



# NOT HOT LIST

2026 | *by Intrepid*

GLOBETRENDER®

Developed in association with Globetrender.



Welcome to Intrepid's 2026 Not Hot List, developed in association with travel trend forecasting agency Globetrender.

While a handful of headline destinations receive millions – even tens of millions – of visitors each year, many remarkable places go virtually unnoticed by mainstream tourism. Our annual Not Hot List seeks to inspire travellers to discover different and unique experiences, with communities that can truly benefit from more visitors. Consider this list our call to action to curious travellers – to push the boundaries, explore new places and connect with new cultures.

The conversation around 'touristification' often focuses on overcrowding, but the reverse scenario is equally compelling. Many destinations are missing out on the economic and cultural benefits tourism can bring. At Intrepid, we don't believe the answer is 'less tourism' but rather 'better tourism'. The Not Hot List is designed to redress the imbalance by directing attention towards regions where travellers can have a positive impact.

In destinations where visitor numbers remain modest, there's often untapped capacity – and a strong desire – to welcome more travellers in a way that strengthens, rather than strains, local communities. Tourism can support small businesses, create jobs, fund conservation projects and help preserve culture.

The places on this list combine authenticity with ambition: where tourism strategies, infrastructure investments and community-led initiatives are laying the foundations for sustainable growth. The 2026 list features alternative regions in popular countries such as Croatia and Mexico, guiding travellers beyond crowded hotspots, as well as emerging destinations like Sierra Leone and Kyrgyzstan, long overlooked by international visitors.

I experienced the value of visiting such places firsthand on a recent Intrepid trip to Greenland – a destination on last year's Not Hot List. As a destination with less than 100 miles of paved roads, a very small population and some of the world's most extreme weather conditions, Greenland faces a number of challenges to economic growth – but tourism is providing new opportunities, particularly for young people, to both carve out a career and to celebrate the distinct culture and devastatingly beautiful country they call home.

To me, that trip captured what Intrepid has always been about: travelling in a way that supports local communities while delivering unique and immersive experiences for travellers. Our locally based leaders are connected to the people at the heart of

the places we visit, ensuring the benefits of tourism stay where they belong.

The Not Hot List speaks to the Intrepid community's endless curiosity. My hope is that it inspires more people to take the road less travelled – to seek out those places where tourism, when done properly, can make the biggest difference. These destinations are opening their doors to us. It's our responsibility as curious travellers to put our best foot forward and step inside these new worlds.

*Erica*

**Erica Kritikides**  
General Manager Global Experiences  
Intrepid Travel

*The places on this list combine authenticity with ambition: where tourism strategies, infrastructure investments and community-led initiatives are laying the foundations for sustainable growth”*



Image right: Erica Kritikides (front centre), travelling by boat from Ilulissat to Disko Island, Greenland – a destination on last year's Not Hot List. Credit: Patrick O'Neill, Intrepid.

Cover: Tien Shan Mountain Range, Kyrgyzstan. Credit: Liz Carlson.



