

Try something new

Take the plunge into selling a new sector of travel and watch your sales soar, writes **Katie McGonagle**

When travel's original entrepreneur, Thomas Cook, spied an opportunity to earn a few shillings selling tours by rail, little did he know those humble mid-19th-century beginnings would herald a new age of travel.

Nearly two centuries later, enterprising agents have even more chances to spot new business opportunities that will increase sales and attract new customers. Whether you're a cruise newbie, have never sold solo tours or simply want fresh ideas for summer sun, we look at how to branch out into some of the most promising – and most lucrative – areas of travel.

CASH IN ON CRUISE

Why sell cruise: Cruising is perfectly set up for agents to sell, with generous commission and the industry's most-engaged trade teams providing training, ship visits and sales support. If you haven't got to grips with holidays on water, it's not too late: with more than 20 ships launching this year, ever-increasing capacity and great-value fares mean time invested now will pay dividends in future. **How to stand out:** Mainstream ocean-going ships dominate the cruise sector, but newcomers can make it more manageable by starting with a specific line or niche area such as luxury, river or expedition. ➤

PICTURE: DREW D

CRUISE SALES FOR BEGINNERS

A six-month training programme, Celebrity Cruises for Beginners, in partnership with *Travel Weekly*, invited agents to build confidence in selling cruise, and is due to run again from this spring. "With consumer demand rapidly increasing, there's never been a better time to sell cruise," says Leigh Thomson, head of marketing and sales, Celebrity Cruises. "People who go on cruises often get hooked, so get them on the right ship and they end up being a client for life." Here's what agents who took part had to say.



Katrina Bevan,
Barrhead Travel

"My confidence has grown so

much since completing the programme – now I can talk to customers about the different types of ships, itineraries and dining experiences and make it more personal by sharing my experiences on *Celebrity Apex*. I have since completed training with Disney Cruise Line, Virgin Voyages and am an ambassador for Royal Caribbean. Get on board and grow your knowledge, then the product will sell itself."



Gemma Higgs,
Travel Counsellors

"Cruise is new to me and that's why this programme appealed. I had preconceived ideas that cruising was for mature clients and those with limited mobility, but they can be perfect for families and those who want adventure too. I now proactively sell cruise and I couldn't believe the facilities and attractions on board."



ABOVE: BodyHoliday in Saint Lucia has rooms designed for solo travellers PICTURE: Alex Lukey Photography

Will Sarson, head of river and ocean cruise at Riviera Travel, says: "There is a large untapped market for river cruise – both for new-to-cruise guests and those who have only taken ocean cruises in the past. Research what each river cruise line offers – once agents break it down, they'll discover many unique selling points."

Top tip: Make the most of agent resources specifically targeted at beginners. Andy Harmer, UK and Ireland managing director at Clia, says: "Cruise lines are focused on growing their business through agents and that benefits everyone. The Clia website contains a range of new-to-cruise materials to suit all agents. We recently added a section supporting new agents with 12 starter topics covered via short videos and how-to guides, plus a new cruise glossary, cruise line 'family tree' and guide to the top reasons to cruise."

TOURING TAKES OFF

Why sell touring and adventure: High-value bookings, commission on every element of the package and surging demand for sustainable, community-based experiences mean there's never been a better time to learn about this up-and-coming area. Research by the Association of Touring & Adventure Suppliers (Atas) found its members' revenues per tour were 18% higher in 2023 than in 2022, with an average commission of £639 per booking. Operators are reporting even higher booking values this year, with Italy, India, South Africa, Vietnam and the US the bestsellers for 2024.

How to stand out: Familiarise yourself with each brand's USPs as the experience varies widely depending on group size, destination, transport and age range.

Many operators offer substantial discounts for agents keen to experience the product on their own holidays, for unbeatable first-hand insight and a chance to reassure customers about the joys of travelling in a group.

