

AITO Inspiration – Follow the Leader

Miss the festive cheer and fun activities of December now the party season is over? Bring your social calendar forward to the New Year by booking a group holiday in 2017. Group holidays continue to be a popular form of travel, whether it be on an expert-led escorted tour, joining pre-set itineraries with the family or party planning with friends.



Here is a selection of ideas from the expert specialists at AITO, The Association of Independent Tour Operators (www.aito.com).

NEW: Uncover the magic of Jordan – from £2,550 pp with Chapters Experience Holidays
Chapters Experience Holidays has a brand-new collection of exciting, small group and expert-led holidays - the perfect way to explore the world. Led by expert local guide, Madhi Hanini, [Jewels of Jordan](#) provides the chance to experience a fantastic mix of Jordan's famous and lesser-known sights, from the souks of busy Amman to wild desert canyons, and from the Crusader castles at Shobak and Kerak and the Roman ruins at Jerash to the Dead Sea, or the opportunity to camp under the desert stars and explore the famous rose red city of Petra. Departing 31 March and 20 October, the trip costs from £2,550 pp (two sharing), including flights, half-board accommodation, local guides, entrance fees and transport. Call Chapters Experience Holidays on 01707 246 666 (www.chaptersholidays.co.uk).

NEW: Bulgaria and its treasures – a cultural trip – from £2,075 pp with CICERONI Travel
Join award-winning escorted cultural tour specialists CICERONI Travel (AITO Tour Operator of the Year 2015, Silver award) to experience the fascinating history and culture of Bulgaria during [On the Frontier: Bulgaria & its Treasures](#). Led by Bulgarian expert, John Osborne, this exciting new trip encapsulates fine mountain scenery, providing a spectacular backdrop to guided tours showcasing a wealth of buildings and monuments from Thracian, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and modern periods. Guests will stay in four-star hotels in three cities: Sofia, Veliko Tarnovo and Plovdiv. Departing 6 June, the eight-day trip costs from £2,075 pp (two sharing double or twin room), including flights (Heathrow), B&B accommodation, five dinners, five lunches with wine, all local transfers, city tax, entry fees and gratuities. Single supplement £195. Call CICERONI Travel on 01869 811167 (www.ciceronitravel.co.uk).

NEW: Northern Lights at Husafell – from £1,019 pp with Discover the World
Discover the iconic Golden Circle's trio of sights – journey through a glacier, travel by an eight-wheel drive truck on Langjokull's icecap and opt to dip in the naturally heated waters of the Blue Lagoon – on this new winter trip to Iceland. Spend two nights at Hotel Husafell – a stunning property full of contemporary flair, offering superb Aurora potential, fine dining and the perfect base for exploring West Iceland – and one night in Reykjavik, with time for city sightseeing. [Northern Lights at Husafell](#) departs 23 February and 16 March and costs from £1,019 pp (two sharing), including flights, airport transfers, two nights' half board at Hotel Husafell, one night's B&B in Reykjavik, the services of drivers and guides, plus excursions (excluding Blue Lagoon). Call Discover the World on 01737 214291 (www.discover-the-world.co.uk).

NEW: Four-night wine tours in Piemonte, Italy – from £2,450 pp with Expressions Holidays
Explore the flourishing vineyards which cloak the hills of Piemonte, led by an expert guide. Sample delicious wines along the way, including the revered Barolo and Barbaresco – produced from the Nebbiolo grape – the distinctive sparkling Asti, and the intriguing Barbera, all in award-winning wineries set in peaceful hilltop wine towns. Accompanying the tours are dinners in restaurants influenced by the 'Slow Food' movement of the region, as well as a chocolate tasting session. [Wine Tours to Piemonte](#) departs on 17 May and 4 October, and costs from £2,450 pp (two sharing a superior or deluxe room), including BA flights (Gatwick), four nights' B&B at the

Relais Villa d'Amelia, expert guiding, all tours and tastings plus three lunches and four dinners. Call Expressions Holidays on 01392 441 245 (www.expressionsholidays.co.uk).

NEW: New Orleans to Natchitoches – from £4,910 pp with Martin Randall Travel

Architectural historian Professor Louis Nelson will lead this 11-day journey through Louisiana, exploring the state's history, culture, food and music. Discover the varied influences and styles of Colonial architecture, and spend two nights in the luxurious cottages surrounding Houmas plantation house. A private boat trip through the bayous of Lafayette and the chance to attend New Orleans Jazz Fest give a well-rounded taste of this extraordinary state. Departing 25 April, [New Orleans to Natchitoches](#) costs from £4,910 pp (two sharing), including BA flights, private coach travel, luxury hotel accommodation, most meals with wine, all admissions, tips and taxes. Call Martin Randall Travel on 020 8742 3355 (www.martinrandall.com).