# Intrepid Travel's 2026 Not Hot List

## Selection Criteria

### LESS-VISITED

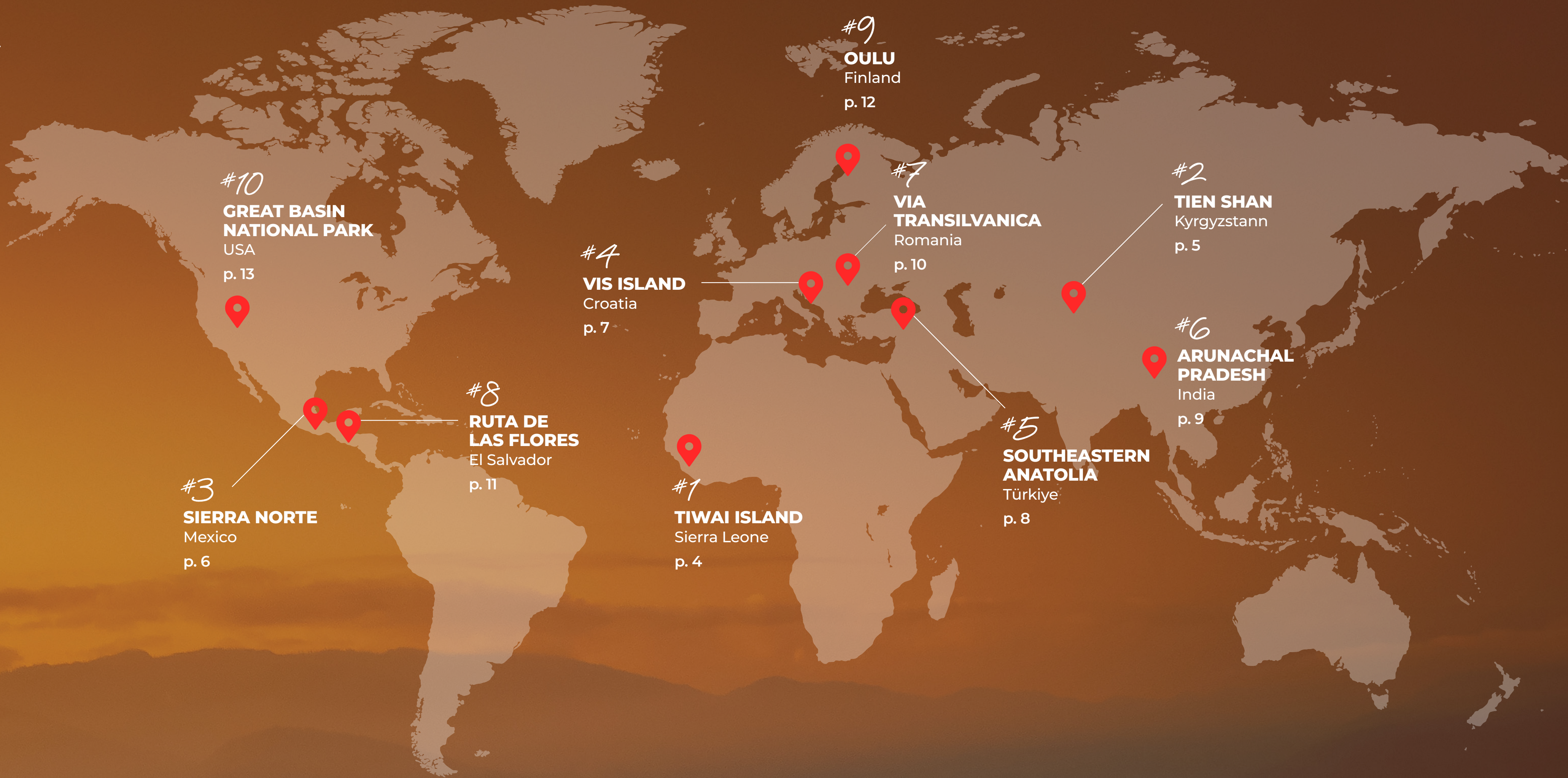
International awareness and visitor numbers are lower compared to nearby or similar destinations.

### TOURISM READINESS

Factoring in infrastructure readiness and sustainable growth plans, there's potential for tourism to benefit local communities.

### NEW IN 2026

Major events, cultural milestones or new tourism capacity put these destinations on the map in 2026.





# TIWAI ISLAND

## Sierra Leone



### Highlights

- Tiwai Island was awarded UNESCO World Heritage status in 2025
- The country is in the midst of a transformative 10-year tourism strategy
- Travellers can take their pick from cultural experiences and nature-based activities

