

LATIN AMERICA

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Adventure and off-the-beaten-track options continue to filter into British tour operators' Latin America programmes. While established destinations and sights still sell steadily, the continent remains a "sleeping giant" in tourism terms. Reports by MIKE SWINDELL.

The remote and unusual is increasingly the hallmark of Latin American travel options on offer from British tour operators.

Journey Latin America is now offering a 24-day budget tour of Brazil which uses public transport and includes two nights' hammock accommodation on a river boat operating between Manaus and Santarem in the Amazon jungle. Prices are from #1,715 including international flights.

JLA is also pushing into northern Peru and the high Andes, territory that has been out of bounds due to terrorist activity.

Other unusual packages include a ski expedition to Chile in August organised by Passage to South America, which has been taken over by Scott Dunne Travel and now operates under the umbrella of Scott Dunne World. There is skiing at La Parva, near the more famous ski fields of Valle Nevado. The price, which has yet to be finalised, will be about #2,000 for one week.

Encounter Overland marketing director Warren Burton confirmed that Britons were becoming more adventurous. Encounter's bookings to Mexico were 75 per cent up on the previous year, while Peru was also showing good growth, and in both countries there was increasing interest in exploring out-of-the-way places.

"Mexico tends to appeal to first-time visitors to the region because it is relatively inexpensive to reach, while Peru's big attraction is the combination of many of the best features of South America in one country," said Mr Burton.

The operator's 28-day itinerary for Peru and the Incas by expedition truck covers nearly 2,000 miles through the heart of the Andes from Lima to the Bolivian capital of La Paz and costs from #1,170, excluding air fares.

Guerba Expeditions is another to delve deeper into the region with a 15-day tour visiting the Indian villages of Lake Titicaca and a canoe transfer to a jungle retreat for three days' exploration of the Amazon rain forest. Prices for the Andes and Amazon Explorer itinerary are from #920, excluding flights from the UK.

Meanwhile, Guyana and Honduras have come into the Trips Worldwide programme.

A 15-day exploration of Honduras, including coral reef diving, rain forest trekking, horse riding and canoeing will cost from #1,795.

Trips Worldwide manager Hamish MacCall claimed the company's new Guyana tour was unique in the UK market.

Highlights include a jungle lodge stay, the Kaieteur Falls, the highest unbroken drop of any waterfall in the world, a chance to see the Harpie Eagle and the world's largest raptor together with a stay at the Karanambu ranch where owner Dianne McTurk looks after orphan giant otters which can grow to a length of six feet. A 15-day tour would cost from #2,250.

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