

**THE PERFECT**  
*Holiday Abroad*

*Begins at*  
**COOK'S**  
 Programmes free from  
 Thomas Cook & Son. Berkeley St. London W.1. or Branches.

**Thomas Cook's Vision**

On 9 June 1841 a 32-year-old cabinet-maker named Thomas Cook walked from his home in Market Harborough to the nearby town of Leicester to attend a temperance meeting. A former Baptist missionary, Thomas Cook was a religious man who believed that most Victorian social problems were related to alcohol and that the lives of working people would be greatly improved if they drank less and became better educated. As he walked along the road to Leicester, he later recalled, *'the thought suddenly flashed across my mind as to the practicability of employing the great powers of railways and locomotion for the furtherance of this social reform'*.



At the meeting, Thomas suggested that a special train be engaged to carry the temperance supporters of Leicester to a meeting in Loughborough about four weeks later. The proposal was received with such enthusiasm that, on the following day, Thomas submitted his idea to the secretary of the Midland Railway Company. A train was subsequently arranged, and on 5 July 1841 about 500 passengers were conveyed in open carriages the enormous distance of 12 miles and back for a shilling. The day was a great success and, as Thomas later recorded, *'thus was struck the keynote of my excursions, and the social idea grew upon me'*.

During the next three summers Thomas arranged a succession of trips between Leicester, Nottingham, Derby and Birmingham on behalf of local temperance societies and Sunday schools. Within these limits many thousands of people experienced rail travel for the first time, and Thomas was able to lay the foundations of his future business. He later described this period as one of *'enthusiastic philanthropy'* since, beyond the printing of posters and handbills, he had no financial interest in any of these early excursions.



**Thomas Cook Archives**

Thomas Cook possesses a unique collection of archive material covering all aspects of the company's history from the founder's first excursion on 5 July 1841 to the present. This material is held in the Company Archives, which functions as a corporate 'memory', offering an information service to Thomas Cook's various departments and providing research facilities for academics, journalists and picture researchers from all over the world.

**Main Collections**

- Handbooks, programmes and brochures, 1845-present
- Copies of *Cook's Excursionist* newspaper, 1851-1902, and its successor, *The Traveller's Gazette* magazine, 1902-39
- Travellers' incidental records (ephemera), 1851-present
- Travellers' diaries (originals and copies), 1855-1980
- Photographs of premises, staff and travellers, 1860s-1990s
- Company business records, 1870s-present
- Railway timetables, 1873-2013
- Travellers' guidebooks, 1874-2013

