

AITO Inspiration – Quirky accommodation



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Travellers seeking somewhere unusual to stay during their next holiday need look no further than these quirky ideas from members of The Association of Independent Tour Operators (www.aito.com), all of which involve accommodation in some wonderfully charming and distinctive places.

Cosy up in a Norwegian wilderness cabin with your own team of huskies, take a romantic break in a hilltop windmill in Greece, or camp under the stars on the edge of the Grand Canyon – all trips come complete with unexpected and unusual features.

Lodge in the rainforest and stay at the foot of live volcano in Costa Rica – from £2,695 pp with Activities Abroad

Explore the wonders of Costa Rica and stay in an eco-lodge in the heart of the jungle, enjoy a glamping experience on the edge of the rainforest, and relax at a stunning hotel by the Arenal volcano. The [Costa Rican Rainforest Explorer](#) trip includes hiking through the rainforest, white water rafting, visits to two national parks, canyoning and zip wiring. Guests can also volunteer at the Eco Centre Danaus and learn about Costa Rican culture. Departing between 22 July and 19 August, the price is from £2,695 pp (children aged eight to 11 from £915 pp), including 12 nights' B&B, transfers, 10 lunches, eight dinners, and guided activities. Flights are extra. Call Activities Abroad on 01670 789 991 (www.activitiesabroad.com).

Keep warm in Cape Verde's spectacular crater hotel – from £1,446 pp with Archipelago Choice

Like the phoenix that rises from the ashes, owners Mustafa and his wife Marisa rebuilt hotel Casa Marisa on top of the hot lava, after nearby volcano Pico de Fogo completely destroyed their home. Built around an open courtyard, Casa Marisa offers ten simple rooms with incredible naturally-heated floors. Guests can sleep comfortably with the window open and gaze at the amazing night sky. The [eight-day trip](#) costs from £1,446 pp (two sharing), including three nights at Praia, two nights at Sao Filipe (both B&B), two nights at Casa Marisa (half-board), flights (London), transfers and guided walks. Departures run throughout the year. Call Archipelago Choice Cape Verde on 01768 721030 (www.capeverdechoice.com).

Camp in the Bedouin desert in Oman – from £3,550 pp with Chapters Experience Holidays

This new 13-day adventure provides an incredible opportunity to sleep under the stars at a Bedouin desert camp, with a night visit to see turtles on the beach at Ras al Hadd. Guests will have the chance to experience the golden desert landscapes, majestic mountain ranges, bustling marketplaces and magnificent sunsets of the Sultanate of Oman – an ideal destination for any nature lover. Visit the Grand Mosque in the capital of Muscat, the awe-inspiring dunes of Wahiba Sands and the impressive Hajar mountain range. Departing 1 November, [Arabian Adventure](#) costs from £3,550 pp, including half-board accommodation, flights and transfers, all entrance fees, local transport, and knowledgeable local walking and sightseeing guides. Call Chapters Experience Holidays on 01707 246666 (www.chaptersholidays.co.uk).

Stay in a rainforest eco lodge in Sri Lanka – from £1,200 pp with Expressions Holidays

Embrace the eco-friendly, nature-conscious ethos of the four-star [Rainforest Eco Lodge](#) by staying in one of its 16 fully-converted shipping containers. Each chalet has been adorned with bamboo panelling on the walls, railway sleepers on the floor and panoramic windows, as well as en-suite bathrooms and terraces which establish a surprisingly modern feel. Guests can enjoy the traditional, authentic cuisine served in the elevated restaurant, after spending the day trekking through the Sinharaja rainforest, across streams and past waterfalls. Resident guides are available for bird-watching and nature trails. Departures can be arranged at any time, and stays are usually included as part of a longer touring holiday, so total prices vary. The price is from £1,200 pp (two sharing), including flights, seven nights' B&B, and private chauffeur-driven transfers. Call Expressions Holidays on 01392 441 245 (www.expressionsholidays.co.uk).

