

*The Road Goes On Forever*

# HIKING & TREKKING

## HIKING & TREKKING VACATIONS

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If you love nature and enjoy getting a great workout, a hiking tour may be for you.

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# HIKING & TREKKING VACATIONS

Hiking tours, or trekking tours as they are sometimes known, are about much more than just walking. The most intensive treks can take days to complete, and they take you to exciting places that can only be reached by foot. With trekking tours, you can explore caves, remote mountain peaks, and villages seen by only a handful of tourists - you can go just about anywhere.

Trekking tours are extremely flexible and versatile, allowing you to choose the style of hiking, sights you want to see, and intensity of the exercise. Not surprisingly, hiking tours provide an excellent way to improve your fitness - a 130-pound person carrying a 20-pound backpack can burn more than 1,300 calories on a four-hour hike. Trekking improves the condition of your heart, immune system, and bone density while building endurance and strength. Being outdoors in clean air provides you with the oxygen you need to feel great, and the natural scenery can clear your mind and reduce stress.

All that and a vacation, too! March on.

The experience of a trekking tour is ideal for travelers who enjoy the outdoors.

It is a great travel opportunity for anyone who wants a unique, active vacation. Hiking tours vary widely, and travelers can choose destinations, companions, and intensity levels to custom-create the vacation of their dreams.

Many trekking tours involve destinations in remote areas rich in wildlife or interesting scenery, taking place on mountain trails, along oceans, or deep within forests. Trips also vary widely based on travelers they attract: you'll find tours for younger hikers, older hikers, beginning and advanced hikers, and hikers who enjoy different lifestyles. Since you will be spending a lot of time with your travel companions, it is imperative to select a tour that includes hikers you will be able to get along with easily.

It's also important to select an itinerary on par with your skill and fitness level. Hiking tours range from fairly low-impact trails to very intense experiences that may include rock climbing and other extreme sport opportunities. To stay safe and happy, choose a trip that's challenging but won't overwhelm you (or your legs).

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# TRAVEL CONSULTANTS & TOUR OPERATORS

If you want to create your own hiking tour, a travel consultant can help and can also ensure that you get the hiking experience you want on your specific budget. In many cases, a travel consultant will do much of the preliminary research for you, weeding through the details of tours and destinations so that you have all of the information you need to plan a hiking vacation. A qualified travel consultant helps you decide what you are looking for in a hike and will explain all of the options available, especially regarding the quality of tour companies, packages that may or may not include transportation and lodging, and other travel logistics. After talking with a travel consultant, you will

be far more knowledgeable about the opportunities available and will become aware of the best values.

Hiking tour operators can offer guides, routes, logistical support, itineraries, equipment, accommodations, emergency help, outdoor savvy, professional experience, safety precautions, food, and additional activities. Some hiking tour operators offer all of these features, while others may provide only basic emergency aid and itineraries. When selecting a company, work with your agent to be sure you have access to the amenities you need, safety assistance, and guides with hiking experience that exceeds your own.

## GROUP SIZE

Before signing up for any trekking tour, ask about the potential group size. Tour operators may sign up small parties of less than 6 people, or they may choose to take large groups of 30 or more. Some tour operators operate private hikes for just one person or for friends and family. Usually, the larger the tour group, the lower the cost of the tour package. Larger groups may result in less interaction with the leader, but they may also hikers to break off into smaller groups to achieve a more intimate experience. If you are going on a trekking vacation mainly to see wildlife, keep in mind that larger groups create more noise and so can scare off animals and birds, so choose accordingly.



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# PLANNING

When planning a trekking tour, you'll need to decide where you want to go. This can be difficult, because you'll find hiking tours available on every continent. You can hike through jungles, forests, volcanoes, mountains, swamps, and coastal areas. You can even find urban hiking tours that take you to city ruins or major city attractions.

If you have trouble deciding on a destination, you could start by asking yourself what you want to see while you hike on vacation. Some tour operators have itineraries offering spectacular bird watching, rare plant hunts, prehistoric caving, or ocean walks. You can also choose a tour based on the activities it supports: some trekking tours cater specifically to photography enthusiasts, history buffs, artists, or spiritual exploration. Some even offer access to extreme sports like white water rafting and mountain biking - in addition to hiking. Choosing a theme will help you narrow your options.

Once you decide where you want to go, learn everything you can about the destination(s). Ask your travel consultant for information or assistance in researching details about climate, elevation, altitude, and terrain. Also find out how much hiking you will do each day.

Depending on what you find out, you may need additional equipment or training to prepare you for the rigors of a hike.

