

The fab tour



Give your customers a ticket to ride by selling the glut of new UK and Europe tours for this year and next, writes **Laura French**

If there's one silver lining that has emerged over the past year, it's the new-found appreciation of how much there is to explore closer to home. From the rolling hills of the Highlands to the honey-hued cottages of the Cotswolds, there's certainly a lot to be getting on with right on our doorstep.

Operators have responded quickly, introducing a flurry of tours in the UK and Europe that get clients under the skin of places they think they already know. To help you navigate your way around the options, we've put together a guide to some of the highlights to look out for in three of the most popular destinations.

THE UK

With ongoing travel restrictions limiting our options abroad, it's little surprise the UK has become a hit among even the most-intrepid of globetrotters, and tour operators have been quick to develop offerings that take visitors beyond the standard sights.

Newmarket Holidays has launched six tours across the country, from explorations along Dorset's Jurassic Coast – including beer tasting at a brewery, a tour

of a gin distillery and a visit to the Isle of Purbeck, inspiration for Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five* – to a Beatles-themed trip in Liverpool.

Shearings has introduced 21 UK tours as part of its More Included collection, with highlights including island-hopping around the west coast of Scotland on a new trip through Ayrshire, and touring the Lake District by steam train, boat and on foot.

Intrepid Travel puts the emphasis on veering off the beaten track and supporting local communities. It has expanded its domestic range with eight recently announced itineraries, which include exploring Hadrian's Wall with a local, and canoeing and hiking in the Highlands on a Scotland Family Holiday.

Riviera Travel, Cosmos, Leger Holidays, Arena Rail Holidays and Just Go! Holidays have also upped their domestic product (page 22), while Contiki has brought out a series of Detour Mini Adventures with UK options. They range from a mini-break in Brighton, complete with a bottomless brunch, to Hiking and Bushcraft in the Lake District, where guests learn wilderness skills such as how to forage and build a campfire. ➤

DESTINATIONS

ESCORTED TOURS | UK & EUROPE



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Vineyards in Piedmont, Italy; Burgos Cathedral, Spain; red deer in the Isle of Arran, Scotland PICTURES: Shutterstock



fast fact

Explore has four new small-group itineraries, including a winter photography break to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone led by photographer David Short

ITALY

Farther afield, Italy is coming up trumps for several escorted touring operators, including Saga Holidays, which has introduced two no-fly tours to the country. One pairs Lake Garda with lesser-visited alternatives including Maggiore, Moro and Lugano; the other explores northwestern wine region Piedmont from a base in the small city of Biella.

G Adventures has also launched a trip to Piedmont. It combines hikes in the hills with wine tastings and other culinary experiences – not least a visit to Alba, famous for its white truffles – all from a single-centre base in the village of Alice Bel Colle. The operator has also added an Explore Southern Sicily trip that takes in Syracuse, Trapani and Palermo, including a guided tour of the Valley of the Temples and a visit to the 11th-century Monreale Cathedral, whose interior glimmers amid thousands of gold mosaic tiles.

Rail operators are getting involved too. Ffestiniog Travel has a new no-fly Trams and Trains tour through the heart of Italy that takes in Milan, Genoa, Rome, Naples and Turin, while Great Rail Journeys has introduced a Lakes and Mountains of Switzerland and Italy itinerary that has passengers ambling past the lakes of Lucerne, Como and Garda. Highlights include a ride on Europe's highest mountain railway, the Bernina Express, plus a cruise on Lake Como and wine tasting at a scenic Swiss vineyard.

BEST OF THE rest

The Scottish Highlands, Jersey, Yorkshire and Stratford-upon-Avon are focal points for a **Cosmos** collection called Stay and Explore, launched late last year, while **Leger**

Holidays has added itineraries including the Isle of Wight, the Orkneys, Cornwall and beyond. Small-group specialist **Rabbie's**

features a three-day Dingle, Killarney and Wild Atlantic Way tour, while **Arena Rail Holidays**

has unveiled new heritage tours including a five-day Yorkshire break.

Sister brands **Just Go! Holidays** and **National Holidays** have created

40 new itineraries between them, combining a series of tribute-act breaks with itineraries such as Blackpool Bright Lights, the Scottish Isles and Cruising Lake Windermere.

SPAIN

Despite its reputation for cheap-and-cheerful package breaks, Spain is also getting its fair share of attention from escorted touring operators.

Cox & Kings will help guests delve deep into the Basque Country on one of its new culture-focused European Spotlight tours. The seven-day tour takes in San Sebastian, Burgos (famous for its Unesco-listed cathedral) and the villages and farms of the rural Basque region, from a base in historic Bilbao.

Back-Roads Touring will also be whisking guests through northern Spain on its new Taste of the Camino coach tour, giving clients of all fitness levels a chance to see the highlights of the popular pilgrimage route. It visits Porto, Leon, Santander, Bilbao and beyond, as well as the iconic Santiago de Compostela – the end point of the Camino, marked out by its towering, elaborate cathedral and atmospheric stone buildings.

Riviera Travel, meanwhile, has introduced a Classical Spain itinerary homing in on Andalusia's Moorish-meets-Spanish culture with visits to Seville, Granada and Cordoba.

G Adventures is upping the game further with a Sailing the Canary Islands itinerary that will have guests living the high life as they cruise between Tenerife, La Gomera and La Palma. If there's an antidote to lockdown fatigue, it's surely having an exclusive yacht to look forward to, no? **TW**