

The best tour operators, according to you

Find out which tour operators triumphed in the 2025 Telegraph Travel Awards, voted for by readers

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Belmond, which runs the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, was named best rail holiday company Credit: Belmond

Around 20,000 readers voted in the [2025 Telegraph Travel Awards](#), nominating their favourite destinations, hotels and holiday companies – and the results are in. Here we reveal your top tour operators, ferry companies and car hire providers.

Best Tour Operator

- Audley Travel
- Traillfinders
- Cox & Kings

Having crowned our table many times over the last decade, Audley once again takes the top spot for best tour operator. Given its offering of complex itineraries in adventurous destinations aimed at travellers with large budgets, such consistency is extremely impressive. It offers travel arrangements all over the world and this year adds some new offerings at three of Telegraph readers' favourite countries.

Tapping into an appetite for discovering the lesser-known and less crowded areas in popular destinations, these include itineraries to the Dolomites in Italy, the Toyama region of Japan and a new hiking holiday along the new Hump Ridge Track, which opened in New Zealand's South Island Fjordland last October.

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The Dolomites now feature in Audley Travel brochures Credit: Getty

Meanwhile, another extraordinarily consistent performer and former winner of our awards, Traillfinders, gains a place over last time to finish as your second favourite operator. Another long-haul specialist with an even longer pedigree, Cox & Kings, comes in at number three.

Best Specialist Tour Operator

- Llama Travel
- McKinlay Kidd
- Inntravel

Topping this category for the first time, Llama Travel was founded in 2002 as a Latin American specialist by Luca Newbold, who lived in Peru for four years and was the son of a former managing director of Thomson Holidays (now Tui). His aim was to offer “the best possible holidays at the best possible prices” and it is a mantra which has paid off as far as Telegraph readers are concerned. The company expanded its range and now also offers holidays to Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

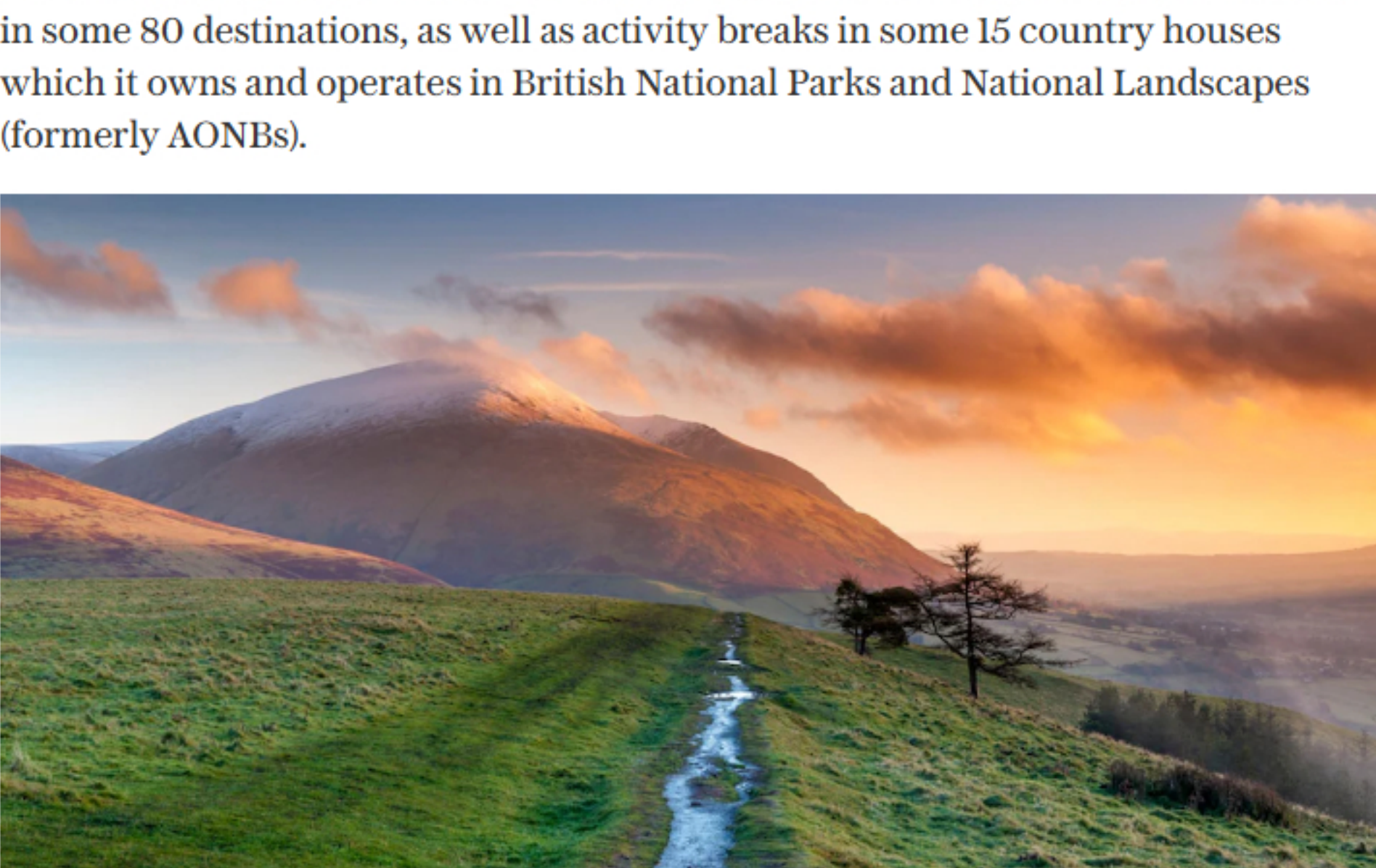
In second place, McKinlay Kidd is that unusual animal, a high-end tour operator that has made a success offering holidays in the British Isles, and especially in Scotland. The offer ranges from island-hopping breaks to tours by train and car and trips focussed on wildlife watching or gourmet breaks. Inntravel is rated third best specialist by readers. Its aim is to offer interesting ways to explore mostly European destinations and its mantra is “slow travel”. Many of its self-guided itineraries involve cycling or walking, though it also has a portfolio of journeys by car, train and boat.

