



8
OF THE
Best
WALKING
HOLIDAYS

Laura French picks out
top trails for the over-50s

@laurafrench121



TOP TIP
Riviera Travel has added extra departures for its new Walk & Discover tours, launched in January

Is there anything quite as therapeutic as ambling along in the great outdoors, wind whistling, birds tweeting and scenery unfolding around you like a real-life postcard?

While coach tours and rail holidays certainly have their place, there's only so much you can see through a window pane, which is probably why walking holidays are booming, especially in the mature market.

But where do you start when it comes to selling them? We've whittled down the product to find some of the best options, with something to suit every taste - from relaxing rambling holidays in Scotland to a once-in-a-lifetime trek to Everest Base Camp.

1 CAMINO DE SANTIAGO
Few trails are quite as revered as the Camino de Santiago, the 1,000-year-old network of pilgrimage routes that stretches through France, Portugal and Spain to reach the iconic Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela.

While the ultra-intrepid can take on the entire Camino Frances - the central trail, stretching nearly 500 miles - most opt for a snippet.

Just You offers one of the most scenic stretches on its eight-day trip from Bilbao, joining the trail at Puente La Reina, known for its Romanesque architecture and medieval churches, before moving on to the vineyards and villages of La Rioja, the quaint canals of Campos de Castilla

and the stone-built cathedrals and castles that colour northern Spain's highlands.

The highlight, of course, is reaching Santiago de Compostela and its ornate cathedral, which towers over the city with its Gothic-meets-baroque structures and gold-bedecked interiors.

Book it: From £1,549 including accommodation, portage, some meals, tour manager and flights from Gatwick. justyou.co.uk

2 EVEREST BASE CAMP
Trekking to Everest base camp might not be the first thing you think of when it comes to the mature market, but for those who've always wanted to make the expedition, and now have the time and money to do so, it's not too late.

World Expeditions offers an epic 21-day trip designed especially for over-55s with a slower-paced itinerary and extra time for acclimatisation, plus comfortable accommodation - think eco-lodges and private campsites with off-the-ground beds and proper pillows - to make it that bit more doable.

It might not be suited to everyone, but active types up for a challenge will find the rewards compelling. Expect day after day of serene ambles (averaging four to eight hours a day, with a couple of rest days in between) through culturally rich villages, soaring pine forests, snowy peaks and icicle-covered glaciers to

reach the illustrious mountain.

The climax is a clamber up to the 5,545m-high lookout Kala Pattar, where panoramic views over Everest and the surrounding peaks unfold like something from a film set.

Book it: From £1,950 including all meals on the trek, domestic flights, transfers, accommodation, guide, porters and entry fees. International flights are extra. worldexpeditions.com

3 THE ANDES
Just as bucket-list worthy is Peru and its iconic Machu Picchu - but walking in this legendary region isn't only about the Inca Trail.

Saga has a Walking in the Andes tour that swaps the trail for a train ride through the Sacred Valley, making time to explore Cusco, Machu Picchu, Lake Titicaca and Arequipa on foot. Highlights include a visit to Maras and Moray - twinned Inca ruins home to sprawling salt flats - a boat trip to Lake Titicaca's man-made Uros islands, and a hike around the Colca Canyon, where condors swoop above verdant, terraced slopes.

Walks are broken up with cultural explorations and transfers between regions, so it's a good option for clients wanting some down time in between the more active parts - as well as those after a bit of history to throw in with the nature explorations.

Book it: From £3,399 including B&B accommodation, tour

manager, portage, some meals, excursions, return flights and transfers. travel.saga.co.uk

4 THE ORKNEYS
Walking holidays don't have to mean heading to the ends of the Earth, though; the UK is blessed with glorious scenery, and among its most captivating charms are the Orkney Isles, northeast of the Scottish mainland.

A wealth of sea and birdlife makes this rugged archipelago of 70 islands and skerries a hotspot for nature lovers, while historical sites draw those after culture. Highlights include the Stone Age village of Skara Brae, the Neolithic monument of Maes Howe (dating back to around 2800BC) and the Italian Chapel, turned into a place of worship by Italian prisoners during the Second World War.

Wilderness Scotland offers the opportunity to explore it all on foot on a gentle week-long walking tour (rated grade two out of nine) taking in all the key sights and mystical sounds, from jagged sea caves to dramatic, craggy cliffs. Accommodation is in a guesthouse and there are plenty of opportunities to enjoy produce fresh from the sea.

Book it: From £1,735 per person based on two sharing, including six nights' accommodation, most meals, services of a walking guide and all transport (starting and finishing in Inverness). wildernessscotland.com

→ **5 SECRET GREECE**

For independent clients wanting to do away with a guide and take charge of the orienteering themselves, suggest a self-guided tour.

Inntravel offers a plethora of options, but for an especially peaceful route traversing barely touched landscapes and unspoiled villages, look to its 'Secret' Andros itinerary in Greece.

Passing empty beaches, waterfall-clad valleys, rolling hills and emerald vineyards via a network of ancient, well-preserved walking trails, it takes hikers through the best of this lush, little-visited island, with Greek cuisine on hand along the way to help walkers fuel up, and plenty of opportunity to sample the local vintages too.

