

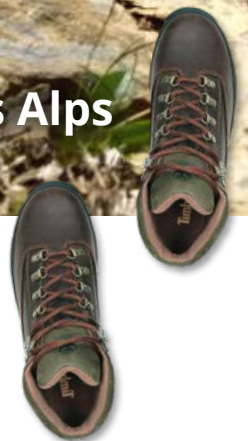
GETTING WALKING FIT FOR THE EUROPEAN ALPS

How to prepare for your multi-day trek

Tour du Mont Blanc | Italian Dolomites | Swiss Alps

RAW TRAVEL
ICONIC WALKS WORLDWIDE

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INTRODUCTION

The European Alps are a vibrant part of the world. Waking up to towering mountains each day invokes a deep happiness into your soul, and trekking over and around these spectacular mountain ranges will give you a great sense of achievement.

Whether you intend to take on the challenge of Mont Blanc, the Dolomites or the Swiss Alps, your walk will be more enjoyable if you have tested all your equipment and clothing and achieved a suitable level of physical conditioning.

Walking on rough trails, up and over passes, in remote locations, over numerous days for 5–8 hours each day requires concerted physical preparation – for both your fitness and your feet.

Whichever RAW Travel European Alps trip has inspired you we strongly advise you to begin a training program at least 3 months prior to your departure. Look at the average walking times of our tour itineraries and walk similar distances and terrain as those daily stages. Proper training will make your feet less prone to blisters, which can be an impediment to your progress and enjoyment on the trail. Other common injuries from lack of preparation include shin splints, tendonitis, joint and muscle pain.

When training, choose hills with steep ascents to train on and push yourself to do long days to prepare yourself adequately. Australian national parks offer some great varied terrain to train on, which will help you prepare for what's in store on your European Alps adventure.

Also make sure that you and your equipment can cope with changing weather conditions. Being in high mountains you should prepare for all eventualities with weather and make sure you have adequate clothing and equipment (eg, trekking poles). Sometimes you will be able to walk in shorts and a t-shirt but at other times you may need to rug up to cross a pass or cope with cloud and damp conditions that set in – all on the same trip!

We have many years of experience taking people on treks and can offer good advice if you are unsure if you will be suitably fit to join one of our groups.

You'll find lots of expert advice and tips in this guide, along with basic training concepts, which you can integrate into your daily life and modify to suit your preferences, current fitness level and trip.

Happy training!
RAW Travel



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STAY UP TO DATE

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ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

- **Hiking poles** – there are many steep ascents and descents in the Alps; poles are good for balance and taking weight off your knees on descents. They are highly recommended.
- **Sunglasses** – sunlight can affect your eyes more at higher altitudes and when reflected off ice or snow. Bring sunglasses that have a high eye protection factor; look for sunglasses that have a lens category of 4 - they will provide a very high level of sun glare reduction and good UV protection.
- **Clothing you can layer** – high altitudes will always be cool and if cloud sets in it can be cold and damp. The best way to stay protected from any weather and temperature changes in the Alps is to add and remove layers as required. You'll need a base layer to manage moisture, an insulating layer to protect you from the cold, and an outer layer to shield you from the wind and rain. Avoid cotton; choose wool or synthetics instead. [Read more about layering.](#)
- **Good quality wet-weather gear and boots** – you'll need waterproof boots with good grip (depending on spring weather in Europe, there may be snow on the passes). A waterproof, breathable jacket and over-trousers are a must.
- **Mobile phone** – if you are on a self-guided trip you should carry a mobile phone with international roaming or buy a local SIM card; coverage can be very limited in the Alps.

See the *European Alps Destination Guide* on our website for a full packing list.



TOUR DU MONT BLANC

RAW Trip Grade: 7 **Strenuous** 

Covering 170km and taking in three countries, the Tour du Mont Blanc is one of the world's greatest walks, offering trekkers a tough but achievable challenge with spectacular scenery.

It's a high-altitude trail around the entire Mont Blanc massif that takes you anti-clockwise from France into Italy and on to Switzerland then back into France. Along the way you climb six passes and traverse under huge glaciers.

As well as thrilling cliffs, pinnacles and precarious paths, you'll likely encounter ibex (wild alpine goats) with enormous curving horns, as well as lizards, snakes and marmots.

WHAT'S IT LIKE UNDERFOOT?

Underfoot the terrain is mountainous, rocky and often rough, but there are also plenty of graded paths. There are sometimes long steady ascents and descents, and the odd steep climb, as well as pass crossings. Depending on spring weather in Europe, there may be snow on the passes.

There are some optional sections where you can use metal ladders and fixed chains and cables to aid negotiation of steep or challenging passes. You don't have to do these sections, and a lot of people choose to bypass them.

You will also come across gravel forest roads, ski pistes and rough tracks for vehicles over agricultural land. There are a couple of points where cable cars are an option.

It's very unlikely that you will experience any altitude sickness, as this generally occurs at heights over 3500 metres and all the passes along the Mont Blanc circuit are below this. You may, however, become slightly short of breath while walking.

Our guided treks of Mont Blanc are led by experienced International Mountain Leaders who have an intimate knowledge of the region. They take safety very seriously so you know you will be in good hands. Most of our guides originate from the UK. They are passionate about the mountains and have each led many Mont Blanc tours successfully.

Our self-guided Tour du Mont Blanc treks are reserved for experienced independent mountain walkers. They involve between 5 and 9 hours (13–20 km) of walking and ascents in excess of 1000 metres (3300 feet) each day. You must be confident with navigation and be prepared for all weather conditions. There is nowhere the weather is more changeable than in the mountains.





CIRCUIT TREK DESCRIPTION

For the full guided circuit trek allow 13 days in total: 10 days of walking, plus a rest day and arrival and departure days.

See our Tour du Mont Blanc website trip pages for the full itineraries.

Stage 1: Chamonix to Les Houches (13km, 5 hours)

Ascent 525m / Descent 1400m

To start the trek, what better viewpoint than the Brevent! From the summit (2525m) the view of Mont Blanc is incomparable. Descend via Bel Lachat and Merlet.

Stage 2: Les Houches to Les Contamines (18km, 7 hours)

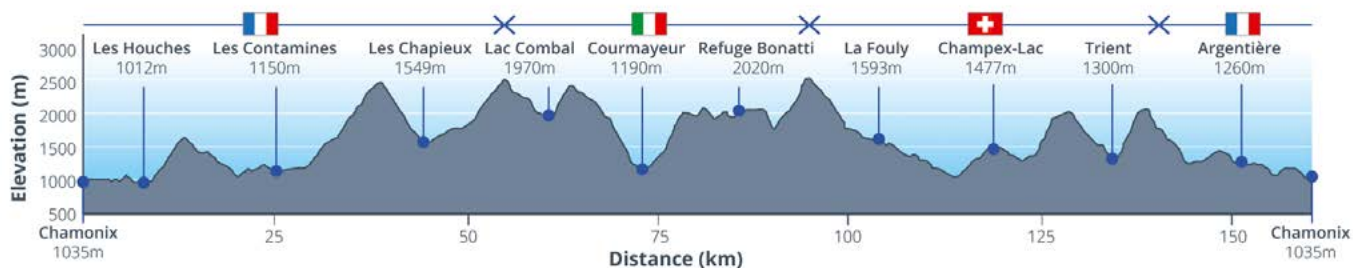
Ascent 700m / Descent 1050m

A beautiful walk across the south-west face of the Mont Blanc massif. Includes a charming traverse that passes at the foot of the Bionnassay Glacier, a swing bridge across a river, then an ascent.

Stage 3: Les Contamines to Les Chapieux (19km, 7 hours)

Ascent 1290m / Descent 850m

A big day of walking, including crossing two passes, the highest being the Col De la Croix du Bonhomme (2483m), and easy walking through forest and meadows before the route climbs to the cols.



Stage 4: Les Chapieux to Val Veny (16km, 6 hours)

Ascent 950m / Descent 600m

A climb to the Val d'Aosta via the Col de la Seigne (2516m) gives you the most imposing view of the south face of Mont Blanc. After reaching the moraine of the Estelette Glacier you continue down the valley to your overnight stop by the glacial Lacs de Miage.

Stage 5: Val Veny to Courmayeur (12km, 5 hours)

Ascent 400m / Descent 1300m

The route has superb views across to Mont Blanc. It then descends to the charming ancient village of Dolonne.

Stage 6: Courmayeur to Italian Val Ferret (12km, 6 hours)

Ascent 900/1300m / Descent 550/950m

This walk offers breathtaking views of the Italian side of the Mont Blanc massif. It starts with a steep climb then traverses across the meadows with not too much exertion required. Then there is a gradual descent to the valley below.

Stage 7: Italian Val Ferret to La Fouly (20km, 8 hours)

Ascent 900m / Descent 1000m

Another big day and another country as you leave Italy and enter Switzerland. The high

point of today's walk is the Grand Col Ferret (2537m), an often-windswept pass. There are a few streams to cross before getting to pastureland and a mixture of paths, tracks and roads.

Stage 8: Champex-Lac to Trient (16km, 6½ hours)

Ascent 800/1200m / Descent 950/1140m

This trail passes meadows, forests and high alpine pastures. There is easy walking followed by a rapid ascent, then a pleasant downhill woodland walk.

Stage 9: Trient to Argentière (13km, 6 hours)

Ascent 980m / Descent 900m

A day of walking that brings you back into France. There is a long but gradual ascent to the col. You can then follow the main TMB over the ridge or save yourself a descent (or in bad weather) by walking or taking a chair lift down.

Stage 10: Argentière to Chamonix (13km, 5–8 hours)

Ascent 850/1100m / Descent 400/500m

From Argentière you climb up to Cheserys, a balcony offering grandiose views. Marvel at the many glaciers and of course Mont Blanc. The trip ends at Flegere and you return to Chamonix by cable car.

SIGNS AND WAYMARKS

The TMB is well signed – especially compared to what we are used to in Australia. The route is variously indicated by finger-post signs, red and white bands or yellow diamonds outlined in black, usually with the letters TMB, painted on rocks, trees or buildings, or the silhouette of a walker in black on a yellow diamond. Many signs also include the TMB trademark logo.

If you keep a diligent eye open for these signs and waymarks, navigation should not pose undue problems.

If you are unsure of the way forward at any point then look around in the vicinity for markers – if you have not seen any for a while it may be that you have taken a wrong turn. In this instance the best idea is to retrace your footsteps to the last visible marker and look to see if you made a wrong turn, or see if you can see walkers on a nearby track that may be the TMB.



ITALIAN DOLOMITES

RAW Trip Grade: 7 Strenuous 

The Italian Dolomites is a huge area of impossibly jagged peaks close to the Austrian border that are composed of a warm granite that glows pinkish red at sunrise and sunset. The outstanding mountain scenery is a huge drawcard.

The Dolomites are spectacular. The valleys retain their own unique culture, architecture and landscape. Each day you will hike up to the ridges and descend into the valleys below, with time to enjoy views of classic Dolomite peaks and green mountain meadows.

Our Dolomites trips are led by experienced International Mountain Leaders who have intimate knowledge of the region. They take safety very seriously so you know you will be in good hands. Most of our guides originate from the UK. They are passionate about the mountains and have each led many successful trips in the Dolomites.

WHAT'S IT LIKE UNDERFOOT?

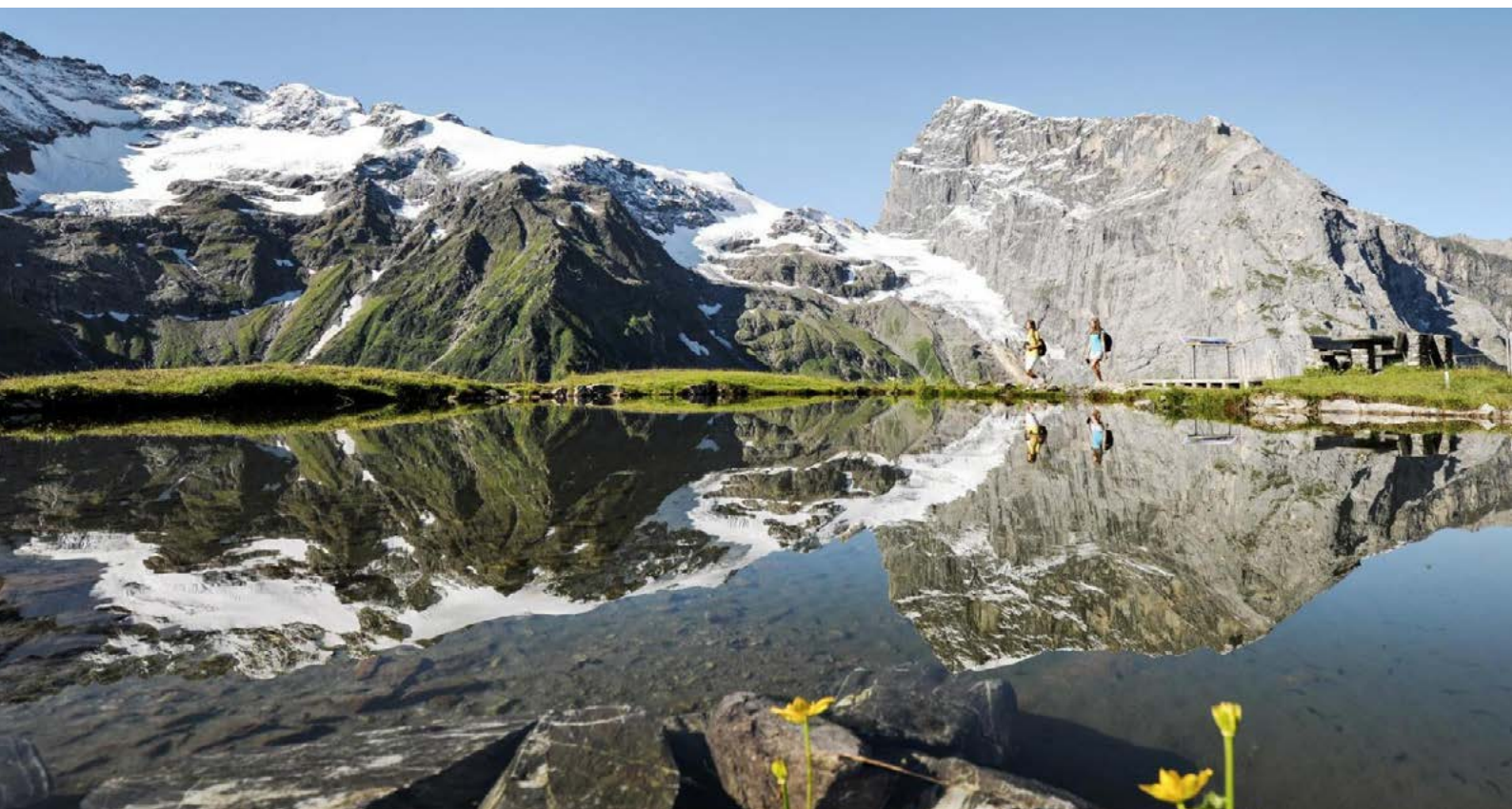
Trekking in the Dolomites is demanding but hugely rewarding. Our trips involve hikes of 6 to 8 hours each day with some ascents and descents of over 1000 metres (3300 feet). The terrain is often uneven, rough and stony underfoot and some of the paths are narrow and exposed.

The Dolomites are very steep and rocky mountains. Dizzying heights and steep slopes are a feature of the walks in this area. You need to be prepared for this, and in particular for some steep downhill over rough ground. To get the most from the hikes on this trip you will need to be fit, experienced and free from vertigo.

Walking poles are highly recommended; they are good for balance and taking weight off your knees on descents.







SWISS ALPS

RAW Trip Grade:

6–7 Challenging to Strenuous 

Switzerland is a paradise for walkers. There are endless options, even for people with little hiking experience. There are shimmering lakes to bathe in, spa resorts to relax in, and of course majestic views and fresh Alpine air.

Our Swiss Alps trips are all about adaptable day hikes (2 to 7 hours) and mountain excursions, using cable cars to speed you to the best high-altitude hikes.

You will fall in love with the mountain wonderland of Zermatt and the Matterhorn. Then we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the rustic countryside of Engelberg (Angel Mountain) in Central Switzerland, with its 12th century monastery, weaving trails and stunning lakes.

You'll also find lots of lovely traditional Swiss cableways that will take you to unspoilt areas of natural beauty that you wouldn't have otherwise come across.

WHAT'S IT LIKE UNDERFOOT?

The terrain includes well-maintained paths and rugged mountain trails, with some steps, rocky sections and exhilarating steep descents. Most activities on our trips in the Swiss Alps take place at elevations of 1200 to 2100 metres, and sometimes up to 3000 metres, which can make the routes feel more challenging than the mileage may suggest. You should be comfortable with Alpine elevation.

Walking poles are highly recommended; they are good for balance and taking weight off your knees on descents.



RAW TRAVEL TRIP GRADINGS

RAW Travel offers a range of multi-day walks for complete beginners through to demanding treks that will satisfy and thrill even veteran adventurers. We have graded each RAW Travel trip from 1 (introductory) to 10 (tough).

Our [grading system](#) is intended to differentiate only the walks that RAW Travel offers, so they won't necessarily match another travel company's assessment of their trips.

We have used several criteria to assess the difficulty of each walk we offer, including the number of hours walking required each day, terrain and conditions underfoot, weather, gradient, altitude, signage and facilities – basic accommodation and food in remote areas will contribute to a walk being graded more difficult. Keep in mind that if a walk is graded moderate, it doesn't mean you will never feel tired.

Our multi-day walks require a suitable level of physical preparation. More detail

is provided in our essential free guides to getting walking fit, which are available for each of our destinations.






WALKING & HIKING

Walking and hiking are mainly leisure activities that involve well-made trails and roads, often on purpose made paths, such as pilgrimage trails and low mountain trails.

TREKKING

Trekking refers to long continuous point-to-point journeys on foot in areas where there is usually no other transport. Trekking is not mountaineering; it is walking for a number of days on often rudimentary trails in challenging environments, which are likely hilly or mountainous. Nepal, the Himalayas, Pakistan and South America are good examples of trekking countries.



					
	Introductory Grade 1–2	Moderate Grade 3–4	Challenging Grade 5–6	Strenuous Grade 7–8	Tough Grade 9–10
Fitness/ experience required	Basic fitness level required.	Good health and a reasonable standard of fitness.	Good base level of fitness; experience walking in remote areas.	Good aerobic conditioning recommended, along with experience walking in mountains and on longer duration walks.	High level of fitness and experience trekking in high mountains and remote areas.
Overview	Relatively easy walking on well-formed paths with no difficult terrain. Generally flat or undulating with no long uphill sections.	Walking that is generally moderate but with some more strenuous sections. Regular ascending and descending may be required.	Longer duration walks where conditions underfoot will be fair to uneven with potential for slippery or rocky surfaces.	More demanding walking with a fairly consistent level of effort required.	Long days; continually demanding; long ascents and descents; steep gradients. Potential for extreme variation in weather at higher altitudes.
Daily hours/ km	Short hikes; 2 to 6 hours walking / up to 15km per day.	4 to 7 hours walking / up to 20km per day.	5 to 8 hours hiking / 25km per day.	6 to 8+ hours / up to 30km per day.	7 to 10 hours / up to 30km per day.
Terrain and path quality	Compacted trail. Fairly even surfaces. Well signposted, well-maintained trail.	Fairly even surfaces.	Variable terrain.	Usually mountainous terrain. May include high pass crossings in remote areas.	High pass crossings in remote areas.
Max altitude	Below 1000m	1500m	2500m	4000m	5500m
Facilities	Comfortable accommodation and good food.	Comfortable accommodation and good food.	Generally comfortable accommodation and good food; occasionally more basic conditions.	Overnighting in basic accommodation/ mountain refugios. Food choices limited and often more basic.	Basic accommodation, limited variety of food, limited recourse to medical facilities.
Preparation required	1 to 2 walks per week (10km each)	1 to 2 walks per week (15km each)	2 to 3 walks per week, increasing distances while carrying an 8kg pack; some hill walking stairs, or heavy sand walking recommended.	2 to 3 walks per week at a reasonable pace and longer distances with an 8kg pack; regular hill / mountain walking or stairs, heavy sand walking is necessary.	2 to 4 walks per week at a reasonable pace, and longer distances with an 8kg pack; must include long duration hikes on steep hills and in mountains.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF WALKING

Walking makes life better. Walking is good for your health, good for the environment and good for your soul.

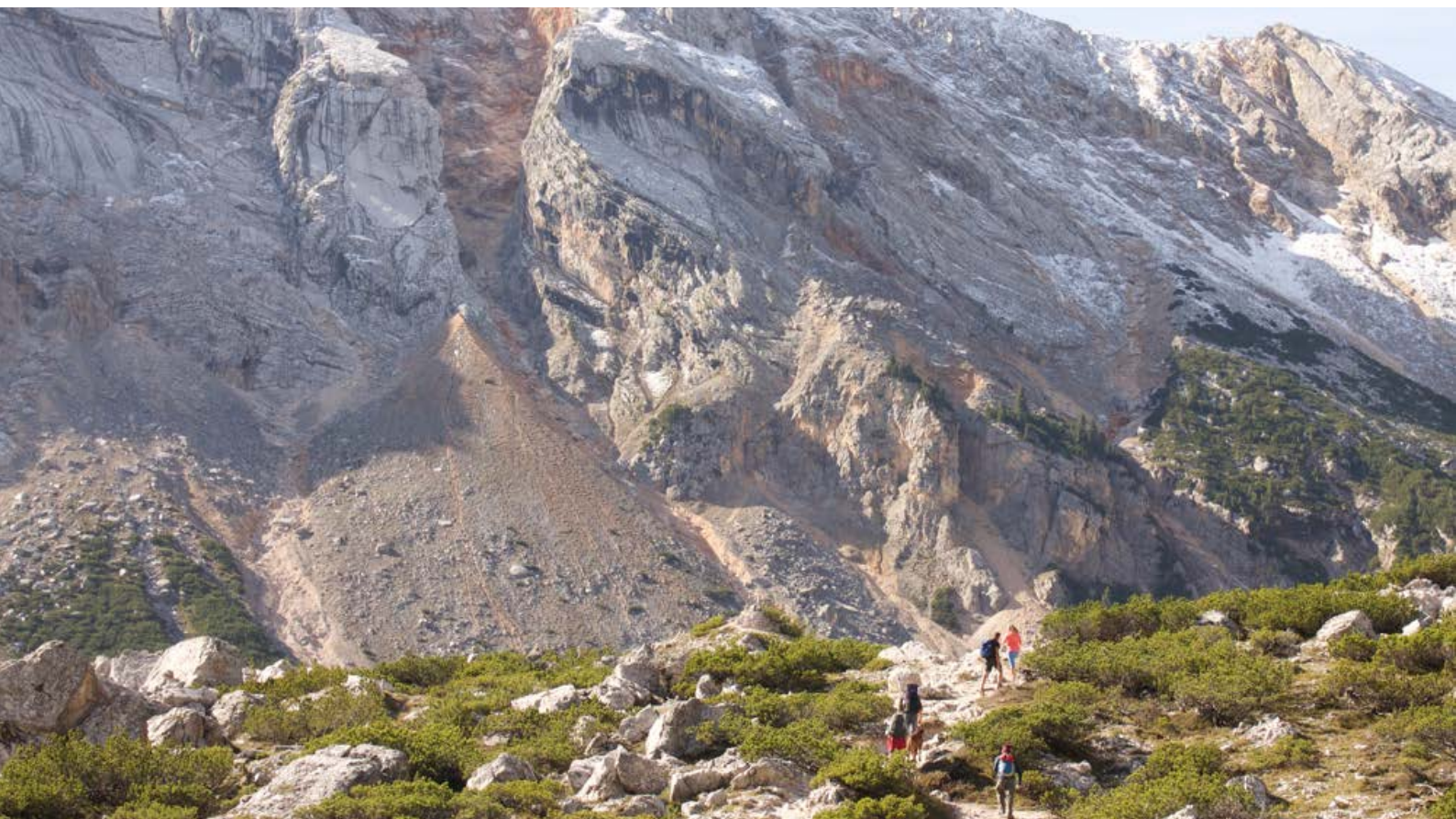
Regular walking can have a powerful effect on your health, and it might even help you live longer. Walking can boost your immune system and keep your heart strong, reducing your risk of heart disease in the long-term by lowering blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels. Walking also aids digestion and helps maintain bone density, flexibility, balance and a healthy weight.

Walking improves energy levels and sleep quality, and reduces stress and anxiety. It's good for your brain, too. It can improve

memory, concentration and creativity. It gives you a chance to think, and can be a kind of meditation.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISING IN NATURE

- Fresh air has more oxygen
- Greenscapes raise serotonin levels
- Primal regions of our brain and psyche are triggered
- More sensory stimulation
- Increased feelings of wellbeing
- Increased vitamin D levels from sun exposure helps optimise hormone balance





GETTING STARTED

Getting physically prepared for your trip is all part of the experience and one that you'll benefit from long after you're back home.

Walking is one of the most natural things to do, so you may feel that you are already in good enough shape. However, our longer treks involve walking for many hours over successive days carrying a daypack, which is likely very different to your current walking schedule.

We recommend that you undertake a training program according to your level of fitness for at least 3 months leading up to your departure. Regular exercise prior to the trip will allow you to build your fitness steadily so that you will enjoy and complete the trip with a smile and energy left over.

Moderate activities such as walking pose little health risk but before starting any new exercise program we recommend that you see your doctor for a check-up, particularly if you have a medical condition, are aged over 40 years, are overweight or haven't exercised in a long time.

You might find it hard to get going at first but after a few weeks you will notice a big improvement, which can be very motivating.

Here are some tips to get you started.

- Plan a schedule and stick to it as closely as possible.
- Track your progress. Download a walking app, wear a pedometer or keep a journal.
- Involve your family and friends on your longer walks or join a walking club.
- Mix up your training activities so that you don't get injured or bored.
- Include other forms of exercise, such as swimming, bike riding, or the step machine at the gym.
- Be mindful of what you eat (see p32)

As well as your training walks, try to build extra walking into each week. For example:

- walk instead of driving to the local shops.
- walk the dog, or your neighbour's dog.
- find a steep set of stairs and climb them several times.
- if you catch a bus or train somewhere, get off one stop earlier and walk.



TRAINING ESSENTIALS

Regular 5km walks around your local park plus some gym sessions will not adequately prepare you physically or mentally for day hikes in the Alps. Whenever possible, walk on trails or grass rather than concrete to help absorb the impact. Walk for time, not kilometres.

FIND SIMILAR TERRAIN

It is important to train on terrain that is similar to what you will encounter on your trip. For example, if your trip involves 5 to 7 hours a day of walking on rugged trails, you need to complete walks of a similar distance on comparable terrain.

MIX IT UP

Don't limit your walking to prepared or cleared trails. Practise walking on uneven ground (rocky, muddy, tree roots etc), as well as uphill (ascents) and downhill (descents).

There is a significant mental toughness required for long days of trekking, so make sure you include full days (and preferably multi-days) in your training.

RAIN, HAIL OR SHINE

Practise training in different weather conditions, too, and at different times of the day. Accept that at some stage during your

training you might feel tired, sore or cranky, but it will pass. Acknowledge it, but don't overthink it.

TEST ALL YOUR EQUIPMENT

During your training walks it's vital that you test all the equipment and clothing that you'll be using on your actual walk, not just your boots, as you may find some things uncomfortable over long distances such as velcro and zips. Get used to carrying your backpack on long walks and try a walking pole. Remember to carry adequate water, nutritious snacks, a basic first aid kit and anything else you might need to keep you comfortable and happy, such as a hat, sunscreen, insect repellent or a jacket.

DRINK LITTLE AND OFTEN

If you feel thirsty while out walking your body is already in the early stages of dehydration. Drink little and often. For longer walks, add powdered electrolytes to your water to help replace lost body salts and help aid your recovery. Backpacks with built-in water bladders make it easy to stay hydrated and are a good alternative to carrying water bottles. They cut out the need to stop every time you need a drink. Being able to drink smaller amounts of water more frequently also eliminates that feeling you get when you drink too much water all at once.



HOW TO TRAIN

In order to build stamina and strength you need to divide your training program into different phases. To start, you will need to build a good foundation (base) so that you can safely go a bit harder later on. Our bodies get used to physical activity, so as your fitness levels improve you can increase the intensity and duration of your walking.

These are the common phases of most good training programs:

- Build a good base (foundation)
- Increase your distance
- Reach your peak
- Reduce your training
- Rest

Start by taking short (1 hour) walks 2 or 3 times a week, wearing the boots and clothes that you will be using for the trek. This will improve your aerobic fitness. If you have not been walking on a regular basis you will benefit much more from taking several 1 hour walks as opposed to one really long walk.

After a couple of weeks, increase the pace during your walks so that you are breathing



hard and able to speak only in short sentences. This is good for fat burning and improving lung capacity.

Build up to regular longer walks (2 hours) at least twice a week. When you are comfortable completing a number of shorter walks each week, test yourself with a 3–5 hour walk over hilly terrain through bushland. Remember to carry water and take a few rest breaks.

If you are an inexperienced walker, you will benefit from including plenty of full-day (and preferably several multi-day) training walks in your schedule.

When you can comfortably complete a training walk of 6–7 hours, including rest breaks, start completing some long-weekend hikes of 15–20km both days across the most difficult terrain you can find.

A week before your departure, recover. Let your body and muscles rest in anticipation of the challenge.

HOW TO RECOVER MORE QUICKLY

A key to multi-day hiking is the ability for your body to recover quickly. Having good flexibility assists hugely in speeding recovery. Find a set of stretching exercises (see p25) and start to incorporate them into your training regime. You will find that not only do you feel stronger, and recover more quickly, but the habit will extend to maintaining the stretching routine during your walk, which will make all the difference to tiredness and muscle recovery day after day. Stretching *after* exercise is the best time to stretch, not before.

DISCLAIMER

RAW Travel does not accept any responsibility for death or injuries caused by any information contained within this guide. All information is provided in good faith. You should consult your doctor before embarking on any program of physical activity.



SAMPLE TRAINING PROGRAM

The table below shows the bare minimum that you should be training. You will need to add full-day and multi-day walks to this training schedule. The more training you do and the better prepared you are, the more you will enjoy your walk. Some people find their walk harder than expected, so please make sure you read and follow the specific fitness advice provided by RAW Travel in relation to your specific trip.

Aim to do three walks per week plus a few cross-training sessions, eg, swimming, gym workout/group fitness class or bike riding. Cross training, along with regular stretching, will reduce your risk of injury and keep the training interesting. It's particularly important

for beginners who are just starting to build their strength and endurance.

Although walking is mainly a cardiovascular activity, to keep going for long periods requires total body strength, so you should also consider a weights program that will strengthen your leg, neck and shoulder muscles, as well as your core.

Plan a systematic approach to your fitness and, if available, use a gym. The step machine is great for preparation. Ask a fitness trainer to design an exercise program for you. This can make a big difference and you can achieve amazing results.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Weeks 1 to 4	1 hour walk	Rest	1 hour walk	Cross train	Rest	2 hour walk	Rest
Weeks 5 to 8	1-2 hour walk	Cross train	1-2 hour walk	Rest	Rest	2-3 hour walk	Rest
Weeks 9 to 12	Rest	1-2 hour walk	Cross train	1-2 hour walk	Rest	3-5 hour walk	Rest



WARMING UP & COOLING DOWN AFTER WALKING

The best way to warm up is to walk slowly. Start off each walk at a leisurely pace to give your muscles time to warm up, and then pick up the speed. Afterwards, gently stretch your leg muscles – particularly your calves and front and back thighs. Stretches should be held for at least 20 seconds. If you feel any pain, ease off the stretch. Don't bounce or jolt, or you could overstretch muscle tissue and cause microscopic tears, which lead to muscle stiffness and tenderness.