Best Escorted Tour Operator

- HF Holidays
- G Adventures
- Explore

HF Holidays takes top place, 11 years after it last won this category. The company was founded in 1913 and is one of Britain's longest-established tour operators. Founder Thomas Arthur Leonard's original mission was to improve the lives of factory workers by helping them get out and enjoy the countryside, and that ethos is still reflected in the company today.

It's stated aim is “to provide shared holiday experiences that inspire friendship, fun and an active enjoyment of the great outdoors.” Though still mainly focussed on walking breaks in the UK, over the decades the programme has expanded to include escorted (and some independent) tours, treks and special interest breaks in some 80 destinations, as well as activity breaks in some 15 country houses which it owns and operates in British National Parks and National Landscapes (formerly AONBs).



HF Holidays is devoted to outdoor breaks, especially in British favourites like the Lake District Credit: Getty

Meanwhile, G Adventures moves down a place after winning in 2023. Founded by a Canadian entrepreneur, Bruce Poon Tip, in 1990 with a small offering of trips in Latin America, it now offers nearly 1,000 tours in over 100 countries. Explore!, another specialist long-haul operator of group itineraries with a huge range of destinations, comes in third.

Best Rail Holiday Company

- Belmond
- The Railway Touring Company
- Tailor Made Rail

The growing popularity of rail-based holidays has played into the hands of luxury operator Belmond, which runs a fleet of iconic trains in destinations around the world and, in the opinion of Telegraph Travel readers, continues to deliver exceptionally high standards. This year's result marks a return to the number one slot which it last held in 2018.

The best known of its trains is the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, with the original 1920s dining cars, which run on Paris to Venice and Paris to Istanbul routings. But the company also owns the Eastern & Oriental Express in Malaysia, the Andean Explorer and Hiram Bingham in Peru, and three classic trains in Britain – the Royal Scotsman, the British Pullman and, new this year, the sleeper train, the Britannic Explorer.