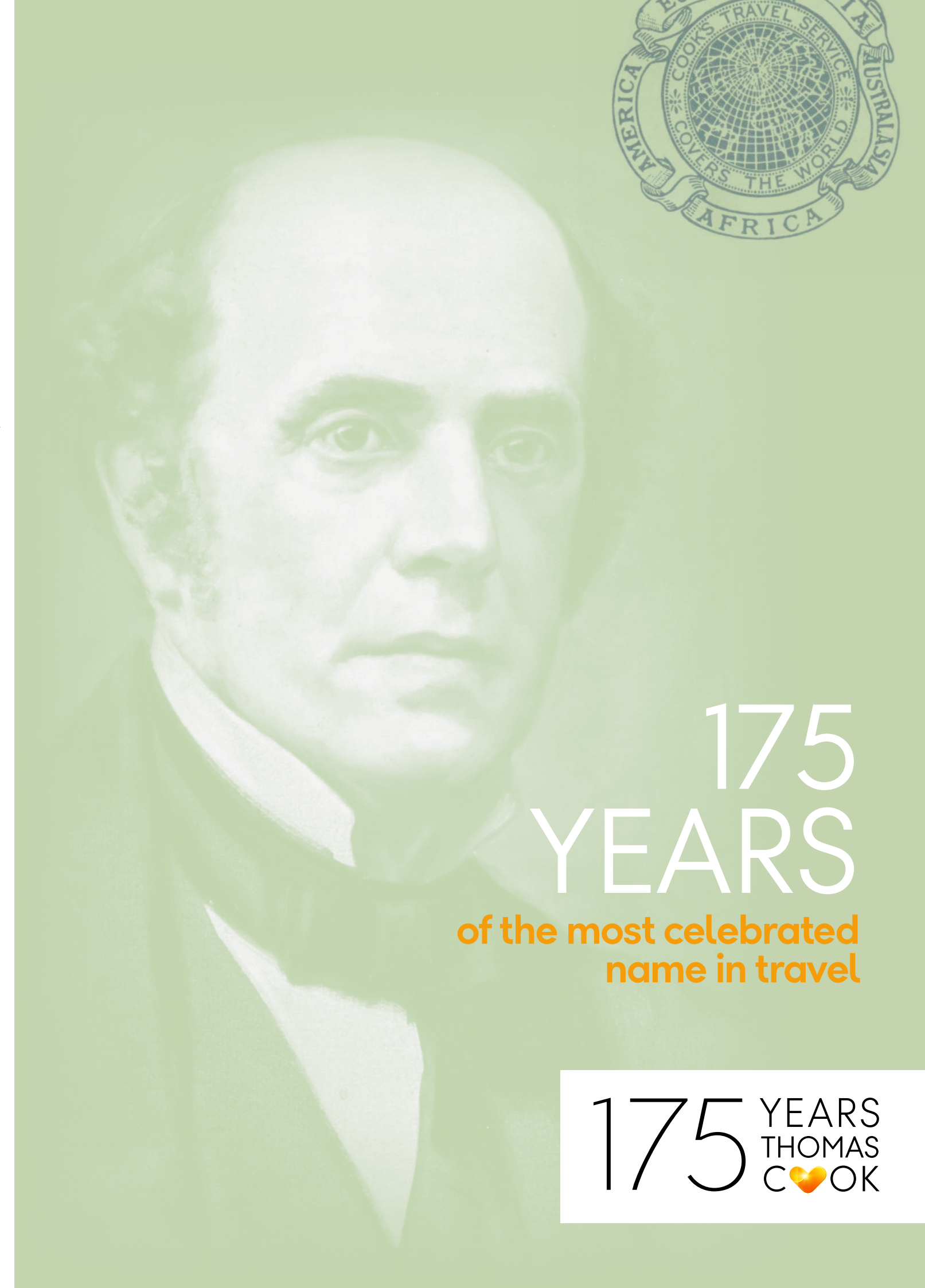
**For further information about Thomas Cook's history or archives, please contact:**

**Paul Smith - Company Archivist**

Thomas Cook Archives  
 Westpoint,  
 Peterborough Business Park,  
 Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6FZ  
 United Kingdom

**Tel:** +44 (0) 1733 417350  
**e-mail:** paul.smith@thomascook.com

*the willing & devoted servant of the travelling public*



175  
 YEARS

of the most celebrated  
 name in travel



## Early Tours

Thomas Cook's first commercial venture took place in the summer of 1845, when he organised a trip to Liverpool. This was a far more ambitious project than anything he had previously attempted, and he made his preparations with great thoroughness. Not content with simply providing tickets at low prices - 15 shillings for first-class passengers and 10 shillings for second - Thomas also investigated the route and published a handbook of the journey. This 60-page booklet was a forerunner of the modern holiday brochure.

## The Great Exhibition

By the end of 1850, having already visited Wales, Scotland and Ireland, Thomas Cook began to contemplate foreign trips to Europe, the United States and the Holy Land. Such thoughts had to be postponed, however, when Sir Joseph Paxton, architect of the Crystal Palace, persuaded Thomas to devote himself to bringing workers from Yorkshire and the Midlands to London for the Great Exhibition of 1851. This he did with great enthusiasm, rarely spending a night at home between June and October, and he even produced a newspaper, *Cook's Exhibition Herald and Excursion Advertiser*, in order to promote his tours. By the end of the season

Thomas had taken 150,000 people to London, his final trains to the Exhibition carrying 3000 children from Leicester, Nottingham and Derby.