NEW: 12-day adventure from Cusco to Lima – from £1,275 pp with Oasis Overland

Soak up the bustling atmosphere of Cuzco, conquer the Inca Trail and explore the ruins at Machu Picchu during this 12-day tour, [Incans & Amazon](#). Led by local guides, the tour includes a four-day trek to Machu Picchu, which combines stunning mountain views and Inca ruins – suitable for those with reasonable fitness. Guests will enjoy an intimate jungle experience deep in the Amazon, spending three nights exploring the diverse flora and fauna with local guides – on foot and by boat – including a night hike and climbing a canopy tower to see the view from the tree tops. Departures run from May to November, costing from £1,275 pp (plus local payment of \$180) for two sharing, including simple accommodation, most meals, expert-led tours and airport transfers. Flights extra. Call Oasis Overland on 01963 530 113 (www.oasisoverland.co.uk).

NEW: Guided tour of Puglia and the Amalfi Coast – from £2,344 pp with Sunvil

Explore the regions of Puglia, Basilicata and Campania – packed with Etruscan and Greek sites – on this chauffeur-driven tour from Sunvil. Whilst offering plenty of time for independent exploration and sightseeing, this seven-night holiday also includes expert-led tours in Lecce, Otranto, Matera and Paestum, and there are year-round departures available to suit everyone. [A Taste of Apulia and Amalfi](#) costs from £2,344 pp (two sharing), including flights (Gatwick), B&B accommodation in selected hotels, a light lunch with wine tasting on 3 days, a chauffeur-driven car and guide service as detailed. Call Sunvil on 020 8758 4722 (www.sunvil.co.uk).

NEW: Road cycling adventure through the five countries of Great Britain and Ireland – from £2,695 pp with Wilderness Scotland

Keen cyclists will enjoy the best road cycling in Great Britain and Ireland on this exceptional 12-day tour, pedalling routes used in the Tour de France and Giro D'Italia. The adventure begins in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, passing through Lancashire and Snowdonia before crossing the Irish Sea to Dublin. After a rest day in the city, continue along Donegal's coastal roads, Northern Ireland's Antrim coastline, past Giant's Causeway and filming locations from Game of Thrones. The trip concludes at Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland's undiscovered gem, where the pedal bicycle was invented in 1839. Departing 15 May, 19 June or 11 September, [Road Cycling – The 5 Countries](#) costs from £2,695 pp (two sharing), including 11 nights' B&B, most meals, transport, transfers and professional guiding throughout. Call Wilderness Scotland on 01479 420020 (www.wildernessscotland.com).

Lava lands and dolphin swimming in the Azores – from £1,325 pp with Activities Abroad

Enjoy a fun-filled and action-packed family holiday exploring the beautiful island of São Miguel in the Azores archipelago with [Exploring the Lava Lands and Dolphin Swimming in the Azores](#). Families will create fantastic memories joining a range of excursions, including snorkelling with dolphins, canyoning with fully-qualified instructors, whale watching, an adventure tour to the Sete Cidades crater lake, a jeep tour to Fogo and much more. Departures run between April and August and cost from £1,325 pp (children 13-18 years from £1,185 pp and 8-12 years from £895 pp) based on four sharing, including flights (Stansted), transfers, seven nights in Hotel São Miguel Park, most meals, activities and the services of fully qualified guides and instructors. Call Activities Abroad on 01670 789 991 (www.activitiesabroad.com).

Embark on a dog-sledding adventure – from £2,075 pp with Artisan Travel

Join the "Master" of Husky sledding, Sven Engholm – Scandinavia's 11-time winner of the Finnmarkslopet dog sled race – for a captivating three-day expedition in Karasjok, Norway. With the chance to spot reindeer and moose while swishing through stunning winter scenery, guests will stay in cosy log cabins at the Engholm Husky Farm – the launch pad for some of the world's best dog sledding. [Karasjok - Three Day Husky Safari](#) costs from £2,075 pp (two sharing) including flights (Heathrow), transfers, two nights' shared log cabin accommodation (in own private room), two nights' wilderness camp/cabin, all meals and cold weather clothing. Departures run from January to April 2017. Call Artisan Travel on 01670 785 085 (www.artisantravel.co.uk).

Visit vibrant Tromsø plus the atmospheric Lyngen Alps – from £965 pp with The Aurora Zone

Experience the best of Norway on this short escape, combining the vibrant city of Tromsø and the tranquil setting of the Lyngen Alps. Guests will enjoy a Northern Lights photography workshop, snowshoeing, snowmobiling and a husky safari, with the option to go whale watching or meet a traditional Sámi family. Two nights will be spent sleeping in a Crystal Lavvo in mountainous surroundings – the cosy wooden building has a spectacular glass roof for views of the night sky. [Tromsø and the Lyngen Alps](#) costs from £965 pp (two sharing), including four nights' accommodation, most meals, activities, cold weather clothing and experienced local guides. Flights extra. Departures run from January to March 2017. Call The Aurora Zone on 01670 785 012 (www.theaurorazone.com).

