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INTRODUCTION

Why do we hike? To exercise? To enjoy some pleasant scenery? To get from A to B? When we asked our global network of 200 travel writers to tell us about their most memorable hikes, it soon became abundantly clear that the reasons went much deeper than that. 'Life-changing' was a phrase that cropped up numerous times. For some it seems hiking is about the personal challenge – the sense of reward and confidence born of completing a long-distance trail from end to end, or reaching the summit of a mountain. For others it is about gaining an understanding – to follow historic or religious trails and learn (and feel) how our ancestors got about before motorised transportation. One common theme is the sense of connection you can achieve with a destination when you put one foot in front of the other, repeatedly, for hours, and days, on end. In his classic 1879 hiking memoir, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*, Robert Louis Stevenson explains, 'The great affair is to move; to feel the needs and hitches of our life more clearly; to come down off this feather-bed of civilisation, and find the globe granite underfoot and strewn with cutting flints.'

This book is intended to inspire hiking in all its myriad and flinty forms. We have selected 50 of the best and most inspiring routes suggested by our pool of travel writers, from athletic one-day summits to months of pacing through valleys and across ridgeways and international borders. These hikes cover almost every corner of the globe. The classics are well represented by the likes of the Pacific Crest Trail, Angels Landing and the Long Trail in the USA, the 'W' Trek in Patagonia, and several of the Great Walks in New Zealand. Wildlife and walking have always gone hand in hand and we have included hikes that involve encounters with

giraffe and zebra (the *Zambian walking safari*), moose and grizzly bear (the *Skyline Trail*), and echidna and koala (the *Gold Coast Hinterland hike*). The intrepid will not be disappointed: we feature hikes in remote areas of India, Indonesia and the Caucasus, and walks across empty stretches of the Great Wall of China. We commune with pilgrims in Tibet and venture on expeditions deep into the South American jungle. And let's not forget the planet's great cities: urban areas can be rich and invigorating hiking destinations themselves, from the bridges of Sydney to the history and architecture along the Thames in London to the skyline trails of Hong Kong.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The main stories in each regional chapter feature first-hand accounts of fantastic hikes within that continent. Each includes a factbox to help plan the trip – the best time of year to hike, how to get there, where to stay. But beyond that, these stories should spark other ideas. We've started that process with the 'more like this' section that follows each story, offering other ideas along a similar theme, not necessarily on the same continent. On the contents page, the hikes have been colour coded according to their difficulty, which takes into account not just how long, remote and challenging they are but their logistics and local conditions. The index collects different types of hike for a variety of interests.

It's important to note that many of the routes in this book are difficult and challenging. Whether you're a fleet-footed, seasoned hiker or a novice embarking on your very first trek, please ensure that you're adequately prepared and have taken appropriate safety precautions to help prevent against risks or dangers to yourself and others.



Clockwise from left: trekking through snow in the Swiss Alps; the lost city of Choquequirao; regarding the view on the Routeburn Track, New Zealand. Previous page: hikers at the top of Mt Kinabalu in Borneo







CAPE TOWN'S THREE PEAKS IN THREE DAYS

Instead of admiring Cape Town's mountains from the city, flip things around and scale the Mother City's peaks for a view of the skyline, hills and coast.

We stood, shivering, on Table Mountain's famously flat top. A sense of achievement was in the air, and not just because we'd managed to ascend the mountain on a day when the infamous 'Table Cloth' was blissfully absent. The layer of thick cloud is renowned for its tendency to roll in and obliterate the vistas of Cape Town below. But our view was unobscured and for the third time that weekend we surveyed the city panorama far beneath our feet.

Over the past three days we had tackled the trio of peaks that watch over Cape Town – Lion's Head, Devil's Peak and Table Mountain. These are not the most daunting peaks in the world to scale. All three added together still fall short of South Africa's highest mountain – and that in turn is half the height of Kilimanjaro. Yet climbing one, two or three of the peaks is a beautiful way to see one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

Hard-core hikers like to up the challenge by tackling all three peaks in one day, but for mere mortals, the hikes are

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best completed over the course of a weekend, interspersed with shopping, beach trips or long lunches in Cape Town's side streets. And so, one Friday evening we joined the after-work crowd gathering on the road leading towards Lion's Head.

