

AITO Inspiration

Want to truly escape the monotony of a daily routine and disappear to somewhere remote? Here are some unique *out of reach* holiday ideas from members of the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO, www.aito.com).

Choose from a range of trips, from relaxing on far-flung private islands, trekking up a mountain that few have conquered or staying in a floating lodge that's only accessible by plane, to finding isolated villages, cruising along the remote reaches of the Amazon or discovering an area that has been out of bounds for years.

La Graciosa, the secret Canary Island – from £597 pp with Cachet Travel

The Canary Islands may not seem the obvious choice for an off-the-beaten-track holiday, but a half-hour boat ride from the northern tip of Lanzarote lies the tiny island of La Graciosa, home to less than 700 people. There are no surfaced roads, and no hotels either, just simple white-washed houses scattered along sandy lanes, with a handful of unpretentious restaurants serving local seafood and a few shops for essentials. Holidays here are about the simple pleasures in life: rambling across volcanic hills, relaxing on unspoilt sandy beaches, swimming in clear waters and watching the comings and goings of the local fishing fleet. In June, a week at [Vista Mar Apartments](#) costs from £597 pp (two sharing), including flights (Gatwick), private harbour transfers and ferry crossings. Available year-round. Call AITO* member Cachet Travel on 020 8847 8700 (www.cachet-travel.co.uk).

NEW: Gangkar Punsum Base Camp Exploration – Bhutan from £5,745 pp with Mountain Kingdoms

This [28-day strenuous trek](#) is an adventure special for 2014. Gangkar Punsum is Bhutan's highest peak, and also a strong candidate for the title of 'highest unclimbed peak in the world'. The trek is led by Mountain Kingdom's Managing Director, Steve Berry - who attempted to climb Gangkar Punsum in 1986 after being granted a special licence - and goes to the mountain's base camp, a once-in-a-lifetime adventure. Departing 28 September, the itinerary includes sightseeing in Paro and a visit to the clifftop Tiger's Nest Monastery. The price, from £5,745 pp (two sharing), includes all meals on trek, accommodation (hotels/tents - two sharing), camping facilities, flights (Heathrow), transfers, Bhutan visa and taxes and mountain kit bag. Call AITO* member Mountain Kingdoms on 01453 844400 (www.mountainkingdoms.com).

Stay in the peaceful Kasbah Tamadot Morocco – from £849 pp with Prestige Holidays

Owned by Sir Richard Branson, [Kasbah Tamadot hotel](#) boasts a wonderfully secluded setting, overlooking a valley in the foothills of the High Atlas Mountains, with the small village and market place of Asni just a few minutes away. The hotel stands in substantial terraced gardens with stunning panoramic views of the local countryside - yet Marrakech is only one hour away. The 27 guestrooms offer individual style and design, including the option of a tented suite or even a private pool. This is the perfect spot to cleanse mind and body and be pampered by fine service, whilst enjoying the natural beauty of this hideaway. The price of £849 pp (two sharing) includes four nights for the price of three in a superior room, B&B, flights (Gatwick) and private transfers. Call AITO* member Prestige Holidays on 01425 480400 (www.prestigeholidays.co.uk).

New: Cederberg 100 Walking Trail – South Africa from £440 pp with Cedarberg African Travel

Hike where the Khoi-San once lived and leopard still roam, among the soaring peaks and road-free red earth of South Africa. This [eight night heritage trail](#) covers 100km of the Cederberg

Wilderness: expect to see glorious mountain scenery, characteristic sculpted rock formations, subsistence rooibos tea farms, a kaleidoscope of wild flowers in spring and, possibly, the endangered indigenous Cedar tree after which the area is named. At night, be hosted in local homes in one of the 14 Moravian mission villages. Each leg of the trail is guided by a community resident, while packs are transported by donkey cart. The trip costs from £440 pp (two sharing) with eight nights' accommodation, all meals and transfers. Flights extra. Call AITO* member Cedarberg African Travel on 020 8898 8533 (www.cedarberg-travel.com).

Escape to a private island paradise – Grenadines from £2,690 pp with Expressions Holidays

For true isolation, visit [Petit St Vincent](#) in the Grenadines in the Caribbean. Occupying a private island of about 113 acres, cottages are dotted around the island and offer the utmost seclusion. Communication is by way of flags raised outside each cottage, indicating service or privacy. This destination offers rustic luxury to provide for simple pleasures without everyday distractions, which is made possible by the lack of phones and televisions. Days at Petit St Vincent are spent on the beach, in hammocks, trying water sports or sailing to neighbouring islands. Seven nights' full board cost from £2,690 pp (two sharing) including flights (London to Barbados), domestic flights and boat transfers. Call AITO* member Expressions Holidays on 01752 878010 (www.expressionsholidays.co.uk).

Visit the 'Land of the Lake' – Malawi from £3,175 pp with Ramblers Worldwide Holidays

This [14-day holiday](#) takes participants through Lake Malawi's landscapes, past the verdant beauty of the Zomba Plateau, tea estates overlooked by majestic Mount Mulanje, the Liwonde National Park, Lilongwe (the capital), Mount Mulanje (the tallest mountain in south central Africa) and the Thyolo Highlands. A particular highlight is the magical sunset boat trip on Lake Malawi, with sundowners to round off the perfect holiday. The price is from £3,175 pp (two sharing) and includes flights (Heathrow), transfers, six nights' half board and five nights' full board accommodation, all entrance fees and the services of a dedicated tour leader. Departures from 18 August. Call AITO* member Ramblers Worldwide Holidays on 01701 331133 (www.ramblersholidays.co.uk).

