

AITO Inspiration



Take a look at these new snowy holiday ideas from members of the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO, www.aito.com).

From brisk country walks and cruises through icebergs, to ice fishing, furry and feathery animal encounters and the magic of the Glacier Express and Santa's Grotto. Or turn up the heat and check out volcanoes, bathe in hot springs or snuggle up under a canopy of stars and witness the incredible Northern Lights across the Scandinavian Arctic Circle.

See below for an array of snow-capped ideas:

From Russia with Love – Unwrap Russia this Christmas from £399 pp with On The Go Tours

For some snowy winter fun this festive season, why not celebrate Christmas or New Year in Russia? For a truly winter wonderland experience, just pack your moon boots, and don a thick coat, gloves and hat and you're set to explore the best of two legendary cities. This six-day Snowball tour costs £399 pp (two sharing) including three-star B&B accommodation, and plenty offers of time to discover UNESCO-listed St Petersburg and Moscow. Highlights include the Hermitage at the Winter Palace, Church on Spilled Blood, Red Square, St Basil's Cathedral, the mighty Kremlin and Lenin's Mausoleum. Russia tours operate all year-round but this is a special Christmas or New Year trip, with departure dates on 24 and 27 December 2013. Flights extra. Call AITO* member On The Go Tours on 020 7371 1113 (www.onthegotours.com).

The Knoydart Peninsula – Scotland from £695 pp with Wilderness Scotland

The remote and beautiful Knoydart peninsula is often described as Scotland's last wilderness, accessible only by boat or via a long mountain trail. Wilderness Scotland's unique [winter walking itinerary](#) combines learning essential winter skills, summiting several snowy peaks and experiencing one of Scotland's most isolated communities during its quietest period. Adventurers ascend the great mountains of Ladhar Bheinn and Sgurr Coire Choinnichean to enjoy the fine views from the summit - hard-earned, but magical. After a day's adventure, return to the warm welcome of Glaschoille House for a glass of whisky by a roaring open fire. The price of £695 pp (two sharing), includes four nights' full board, guiding, travel throughout the trip from Inverness, and use of safety equipment. Departures dates are 24 January and 21 February 2014. Call AITO* member Wilderness Scotland on 01479 420020. (www.wildernessscotland.com).

Winter Wonderland *Winter Highlights* tour – from £3,000 pp with InsideJapan Tours

Head from Tokyo's neon to Japan's snowy wilderness - the northern island of Hokkaido, with its majestic red crowned cranes - on a ['Winter Highlights' tour](#). Cruise through drift ice off the remote Shiretoko Peninsula, which provides a temporary home to hundreds of spotted seals and huge Stellar Sea Eagles. Take in the Sapporo Snow festival, visit the hot-spring-bathing snow monkeys in the Japanese Alps and experience cultural Kyoto. Departing on 4 February, the trip costs from £3,000 pp (two sharing), and includes 14 nights' B&B accommodation in hotels and traditional Ryokan, domestic flights and all transport within Japan, seven evening meals, airport transfers, some local guides and the full-time services of a tour leader. Flights extra. Call AITO* member InsideJapan Tours on 0117 341 4620 (www.insidejapantours.com).

NEW - Iceland's Volcanic Ski Tour – From £1,095 with KE Adventure Travel

Just three hours from the Icelandic capital, Landmannalaugar lies at the centre of the volcanic wilderness of the Fjallabak. Rugged peaks, narrow valleys, glaciers and hot springs make this one of Iceland's most fascinating areas and pristine winter snow cover offers endless opportunities for ski-touring. This week of non-technical cross-country skiing from a comfortable refuge starts on easy terrain and progresses to more exhilarating ski-touring on the Fjallabak hills. Relax each evening in the hot springs beneath the star-studded sky. This [eight-day holiday](#) costs £1,095 pp (two sharing) and includes five nights' refuge with all meals, six days' ski touring, plus two nights in Reykavik (meals not included). Ski equipment can be hired locally. Flights extra. Departure dates are February, March and April 2014. Call AITO* member KE Adventure travel on 01768 773966 (www.keadventure.com).

Snow and Aurora Break in Kiruna – from £795 pp with Taber Holidays

The brand new ['Snow and Aurora Break'](#) is perfect for some winter family fun. With strong chances of seeing the Northern Lights and a multitude of exciting activities, it's an ideal short break. The trip includes three nights' B&B at Ripan Lodge, a unique hotel with high-quality facilities, excellent restaurant and

comfortable lounge with large picture windows, so you can keep watch for the Northern Lights. Optional excursions include a reindeer encounter, Northern Lights hunt by snowmobile or dog-sled, a moose safari and a visit to the Aurora Sky Station. The price starts from £795 pp based on four adults sharing, or £2,822 for a family of four (two adults and two children under 12). This includes flights (Heathrow to Kiruna via Stockholm) and transfers. Departures are daily from 1 September to 30 April. Call AITO* member Taber Holidays on 01274 875 199 (www.taberhols.co.uk).

