

Greece

# FIND YOUR TOURING TRIBE

Mykonos Town on the Greek island of Mykonos.



## Niche group tours are becoming one of the hottest trends of 2026 as travellers choose trips tailored to their personal passions, writes Kirrily Schwarz

**T**he wind at the top of Mount Ramelau, the tallest peak in Timor-Leste, is not to be underestimated. It's blasting my face with such ferocity that, at times, I feel like I can't actually breathe – and despite the fact we're in a tropical country it's freezing.

Even though I had to haul myself out of bed in the wee hours and just spent two hours climbing a rocky trail in the dark, I'm delighted to be out here. The world below us is blue, but as the sun peeks over the horizon, it softens to purple, red, orange, then gold. I'm here on the nine-day Timor-Leste Expedition with Intrepid Travel, a tour designed for people like me, who thrive off the beaten track and don't mind a bucket shower. Dawn in this

part of the world is lovely, but the experience is not everyone's cup of tea, and that's precisely the point.

Touring has had a rebrand, and while the word still conjures up images of 52-seat coaches and flags on sticks, a quiet transformation has been under way in the world of specialty travel. Niche tours are taking off, allowing travellers to follow curiosities, tailor preferences and have spirited discussions about beloved topics – whether you want to visit Europe's great opera houses, spend an entire cruise playing bridge, ride motorcycles to Cape York or follow the footsteps of famous crime writers.

Whatever your passion, someone has designed a tour around it, and here are some starting points.

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Turkey

**The Library of Celsus at Ephesus, Turkey. Right, from top: Lake Pukaki on the road to Aoraki/Mount Cook in New Zealand; the Socceroos in a World Cup qualifier; forest hike in Whistler, Canada.**

## > FOR SOCCER FANS

**WHAT:** Things are looking good for the Socceroos in the upcoming Fifa World Cup 2026, which has more teams and more host nations than ever before. This tour sorts everything from game tickets to transfers and accommodation. Between matches, you'll visit Vancouver Island, take an Amtrak train to Portland, explore Alcatraz, see California's mighty sequoia trees and sample Napa Valley wines.

**WHERE:** See the Socceroos play their group-stage matches in Vancouver, Seattle and San Francisco.

**WHO:** "This is about more than just sharing the football moment," says Mike Hamilton, head of sales and marketing at World of Discoveries. "The sport is the reason we're there – and we take care of that – but it's also designed for people who want to use the event as an excuse to travel, who want to look around, share experiences and create friendships with the people they're travelling with."

**HOW:** Secure your spot on the Follow Socceroos: 2026 World Cup tour, from \$8300. [wofdi.com.au](http://wofdi.com.au)

**TIP:** Consider other attractions before you lock in dates – it's easy for the booking team to add a trip to Whistler before the tour, or Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon after the tour, so you don't miss out.



## > FOR PILGRIMS

**WHAT:** Paul the Apostle made four journeys on his mission to spread Christianity around the Mediterranean, forever changing religion and politics. You'll enjoy thought-provoking debates as you follow his footsteps and visit the communities where he started churches and wrote his famous letters. Along the way, you'll see New Testament sites such as Thessaloniki, Philippi, Ephesus and Corinth, with time to reflect and relax in holiday hotspots such as Mykonos, Crete and Santorini.

**WHERE:** This tour meanders through Greece and Turkey, starting and finishing in Athens.

**WHO:** "Our faith-based tours are made for everyone, church-going or otherwise," says Johanna Raeder, head of marketing in Asia-Pacific for Globus. "It's designed to make a new impression and reframe some of the region's most-iconic locations – a mix of Unesco sites, ancient cities and standout Greek islands make it perfect for those looking for more than a standard island-hopping holiday."

**HOW:** Book the 10-day Footsteps of Apostle Paul tour, from \$5768. [globusjourneys.com.au](http://globusjourneys.com.au)

**TIP:** Globus offers a dinner and folklore add-on in Athens that includes a visit to the Spartan city of Thermopylae, plus a four-course dinner featuring Greek specialties and traditional music.

## > FOR RELAXED CYCLISTS

**WHAT:** Hunger is always the best seasoning, so when you combine an activity such as cycling with New Zealand's best produce, the result will be delicious. This food-lover's tour includes opportunities to meet hazelnut growers, chat to salmon and wine producers and learn the secrets behind some of the South Island's best cheeses while rolling past Lake Pukaki, Aoraki/Mount Cook and the Waitaki Valley.

**WHERE:** Cycle a scenic loop around New Zealand's South Island, starting and finishing in Christchurch.

**WHO:** "This tour is designed for active travellers who enjoy food and culture as much as scenery," says Angela Sexton, general manager of Adventure South NZ. "Our guests value comfort, good company and depth of experience over racing from one highlight to the next. The e-bikes and full support mean you don't have to be a hardcore cyclist, just keen to ride, taste and explore."

