customers from their holiday abroad or give them a break to be getting on with until their overseas escape is back on the agenda.

REDISCOVER THE JOY OF HOLIDAYS AT HOME

"It's a common misconception that domestic holidays are somehow less exciting or glamorous than overseas trips," says Rachel Coffey, sales and business development director for Trafalgar, Costsaver, Insight Vacations and Luxury Gold.

"The right trip can open up amazing new discoveries and experiences. It's worth remembering the benefits of an escorted journey all still apply, and there are clients who don't want to do the research themselves and want to be looked after every step of the way.

"We definitely see a big opportunity for agents to sell domestic guided holidays as government restrictions start to ease, and we are in a good place to support them."

As examples of the pros ➤

ASK THE expert

"The UK provides an excellent opportunity for agents to engage with their customers and inspire them to holiday at home. More than 60% of our customers in a recent survey said they wanted to take a UK break within the next three months – government guidelines allowing – and were looking to do so through an Abta-approved agent. With the UK boasting more than 32 World Heritage Sites, 15 national parks and some of the most beautiful coastline in the world, agents can put their passion for travel behind the UK and drive staycations as a replacement for customers' next holidays. For places to visit other than Devon and Cornwall, look out for Norfolk, with its 90 miles of beaches, and the Cotswolds, with its 140 lakes and wetlands – these places avoid the big crowds but still offer the beauty and charm of the idyllic countryside and coastline."

Diana Evans,
managing director,
Great Little Breaks



of touring, Coffey points to Luxury Gold's British Royale trip, on which guests enjoy Michelin-starred dining and a front-row seat for the Tower of London's Ceremony of the Keys, which usually sells out months in advance.

Even if you don't have to get on a plane to reach your destination, the UK and Ireland – and particularly their remote regions – still offer plenty of exotic appeal.

Heather McKinlay, founder and director of Scottish specialist McKinlay Kidd, says: "Some of the remoter destinations in the UK and Ireland are very different and deliver the feel of a holiday escape."

"On a sunny day, a beach in the Outer Hebrides can do a fantastic impression of the Caribbean, with white sand and turquoise waters."

"These beaches are so vast, you will barely see another soul – social distancing is the norm!"

"Shetland, famous from the recent TV series, captivates with its wild, coastal landscapes that feel more Nordic than British, though of course everyone speaks English."

"And in the west of Ireland, wildlife abounds in rural and coastal areas – eagles, otters, seals, badgers, pine martens and more. You can even go whale-watching off the west of Ireland and from the Isle of Mull in Scotland."

"Go big on displaying the UK – holidays closer to home will be in huge demand once it is deemed safe to travel again"

BROADEN YOUR HORIZONS

While you might already have a decent choice of local coach departures or family holiday parks, now is the time to learn about areas of the British Isles that you might not have sold before. Recent surveys have shown a spike in interest for remoter regions including the Scottish highlands and the Channel Islands, which recently came to attention for the 75th anniversary of their liberation from German occupation (page 25).

"The Channel Islands are the staycation with a difference," says Lydia Smith, marketing and development manager for C I Travel Group, owner of island specialist Airways Holidays. "Closer to home than many overseas destinations but still miles away; a French feel while on British soil. Travel time is minimal but you



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Tower of London; a cobbled street in Alderney; the Shetland Islands; cycling in Guernsey

PICTURES: VisitBritain/Historic Royal Palaces, Lee Beel, Alex Zouaghi; Chris George Photography; Shutterstock

still have that overseas experience, with one short flight from regional airports across the UK or ferry travel from Poole and Portsmouth, which makes the journey part of the holiday as travellers move around freely and enjoy the sea air."

The Isles of Scilly offer a similar home-away vibe, combining long stretches of sandy beaches, stone cottages, charming harbour towns, a reliably balmy climate and the chance for birders to spot migrating species every spring and autumn.

"When you're there, you feel like you're much farther away from the UK than you are," says Debbie Goffin, head of sales and marketing for Premier Holidays. "The Isles of Scilly offer beautiful, uncrowded and unspoilt beaches, history, walking and watersports, and are a great place to get away from it all."

If getting to the south coast is a

stretch, consider the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales or highlands and islands of Scotland, once restrictions on movement are lifted in all parts of the UK. Lee Hamilton, general sales manager for Prestige Holidays, says: "Destinations that people can reach by car, train or ferry will appeal for a post-lockdown escape, as will lesser-known and more-remote places. Scotland is an obvious choice – keeping your distance from others is relatively straightforward in the highlands. You can cycle along loch edges, search for red squirrels in the forests, or explore one of hundreds of secluded islands and rarely see another person. Autumn can be a great time to travel for wildlife, lack of crowds and fantastic prices."

He also suggests agents think laterally: "If you have a client that has been on an African safari or a

bear-watching break in Canada, then a short escape to see wildlife in the Cairngorms or on the island of Mull could be a good alternative closer to home."

TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE CURRENT CLIMATE

After months of being cooped up at home, many clients will be keen to get away, but that doesn't mean they'll travel as they would have done before the coronavirus crisis, so think about the extra considerations they'll need to take into account.

Many operators are predicting growth in self-drive holidays and self-catering accommodation, so identify destinations within a half-day's drive of your area and familiarise yourself with the properties there. Workers may not have the flexibility to take their usual one or two-week summer holiday,

DESTINATIONS

HOLIDAYS AT HOME | UK & IRELAND

SELLING TIPS

Be sensitive with the timing of your marketing – plan your promotional activity now but wait until you feel the time is right to push it out to clients on your database.

Prioritise social media, e-blasts and direct marketing over window displays as lower footfall on high streets means traditional methods will be less effective.

If you're rebooking customers' overseas holidays, highlight to them that you can also book domestic breaks and have offers ready to suggest if they show interest.

given disruption to many businesses, so consider shorter, flexible durations too.

Harold Burke, sales and marketing director for Grand UK Holidays, says short breaks, seaside destinations and festive holidays look set to do well.

"Holidays closer to home will be in huge demand once it is deemed safe to travel again," he says. "Agents need to be ready for a surge in demand and target each market sector with a range of available product for late 2020 – if permissible – and 2021."

"There will be a resurgence in seaside holidays and popular venues like Warner Leisure Hotels. Go big on displaying the UK as a destination and sell the benefits of a holiday closer to home – all without undermining the overseas market, which will take longer to recover." **TW**