Easter Island holiday extension – Chile from £999 pp with Llama Travel

Travel 2,300 miles off Chile's west coast on this [four-day trip to Easter Island](#) - the world's most isolated, and arguably most mysterious, inhabited island. Highlights include a traditional Easter Island reception with flower necklaces, staying in the town of Hanga Roa and getting to know the local traditions and culture, exploring Easter Island's epic volcanic craters and secluded sandy beaches, and coming face-to-face with the iconic Moai stone heads. The trip extension costs from £999 pp (two sharing) and is typically added to the 12-day [Natural Wonders of Chile](#) itinerary. The price includes flights (London), hotels and transfers. Departures are between 9 April and 11 March. Call AITO* member Llama Travel on 020 7263 3000 (www.llamatravel.com).

Stay in a floating lodge – western Canada from £3,000 pp with Bridge and Wickers

Tucked away at the end of an inlet called Smith - a deep, wild fjord off the coast of western Canada - is the simple, five-room floating [Great Bear Lodge](#). With no access via roads or by ferry, the only approach is by float plane from Prince Rupert on Vancouver Island. Each day there are guided activities on offer, mostly by boat and geared to looking for bears. Take in nature's other offerings, too, from the fantastic scenery to other animals such as seals, bald eagles, mink and otters. At Great Bear Lodge, enjoy being completely immersed in the natural rhythms of the wilderness, as well as being well fed, cosseted, guided and educated. The price is from £3,000 pp (two sharing) including two nights at the Lodge with all meals, drinks and

guided activities; one night room only in Port Hardy and four nights' room only in Vancouver. Call AITO* member Bridge and Wickers on 020 3355 0839 (www.bridgeandwickers.co.uk).

Aqua Expeditions Amazon Cruise – Peru from £2,390 pp with Tribes

Head out on a luxurious riverboat to explore the rivers, forests, birds and wildlife of the [Amazon River](#). Explore three main tributaries of the Amazon - going on boat trips through flooded forest, taking jungle walks to spot the wildlife and visiting riverside villages to see a bit of local life in this region. Meet the fishermen, go fishing for colourful tropical fish (or maybe pirhanas!) and take night trips on boats to spot nocturnal forest life. The five-day cruise costs from £2,390 pp (two sharing), including all meals, most drinks and all activities whilst on the cruise. Flights extra. Call AITO* member Tribes on 01473 890499 (www.tribes.co.uk).

Robinson Crusoe escape – Greece from £884 pp with GIC The Villa Collection

Couples can disappear into their own little world with a stay in [Bacchus House](#), a romantic and totally secluded property on the tiny Ionian island of Antipaxos. The island is home to a mere 30 inhabitants, and has four tavernas but no shops - instead supplies can be delivered to the cottage by boat. The property is hidden away in a delightful sheltered garden with almond, lemon, quince and fig trees, plus there is a private pool with views across the sparkling sea to the mainland. A fifteen minute walk away is a taverna and the powder-soft sandy beach of Vrika. A seven-night stay costs from £884 pp including flights (Gatwick) and transfers. Call AITO* member GIC The Villa Collection on 020 8232 9780 (www.gicthevillacollection.com).

26-day trekking in Russia – from £4,045 pp with KE Adventure

Travelling by way of Yakutsk to the isolated gold mining settlement of Ust-Nera, this outlandish, self-supported, [200km trek](#) follows river valleys, crosses low passes and includes easy summits such as Kisyl Tass (2,230m). Living in part from the land, catching game and fishing, the group are accompanied by Yakut rangers and packhorses. From Sasyr, a trapping and reindeer herding village 'at the end of the earth', this magnificent journey concludes with a week-long descent in open canoes of the meandering Moma River. Departing on 13 July, the trip costs from £4,045 pp (two sharing) including flights (Heathrow), internal flights, all transport, camping support, park fees, accommodation and most meals. Call AITO* member KE Adventure Travel on 017687 73966 (www.keadventure.com).

Chad: Peaks of the Tibesti – Africa from £3,749 pp with Undiscovered Destinations

Travel to the remote [Tibesti Mountains in the north of Chad](#) to explore dramatic peaks, including the Sahara's highest mountain, and meet the Tubu people living here. This area has been out of bounds for a long time and harbours traditions that are unchanged since the grand days of the trans-Saharan trade - this is a unique opportunity to go where few have gone before. The price, from £3,749 pp (two sharing), includes all accommodation, transfers, English-speaking guide and most meals. Flights extra. Departures are on 16 November and 12 January. Call AITO* member Undiscovered Destinations on 0191 296 2674 (www.undiscovered-destinations.com).

***AITO is a highly-respected travel organisation that provides an unrivalled collection of exciting, specialist holidays from award-winning tour operators. Its 120-plus members are all focused on quality of customer experience and personal service, and aim to offer sustainable travel options. Visit www.aito.com for more holiday ideas.**

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Press: For more information about AITO (www.aito.com) please contact Sue Ockwell, Rebecca Milne or Laura Manning at Travel PR (020 8891 4440, s.ockwell@travelpr.co.uk, r.milne@travelpr.co.uk or l.manning@travelpr.co.uk).