It doesn't matter what time of day you choose to ascend the 2195ft (669m) hill – you're always going to have plenty of company. Early risers head up for a sunrise over the city, a steady line of hikers climb throughout the day and on a full moon the diminutive peak is packed with wine-toting walkers here to watch the sun set and the moon rise.

It's only about an hour from the car park to the top, but just because it's short and slap bang in a city, that doesn't make the walk easy. There are vertiginous ledges, steep inclines and for those who crave a touch of adventure, a route that involves clinging on to ladders and chains manacled to the mountainside. If you're a little queasy with heights, you can bypass the ladders – just keep an eye out for the sign marking the detour.

As the hike circles Lion's Head, you get an ever-changing view of the city, the coast, the port, and once at the peak you can enjoy a vista that is considered by many to be superior to that from the top of Table Mountain, largely because the mountain itself is the central feature of the view. The downward scramble takes another hour and dusk is settling in when we head home to find a clean pair of socks for the next day's hike.

Although when seen from afar Devil's Peak seems to jut above Table Mountain, its jagged peak is in fact some 280ft (85m) shy of Table Mountain's highest point. Of course, the main lure of

“As the hike circles Lion's Head, you get an ever-changing view of the city, the coast, the port and Table Mountain”

all three of the peaks is the varied vistas over Cape Town, but there's also plenty to see on the mountainside itself, particularly for botanists and flower fans. The whole Table Mountain range is layered with fynbos – indigenous shrub-like vegetation unique to the region – and the overgrown vegetation provides a little shade on an otherwise exposed route.

It's not just sun you're likely to meet on Devil's Peak – the mountain, much like the city it resides in, is notoriously windy and as we emerge at the 3287ft (1000m) summit we're almost blasted back down to road level. It's instantly obvious why everyone quickly retreats to the eastern side of the peak to crack open the picnic. Once sheltered from the wind, we munch on slightly soggy sandwiches and try to pick out landmarks in Woodstock, the southern suburbs and as far away as the Cape Flats.

It's an out-and-back hike, and the loose gravel and sometimes steep incline make for a knee-jarring descent. By the time we're back at the car, my legs are wobbling in a way that makes me very happy that on the final hike there's an alternative way to get down the mountain.

There are many routes to the top of Table Mountain but we're joining the shortest and most popular route, Platteklip



Gorge. It's a steep, 2-mile (3km) climb and admittedly isn't the prettiest of the Table Mountain routes, but that's not to say it's an unattractive hike. There's no disappointing way to reach the top of Table Mountain, particularly if the peak is free from clouds. I mean to count the uneven and occasionally enormous steps as we go, but after about 50 or so my mind wanders to more important things – photographing the slowly retreating city behind me, not tripping over loose rocks, keeping an eye out for dassies scurrying in the undergrowth.

We eventually emerge from the narrow gorge, but our climb is not quite done. You can't really call it a peak unless you reach the highest part, so we walk the extra half-hour to Maclear's Beacon. At 3563ft (1086m), it's only 62ft (19m) higher than the upper cableway station, but it's the principle of the thing that counts, so we save the celebratory high five for our arrival at the pyramidal pile of rocks marking Table Mountain's apex. By this point I wish I had followed the 'dress warm' advice that I always offer to others heading up Table Mountain, but I had failed to bring anything more than a very light sweater and the wind is whipping straight through it.

It's as good a time as any to join the queue for the cable car – the easiest and least knee-knocking way to descend. We might not have managed the Three Peaks in record time – the speediest to date is under five hours to scale the trio back-to-back – but at least the slow pace gives time to get back to sea level and enjoy the sights and bites of the city we've now viewed from every possible angle. **LC**



DASSIES OF TABLE MOUNTAIN

Wildlife along the three peaks is largely limited to lizards, bugs and birds, but you are fairly likely to meet a dassie, particularly on top of Table Mountain. Looking a lot like a big fat rodent, the fluffy mammals are actually most closely related to the elephant. Also known by the name of rock hyrax, the cute creatures hop between rocks and provide photographers with an adorable alternative to all those cityscape shots.

