

THE NEXT BIG THING

One thing's for sure: our appetite for travel has never been greater and there's an increasing desire to seek new experiences beyond established hotspots, says **Laura Millar**

It's 21.00 on a balmy June evening and I'm amid a huge throng of people milling around Republic Square in Yerevan, capital of Armenia. .

A series of illuminated fountains gush to the soundtrack of classical music (and, at one point, the theme tune to *Star Wars*), while families, couples and groups of friends enjoy the carnival-like atmosphere.

But this isn't even a special event or celebration; the Dancing Fountain show takes place every evening during summer. Over the next few days, I find even more to marvel at in this cultured, cosmopolitan city – from the extraordinary Cascade Complex, a giant, tiered structure in the centre, to

historic sights such as the Parthenon-like Garni Temple a few miles outside it. Armenia is somewhere I'd always been aware of, especially since visiting its neighbour Georgia

the year before, but the recent launch of a new direct flight from Luton by Wizz Air meant I could easily head there to explore. In fact, there is solid evidence to demonstrate that a different range of countries, not to mention little-known regions in more mainstream destinations, should now be firmly on agents' radar.

There are several factors pushing this trend. First, there is improved accessibility; earlier this year, Ryanair established a direct route from Birmingham to Albania's capital, Tirana.

The relaxation of visa rules can also have an influence; in February, China granted Brits access to its mainland for stays of up to 30 days.

Value for money is another factor, particularly in destinations that don't use the dollar or euro: think Balkan countries such as Serbia or Bulgaria, or Asian nations like Laos.

And perhaps, most crucially, there's a huge appetite for avoiding overtourism. "Travellers are looking beyond the obvious in 2026," affirms Clare Tobin,

CEO of Wild Frontiers, "and swapping classic routes for harder-to-reach, culture-rich destinations."

Search demand is backing this shift, with Google searches for 'authentic travel experiences' up by 70% and 'unique places to travel' up by 30%.

AFRICAN ALLURE

You won't – yet – find many Britons who have been to the North African country of Algeria, but it's one of the more surprising places attracting growing interest.

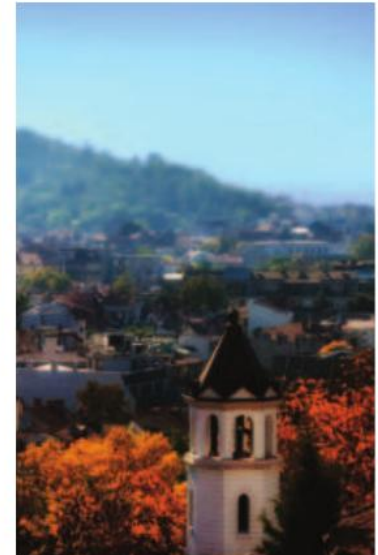
Wild Frontiers has seen an 85.4 per cent increase in bookings year on year, and an 86.2 per cent rise in enquiries for this sizeable Maghreb nation, which sits between Morocco and Tunisia and is Africa's biggest country by land area.

"Its appeal lies in its rarity," explains Tobin. "While much of North Africa is already well-established with travellers, Algeria still feels comparatively unexplored. You'll find Roman ruins, Ottoman heritage, Mediterranean cities, mountain scenery and vast ►

Pictured: (above) The dramatic Saharan landscapes of Algeria (Mounir Abdi)

