

8 of the BEST

TRENDS FOR 2021

How will our travel priorities shift next year?

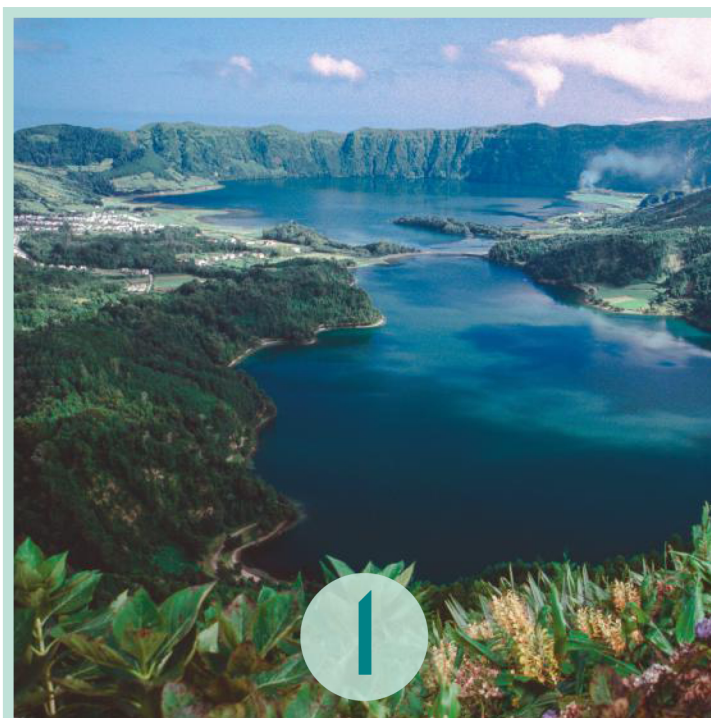
Katie McGonagle asks the experts

Predicting travel trends is a tricky task at the best of times, but after a year in which our lives have changed almost beyond recognition, there's no doubt how we holiday has changed too.

Customers who once focused on finding the best bargain or the best beach are now asking about safety, testing requirements and cancellation policies, while others are playing it safe by shifting their sights to destinations that feel more familiar.

Yet there's also a wave of travellers who've spent lockdown plotting their next great escape, rolling over this year's holiday fund to finally embark on a long-dreamed-about adventure.

To help you make sense of some of those shifts, we've polled experts across the industry to find out which travel trends will gather pace as we all look ahead to a better, brighter 2021.



SHORT-HAUL FAVOURITES

Even with a vaccine rollout heralding a return to a little more normality, travellers' confidence will take time to rebuild, so it shouldn't be a surprise that many are sticking to old-favourite destinations they know and love for their first trip post-pandemic. The latest Abta research found just 32% of people were keen to visit a country they'd never been to before, down from 45% last year. Operators have responded by ramping up short-haul programmes to meet demand. G Adventures, for example, released seven European tours aimed at the UK market, covering Andalusia, Ibiza, Corfu, Crete, Sicily, the Azores and Greenland, with departures from March. EMEA managing director Brian Young says: "We're bringing together some of Europe's most-loved destinations, which have traditionally been popular for package breaks, cruising or nightlife, and offering travellers the opportunity to see a completely different side to their favourite holiday spot."



VILLA HOLIDAYS

Offering both space and seclusion, villas have rocketed in popularity this year, as travellers eschew the company of others in favour of a place they can call their own. That looks set to continue in 2021 too, as multigenerational families or groups of friends look for somewhere to reconnect with loved ones they haven't seen for far too long. Pete Brudenell, head of marketing at CV Villas, says: "We've seen an uplift over the last three weeks and at the end of last week we were up 33% year on year. We've seen new bookings increase 7% in share versus repeat, which may suggest more people moving from hotel holidays. Mintel's recent report on holiday rentals also suggested a more even split between preference for villas over hotels, which ties in with what we're seeing." Short-haul spots such as Greece and Italy are up 37% and 32% respectively for the company, with Corfu and Puglia most popular.

