



of the BEST



ALTERNATIVE ADVENTURES

Sell an outdoor break your clients might not have thought of, writes **Laura French**

From Machu Picchu to Kilimanjaro, Everest to the Great Barrier Reef, the bucket-list icons of the world have found fame for a reason, but to focus only on the big-hitters is to miss some of Earth's greatest treasures.

To help diversify your sales and spread the net wider once travel starts to recover, we've rounded up some of the best alternative adventures – from cycling the Silk Road to surfing the Mexican coast, horse riding on a ranch to hiking in the Himalayas – all without the crowds to obscure the views.



TREK THE EVEREST REGION WITHOUT THE CROWDS

Everest Base Camp might be the stuff of dreams for many adventurers, but don't overlook the rest of Nepal. For clients after a quieter alternative that packs in all the dramatic peaks, glacial lakes and Sherpa villages of its better-known cousin, suggest World Expeditions' Gokyo & the Renjo La trip. Highlights of the 13-day trek include walking alongside the Himalayas' longest glacier, flying over the mountains to the city of Lukla, climbing the 5,483m-peak Gokyo Ri and crossing Renjo La, an ancient Tibetan trading route where hikers zigzag their way through huge boulders with sweeping Himalayan views all around.

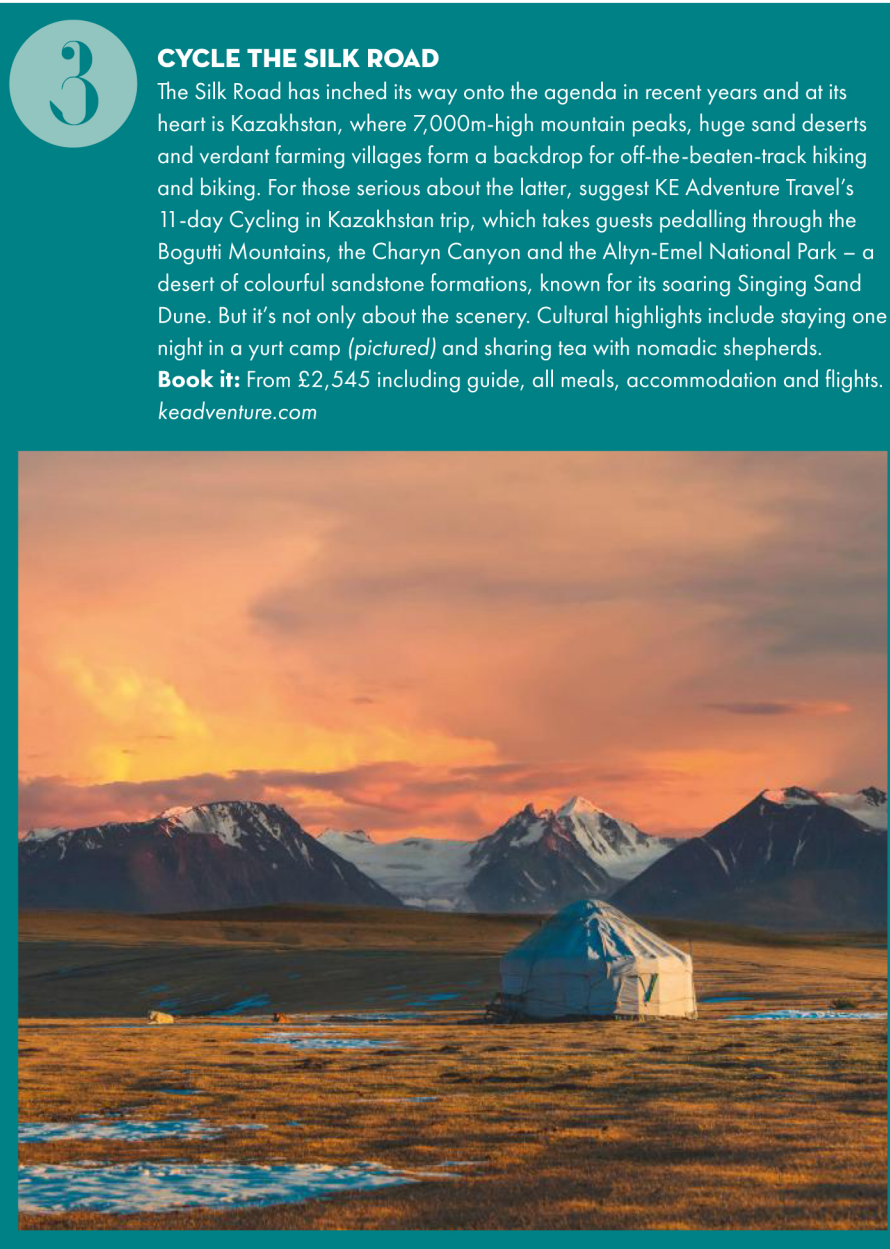
Book it: From £1,970 including guide, porters, transfers, most meals and accommodation (excluding international flights). worldexpeditions.com