Top tip: Sign up for Atas membership (free for agents) at touringandadventure.com to access training modules, tour operator campaigns, an agent toolkit, webinars and details of events and the annual Atas Conference.

SUMMER - HOT OR NOT?

Why sell summer alternatives: There's lots to love about sunny beach breaks in the Med, but last year's summer heatwave meant that peak-season demand started to shift towards milder climes. As climate change reshapes weather patterns, those bestselling beaches will extend their shoulder seasons, while the likes of Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Scandinavia will grow in popularity during summer. Last year, Denmark saw a record number of UK travellers with a 26.9% rise in bed nights year on year, peaking in August amid the 'coolcation' trend.

How to stand out: Brush up on lakes and mountains-based itineraries and refresh training on key European destinations now, so you have the knowledge at your fingertips.

Top tip: Summer can be a more affordable time to travel, according to Alex Herrmann, UK and Ireland director at Switzerland Tourism. He says: "Summer in the Swiss Alps is a fantastic alternative to beach destinations, especially for families and active travellers. Walking, hiking, summer tobogganing, rope parks and activities are offered in mountain resorts, and lakes,

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Superkilen park, Copenhagen, Denmark; Ephesus, Turkey; Virgin Voyages; Celebrity Edge-class ships

PICTURES: Sophia Bergholm; Annapurna Mellor; Virgin Voyages/Melanie Acevedo; Celebrity Cruises



rivers and pools ensure swimming and watersports are possible too. Rates are generally lower than in winter, especially towards the end of August and early September when kids in most European countries are back in school.”

SELLING TO SOLOS

Why sell solo travel: “Solo travel continues to be very popular among customers and women are the driving force,” says Hazel McGuire, UK and Ireland general manager at Intrepid Travel. “More than half

of our bookings are from solo travellers and nearly 70% of those are women.” Solo travellers have long been a core audience for adventure brands such as Explore and G Adventures, plus specialist touring operators including Solos, Just You and Friendship Travel. An emerging area, however, is hotel-based holidays, with hotel groups dropping single supplements or designing rooms with individual guests in mind, such as the Solo Garden View Rooms at

BodyHoliday in Saint Lucia.

How to stand out: Recognise that solo travellers aren’t all singles – couples with differing interests, career-break travellers and the newly retired are also key.

Top tip: Emphasise affordability, safety and security, says Brian Young, G Adventures’ managing director EMEA. “There is no ‘single supplement’ as we match travellers up with same-sex roommates – this can make a huge difference to budgets with the added benefit of potentially making friends for life. Travelling with a small-group operator also allows solo travellers to step outside their comfort zone, try new things and immerse themselves in new cultures, while knowing they are safe within a group.”

EXPERIENCE IS ALL

Why sell experiential travel: Sightseeing simply doesn’t cut it anymore – today’s travellers want total cultural immersion, whether that’s picking up skills in a cooking class, partying

INSIDER insight



Karl Douglas,
co-owner,
Beverley
Travel

Yorkshire-based Beverley Travel has seen touring and adventure bookings grow from 15%-20% of total revenue in 2022 to 25% in 2023-24. Co-owner Douglas began focusing on the sector after meeting suppliers at the 2019 Atas Conference. He says: “It’s absolutely critical to our business, we wouldn’t have the turnover we have without touring. The experiences, the value and the fact that the majority of suppliers have price parity is great for the customer, but also great for us as agents. It has taken time to build knowledge, experience and confidence in the team so it’s not an overnight thing. It’s about finding the right holiday for the client, not just selling a specific set of itineraries or suppliers.”



Ashley Dellow,
head of
retail sales,

Leger Shearings Group
“The great thing about touring holidays is they make agents’ jobs easier. The travel is sorted, all the components are pieced together, the itinerary is planned and they’re usually fully escorted so there’s someone to answer questions. We have a library of marketing collateral, window posters and social media assets, which agents can use to promote sales.”

