

# The Telegraph Travel Awards 2019





# 'Our awards are a fantasy what you love about the

*Claire Irvin explains  
how your votes help to  
deliver one of the most  
comprehensive travel  
surveys in Britain – and  
on the following pages,  
we reveal the winners*

**A**nd so, finally, after months of anticipation, the results of the Telegraph Travel Awards 2019 have been revealed – and how! More than 40,000 of our registered readers took the time to complete the survey, share their travel preferences and cast hundreds of thousands of votes. This makes it one of the most, if not the most, wide-ranging independent travel surveys in Britain and a fantastic insight into what you love most about the trips you take – not to mention

where you are planning to go next year and beyond.

Like all big moments, this one has been months in the making. First, back in June, came the unveiling of the jaw-dropping prizes on offer to all those completing the survey across all our platforms: in print, online and on social media. From family holidays to adventure travel and well-being breaks; from a luxury tour of India to a week at an exclusive Caribbean hideaway, these worldwide experiences had a total value of more than £500,000 – and, I'm sure, fuelled some daydreams (not to mention some rather wonderful



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# tastic insight into the trips you take'



holiday planning) as we revealed them in our print sections week after week. You entered in droves. Then came the task of collating the results - and the nerve-racking months of waiting for those included in the survey. Who would win? Would the consistent reader favourites of the past retain their crowns - or would our readers' sense of adventure inspire them to choose new favourites?

Finally, it was time to reveal the results - and last Wednesday, at a star-studded event in The Magazine, a building in Hyde Park designed by Zaha Hadid, the contenders gathered to find out how you voted. The

awards, hosted by explorer and *Telegraph Travel* columnist Benedict Allen, gave up some surprising results, and some less so. Over the page, Nick Trend, our chief consumer and culture editor, gives his views on what those results say about how we as travellers are changing. It's a fascinating insight, and one we will use to continue to bring you inspiration and expertise in 2020 and beyond. Thank you for your votes - and see you again next year.

**Claire Irvin is *The Telegraph's* head of travel**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 →

## sale of the year starts!

up to 35% on 600 tours on offer. The sale ends 5 December so don't miss our best deals of 2019!



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per person on the select 600 tours as indicated on the G Adventures website. Tour must be booked by 5 December 2019, and exclude international airfare not specified in the itinerary, are valid for new bookings only and are subject to availability. G Adventures reserves the right to withdraw this offer without notice.



loss in bare feet, as we did, be ready for the excruciating pain as stones jab at your cosseted soles. On the other side, the trail was well marked. A hut near the landing strip is one of a number providing shelter and a shower on the long paths into this wild frontier region, which is bigger than Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks put together. It tugged me. I need to go back.

But, goodness, our short walk was remarkable. The clouds. The green of the silver beeches. The lighter greens of the pasture. The river water which remained azure blue. Our trail was originally cut by a farmer to get his cattle back from high pasture. It quickly led into the shelter of the forest: a high, enfolding world hung with lichen, dotted with huge boulders and running with water tumbling down steep cliffs.

I ended up suffering from waterfall haunton: scenery fatigue. The southern Alps of New Zealand are not made for brooding on transience. They are just too beautiful.

A jet boat was waiting. Originally invented in New Zealand, and designed to access outlying pastures, it is a faster way of getting from A to than road. At 70mph we twisted through the shallows of outspread veins of water. At times, we seemed hunker down and almost fly uphill. It was always seem to take to the wilderness with a dash of extra bitters. It all feels on the good side of risky.

We took the scenic route back to Queenstown through open landscapes that reminded me of South Africa. Following the river, and beside a wide agricultural plain of fruit farms and little fields (vineyards and crops with a curtain of vacant mountains miles away), we eventually plunged into a purple gorge spattered with outbreaks of heather before finding the airport and the route home.

I'm not the only traveller who has been to a small part of New Zealand who wants to see it all. I'm not the only temporary resident who has gone on a short break and started to think about migrating. New Zealand is not really a place you can ever "do" with certainty. I fear you will always want more. It's hardly surprising that *Telegraph Travel* readers have just voted it their favourite destination in the world for the seventh time in a row.

## BEYOND INFINITY

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## BEST TOUR OPERATOR AUDLEY

RUNNERS-UP  
TRAILFINDERS, SCOTT DUNN

Audley, the winner of this category both in 2017 and the previous year,

# And the 2019 winners are...

slipped to third place in 2018, but has now stormed back to reclaim its crown. The vast majority of its customers are booking expensive, adventurous, tailor-made holidays to far-flung destinations. It is a list which has grown enormously over the years, but good examples include Bhutan, Botswana, the Galapagos Islands and China.

