

No flies on these tours

Savvy travellers are keeping their feet on the ground with no-fly tours, writes Joanna Booth

Sometimes, getting there is half the fun.

Don't just take my word for it. From the ancient Chinese proverb that runs 'the journey

is the reward', to Aerosmith howling 'life's a journey, not a destination', the world agrees. And if you think Aerosmith has nothing to teach you about travel, well – they probably know a thing or two about making the most of their time on a tour bus. Because the journey's the thing, when it comes to no-fly tours.

Sure, some nervous flyers will initially book one because it allows them to

avoid an aircraft. But for many, they are a way of turning the travelling part of a trip into a pleasure, and starting the holiday the minute they leave home.

▶ NOT JUST HOT AIR

Avoiding flying is the most obvious benefit, but there's actually a whole host of reasons to take a no-fly tour that extend beyond steering clear of flights and airports.

Those who don't live near an airport can avoid lengthy transfers. Plenty of operators offer local departure points or home pick-ups on no-fly tours, so clients can kick back and relax straight

away, sometimes from their own front door.

Shearings, for example, offers pick-ups from more than 650 joining points, and a free home-connect service is included in its Grand Tourer itineraries.

Cost-conscious travellers will be pleasantly surprised by the competitive pricing of no-fly tours – Leger Holidays includes many meals and excursions in its prices to maximise value – and the environmentally conscious will be similarly happy to see that ➔



PICTURE: RIVIERA TRAVEL



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ESCORTED TOURS NO-FLY TOURS DESTINATIONS



LEFT:
Coach tour
for 18-30s
in Europe

RIGHT:
Contiki, Paris

BELOW:
Saint Basil's
Cathedral,
Moscow



→ they can knock the carbon cost of flying on the head too. There's no need to sacrifice comfort, either, as most operators now use spacious, comfortable vehicles with air-conditioning and reclining seats, and even seat-back TVs.

Yes, classic escorted touring specialists popular with the over-50s may be particularly strong in this sector, but they aren't the only ones. Topdeck Travel, for the 18-39 market, has a range of no-fly London-to-London itineraries, and they are most popular with first-time travellers. Its European Inspired trip visits 12 countries over 26 days, staying in a mix of campsites and hostels, from £1,695.

Other itineraries include a journey to Greece to sail among the islands, and a Christmas escape to Europe.

Similarly, Contiki offers no-fly tours for the youth market, from nine days' skiing in Austria from £549, to a four-day, £355 Christmas in Paris trip, alongside traditional European circuits.

Donna Jeavons, sales & marketing director at Contiki, says: "With a state-of-the-art coach with free Wi-Fi, charge points and a pumping sound system, Contiki's no-fly trips to Europe are great value for money. Travellers will find their holiday budget stretches that bit further, which means any savings can be spent on more unforgettable experiences in some of Europe's must-see destinations."

COVERING GROUND

Choosing not to fly doesn't mean clients have to resign themselves to never leaving British shores.

Leger's choice of 265 no-fly tours can transport passengers as far east as Russia, as far south as Sicily and as far north as the Arctic Circle (on the Grand Russian Spectacular, Fire and Ice, and Arctic Circle & Land of the Midnight Sun tours respectively). These are all distances that