## Across the Channel

Thomas continued to expand his business in Britain, but he was determined to develop it in Europe too. In 1855 an International Exhibition was held in Paris and Thomas seized this opportunity by trying to persuade the companies commanding the Channel traffic to allow him concessions. They refused to work with him, however, and the only route he was able to use was the one between Harwich and Antwerp. This opened up the way for a grand circular tour to include Brussels, Cologne, the Rhine, Heidelberg, Strasbourg

and Paris. By this route, during the summer of 1855, Thomas escorted his first tourists to Europe.

## Switzerland and Italy

Thomas visited Switzerland for the first time in June 1863. Although this initial tour was little more than an information-gathering trip, a party of more than 60 ladies and gentlemen accompanied Thomas as far as Geneva. Among these pioneering tourists was a young woman called Jemima Morrell, who maintained a written account of each day's events. Her original diaries may be studied today in the Thomas Cook Archives.

Thomas organised further trips to the Continent in 1863, and by the end of the season he had taken nearly 2000 tourists to Paris, some 500 of whom had continued to Switzerland. With the co-operation of the Paris, Lyons and Mediterranean Railway, Thomas began to issue circular tickets (in both English and French) between Paris and the Alps. He also established the first circular tours within Switzerland. These were such an immediate success that the following summer he extended his arrangements across the Alps into Italy.

## Hotel Coupons and Circular Notes

Travellers to Switzerland and Italy in the 1860s were from the growing middle classes. To satisfy their demands for better standards of accommodation, Thomas developed two important travel systems: one was the hotel coupon, launched in 1868, which provided pre-paid rooms and meals at fixed prices; the other was his version of the circular note, issued in 1874 and a forerunner of the travellers cheque, which enabled tourists to obtain local currency in a relatively safe and straightforward manner.

## Beyond Europe

Building on his successes in Europe, Thomas Cook made an exploratory trip to North America in 1865 and set up a system of tours covering 4000 miles of railways. Four years later, in 1869, he hired two steamers and conducted his first party up the Nile.

climax of his career, however, came in September 1872, when, at the age of 63, he departed from Leicester on a tour of the world. It had long been his ambition to travel *'to Egypt via China'*, but such a trip only became practicable at the end of 1869 following the opening of the Suez Canal and the completion of a rail network linking the east and west coasts of America.

Thomas and his party crossed the Atlantic by steamship and made their way from New York to San Francisco by rail. They travelled by Pacific steamer to Japan, then across the Inland Sea to China, and afterwards visited Singapore, Ceylon and India. Leaving Bombay, they crossed the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea to Cairo, from where most of the party travelled back to London. Thomas himself, however, set off on an extended tour of Egypt and Palestine, finally returning home via Turkey, Greece, Italy and France after an absence of 222 days. The conducted world tour quickly became an annual event, but many additional tickets were issued to independent travellers, some of whom went via Australia and New Zealand rather than China and Japan.

## John Mason Cook

While Thomas was travelling round the world, his son, John Mason Cook, successfully completed the firm's move to a new head office at Ludgate Circus in London. Father and son argued over certain aspects of the project, however, and in 1878 their partnership ended. John was a better businessman than Thomas, and he set about expanding the company internationally.

In an age when telegraphy was in its infancy and there were no telephones or fax machines, this was far from easy.

John created overseas editions of *The Excursionist*, the newspaper started by his father in 1851, to inform customers in places such as France, Germany, India, Australasia, America

and the Far East about the services he offered. (This newspaper, which became known as *The Traveller's Gazette* in May 1902, continued to be published until 1939.) He also kept up a continuous stream of correspondence with his offices abroad, checking on their work and complaining if anything went wrong. Like many successful businessmen, John Mason Cook combined a flair for grasping commercial opportunities with a remarkable memory for small details.