Audley's success lies, I think, partly in the fact that these are such special, memorable places to visit. But the operator only gets your vote because it delivers an outstanding experience and this seems to be partly because, as it claims in its marketing blurb, it aims to listen to its clients first, and then design their trip. While this might





tours in Australia. After branching out into New Zealand, Canada and Alaska by the Nineties, and then travel by luxury train and cruise ship in the 2000s, it now offers an impressive programme of top-end escorted itineraries all around the world. It has performed exceptionally well in our awards in recent years, heading the top poll in 2017 and coming third last year. It wins again this year and, if you are looking for an imaginative group itinerary with excellent insights into the destination in question, bespoke experiences and efficient organisation, then – according to *Telegraph* readers, at least – you can do no better.

Meanwhile, in second place, HF Holidays has been offering guided walking holidays and special-interest breaks since 1913, making it one of Britain's longest-established tour operators. As well as offering tours and walks in more than 80 destinations on six continents, it also offers activity breaks in 18 country houses which it owns and operates in the UK.

In third place, G Adventures – founded on a shoestring by a Canadian entrepreneur in 1990 – has grown from a company operating a handful of trips in Latin America to an offer of more than 700 small-group adventures all over the world, and it has clearly managed to keep the quality up at the same time. *NT*

## BEST SPECIALIST TOUR OPERATOR NEW ZEALAND IN DEPTH

**RUNNERS-UP**  
**INNTRAVEL, NEILSON**

Given that New Zealand once again won our best destination category, it is perhaps no surprise that one of the leading specialists in arranging holidays there has done so well. Buxton-based New Zealand In Depth has been in business since 2003 and

specialist in a different mould, offering lots of destinations (mostly in Europe) but focusing on interesting ways to explore them. Its mantra is “slow holidays” and many of its self-guided itineraries involve cycling or walking, though it also has a portfolio of journeys by car, train and boat. Although no longer a family-run firm (it's now part of the Hotelplan group), its performance this year suggests it is keeping its standards high.

Third-placed Neilson offers yet another different focus: if you are looking for a beach club or sailing holiday in the Med, this is where *Telegraph* readers think you should turn first. *NT*

## BEST SKI OPERATOR PEAK RETREATS

**RUNNERS-UP**  
**CLUB MED, VIP SKI**

Peak Retreats is in many ways the antithesis of the standard ski operator; while it does serve some of the big-name resorts which many Britons favour, its real mission is spreading the word about under-the-radar France. It offers accommodation in smaller villages serving famous ski areas – St Martin de Belleville or Orelle for the Trois Vallées instead of Méribel, for example, Les Carroz rather than Flaine for the Grand Massif. And it sings the praises of smaller ski areas with a true French feel, such as Aussois, Vars and Praz de Lys.

The directors are two French anglophiles, Xavier Schouller and Nathalie Soma, whose desire to encourage skiers and snowboarders out of their comfort zone has obviously chimed this year, perhaps also because these lesser-known destinations also tend to be money savers. But this doesn't mean roughing it; Peak Retreats takes care to choose



quality hotels and self-catering apartments and the directors visit every property that they recommend.

This year's runners-up also reflect a desire for value along with quality. Club

Med's all-inclusive model, with full board, lift passes and lessons all covered, has gone from strength to strength. It regularly opens new hotel complexes and this season is venturing into luxury chalet-apartments, in Samoëns France. VIP Ski specialises in catered chalets and chalet-hotels in 10 resorts in France and Austria. The company is lifted above the norm by high levels of catering and attention to detail, as well as quality accommodation in great locations – most chalets on its books have been built to VIP Ski's own specifications. *Cat Weakley*

## BEST FERRY LINE BRITANNY FERRIES

**RUNNERS-UP**  
**STENA LINE, P&O FERRIES**

No company featuring in our travel awards over the years has been more



sound like an obvious approach, it is remarkable how few travel companies understand this basic principle of customer service.

Once again, Trailfinders will be frustrated to find itself piped into second place. Once a regular winner in our awards, this is the fourth year in a row that it has just failed to take the title. But, given the broad nature of its offering – from good-value airfares and complex itineraries to luxury holidays – this is still an excellent performance and its experienced and well-trained staff remain an obvious port of call for advice on long-haul travel arrangements.

In third place, Scott Dunn is another consistent performer. Founded as a luxury ski operator, it now offers a much bigger portfolio of tailor-made, top-end holidays that stretches from African safaris to honeymoons,

