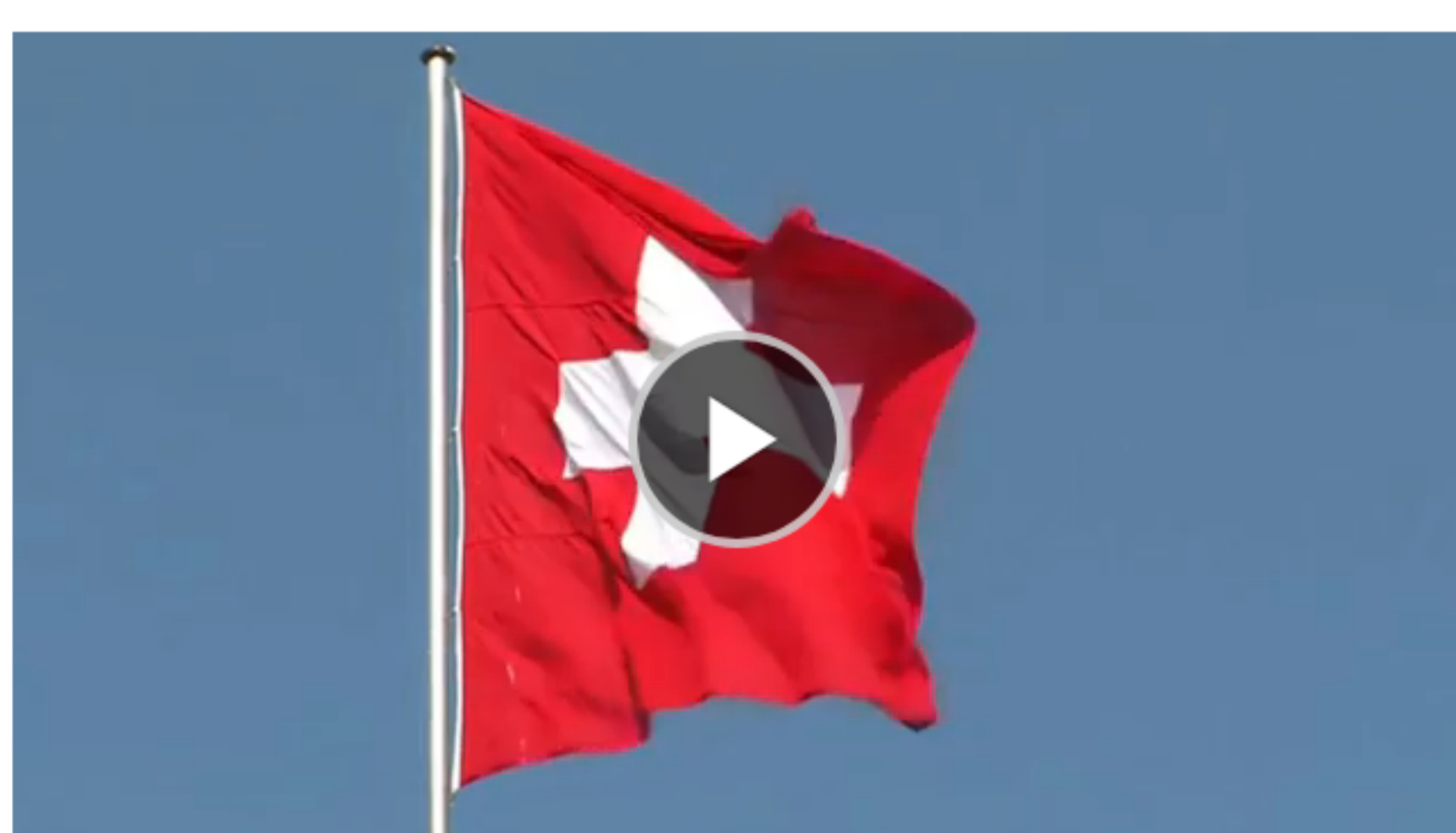


How Travel Companies Are Adapting to Serve Travelers With Mental Health Challenges

Travel is often seen as a chance to leave your troubles behind. But now, smart trip planners are embracing the fact that our baggage — *that* baggage — too often comes along with us.

BY JANCEE DUNN | JULY 23, 2020



Editor's Note: Travel might be complicated right now, but use our inspirational trip ideas to plan ahead for your next bucket list adventure.

Adventure operators have begun crafting trips that help individuals tackle their emotions and personal issues, whether that means business problems, major life transitions, or family struggles. “We even have experts who specialize in trips for recent divorcees, introverts, and families going on sabbatical together,” says Matthew Upchurch, CEO of the travel-advisor collective Virtuoso.

Kim Mlinarik, cofounder of [Alchemy Adventures](#) (nine-day tours from \$3,595) and a practicing psychotherapist, designed the Trails of Tuscany tour specifically for shell-shocked parents of teens. “It’s so easy for the grown-ups in the family to lose perspective,” she says. “We have adults turn their energy and focus back on themselves,” a process which begins by leaving the kids at home. Travelers go hiking outside Siena and wine tasting in Montepulciano, then engage in self-reflection exercises like a creative writing session led by Mlinarik.



Exploring Tuscany with Alchemy Adventures. | CREDIT: COURTESY OF ALCHEMY ADVENTURES

[Black Tomato](#) (nine-day trips from \$5,531) offers Bring It Back, a series of trips designed to address specific life challenges. Those with poor work-life balances can embed themselves in Copenhagen’s healthy working culture — which prioritizes family life over long office hours — under the guidance of experts. Among them are a high-powered tech CEO and a well-known Danish journalist who authored a book about his parental leave. “This one stemmed from myriad client conversations,” says the firm’s cofounder Tom Marchant. “A burgeoning number are seeking purposeful travel to spark real change.”

Quito-based company [Tierra del Volcán](#) (15-day trips from \$4,989) has introduced an Ecuadoran adventure called Twenty-Five Seconds, a reference to how long humans have been on the planet, if the history of Earth were a 24-hour period. The trip hits the Amazon, the Andes, and the Galápagos; it culminates with a night spent alone in a cozy-but-basic tent on the slopes of the Rumiñahui, the dormant volcano near Cotopaxi National Park. “You can’t take your phone,” says company cofounder Maria Jose Andrade, a certified life coach. “Just a journal to connect deeply with yourself.”

Travel advisor [David Prior](#) (five-day trips from \$3,750) helps clients tackle relationship issues by crafting what he calls “travel prescriptions,” like the journey to North Africa to sail the Nile, visit the tomb of Nefertari (which is normally closed to the public), and explore one of Egypt’s archeological wonders, the Catacombs of Kom El Shoqafa. “We’re starting to think of the experience of travel itself as a health and wellness benefit,” he says.

Taking the idea to its extreme, the U.K.-based luxury travel firm [Brown & Hudson](#) (seven-day trips from \$125,000) has introduced the Voyage to Inner Space for those grappling with a range of issues, from overcoming trauma to struggling to make strategic business decisions. A month before departure, trust-building sessions are conducted with a psychologist; among the pros on their roster is Jaime Kurtz of James Madison University, in Virginia. Clients are then dropped into the wilderness of Mongolia with a satellite phone and basic provisions to last a week. At critical moments, the therapist is brought in to provide counsel. It’s intensive — and expensive — because the goal is to gain “accelerated clarity” that would normally take months of conventional therapy, says founder Philippe Brown.

A version of this story first appeared in the July 2020 issue of Travel + Leisure under the headline The Road to Self-Improvement.