

ABOUT THIS SUPPLEMENT

In the good old-fashioned days of travel, guided tours were afforded only to those wealthy enough to venture to far-away places with exotic-sounding names.

Not any more. As our taste for travel broadens, the idea of getting someone else to take care of all the arrangements is a luxury that we can all afford.

And that's where escorted travel comes in. From booking flights, to creating bespoke itineraries, organising special tours, restaurants and local guides, escorted tours are a surefire way to get the most of your time away.

Whatever kind of holiday you are looking for, there's a specialist who will create a tour to suit you.

In this 16-page supplement, we offer a glimpse of just some of the options: from how to travel Eastern Europe, to river safaris in China, and a gourmet's guide to Tasmania. All you have to do is decide how far and wide you want to go, and let our guide show you how.

PARAMOUNT/THE KOBAL COLLECTION



Carried away: Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and Dorothy Lamour in the 1942 film *Road to Morocco*

TAKING THE LEADING ROLE

REPORT BY CAROLINE SUTTON

TRAVEL IS MUCH EASIER THESE DAYS, AND THE MORE THE WORLD OPENS UP, THE MORE THERE IS TO DISCOVER. SO, HOW BEST TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TRAVELS? CHOOSE THE BLISSFUL SIMPLICITY OF AN ESCORTED TOUR

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COVER IMAGE: CAROLINE SCHIFF, GETTY

The intrepid Brit was known for venturing into unknown territories with numerous man-servants and donkeys in tow, for luggage alone.

Later, the seriously rich took to travelling Agatha Christie-style on the Orient Express.

These days every student worth their iPod heads off to far-flung lands for an essential educational gap-year.

But you don't need to pack a rucksack and a copy of the *Rough Guide* to visit wonderful places such as Thailand, New Zealand or Hawaii.

Many of the UK's canniest travellers opt for escorted travel, knowing they can leave all the details to the travel company, so they can relax and enjoy the trip.

Many more people, from young professionals to older travellers are opting for the ease and adventure of escorted travel. The range of tour options is phenomenal, and there's a company that will organise transport, accommodation and a fabulous itinerary suited to your lifestyle and budget.

You could visit Shangri-La in the Yunnan Province, stay with a Bedouin tribe in Jordan or go whale-watching in New Zealand. Maybe you'd like to take a cruise in the Arctic or follow in the

footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi in Umbria, Italy. You can even make sure you are first in line for the best view of the total eclipse in Russia on August 1 next year.

If it's adventure you're after, you can opt to join a group of people with similar interests. Many operators now provide

THE SHEER LOGISTICS OF REACHING THE REMOTEST PLACES ON EARTH WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR SOME WITHOUT EXPERT HELP

holidays for solo travellers who love going away and enjoy the camaraderie of a group and meeting new people.

Helen Broomfield, 37, from Essex fulfilled a lifelong ambition when she went to the Galapagos Islands on a tour with a group of people she had never met before. "It wasn't just a fantastic holiday and a dream come true - I had always wanted to see the wildlife on the Galapagos - I made a lot of new friends. It was a great way to travel."

Travellers of all types are attracted to this style of holiday. Some enjoy the comfort and ease

of travelling with a company. For others, the sheer logistics of reaching some of the most remote places on earth would be impossible without expert help.

Margaret Dudley, a 74-year-old traveller from Guildford, has been on four escorted tour holidays with CTS Horizons to places such as Costa Rica and the Easter Islands. She even circumnavigated Spitsbergen island in the Arctic.

"Travelling, as they say, broadens your mind, and I'm sure I'm more tolerant of different beliefs and cultures from my travels. The local guides on these tours can take you to places that you wouldn't think of visiting as a normal tourist."

While escorted travel can be more expensive, it usually incorporates all travel arrangements, accommodation and food for a set price.

Gary Bartelings, UK director for Australian Pacific Touring says: "The majority of our customers are over 45, but groups are mixed. Some are couples, others are on their own or with friends."

"Most people tend to be sociable, with a gung-ho attitude to life, it's a great way to travel the world." Single-only and adventure tours

attract younger people who are often well-seasoned travellers who still want adventure but don't want to rough-it. They want to maximise their experience and not waste time with the usual problems of independent travel.

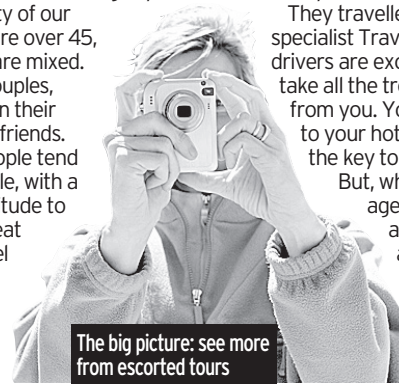
"I'm not interested in lying on a beach for a fortnight anymore. I want to immerse myself in new cultures," says 47-year-old bank worker Anne Carvalho. Anne, who lives in Bristol, travelled with solo tour company Just You. "Escorted itineraries let you concentrate on the place you're visiting without worrying about accommodation or food."

Some tour operators have no-flying holidays, providing accessible train, coach or boat journeys instead. And, if you fancy a challenge, you can ride or walk.

William Higson, 78, and his wife Elfriede, 79, have enjoyed taking escorted coach tours for over 30 years now.

They travelled with tour specialist Travelsphere: "The drivers are exceptional. They take all the trouble away from you. You're just taken to your hotel and given the key to your room."

But, whatever your age, if you want adventure with an easy ride, then escorted travel is surely the best way to go.



The big picture: see more from escorted tours