RAFT YOUR WAY THROUGH SLOVENIA

Slovenia's reputation as an outdoor adventure hub is growing, and not only because of its winter sports. For a memorable way to experience its landscapes, suggest rafting the rapids of the Soca River (pictured) – a wild, frothing plume of aquamarine that rushes down from the Julian Alps against a backdrop of mountains and forests – or abseiling the falls of the Susec canyon, as huge, frothing torrents rush over your head. Exodus Travels combines both with white-water kayaking, mountain biking, hiking, ziplining and other adventures on an eight-day Mixed Activity trip that's tailor-made for customers seeking an adrenaline rush.

Book it: From £1,299 including accommodation, some meals, guide, equipment and flights. exodus.co.uk



CYCLE THE SILK ROAD

The Silk Road has inched its way onto the agenda in recent years and at its heart is Kazakhstan, where 7,000m-high mountain peaks, huge sand deserts and verdant farming villages form a backdrop for off-the-beaten-track hiking and biking. For those serious about the latter, suggest KE Adventure Travel's 11-day Cycling in Kazakhstan trip, which takes guests pedalling through the Bogutti Mountains, the Charyn Canyon and the Altyn-Emel National Park – a desert of colourful sandstone formations, known for its soaring Singing Sand Dune. But it's not only about the scenery. Cultural highlights include staying one night in a yurt camp (pictured) and sharing tea with nomadic shepherds.

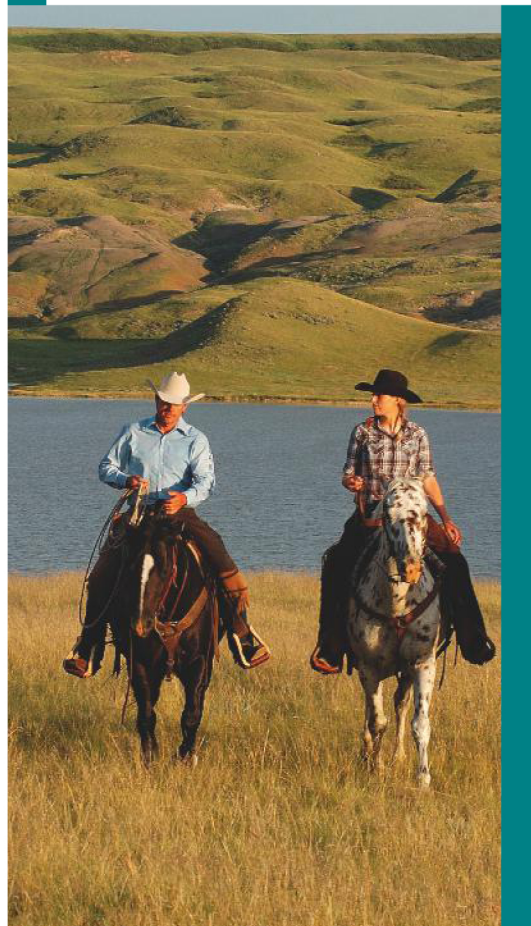
Book it: From £2,545 including guide, all meals, accommodation and flights. keadventure.com



SADDLE UP IN CANADA

Canada's landscapes need little preface, but for adventurous types wanting to explore them in a different way while avoiding the crowds of the national parks, look to the country's ranches. These working farms aren't only for horse riding pros, with many offering riding for beginners, while other activities give guests a chance to get involved with the workings of the land. Specialist operator Ranch Rider recommends La Reata Ranch (pictured) in Saskatchewan for an especially tranquil retreat, with lessons for all levels available alongside other activities such as sorting calves and moving the herd, fishing and boating on the lake.

