

'Tis the Season

Sell the UK and Ireland at any time of the year, writes Laura French

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It's a common irony that you see less of your own country than you do the rest of the world, especially when you've got the word 'travel' in your job title.

But while jetting off to exotic, far-flung islands and picture-perfect beaches is still pretty dreamy, the UK and Ireland have their own prizes to offer up too – and it's not only in the summer months that they come into bloom. From light shows in winter to flower festivals in spring, carnivals in summer to Christmas markets in winter, our home shores are radiant year-round – if you know where to go and when.

To help you wise up on exactly that, we've rounded up some of the best holidays across our glorious region, helping you sell it to clients in every season – starting with what's still in store for the rest of this year.

► AUTUMN

Experience Blackpool

Illuminations: Crisp blue skies, red-leaved trees and bright green fields – autumn in the UK can be spectacular, and there's plenty going on to help you make the most of it.

Among the highlights is

Blackpool Illuminations, a free event approaching its 140th year that sees the city's six-mile promenade shine like a kaleidoscope with more than 500,000 lasers, lights and lamps.

This year's switch-on will see Britney Spears entertaining crowds as the city's key landmarks start to glow, with Shearings offering tours to experience it from £172 per person for five days, including an evening tram ride and a visit to Liverpool.

Visit Tennerfest: It's the food that really shines in autumn, with freshly harvested produce filling restaurants across the country. For the best way to experience it all, Premier Holidays recommends heading to the Channel Islands during Tennerfest – a six-week food festival that sees restaurants, hotels and cafes in both Jersey and Guernsey serve low-cost, fixed-price menus to showcase local cuisine.

"From Jersey Royal potatoes to fresh seafood, home-grown produce to delicious ice cream, you can try all sorts of local food, with menus from just £10," says Beverley Scarr, short-haul general manager for the operator.

Go foraging: If clients want to take things back one step and

see the origins of what they're eating, suggest some wild foraging. It's become something of a trend of late, with hotels offering experiences ranging from garlic-picking to mushroom-hunting.

Haven has opened up the experience to families on a budget with foraging trips led by rangers across its parks. The option joins several other autumnal activities on Haven's Nature Rockz programme, including fire-lighting, nature trails and survival skills workshops, at several of its rural properties including Haggerston Castle in Northumberland and Allhallows in Kent.

Cruise the Hebrides: Don't overlook the more 'summery' activities. Autumn is an ideal time to get out there and explore the UK's lush greenery without the crowds, and you can find some excellent bargains in the cooler months.

St Hilda Sea Adventures offers an autumn discount on its Scottish Castles and Sheltered Sea Lochs cruise around the Hebrides – taking passengers along the Sound of Mull via sea lochs, ancient castles and whisky distilleries – at a time when the hills are alive with colour and the

wildlife is at its most active, with prices for a five-night trip from £750 per person in September and October.

► WINTER

Browse Christmas markets:

Winter in the UK is magical, with colourful Christmas markets, cosy pop-up bars and heart-warming carol concerts giving you an excuse to sell a UK city break with a twist.

Bath has become something of a go-to for December with its giant Christmas tree and German-style market huts selling quaint little handicrafts, drinks and gifts. Titan Travel packages it up with a visit to see the thousands of Chinese lanterns that illuminate the grounds of Longleat House over the Christmas weekend, with prices from £1,149 per person for five days (departing December 23).

York is just as spectacular, with the annual St Nicholas Christmas Fair bringing even more charm to the city's medieval, cobbled lanes – all spiced mulled wine, sweet treats and twinkling lights spilling out from traditional wooden chalets.

Leger Holidays combines it with a visit to the Christmas-themed Dickensian Festival

PICTURES: VISITENGLAND/EDEN PROJECT, LUKE ROGERS; AELT/CJONBUCKLE; HAVEN

3 OF THE BEST FESTIVALS

Notting Hill Carnival

With feather-bedecked costumes, a huge colourful parade and jerk chicken stalls en masse, Notting Hill Carnival is about as close to the Caribbean as you can get without leaving sunny London.

This year: August 26-27.

The Hay Festival

Spring sees Wales's biggest literary festival descend on Hay-on-Wye with talks, readings and everything else book-related.

Next year: May 23 to June 2.

Edinburgh Fringe Festival

Theatre, music, dance and, of course, comedy – it wouldn't be summer without the Edinburgh Fringe, so use it to sell this charming city. This year: August 3-27.

➔ in Grassington and the Christkindlmarkt in Leeds, where stollen, bratwurst, gingerbread and glühwein are stacked high on stalls straight out of Frankfurt (four days from £279 per person).

Celebrate Hogmanay: The fun doesn't end with Christmas, though. In the lead-up to New Year's Day, you'll find one of the UK's biggest festivals: Scottish Hogmanay.

Edinburgh is at the heart of the revelry with 150,000 people flocking to see its festivities, including a huge torchlit procession and all-out fireworks display on New Year's Eve, plus a fancy-dress plunge in the icy cold River Forth on New Year's Day.

