

# PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

WALKING HOLIDAYS: Choose from dramatic uphill hikes or scenic and sedate strolls

By NICK REDMAYNE

**W**HIZZING through the planet's perpetual blue sky aboard superannuated cigar tubes effects a jet age homogeneity upon travel almost as numbingly ubiquitous as the never-ending global high street, begging the question: "Why do we bother?"

Perhaps Mr Miliband is right and we should all stay close to home eating our chips, or frites, under reassuringly expensive plastic domes... Rail enthusiasts, self-drivers and luminously lycra-clad cyclists will say they still know what it is to travel hopefully, but surely no-one has greater appreciation of a landscape than a walker whose humble progress is measured one step at a time.

The new South Loch Ness Trail ([visitlochness.com](http://visitlochness.com)) covers 28 miles of shoreline between Loch Tarff, near Fort Augustus, to Torbreck, close by Inverness. This relatively "undiscovered"

path takes in wildlife-rich countryside, panoramic look-outs, 18th-century bridges, woodlands, hamlets and historic houses. It's early days, and thus far no commercial tour operators package the route. However, the website includes history, sights and suggested accommodation, while the handy South Loch

Ness Heritage Group Booklet (£3) is available at the Dores Inn, Foyers Cafe and Whitebridge Hotel en route. Owners Direct ([ownersdirect.co.uk](http://ownersdirect.co.uk)) features rental properties nearby including a converted monastery and a former smithy.

Overseas, mass tourism may have overtaken some areas of Mallorca but, as recently recognised by Unesco, away from these enclaves the rugged uplands of the Sierra de Tramuntana provide truly dramatic mountain walking. A seven-night self-guided tour offered Inntravel ([inntravel.co.uk](http://inntravel.co.uk)) by follows ancient mule tracks between villages, through wooded valleys,

among terraces of olive and citrus trees, high above the coastline. Highlights include the Lake Cuver to Ofre Pass trail, Chopin's former retreat in a Carthusian monastery, and the Muleta Plateau's expansive sea views. The holiday costs £765pp

including B&B, luggage transfers, walking maps and route notes. In October return flights from Glasgow to Palma with Jet2 ([jet2.com](http://jet2.com)) cost from £82pp.

When Greece makes headlines the terms "debt" and "crisis" are never far away.

However, Crete, largest and most southerly of the

Greek islands, has historically maintained a more robust economy, in addition to possessing superlative mountain and gorge hiking amid a wealth of botanical and ornithological interest.

Planet Holidays ([planet-holidays.co.uk](http://planet-holidays.co.uk)) offers seven nights at the Knossos Royal in Anissaras where guests can choose from a range of guided nature rambles at €46 to €66 per walk. Each itinerary is led by a local and offers varying geographical and natural history focus. Holidays cost from £799pp including half-board accommodation, transfers, and flights from Glasgow to Heraklion.

Elsewhere, raising your walk to a jog to catch the September 4 Edinburgh departure, Mountain Paradise ([mountain-paradise.co.uk](http://mountain-paradise.co.uk)) offers £100 off its week-long holiday in the Tatra Mountains of Slovakia. From Pension Fortuna in the Old Town of Poprad, five days of guided hikes explore lakes, alpine meadows, waterfalls and steep cliffs in one of Europe's most under-touristed mountain ranges. The holiday costs £699pp including half-board accommodation, transfers and flights.

Finally, an independent Dolomite walking holiday

from specialist Headwater ([headwater.com](http://headwater.com)) uses an extensive network of high-

level trails, accessible by cable car, to trek the northern Alta Pusteria Valley. Highlights of the seven-night break include a ridge walk along the Austrian border with views over the Dolomites and Austrian Alps, and a walk encircling Drei Zinnen rock monolith. The tour costs from £936pp including flights from Glasgow, half-board accommodation, maps and route notes.



● **YOMPING?** Walks, hikes and treks are all fairly loose terms. Many tour operators go to some lengths to describe daily distances, ascent, types of terrain and levels of fitness required – the last thing they want is an unhappy client.

Be honest and decide whether your walking enjoyment extends to twenty-plus undulating kilometres a day over rocky and precipitous mountain paths, gentle strolls through grassy meadows to a rustic restaurant, or five minutes from the pub if you're looking for a sit down...

● **FEET FIRST:** Very few maladies affect the spirit more profoundly than sore

## TOP TIPS WHEN STEPPING OUT

feet. Do not make the mistake of buying new boots for a trip. Instead, take well-tried footwear that hold no uncomfortable surprises and, depending upon climate, combine with a pair of good quality walkers' socks such as those offered by Capricorn Socks (capricornsocks.co.uk).

● **PACK IT IN:** A walking guide once regaled me about a client who turned up at the start of a serious backpacking tour dragging a substantial armoured wheelie case. Though his was an anecdotal

example, it's worth checking what baggage suits your style of tour.

Even when luggage transfers are offered, vehicles providing transport to trailheads may be unable to accommodate stacks of rigid cases. Tour operators sometimes provide soft trek bags in advance to circumvent such problems.

● **LOOK AT THE VIEW:** It's common sense, but on a narrow, high mountain track, spectacular panoramic vistas are best appreciated while stationary. A sprained ankle or twisted knee joint provides an unremarkable but effective way of curtailing your enjoyment – just watch where you're going.



Loch Tarff marks the start of the new South Loch Ness Trail to Torbreck





■ The Tatra Mountains in Slovakia are largely unexplored by tourists and offer a variety of landscapes from alpine meadows to steep cliffs