Immersive guided walking in the unspoilt Azores – from £2,110 pp with Archipelago Choice

Visit one of the few unspoilt paradises on the planet and explore the less frequented islands of the Azores on Archipelago Choice's [Azores Guided Walking Holiday](#). An expert geologist will escort guests through Flores, Terceira, Graciosa and Santa Maria, uncovering each island's distinctive character and following pretty trails at a gentle pace. There will also be opportunities to stop and soak up the spectacular views and enjoy the village cafés. Departing 9 September, the trip costs from £2,110 pp (two sharing), including 14 nights' B&B, flights, airport taxes, the services of expert guides, picnics and all transfers. Call Archipelago Choice on 01768 721017 (<http://www.azoreschoice.com>).

Exclusive Nepalese Himalayan walks with local guides – from £2,145 pp with Inntravel

With Nepalese communities ready to receive visitors once again, Inntravel has reintroduced its privately-guided holiday to Nepal, offering thrilling walks between the welcoming mountain communities of the remote Sailung Valley. This is a region in the mid-hills of the Nepalese Himalayas, not featured in guide books, where walkers are welcomed as honoured guests. Staying in comfortable community-run guesthouses, visitors will experience the rhythm of village life as few others see it. [Nepal – Himalayan Panoramas](#) costs from £2,145 pp (two sharing), including return flights (Heathrow), seven nights' full board, three nights' B&B, a walking guide, a driver in Kathmandu, and transfers. Call Inntravel on 01653 617000 (www.inntravel.co.uk).

Follow the Shepherds' Trails in southern France – from £2,490 pp with Kudu Travel

Spend a week walking in the Causses and the Cévennes, an enchanting UNESCO-listed mountainous region in southern France. Led by mountain leader Sarah Wright, who has immense knowledge and enthusiasm for the area, explore ancient drovers' paths, stroll through flower-strewn meadows, see spectacular rock formations and learn about the history of the Knights Templar. Departing 21 May, the eight-day [Walking in the Cévennes](#) tour costs from £2,490 pp (two sharing), including seven nights' full board in a four-star château hotel, private transfers, entrance fees and the services of two tour leaders. Flights extra. Call Kudu Travel on 01225 436 115 (www.kudutravel.com).

Definitive Cultural Tour of Bhutan - from £2,795 pp with Mountain Kingdoms

In 2017, Honorary Consul and tutor to the previous king, Michael Rutland, will lead three departures of Mountain Kingdoms' 13-day in-depth [Cultural Tour of Bhutan](#), with a fourth departure led by a local Bhutanese guide. During visits to artisan workshops, impressive dzongs, traditional rural villages and the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery, Michael will impart his intimate knowledge and network of connections to provide a privileged insight into Bhutan. Departing 28 September, the price is from £2,795 pp (two sharing), including hotel accommodation, all meals in Bhutan, airport transfers, private transport and sightseeing as per the itinerary. Flights extra. Tours led by Michael depart 8 April, 4 November and 16 December, and cost from £3,270 pp on the same basis. Call Mountain Kingdoms on 01453 844400 (www.mountainkingdoms.com).

Explore the Amalfi Coast on a gulet cruise – from £3,975 pp with Peter Sommer Travels

As holidays around the Bay of Naples and the Amalfi Coast are typically on land, this seven-night cruise differentiates itself from the crowd, offering just ten guests the opportunity to see the beautiful Italian coastline from the water. Expert guides will lead visits to famous sites including Capri, Pompeii and Amalfi, and lesser-known gems including the Imperial Villa Baia and the outstanding Roman frescoes of the Villa Oplontis. Departing 2 September, [Cruising the Amalfi Coast](#) costs from £3,975 pp (two sharing), including full-board accommodation, all crew services, expert-led excursions, entrance fees and transfers. Flights extra. Call Peter Sommer Travels on 01600 888 220 (www.petersommer.com).

Ends – 11 JANUARY 2017

Note to Editors:

AITO, established in 1976, is an alliance of over 120 specialist holiday companies, all of which offer full financial protection to their clients and all of which are proud of their expertise and knowledge, the quality of service offered and the emphasis which they place on Sustainable Tourism. AITO members together offer holidays and travel arrangements around the globe, with a huge array of niche holiday ideas that simply can't be found elsewhere. Visit www.aito.com for a full list of members and the destinations which they serve.

For the latest Directory of AITO members' PR contacts, please [click here](#).

Travel PR will happily email all AITO members with any queries that travel writers may have – it's a great way to receive speedy feedback or information from AITO experts via just one email request.

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

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