



Search | Video | Rewards

Subscribe - 30 days free

Login

Register

The Telegraph

HOME | NEWS | SPORT | BUSINESS | ALL SECTIONS

Travel | Advice

Destinations | Hotels | Offers | Holiday types | City | Beach | Tours | Cruise | Ski | Family | **Advice** | LuxuryMore

Travel > Advice

Britain's best tour operators, according to you



Audley originally specialised in trips to Asia but now covers all corners of the globe. credit: getty

By **Telegraph Travel**
1 DECEMBER 2017 • 1:56PM

Audley has retained the title of best tour operator in the 2017 Telegraph Travel Awards, based on the opinions of almost 90,000 readers, while APT, McKinlay Kidd, Belmond and Premiere Neige also won awards.

Audley, a tailor-made specialist, offers itineraries to long-haul destinations including Asia, Africa, Australasia and Latin and North America.

Founded in 1996, it first began providing itineraries to south-east Asia, then South America, but now its portfolio comprises all corners of the globe. The operator has perfected the art of devising the perfect trip, thanks to its extensive network of contacts on the ground and excellent specialists and advisers.

Best tour operator

- 1 Audley
- 2 Trailfinders
- 3 Turquoise Holidays

Not far behind is Trailfinders, another tailor-made provider. The independently-owned company is a firm favourite and has performed consistently throughout the years. Owner Mike Gooley and his team offer exceptional service and competitive prices.

Audley Travel | Luxury, tailor-made trips with a great network of local partners

Established: 1996

Best for: Well travelled families seeking grassroots experiences in style with budgets of £2000 plus per person.

Visit website: audleytravel.com



View our Exclusive Tours 2018

Extraordinary trips with extraordinary people

READ MORE

- 1 **Get fit for the slopes: strengthen your core**
30 Nov 2017
- 2 **How to get fit for the slopes: jump squats**
30 Nov 2017
- 3 **Ski holidays: the best deals and packages for 2017/18**
29 Nov 2017
- 4 **Mount Agung eruption: Should I cancel my trip to Bali?**
28 Nov 2017
- 5 **LA for £175, Mallorca for a tenner – the best Black Friday travel deals and discounts**
24 Nov 2017

Top 5 | Audley's best-selling destinations

- 1 India
- 2 USA
- 3 South Africa
- 4 Canada
- 5 New Zealand

A new entrant this year is Turquoise Holidays. The tailor-made specialist, which started operating in 2002, has grown to become a boutique long-haul luxury holidays and honeymoon operator. The company's biggest-selling destinations by volume are typically tropical island idylls, including the Maldives, Mauritius and Thailand. It also offers a strong family holidays programme.



For new entrant: Turquoise Holidays, the Maldives are a best-seller credit: GETTY

Best escorted tour operator

- 1 APT
- 2 Exodus
- 3 Riviera

At this year's ABTA conference, touring was singled out as a fast-growing travel trend. In response, operators are delivering increasingly sophisticated itineraries for every type of traveller. While general destination tours to long-haul destinations continue to be popular, we are also seeing a rise in adventure tours as well as learning holidays and itineraries that offer exclusive access.

This year, APT finds its way to the top. Many might know the Australian company as a river cruise operator but it also runs an extensive escorted tours programme. Itineraries range from botanical excursions and culinary trips to four-wheel drive adventures.

APT | Memorable themed tours

Established: 1920s

Best for: Varied itineraries for adventure seekers that offer unique sightseeing opportunities, dining experiences and expert local guides.

Visit website: aptouring.co.uk



The adventure travel company Exodus comes in at second. The operator first took a group of travellers to the Himalayas more than 40 years ago, and has since expanded to offer itineraries across the world. Trips include cycling, walking, riding and mixed activity adventures as well as family and winter sports holidays.



In third place is tour operator Riviera. The company has been around since 1984 and has plenty of experience in general coach tours, which takes in both hidden gems and destination highlights.

Best specialist tour operator

- 1 McKinlay Kidd
- 2 Selective Asia
- 3 Wellbeing Escapes

The idea of booking an itinerary with a specialist tour operator is something we tend to consider without question when the destination we are dreaming of is far-flung or hard to visit without assistance. But we may be less prone to call the experts when we are planning a break on domestic soil.

With this in mind, McKinlay Kidd's triumph in this year's Specialist Tour Operator category is a tribute to its continued excellence. Based in Glasgow, the company only came into existence in 2003. Initially, it focused on Scotland, attempting to show holidaymakers a side of the country beyond cliché.

It expanded its vision to take in Ireland in 2010, and has subsequently added England to an increasingly rich stew. Its "Trips of a Lifetime" include a 12-night "Borders & North of England Explorer" which wanders on both sides of Hadrian's Wall, splicing the Lake District to the Tweed Valley to winning effect.

McKinlay Kidd | Authentic getaways in Britain

Established: 2003

Best for: Lining up schedules in beautiful destinations across England, Scotland and Ireland that dodge the tourist spots and delve into local cultures.

Visit website: mckinlaykidd.com



If McKinlay Kidd's success could be taken as evidence of a growing appetite for home comforts in turbulent times, the commendable second place for Selective Asia shows there is still a travel hunger for the Far East – this Brighton operator is a trusted source of getaways to everywhere from Sri Lanka and South Korea to the Philippines.

The presence of London outfit Wellbeing Escapes in the joint runners-up spot, meanwhile, demonstrates that there is always a desire for spa escapes and yoga retreats. The company has built its reputation on selling relaxing jaunts to countries as diverse as Canada, India, Portugal and the Maldives.



