

ASK THE experts

City breaks are a mainstay of the short-haul market, but how are they faring in the pandemic? **Katie McGonagle** reports



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1 “There’s more confidence around UK than Europe”

City-break specialist Osprey Holidays, sister brand to Ski Independence, was founded in 1973 as part of a wider travel agency group. The agency business was sold in 1985, but Osprey was retained and is still owned and run by the same family. Bennett has worked with the company since 2002.



Michael Bennett
managing director, Osprey Holidays

Osprey Holidays has both European short breaks and UK product, and we’re seeing more confidence for summer UK bookings than Europe. The majority of requests are for autumn or winter 2021 and into 2022, which shows a sensible approach to possible restrictions over the summer.

In Europe, the most popular destinations rarely change – Paris, Barcelona, Venice, Rome, Berlin, Krakow – as clients look for a blend of culture, art and history, plus good restaurants and cafes.

In the UK, London and Edinburgh (pictured) top the city list, with coastal and highland Scotland, the Lake District, the New Forest and Devon and Cornwall most popular away from the city. We’ve seen a trend towards slightly longer durations, most notably in UK bookings, especially in Scotland with itineraries like the North Coast 500.

It’s difficult to predict with certainty how a city break might differ post-pandemic, but it can’t be the same. The main difference might be that cities are quieter, and museums and attractions will have smarter ticketing and visitor management systems in place to avert queueing and overcrowding. It’s essential clients accept things may be different across every element of their itinerary.

If customers are nervous about travelling again, Osprey can suggest quieter European destinations or a UK break to a more-remote destination to rebuild confidence in travelling.

2 “Clients have benefited from cities being so quiet”

Citalia offers a selection of Italian city breaks with three to five-star hotels in central locations. While Venice, Florence and Rome are popular, Green recommends smaller cities such as Bologna, Ravenna and Turin for a shorter stay, and says Naples is a favourite thanks to its vibrancy and proximity to Pompeii.



Heather Green
regional destination manager, Citalia

Clients who travelled with us last year benefited from it being so quiet – it’s been a good time to appreciate the cities, and locals have been delighted to welcome tourists.

Numbers have been restricted at key sites so it’s best to book ahead to confirm your place. As we know from our experience here in the UK, things can change, so it’s important that customers are prepared to be a bit flexible.

Venice, Florence and Rome are our most-popular destinations and are often the first part of a multi-centre holiday: Venice and Lake Garda, and Rome and Sorrento are particularly popular twin-centres. It’s easy to move between the cities on the high-speed train network, which is very quick and efficient.

We are seeing a trend for smaller properties and longer durations, with some customers booking from mid-summer 2021 while others are preferring to wait until 2022.

Agents could look to promote some of the lesser-known cities to alleviate any fears that crowds might be a problem. For example, the beautiful foodie city of Siena (pictured) could be visited on a twin-centre with Viareggio. Our Travel with Confidence promise means we work with trusted partners to ensure the hotels and holidays we are recommending are safe.

3 “Iceland and Christmas markets are popular”

Jet2CityBreaks is the biggest UK-based operator of European city breaks, with 32 city destinations on sale and packages that include flights, hold luggage and airport transfers. The operator recently released a Christmas markets programme featuring regional routes such as Belfast-Prague, Birmingham-Berlin and Glasgow-Budapest.



Alan Cross
head of trade sales, Jet2holidays

Following the prime minister’s announcement of a roadmap out of lockdown, we experienced a surge in bookings across the board, including for our leisure city destinations. We’re seeing a notable increase in bookings from July, which continues through the rest of the summer holidays, as well as winter 2021-22 and next summer.

As always, we have responded to demand and expanded our portfolio to include some exciting city-break destinations. These include the historic city of Athens for summer 2022 and the bustling Portuguese capital, Lisbon, where services are due to commence this September. We’re seeing high demand for these new destinations in addition to classics such as Rome, Barcelona, Budapest, Prague and Paris, as well as cultural centres like Krakow and Dubrovnik.

Our Christmas markets and Iceland (pictured) programmes are also proving popular as people look to make next Christmas extra-special or visit a bucket-list destination such as Iceland.

As well making customers aware of additional safety measures at the airport and while in the air, agents should advise clients to familiarise themselves with the safety requirements of their destination. At a time when assurance is more important than ever, independent agents should remind customers that Jet2CityBreaks packages are Atol-protected, giving customers peace of mind.