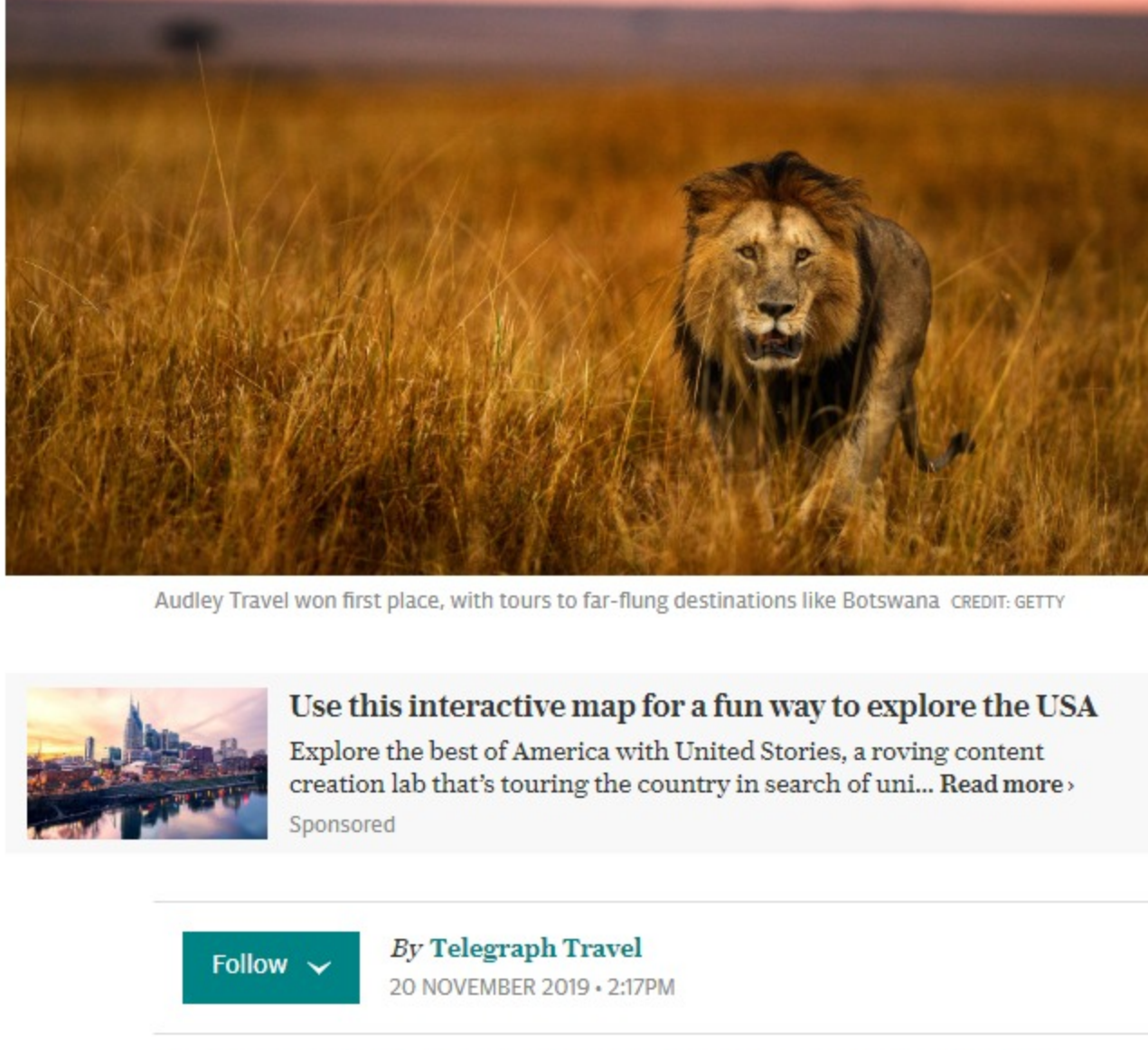
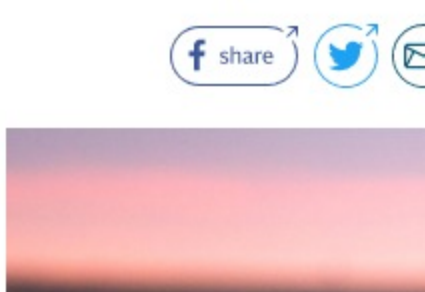