Best rail operator

- 1 Belmond
- 2 Rocky Mountaineer
- 3 Audley

Trains, don't we love them! From the rose-tinted nostalgia of puffing steam engines (think Flying Scotsman, Hogwarts Express) to the super sleek and speedy (Bullet Train; Shanghai Maglev) to the seriously epic (Trans-Siberian; Indian Pacific) we – or rather you, the readers – just

can't get enough of them. Travelling them and watching television programmes about them (thank you Michael Portillo).

Belmond | A stylish operator with a rich heritage

Established: 1976

Best for: Its iconic Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, running between London and Venice. Rail journeys don't get much more glamorous than this, but be prepared to pay a princely sum.

Visit website: belmond.com



So it comes as little surprise that in this category the operator that comes at the top of your list is Belmond, the company behind the most famous of the lot – the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, that legendary train so lovingly restored to its 1930s glamorous best with beautiful Art Deco flourishes, exquisite fine dining and sheer black tie class.



One of the best ways to explore a new country credit: GETTY

While the signature route is London-Venice, the train does once a year return to its original destination, Istanbul, evoking the story that has once again this year hit the silver screen, *Murder on the Orient Express*. Beyond that, Belmond operates similarly luxurious trains in Britain (the Belmond British Pullman and Belmond Royal Scotsman) and south-east Asia (Eastern & Oriental Express). Testifying to the growing demand for this sort of travel, it has in the last two years launched new trains in Ireland (Belmond Grand Hibernian) and Peru (Belmond Andean Explorer).

Runner-up Rocky Mountaineer offers a similarly sophisticated take on rail travel with four main routings in the spectacular setting of the Rocky Mountains on trains with double-decker carriages offering majestic viewing possibilities and sumptuous dining. The other runner-up, Audley Travel, a huge favourite of Telegraph Travel readers, can incorporate top-end train experiences into the much broader itineraries it tailor makes for journeys throughout the world.

Best ski operator

- 1 Premiere Neige
- 2 YSE
- 3 Peak Retreats

Luxury holidays are one of the key growth areas in the ski market. Premiere Neige has successfully met this demand with its collection of expertly selected chalets and self-catering apartments in the small French resort of Sainte Foy without pushing the price beyond that which many holidaying skiers and families can afford.

Sainte Foy's base village has grown considerably since lifts first opened in 1990, and Premiere Neige, founded in 2001 and the first chalet company to specialise in the resort, has grown with it and responded to skiers' changing needs. The level of service is impressively high and other welcome touches include hot tubs on balconies, high-end bathroom products and top-quality bed linen and towels.

Premiere Neige | Carefully curated ski holidays in France

Established: 2001

Best for: Luxury catered and self-catered accommodation in the French ski resort of Sainte Foy, which can be packaged with ski passes, lessons and gear.



Visit website: premiere-neige.com

Première Neige now offers seven catered chalets, chosen for their location, striking interiors and impressive Alpine views. Imaginative catering and well-selected wine, mean the quality is high.

Première Neige's 22 self-catering properties are geared towards comfort with features including log fires, saunas and satellite TVs, and benefit from the company's trademark service.

As part of packages Première Neige can arrange lift passes, ski school, child care and airport transfers in advance; once in resort the concierge is available by phone or in an office at the Sainte Foy base, whether to book a last minute mountain guide, or advise on and make a restaurant reservation.



France reigns supreme when it comes to skiing destinations ©GEM/GETTY

Runner up is another luxury operator, YSE with 19 catered chalets in Val d'Isère, France. In third place, reflecting UK skiers ongoing love affair with France, is French specialist Peak Retreats. The company's USP is offering holidays to lesser-known destinations such as Praz de Lys, Valmorel and Vaujany.

Previous winners | Telegraph Travel Awards 2011-2017

Category Winners	2017	2016/2015	2014	2013	2012
Best country	New Zealand	New Zealand	New Zealand	New Zealand	New Zealand
Best city	Cape Town	Cape Town	Cape Town	Cape Town	Cape Town
Best long-haul airline	Singapore Airlines	Emirates	Singapore Airlines	Singapore Airlines	Singapore Airlines
Best short-haul airline	Swiss	BA	BA	BA	BA
Best tour operator	Audley	Audley	Trailfinders	Audley	Trailfinders
Best specialist tour operator	McKinlay Kidd	Wellbeing Escapes	HF Holidays	Red Savannah	N/A

Show more

Best villas operator

- 1 Mr & Mrs Smith
- 2 Vintage Travel
- 3 Tuscany Now & More

The lure of a villa is straight-forward: a home-from-home makes particular sense for families and groups travelling together, and is the perfect base for exploring or for relaxing. But villa holidays have changed radically in recent years: where once the main lure of a self-catering property was economic, our results show that travellers are choosing operators that offer high-end properties around the world with great design and sophisticated concierge services.

Mr & Mrs Smith takes the top award in the first year Telegraph Travel has included a "villa" category, with readers drawn to the group's grand, characterful properties around the world. From Morocco to Indonesia, Tuscany to Santorini, Mr & Mrs well-located stylish homes offer impeccable service and high-tech features.

Runner up is Vintage Travel, with its portfolio of practical and homely family-sized villas in quiet rural locations around the Med, the Canary Islands and across Britain.

In third place is Tuscany Now & More, which features grand properties in Tuscany but also in Umbria, Portofino, Verona, Venice and Rome, along with an impressive concierge service that can arrange anything from a private chef to bespoke tours of the local sites.

Contributions from Trisha Andres, Chris Leadbeater, Adrian Bridge, Sally Peck and Henry Druce