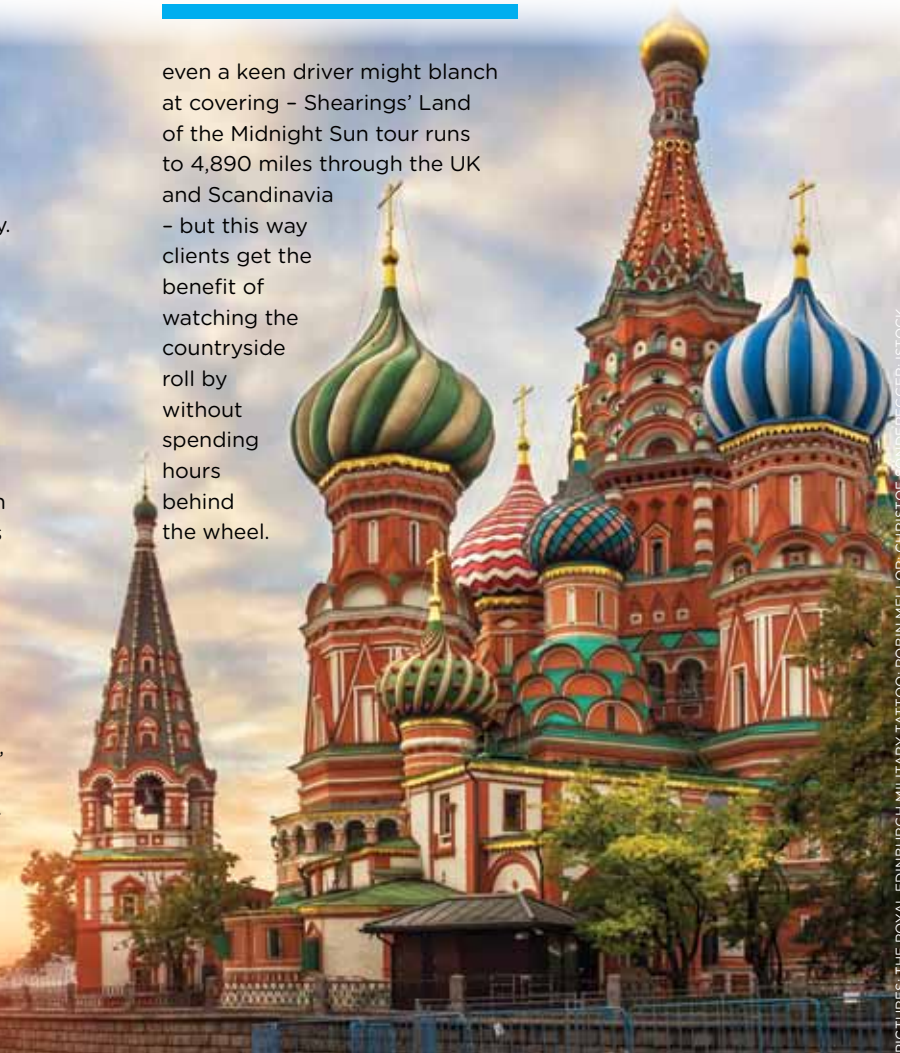


Any savings can be spent on more unforgettable experiences in must-see destinations

It's not all about chasing the miles. Many of the most popular tours in this market are in western Europe. Riviera Travel's best-seller is Timeless Provence, which allows guests to visit Avignon, Arles and the Camargue with a choice of either four or five-star hotel stays.

However, many operators →

even a keen driver might blanch at covering - Shearings' Land of the Midnight Sun tour runs to 4,890 miles through the UK and Scandinavia - but this way clients get the benefit of watching the countryside roll by without spending hours behind the wheel.



PICTURES: THE ROYAL EDINBURGH MILITARY TATTOO; ROBIN MELLOR; CHRISTOPHER REEDER; ISTOCK



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→ report that customers are also keen to explore home shores, with the British Isles very popular as a no-fly destination. Trafalgar has 10 trips covering the UK and Ireland, using ferry crossings where necessary, including the expansive Britain and Ireland Panorama. This 16-day trip visits 37 cities across England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, reaching north to the Isle of Skye, west to the Ring of Kerry and all the way south to Dartmoor.

For something shorter, sister brand Insight Vacations' Gems of Britain is a five-day break that still packs in London, Stratford-upon-Avon, York, Edinburgh, the Lakes, Liverpool, Chester, Cardiff, Bath and Stonehenge.

Less whistle-stop itineraries can be found; Back-Roads Touring's seven-day Corners of Cornwall tour delves into the county's maritime heritage, rural beauty and culinary tradition.

THE TRAIN'S NO STRAIN

Some operators, including Riviera Travel and Travelsphere, forgo long coach journeys for Eurostar rail connections to make the jump to the continent. Others, such as Great Rail Journeys and Ffestiniog Travel, have options that also make the train the star throughout the trip.

"The practical, convenient reasons for travelling by train are numerous," says Ffestiniog general manager Maria Cook. "No need to check in hours before travel; no luggage or carry-on restrictions; you arrive in a central location so no onward transfers are



There is no denying that travelling by train boasts an appealing old-fashioned charm

necessary; and it is a sociable way to travel that allows you to chat to fellow passengers, read a book or take a stroll. There is also no denying that travelling by train boasts an appealing old-fashioned charm."

Ffestiniog offers both connoisseur tours for those with a passion for trains, including a new itinerary exploring the tram systems of southeast France, and grand tours, for those who like to explore by rail. For the latter, Switzerland is the most popular destination. Customers are all offered tickets including travel from their home railway station.

Great Rail Journeys has a host of iconic railway journeys and steam train trips, but also emphasises that not all its customers are die-hard rail obsessives. New itineraries include the 10-day All Inclusive Tuscan Villa trip, with a relaxing stay in a rural property and low-key sightseeing bookended by rail travel, from £2,495. Sister value brand Rail Discoveries offers a similarly chilled-out holiday on the French Riviera, the eight-day St Raphael & the Cote D'Azur, from £875.



ABOVE:
Edinburgh Tattoo

BELOW:
Switzerland



NO-FLY NICHES

Niche and special-interest markets are very well represented in the no-fly sector, and these types of holidays are great introductions for those who haven't previously taken a tour.

The majority of Newmarket Holidays' no-fly trips are themed breaks in the UK, from heritage and steam railways to overnight trips to flower shows, sporting events or concerts. Some of the most popular are Diana: Her Fashion Story at Kensington Palace; Wimbledon Tennis Championship breaks; and the Edinburgh Tattoo.

Shearings has introduced Grand Prix holidays for 2018, and Leger Holidays is famous for its multitude of battlefields tours, including the best-selling four-day All Quiet on the Western Front itinerary, visiting the major First World War battlefields of Flanders and France. Travelsphere's similar Battlefields of France and Flanders by Rail is equally one of its most popular no-fly options.

Sister brand Just You offers solo travellers 26 no-fly tours across five countries, including European short breaks, numerous UK festive holidays and the active Walking the Wild Atlantic Way in Ireland.

Adventure fans can find group tours to suit in the UK too, from the likes of Wilderness Scotland. The operator has guided walking and cycling trips north of the border, plus more unusual options including sea kayaking, sailing, and wildlife spotting adventures.