Contiki, Busabout and Topdeck all offer packages for younger clients wanting to see it in style, while Shearings offers a trip to experience the celebrations in Inverness with afternoon tea, champagne, cocktails and a gourmet dinner, complete with all the bagpipes and dancing you'd expect at one of Scotland's biggest parties.

Get spooked: It's not only about the festive period, of course. Winter is an ideal time to try something a little different, and London is chock-full of spooky night-time tours that you can sell when the evening temperatures start to drop. Evan Evans Tours

offers a Jack the Ripper and Haunted London trip, taking daredevil clients on a guided tour around the East End of the city to learn all about the area's bloody history. The tour costs from £37 per person, including a fish-and-chip dinner, and runs



PICTURE: JERSEY TOURISM/GARETH SAMBRIDGE



ABOVE: The Tennerfest food festival in Jersey and Guernsey

LEFT: Blackpool Illuminations



This year's Blackpool Illuminations switch-on will see Britney Spears entertaining the crowds

from November 1 to March 31. It's also probably not the first activity your clients might think of, which makes it a good one to push.

► SPRING

Drink a Guinness in Dublin: St Patrick's Day merriments bring clients flocking to Ireland, and there's a variety of commissionable trips on hand in the capital. Contiki and Topdeck lead the pack, taking clients from London to Dublin with a guide on hand to help them get the most out of their visit and live it up Irish-style with colourful parades,

flamboyant costumes, carnival-style street parties and Guinness aplenty. Just put March 17 in your diary for next year.

Go on an egg hunt: Easter has its own set of festivities, with annual family-friendly egg hunts at castles, palaces and National Trust properties across the UK, but for those wanting to make a full getaway of it, suggest a trip to Butlin's. Its three resorts will be hosting various activities in 2019 including an all-singing, all-dancing Easter Parade, a chocolate-filled arts and crafts session and an egg hunt. Guests coming at this time of year will also be able to see the Spring Farmyard, home to donkeys, rabbits, piglets and other cute creatures (prices from £94 per person based on four sharing a two-bedroom apartment in Minehead, for a trip starting on April 5, 2019).

See the UK in bloom: Spring is also the time when the UK's gardens burst into colour, and

gardens across the country, from Chatsworth to Chelsea, get out their glad rags and put on their flower shows.

Great Rail Journeys offers a Cornwall Spring Flower Show trip for guests wanting to see the daffodils, magnolias and myriad other flora filling Cornwall's picturesque Boconnoc Estate in April, combining it with visits to the Eden Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan, and adding in a ride on the Bodmin & Wenford Steam Railway (from £595 per person, departing April 5, 2019).

Just Go Holidays, meanwhile, takes clients to the Cotswolds on a gardens and villages-themed trip as part of its new National Trust range, stopping at Hidcote and Snowhill Manor Garden and exploring the grey-stone, quintessentially English towns that scatter the region, with prices from £510 per person self-drive or £655 by coach (for four nights' half-board).



LEFT: Fairground at Butlin's Minehead

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SUMMER

Watch Wimbledon: Nothing says summer quite like strawberries and cream, with Murray on the big screen and crowds thronging under a sunny sky. Tickets for the real deal aren't easy to come by, so suggest a pre-arranged package from the likes of Newmarket Holidays for those wanting to do it without the hassle. The operator offers a seat on No 1 Court over Finals weekend, with ample time to stroll around the grounds, combining it with a visit to Royal Windsor the next day (departures from all over the country; 2019 dates and prices yet to be announced).

Take a hike: From the Peak District to the Lakes, the UK is blessed with places to get outdoorsy and there's no better time than summer to get out and enjoy it all. Wales is chock-full of hiking trails, not least among the sweeping, lake-studded



Nothing says summer quite like Wimbledon, with strawberries and cream, and Murray on the big screen

mountains of Brecon Beacons National Park and the iconic peaks of Snowdonia. While going it alone is totally doable, a guided tour can make it that little more accessible. HF Holidays



LEFT: Buckingham Palace

FAR LEFT: Snowdonia

Rooms with a guided tour of the 39-acre garden plus a stay at the four-star Cavendish Hotel, from £135 per person on select dates in August and September.

Edinburgh Tattoo: More than 13 million people have attended the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo since it began in 1950, and Newmarket Holidays says its tours centred around the festival are among its most popular UK summer breaks. Leger Holidays, Shearings and Super Break all offer it too, while Fred Olsen Cruise Lines pairs it with the Orkney Islands, Isle of Mull, Belfast and beyond on an eight-night cruise (from £1,329 per person via Saga Holidays, departing August 13, 2019). Expect military bands, singers, dancing troupes and the poignant refrain of the lone piper against a castle backdrop at one of Scotland's top events, running from August 3-25 this year. **tw**

offers tours to both, with prices from £309 per person for its Snowdonia tour taking in the summits of Glyder Fach, the Nantlle Ridge and Snowdon, and staying at the National Trust's

idyllic Craflywn Hall country house (August 31 departure). **Tour Buckingham Palace:** The Queen's home opens its doors to the public in summer when the family aren't in residence,

and the gardens – home to more than 350 types of wild flowers, 200 trees and a three-acre lake – spring into bloom. Super Break offers a mini-break to see it all, packaging a ticket to the State

DISCOVER

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