

Sustainable swaps

Skip the airport and switch-sell clients to these flight-free alternatives for a greener way to get away, writes **Alice Barnes-Brown**

Although the era of cheap flights to the Continent has broadened British horizons, investigating no-fly alternatives to the most popular European destinations is a sure-fire way to future-proof your business.

Abta's Holiday Habits 2023-24 report found 17% of respondents had chosen a destination closer to the UK due to climate-change concerns, while 12% had travelled by a mode of transport other than air.

Even if clients lack time, there are many ways to turn a classic escape into a viable flight-free alternative. From beach dreams to weekends in Europe's coolest cities, discover how you can sell a memorable getaway – no boarding pass required.

NO-FLY AND FLOP

By far the most popular destination with Brits, Spain has a high-speed train network connecting directly with Paris, ferry connections with Portsmouth and Plymouth, plus superb highways, so getting to the Iberian Peninsula without flying is as easy as pie – or paella.

Just Go Holidays offers a coach trip to the glorious Costa Brava coastline, providing clients

with all the joy of a sun, sea and sand holiday without the hassle of flying. Departing from coach pick-up points across the UK, passengers will stop in France to break up the journey en route to a half-board haven in Lloret de Mar.

The itinerary combines lazing the day away on the cove's soft sand and shallow turquoise waters with excursions to the birthplace of Salvador Dalí, medieval Catalan towns and, for an extra £25, pulsating Barcelona.

Book it: The nine-day coach trip costs from £749, based on two sharing, including coach travel, ferry crossings, six nights' half-board in the Costa Brava, two nights' B&B in France, some excursions, plus a free bar between 3pm and 9pm. The price is based on a September 14 departure. justgoholidays.com/agents

INTO THE ARCTIC

Instead of flying to Norway in search of the aurora borealis, why not consider a relaxed sailing to the frozen north? Ambassador Cruise Line offers a 16-night Northern Lights and Scotland cruise on board flagship *Ambience* – which, according

Lloret de Mar, Spain

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Osvaldo Mussa

DESTINATIONS

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL | NO-FLY HOLIDAYS



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Bordeaux, France; Villa Zacharenia, Corfu; Bernina Express, Switzerland; Uig, Isle of Lewis

PICTURES: Railbookers; Stephen Hughes; McKinlay Kidd; Unsplash /Andreas Stutz

to the line, is in the top 10%-15% of ships for emissions, thanks to a 95% reduction in nitrogen oxide emissions.

Setting off from Tilbury, *Ambience* works its way up the UK's eastern coastline, before crossing the North Sea and winding between fjord-filled Ålesund and leafy Trondheim. Tromsø marks the first stop in the Arctic Circle, but the ship ventures farther into the Arctic, reaching the remote town of Alta for a night in port. If clients opt for a departure between October and March, there could be opportunities to spot the aurora every night of the cruise.

Book it: Prices start at £1,830 per person, based on two sharing a standard inside twin cabin on a Saver Fare, departing October 27. The rate includes full-board accommodation, captain's cocktail party and gala dinner. ambassadorcruise.com

BITE-SIZED BORDEAUX

For clients looking for a long weekend in an exciting European city, Bordeaux is a tempting alternative to classic city-break sellers such as Budapest or Prague.

It's accessible in just six hours from London which, when stacked up against airport transfers, security and departure-lounge waiting times, is comparable with a flight. With 20 museums and galleries in town, culture-seeking clients could spend their whole weekend hopping from Van Gogh to the Cité du Vin. But that would mean missing out on picnics in fragrant parks (suggest buying a baguette, brie and bottle of bordeaux and enjoying it in the Jardin Public), admiring the world's largest reflecting pool or even giving ice karting a go.



ANNA DAVIES director, partnership marketing, Railbookers

"A big plus for agents [booking rail holidays] is that their customers can start from any station in the UK, and travel to 26,000 stations on the European network – there are so many possibilities. Switzerland and Italy always sell well, but we're seeing a lot of Spain and Portugal bookings, plus a return to form for our Prague-Vienna combinations. They may not win time-wise, but we've got a great interactive map on our website that allows agents to search trips by duration. It also acts as a conversation starter with customers to look at where might be possible."