Britain's best tour operators, according to you



Audley Travel won first place, with tours to far-flung destinations like Botswana (caption omitted)

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Audley Travel has won the title of best tour operator in the 2019 Telegraph Travel Awards, based on the opinions of almost 50,000 readers, while APT, New Zealand In Depth, Peak Retreats, Rocky Mountaineer and Vintage Travel also picked up awards.

The luxury tour operator took first place in 2016 and 2017, but slipped to third place in 2018. This year the company has returned to full force, sweeping the top spot with its tailored approach to travel.

Of the five sub-categories (best escorted tour operator, best specialist, best ski, best rail and best villa operator), no previous winners have held onto their titles this year.

Best Tour Operator

- 1 Audley Travel
- 2 Trailfinders
- 3 Scott Dunn

The vast majority of Audley's customers are looking 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, the Galapagos Islands, Botswana and China. Audley's success perhaps lies 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 lie its ability to listen to its clients first, and then design their trip. While this might sound like an obvious approach, it is remarkable how few travel companies employ this basic principle of customer service.

Top 51 Audley's best-selling destinations

- 1 USA

Telegraph Travel Awards 2019 | Britain's best tour operators

Best Tour Operator

- 1 Audley Travel
- 2 Trailfinders
- 3 Scott Dunn

Best Escorted Tour Operator

- 1 APT
- 2 HF Holidays
- 3 G Adventures

Best Specialist Tour Operator

- 1 New Zealand In Depth
- 2 Inn Travel
- 3 Neilson

Best Ski Operator

- 1 Peak Retreats
- 2 Club Med
- 3 VIP Ski

Best Rail Operator

- 1 Rocky Mountaineer
- 2 Belmond
- 3 Great Rail Journeys

Best Villa Operator

- 1 Vintage Travel
- 2 Simpson Travel
- 3 The Thinking Traveller

Best Escorted Tour Operator

- 1 APT
- 2 HF Holidays
- 3 G Adventures

APT may be more familiar to you for its river cruise programme (a category it won in 2014 and 2016), but this arm of the company, which was launched in 2005, is actually a relatively recent development. APT (the acronym stood originally for Australian Pacific Touring) was founded in Melbourne and built its success on escorted coach tours in Australia. After branching out into New Zealand, Canada and Alaska by the 1960s and then travel by luxury train and cruise ships 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, topping the poll in 2017, and coming third last year. It was 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.

APT | Memorable themed tours

Established: 1970s

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

Visit website: aptouring.co.uk



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 30 destinations on six continents it also offers activity breaks in 18 country houses which it owns and operates in the UK.