## Frank, Ernest and Bert

Thomas and John Mason Cook both died during the 1890s and the business was inherited by John's three sons: Frank Henry, Ernest Edward and Thomas Albert ('Bert'). During the first quarter of the twentieth century - a period which saw the introduction of winter sports holidays, tours by motor car and commercial air travel - the firm of Thos Cook and Son dominated the world travel scene.

The company was incorporated as Thos Cook & Son Ltd in 1924, and in 1926 the headquarters moved from Ludgate Circus to Berkeley Street in Mayfair, a once aristocratic area that was now the centre of London society. Two years later, in 1928, the surviving grandsons, Frank and Ernest (Bert having died in 1914), unexpectedly sold the business to the Belgian *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits et des Grands Express Européens*, operators of most of Europe's luxury sleeping cars, including the Orient Express.

## From Wagons-Lits to British Railways

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, occupying forces seized the Wagons-Lits headquarters in Paris, and Thomas Cook's British assets were requisitioned by the British Government. To save the company from financial collapse in its centenary year, a deal was brokered and the organisation was sold to Britain's four mainline railway companies. Thomas Cook settled its affairs with Wagons-Lits (which retained a 25% share in Cook's overseas businesses) immediately after the war, and in 1948 the firm became state-owned as part of the nationalised British Railways.

## The Fifties and Sixties

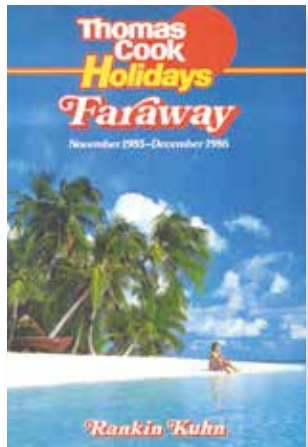
Thomas Cook benefited from the post-war holiday boom, which saw one million Britons travelling abroad by 1950. The company set up a Business Travel Service and refurbished its holiday camp at Prestatyn (which had opened shortly before the outbreak of war).



Although Thomas Cook remained the largest and most successful company in the industry, its pre-eminence was now being challenged by new travel firms that were able to undercut Thomas Cook's prices and offer cheap package deals. In 1965 the company's net profits exceeded £1 million for the first time, but in an increasingly cut-throat marketplace Thomas Cook began to fall behind its younger rivals.

## De-Nationalisation and Beyond

In 1972 Thomas Cook returned to private ownership, bought by a consortium of Midland Bank, Trust House Forte and the Automobile Association. Radical reorganisation followed and a new,



standardised corporate logo (the words 'Thomas Cook' in 'flame' red) was soon introduced. Thomas Cook managed to survive the recession of the 1970s - a recession that witnessed the collapse of several travel firms - and enhanced its reputation for providing excellent service by launching a Money Back Guarantee scheme in 1974.

Thomas Cook experienced many changes during the 1970s, including the sale of its holiday camp at Prestatyn and the relocation of its administrative headquarters from London to Peterborough. The firm also became a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Midland Bank Group. During the 1980s Thomas Cook began to concentrate on its long-haul tours programme, purchasing Rankin Kuhn Travel in 1982 and quitting the short-haul package tours market in 1988 (a market to which Thomas Cook successfully returned in 1996 when it acquired Sunworld). Between 1985 and 1990, Thomas Cook also expanded its network of high street shops through the acquisition of the retail chains Frames, Blue Sky and Four Corners.

The company's continued success was assured in 1992 when it was purchased by Westdeutsche Landesbank (WestLB), Germany's third largest bank, and LTU Group, Germany's leading charter airline. WestLB became sole owners of Thomas Cook in 1995, and a period of expansion followed - which saw the acquisition of Sunworld, Time Off and Flying Colours in quick succession - culminating in Thomas Cook's merger with Carlson Leisure Group's UK travel interests and the subsequent formation of JMC (including JMC Airlines) in 1999.