Book it: Railbookers sells a two-night city break in Bordeaux from £719, including rail travel, B&B accommodation and a skip-the-line ticket to La Cité du Vin museum. The price is based on a September 2 departure. railbookers.co.uk

HELLENIC ESCAPE

Reaching the Greek islands for a two-week getaway is possible without flying – and a new partnership between CV Villas and Byway, which offers flight-free transport to popular European destinations, is taking the stress out of route planning. Byway's head of partnerships, Paul Conroy, says: "Our customers are often looking to book a villa as part of their trip, so we're delighted that we are now able to point them straight to CV Villas."

Byway's 15-night itinerary to lush Corfu includes a seven-night stay at family-friendly Villa Zacharenia – but the journey to and from the island is all part of the adventure. With overnight stops in Zurich, Bologna and Bari, attractions abound – from Zurich's museum of optical ➤



ABOVE: Intrepid Travel's Amalfi Coast: Hike and Kayak itinerary

illusions to Bari's Norman cathedral. A comfy overnight ferry acts as the gateway to and from Greece, while on the way back, Ancona, Milan and Geneva await.

Book it: Byway offers a 15-night journey from £3,100 for two people, plus £1,600 for seven nights at Villa Zacharenia, based on two staying, when booking with CV Villas. The price includes return train transport and B&B accommodation at all stops, based on a September 12 departure.
byway.travel; cvvillas.com

SELF-DRIVE IN SCOTLAND

There are fly-drives aplenty, from epic road trips in North America to the twists and turns of New Zealand's twin islands. But eco-conscious clients can get their share of sights too with a self-drive amid Scotland's staggering scenery – plus, they can bring their own car.

McKinlay Kidd's new Grand Hebrides Road Trip spends its first day on the 'whisky island' of Islay. They'll get a private tour of the island's newest distillery, with a dram or two for the driver to take away for later.

A baronial pile on the private Isle of Eriska acts as a sanctuary for a night, before the drive continues to rugged Skye, with cliffs ripe for hiking and Caribbean-clear seas to stroll alongside. The itinerary comes with luxurious extras, so clients will be pampered with a hot bath and a tantalising tasting menu when they get back to their coaching inn.

Book it: McKinlay Kidd sells the 10-night Grand Hebrides Road Trip from £3,145 based on two

sharing, including luxury accommodation (some including breakfast), all ferry transfers, three dinners, plus a private distillery tour with lunch. The price is based on an October departure.
mckinlaykidd.com

ADVENTURE ON THE AMALFI COAST

Italy was made for getting around by train – and it's surprisingly simple to reach by rail too, with high-speed services linking Paris with Turin and Milan, plus easy onward travel using the country's extensive rail network.

Thanks to another partnership with Byway, clients on Intrepid Travel's Amalfi Coast: Hike and Kayak itinerary can reach the tour starting point by rail, ready to wind their way slowly around the stellar Amalfi Coast.

After meeting in Naples, guests spend a memorable first full day walking around the crater of mighty Vesuvius. The archaeological site of Pompeii is next, where they can witness the destruction caused by an eruption of the volcano in 79BC.

Then the tour veers towards the sea, where hikes along the crashing cliffs of Capri one day contrast with chilled kayaking and cocktails on the beach the next. Following two nights in Amalfi, clients can spend the sleek train journey home reflecting on the highlights.

Book it: Intrepid Travel sells the seven-night tour from £1,515, including B&B accommodation and ground transport. Return rail transfers cost from £1,294, based on an October 10 departure.
intrepidtravel.com TW



DO SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES

Sustainable travel isn't just about swerving flights – what clients get up to in a destination matters too. Even in western Europe, supporting local businesses is a good way to ensure tourism revenue is a positive force: research independent restaurants and shops where clients can enjoy personalised and unique experiences.



DON'T LIMIT YOUR HORIZONS

Don't assume that clients can travel to places only within a certain radius of home. Ferries connect the British mainland to destinations including Ireland, France, Spain and the Netherlands, while a growing network of sleeper trains offer cross-continental journeys. If they have time to spare, even farther-flung destinations such as Morocco and Istanbul can be reached by train within four days.



Tossa de Mar, Spain

PICTURE: IG Holidays