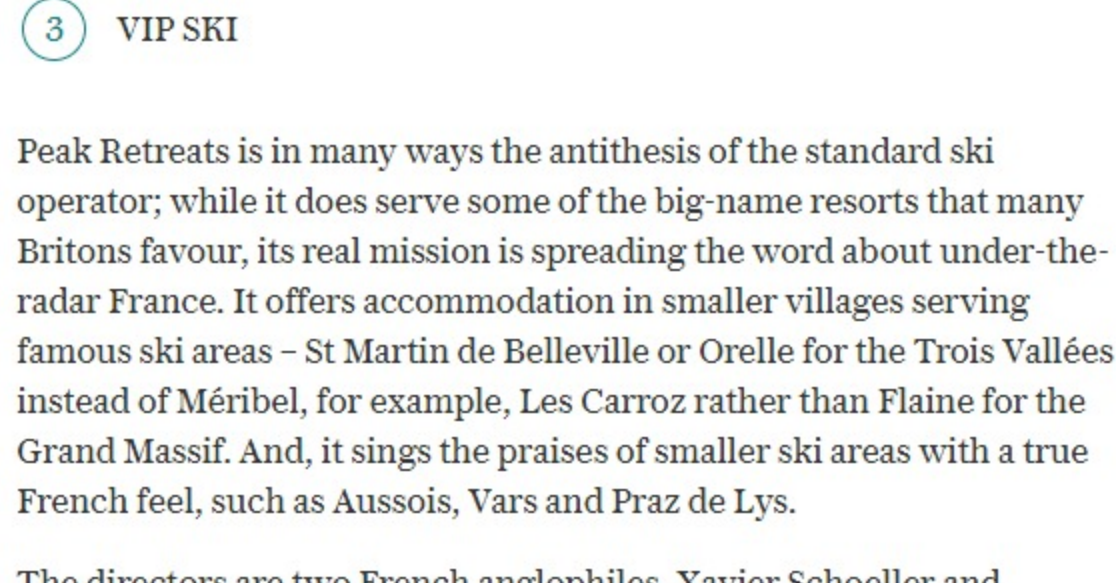
In third place G Adventures, founded on a shoe string by a Canadian entrepreneur in 1990, has grown from a company operating a handful of trips in Latin America to an offer of more than 700 small group adventures all over the world, and it has clearly managed to maintain quality up at the same time.

Best Specialist Tour Operator

- 1 New Zealand In Depth
- 2 Inntravel
- 3 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. Duxton-based New Zealand In Depth has been in business since 2003 and takes a distinctive approach to customer service. It is not just the bookings are looked after by the same member of staff from the outset and that person is responsible for housing and then delivering the itinerary.

The staff are experts in all aspects of the country and they work particularly closely with partners on the ground, having developed long standing relationships with accommodation suppliers, guides, drivers and so on. New Zealand in Depth also supports local tourism and environmental projects - in short, it is the model of how a specialist tour operator should work, and it has clearly impressed Telegraph readers over the last year and more.



New Zealand also won best country in the Telegraph Travel awards (caption omitted)

In second place, Inntravel is a 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 is now part of the Hotelplan group), its performance this year suggests it is keeping its standards high.

Inntravel | Holidays for keen walkers and cyclists

Established: 1984

Best for: Slow, independent travel via foot, bicycle or train that let you really get to know some of the world's most beautiful destinations.

Visit website: inntravel.co.uk



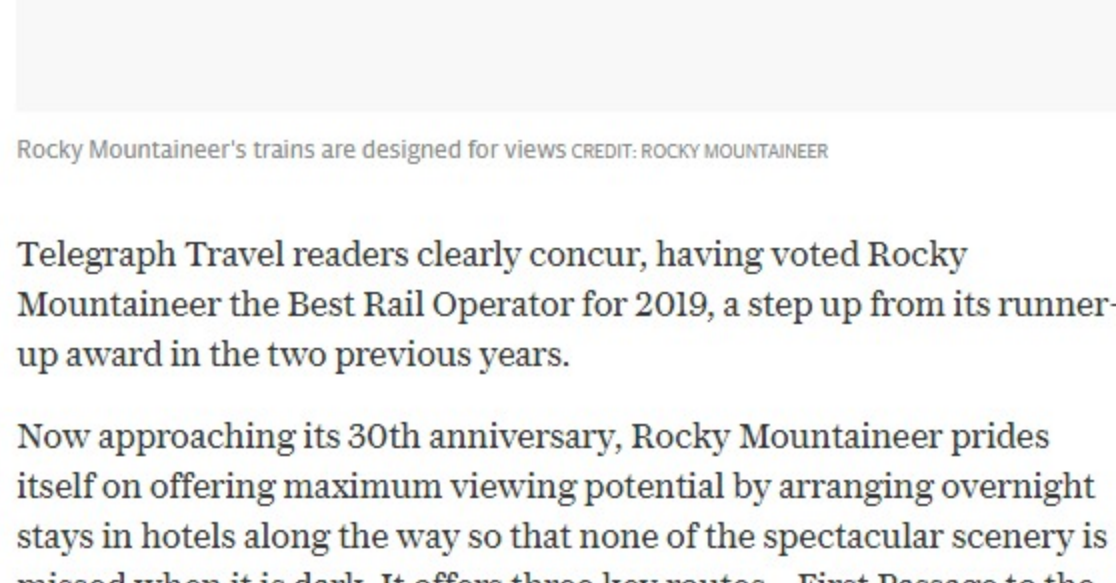
Third-placed Neilson offers yet another different focus - if you are looking for a beach club or sailing holiday in the Med, this is where Telegraph readers think you should turn first.

