

Back to the past: Tours to the legendary sites of antiquity

By: Karen Dabrowska

Acropolis



The past is alive and well. Ancient ruins throughout the world are visited each year by thousands of tourists who love archaeological remains and get a thrill out of seeing the remains of glorious civilisations. Islamic Tourism magazine introduces some of the companies who specialise in tours to the legendary sites of antiquity.

ACE CULTURAL TOURS

ACE CULTURAL TOURS runs tours and cruises in the United Kingdom, Europe and across the globe. Founded in 1958 as ACE Study Tours, ACE pioneers over 150 escorted programmes every year, from one-day courses to

extended study tours and cultural cruises. ACE's itineraries cover every aspect of the arts.

The foci of the company's sojourn in the Cotswolds will be Cirencester, Roman Britain's second city, and Bath, one of antiquity's foremost

Blue mosque





Corinium Museum

healing shrines. Detailed tours of the Roman villas at Great Witcombe and Chedworth will further deepen the visitors' understanding of everyday life in this secluded corner of the Roman empire. Cirencester's Corinium Museum celebrates the town's importance as Roman Britain's largest settlement outside Londinium. The museum's valuable collection of Romano-British antiquities ranges from mosaics and numismatics to

ceramics and military artefacts. Cirencester's visible Roman legacy includes sections of the town wall and a substantial 1st century AD earthen amphitheatre.

ANDANTE TRAVELS

This company is owned and run by people who love (and are highly qualified and experienced in!) archaeology. Over the past 26 years it has created a wonderful portfolio of holidays enjoyed by thousands of people, all led by



Wadi Al Rayan
Waterfall - Al
Fayoum Egypt

Siwa oasis



specialists chosen for their ability to tell the real story of the past.

The pre-historic Moroccan rock art tour focuses on the rich legacy of rock art sites in the Draa Valley and the foothills of the Atlas and Anti-Atlas mountains. Competing for interest with the early art are the wonderful and dramatic landscapes, and the glimpses of contemporary life in this remote desert region.

The other Egypt is a journey to discover the other Egypt: the one most tourists never get to see. From the fabulous city of Alexandria, redolant with faded grandeur, visitors travel across the northern desert to the oasis of Siwa, site of the oracle, and then to Bahariya, with recently discovered mummies, then to the Fayoum, where Graeco-Roman cities still lie spread across the sands, visited only by the few.



Erbil citadel

Geoff Hann
(second from
left) in Babylon



CICERONI TRAVEL

CICERONI Travel is a highly regarded company, founded by Tom Duncan, specialising in cultural tours for groups and individuals. The name CICERONI, is the Italian for a group of eighteenth century grand tour guides. The company create and conduct tours in the relaxed but informative manner of “The Grand Tour” with a particular accent on private visits to houses and gardens, good food and comfortable hotels in enviable country and city locations.

One of the most popular tours is Sicily crossroads of the

Mediterranean Sitting in the centre of the Mediterranean, Sicily has always been a strategic resource fought over for millennia. The original settlers were overcome by the Phoenicians from Carthage; then came the Greeks who were attracted by the great natural resources of the island; finally in classical times, the Romans arrived. During the so-called Dark Ages Sicily continued to prosper, particularly during its period as part of the Byzantine Empire, a heritage reflected in the fine mosaic cycles later made for the Normans after Byzantine traditions.

From the ninth century onwards Arabic, or “Moorish” culture added to this heady mix. It was the arrival of the Normans which initiated a further period of great wealth and sophistication, a golden age when the cultures of east and west fused. In more modern times Sicily saw a succession of foreign dynasties, particularly French and Spanish, rule the island with sublime indifference. However, their resident aristocracies have given the island a rich heritage of Baroque, Rococo and Neoclassical monuments of great power and

beauty.

