

What to Know About Adventure Travel Operator Explore Worldwide

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Walking and hiking tours are among the company's most popular options.
Credit: 2024 Explore Worldwide

Established in the U.K. in 1981, [Explore Worldwide](#) has more than 40 years of experience operating small-group adventure tours around the world. Though the company does have a global presence, U.S. travel advisors might not yet be intimately acquainted with the brand — a fact that the operator is looking to change as its North America sales grow (it saw a 22% year-over-year increase in North American travelers this year and expects to further grow by 33% for 2025).

Offering more than 350 trips in 100 countries, Explore focuses on immersive, sustainably minded experiences spanning cultural and culinary discovery, hiking, cycling and other active pursuits. The company also recently achieved B-Corp certification (a rigorous third-party check on sustainable practices); completed a massive carbon-labeling project in 2022 of more than 400 tours, 1,800 accommodation providers, transportation, excursions and more; and is working on halving its own carbon emissions by 2030.

And, in October, Explore announced the debut of 20 new tours for 2025, including five new destinations and itineraries that cater to solo travelers and walking enthusiasts, two trending trip types for the brand.

We recently sat down with Katy Rockett, regional director of North America for Explore Worldwide, to learn more.

For those U.S. travel advisors who aren't yet familiar with Explore Worldwide, what are some of the company's differentiating factors?

Our group size is quite unique in that we keep it really small. We average around 11 people per trip; some of them have 16. We find that to be an ideal size for travelers, so they get a real sense of companionship within the trip. But it also allows us to get into places that only locals know about. We have a local guide for the duration of the trip, and that's really from the moment you land at the airport until your trip finishes. And it's really about having cultural experiences, understanding the [local] history and fully immersing yourself in a destination.

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Katy Rockett, regional director of North America for Explore Worldwide
Credit: 2024 Explore Worldwide

We have a few different styles that we offer. The most popular is our cultural discovery, and that's typically a point-to-point trip, so you're moving every couple of days to a new place, getting a good sense of either a region or a destination. And then we offer walking and hiking trips, as well as cycling trips, both of which get you out and moving. Then we have food and drink trips, some wildlife trips and a new range of Upgraded tours [with more premium hotels].

Sustainable and responsible practices are clearly very important to Explore — tell us a little more about that.

Sustainability has been in our DNA ever since we started. Keeping our groups small allows us to use local transportation throughout a lot of our trips, cutting down our carbon footprint. We have carbon labeling on all of our trips, so that you can see exactly what the impact will be. We work with all our hotel partners on a sustainability questionnaire ... and we have very strong animal welfare policies — we're ruthless about it. And we'll use that as a teaching opportunity a lot of times to explain what we're doing and not doing in order to see wildlife in a safe way.

“Sustainability has been in our DNA ever since we started.”

And then it's about supporting the local economy as much as possible. We always use locally owned accommodations, and all our activities are done with local companies. We employ local tour leaders as much as possible, really trying to keep as much money in the local economy as we can and making sure our presence has a positive impact on the destination that we're visiting.



Active tours have a lower carbon footprint than many other types of travel.

Credit: 2024 Explore Worldwide

As you see growth in the North American market, what kinds of trips are proving most popular?

More people are discovering the active style of travel and, once they do, they're hooked. Walking and cycling reign supreme. Our Amalfi Coast

walking trip [in Italy] is always our top trip, no matter the time of year. Walking in [Madeira](#) [Portugal] is another trip that's popular — I think people are captivated by Portugal and maybe have been, but want to revisit and see it in a different way. And interestingly, we sell more North America [cycling trips](#) than any other region for the company, so there is a huge appetite for that, as well.

“ More people are discovering the active style of travel and, once they do, they're hooked. ”

Explore also sees significant booking from [solo travelers](#). What about your tours appeals to those going it alone, and how do you cater to this growing market?

More than 60% of our travelers are solo, so it's something we see high demand for, and there are a lot of aspects that influence that. One is you've got a group of people that you're traveling with, including a leader. So, instantly, for a [solo traveler](#), it's a lot more safe and secure, with built-in camaraderie, as well. We also have a lot of flexibility on our trips, so there are optional activities or free time that give people a sense of independence in experiencing the destination in their own way.

And we don't penalize solo travelers; we encourage them. So, if you sign on to one of our trips, the price that you see is basically for one person. We'll do a room share for people of the same gender, or if you choose to, you can pay a bit extra for a single supplement to guarantee your own room.

Are there any other trends you're noticing among your bookings?

We're starting to see specific regions emerge in popularity. There was a return to Asia over the last year. We're up about 52% on passengers year over year to Asia in general, with Japan being the standout destination. Sri Lanka has jumped up in popularity, as well, as one of the last destinations to reemerge post-pandemic.

And some slightly lesser-known regions have really surprised me this year, with Albania being one of them. It's frequently showing up in our top 10 destinations which, I've been in this industry for 15 years, and I've never once seen Albania in the top 10. But I think Croatia was popular a few years ago, so people fell in love with the Balkan region, but want to go somewhere else now.



A cycling trip in France's Loire Valley is new for 2025.
Credit: 2024 Explore Worldwide

Among the 20 new tours being launched for 2025, are there any you are particularly excited about?

I'm excited that we're expanding our list of Upgraded itineraries. I think they make adventure travel a little more accessible. All of our accommodations are clean and comfortable, but are more of a three-star standard [compared to more of a four-star level for Upgraded tours].

And we've got some interesting ones coming up, like the Faroe Islands, which hasn't been released yet. We've got a cool trip in Ghana that just launched. And South Korea is another one that I'm interested in. That's been a hot destination that I've seen popping up in trends within the industry in general, so I'm excited that we're going to have something to offer there.

“ We have so many repeat bookings that we know there's a huge appetite for this style of travel. ”

Finally, what should travel advisors know about working with you?

First, we have so many repeat bookings that we know there's a huge appetite for this style of travel. And second, we've really been increasing our focus on the [travel advisor](#) community in North America. We have a dedicated representative who is the point of contact for new agents, who is able to facilitate information on products and set up trainings. We also have our Facebook community group, and that's a great way to keep informed on special offers that we have. We're looking to run a fam for agents to get out and experience the product firsthand. And we're increasing our training, as well.

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