Best Ski Operator

- 1 Peak Retreats
- 2 Club Med
- 3 VIPSKI

Peak Retreats is in many ways the antithesis of the standard ski operator: while it does serve some of the big name resorts that 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 Praiz de Lys.

The directors are two French anglophiles, Xavier Schoeller and Nathalie Soua, 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 they do not mean roughing it, Peak Retreats takes care to choose quality hotels and self-catering apartments, and the directors visit every recommended property.



Peak Retreats champions lesser-known parts of France, like Praiz de Lys (caption omitted)

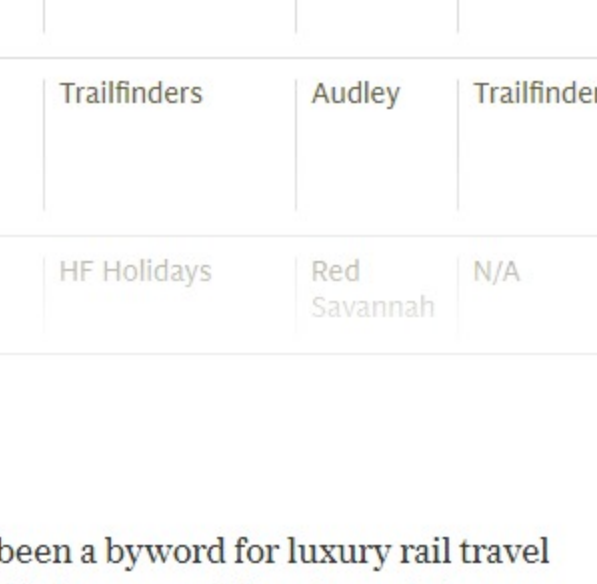
This year's runners up also reflect a desire for value along with quality. Club Med's all-inclusive model, with full-board, lift passes and lessons all covered, has gone from strength to strength. It regularly opens new hotel complexes and this season is venturing into luxury chalet-apartments, in Samois, France.

Club Med | Premium all-inclusive holidays with a global reach

Established: 1950

Best for: Active families paying from £800pp with no hidden extras and kids-stay-free promotions at selected resorts