From left: hiking the path up Lion's Head; a dassie watches on. Previous page: the magnificent cityscape of Cape Town



ORIENTATION

Start // The Lion's Head hike starts at the car park on Signal Hill Rd. The easiest route up Devil's Peak leaves from Tafelberg Rd, a little further on from the starting point for the Platteklip Gorge hike.

End // All three are out-and-back hikes, or you can opt to take the cable car back down the Table Mountain section.

Distance // Lion's Head 3 miles (5km); Devil's Peak 5.3 miles (8.5km); Maclear's Beacon via Platteklip Gorge 5 miles (8km); all distances are for a round trip.

Getting there // Cape Town airport is 11 miles (18km) from the city. The hikes are best reached by car or taxi – all are a short drive from the city centre.

What to take // The weather is extremely changeable so be sure to have a light rain jacket and warm layers plus sunscreen and a hat.

Opposite: admiring the rocky landscape of Cederberg from beneath the Wolfberg Arch

MORE LIKE THIS SOUTH AFRICAN DAY HIKES

MALTESE CROSS, CEDERBERG

If you want to soak up the sandstone scenery of the Cederberg on foot, but are not quite up to an all-day scramble up precipitous rock faces, the Maltese Cross hike is perfect. Undulating but never steep, the three-hour round-trip walk takes in all that is best about the Cederberg – scuttling lizards, big blue skies, hardy endemic plants and weird rock formations. The usual turn-around point is the Maltese Cross, a curious monolith seemingly sprouting from the rocks scattered around it. If you're feeling energetic – and you already have a permit – you could continue up Sneeuberg, the range's highest peak at 6647ft (2026m).

Start/End // Sanddrif Holiday Resort

Distance // 4.3 miles (7km)

More info // Permits must be obtained in advance from Sanddrif

SENTINEL PEAK, DRAKENSBERG

Also known as the 'chain ladder walk', this is not a route for the vertigo sufferer. After an initial steep climb, the path flattens out for a while, but the real challenge still awaits. Scaling the chain ladders up the sheer face of the Mont-Aux-Sources massif takes a bit of nerve, but there is an (admittedly steep) alternative if you just can't face the two ladders. Once at the top, a fairly flat walk takes you above the Tugela Falls, the second highest in the world. Allow at least seven hours for the round-trip hike.

Start/End // Sentinel Car Park,

Free State

Distance // 9 miles (14km)

SHELTER ROCK, MAGALIESBERG

Within easy access of Johannesburg, the Magaliesberg is a playground for outdoorsy Gauteng dwellers. Although dwarfed by the Drakensberg, the Magaliesberg has its own majesty thanks in no small part to the quintessential African panoramas viewed from mountaintops. Leaving from an adventure camp that also offers abseiling and rock climbing, the hike transports you to the top of the Magaliesberg range. There's plenty of interest along the way, including glimpses of antelopes in the distance, Boer War relics, enough birdlife to have you whipping out your field guide and of course Shelter Rock itself, a very climbable hulk of ochre-coloured sandstone.

Start/End // Shelter Rock Base Camp

Distance // 5 miles (8km)

More info // Advance bookings are required and there is a fee to access the trail. Call +27 (0) 71 473 6298





THE ABEL TASMAN COAST TRACK

One of New Zealand's Great Walks, this world-class beachcombing caper tiptoes around tides and bounds between the bays and golden coves of the South Island.

