



TRAVEL GEEKS

ASK THE EXPERTS

NEED ADVICE FOR YOUR NEXT TRIP? ARE YOU AFTER RECOMMENDATIONS, TIPS AND GUIDANCE? THE TRAVEL GEEKS HAVE THE ANSWERS...

Q // I'd like to do a long-distance cycle in the UK. What do you recommend?

It's the Everest of British cycling: the longest, hardest ride you can do without running out of road. But pedalling from John O'Groats to Land's End (or the other way) is a long, logistically fraught endeavour, however, so if you're set on testing your mettle on two wheels, then check out the 980-mile Deloitte Ride Across Britain for a fully supported, nine-day annual event. rideacrossbritain.com

But there are shorter and often more spectacular alternatives for those who want a proper end-to-end journey to break up the usual cycle of circuits or loops. The next most-famous — and more popular — long-distance route is the Sea to Sea (C2C) ride across the width of Britain rather than the length. Running between the Irish Sea and the North Sea,

from Cumbria to Tyneside, the 137-mile route passes through the Lake District before climbing the Pennines and descending to the railway paths of County Durham. You'll have more favourable winds — and longer downhill sections — riding from west to east, and you could do it in a day if you're very fit. If you prefer to break it up, Saddle Skedaddle offers a more leisurely five-day alternative in June, July and September, with B&Bs booked along the way. Sustrans has all the route information if you're keen on doing it solo. skedaddle.com sustrans.org.uk

The North Coast 500, meanwhile, is actually a loop. It brings together 516 miles of spectacular Scottish coastline and Highland scenery and can be cycled over several days. Just

beware the summer crowds and plan ahead — the route has been a huge hit with cyclists since its launch in 2015. Northcoast500.com has a suggested eight-day itinerary starting in Inverness, including recommended sights and stops, with an average of 65 miles' cycling each day.

Or why not go off-road as part of the current trend for 'gravel' — a cross between road and mountain biking? The South Downs Century is a 100-mile leg-buster from Winchester to Eastbourne, mostly along chalk tracks, with beautiful views of the Downs and English Channel. You'll find routes online, or sign up for a supported event staged each July by CX Sportive, which includes food and drink stations along the way. trailbreak.co.uk/cx-sportive **SIMON USBORNE**

IMAGES: GETTY; AVL IMAGES

FROM LEFT: Cycling in the Lake District; Sanssouci Palace, Potsdam, a short train ride from Berlin

Q // Is it worth getting travel insurance for a UK holiday?

Be it a UK trip or foreign holiday, the same rules apply — get travel insurance as soon as you book. This way, you'll be covered if something stops you going entirely, such as illness, injury, jury service, redundancy, bereavement or a home emergency, or where you need to cut your holiday short. Some policies will also reimburse you if you can't make use of your booking (including valid Covid claims) for one of these reasons.

It's worth knowing, however, that it won't cover you for Covid-19 lockdown cancellations, so consider flexible or easy-to-cancel accommodation where

possible. Weigh up if travel insurance is going to be worth it for you: if you're going for a cheap weekend away with no valuables, you might decide not to bother. But if you're going away for longer, more expensive trips, or have pre-booked activities, you should probably consider it.

For extra protection, pay on plastic. Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act states that for items worth over £100, the credit card provider is jointly liable if something goes wrong. Using a debit card will offer some protection too, though firms do sometimes challenge these claims.

TONY FORCHIONE



Q // Once borders open, I'm hoping to visit friends in Berlin. Can you suggest some good day trips to take outside the city?

Given the extensive public transportation network in and around Berlin, it's easy to escape the capital for a day trip.

With its web of canals and forests, Spreewald is a UNESCO biosphere reserve and offers a fairytale-like escape just an hour from Berlin. Take the train to Lübbenau, where you can rent a canoe or kayak, or hop on a guided boat tour, and cruise along the waterways. Spreewald is also famous for its gherkins, which have a protected geographical indication (PGI), so don't leave without trying one.

History buffs, meanwhile, should head to Potsdam, the capital of the surrounding state of Brandenburg. In around 30 minutes on public transport, you can tour the grand palaces and beautiful gardens (collectively

designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site), including Sanssouci Palace, Germany's answer to Versailles. Alternatively, the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum tells the story of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, which operated from 1936 to 1945. Free to visit, it's just 45 minutes away by train.

Berliners love to head to the lakes in good weather and two of the best are found just an hour outside the city limits: Wandlitzer See and Liepnitzsee. The former is the bigger of the two, and the latter is sometimes called 'the turquoise lake' for its clear, clean waters that make it a perfect spot for a swim. Take the train north to Wandlitzsee to get to the first lake, and from there it's a short walk or bike ride to Lipenitzsee.

CINDY BRZOSTOWSKI

Q // I'd like to get involved in a hands-on reforestation project. Where would you recommend?

If you want your trip to centre around planting trees, a good place to start would be Workaway, where free accommodation is offered for volunteer work, whether it's in the mountains of Portugal or the Atlantic Rainforest in Brazil. workaway.info

If you're after a more luxurious getaway, then set your sights on Hawaii. Last year, the state's tourism authority launched its Malama Hawaii programme, where visitors earn various perks, including a free night of accommodation, in return for taking part in conservation schemes. Projects include the Hawaiian Legacy Reforestation Initiative, where guests can help to re-establish critical habitats and trees. gohawaii.com/malama

In Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park, Bisate Lodge is reforesting 105 acres of land. Guests are encouraged to spend time in the nursery and plant saplings. From \$1,750 (1,270) per person, per night. wilderness-safaris.com

For a real far-flung escape, North Island is a small island in the Seychelles featuring 11 private villas. Guests are invited to help out with a conservation programme by planting out trees grown in a local nursery. From €5,500 (£4,777) per villa, per night. north-island.com **SOPHIE YEO**

THE EXPERTS

SIMON USBORNE // FREELANCE JOURNALIST

TONY FORCHIONE // INSURANCE EXPERT, MONEYSAVINGEXPERT.COM

CINDY BRZOSTOWSKI // BERLIN-BASED JOURNALIST

SOPHIE YEO // ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALIST