



Until the relatively recent invention of the steam and internal combustion engines, humans traveled the earth by foot. The slow travel meant that explorers and pilgrims frequently returned with a catalog of stories about far-off lands: some of them wild tales, some honest renderings.

Barbara Klion, a retiree from Harstdale, N.Y., knows what that's like. As an avid walker who has toured Australia, Kenya, and China on foot, her trips are the contemporary version of an age-old tradition.

For years, Klion and her husband, now 75 and 80, traveled independently. In 2003, they decided to try guided walking tours. That's when the couple went to Scotland with the La Jolla, Calif.-based tour operator Classic Journeys.

"He had us right back there in the 16th century," Klion says of her guide, who was also a historian, singer and expert on Robert Burns, a famous Scottish poet. "He led us through the highlands, telling the history of Scotland. It rained every single day but we didn't care."

Walkers are generally a committed bunch; they know that seeing the world by foot yields a rare experience. Often travelers bond with interesting locals. They also get a vivid, lasting impression of the landscape. Walking tours can be done in one's figurative backyard, but there are several destinations around the world that expose travelers to the best of nature and culture.

### **What To Look For**

Tim Smith, a guide for the Waterbury, Vt.-based tour company Country Walkers, says the essentials of a quality stroll are a great landscape, tolerable weather, suitable level of difficulty and something, like ecology, history or culture, to get the brain buzzing. These may seem like vague directives, but the fun of walking tours is that they're easily personalized by the traveler.

Someone who appreciates hot climates, wildlife and flat terrain could opt for a walking safari in Zambia's South Luangwa National Park. Walkers can watch hippopotamuses and crocodiles swim in the Luangwa River and yellow-billed storks try to catch fish in the shallow waters of oxbow lagoons.

Travelers who don't mind the cold and enjoy adventure could hike Patagonia, a region of southern Argentina east of the Andes. The area is characterized by its many eco-systems and majestic glaciers. The tour operator Butterfield & Robinson offers a week-long walking tour of Patagonia, including trips to the Los Glaciares National Park and the Perito Moreno Glacier. Walkers accustomed to well-appointed accommodations don't have to worry; the Butterfield & Robinson tour puts travelers up at luxury hotels with spa services and gourmet meals paired with Argentinean wines.

For those concerned about distance and level of difficulty, mileage varies depending on the itinerary, and tour operators and national parks differentiate between easier walks and harder ones. In general, independent travelers can decide how far to go each day, while guests of a tour operator should expect to walk an average of four to eight miles daily. At the Fiordland National Park in New Zealand, for example, there are several easy-to-moderate hikes and three "great walks," giving travelers who want to enjoy views of the rain forest and alpine landscape many options.

### Exceptional Excursions

Companies that organize walking tours also work hard to set themselves apart from the competition, often emphasizing an exclusive cultural experience. Sarah Thies, a marketing and communications manager for Classic Journeys, says the company focuses on connections with locals.

"They're introducing us to their friends and family members," she says, "and they're opening up their homes to us." This might include visiting a Tuscan shepherd who allows the guests to sample traditional cheeses or discussing wine and politics with a winemaker who opened the first Croatian vineyard after the fall of communism.

Country Walkers builds relationships with local guides who find less-traveled paths and villages. In Nepal, for example, the company stays away from the heavily-trafficked Mount Everest route and instead walks trails also used by villagers.

"We feel when we go to these areas," says Jamen Yeaton-Masi, the director of operations for Country Walkers, "we are walking on the trails that people have been walking on for hundreds of years. It's really like stepping back in time."



#### **Manuel Antonio National Park, Costa Rica**

This small park has an extensive trail system for visitors, who are likely to see monkeys, iguanas, toucans and sloths during their walks. The area's biodiversity is remarkable; forested hillsides eventually meet islands and islets on the Pacific Ocean. Classic Journeys, a walking tour operator, offers a seven-day trip to this and other Costa Rican national parks. Travelers stay at the beach-side Parador Boutique Hotel & Spa.

For more information visit  
[www.classicjourneys.com](http://www.classicjourneys.com).