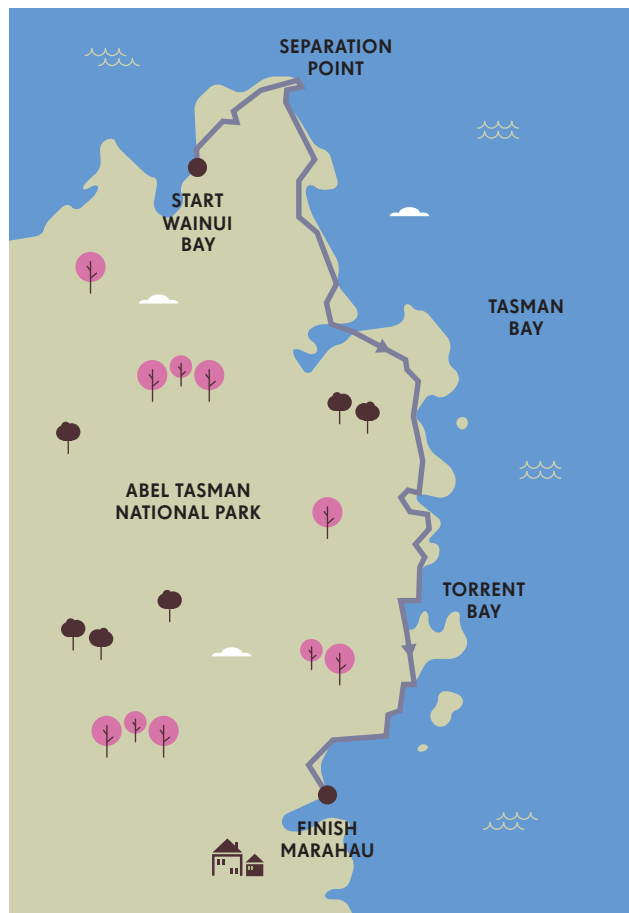
If the huge piece of driftwood hadn't suddenly sprouted a head and let out an indignant snort, I'd have sat on it to eat lunch. Apparently, this log isn't wood at all. It's a heaving, breathing, belching lump of grumpy New Zealand fur seal, which had been enjoying a morning snooze under shimmering sun until I ruined its reverie by gatecrashing the secluded beach.

Evidently, my new friend isn't as excited about our encounter as I am – something he makes cacophonously clear when I begin bagging silly sealy selfies. I keep a respectful distance, not wanting to end up in a fist/flipper fight with 330lb (150kg) of rudely awoken sea mammal, especially not quarterway through a 37-mile (60km) walk, beyond limping range of human habitation or help.

So I leave him to snore and seek an alternative snack spot. Fortunately, picnic possies with epic ocean views are plentiful along the Abel Tasman Coast Track, and before long I stumble into another beautiful bay, gilded by golden sand and gently stroked by the waters of Tasman Bay, a glassy puddle becalmed between the protective arms of Farewell Spit and D'Urville Island.

Once lunch is munched, an internal debate begins: should I have a quick swim, or keep walking towards the hut? And therein lies the problem with this trail, a rambling route through rata forests fringing the coastline of Abel Tasman National Park, linking a series of idyllic coves at the top of New Zealand's South Island.

The hike isn't physically tough – not compared with most multiday Kiwi capers – and covering 9 miles (15km) a day allows walkers to enjoy the experience at a comfortable clip. No, here the challenge is different. For round every corner is a beach so fine it would be unforgivable not to stop, strip and plunge into the blue. And then you continue, only to find another sublime bay. And so it goes on.



Small wonder the Coast Track is an original member of New Zealand's much-feted group of Great Walks, a list that features the nation's top trails. In a country well-endowed with epic hiking routes, it takes something special to feature in this premier league of paths. Tongariro has dramatic volcanoes and multi-coloured mineral-stained lakes; the Routeburn, Kepler and Milford Tracks make the grade through the magnificence of Fiordland; and the Abel Tasman Coast Track gets the nod because it's one of the world's best beachcombing adventures.

The walk can be done in either direction, but most people start at Marahau and spend several days strolling north, returning via water taxi from Totaranui. A decade earlier I'd walked the route this way. Then, tramping around New Zealand on a backpacker's budget and unable to afford the boat transfers, I had continued to Whariwharangi Hut and spent three days trekking back to Marahau via the Abel Tasman Inland Track (a 25-mile/41km path along Evans Ridge and through the beech forests of Moa Park), a more challenging and less trafficked trail than its coastal cousin.

This experience taught me that the top part of the Coast Track offers quieter paths, better vistas and more wildlife encounters than the rest of the route. Armed with this insight and angling for new views, I've returned to walk north-to-south, after being dropped off at Wainui Bay. Trekking in this direction involves an extra layer of logistics, but it launches you straight into the wildest sections of the trail, and soon after rounding scenic Separation Point, the decision pays off, as I meet the seal in Mutton Cove.

"Round every corner is a beach so fine it would be unforgivable not to stop, strip and plunge into the blue"



KAYAKING THE COAST TRACK

The Coast Track is a cracking walk, but Abel Tasman National Park's shores can also be explored from the cockpit of a sea kayak. Several operators offer combined hiking and paddling adventures, where it's possible to kayak across translucent lagoons and between bays, before swapping blade for boots and walking back. Marahau to Anchorage Bay is a popular paddling section, with walkers wandering onward usually to Bark Bay or Onetahuti before catching a water taxi back.