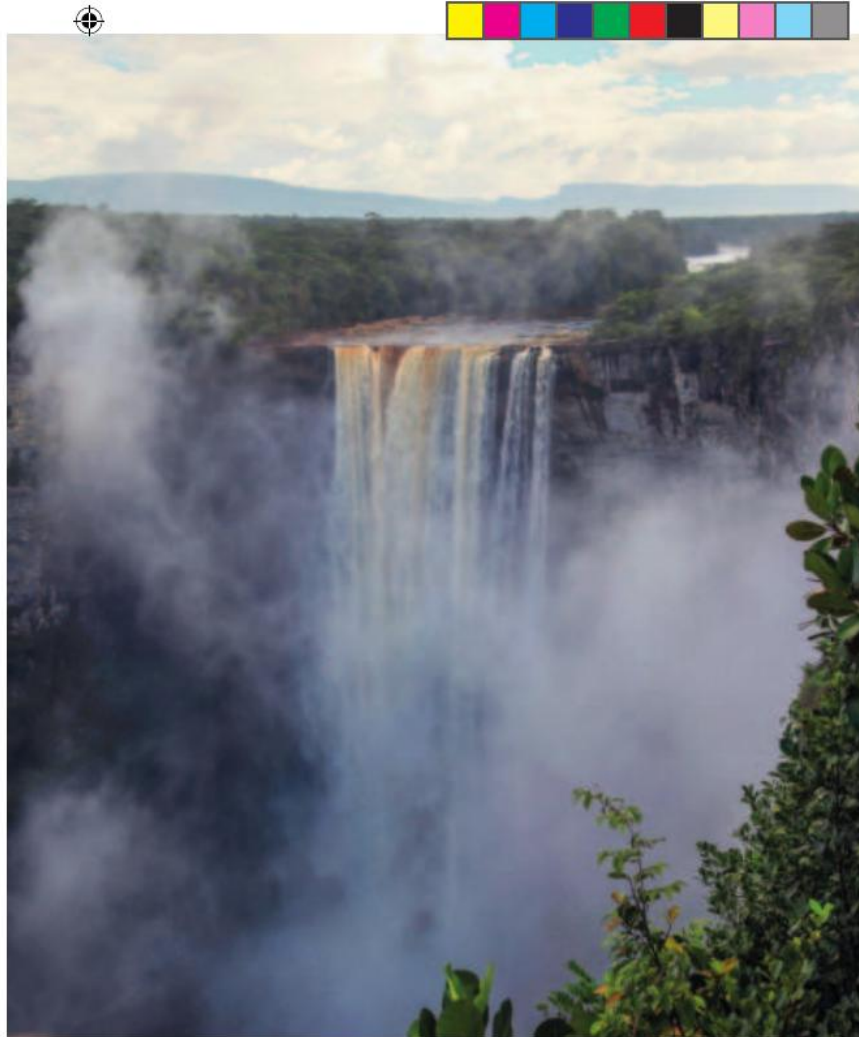


Emerging destinations



Pictured: (left to right from top) A lively pedestrian street in downtown Yerevan, Armenia (*Levon Vardanyan*); The Monastery of Saint Ivan of Rila, nestled in the Rila Mountains of Bulgaria (*Thomas Isbister*); A traditional Kazakh eagle hunter holding a golden eagle in Mongolia; The Church of the Holy Mother of God, located in the Old Town of Plovdiv, Bulgaria (*Deniz Fuchidzhiev*); Registan Square in Samarkand, Uzbekistan (*Ozodbek Irkinov*); Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, with Mount Ararat in the background (*Levon Vardanyan*)





► Saharan landscapes – all without the crowds.”

This sentiment is echoed by James Willcox, Founder of Untamed Borders. “Of all the destinations we work in, Algeria is the one increasing in popularity. It was historically a tricky place to visit due to being somewhat isolationist, but it has recently made a concerted tourism effort,” he explains.

“An e-visa is imminent, and the nation is working hard to attract tourism investment; it aims to increase its tourism numbers fivefold by 2030.”

To further tempt clients, it’s just a short hop on a flight from Europe and has a year-round warm climate.

LATIN ROOTS

Another intriguing destination attracting attention from travellers keen to get off the beaten path is Guyana, made more accessible by being South America’s only English-speaking nation.

“Guyana is one of the world’s fastest-emerging tourism destinations because it offers something increasingly rare in global travel: authenticity,” explains Susan Rodrigues, Guyana’s Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce.

“It has remained largely undiscovered, allowing visitors to experience its rich

biodiversity – over 85 per cent of the country is covered by intact rainforest – pristine ecosystems and genuine cultural connections.”

Among its most breathtaking sights is Kaieteur, one of the world’s tallest single-drop waterfalls.