If you are hiking at high altitudes, for example, you may need extra conditioning and a visit to the doctor to ensure that your body can take the extra stress. If you will be hiking along slippery trails, you may need to purchase extra-grip boots. The company you eventually select should offer tips and lists for you to follow when preparing and packing.

When considering hiking tours, look closely at food, accommodations, and other factors that impact your non-trekking time. Your tour operator may have chosen specific lodgings or camp sites. Inquire about all of the hotels, B&Bs or camping grounds where you will be staying. Similarly, the tour operator's choice of food and preparation methods are important, especially if you are a vegetarian or traveling in a foreign country. If you have any special needs or requirements for lodging or food, make sure the tour can accommodate those needs by informing your travel consultant early on in the booking process. Find out exactly what costs the tour price covers and if there are additional costs you'll need to cover on the hike. If you must take cash, remember to carry it on you at all times.



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# HEALTH PREPARATION

**TALKING TO A KNOWLEDGEABLE TRAVEL MEDICINE SPECIALIST IS YOUR BEST WAY TO ENSURE THAT YOU WILL RELAX AND ENJOY YOUR ACTIVE TRAVELS.**



If you are traveling outside of the country or even your immediate area for your hiking tour, ask your doctor to recommend you to a physician with travel medicine experience. Inquire about any vaccines you may need for your journey. Also ask about any water and food precautions for your destination. Depending on where you go, you may need to make special provisions to ensure that what you are eating and drinking is safe. If you are hiking at altitudes above 7,000 feet, you should discussed additional considerations with a doctor. Talking to a knowledgeable travel medicine specialist is your best way to ensure that you will relax and enjoy your active travels.

**DEPENDING ON WHERE YOU GO, YOU MAY NEED TO MAKE SPECIAL PROVISIONS TO ENSURE THAT WHAT YOU ARE EATING AND DRINKING IS SAFE.**



## WHAT TO PACK

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As mentioned, be sure to consult with the tour operator about what to pack and what the weather will be like. You will need hiking shoes and a back up pair, if at all possible. These shoes should be designed specifically for hiking and should be made by a reliable brand. They should have great treads for traction, a metal shank for support, and ankle support, in addition to being waterproof, light-weight, and very comfortable. Try on many pairs and choose the best quality pair with the most comfortable fit - this is not a time to try to save \$50 if it means you'll be anything less than totally confident in your shoes. Bad shoes on a hiking tour can cause great discomfort and even injury.

Never break in a new pair of boots or shoes on your trip; wear these shoes while you train for as many hours as possible.

You will also need to pack high-quality socks to avoid painful blisters, shirts for layering, and light rain jackets. Look for the newest synthetic sports materials that whisk sweat away from your body. You may need mittens, hats, and cold-weather wear on some hikes, along with sunscreen, insect repellent, and sunglasses. You may also want to pack your sketch pad, notebook, or camera to record your trip - keeping in mind that you'll be carrying it. Some hikers also like to use walking sticks, heart monitors, or pedometers.

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# RISKS

All travel entails some risks. Trekking tours have additional risks associated with outdoor physical activity. For these reasons, you will want to work with a responsible and safety-conscious tour operator that your professional travel agent can confidently recommend.

In addition, you can do many things to stay safe on your hike:

- Drink plenty of water, wear sunscreen and a hat, and don't push yourself beyond your physical limits. Even on overcast days, the sun can wreak havoc on unprepared hikers.
- Follow all the rules that your tour operator sets out for you. These rules are made for your own safety.
- Respect the environment, the tour operator, your hiking companions, and anyone you meet on the trip. Be friendly and do not go off by yourself, away from approved hiking areas. Do not pick up or remove plants or animals from their natural environment. Do not litter. Strive to leave the environment just as you found it, or better.
- Use good equipment - especially good hiking shoes. If your tour operator offers you equipment, make sure it is safe and in good condition. If you buy your own, make sure you buy the correct equipment from a qualified store. Get a salesperson to help you.
- As with all travel, good trip interruption and medical insurance is highly recommended. Remember that your own medical insurance policy may not cover you for out-of-country travel.



## LAST-MINUTE TIPS

If you are leaving the country, you may need a passport and visa. It is good to arrange for these travel documents well in advance in case there are delays. You will also want to arrange for travel and health insurance to make sure that your tour is hassle-free. Finally, if you are traveling to your destination by airplane, be aware that new airport regulations may affect your ability to travel with your equipment. You may need to check much of your hiking equipment before getting on the plane.

You'll find hiking tours out there for almost every trekking enthusiast and every beginner. If you are a seasoned expert, or if you can picture yourself getting in the best possible shape over your next holiday while on an adventure of a lifetime, a trekking tour is an exciting way to hit the road.