Charming wilderness lodge and winter activities in Finland – from £1,256 pp with Discover the World

The picturesque surroundings of [Muotka Wilderness Lodge](#), in northern Finland, provide the perfect backdrop for a range of snowy activities, including reindeer sledging, snowmobiling and husky-sledding. Enjoy evenings spent beside a roaring log fire before seeking out the magical Northern Lights. Departing November to April, the price - from £1,256 pp (twin share) - includes three, four or six nights' full board, flights (UK to Ivalo via Helsinki), activities and excursions dependent on your chosen itinerary, winter clothing and transfers. Call AITO* member Discover the World on 01737 214 291 (www.discover-the-world.co.uk).

Beitostølen by Learjet – Norway from £995 pp with Inntravel

New for 2013-14 is Beitostølen, a self-contained village in the highlands of Norway and a truly unique family-run mountain idyll. A cross-country skier's paradise - with 300km of trails leading deep into the Jotunheimen National Park, as well as excellent downhill slopes for beginners and intermediates, husky tours, snowmobile safaris and ice-fishing - this is the perfect snowy adventure playground. [Stay at the Bergo Hotel](#) and arrive in style - the included transfer is a short hop by Learjet from Oslo to nearby Farganes airfield. The price, from £995 pp (two sharing), includes flights (Heathrow-Oslo), internal flights, transfers, seven nights' full-board accommodation and free use of the cross-country trails. Departure dates are flexible, from 22 December to 30 March. Call AITO* member Inntravel on 01653 617000 (www.inntravel.co.uk).

Snowy winter in Bulgaria – from £969 pp with Ramblers Holidays Worldwide

This seven-night luxury [winter wonderland guided walking adventure](#) visits two glorious locations in Bulgaria. First is Velingrad, a beautiful spa town in the Rhodopi Mountains - the birthplace of Orpheus - and the second is Bansko, a traditional ski resort at the foot of the Pirin Mountains. This holiday incorporates winter walking, a spectacular ride on Bulgaria's last mountain train across the Rila and Pirin mountains and an opportunity to enjoy traditional culture and folklore. Departing 5 February, the price - from £969 pp (two sharing) - includes flights, transfers, half-board accommodation at the four-star Hotel Zdravets in Velingrad and Park Hotel Gardenia in Bansko and the services of a dedicated tour leader. Call AITO* member Ramblers Holidays Worldwide on 01707 33 11 33 (www.ramblersholidays.co.uk).

See penguin chicks hatch in January – Antarctica from £8,258 pp (save £1,660 pp) with Journey Latin America

Take this enchanting, once in a lifetime [19-night cruise](#) to the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula to marvel at Adelie, Chin strap, Gentoo, Rockhopper and Macaroni penguins as their chicks hatch against a backdrop of snow-drenched mountains surrounded by jagged icebergs - one of the Earth's last wildernesses. The cruise departs on 31 December from Ushuaia, Argentina (this departure offers a saving of £1,660 pp). The price of £8,258 pp (two sharing) includes lectures, full-board accommodation and excursions to Port Lockroy, Cuverville Island, Gerlache Strait, Neumeyer Channel, Neko Harbour, Paradise Bay and the Melchior Islands. Call AITO* member Journey Latin America on 020 8622 8422 (www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk).

Cross-country skiing on the Russian Border – from £1,010 pp with Baltic Holidays

Up for an adventure this Winter? Follow the Russian border trails in this [Cross Country skiing adventure](#) with only the tracks of bears, wolverines and hares for company, plus the occasional border guard. Flying into Kuusamo, Finland, you'll be skiing from hut to hut for around 20km a day under the wing of your expert guide. Whilst in the wilderness, you have a good chance of seeing the Northern Lights. The price of £1,010 pp (no single supplement) includes six nights' accommodation in guest houses, all meals and tours in a small group of up to 12. Departure dates are from February to April, when the days are longer. Flights extra - Baltic Holidays can arrange flights for around £300 pp. Call AITO* Member Baltic Holidays on 0161 8605248 (www.balticholidays.com).