Visit website: clubmed.co.uk

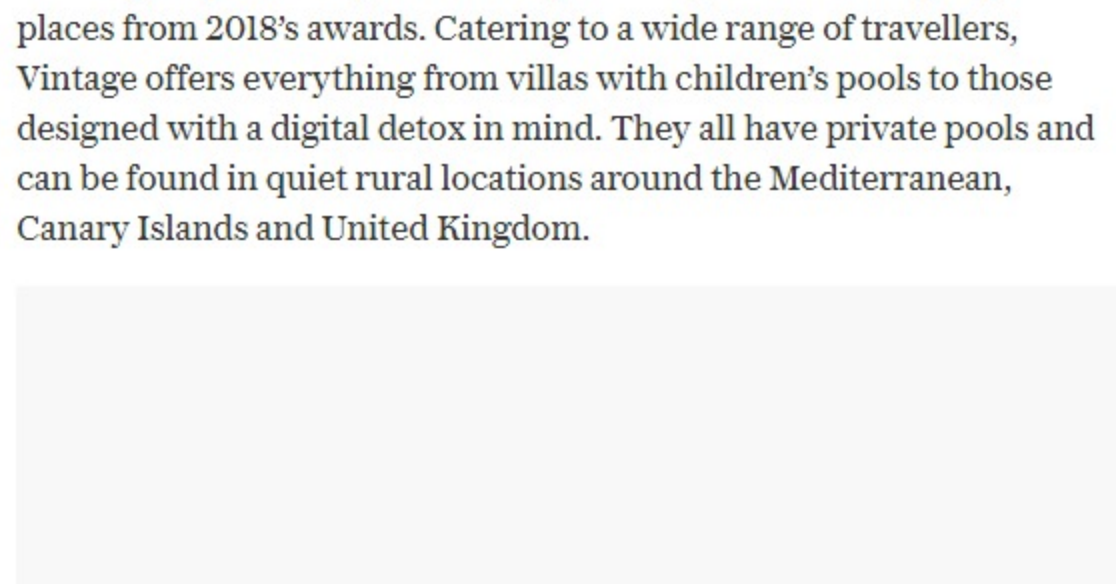


VIP SKI specialises in catered chalets and chalet hotels in 10 resorts in France and Austria. The company is lifted above the norm by high levels of catering and attention to detail, as well as quality accommodation in great locations - most chalets on its books have been built to VIP's own specifications.

Best Rail Operator

- 1 Rocky Mountaineer
- 2 Belmond
- 3 Great Rail Journeys

The website of the Vancouver-based Rocky Mountaineer train company presents something of a dilemma when it comes to describing the two levels of service on its signature journeys through some of the most spectacular scenery in the world. "Choose between excellent and extraordinary" it suggests - the terms it uses to describe its Silver Leaf and Gold Leaf options, both offering fantastic views, food and service, with the latter scaling even greater heights of superlativeness.



Rocky Mountaineer's trains are designed for views (caption omitted)

Telegraph Travel readers clearly concur, having voted Rocky Mountaineer the Best Rail Operator for 2019, a step up from its runner-up award in the two previous years.

Now approaching its 30th anniversary, Rocky Mountaineer prides itself on offering maximum viewing potential by arranging overnight stays in hotels along the way so that none of the spectacular scenery is missed when it is dark. It offers three key routes - First Passage to the West, Journey through the Clouds and Rainforest to Gold Rush - in a range of packages of different duration and optional off-train experiences that as of this year have included heli-hiking.

Previous winners | Telegraph Travel Awards 2011-2018

Category	2018	2017	2016/2015	2014	2013	2012
Best country	New Zealand	New Zealand	New Zealand	New Zealand	New Zealand	New Zealand
Best city	Cape Town	Cape Town	Cape Town	Cape Town	Cape Town	Cape Town
Best long-haul airline	Singapore Airlines	Singapore Airlines	Emirates	Singapore Airlines	Singapore Airlines	Singapore Airlines
Best short-haul airline	Swire	Swire	BA	BA	BA	BA
Best tour operator	The Telegraph Holiday Company	Audley	Audley	Trailfinders	Audley	Trailfinders
Best specialist	Flammarion	McDonnell	Wellspring	HF Holidays	Red Savannah	N/A

Show more

Another company that has long been a byword for luxury rail travel (and indeed a previous winner of this category) is Belmond, the operator of the legendary Venice Simplon-Orient-Express and a host of other sumptuous rail adventures in countries as diverse as Peru, Thailand, Malaysia and Ireland. The other runner up this year is Great Rail Journeys, a company which offers an extensive range of guided tours by rail worldwide, including trips on both the Rocky Mountaineer and the London to Venice Belmond routing.