Stay in a stylish windmill on a peaceful Greek island – from £821 pp with GIC The Villa Collection

Villa Milos is a stylishly-renovated old windmill (used for grinding grain to make bread flour and last used as a working mill in 1961), complete with its original sail structure, on the island of Lefkas. This imaginatively-created dwelling space for two sits atop a hill with spectacular views in all directions, including sea and mountain, and benefits from a welcome, ever-present breeze. Both shade and sunshine can be enjoyed in

its lovely garden, complete with delightful pale turquoise swimming pool into which swallows dip to drink when all is quiet. Perfect for honeymooners and couples seeking romance and a private escape. Departing between March and October, a [seven-night self-catering holiday](#) costs from £821 pp (two sharing), including flights (Gatwick) and car hire. Call GIC The Villa Collection on 020 8232 9780 (www.gicthevillacollection.com).

Sleep in a Tree-house Ecolodge in an Argentinian Rainforest – from £4,675 pp with KE Adventure

Spend a night in the rainforest in a tree-house style Ecolodge, offering spacious terraces and private balconies with hammocks (studio rooms and cabins also available), and experience a traditional working *estancia* (ranch) with ensuite facilities and simple, traditional interiors on this [14-day trip](#) to Northern Argentina. With jaw-dropping canyons, fragrant rainforests, thundering UNESCO waterfalls, magnificent wetlands, world-class vineyards, Inca trails and a red-hot city, Northern Argentina grips travellers like a world class tango dancer! Departures are between July and November, costing from £4,675 pp (two sharing), including flights (London), B&B accommodation, eight lunches, 13 dinners, transfers, guides and camping equipment. Call KE Adventure Travel on 017687 73966 (www.keadventure.com).

Spend the night on an old English Steam Ship in Peru – from £1,749 pp with Llama Travel

[Peru Holiday & Lake Titicaca](#) provides the unique opportunity to spend the night on Steamship Yavari on Lake Titicaca. The trip begins in Lima, travelling to Cusco, the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu, followed by a visit to Lake Titicaca. Here, guests can stay on the vessel (supplement of £15 pp) and learn about the rich history of the Yavari, which was built in England in 1862. Titicaca's fresh water means the boat has not rusted, allowing guests to absorb its history over 100 years after it was built. Departures run between March and November, and the price is from £1,749 pp (two sharing), including flights (Heathrow), transfers, 11 nights' B&B and the services of local guides. Call Llama Travel on 020 7263 3000 (www.llamatravel.com).

Stay at 18th century Ardgowan house in Scotland – from £2,780 pp with Martin Randall Travel

Stay at Ardgowan – a grand 18th-century country house which remains a private home – on this five-night country house tour in Scotland. Each bedroom retains an individual charm and is laden with antiques and books, and guests are free to roam at leisure through the house and gardens. Visit other country houses in the vicinity, all by special arrangement or with privileged access, in the company of architectural historian Caroline Knight. Departing 6 July 2017, [At Home at Ardgowan](#) costs from £2,780 pp (two sharing), including private coach travel, ferry journeys to the Isle of Bute and the Cowal Peninsula, B&B, most meals, all admissions, tips, taxes and the services of the lecturer. Call Martin Randall Travel on 020 8742 3355 (www.martinrandall.com).

Sleep under the stars at the Grand Canyon – from £4,395 pp with Mountain Kingdoms

After a day spent cycling the scenic Rainbow Rim Trail, there's no more impressive place to camp under the stars than on the edge of the Grand Canyon. These two nights offer a dramatic culmination of the thrilling 17-day cycle tour which takes in the epic sites of the National Parks of the American West, including Bryce and Zion Canyons, Arches NP and the White Rim Trail in Canyonlands. Departing 14 September, [Cycling the Great American South West](#) costs from £4,395 pp for two sharing (£5,270 with flights), including transfers, professional guides, bike hire, park fees, some meals, full service camping for two nights and hotel and lodge accommodation. Call Mountain Kingdoms on 01453 844 400 (www.mountainkingdoms.com).

Cross the Zaskar and camp by Pangong Lake in the Himalayas – from £3,350 pp with Pettitts

Stay at the remote Whispering Waves Tented Camp, located alongside the world's highest saltwater lake, Pangong, 4,300m above sea level, at the furthest point permitted to travellers during this 15-day private tour. Explore the monasteries of Ladakh, embark on an intrepid overland journey from Shimla to Leh, which includes crossing the Taglang La Pass – the second highest motor pass in the world. Departures run throughout the year, with the best time to visit from late June to September. [Crossing the Zaskar – an overland journey from Delhi to Ladakh](#) – costs from £3,350 pp (two sharing), including flights (Heathrow), hotel accommodation, private car and driver, English speaking guides, entrance fees, and taxes. Call Pettitts on 01892 515966 (www.pettitts.co.uk).