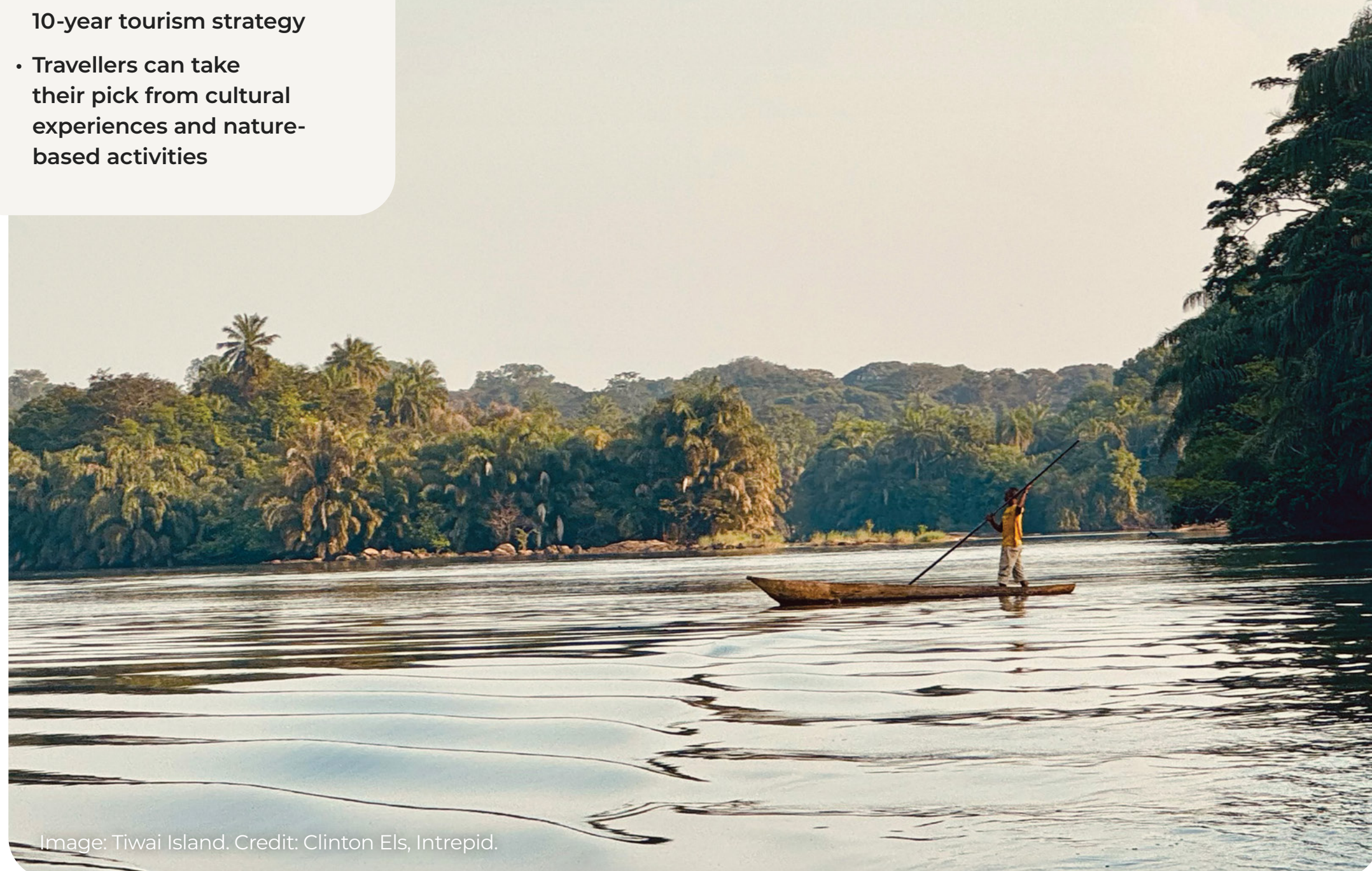


Image: Tiwai Island. Credit: Clinton Els, Intrepid.

Sierra Leone recently launched a landmark 10-year tourism strategy, a bold plan to attract international travellers and recast the country as a leader in ecotourism.

Rather than queues and crowds of travellers, Sierra Leone will greet you with untamed landscapes and a genuine warmth from the local communities. In 2024, the country welcomed just 60,890 international overnight visitors – a fraction of the 1.2 million recorded for Ghana, one of West Africa's most popular destinations (WTTC/Oxford Economics). But after President Julius Maada Bio introduced Sierra Leone's first-ever 10-year tourism strategy in 2024, a bold plan was put in place to recast the country as a leader in sustainable travel. And with World Bank support, the transformation has already begun.

Direct London flights launched earlier this year, a new solar-powered airport terminal and momentum from its 2025 'Year of Ecotourism' are putting Sierra Leone's nature,

heritage and beaches firmly in the spotlight. The strategy seeks to leverage tourism to diversify the economy, reduce poverty and create sustainable employment opportunities, while enhancing infrastructure and promoting the country's unique cultural heritage.

At the heart of Sierra Leone's tourism transformation is Tiwai Island. Renowned for its diverse populations of animals and part of the Gola Forest National Park, it's a sanctuary of rare flora and fauna. The island celebrated a historic milestone when it was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in July 2025. It's managed by the Environmental Foundation for Africa, which collaborates with eight local communities that reinvest all tourism revenue into community development.

Intrepid travellers will be among the few visitors to explore Tiwai Island on its new 8-day [Sierra Leone Adventure: History, Culture & Nature](#) trip. They'll spend a night on Tiwai Island, enveloped by rainforest, where local guides will take them on night walks through dense jungle and serene boat cruises along the Moa River. Highlights also include visiting the country's capital, Freetown, and Boma Community Village, where they'll meet one of Sierra Leone's few women chiefs.

Meghan Verbeek, product manager for Sub-Saharan Africa at Intrepid, says: 'What sets Sierra Leone apart is its raw authenticity. Tourism here is still in its infancy, offering a rare chance to explore a destination untouched by mainstream tourism.'



Long traversed by nomads, yet little-known by outsiders, this trekking paradise is finding its rightful place on the radar of adventure-seekers around the world.

