

On the road again



Sell a socially-distanced road trip with **Laura French's** guide to self-drive holidays in Europe

There's nothing quite like getting out on the open road – windows down, music playing and ever-changing landscapes streaming before your eyes – as you motor from one unknown place to the next.

Which is why a self-drive is an excellent option for clients after an independent holiday where they can explore at their own pace, discover little-known treasures and make up for lost time by ticking off several places in one big trip – all while remaining in the safety of their own socially-distanced bubble.

Whether your clients are seeking a driving holiday straight from the UK or a fly-drive that'll take them off the beaten track, we've put together a guide to some of the best itineraries across Europe that will get them back out on the open road again.

BEST FOR...GETTING OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Where: Germany

Why: Christmas markets, Rhine cruises and city breaks might spring to mind when you think of Germany, but a self-drive gives clients the chance to dig a little deeper. Fred Holidays reservations manager Jan Alexander recommends a six-night German Fairytale Route that meanders from Frankfurt up to Bremen, with highlights including Marburg, a castle-topped university town; Kassel, home to a baroque palace; and Hamelin, a medieval town in Lower Saxony that's the origin of the Pied Piper tale.

Book it: From £699, including accommodation, car rental and return flights. It can also be tailor-made for clients wanting to drive their own car from the UK. fredholidays.co.uk ➤

DESTINATIONS

EUROPE | SELF-DRIVES

NEED TO KNOW

⚙ Most European car rental companies have a minimum age of 21, with a surcharge for under-25s, and drivers normally need to have had their licence for at least a year.

⚙ If clients are bringing their own car from the UK, they'll need to carry a European driving kit including a warning triangle, headlamp beam deflectors and GB sticker, as well as a Green Card as proof of insurance.



ABOVE: The Wicklow Mountains, Ireland PICTURE: Shutterstock

BEST FOR...LONG, SCENIC DRIVES

Where: Ireland

Why: From the Ring of Kerry to the Causeway Coast, Ireland seems to have been made for long, lazy drives through billowing landscapes. Abercrombie & Kent combines the highlights in an eight-night Tastes of Ireland self-drive from Dublin to Galway, which takes clients through the Wicklow Mountains, Cork, Blarney Castle, Kerry, Connemara, County Kildare and beyond. Along the way, they'll enjoy Irish cooking classes, whiskey tasting and a tour of The Burren Smokehouse to learn how smoked salmon is prepared, with lavish accommodation including The K Club, a French-style chateau famous for its two championship golf courses.

Book it: From £3,929 per person, including accommodation, activities and some meals. For a no-fly option, Irish Ferries operates services to Dublin from Holyhead, and P&O Ferries sails from Liverpool. abercrombiekent.co.uk

BEST FOR...CULTURE

Where: Croatia

Why: Croatia's historic walled towns, white-sand shores and dramatic karst-filled landscapes tick just about every box, and with its compact size, good roads and clear signage, it's easy to get around, says Nicky Shafe,



JEANETTE HARPER director of international travel and partnerships, Avis Budget Group

"Agents are asking me if Brexit has affected car rental in the EU and I am happy to say 'not much'! UK drivers won't need any extra paperwork or an international driving permit. Any required equipment, such as a hazard triangle, will be supplied at the car rental location. Anyone hiring a car in the UK will need to tell the company when they're making the reservation if they want to take it to Europe. The only post-Brexit change is if a customer wants to hire a car in the UK and take it across the Channel, as additional documents are then required, but the car rental company will supply these. My top tip would be to not leave it to the last minute when booking car hire. Lockdown has affected company's fleet sizes and if the 2021 season gets moving sooner than predicted, there may be a shortage. It's also worth suggesting our Avis Preferred priority service, so customers can fast-track through queues, and check how much luggage they're taking to make sure they get a big enough vehicle."

marketing manager for Prestige Holidays. The operator has launched a new fly-drive here in response to growing demand, with key stops including the traditional hilltop village of Motovun, culture-rich Zagreb, Plitvice Lakes National Park and the Istrian capital of Pula, famed for its majestic Roman amphitheatre.

Book it: From £989 per person, including four-star accommodation, daily breakfast and flights. prestigeholidays.co.uk ➤

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Pula Arena, Croatia; flamenco dancers in Plaza de España, Seville, Spain; Agerola, a village on the 'Path of Gods' on the Amalfi Coast, Italy **PICTURES:** Shutterstock/leonov.o

BEST FOR...COASTAL VIEWS

Where: Italy

Why: Plunging cliffs, turquoise coasts, soaring mountains and whitewashed fishing villages make the Amalfi Coast worthy of a multi-stop itinerary, and for those looking to combine it with Puglia, Citalia has the answer – an eight-day self-drive that takes in Amalfi Town, Positano and Praiano, then hops across to the other side of the 'boot' to explore rural Puglia. Experiences on the coast include a hike along the ocean-fringed 'Path of the Gods' and a visit to the Emerald Grotto, a jade-coloured pool. Over in Puglia clients can amble through the White City's maze of streets, visit Unesco-listed Alberobello to see its famous cone-shaped trulli houses, and explore the baroque city of Lecce, with ample time to stop and sample local delicacies along the way.

Book it: From £949, including accommodation, daily breakfast, car hire and flights in September. citalia.com

BEST FOR...LATE-SEASON SUN

Where: Spain

Why: From the heritage-filled villages of the north to the sun-soaked beaches of the south, Spain is impressively diverse and there's no better way to get to know it than on an independent tour. Direct those after a late-season escape to Andalusia, where Brightwater Holidays offers a self-drive version of its Gardens & Architecture group trip. The eight-day itinerary takes in the region's Moorish influences – best seen at the elaborate Alhambra Palace – as well as the mountain villages of the Sierra Nevada, the arched columns of Cordoba and the colourful tiled courtyards of Seville, showing visitors an alternative side to southern Spain and taking them beneath the skin of this culturally rich region.

Book it: From £995, including accommodation, daily breakfast and flights. brightwaterholidays.com **TW**

BEST OF THE rest



Chamonix: Inghams offers self-drive ski trips for clients seeking a single-centre stay they can drive to straight from home. Seven nights at the Hotel Rocky Pop in Les Houches, near Chamonix (pictured), France, costs from £703, including Eurotunnel crossing, departing on January 15, 2022. ingham.co.uk



The Azores: Amid growing interest in the Portuguese islands, Regent Holidays has introduced two fly-drives. A 10-day itinerary exploring the volcanic Pico Island (pictured) starts at £1,725, including all flights, B&B accommodation and car hire, plus guided walks, wine tasting and whale spotting. regent-holidays.co.uk



Greece: For clients wanting to twin spectacular scenery with intriguing history, it's hard to beat Greece's Peloponnese region. Inntravel offers a 12-night self-drive here combining ancient cities such as Olympia and Epidavros with medieval castles, forested mountains and plenty more, with prices from £1,195 per person including B&B accommodation, car hire and maps. inntravel.co.uk