EXPLORE

The motto of this adventurous but experienced tour company is ‘Don’t just travel – explore!’ Set up 30 years ago Explore takes its clients trekking up mountains, mingling with locals, and discovering long-forgotten cultures in 130 different countries including Armenia, Easter Island, Ethiopia, Greece, Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, Mongolia, Oman, Tibet, and Cambodia.

Isfahan



Karnak temple



In Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Cappadocia the journeys took in extraordinary archaeological sites, amazing art and architecture, exotic markets and wonderful wildlife.

History comes alive in Explore's The Taj Mahal - visiting at sunrise might mean an early wake-up; but the experience of watching the weak sun burn off the mist of the Yamuna River to reveal the faint, evocative outline of the

domes is truly unforgettable.

HEBRIDEAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURS

To visit wonderful sites and scenery in the Outer Hebrides, freelance archaeologist Dave Godwin organises private tours for up to six people, led by local archaeologists and guides, on the islands of Lewis and Harris. These islands have the largest number of stone circles and standing stones in the UK, including the stunning

Callanish complex. For those interested in archaeo-astronomy Dave can arrange visits to these ancient sites at sunrise, sunset, moonrise and moonset.

HINTERLAND TRAVEL

Hinterland Travel is a specialist adventure travel company, founded on over 35 years of overland adventure travel experience by Geoff Hann, its owner and Managing Director. The knowledge and expertise of Geoff

in the Middle East, Mesopotamia Iraq and Afghanistan has put the Company to the forefront of Iraq and Afghanistan tour operators and experts. The very successful tours across the wilds of Northern and Central Afghanistan , led to the National Geographic Traveller Magazine accreditation as one of its 50 tours of a lifetime.

The present situation in Mesopotamia has improved vastly this year and Hinterland has

Machu Picchu





Moroccan rock art

successfully operated several tours. It has added some previously off limit sites to its itinerary, notably Nimrud and Assur and explored Tikrit more thoroughly. The palaces of Saddam are included along with many other sites. Geoff continues

to lead most of the tours and maintains his links with the country and its people.

MARTIN RANDALL TRAVEL

The leading specialist in cultural holidays, organising a unique series of all-inclusive music



Nazca lines

festivals and around 200 small-group tours every year in Europe, the Middle East and the USA is Martin Randall Travel. Lecturers are a key ingredient of the tours. Their scholarship is unimpeachable but their ability to communicate their learning is equally important. Their brief is to enlighten and stimulate, not merely to inform.

The company's archaeology holidays feature a wide selection of small-group tours exploring the ancient and classical world, from Ancient Rome to Ancient Egypt, Classical Greece to Classical Turkey and the Caravan Cities of

Syria to the Deserts and Oases west of the Nile.

Tours include the famed Acropolis in Athens, Isfahan in Iran, the temple complex in Karnak and the Pantheon in Rome, as well as countless lesser known destinations.

PETEN TRAVELS

Since 1997 Peten Travels has specialized in the design and delivery of tours within Turkey. It is one of the few tour companies operating within Turkey, that is 100 percent Turkish owned and

Outer Hebrides





Roman villa at Witcombe

operated. Its lecturers and guides, who lead participants into the very heart of Turkey's history and pre-history, are carefully selected. On a Peter Sommer Travels tour all lectures and tours of archaeological sites are conducted by the project directors or key staff members. This provides for a richly detailed and unique perspective for all travellers.

PETER SOMMER TRAVELS

Peter Sommer Travels specialises in small group escorted tours (max

18 people) in Turkey, Greece and Italy, primarily gulet cruises aboard traditional Turkish gulets. In the footsteps of Alexander the Great is one of the most popular tours which provides a unique opportunity to retrace his footsteps across Asia Minor, the first leg of his extraordinary 22,000 mile journey.

THE TRAVELLER

Formerly the tour operating department at the British Museum, The Traveller became an

independent entity in 2003, but with the same ethos and retaining strong links with the staff and curators, many of whom continue to lead tours. This enviable position has enabled The Traveller to become recognised as one of the UK's leading specialists in archaeological, historic and cultural tours.