Clockwise from top: kayaks at Watering Cove; walking the beaches of Abel Tasman; another glorious bay. Previous page: footsteps in the golden sands of Marahau

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ORIENTATION

Start // Wainui Car Park
End // Marahau
Distance // 37 miles (60km)

Getting there // Marahau is easily accessed from Picton, where the Interislander ferry arrives from Wellington.

When to go // The Abel Tasman can be done any time of year, but the trails and campsites heave with hikers (and kayakers) during summer (Dec–Feb). October to November and March to April offer better conditions.

Where to stay // The Department of Conservation (DoC) operates huts and campsites along the route; book ahead.

What to take // A relatively gentle multiday hike, the Abel Tasman can easily be done in running shoes. The route rarely rears above 650ft (200m) and the weather is temperate, but take waterproofs and warm layers for evenings. Pack swimming gear, and a mask and snorkel.



Opposite from top: Carrick-a-Rede on Northern Ireland's Causeway Coast; crossing the bridge at the climax of New Zealand's Heaphy Track

MORE LIKE THIS MULTI-SPORTS TRAILS

THE HEAPHY TRACK, NEW ZEALAND

Another Great Walk, the Heaphy Track can also be enjoyed in two distinct ways. As adventurers can explore the Abel Tasman by boot or boat, so the Heaphy can be hiked or biked (mountain bikes are permitted 1 May–30 November). You can tackle the track in both directions, either starting at Kohaihai and tracing the Tasman Sea along the South Island's wild west coast, before crossing the Heaphy River, ascending Goulund Downs and traversing Kahurangi National Park via Perry Saddle, or beginning at Brown Hut and doing the same in reverse. Whichever way you approach it, the Heaphy is an epic challenge. Allow two nights/three days to pedal the route, or four days to walk it, and look out for powelliphanta (a giant carnivorous snail!) and roa (great spotted kiwi) en route.

Start // Kohaihai (near Karamaea)

End // Brown Hut (Golden Bay, via Collingwood)

Distance // 49 miles (78.4km) one way

More info // www.doc.govt.nz/heaphytrack

JATBULA TRAIL, AUSTRALIA

A hiking experience punctuated by plunge pools, the Jatbula Trail in the Northern Territory is an epic Australian adventure. Beginning with a boat trip across the Katherine River at 17 Mile Creek, the rugged route can be hiked independently or with guided groups, but the track is only marked in one direction, with blue triangles pointing the way from Katherine Gorge to Leliyn. It typically takes five days to trek the trail, which traverses Nitmiluk National Park, tracing an ancient indigenous songline and passing Jawoyn rock art and spectacular waterfalls tumbling from the towering Arnhem Land escarpment. Campsites at Biddlecombe Cascades, Crystal Creek, 17 Mile Falls, Sandy Camp and Sweetwater Pool are all situated beside swimming spots. This tropical trail is best walked during 'the Dry' (May–August). Some operators combine walks with gorge-exploring canoeing adventures.

Start // Nitmiluk Gorge

End // Leliyn (Edith Falls)

Distance // 38.5 miles (62km) one way

More info // www.northernterritory.com

CAUSEWAY COAST WAY, NORTHERN IRELAND

Stepping out along a super storied section of Ulster's jagged shores, the Causeway Coast Way draws a dramatic line between the historic towns of Ballycastle and Portstewart, taking in a series of iconic sights along the way. These include the nerve-knacking Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge, medieval Dunluce Castle and, of course, the enigmatic Giant's Causeway – a semi-submerged geological wonder comprised of 40,000 hexagonal basalt columns created either by a huge volcanic eruption, or a Celtic warrior called Fionn mac Cumhaill, depending on who you listen to. The walk can be done in either direction, over two or three relatively easy days, but if you want to up the ante, try running the route during the Causeway Coast ultramarathon, or paddle it while exploring the North Coast Sea Kayak Trail between Magilligan Point and the Glens of Antrim.

Start // Ballycastle

End // Portstewart

Distance // 32 miles (51km)

More info // www.causewaycoastway.com