## Into the 21st Century

In 2001, following the sale of its Global and Financial Services Division to Travelex, Thomas Cook was acquired by C&N Touristic AG, one of Germany's largest travel groups. Within a matter of months, C&N Touristic AG had changed its name to Thomas Cook AG and launched a new logo and brand identity. On 19 June 2007, Thomas Cook AG and MyTravel Group plc merged to form Thomas Cook Group plc.

Another merger followed in 2011, when Thomas Cook and the Co-operative Group amalgamated their high street travel businesses to create the UK's largest retail travel network.

On 1 October 2013 Thomas Cook officially unveiled its new unified 'Sunny Heart' brand to the world.

## Thomas Cook Today

Today, Thomas Cook Group plc is one of the world's leading leisure travel groups, with sales of £7.8 billion and 20 million customers each year. The group is supported by around 22,000 employees and operates from 15 countries. It is number one or two (by revenue) in all its core markets.

Thomas Cook's vision is to be the best-loved holiday company, delivering inspiring, personalised holiday experiences for all its customers.

One reason for the company's longevity and continued success is its commitment to consistently meet and exceed the expectations of its customers. Thomas Cook once described himself as *'the willing and devoted servant of the travelling public'*. Today, 175 years after his pioneering excursion, he would be proud to know that the company he founded continues to follow in his footsteps.

# Thomas Cook timeline

**1841** Thomas Cook organises his first excursion, a rail journey from Leicester to a temperance meeting in Loughborough. On Monday 5 July a special train carries some 500 passengers a distance of 12 miles and back for one shilling.



**1855** Thomas Cook's first continental tour. He personally conducts two parties from Harwich to Antwerp, then on to Brussels, Cologne, Frankfurt, Heidelberg, Strasbourg and, finally, to Paris for the International Exhibition.

**1872** Thomas Cook organises and leads the first round-the-world tour. He is away from home for 222 days and covers more than 25,000 miles.



**1886** John Mason Cook launches his new fleet of luxurious Nile steamers.



**1927** Thos Cook & Son Ltd organises the first personally-conducted air tour - from New York to Chicago for the Dempsey-Tunney heavyweight boxing contest.



**1939** Holidays by air on specially chartered aircraft to the French Riviera are included in Cook's summer brochure for the first time.



**1972** Thomas Cook is privatised and bought by a consortium of Midland Bank, Trust House Forte and the Automobile Association.

**2001** Thomas Cook is acquired by C&N Touristic AG, which changes its name to Thomas Cook AG and launches a new logo.



**2007** Thomas Cook AG and MyTravel plc merge to form Thomas Cook Group plc.

**2016** Thomas Cook celebrates its 175th anniversary.



**1845** Thomas Cook conducts his first trip for profit. It is a railway journey to Liverpool from Leicester, Nottingham and Derby. Fares are 15/- first class and 10/- second class, with a supplementary charge for travelling by special steamer to North Wales.

**1865** Thomas Cook opens his first high-street shop in Fleet Street, London, the upper floor of which is used as a Temperance Boarding House.



**1873** *Cook's Continental Time Tables & Tourist's Handbook* is published for the first time.

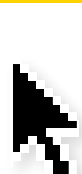


**1919** Thos Cook & Son is the first travel agent to advertise pleasure trips by air.

**1928** Frank and Ernest Cook, the two surviving grandsons of Thomas Cook, retire, selling the family business to the *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits et des Grands Express Européens*.

**1948** Thos Cook & Son Ltd becomes state-owned under the British Transport Holding Company.

**1997** Thomas Cook On-Line is launched, making Thomas Cook the first UK retail travel agency to offer customers a way to buy holidays over the Internet.



**2003** Thomas Cook Airlines is formally launched in the UK.



**2011** Thomas Cook and the Co-operative Group merge their high street travel businesses to create the UK's largest retail travel network.

**The co-operative travel**  
Here for you for life