

THE WORLD'S BEST WALKS

Make tracks to one of these amazing trails and put your boots through their paces

HIKING HAS NEVER BEEN SO HOT – and the world is full of amazing trails to explore. If you've been meaning to combine two of your greatest loves – fitness and travelling – for a while, consider this permission to apply for annual leave today. From glorious mountains to pristine wilderness and even a gourmet gambol through Europe, there's at least one incredible trekking destination on this list that you won't be able to resist. Happy hiking!

THE TRACK: OVERLAND TRACK, TASMANIA BEST FOR: WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

Quolls and echidnas and Tasmanian devils, oh my! The unique wildlife isn't the only reason to hike the Overland Track, but it's a highlight of this remarkably pristine part of the world. You'll also savour magnificent views of mountains, lakes and waterfalls created by glacier action as you hike the 65km trail (or 80km if you choose to walk around Lake St Clair rather than take the ferry on the last day). Most hikers complete the track in six to seven days, but there are numerous side trips you can tack on – such as scaling Tasmania's highest peak, Mt Ossa – if you have some extra time to play with.

You can hike Overland all year, but most

prefer January through March as it's less likely to snow (though it can happen year-round!). Between 1 October and 31 May, you're required to book your departure date online, pay a \$200 fee, obtain a current National Parks Pass and walk the track from north to south. This allows the Parks and Wildlife Service to keep tabs on the number of walkers during peak season to avoid overcrowding and reduce environmental impact. The track is well-marked and there are six overnight nodes along the way that offer huts and tent platforms to walkers on a first in, best-rested basis.

HOT TIP: The Parks and Wildlife Service website (link below) contains a wealth of information on hiking the Overland Track, including detailed daily walk notes that will help you plan your journey.

TELL ME MORE: parks.tas.gov.au



THE TRACK: EVEREST BASE CAMP, NEPAL BEST FOR: BRAGGING RIGHTS

Not only will you get to eyeball the highest point on earth during this life-changing 130km hike from Lukla to Everest Base Camp, but you'll get to do it nice and slow. There's no rushing when you're trying to acclimatise to the elevation and avoid altitude sickness! The entire hike takes 14 to 16 days.

As you plod along, you'll get to experience the culture of the local Sherpa people, visit Buddhist monasteries and try local delicacies such as homemade yak

cheese in the historical village of Namche Bazaar. When you're planning your trip, be sure to avoid monsoon season which is from mid-June to August. The best times to hike are March to May when the rhododendrons are in bloom, and September to November when the weather is drier.

HOT TIP: It's a good idea to book a tour for a trip like this, so you can leave the logistics to the pros and focus on your climb. Intrepid offers a 15-day Everest Base Camp trip which includes time to explore Kathmandu, too.

TELL ME MORE: intrepidtravel.com



THE TRACK: GRAND CANYON R2R2R, ARIZONA

BEST FOR: AMAZING EYE CANDY

A record 5.9 million visitors took in the majestic beauty of the Grand Canyon in 2016, but most of them stayed above the rim. The 77km Rim to Rim to Rim (R2R2R) hike takes you from the North Rim down to the Colorado River, up to the South Rim and back again – or you can do it the other way around. Unless you're super-fit, you should allow four to six days to take in the sights at a leisurely pace. If you're crunched for time, you can do a Rim to Rim hike (only one way) in two to three days.

Keep your eyes peeled for elk and desert bighorn sheep, and stop for a refreshing dip at Ribbon Falls off the North Kaibab Trail. You can camp anywhere in the park as long as you obtain a backcountry permit at nps.gov. There are also three campgrounds that don't require permits, or you can enter an online lottery 15 months before your stay in hopes of scoring a cosy bed and hot meal at Phantom Ranch.

HOT TIP: Timing is everything! The best weather is from mid-May to mid-June and late September to mid-November, but expect it to be busy. Roads are closed at the North Rim from the end of November to mid-May, but R2R2R can be done in winter with adequate preparation. Avoid the sweltering months of July and August. **TELL ME MORE:** nps.gov/grca

THE TRACK: TE ARAROA, NEW ZEALAND

BEST FOR: EPIC ADVENTURE

Meaning "the long pathway" in Maori, the Te Araroa stretches 3,000km from the top of the North Island to the bottom of the South Island and offers an incredible array of landscapes ranging from volcanoes, mountains and jungles to valleys, rivers and beaches. Along the way you'll discover New Zealand's rich history and be immersed in Maori culture.

Since the Te Araroa opened in 2011, hundreds of avid "trampers" have attempted a "thru-hike" – walking the entire length of the trail in four to six months – but you don't have to quit your day job to enjoy its beauty. With more than 160 tracks to choose from, you can plan a day walk (try the Puhoi Track which takes you across a swingbridge and through forests) or a multi-day hike (the East Ahuriri Track features stunning views of Lake Ohau).

HOT TIP: Some sections of the Te Araroa are wild and untamed, so do your research to choose the right track for your experience.

TELL ME MORE: teararoa.org.nz



THE TRACK: TOUR DU MONT BLANC, FRANCE, ITALY AND SWITZERLAND

BEST FOR: GOURMET PERKS

Hike through three countries, circle Western Europe's highest mountain, and sample local wine and cheese along the way? Shut up and take our money! This relatively easy 170km walk usually takes 10 days to complete at a laidback pace. The trails are well-marked and there's more quaint accommodation than you can shake a walking pole at. It's the perfect choice for an adventure holiday with your girl squad – you'll feel accomplished at the end of the day, not broken.

If you think that means you'll have to compromise on breathtaking landscapes because you're choosing a more relaxed hike, rest easy. As you circumnavigate the Mont Blanc massif – a mountain range known as the "Monarch of the Alps" – you'll take in spectacular views of the mammoth Mont Blanc itself (it rises 4,810m above sea level!) as well as countless other snowy peaks and impressive glaciers. Do the Tour du Mont Blanc between July and September for a peak #mindblown experience.

HOT TIP: Some walkers swear you don't need to book the charming huts ahead of time because there are so many peppered along the trail, giving you the freedom to modify your itinerary and pace as you wish. But if that idea makes you break out in a cold sweat, you can book at the link below.

TELL ME MORE: autourdumontblanc.com/en

THE TRACK: TORRES DEL PAINE "W" TREK, PATAGONIA, CHILE

BEST FOR: A NEXT-LEVEL INSTA

At the bottom of South America, in Chilean Patagonia, lies a magical land known as Torres del Paine National Park. Images of the area will explode your brain – snow-capped mountains, volcanic peaks, crystal-clear turquoise lakes, dramatic glaciers and distinctive fauna live together in perfect harmony. And while you'll need to take a series of flights from North America followed by a bus ride to get there, the magical scenery is, by all accounts, worth the effort.

The 80km "W" trek is the most popular hike and takes four to six days. The peak season is December to February, but it's busy from October to April due to the longer and warmer days. Whether you want to camp at free campgrounds run by the National Forestry Corporation (CONAF) or pay to stay at *refugios* where you'll get a bunk room and hot showers, you should book online several months before your trip because spots are snapped up quickly.

HOT TIP: Everything is very expensive inside the park compared to normal South American standards (for example, a Snickers bar costs around \$1 outside the park and \$4 inside), so save coin by stocking up on essentials and snacks before you enter.

TELL ME MORE: Head to arquetorresdelpaine.cl/en



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