With over 90% of its land cloaked in mountains, Kyrgyzstan offers unparalleled opportunities for alpine adventure, yet it's only just beginning to pique the interest of the global travel community. Dominating the landscape, the Tien Shan Mountain Range stretches across China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. But here, hiking means more than just spectacular scenery – it's an immersion into local nomadic life, with warm exchanges shared with shepherd families along the way.

Launched in 2025, Kyrgyzstan's Sustainable Tourism Development Program aims to improve infrastructure and digital travel services, and community-led experiences showcase the nation's ambitions to welcome more

travellers while preserving its cultural heritage. By 2030, the country aims to boost tourism revenue to 7% of GDP, up from 4.3% of GDP in Q1 and Q2 of 2025 when it welcomed 4.3 million international overnight visitors (WTTC/Oxford Economics). Central to this transformation is the Kyrgyz Nomad Trail, a 2000 km grassroots trekking network that expanded by an additional 1000 km through the remote southwestern Tien Shan Mountain Range in 2025.

Trekkers on Intrepid's new 2026 [Kyrgyzstan: Trekking the Tien Shan Trails](#) trip will hike routes that wind through remote valleys – passing glacial lakes and staying in traditional yurts along the way. The 10-day trip follows nomads' trails and places

authentic cultural connection at the heart of the experience, giving travellers the opportunity to share meals and stories with nomadic families whose way of life has endured for generations.

Karen Zhao, product manager for Asia, says: *'While Central Asia has seen rising interest for cultural tourism, a lot of people are yet to discover its charm as an adventure destination. In the Tien Shan mountain region, trekkers will rarely see other tourists, allowing them to embrace the experience in a more personal, uninterrupted way. Whether you're sharing stories with local families or lying beneath a sky unspoiled by light or noise, it's a journey that heals, inspires and changes the way you see the world.'*



### Highlights

- Home to the 2000 km Kyrgyz Nomad Trail, expanded by 1000 km in 2025
- Considered an undiscovered trekking paradise that rivals some of the world's best
- Travellers stay in traditional yurts and share meals with local families





In Mexico's less-visited highlands, Indigenous Zapotec culture is reshaping sustainable tourism, offering travellers insight into ancient traditions through community-led travel.

Deep in the Sierra Norte mountains of Oaxaca, far from Mexico's all-inclusive resorts and urban centres, lies one of the most compelling examples of Indigenous-led tourism in the world: the Pueblos Mancomunados. This cooperative of eight self-governing Zapotec villages have been quietly building a blueprint for sustainable travel for more than 30 years. Yet its remote location and limited infrastructure have so far kept it off the tourist map. The region welcomed just 20,000 visitors in 2024 – a fraction of Mexico's 45 million overnight international visitors.

The Pueblos Mancomunados operate under a community-led tourism model that shares profits equally and limits visitor numbers. Trails remain pristine, the forest is cared for and young Zapotec people have economic reasons to stay and invest in their future. Visitors take part in age-old traditions – sweating out impurities in volcanic temazcal saunas, hand-pulping glasses of pulque and tepache or hiking a 100 km network of trails between villages. The opening of the new 104 km Barranca Larga-Ventanilla highway and major upgrades to Oaxaca International Airport have improved access to the region, unlocking a rare opportunity to experience

Indigenous culture not curated for visitors but lived authentically in communities that have stewarded these mountains for centuries.

Intrepid's new 5-day trip, [Hiking in Mexico: Oaxaca's Indigenous Highlands](#), offers an off-the-grid adventure, hiking to the remote Benito Juarez, La Neveria and Latuvi villages in the Pueblos Mancomunados. Travellers will stay in community-run cabins, enjoy a home-cooked meal and join a gastronomic workshop at a local farmstay in a small highland village. With Intrepid, they'll experience Sierra Norte not as outsiders, but as welcomed guests in a region where tourism is a force for good.

Cindy Ramirez, destination product manager for Central America at Intrepid says: *'The Pueblos Mancomunados offer a model for how Indigenous communities can lead tourism while protecting their culture and environment. The 100 km of trails remain uncrowded and carefully maintained, with visitor numbers managed by the community to ensure growth never outpaces what they can sustainably support.'*

### Highlights

- Operates under a community-led tourism model that benefits locals and visitors
- Provides a unique alternative to Mexico's busy urban centres
- Offers an opportunity to connect with Indigenous Zapotec cultures and traditions



# SIERRA NORTE

## Mexico

Image: Sierra Norte, Oaxaca, Mexico. Credit: Expediciones Sierra Norte





# VIS ISLAND

## Croatia



### Highlights

- Previously closed to tourism, this island is one of the least-visited in Croatia
- New walking and cycling trails, along with the opening of the Museum of Issa in 2026
- Featured in Croatia's 2025 tourism campaign championing more meaningful travel



Image: Vis Island beach. Credit: Vis Island Tourism Board

As Croatia steers visitors away from overcrowded destinations, Vis Island is emerging as the perfect antidote to mass tourism.