Skiing in Gulmarg – from £1,465 pp with Indus Experiences

Ski in the Himalayas is widely acknowledged as the final frontier amongst the skiing fraternity. Located on a mountain shelf, Gulmarg is nestled under the protective mass (4km in height and 5km shoulders) of Mt. Apharwat. From here it overlooks the Vale of Kashmir to 8km-high Nanga Parbat and other distant peaks. These [eight-night skiing holidays](#) include six nights' stay in Gulmarg, one night in Srinagar and one night in Delhi. The price of £1,755 pp (two sharing) includes all international and domestic flights, five days' skiing with Kashmir Powdercats, breakfast and dinner in Gulmarg plus all transfers by private car or jeep. The departure dates operate every Saturday – best time to go is from mid-January to end February. Call AITO* member Indus Experiences on 020 8901 7320 (www.indusexperiences.co.uk).

Christmas Magic of Lapland – Finland from £1,465 pp with skiLapland

New for 2013, is exclusive three and four-night luxury [Christmas holidays](#) in December to stunning Finnish Lapland. Stay in a choice of beautiful log cabins, luxury apartments or a welcoming hotel. Meet Father Christmas and enjoy a meal at his secret cottage, as well as many other great activities, from dog-sledding to visiting a reindeer farm. The trips are just as much fun for the older kids in your party. The price - from £1,465 per adult or £1,145 and £697 per child - based on a family of four sharing, and includes scheduled flights (Heathrow/Manchester), airport transfers, full-board accommodation and a range of exclusive activities enjoyed in small group sizes. Departures dates are 14 and 17 December. Call AITO* member skiLapland on 020 7199 6012 (www.ski-lapland.co.uk)

Have an ice hotel adventure – Romania from £757 pp

Travel to the heart of the Transylvanian Alps on this action-packed winter break. Take a cable car to the fabulous [Romanian Ice Hotel](#), which offers great value for money and a unique overnight experience sleeping on ice beds. Along the way, toboggan and trek on snowshoes through the beautiful mountains, and visit the medieval town of Sibiu in addition to the capital, Bucharest. This five-day tour costs from £757 pp (no single supplement) including flights (Heathrow), B&B accommodation, one other meal, transport and the services of a tour leader. The departure dates are in January, February and April 2014. Call AITO* member Explore on 0844 499 0901 (www.explore.co.uk)

Snow on the Alps – Switzerland by rail, £1,680 pp with Ffestiniog Travel

Enjoy majestic winter scenery from the comfort of your carriage on a ten-day Swiss trip that's just the ticket for rail enthusiasts. As well as ample opportunity to explore independently by train, post bus, lake steamer, city bus and tram, there's a full-day excursion from Chur to Tirano in Northern Italy on the Bernina Express, and the UNESCO Rhaetian Railways network to enjoy. Departing 11 February, [Snow on the Alps](#) costs £1,680 pp (two sharing) including standard-class rail travel to/from Switzerland, a first-class Swiss Pass, transfers, B&B and the services of a tour leader throughout. Call AITO* member Ffestiniog Travel on 01766 772030 (www.ffestiniogtravel.com).

Reindeer, huskies and Aurora – Northern Norway from £1,602 pp with Sunvil Discovery

Buzzing Tromsø is the largest city above the Arctic Circle: between September and April, it's bathed in the glow of the Aurora Borealis, and is the ideal base for a variety of winter excursions into the bewitching and majestic landscapes of Northern Norway. Departing 7 December, this special snow itinerary, includes an Aurora-hunting excursion, a husky-dog sledding trip and a reindeer-sledding activity. The seven-night itinerary costs from £1,602 pp (two sharing) including flights (Gatwick), transfers, excursions, B&B, afternoon waffles and a light evening meal at the Clarion Collection Hotel With, in Tromsø's historic Skansen area. Call AITO* member Sunvil Discovery (020 8758 4722, www.sunvil.co.uk).

Glacier Express in winter – from £1,028 pp with Great Rail Journeys

This adventurous twin-centre rail holiday provides ample opportunity to explore the majestic Swiss Alps cloaked in their winter finery, and to enjoy a trip on the famous Glacier Express, surely the slowest and one of the most scenic 'express' trains in the world. This eight-day twin-centre tour of the majestic Swiss Alps is priced from just £1,028 pp (two sharing), and includes Eurostar (London), domestic rail travel, seven nights' B&B accommodation, five dinners, a visit to Zermatt by mountain railway, a stay in the beautiful mountain resort of Kandersteg, all transfers, a Great Rail Journeys Swiss Travel Card and the services of a professional Tour Manager. Call AITO* member Great Rail Journeys on 01904 521 980 (www.GreatRail.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.**

Ends - 13 November 2013

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