3

SELF-DRIVE BREAKS

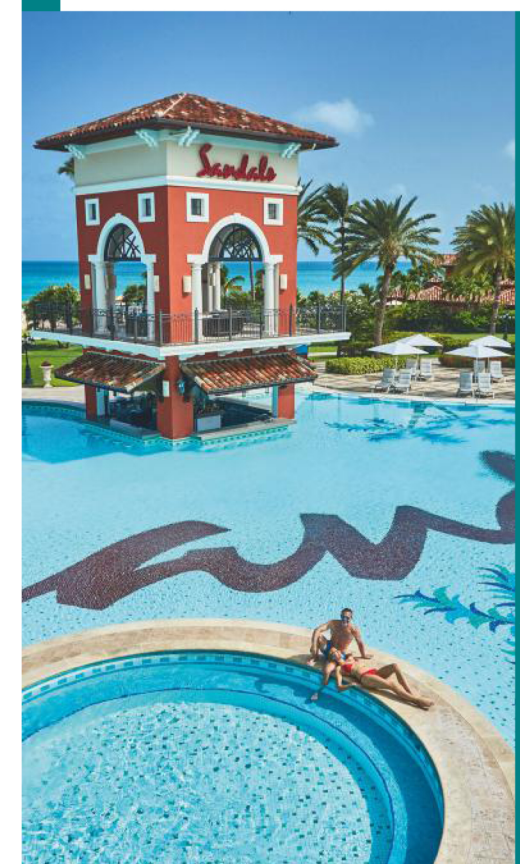
The desire for self-contained styles of travel has increased as travellers look to minimise contact with others, yet the appeal of a self-drive – going where you want, when you want, with no schedule to stick to – is not just about Covid-19. The difference this year was that rather than a fly-drive through the Canadian Rockies or campervan trip around New Zealand, people have set their sights closer to home. But with clients having rediscovered the joy of travelling at their own pace, self-drives will continue to sell well. Heather McKinlay, founder and director of McKinlay Kidd, says: "The road trip has increased enormously in attraction, giving people the freedom to explore in a self-contained way. Some of the most popular are week-long or even fortnight-long, multi-centre trips, such as touring the southwest of England, Scotland's far north coast (pictured) or a circuit of Wales. Scottish island-hopping adventures also have strong appeal."



4

LATE BOOKINGS

With uncertainty over travel corridors, local lockdowns and entry requirements on arrival, many customers are booking as close to their departure date as possible, reluctant to commit their cash until the last minute in case things change – a trend likely to continue into early 2021, at least. Karl Thompson, managing director of Sandals representative Unique Caribbean Holidays, says: "Before the second lockdown in England, we reported a third of our business for 2020 was late business – trips due to depart within three months of the booking date – and towards the end of the second lockdown, our late business picked back up again. During the peak of our Black Friday sale, between November 24 and December 1, most bookings were for December 2020 departures, and 29% were for departures within the next three months. Agents have fed back to us that clients are chomping at the bit to snap up last-minute deals before the rules change again."



PICTURES: Shutterstock / G Adventures / Roland Koch

ASK THE experts

Matt Brazier, head of marketing, Experience Travel Group, and Asia spokesman for Pata UK & Ireland

"There has been a significant shift in gear as travellers opt for 'slow travel'. Our tour operator members have commented on how the traditional multi-centre approach to Pacific Asia is changing – they'll be single-destination trips, so once you're there, you're there."

Tricia Birmingham, trading director, Gold Medal

"We're noticing an increase in the average value of new bookings; in some destinations we have seen a double-digit percentage increase for 2021. Agents are telling us customers want to trade up their hotel or the length of their holiday to 'compensate' for not going away this year. We're also seeing a marked increase in package sales, from 48% this year to 77% in 2021."

Helen Adamson, managing director, Citalia

"Customers are going for slightly longer and slightly more upscale holidays, because they're wanting more space. People will go for fewer holidays but [they will be] longer and more expensive, getting off the beaten track and trying new things out."