**HOW:** Join the six-day Tastes of the Alps to Ocean tour, from \$3698. [adventuresouth.co.nz](http://adventuresouth.co.nz)

**TIP:** Make time to explore Oamaru's Victorian Precinct beyond the main street – you'll find excellent small galleries and food producers tucked away along the side streets, which are all well worth visiting.



## > FOR CREATIVE TYPES

**WHAT:** India has had a profound impact on the global textile trade and you can discover the nitty-gritties as you meet everyone from rural village weavers to designers, embroidery masters and respected collectors. You'll also be able to try the techniques yourself, with a tie-and-dye workshop in Bandhini and a block printing workshop in Jaipur – filling your suitcase to the brim, naturally.

**WHERE:** Get a new perspective in northwest India, starting in Ahmedabad and finishing in Delhi.

**WHO:** “This tour will naturally attract someone interested in fabrics, art, embroidery and design, but also someone interested in going a bit deeper in India,” says Sarah Meikle, founder of All India Permit. “This tour doesn’t skim the surface, it gives you first hand experiences to see the incredible crafts and meet the people behind them – you need to be someone who wants to go to the source.”

**HOW:** Sign up for All India Permit’s 18-day Textile and Design Tour, from \$11,000. [allindiapermit.co.nz](http://allindiapermit.co.nz)

**TIP:** This tour is timed to fall at the end of India’s winter, which means it can be surprisingly cool in mornings and evenings – check the recommended packing list and make sure you bring layers.

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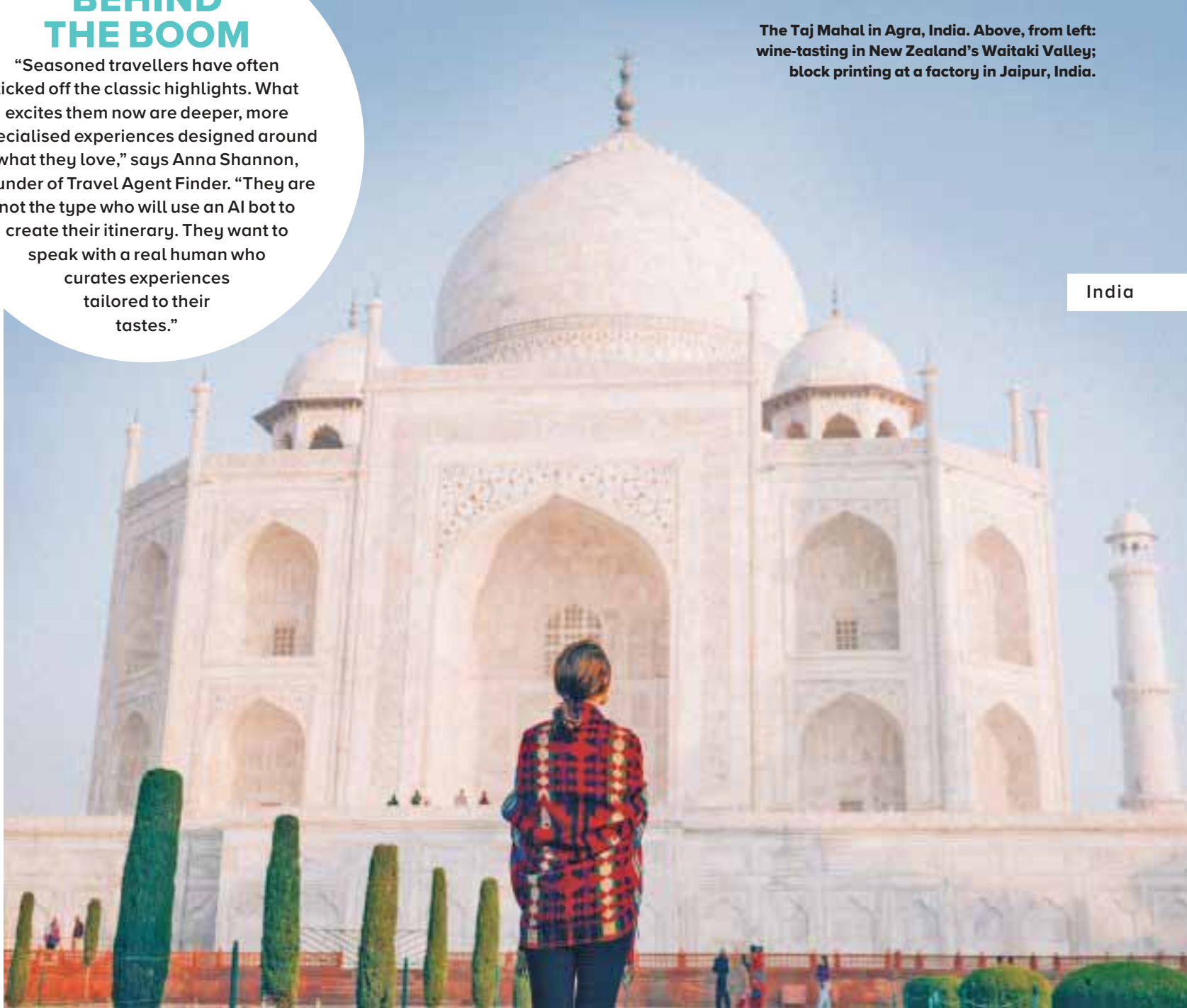


## BEHIND THE BOOM

“Seasoned travellers have often ticked off the classic highlights. What excites them now are deeper, more specialised experiences designed around what they love,” says Anna Shannon, founder of Travel Agent Finder. “They are not the type who will use an AI bot to create their itinerary. They want to speak with a real human who curates experiences tailored to their tastes.”

