

European Long Distance Paths

The options for walking in Europe are as many and various as the countries and the terrain they pass through and any attempt to highlight the best is necessarily subjective. However, any list of the most famous walks would include:

TOUR DU MONT BLANC (SWITZERLAND/ITALY/France)

A circular route around Western Europe's highest peak crossing glaciers and mountain peaks with majestic views of the Alps including Mont Blanc, Aiguille Verte, and Les Drus. The trail crosses three borders, from France into Switzerland then into Italy and back to France and takes from a week to ten days.

Explore (0870 333 4001, www.explore.co.uk)

HAUTE ROUTE (France/Spain)

The Haute Route runs between Chamonix, France and Zermatt, Switzerland and was first charted as a summer mountaineering route by members of the Alpine Club (UK) in the mid 19th Century later becoming one of the best known winter ski tours in the world. It is now an increasingly popular summer walk passing under 10 of the 12 highest peaks in the Alps with hugely varied scenery from high passes to lush Alpine valleys and meadows.

Responsible Travel (01273 600030, www.responsibletravel.com)

GR 20 (CORSICA)

The GR20 is a 173km trail that crosses the Mediterranean island of Corsica from north to south and is considered one of the best (and most difficult) walking trails in Europe passing through pine forests, granite rock formations, mountain torrents, and glacial lakes. The trail takes about 15 days but has few escape routes as there are few paths or roads crossing or leading away from it. There are mountain huts along the way with basic food and accommodation.

Sherpa Expeditions (020 8577 2717, www.sherpaescorted.com)

CAMINO DE SANTIAGO (France/Spain)

The 'Way of St James' was one of the most important Christian pilgrimage routes during medieval times ending at the burial site of the apostle, James the Great. Since the 1980s it has regained much of its popularity with thousands of pilgrims walking at least part of the 800 km trail every year. In order to be counted as a pilgrim (and receive your certificate) you must walk at least 100 km.

www.caminodesantiago.me.uk

LESSER KNOWN GEMS SWEDEN

Sweden remains a largely undiscovered and little-known hiking destination for UK travellers and yet has Europe's largest area of wilderness with summer temperatures in the high 20s so walkers have the chance to bathe in a lake, river, bay or stream almost every day. Thanks to the 'Every Man's Right' system of public access, wild camping is possible throughout the country, allowing a unique freedom to explore the country's large tracts of wilderness.

Nature Travels (01929 463774, www.naturetravels.co.uk)

UMBRIA

The south-east corner of Umbria, far from the most famous centres of Assisi, Perugia etc, remains relatively inaccessible and is a magical combination of isolated historic hill towns and flower-filled pastures against a backdrop of mountains. En route



Above and below: Walking in Sweden



are walled medieval Norcia, the craggy Roccaporena, early monasteries, remote frescoed churches, including the town of Gavelli and finally Spoleto with the most elegant approach on foot to any city in Europe across the 14th Century aqueduct, the Ponte delle Torri.

ATG Oxford (01865 315678, www.atg-oxford.com)

CYCLADES ISLANDS, GREECE

Walking in the Cyclades is to experience Greece in microcosm – the characteristic scenery, ancient history, and a way of life that follows the seasons are condensed into one digestible area. You can cover a single (deserted) island in a day or enjoy a week's-worth of several day-walks.

Walking Plus (020 8835 8303, www.walkingplus.co.uk)

E ROUTES

The European Ramblers' Association is currently pioneering an international network of 11 ultra-long-distance walking routes (E Routes) running for many thousands of kilometres across not just the European Union but the whole of Europe, linking the national and local path networks of member countries.

www.era-ewv-ferp.org, www.walkingontheweb.co.uk