ASK THE expert

MARTYN SUMNERS
executive director,
Aito (The Specialist Travel Association)



“Specialist travel is going from strength to strength, with consumers looking for a wider range of experiences and more active and adventurous holidays. It might be nerve-racking to sell something that you haven’t experienced personally, but Aito tour operators are there to guide agents and customers through the process. It’s also highly lucrative as customers are always seeking that next experience – don’t be afraid to deliver it to them.”

DESTINATIONS

TAKE A LEAP | BOOST YOUR SALES

3 BUNGEE JUMPING TRIPS

Sell an exhilarating trip to clients keen to take a leap themselves, writes Lina Molloholli

Bloukrans Bridge, South Africa

The highest bungee jump bridge in the world is Bloukrans Bridge, in Tsitsikamma National Park. It towers 216 metres above the gorge.

Book it: A 10-day Garden Route tour costs from £879, departing April 26. encounterstravel.com

Tara River Bridge, Montenegro

Tara River Canyon is Europe's deepest river canyon and a Unesco World Heritage Site. Freefall 152 metres from the Tara River Bridge over rushing waters.

Book it: A seven-night Secret Balkans trip costs from £1,595, departing October 6. vjv.com

Kawarau Bridge, New Zealand

This spot near Queenstown is the birthplace of bungee jumping. Thrill-seekers can take the ultimate leap of faith (pictured) from a height of 43 metres above the turquoise waters of the Kawarau River.

Book it: A 29-day Highlights of Australia and New Zealand trip costs from £4,903, departing May 9. gadventures.com



PICTURE: Shutterstock/Martin Helgemoir



ABOVE: Arranging unique experiences, like proposing at Sydney Opera House, can help you stand out to clients

with locals at a festival, having a traditional hammam experience or getting hands-on with conservation.

How to stand out: Fancy popping the question on stage at the Sydney Opera House or being a 'diva for a day' complete with hair, make-up and costume fittings behind the scenes of the Aussie icon? These eye-catching activities – bookable by agents via Cultural Attractions of Australia – are emblematic of how experiential travel can pique customers' curiosity and provide a starting point for a conversation.

Top tip: There are myriad ways to bring travel experiences to life for you and your customers, even if you haven't had the chance to try them yourself. Sign up for training webinars, watch YouTube videos and explore online resources such as Inspiring Travel's new podcast, where destination specialists offer insider tips on how to make the most of time in the Caribbean, Italy, New Zealand and the Maldives.

TRAIN AND GAIN

Why sell rail holidays: Forget the so-called 'golden age' of train travel – now is the time to rejoice

in rail with a new wave of European sleeper trains and 'bucket-list' journeys around the world. "Last year was our company's best yet and demand continues to grow," says Anna Davies, director of partnership marketing at Railbookers. "Customers are looking to experience a different way of exploring destinations; you see so much more when you take the train and it's a fantastic way to celebrate special occasions."

How to stand out: You don't need to spend hours poring over train timetables – call on expert knowledge from the likes of Great Rail Journeys, Wendy Wu Tours' new rail programme or Railbookers, which can arrange three-way calls to help agents answer customers' questions on the spot and close the sale.

Top tip: Growing demand for slow, sustainable travel ties in with the rise of rail. Intrepid Travel has cut 4,000 flights from its 2024 portfolio by swapping internal air travel to public transport, and has introduced its first flight-free tour (from London to Madrid), so sustainably minded clients can still see the world while minimising their environmental impact. **TW**

TIPS ON FINDING A NEW NICHE

- Are you a skier, scuba diver or sailor? Tap into your own travel experiences and your enthusiasm will shine through.
- Partner with local sports teams, cycling clubs, history societies or other organisations to find new audiences.
- Look out for relevant anniversaries or 'national days' and time social media promotions or e-shot offers to coincide.
- Invite suppliers to host an event in-store or online so customers can ask questions and you can gauge interest.
- Sign up for training and agent-focused events with tourist boards, Clia, Atas and other suppliers to grow your network.