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



Best villa operator

- 1 Vintage Travel
- 2 Simpson Travel
- 3 The Thinking Traveller

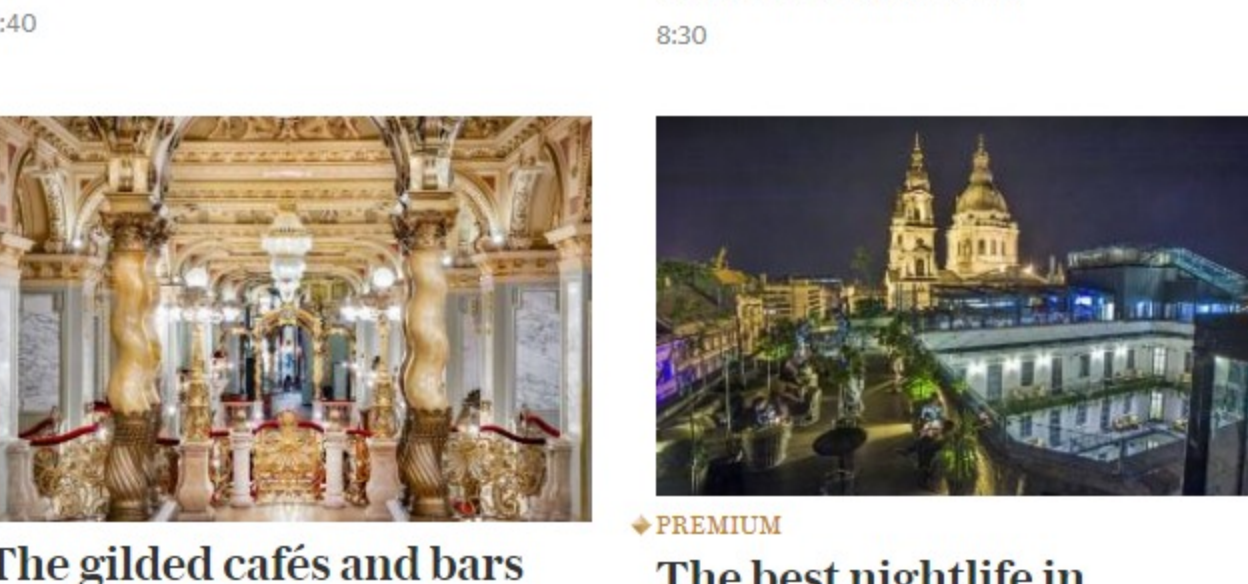
Villa stays are on the up as more of us head off on multi-generation holidays, with grandparents and grandchildren in tow. Not only do these villas provide an environment that makes it easy to cater for all manner of fussy eaters, they also offer a sense of privacy that is hard to find at a hotel. The best will take you to the heart of a destination, while the in-house concierge services will share you the region's soul - from truffle hunting in Italy to wine tasting in France.

Leading the pack this year is Vintage Travel, which has kept up two places from 2018's awards, catering to a wide range of travellers. Vintage offers everything from villas with children's pools to those designed with a digital detox in mind. They all have private pools and can be found in quiet rural locations around the Mediterranean, Canary Islands and United Kingdom.



Vintage Travel's villa destinations include the Canary Islands (caption omitted)

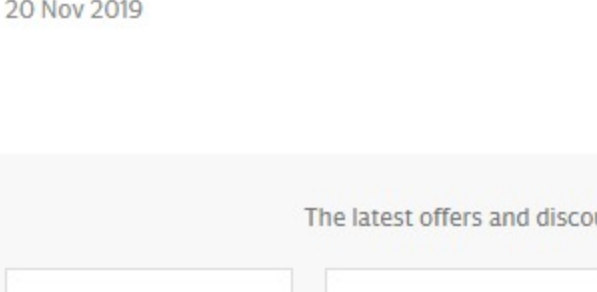
First runner-up is last year's winner Simpson Travel, with high-end self-catering in Corsica, Mallorca, France, Italy, Turkey and the Greek islands. Intimate honeymoon hideaways and family villas are popular favourites, with a range of activities - from sailing lessons to horse riding - on offer.



Established: 1978

Best for: Families looking for both the freedom of a self-catering villa but with on-site child-care and age-specific activities on hand.

Visit website: simpsontravel.com



Following closely behind is Thinking Traveller, purveyor of beautiful properties in equally beautiful locations: Puglia, Sicily, Corsica and the Ionian and Sporades islands. Their experiential offering includes yacht charters and private guided tours of Unesco World Heritage sites.

