

COSY UP IN BRUGES

Colourful houses framing idyllic canals, elaborate shops selling handcrafted chocolates, and warm, cosy bars with roaring log fires – Bruges is the stuff of fairytales, and while it might be winter that gets the limelight with its lit-up Christmas stalls and wafts of glühwein, autumn is just as charming. Medieval spires poking through the mist, crispy leaves covering the cobbles and fewer visitors ambling its lanes all lend appeal in the shoulder season, while cooler temperatures provide the perfect excuse to warm up with a cream-covered waffle or a hearty hot chocolate, Belgian-style.

Book it: Osprey Holidays offers two nights at the four-star Hotel Prinsenhof with breakfast from £285, including Eurostar, for an October 27 departure. ospreyholidays.com



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VISIT VENICE WITHOUT THE CROWDS

From elaborate piazzas framed with marble palaces to age-old gondolas traversing the Grand Canal, Venice's lures need little preface, and there's no time like the coming months to explore them at their most pristine. Autumn brings all the glory of the high season without the searing heat and busy streets. And if the weather doesn't deliver, the likes of Doge's Palace, the Guggenheim Museum and the Museo Correr – the latter all Venetian paintings housed in chandelier-gilded neoclassical rooms – have plenty to lure.

Book it: For clients looking to stay in the heart of the action, Kirker Holidays recommends the American Dinesen, set in an 18th-century canal building right by the Guggenheim Museum. Three nights' B&B costs from £968 in September or October, including flights, water taxis and entry to Doge's Palace. kirkerholidays.com



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EXPLORE ICELAND

It's not only in winter that Iceland gets its show-face on. Come autumn, mosses turn red, skies glow blue and berries cover the forests – and all without the crowds. The odds are in clients' favour for aurora displays too, thanks to dark, cloudless skies, and viewers won't have to suffer numb fingers, as temperatures average around 4C in October and November. Autumn is also festival season; don't miss Rétir, an all-out fiesta where locals gather in the countryside to watch farmers round up their free-roaming sheep.

Book it: Intrepid Retreats has a four-night break combining Reykjavik, the Golden Circle and beyond from a base at a farm in the Hvalsvollur Valley. Prices start at £915, including transport, activities and some meals. intrepidtravel.com



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HIKE THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

Majestic peaks, legend-filled lochs, starry skies and windswept seascapes – if clients haven't already experienced the charms of the Scottish Highlands, now's the time to sell them, and not just for summer. October is an excellent time to visit, with landscapes cloaked in russet red and gold, seasonal produce served up fresh from the harvest, and fewer tourists sharing the region's wild, remote trails, while the annual rut, when stags battle it out to impress the female deer, makes for an impressive display, with roars echoing for miles around.

Book it: HF Holidays has a three-night guided walking holiday, taking in the North Face Path, the Ardgour peninsula, Fort William and beyond, from £289, including full-board accommodation and based on a November 6 departure. hfholidays.co.uk

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BEST



AUTUMN BREAKS

Sell an autumn escape with
Laura French's pick of the best

A crunching leaf under a crisp blue sky, a sun-dappled forest cloaked in copper, a blackberry tree brushed with dew: there's something colourfully alluring about autumn, and there's no time like the present to start selling the season – and to capitalise on pent-up demand.

Whether it's a UK break in the Lake District or a late-sun escape to Turkey, a city break in Bruges or a walking trip in Scotland, clients looking for a long weekend in the coming months have plenty of choice. Here, we round up some of the best options from across the board to help inspire.

DESTINATIONS

SHORT BREAKS | AUTUMN

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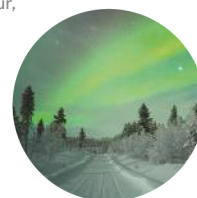
SOAK UP THE SUN IN TURKEY

If it's a dose of vitamin sea clients are after, look no further than Turkey, where you can be sunbathing in 20C temperatures within four hours of the UK, even in November. Fethiye, Bodrum and Antalya are all winning winter-sun options; suggest the last of these for fine-sand beaches flanked by the curacao waters of the Turquoise Coast, as well as a host of cultural draws – from the city's historic old quarter, where Ottoman houses line quaint cobbled streets, to its Roman-era harbour, nestled among the cliffs.

Book it: For a family-friendly option in Antalya, suggest Tui's 5T-rated Hotel Baia Lara, a beachside all-inclusive boasting seven pools, nine waterslides and three restaurants. Four nights costs from £455 per person, based on two adults sharing with flights from Gatwick on November 17. tui.co.uk

BEST OF THE REST

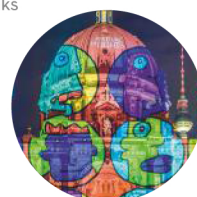
Lapland: It's not only in December that Lapland turns on the charm. In October, its forests explode into colour, while the autumn equinox brings impressive northern lights displays boosted by clear skies – and all with a fraction of the visitor numbers of winter.



Krakow: Clients looking to go a little off the beaten track? Suggest this Polish favourite for seasonal festivals such as Krakow Jazz Autumn and Audio Art, markets overflowing with just-harvested apples and al fresco terraces where locals sit sipping beside the Vistula River.



Berlin: Parks blazing with fall colours, bierkellers serving hearty brews and a busy schedule of events make the German capital an excellent option for culture-filled breaks in the cooler months. Look out for the annual Festival of Lights, when iconic landmarks dazzle with video projections and impressive light shows.



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LINGER IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

From Beatrix Potter to Wordsworth via Constable and Lowry, the Lake District has inspired many an artist, and it's not hard to see why. It's in autumn the real magic happens, though, with frosts clinging to dramatic peaks and mists hovering above mirror-like lakes. Late September sees the arrival of the Taste Cumbria Food Festival, while October heralds the Winter Droving in Penrith, featuring live performances, lantern processions and other festivities in celebration of the animal herding tradition.

Book it: For a good-value option in an excellent location just outside Penrith, suggest Hoseasons' Ullswater Heights, where lodges come with hot tubs overlooking the hills. Seven nights in October half-term costs from £1,615 per family, based on four sharing a Spa Retreat View lodge. hoseasons.co.uk

PICTURES: Shutterstock