In response to growing crowds in Dubrovnik and Hvar, Croatia is shifting the focus to Vis Island, a serene refuge poised to welcome more travellers in 2026. Shielded from tourism for decades by its past as a Yugoslav military base, Vis has had the rare chance to observe and learn from the overtourism challenges faced by its Adriatic neighbours. This helped shape an approach grounded in small-scale, local experiences that celebrate the Dalmatian concept of slowing down and embracing authenticity.

With no airports or cruise stops and modest, locally-owned accommodation, Vis welcomed 27,518 visitors in 2024. By comparison, Hvar, one of Croatia's most popular islands, received 195,000 arrivals (Croatian Bureau of Statistics). Now, Croatia's tourism

board is highlighting Vis in their latest 'Find Your Pomalo' campaign, which translates to 'Find your slow, relaxed or easy-going way of life'. As the name suggests, the campaign champions a slower, more meaningful style of travel that tourists are increasingly seeking – and Vis is answering the call.

New walking and cycling trails are planned in 2026, along with the opening of the Museum of Issa, giving travellers more ways to explore. Natural wonders provide the perfect terrain for free-climbing and caving, attracting adventure-enthusiasts, while traditional villages, local wineries and family-run restaurants continue to define Vis's charm.

Intrepid recognised the lesser-known island's allure and added it to its 8-day [Explore Croatia](#) adventure

– one of its top-selling Croatia trips – for 2026. The journey now includes a two-night stay on Vis, giving travellers a chance to explore the island at its own unhurried pace and without the crowds. Travellers enjoy a wine and food tasting at a family-run property, sample island produce and explore relics of its military past.

Intrepid's assistant product manager for West Europe, Duje Dropuljic, says: *'Vis Island invites travellers to slow down and experience the Adriatic at a different pace. It's free from long queues and heavy crowds, removing the stress that often comes with popular destinations. The food scene is shaped by local farms and fresh ingredients and I urge visitors to try the famous traditional pie – Viška pogača. While some see Vis's remoteness as a drawback, it's exactly what makes Vis so special.'*



Southeastern Anatolia is poised for a tourism revival, driven by a national push to showcase the region's cultural and culinary heritage.

Türkiye's Southeastern Anatolia region, and cities such as Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep, remain well off the beaten path for most foreign visitors, who typically stick to Istanbul, Cappadocia, Antalya and the Turquoise Coast. But the region has recently undergone a powerful revival, with investment in heritage restoration, cultural tourism and sustainable travel. And with a new direct flight route connecting London and Gaziantep, Southeastern Anatolia is more accessible than ever.

The area is dotted with UNESCO World Heritage Sites and the region's cities are deeply invested in attracting more visitors while preserving cultural heritage. The Liberation Museum will reopen in Şanlıurfa in 2026, adding new depth to the city's list of attractions. Less than 15 km away lies the

extraordinary Neolithic site of Göbekli Tepe and the broader Taş Tepeler region where expanded visitor infrastructure will soon make it easier to explore.

Gaziantep is a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, renowned for its baklava and vibrant spice markets that still echo the spirit of the Silk Road. Today the city is buzzing with renewal, with 65 major development projects underway, including landmark restorations, a new tram system and a high-speed train connecting Gaziantep to neighbouring Şanlıurfa.

Intrepid's new 11-day [Eastern Turkey Explorer](#) trip shines a light on this little-explored region. Along the way, travellers will visit Gaziantep, Mardin, Diyarbakır and Mount Nemrut. Highlights include

learning to make baklava with local artisans and sampling the country's traditional cuisine on a locally-led street food tour. At a time when community-based travel has never mattered more, Southeastern Anatolia offers visitors the chance to slow down and take it all in.

Intrepid's general manager for Türkiye, Pelin Bengü, says: 'Southeastern Anatolia has

*leveraged its history and culture in recent years to provide a unique tourism experience for travellers. This is reflected in Intrepid's new trip which journeys to ancient sites and historic monasteries, and sets off on a tasting trail through Gaziantep. Now is the perfect time for travellers to discover this remarkable part of the world and enjoy an authentic experience that busier destinations increasingly struggle to offer.'*

### Highlights

- The region is investing in heritage restoration, cultural tourism and sustainable travel
- Major cities are focussed on welcoming more visitors while preserving cultural heritage
- Gaziantep, a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, has 65 development projects underway



# SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA

## Türkiye





The sun is rising on India's remote northeast, where a fresh approach to community-led tourism is catching the attention of travellers seeking out cultural connection.