Book it: From £635 each based on two sharing, including six nights' B&B in a guesthouse, route notes, maps and luggage transfers. Flights extra.

inntravel.co.uk

6 KUMANO KODO TRAIL, JAPAN

Think Japan, think Mount Fuji? While there's good reason this mystical mountain has a reputation among hikers the world over, Japan has plenty to explore beyond its most famous landmark.

Among the country's most scenic routes is the Kumano Kodo, a network of walking trails through the countryside that served as a pilgrimage



ABOVE: Cherry blossom on Japan's Yamanobe-no-Michi trail

BELOW: Machu Picchu, Peru



Walks in flower-strewn meadows, gondola rides to viewing points and boat trips on lakes are on the Austrian itinerary

route for more than a millennium and is now a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Exodus Travels offers a two-week walking tour through the region exploring the ancient shrines, temples, villages and teahouses that colour it, with visits to the likes of Toba, famed for its pearl divers; Nachi, where a plume of white water crashes down the rocks; and Yamanobe-no-Michi, one of the country's oldest pathways, dating back more than 1,200 years.

Walking days range from casual two-hour strolls to more-intense days of hiking (up to nine hours), so it's best reserved for those with a good level of fitness, but most trails are on good, well-marked paths, and bus and train transfers between points provide ample time to rest the legs.

Book it: From £5,499 including B&B accommodation, some meals, guide, transfers and flights.

exodus.co.uk

7 AUSTRIAN ALPS

Nothing beats taking in the fresh, mountain air of the Alps as pines soar into the sky around you and cowbells jingle in the distance - and it doesn't get much more idyllic than the Austrian Tyrol.

For those wanting to see the region at its best, suggest walking specialist Adagio (part of Ramblers Worldwide Holidays), which offers a seven-night trip in the iconic Zugspitz Arena, where jagged peaks overlook quaint Alpine villages.

Gentle walks around flower-strewn meadows, gondola rides to panoramic lookouts (including the Zugspitze peak, reaching nearly 3,000m) and boat trips along aqua-blue lakes are all on the itinerary here, with easy one to three-hour strolls each day, alongside plenty of free time to explore at leisure.

Guests stay in Ehrwald, a peaceful village right in the mountains, and when they're done walking they can slot in some R&R time with saunas, salt steam rooms and spa treatments, all available at the hotel.

Book it: From £1,250 including en-suite accommodation with breakfast at the four-star Hotel Alpen Residence, transport, entrance fees and flights, plus a local travel pass. Departures in June, July and September.

adagio.co.uk




→ **8 NORWEGIAN FJORDS**
These much-photographed fjords are spectacular, but you don't have to be on a cruise ship to explore them, with hundreds of hiking trails spread across the country's green-carpeted landscapes.

For some of the best walking spots, Inghams suggests heading to Ulvik, a village of traditional wooden houses set in a bay on Hardangerfjord.

Here visitors can sample fresh produce on local farms, explore meadows filled with wild flowers and swim in crystal-clear waters, where reflections of snow-capped mountains bounce off the glassy surface. Several of the walks are accessible straight from the village, while public transport can take guests farther afield to explore the surrounding hills and waters.

Book it: A week at the four-star Brakanes Hotel in Ulvik with Inghams costs from £1,189 based on two sharing half-board and including flights and airport transfers in June.

agents.inghams.co.uk 

Best of the rest

CANARY ISLANDS

The Canaries are a walkers' dream, and La Palma is particularly enchanting. For those wanting to discover its highlights on foot, suggest Explore's eight-day Volcanoes and Cloud Forest trip, which takes in the island's black-sand beaches, dramatic volcanic scenery and subtropical cloud forest, with cultural sights along the way.

LAKE DISTRICT

For keen walkers wanting to stretch the legs without jetting off on an aircraft, the Lake District has it covered. HF Holidays offers several tours here, including its Northern Lake District Guided Walking tour around Derwent Water – also available as a solos tour.

ARNHEM

Clients into their history? Recommend Leger Holidays' Walking Arnhem, which takes travellers back in time with five days of battlefields walks around this quaint Dutch town and its surrounding areas.



PICTURE: PETER BACKHOUSE; MARK TIPPLE; ROBIN STRAND; SHUTTERSTOCK; FRANS LEMMENS



LOW DEPOSITS



Your Escorted Tour Specialists



Order your brochure at www.tradegate.co.uk



Helsinki, Tallinn & Riga
| 8-day escorted holiday from £849
| Flying direct from 13 UK airports
| Available Apr - Oct 2019



Riads of Marrakesh & the Colours of Morocco
| 6-day escorted holiday from £649
| Flying direct from 3 UK airports
| Available Nov 2019 - Apr 2020



Oberammergau 2020 & Delightful Lake Garda
| 10-day escorted holiday from £1,899
| Flying direct from 6 UK airports
| Available May - Oct 2020

For bookings & more, visit our *new* agent portal at agents.newmarketholidays.co.uk or call us on 0330 160 7999