1,000 Dream Trips

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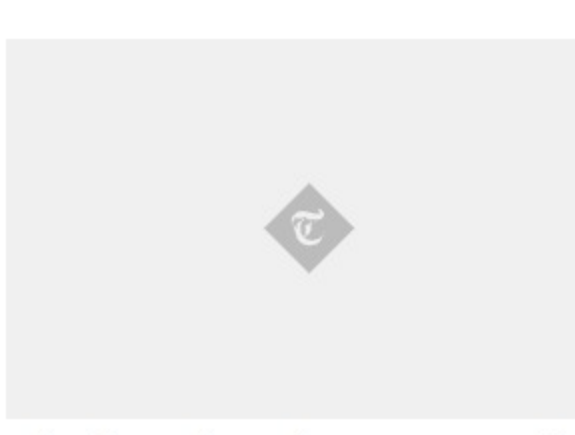
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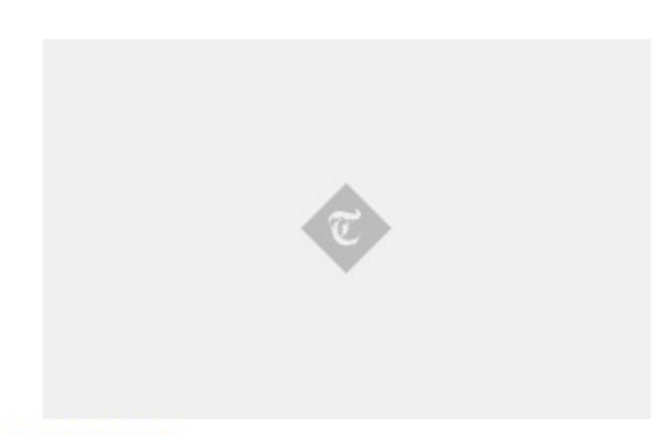
Travel latest



Looking for 28 of the UK's best festive events for families

10:24

Why this is Europe's greatest city
MARCEL THEROUX
10:03



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10:56



13 of the best free things to do in Venice

10:55



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10:54



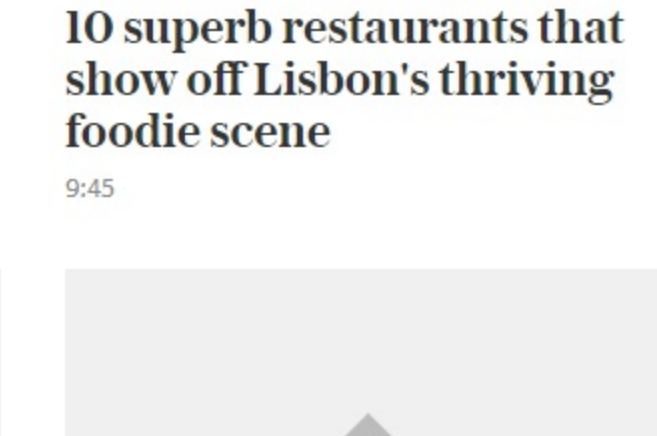
Which city did you name the greatest on Earth?

10:40



The best hotels to network and chill in... Madrid, from post-meeting bath-butlers to cupcake pop-ups

10:40



The best nightlife in Madrid, from cool rooftop bars to funky clubs

10:37



Where to drink in Madrid, from classic bodegas to cool cocktail bars

10:02



The best budget hotels in Madrid, from arty townhouses to chic posadas

10:35



The best restaurants in Madrid, from traditional tapas to modern marvels

10:10



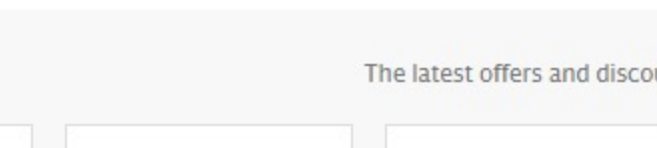
The best places to shop in Lisbon, from ceramics to soaps

10:00



48 hours in... Lisbon, an insider guide to Portugal's timeless capital

9:55



10 superb restaurants that show off Lisbon's thriving foodie scene

9:45



The best luxury hotels in Lisbon, from sumptuous suites to slick rooftop pools

9:40

The best things to do in Lisbon, from sweeping views to street art

9:40

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8:30

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