Wildlife is another major draw: travellers can encounter jaguars, giant anteaters and harpy eagles in their natural habitat, and the country is home to over 900 bird species.

Investment in infrastructure and tourism development has helped to boost visitor arrivals, while expanded international air connectivity from carriers such as KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and Canadian carrier Air Transat has further strengthened

the country’s position as a viable emerging destination.

“We are intentionally building a tourism industry that is sustainable, inclusive and community-driven,” emphasises Rodrigues. “That is what makes us an emerging destination, not simply because we are growing, but

“Different destinations and little-known regions in popular countries should be firmly on agents’ radars”

because we are growing with purpose.

I would encourage travel agents to position Guyana as South America’s best-kept secret; a destination for those who want to experience something genuinely different. For travellers who have ‘seen it all,’ Guyana offers the excitement of discovery.”

Conversely, sometimes travellers want to stick with a tried-and-tested country. Explore Worldwide is offering 20% off several Peru itineraries for all 2027 departures. Travellers looking for a lesser-known foray into the destination can join its Inca Trail Trek .

STAN AND DELIVER

Call it the “*Race Across the World* effect”, but programmes such as ►



Pictured: (clockwise from top) Rewa Eco Lodge, Guyana (Zachary Johnston); Kaieteur Falls, one of the tallest single-drop waterfalls; A traveller in the Tassili n'Ajjer region of the Algerian Sahara (Mounir Abdi); A lavender field in Bulgaria (Nikolay Hristov)

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**SELLING TIPS FROM
ASHLEY QUINT**
Travel Time World

➔ **Ashley Quint, Director and Chief Travel Maestro and Responsible Travel Champion, at Travel Time World, offers his tips for selling emerging destinations:**

"Don't assume that a client won't be adventurous. Set out the reasons why they would enjoy the destination, and the benefits over somewhere more familiar or mainstream.

"Try including elements that feel more familiar, such as a stopover in Cape Town or the Middle East, so it doesn't feel so daunting. Consider incorporating elements such as a river or expedition cruise.

"Families are a lot more adventurous than they used to be, and it's OK to go slightly off the beaten track, especially when adding more of a cultural or educational element.

"Sell more unusual destinations as being 'exclusive'."

► this have opened people's eyes to the appeal of Central Asia, which showcased the region in series six.

According to WeRoad, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are emerging as two of the most exciting – and fastest-growing – destinations for travellers looking to venture beyond traditional European hotspots, with bookings up 380 per cent and 350 per cent year-on-year respectively.

"Uzbekistan combines the extraordinary history of the Silk Road with spectacular architecture and UNESCO World Heritage sites," explains Stefano Arossa, WeRoad's Europe Director, "while with Kyrgyzstan you have dramatic mountain landscapes, nomadic culture and outdoor adventure.

"Together, they offer an alternative to more established destinations. And because we offer travel as part of a group, that gives people the confidence to visit places they may previously have considered too challenging to explore independently."

Jim Louth, Director of Undiscovered Destinations, echoes the *Race Across the World* effect. Series six ended in Mongolia, another emerging destination, where the company also runs group trips. But, Louth adds that

social media is also a key trigger for travellers' choices.

"People are looking for more authentic experiences and lesser-known destinations to visit now, before they get too populated," he states, and recommends that, when possible, travel agents learn about a destination, speak to specialists and local tour operators, and get first-hand experience before selling to clients.

BOOK IT:

Explore Worldwide's Inca Trail Trek is priced from £1,012pp, for a March 26, 2027 departure. explore.co.uk/holidays/inca-trail-trek



LAURA MILLAR

➔ Laura predicts Algeria will be a big destination for 2027, as its less crowded than Morocco and is a good viewing spot for next year's eclipse.

Pictured: (clockwise from top) Even well-trodden destinations such as Peru offer opportunities to sell lesser-known locations or itineraries which offer a "different perspective" on a country; The interior of the Aryapala Temple Meditation Center in Gorkhi-Terelj National Park, Mongolia (Alexander Popovkin)