As India's easternmost state, Arunachal Pradesh draws adventurous travellers with the chance to witness the country's first light, which illuminates a dramatic landscape where lush rainforests meet the towering Himalayas. But despite snow-capped peaks, ancient monasteries and diverse tribal cultures, its remoteness, strict permit rules and low international profile have long kept it in the shadows.

That's beginning to change. Under India's northeast development drive, Arunachal is stepping into the spotlight with upgraded highways, rising accommodation capacity and a recently opened airport in Itanagar. At the heart of its refreshed tourism approach is a commitment to community-based travel, with authentic homestays and locally-led experiences that give travellers a unique insight into everyday life. Home to over 26 major tribes and over 100 sub-tribes, visitors can witness ancient rituals, crafts and festivals that have been passed down for generations.

New for 2026, the 5-day 'Sunrise Festival' in Dong village will honour where dawn first breaks on Indian soil, celebrating the symbolic and spiritual significance of the sunrise, alongside cultural performances, local cuisine, traditional crafts and guided treks to panoramic viewpoints. And the state's new brand identity – Arunachal: Beyond Myths and Mountains – reflects a push toward experiential tourism, from farm stays to spiritual journeys, ecotourism and nature-based adventures.

Travellers can take on white-water rafting on the Siang River, trek alpine trails in Dirang Valley, mountain bike through wild terrain or join a jungle safari.

For thrill-seekers, the Fong Fong Ma Adventure Zone at Ma Falls offers a zip line, bungee jump, glass bridge and giant swing which were newly introduced in 2025.

Saurabh Joshi, destination product manager for India, says: 'As a key frontier in India's geopolitical and cultural integration with Southeast Asia, Arunachal Pradesh is poised to gain increased international attention in the coming years, and 2026 presents a rare opportunity to experience this remarkable destination as it emerges onto the global stage.'

### Highlights

- A new 5-day 'Sunrise Festival' in Dong village honours dawn's first light on Indian soil
- The state's new brand identity aims to showcase tribal cultures and diverse ecosystems with a focus on sustainable tourism
- Thrill-seekers can flock to the Fong Fong Ma Adventure Zone's recently added zip line, bungee jump, glass bridge and giant swing

# ARUNACHAL PRADESH

India





Following Romania's recent inclusion in the Schengen area, the country is poised for a new chapter in responsible tourism – and the Via Transilvanica is leading the way.

Dubbed the 'Camino of the East', Romania's 1400 km long-distance walking trail, Via Transilvanica, is helping position the country as Europe's next great walking destination. Initiated by Intrepid Foundation partner Tășuleasa Social Association, and known as 'the road that unites', its route is intentionally designed to connect travellers

to lesser-known communities and share the economic benefits of tourism more widely. The trail takes travellers through villages, ancient forests and 12 UNESCO World Heritage sites.

And with visitor numbers rising, now's the perfect time for the nation to be considering its approach to sustainable tourism. Romania welcomed 7.1 million overnight international visitors (WTTC/Oxford Economics) in 2024. While modest compared to other European travel destinations, the country's growing allure for travellers is clear.

The addition of 170 km of new paths opening in 2026 marks the first phase of a larger 20-year expansion plan to grow the Via Transilvanica

trail beyond its original footprint, broadening its reach across Romania. Smoother travel times (thanks to Romania's 2025 Schengen debut that scrapped border checks with its European neighbours) and new flight routes from Birmingham, UK to Sibiu – placing travellers just one hour from Via Transilvanica – have opened the door to a new era of travel for the region.

Anna Székely, vice-president of the Tășuleasa Social Association, says: *'This slow-travel route isn't just scenic, it's built to revive depopulated villages, support local enterprise and give visitors a rare chance to experience traditions that feel untouched by time. For us, hospitality means creating genuine meeting points between hikers*

*and locals – places where shared meals, old stories and the rhythm of rural life are as much a part of the journey as the miles walked.'*

Intrepid's new 10-day [Hiking in Romania via Transilvanica Trail](#) trip gives travellers early access to some of the newly added sections of the trail. Hike to spiritual sites such as the UNESCO World

Heritage-listed Sucevita and Moldovita monasteries and explore Bran Castle, linked to the Dracula legend. Enjoy the occasional home-made dinner and local wine with residents living in small villages along the trail and learn about each community's culture.