The Taj Mahal in Agra, India. Above, from left: wine-tasting in New Zealand’s Waitaki Valley; block printing at a factory in Jaipur, India.

India





## > FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

**WHAT:** The Antarctic Peninsula – home to wildlife, icebergs and dramatic landscapes – is something every photographer dreams of capturing. However, you'll appreciate its photogenic glory on a whole new level when you have expert guidance from professional photographers, including workshops and hands-on advice. Aurora Expeditions operates small ships, meaning fewer guests, and it treats its vessels as floating adventure base camps – so you'll be able to snap as many photos as possible.

**WHERE:** Cruise from South America to Antarctica, starting in Punta Arenas, Chile, and finishing in Ushuaia, Argentina.

**WHO:** “These voyages are designed for travellers who love photography, whether they're enthusiastic beginners or experienced photographers,” says Will Abbott, general manager of operations at Aurora Expeditions. “Many guests join to improve their skills while exploring remote regions. Antarctica in particular offers spectacular photographic opportunities, from penguin colonies to polar light.”

**HOW:** The 12-day Antarctica: Through the Lens cruise starts from \$36,209. [aurora-expeditions.com](http://aurora-expeditions.com)

**TIP:** Bring a versatile camera setup, including a telephoto lens for wildlife and a wide-angle lens for landscapes, and make sure you're always ready to shoot – polar regions are constantly changing.

**Clockwise from top:** Whale-spotting on the Antarctic Peninsula; Aurora Expeditions' *Sylvia Earl* off *Danco* in Antarctica; explore Chefchaouen on a stargazing tour of Morocco; Berkeley Castle, England, is home to magnificent tapestries; Longleat House in England.



## > FOR DOWNTON DEVOTEES

**WHAT:** It's one thing to visit the great country houses and historic gardens of southwest England; it's another to enjoy special arrangements. Martin Randall Travel offers access you'd never be able to arrange on your own – for example, a private tour of a well-known house such as Longleat, or an out-of-hours stop at a lesser-visited property such as Berkeley Castle, where you'll chat to the owner and have the opportunity to fully appreciate its magnificent tapestries, paintings and furniture.

**WHERE:** Explore the best of Wiltshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Dorset and Devon.

**WHO:** “This itinerary celebrates exceptional buildings in some of the most beautiful counties of England, and at a glorious time of year,” says Charlotte Crow, director of academic and content at Martin Randall Travel. “It's ideal for those with an appetite for knowledge, who really want to appreciate and understand the architecture, landscapes and art collections. We'll take you to places and show you things you might not normally view, often out of sight of the general public.”

**HOW:** Spots on the Great Houses of South-West England tour start from \$8390. [martinrandall.com.au](http://martinrandall.com.au)

**TIP:** Take the experience a step further by adding on Martin Randall's Art in Scotland tour, led by leading art historian Desmond Shawe-Taylor, who is the former Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures.

## > FOR STARGAZERS

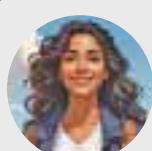
**WHAT:** Dark-sky tourism is booming and location is everything, especially for events such as the total solar eclipse on August 2, 2027 (set to last more than six minutes). Trips are rapidly selling out, but Smithsonian Journeys has launched a brand-new eclipse tour in Morocco – here, you'll be able to combine your passion for stargazing with engaging lectures and insightful conversations with other astronomy fans from a prime viewing position.

**WHERE:** Explore Tangier and Chefchaouen before taking up your spot at a private watch party on a hotel rooftop.

**WHO:** “At the heart of any Smithsonian Journeys trip are world-class experts, chosen for their deep knowledge, charisma and gift for storytelling,” says Angela Ferragamo, Smithsonian Journeys' vice-president of marketing. “Our guests (come from) a broad spectrum of backgrounds, but they are all curious life-long learners who enjoy engaging with the world – every journey emphasises discovery.”

**HOW:** Book the new Solar Eclipse in Morocco: Totality in Tangier tour now. [smithsonianjourneys.org](http://smithsonianjourneys.org)

**TIP:** Enhance your experience by tackling the Smithsonian reading lists, listed on each tour webpage, which include curated recommendations ranging from history and mythology to wildlife and fiction.



**Ask Skye** DO YOU HAVE A SPECIAL INTEREST IN A PARTICULAR TOPIC? SCAN HERE AND SKYE WILL BUILD AN ITINERARY BASED AROUND YOUR TRAVEL NICHE.

