

Eight myths about package holidays

Forget the 1970s stereotypes — package holidays deliver all sorts of experience, from fly-and-flop to stirring adventure. Here's what you need to know



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Sales of package holidays are soaring in 2023 thanks to the cost-of-living crisis and post-pandemic anxiety about securing a refund if things go wrong.

Over 80 per cent of 2,000 people polled by the UK's largest tour operator, Jet2, said they were now considering a package because of the current economic climate. Jet2's summer 2023 programme will be the biggest ever — it has just added flights to Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Larnaca, Majorca, Tenerife, Faro and Malaga.

Meanwhile, travel trade association Abta has revealed that 29 per cent of Brits are planning on taking an all-inclusive holiday this year to keep costs under control.

Still think this style of trip is just not for you? Here are eight popular myths about package holidays that you shouldn't believe.

1. Package holidays involve two weeks in Spain, eating at the same restaurant every night

Forget that 1970s fly-and-flop stereotype: packages come in all shapes and sizes. Any type of trip, from trekking through Bhutan to exploring the vineyards of California's Napa Valley on horseback can be a package holiday. The definition of a package is simply that a travel company has put at least two elements of your trip together for you, such as flights, accommodation and car hire. Check out Aito, a brilliant site for sourcing every style of holiday, in destinations from Argentina to the Azores, offered by independent and specialist travel companies.

aito.com

2. Packages are more expensive than booking hotels and flights separately

Not necessarily. You may think you're getting better value for money by going it alone but for traditional seaside summer holidays in destinations such as Greece and Portugal package holidays will generally be cheaper than DIY trips. Research by consumer group Which? in 2020 showed this was true in eight out of ten of the trips it looked at, and you won't run the risk of losing your holiday if your airline or hotel goes bust.

Even city breaks can be cheaper when booked as a package: BA Holidays has some great hotel and flight deals especially off season. Short-haul trips tend to offer fairly modest savings. A two-night break for two people to Nice in late March staying at the Hotel Monsigny with its pretty rooftop terrace is £52 cheaper with BA Holidays than if flights and hotel were booked separately. But long-haul deals can be incredible bargains if you strike lucky: a three-night trip to New York from Gatwick, staying at the plush Indigo Hotel on the Lower East Side in mid-March is £565pp

if two people are sharing a room, saving an astonishing £2,275 on the cost when booked separately.

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3. A package isn't for me if I only want to book a villa or ski chalet

If you've found the perfect chalet in Switzerland, or gorgeous villa in Tuscany, you may think there's no reason to add flights or car hire to the deal, but far too many people discovered during the pandemic that if things go wrong, it can be impossible to get refunds from private villa or chalet owners based abroad.

If accommodation is booked on a non-refundable basis, a claim through a credit card company won't work and there's no redress in the UK small claims court (now called Money Claim Online). For villa packages, try Simpson Travel, which will book some of its villas with flights, and for ski chalet packages try Alpine Elements.

simpsontravel.com

alpineelements.co.uk

4. All-inclusive holidays are all wristbands, cheap booze and dodgy food

All-inclusive holidays have always been a brilliant way of keeping spending under control and according to Abta, 40 per cent among those aged 44 and under and 57 per cent of young families are planning to take one in 2023 to manage their finances.

All-inclusives cover all price points and if the cheap and cheerful doesn't appeal, a new breed of high-end all-inclusive has redefined the experience. Five-star Ikos Resorts (with resorts in Greece and Spain) offers the "Infinite Lifestyle concept", including restaurants with Michelin-starred menus, cocktails designed by top mixologists, 24-hour complimentary room service, kids' clubs and a dine-out option that means that guests can try local restaurants. Book through tour operators such as *Jet2Holidays.com*, *trailfinders.com* and *britishairways.com*.

5. It's quicker and easier to book everything myself

The internet can be a wonderful resource but planning a complicated trip online will be time-consuming and can be stressful and confusing. Book through the right travel agent or tour operator and their staff will be on top of the logistics; they'll have been on the excursions, stayed in the hotels, eaten in the restaurants and know the right time of year to travel, so you shouldn't get any nasty surprises.

6. An escorted tour means endless coach travel and a big group wearing name badges

Small group escorted tours have soared in popularity in recent years, partly because they're a brilliant option for solo travellers. They're led by expert guides (whose services would cost a fortune if booked privately) and often include packed itineraries and experiences that would be impossible to arrange privately, in off-the-beaten track destinations that can be daunting to navigate for newbies. Group sizes are often no more than 12.

Explore! for example, whose average group size is 11, has a week-long Highlights of Lebanon tour including crusader castles and Phoenician ruins, and a sobering reminder of the civil war on a walking tour of Beirut. Some operators offer different grades of comfort and pace: Intrepid, whose new trips for 2023 range from communing with penguins in Patagonia to hiking and biking

through Morocco, has four, ranging from “Basic” itineraries for those on a budget to “Premium”, with top-notch accommodation, many meals and tips included.

7. Packages are a one-size-fits-all trip

Many tour operators offer tailor-made trips so that you can explore at your own pace, stay in exactly the sort of hotel that suits you and eat when and where you want. Exodus, for example, has a self-guided seven-night cycling holiday starting in Vienna that meanders along the Danube and includes cycling in three countries in one week, with stays in four-star hotels, luggage transfers and flights from £1,299pp. Tailor-made trips can also include insider access: try Abercrombie and Kent, whose little black book of contacts will get you an exclusive pre-opening tour of the Grand Egyptian Museum in Cairo if you book a wider itinerary.

8. I don't need a package to guarantee financial protection

Thanks to the marvellous Package Travel and Linked Travel Arrangements Regulations 2018, there are many advantages to booking a package over and above getting a refund if your tour operator goes bust. You also have the right to a replacement holiday or the right to a refund if your holiday is “significantly” altered — if the four-star resort you booked, for example, turns out to be a two-star nightmare.

One of the most valuable benefits is that if your flight is cancelled, your travel company has to rearrange your flight or offer you a refund for your whole package, so there's no desperate scrambling to rebook. If your travel company fails while you're on holiday and the package included return travel, the cost of getting you home will be covered and you can also claim for the parts of the holiday you didn't get. Tour operator and travel agent members of Abta sign up to a code of conduct that requires them to provide you with information on insurance, visas, passports, health requirements and alterations to your trip. Meanwhile, all members of Aito sign up to a quality charter.