### Highlights

- 170 km of brand-new trails to explore in 2026
- The country's 2025 Schengen area inclusion makes cross-border travel times smoother
- Stand out experiences include seeing Bran Castle, trekking or riding through the Bucovina mountains



# VIA TRANSILVANICA

## Romania





# RUTA DE LAS FLORES

## El Salvador



Long overshadowed by its turbulent past, El Salvador is now emerging as one of the world's fastest-growing travel destinations.

World-class surf beaches, active volcanoes and ancient Mayan ruins – El Salvador boasts a rich culture and striking natural beauty. According to UN Tourism, it's one of the fastest-growing travel destinations globally. Between 2019 and 2024, tourist arrivals to El Salvador surged by 80%, driven by a successful crackdown on crime that significantly improved traveller safety. The country welcomed 3.1 million international overnight visitors in 2024 (WTTC/Oxford Economics).

Its millennial president, Nayib Bukele, has made waves by making Bitcoin legal tender – a world first – and by launching the Surf City initiative in 2019 to transform the

country's coastal region into a premier surfing hub. Yet beyond the beaches, the Ruta de las Flores remains one of the country's best kept secrets. Just a couple of hours from the capital, this 36 km scenic route winds through the western highlands, connecting five rural towns of Nahuizalco, Salcoatitán, Juayúa, Apaneca and Concepción de Ataco, all known for their coffee plantations, waterfalls, vibrant murals, weekend food markets and cool mountain air.

Intrepid's new 9-day [Discover Guatemala, Honduras & El Salvador](#) trip explores this lesser-known region while it still feels untouched, offering travellers an immersive highland experience built around

coffee, culture and connection. Travellers journey through El Salvador's charming Flower Route towns with their lively art and cuisine, learn about the local coffee culture and enjoy a tasting at a local coffee plantation.

Holly Miller, product manager for North and Central America at Intrepid says: *'Tourism to El Salvador is growing rapidly, but most of it is concentrated on the surf beaches. Only a fraction of visitors venture into the highlands around the Ruta de las Flores, which means the villages remain uncrowded and authentic. Now is the time to go, before more people start to recognise its appeal.'*

### Highlights

- One of the fastest-growing travel destinations globally according to UN Tourism
- As coastal tourism surges, the highlands remain one of the country's best-kept secrets
- Travellers get a taste of authentic coffee culture with a chance to buy directly from the farmers

Image: Ahuachapán, El-Salvador. Credit: El Salvador Travel.



Newly dubbed the European Capital of Culture, Oulu is attracting visitors with a year-long program spotlighting Arctic nature, creative innovation and Indigenous heritage.

Sometimes all it takes is a new title, say 'European Capital of Culture 2026', to put a destination on the map. Case in point: Oulu, a dynamic, forward-thinking coastal city just below the Arctic Circle in Finland. CEO of Visit Oulu, Yrjötapio 'Y.t.' Kivisaari, says: *'Oulu's year as European Capital of Culture in 2026 is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to showcase our unique northern lifestyle, creativity and experiences to the world. It marks a milestone in our long-term goal to position Oulu as the leading hub of Northern Finland – a place where urban culture, cutting-edge innovation and wild nature meet.'*

Perched on the delta of the Oulujoki River and surrounded by untamed wilderness, Oulu leans into every season. In summer, it's wet and wild – bike tyres and hiking boots traverse mysterious swamps, and

the Baltic waters are dotted with swimmers in wetsuits and floating saunas. Come winter, fat bikes and snowshoes crunch across snow-blanketed silence. Being this close to nature's bounty, it's little wonder Finland topped the UN-sponsored World Happiness Report in 2025.

With its new title and a direct flight from Frankfurt launching just in time, Oulu is seizing the opportunity to champion environmental awareness through a bold cultural program that fuses climate science with creative expression. Arctic Food Lab events will celebrate the traditions and possibilities of northern gastronomy, with open-air dinners showcasing ingredients shaped by the region's extremes. The surrounding forests, wetlands and fells will inspire a seven-piece art installation, co-created with scientists as a tribute to the local

landscape. Meanwhile, the Sámi people, the EU's only officially recognised Indigenous population, will share their millennia-old knowledge through soundscapes and hands-on workshops rooted in nature-based living.

*'After 2026, travellers can expect Oulu to continue surprising them with bold cultural events, distinctive food and nature experiences and innovative festivals that blend art, science and sustainability. The European Capital of Culture title is not the end, but the beginning of a new era – one in which Oulu is firmly on the world map as the vibrant gateway to the north, inviting curious travellers all year round,'* Kivisaari says. There were 4.3 million international overnight visitors to Finland as a whole in 2024 (WTTC/Oxford Economics).

