



Pick up the pace with walking holidays in the open air, writes **Katie McGonagle**

If ever there was a reason to remind ourselves of the joys of the great outdoors, being stuck inside for weeks on end, with only our once-a-day exercise to break up the monotony, is it. Even now, as lockdown restrictions are gradually being eased, those daily walks feel like a lifeline to the outside world in a time of turmoil.

Whether you've taken the chance to explore your local area on foot instead of by car, walked through woodlands or past lakes you'd never been to before, or simply dug out that old pair of trainers from the back of the wardrobe for a short stroll around the block, you can be sure your clients will have been doing the same.

Some might even have found they rather like this healthy new habit and want to carry on walking well after lockdown is over – which is why bumping up your knowledge of the best holidays on foot would be a wise investment of time right now.

Even before the coronavirus crisis, walking holidays had been on the rise, both in groups or self-guided, as part of a wider trend towards active breaks such as cycling and hiking. Add growing consumer sentiment in favour of outdoor breaks where holidaymakers can keep their distance from fellow travellers, and it's fair to say a boom in walking breaks might be on the horizon.



LIKE THIS?

## SOUTH OF FRANCE

Few places are so redolent of the good life than the south of France, where strolls through the quaint villages of the Dordogne or lavender-filled fields of Provence are rewarded with stops at cellar doors or chateaux to feast on cheese and wine, knowing you can work it off again the next day.

## ANDORRA

**WHY GO:** You don't have to move too far down the map to get to Andorra, the tiny landlocked country set in the Pyrenees mountains between the borders of France and Spain. It's a popular spot during the ski season, but come summer, those mountain slopes and scenic passes transform into lush meadows scattered with delicate wildflowers, interrupted only by the occasional farmer's field or tiny wooden chalet.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** The always-photographable peaks of the Pyrenees provide a scenic backdrop to just about every walking route here, as terrain varies from unspoilt Alpine slopes to glassy mountain lakes. Among the standouts is the Unesco-listed Madriu-Perafita-Claror Valley, a glacial valley reached via a fairly challenging hike but one that rewards walkers with rare wildlife and an insight into the agricultural heart of the country.

**BOOK IT:** Ramblers Walking Holidays has seven and 14-night options on its Hiking in Andorra holiday, which starts from £1,029 for a week departing May 30, 2021, including BA flights to Toulouse, transfers, full-board accommodation, local transport and walking guides, with a choice of moderate or more challenging walks, depending on clients' preferences. [ramblersholidays.co.uk](http://ramblersholidays.co.uk)

TRY THIS



LIKE THIS?

## JURASSIC COAST, UK

This is one of the jewels of southern England. Stretching from Dorset to Devon, it combines sweeping sea views along craggy cliff edges with rolling countryside, iconic sights such as Durdle Door, the remnants of Iron Age forts, the shingly marvel of Chesil Beach, plus old-fashioned seaside towns such as Lyme Regis and pretty villages where quaint tea rooms and old-style pubs abound.

## KERRY WAY, IRELAND

**WHY GO:** Ireland's west coast is well known for the spectacular scenery of the Wild Atlantic Way, but home in on smaller sections of the route and there are some pleasant surprises in store. The Kerry Way is a well-signposted, 130-mile trail that starts and ends in Killarney, adjoining the famous Ring of Kerry road. Along the way, walkers pass billowing hills carpeted in every possible shade of green, centuries-old stony paths where they're more likely to encounter a sheep than another human being, and an undulating coastline where every turn reveals another breathtaking view.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Killarney National Park is worth the journey alone, being home to Ireland's highest mountain range and its only population of native red deer, three renowned lakes and impressive 19th-century mansion Muckross House. It's also worth making time for pretty towns and villages such as Sneem and Waterville, then have cameras at the ready on the final day of walking for knockout views of the Dingle Peninsula and Rossbeigh Strand.

**BOOK IT:** Headwater offers a week-long self-guided route, The Kerry Way and Killarney National Park, from £1,179 in September, including seven nights' B&B, maps and luggage transfers; flights not included. A four-night option is also available. [headwater.com](http://headwater.com)

TRY THIS



LIKE THIS?

## AUSTRALIA

It probably isn't the first destination that springs to mind for a walking holiday, but Australia's diverse scenery – from rainforest to red desert, wine country to winding coast – is prime territory to explore on foot. Great Walks of Australia has a host of incredible routes, including a newly extended five-day Scenic Rim Trail, one of Queensland's biggest-ever ecotourism projects, as well as shorter day hikes.

## NEW ZEALAND

**WHY GO:** It's hard to imagine not falling in love with New Zealand's landscapes, whether the glacier-carved valleys and fjords of the South Island, or volcanic interior and beach-edged coasts of the North. There are nine Great Walks, such as the Milford Track, offering multi-day itineraries through glorious scenery, but all except the most-dedicated hikers will find it easier to link together shorter hikes as they tour the islands.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Choosing your favourite New Zealand landscape is like choosing a favourite child, but highlights of HF Holidays' tour (see below) include the famous Tongariro Alpine Crossing (setting for *The Lord of the Rings*' Mount Doom). Then there's Abel Tasman National Park, a coastal route with views over Tasman Bay; numerous trails offering views of Aoraki (Mount Cook); and a chance to hike part of the Kepler Track.

**BOOK IT:** HF Holidays' epic 23-day New Zealand Guided Walking Holiday takes in Auckland, Rotorua, Tongariro National Park, Abel Tasman, Aoraki, Te Anau, Milford Sound and Queenstown. Prices start at £6,499 for a March 6, 2021, departure, excluding flights. [hfholidays.co.uk](http://hfholidays.co.uk)

TRY THIS