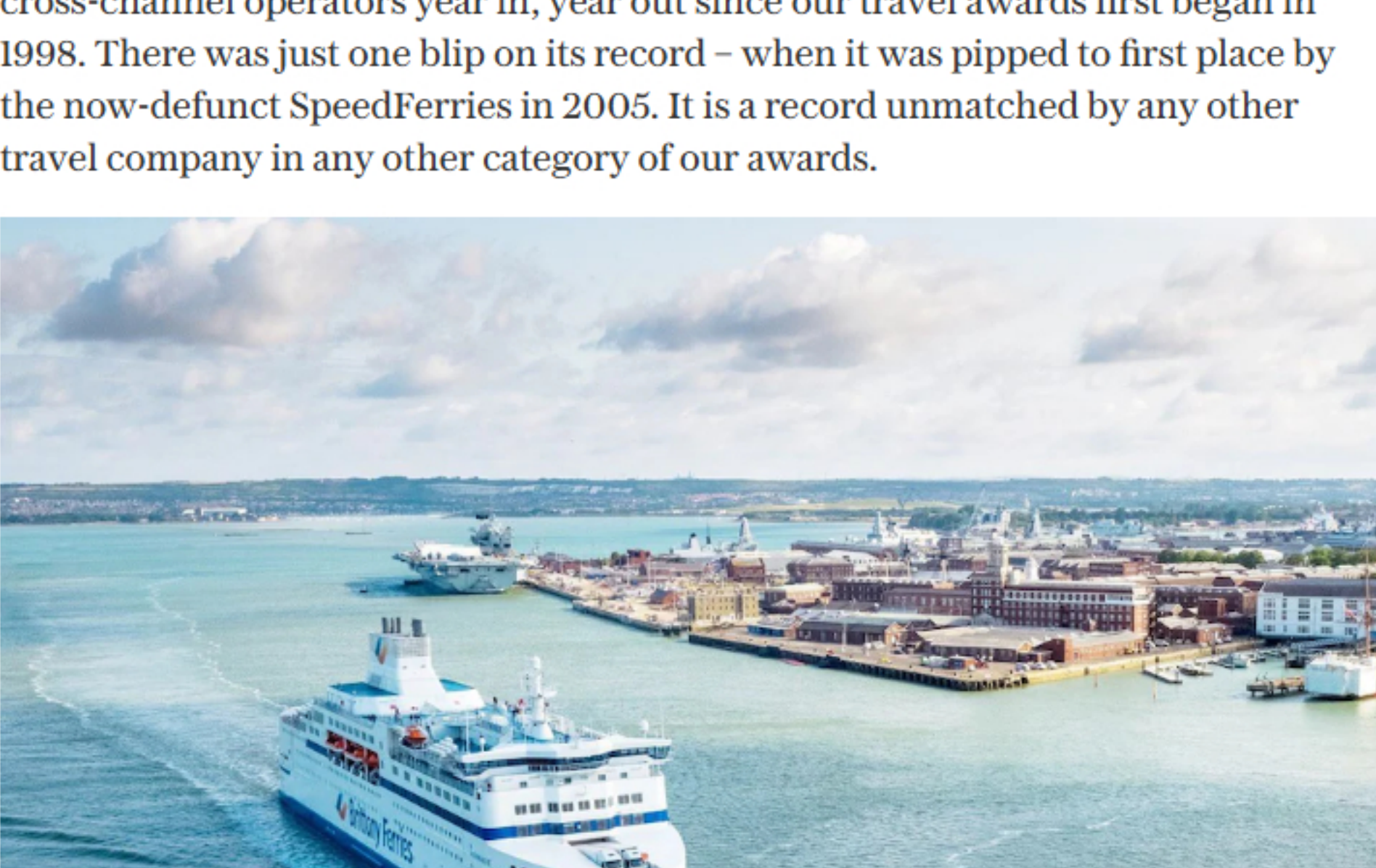
In second place, The Railway Touring Company offers a broad range of escorted tours on famous trains and routes in Europe and beyond as well as a selection of day trips in this country featuring famous steam engines such as the Flying Scotsman. At number three, Tailor Made Rail, as its name suggests, specialises in making arrangements for independent travellers.

The best tour operators – previous winners					
Year	Best Tour Operator	Best Escorted Tour Operator	Best Specialist Tour Operator	Best Rail Operator	Best Car Hire Operator
2025	Audley	HF Holidays	Llama Travel	Belmond	Zest Car Rental
2023	Audley	G Adventures	McKinlay Kidd	Great Rail Journeys	Auto Reisen
2019	Audley	APT	New Zealand in Depth	Rocky Mountaineer	Auto Reisen
2018	The Turquoise Holiday Company	Titan Travel	Fleewinter	Belmond	N/A
2017	Audley	APT	McKinlay Kidd	Belmond	N/A
2015/16	Audley	Trafalgar	Wellbeing Escapes	Rocky Mountaineer	N/A
2014	Traillfinders	Scenic Tours	HF Holidays	Great Rail Journeys	N/A
2013	Audley	N/A	Red Savannah	Orient Express Trains	N/A
2012	Traillfinders	Riviera Travel	N/A	N/A	N/A
2011	Riviera Travel	N/A	Traillfinders	N/A	N/A

Best Ferry Line

- Brittany Ferries
- Stena Line
- DFDS

If you have a sense of *déjà-vu* reading this result, it is not surprising. Brittany Ferries has an extraordinary record in our travel awards, topping our poll of cross-channel operators year in, year out since our travel awards first began in 1998. There was just one blip on its record – when it was pipped to first place by the now-defunct SpeedFerries in 2005. It is a record unmatched by any other travel company in any other category of our awards.



Brittany Ferries still rules the waves Credit: Brittany Ferries

So what is the secret of the French-run operator's popularity with Telegraph readers? Certainly, it offers some lovely routes – longer, more relaxing crossings from Portsmouth, Plymouth and Poole to attractive destinations on the Brittany and Normandy coasts as well as the 24-hour “mini cruises” across the Bay of Biscay to Bilbao or Santander. But its consistent delivery of excellent food on comfortable, well-presented ships over decades leaves it streets ahead of its cross-Channel rivals.

As in 2023, Stena Line – with services between Harwich and the Hook of Holland and across the Irish Sea – came second, and DFDS is the runner up to Brittany Ferries on cross-Channel routes.

Best Car Hire Operator

- Zest Car Rental
- Auto Reisen
- Cicar

This is a highly impressive performance by the car hire broker Zest, which heads this category for the first time after last time coming third. Norfolk-based Zest offers hire cars in dozens of countries around the world and, as a broker, strikes deals with individual suppliers in each destination. Its success seems to be based on a combination of good customer service, competitive pricing and clear information when it comes to one of the biggest bugbears in the car hire market – insurance charges.

As part of the booking process it offers the option of top-up insurance at £5 per day. This protects you against high excess payments if you have an accident so that you don't have to pay through the nose when you pick up then car from the local agent.

In second place is Canary Island specialist Auto Reisen, which won this award in

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