Book it: Seven nights at La Reata Ranch costs from £995 based on two sharing, including ranch activities. ranchrider.com



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SURF THE WAVES OF MEXICO

For clients after an adrenaline kick, suggest a surf holiday. While Australia, California and other big-hitters attract those wanting to get serious with their surfing, there are plenty of lesser-known, less-intense destinations too. Specialist surfing provider Tropicsurf offers programmes at luxury resorts in Bali, the Maldives, Fiji and beyond for those wanting to combine elements of outdoor adventure with more relaxing pursuits. For a standout option look to its programme at One&Only Palmilla on Mexico's Baja Peninsula (*pictured*), which hosts regular visits by surf pros and boasts surfing breaks for all levels, plus plenty of wellness experiences for soothing the muscles afterwards.

Book it: Nightly rates for an Ocean Front Room at One&Only Palmilla start at \$890 (June to July 2021). An Art of Luxury Surfing class is from \$150. oneandonlyresorts.com

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GO SEA KAYAKING IN THE OUTER HEBRIDES

Escaping the crowds doesn't have to mean traipsing to the ends of the Earth. Scotland's Outer Hebrides are home to some of Europe's wildest spots, and if clients haven't yet experienced its crashing coastlines, remote wildlife and Gaelic traditions, they're missing out. Hiking, cycling and birdwatching are all in abundance here, but for those wanting to get really intrepid, suggest a sea kayaking trip. Wilderness Scotland has a six-night itinerary taking guests out each day from a base on the island of Lewis, with the grand climax a two-night, wild-camping expedition to some of the archipelago's most remote islands.

Book it: From £1,255 including guide, accommodation (guesthouses and camping), meals and transfers. wildernessscotland.com



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WALK THE QUIETER CAMINO

For clients who like stepping out, few tracks are quite as epic as the Camino de Santiago, the network of ancient pilgrimage routes in Spain and Portugal that date back more than 1,000 years and are now a go-to for hikers spiritual or not. While the majority opt for a section of the Camino Frances, the best-known of the routes, there are plenty of alternatives. Direct clients wanting quieter paths to the likes of the Camino Primitivo, the Camino Portugues or the Camino del Norte, where they'll find all the history, scenery and rural tranquillity for which the routes are renowned but without the crowds.

Book it: Camino Ways offers a seven-night self-guided trip along the final 70 miles of the Camino Portugues from €621, including B&B accommodation and route maps (luggage transfers extra). caminoways.com

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GO ROCK-CLIMBING IN CROATIA

Croatia might have a reputation for sugar-sand beaches and castaway islands, but it's not only the coastline that appeals. Paklenica National Park, just north of Zadar, is one of Europe's premier rock-climbing grounds, with dramatic canyon walls and limestone karst formations creating an ideal playground for the daring (there's a formidable 712m-rockface among the offerings). For those wanting to combine it with other outdoor pursuits, Neilson's Alana Beachclub lies just around the corner and offers rock-climbing experiences in the park, as well as lessons at its indoor climbing wall.

Book it: A week at Alana Beachclub starts at £735, based on two sharing on a club-board basis, including activities, transfers and flights from Stansted on October 3, 2021. neilson.co.uk



BEST OF THE REST

Swim in Switzerland

Wild swimming has become the trend *du jour* in Switzerland over recent years – the annual Lake Zurich crossing (normally) attracts up to 9,000 swimmers – and at the heart of the scene is the Aare River in Bern. Suggest a weekend break to this picturesque medieval city for clients wanting to join the locals on a summertime dip in the clear, glacial meltwater as they glide past the charming Altstadt (old town).

Hike and horse ride in Morocco

Scenic villages, traditional Berber culture and dramatic peaks give the High Atlas Mountains legendary status. For active types wanting to explore, suggest Intrepid Travel's hike, bike and horse ride trip, which takes guests cycling in Marrakech, hiking in the mountains and horse riding on the beach in Essaouira, hoofs kicking up the sand as they trot along the shore.

Go bear-spotting in Romania

If the call of the wild has captured clients' imaginations during lockdown, the Carpathian Mountains could be the answer. Stretching from the Czech Republic to Romania, the peaks are home to 43% of Europe's bear population. Explore has a three-night Transylvania Long Weekend trip combining evening sightings of these elusive creatures with visits to castles and cultural musings in this oft-underrated country.