# OULU

## Finland

EUROPE

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LIST #9

### Highlights

- Freshly dubbed 'European Capital of Culture 2026'
- Offering a year-long cultural program fusing climate science and cultural expression
- Direct flights from Frankfurt recently launched make the city more accessible

Image: Oulu coastline, Finland. Credit: Visit Oulu.



## Highlights

- Expanded number of year-round campgrounds to welcome more visitors
- Visiting acts as a vote of confidence in the future of the United State's national parks
- Travellers can visit Lehman Caves network, relit for 2026, or join a summer astronomy class

With proposed budget cuts looming over the United States' national parks, this under-the-radar spot packed with natural beauty reminds us what's at stake.

Across its ancient bristlecone pines, snow-fed alpine lakes and some of the darkest skies in America, Great Basin National Park offers a rare kind of national park experience that's vast, quiet and still largely untouched by mass tourism. Tucked into eastern Nevada, about 500 km from Las Vegas along Route 93, it's a haven for stargazers, hikers and travellers seeking solitude.

Great Basin remains one of the country's least-visited parks, welcoming just 152,000 visitors in 2024, compared to the popular Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which clocked more than 12 million visitors. However, the site is preparing for a gradual rise in travellers, expanding its number of year-round campgrounds in 2025.

2025 also marked the park's first-ever astronomy road trip. Stargazers were drawn to the park – known as one of the darkest in the US – by 'Park-to-Park in the Dark', which led night-riders through a number of Nevada's picturesque small towns to Death Valley National Park. Well-placed to invite more astrotourism, Great Basin boasts an Astronomy Amphitheatre and a number of cinematic viewpoints.

The Lehman Caves – the longest cave system in the state of Nevada – will glow-up (literally) in 2026 as the 1977 electrical system gets rewired, casting this archaeological phenomenon in an entirely new light.

But just as the park begins to gain recognition, it faces a critical moment. Proposed federal budget cuts would slash national park

funding by over a third, while rising entry fees for foreign visitors risk making destinations like Great Basin less accessible. Visiting now is not just a quiet getaway, it's a vote of confidence in the places that protect America's most profound natural environments.

Tracie Barnthouse, chief communications officer for Travel Nevada says: *'Unlike many other national parks with a gateway town, visiting the Great Basin National Park requires forward planning. High season typically takes place between June and September but even then, it can often feel like you have the park to yourself. Home to 4,000-year-old Bristlecones and the only alpine glacier in Nevada, visitors get to connect with nature in a wilder setting.'*

# GREAT BASIN NATIONAL PARK

Nevada, United States





# Methodology

The 2026 Not Hot List highlights ten destinations that are overlooked by mainstream travellers yet poised for gradual growth in 2026. These are places with untapped appeal, community-led tourism ambitions and a strong ‘why now’ story for the year ahead.

Our goal is twofold: to inspire travellers to look beyond over-saturated hotspots and to spotlight regions within certain destinations that will benefit culturally, economically and environmentally from well-managed tourism.

## Selection criteria

Globetrender began by assessing a long-list of about 20 destinations where Intrepid will be hosting new trips in 2026, and then moved on to compiling a list of additional non-Intrepid destinations for consideration.

Each place was assessed against three key measures (scored 1-5), supported by both data and expert insight:

- **Less-visited** – Low awareness and visitor numbers compared with nearby or similar destinations.
- **Tourism readiness** – Potential for tourism to contribute positively, with consideration of infrastructure readiness, community benefit and sustainable growth plans.
- **New in 2026** – Timely news pegs for 2026, such as major events, new infrastructure, or cultural milestones that make the destination relevant now.

## Research process

We combined quantitative and qualitative inputs:

- **Tourism data** – 2024 international arrival figures, growth rates and comparisons to regional benchmarks.
- **Readiness indicators** – Infrastructure projects, air connectivity, accommodation capacity and environmental protections.
- **Economic context** – International visitor spending and GDP contribution from tourism.
- **Media scan** – Review of current coverage to identify underexposed destinations with strong storytelling potential.
- **Local intelligence** – Insights from Intrepid’s in-country teams and national tourism boards.

## Shortlisting and refinement

We began with a longlist of about 30 destinations drawn from both Globetrender and Intrepid. Each was scored against the core criteria, with qualitative notes on overtourism risk, safety, accessibility and media fit. Destinations were removed if they lacked topical news for 2026, had insufficient infrastructure or were deemed too environmentally fragile for promotion. The final ten reflect a balance of continents, trip types and narratives – from cultural capitals to emerging adventure hubs.

## Editorial judgement

While informed by statistics, the Not Hot List is not a scientific ranking. It blends numbers with human judgement, industry expertise and media instincts.

**Jenny Southan**  
Founder and CEO of Globetrender

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