

This week's dream: a tour of Germany's great church organs

To experience the music of Bach, Mozart and Handel in the way they expected it to be heard, travel to Germany – home to some of Europe's most magnificent church organs, says Akhil Sharma in the FT. The Germans have a particular passion for organ music (the country still has around 120 organ makers), and many churches hold regular recitals and offer public tours. But for more “exclusive” access, contact London-based travel firm Brown and Hudson. They specialise in tailoring trips to clients' interests, and can arrange a tour featuring concerts, private visits to organ makers' workshops and meetings with experts.

The centuries-old Ottobeuren Abbey, in Bavaria, has three organs, including a double organ, built by Karl Joseph Riepp and completed in 1766, that is one of the most treasured in Europe. To hear the great works played on this instrument, in the basilica's soaring rococo interior, surrounded by worshippers – many in Bavarian costume – is overwhelming.



The rococo interior of the basilica at Ottobeuren Abbey

Listening to an orchestral work, the sound often seems to be coming from one direction. Organ music, by contrast, completely occupies the church. After the service, Ottobeuren organist Josef Miltschitzky will take you on a tour of the organ loft, during which you can climb in among the pipes while he explains their workings.

At the Jehmlich Orgelbau workshop in Dresden, you can get a fascinating insight into how these machines are made, and see dismantled parts usually hidden inside – a huge bellow dating from the 1600s, a pipe wide enough for a man to crawl inside, another the size of a pencil. Head to Dresden Cathedral to hear the last organ made by

Gottfried Silbermann, “the Antonio Stradivari of organ makers”, whose work Mozart declared “magnificent beyond measure”. Even a recording of its silvery notes “can make one's hair stand on end”. A bespoke four-day tour with Brown and Hudson costs about €6,500 (020-3358 0110, www.browndanhdudson.com).

Hotel of the week



Amangiri, Utah, US

This elegant, polished-concrete wilderness resort in Utah's Navajo country is “a luminous place of startling beauty”, says Condé Nast Traveller – and also “ridiculously” enjoyable. Run by the Aman group, it offers endless activities – from hiking and horse riding to “doughnutting behind speedboats” on nearby Lake Powell – that make it “brilliant for families”. But it is also “absurdly romantic”, with rooftop beds for stargazing, a pool built around a 164-million-year-old rock, and private terraces with fireplaces outside every room. The New-American cuisine is zingy, too, and the service is “superlative”.

Doubles from about £1,375, full board, including transfers. +1 435 675 3999, www.amangiri.com.

Getting the flavour of...

Family sailing lessons in Croatia

Learning the basics of sailing a catamaran in just a week is hard work. But do it as a family among the islands of Croatia's Dalmatian coast and you'll find it's “terrific fun” too, says Fiona Bruce in The Sunday Telegraph. That's not only thanks to the sunshine, the long lunches on tiny wild islands, and the chance to dive into the “clear, lapis-blue” sea whenever the fancy takes you. It's also because working together as a family (under the skipper's instructions) is surprisingly joyful. There's a “tremendous” sense of freedom as you sail around, and you have a good chance of passing the exam for an International Certificate of Competence at the end – qualifying you to sail within about five miles of the coast in daylight hours. *Sunsail* (020-3468 9205, www.sunsail.co.uk) has a one-week flotilla holiday with training from £1,582pp.

Blood and beauty in South Africa

The province of KwaZulu-Natal in eastern South Africa is known for its amazing beaches and safari reserves, but it has another, lesser known tourist draw, says Jon Stone in The Independent – the starkly beautiful battlefields of the Anglo-Zulu war. Sparked by the British invasion of the Zulu Kingdom in 1879, this bloody and hard-fought conflict is remembered chiefly for the battle of Rorke's Drift – featured in the 1964

film *Zulu* – in which around 140 British soldiers held off up to 4,000 warriors of the Zulu king. More significant, however, was the Zulu victory at Isandlwana, nearby. There, white cairns marking mass graves dot the plain, which stretches out toward distant “blue-grey” mountains. It is a “stunning” landscape, made more moving by its dark history. Many details of the battle are remembered in oral traditions which the best local guides can recount. *Isandlwana Lodge* (+27 34 271 8301, www.isandlwana.co.za) has rooms from £208pp per night, full board.

A taste of old Arabia

For “a short break with a big perspective”, head to the ancient desert sultanate of Oman, says Lydia Bell in The Times. Beyond the country's beach resorts lies a heady dose of old Arabia, free of Dubai's shiny malls and high-rises. Take cooking classes with local women at Bait Al Bilad, a beautifully restored old house in a traditional fishing village. Go snorkelling with hawksbill turtles in the turquoise seas of the wild Daymaniyat Islands. And retreat to a luxury desert camp in Sharqiya Sands, where you can swim in the “crystalline” waters of lonely oases where the ivy-hued palms have an “unreal, cinematic beauty” under the piercing blue sky. *Original Travel* (020-7978 7333, www.originaltravel.co.uk) has a five-night trip from £4,420pp, including flights.

Last-minute offers from top travel companies

Walk Hadrian's Wall

Set in glorious countryside, just a stone's throw from Hadrian's Wall, three nights at Peel Bothy cottage (sleeps 2), in Hexham, are just £416. 0344-800 2070, www.nationaltrustholidays.co.uk. Arrive 17 February.

Wine, food and science

Tour Galileo's Italy with stops in Florence, Pisa and Bologna – a 7-night trip, with breakfast and 3 dinners, costs £1,795pp, including flights. 020-7251 0045, www.traveleditions.co.uk. Depart 9 March.

Viva Las Vegas

Live it up in Las Vegas with five nights at the Circus Circus hotel, room only, from £540pp (two adults sharing), including flights and car hire. 0344-557 6965, www.travelcitydirect.com. Depart 12 March.

A tropical getaway

Bask in the sun at the Lux* Belle Mare hotel in beautiful Mauritius. From £1,675pp for 7 nights' b&cb, including return flights. 01293-765003, www.vernon.com. Depart 6 March.