Sleep in an Elizabethan Star Castle on the Isles of Scilly – from £610 pp with Prestige Holidays

Staying at the Star Castle on St Mary's in the Isles of Scilly is an adventure in itself. Built in the sixteenth century in the shape of an eight-pointed star, it has a moat, dungeon and canons that were strategically placed long ago in the defence of Scilly and mainland Britain. The restaurant was once the officer's mess,

but now serves the freshest seafood and locally-sourced menus, cooked to perfection by the hotel's award-winning chefs. It also features an indoor heated pool, free tennis and a pirate's playground, which is a short stroll away. Departing between 10 and 20 April, the [three-night break](#) costs from £610 pp (two sharing), including B&B in a castle room, flights from Land's End and transfers. Call Prestige Holidays on 01425 480600 (www.toursprestigeholidays.co.uk).

Escape to a traditional log cabin on private Swedish island – from £1,350 pp with Simply Sweden

This trip combines two nights in a traditional log cabin on a secret private island, accessible only by boat, with two nights at a stylish guesthouse in a converted village school in Stilleben. Hosts will greet guests arriving in Stockholm and escort them to the island, where the peace, remoteness and traditions surrounding rural Sweden can be truly enjoyed. Guests will cook their own meals from local recipes and produce and can enjoy the long, sunny days canoeing, lake-swimming and even skinny-dipping in the privacy of the island. Departing between May and September, [Escape – Swedish Style](#) costs from £1,350 pp (two sharing), including flights, transfers (or car rental), full board accommodation, and a spa package (sauna and hot tub). Call Simply Sweden on 01427 700115 (www.simplysweden.co.uk).

Stay in a converted mill house in Corsica – from £1,001 pp with Simpson Travel

Stay in the secluded Moulin des Calanques, a converted mill in Corsica, which has one of the best views in the region. Surrounded by spectacular scenery, guests can walk along the river to a swimming pool carved out of the rocks, with its own incredible waterfall, explore the mesmerising pink cliffs and wander serpentine paths through ancient rock formations. There's also the option to spend time in the delightful village of Piana, one of the loveliest in Corsica, just three kilometres away. Departing 7 May, this [seven-night break](#) staying at Moulin des Calanques costs from £1,001 pp (two sharing), including self-catering accommodation, flights and car hire. Call Simpson Travel on 020 8003 6557 (www.simpsontravel.com).

Atmospheric hotel set in the pre-historic caves of Sassi, Italy – from £1,392 pp with Sunvil

Stay in the widely-admired historic city of Matera in Italy, well-known for its surreal 'Sassi di Matera' – prehistoric houses dug into the local tufa rock. These natural caves were the first houses of the Neolithic inhabitants of the region, who transformed the natural landscape into new forms of architecture. The Sextantio le Grotte della Civita is an exceptional four-star boutique hotel built into the pre-historic caves of Sassi, which form part of Matera's UNESCO World Heritage Site. The hotel's conversion took ten years and offers beautifully-crafted rooms full of natural features - archways, vaulted ceilings and stone flooring. Departing between March and October, [the seven-night holiday](#) costs from £1,392 pp (two sharing), including flights (Gatwick), seven nights' B&B and car hire. Call Sunvil on 020 8758 4722 (www.sunvil.co.uk).

Set sail on a traditional yacht in the Scottish isles – from £1,395 pp with Wilderness Scotland

Explore the remote Rough Bounds of Knoydart, often referred to as Scotland's last wilderness, and some of the most beautiful isles aboard Eda Frandsen – a converted 70-year-old Gaff Cutter. Below deck, Eda Frandsen is comfortable and well-equipped, with a spacious saloon in which to enjoy delicious meals. Lovingly restored, the graceful sailing boat offers the chance to discover the Skye and Small Isles in style, led by an experienced skipper, first mate and walking guide. Enjoy some of Scotland's finest walking, accessing rarely-trodden routes, travel coastal waters renowned for diversity of wildlife, and spot whales, dolphins and a plethora of birdlife. Departing 6 May, the six-night [Knoydart, Skye & The Small Isles](#) trip costs from £1,395 pp (two sharing), including full-board, skipper, first mate and a walking guide. Call Wilderness Scotland on 01479 420020 (www.wildernessscotland.com).

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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.

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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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