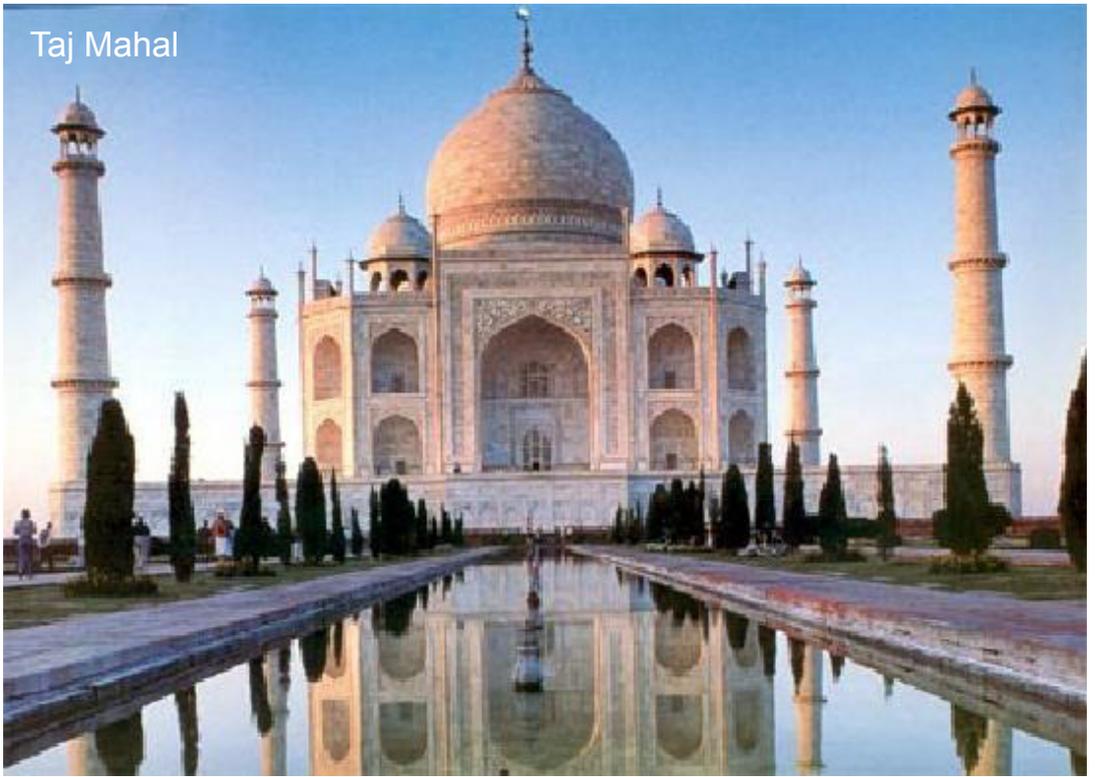
This year, tours explore the

foundations of some of the world's major religions, covering Egypt, Israel, Palestine and Jordan, as well as exploring the heartland of Islam in Saudi Arabia. There are also excellent itineraries in Turkey, Syria and Jordan, all with leading archaeological experts.

The nine-day treasures of Kurdistan tour is a truly fascinating journey into one of the least visited



Taj Mahal



areas of the world. Travelling through beautiful mountain scenery where local customs still thrive, the golden age of the Assyrians comes alive. Their empire stretched from 2400 BC until 612 BC. Medes, Babylonians and Scythians followed. Today's traveller is a witness to their occupation.

TRIBES TRAVEL

This award-winning company will arrange tailor-made holidays in

Africa, South America, the Middle East and Asia. If trekking along the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu and flying over the Nazca lines does not appeal, then exploring the 'Valley of a Thousand Kasbahs' in Morocco or visiting Petra at night, Jerash and the Decapolis Cities in Jordan might do. Tribes will put together a tailor-made tour with excellent accommodation, private guides and transport with your own driver.