Andrea Godfrey, product manager, Regent Holidays

"People are looking ahead further than they might have done before. We are finding our clients are inclining largely towards destinations perceived as being remote or 'far flung', where they can enjoy wide open spaces and experience natural wonders."

DOMESTIC DEMAND

If one good thing has come from the pandemic, it's a newfound appreciation of how much beauty we have on our doorstep. Holidaymakers who would normally flock to far-flung destinations have rediscovered the UK's rolling countryside, coastal towns or quirky hotels. Chris Cundall, director of trade relations at Great Little Breaks, says: "When the announcement came that hotels were reopening on July 4, the demand for UK breaks was astonishing. During August and September, we saw our biggest-ever booking months, with agents delivering over 50% of the business." The trade can continue to capitalise on domestic demand next year, with Jet2 and Loganair adding capacity to Jersey, more specialist product such as UK rail trips from Arena Rail Holidays, and operators such as Cosmos, Kuoni and Explore expanding their UK programmes.

5



OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

With little to do during lockdown except take long walks through the woods or cycle rides through the countryside, many of us are embracing a more active, outdoor lifestyle, and that's showing through in our holiday preferences as well. Intrepid Travel's EMEA managing director Zina Bencheikh says: "Our cycling trips have been very popular this year, with many clients who weren't able to travel abroad opting for an active break in the UK. We're seeing this trend continuing into 2021 and we'll be adding to our range of UK and Europe cycling breaks in the coming months. For the safety-conscious, cycling offers natural social distancing and lots of time outdoors, plus it's one of the most eco-friendly ways to see the world." Popular choices for next year include the Lake District (pictured), Vietnam, Jordan and Morocco, along with nature-focused adventures in the Galápagos and Costa Rica, and bucket-list trips such as trekking in Nepal or cruises in Antarctica.

6



TRAVEL BY TRAIN

Rail-based breaks were on the rise long before Covid-19 came into the picture, between eco-aware clients seeking an alternative to flying, independent travellers wanting a hassle-free way to get around, and others keen to experience some of the world's most scenic or luxurious journeys. Anna Davies, sales and marketing manager at Railbookers, says: "The demand for independent, customised, flexible holidays using the train will undoubtedly continue to grow in 2021. We know that 85% of customers who booked with Railbookers in 2020 were new to us, which is incredibly positive as we look ahead to 2021. Events this year have certainly made customers think about travelling by train when they may not have considered it previously. Thanks to our extensive choice of holidays and destinations, there hasn't been a single day during the pandemic where we haven't made a new booking." Luxury rail journeys such as the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express (pictured), cruise add-ons and trips through Scotland, Switzerland and Italy are among the most popular.

8

WILDLIFE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The desire to travel more responsibly and minimise our environmental impact has been gradually gathering pace for years, but lockdown – which saw wildlife and the environment flourish – acted as a catalyst for that change, with operators reporting that sustainability is becoming a bigger factor in consumers' decision-making. Yet the news wasn't all positive this year, with increased poaching in many of Africa's most-popular safari spots as tourist income dried up and conservation efforts were put on hold. The Uganda Wildlife Authority has reduced the cost of gorilla trekking permits from \$700 to \$400 until March 31 in a bid to revive tourism in the region. Abercrombie & Kent managing director Kerry Golds says: "While lockdowns have allowed animals to roam more freely, they have also cut off crucial sources of funding and given poachers free rein to operate. Conservationists are hoping the pandemic can focus global attention on the need to protect biodiversity."



10
OF THE
BEST

DESTINATIONS FOR 2021

The most popular spots for
holidays next year, based
on Abta's latest survey

Spain (33%)
France (19%)
The US (17%)
Italy (16%)
Greece (14%)
Portugal (9%)
Germany (8%)
Croatia (5%)
The Netherlands (4%)
Australia (4%)

Source: Abta's Holiday Habits research 2020