BASIC STRETCH ROUTINE

Hamstring (back of thigh)

- Cross your right foot over your left.
- Bend forward from your hips and keep your back straight and your hands pointing down towards your toes.
- Lean forward until you feel the stretch down the back of your left leg. Do not bounce.
- Hold for 20 seconds.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Quad (front of thigh)

- Standing on your left leg hold your right foot in your right hand behind your backside.
- Hold your stomach in and gently push your hips forward until you feel the stretch down your right thigh.
- Hold for 20 seconds
- Repeat with the other leg.

Calf

- Put your hands on a wall at shoulder height.
- Stand with your right leg forward, foot flat on the floor.

- Extend your left leg straight back, placing your heel flat on the floor. Don't bend your back knee.
- Bend the front knee and lean into the wall until you feel a stretch in the straight leg.
- Hold for 20 seconds.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Hips

- Stand with your feet at shoulder width apart and put your hands on hips.
- Keeping your head still, rotate your hips clockwise 10 times and anti-clockwise 10 times.
- Repeat 3 times.

Standing stretch

- Stand with your feet together.
- Place your hands together and reach as high as you can.
- Hold for 10 seconds, relax.
- Repeat 3 times.

MASSAGE

Self-massage and a foot soak is a great way to loosen tight muscles and get rid of lactic acid after a long training walk. If you Google 'self-massage techniques' you'll find lots of useful instructions, tips and videos online.

If hiking soreness is a routine problem, invest in a deep tissue or sports massage. A therapist can tailor the massage to your needs and comfort level. Always drink a lot of water after your massage.

If you don't like the way you feel post-walk, invest time in working out what the cause is and fixing it. Listen to your body and adjust your stretching, technique or equipment.

BUYING THE RIGHT BOOTS

There are many good makes of hiking boots. Finding the right make and model comes down to the fit on your foot. For comfort and safety, boots must be waterproof, have a good sole with good grip (look for Vibram or a similar recognised mark such as Contagrip), provide ankle support and be lightweight.

Remember that your feet can swell as much as half a size as the day progresses, so buy your boots in the afternoon.

1. Buy the right style of boots for you

Whether to go for full leather boots or lighter-weight fabric and Goretex is up to you – it's personal choice. Think about the weather and what it will be like underfoot when you are trekking – technical routes with snow, slippery forest trails or flat, paved paths?

2. Choose boots that are the right length for your feet

Boots should give you about 1cm or one thumb-width (whichever is greater) between your toes and the front of the boot, and fit perfectly everywhere else – the heel, width, and so on. This rarely happens. The golden rule is to never accommodate another part of your

foot (narrow heels, slim ankles) by choosing a smaller size and pushing your toes too close to the front of the boot. Your toes will be in agony squeezed up against the boot.

3. Prioritise toe room when buying boots

Many boots have too much volume around the heel and/or ball of the foot, so experiment with heel gel pads and/or insoles to take up the volume. You can also do this if you have already bought a pair of boots and are finding they have a little too much room around the ankle or ball of the foot.

4. Try the boots going uphill and downhill

If possible, test the boots outdoors, or at least on a proper boot-trying ramp with an uneven surface/stones etc. Good outdoor retailers usually provide one of these.

5. Wear the same socks you prefer to wear for hiking

There are all sorts of opinions on socks so you need to decide what works for you. Take your own socks with you. Don't rely on the testing socks in the shop: they usually bear no resemblance to the socks you'd wear on a trek.





6. Ask the shop assistant to explain the lacing system

This is really important. If they don't have a clue, either take a friend who is a regular hiker with you, or shop elsewhere.

7. Look after your boots

Fabric boots usually need gentle scrubbing. Never use detergent, only tepid water or very mild soap flakes; detergent can ruin your waterproofing and is very difficult to rinse off. Then they will need respraying or recoating with Goretex-suitable waterproofing, at least once a year.

Leather boots need slightly more work – continual applications of a suitable leather/ nubuck cream or wax after every few hikes. They also need treating after you get them out of the cupboard if you haven't used them in a while (and ideally before you put them in the cupboard, too).

8. If you get soaked, dry your boots slowly and carefully

Never apply too much direct heat – don't put boots on radiators, or too close to roaring fires. Be very careful with the hot-air blowers

designed for ski-boots – don't have them on too high a setting and don't leave your boots on them for more than a couple of hours. It is better both for the longevity of your boot and the state of your feet to dry them slowly, even if it means they aren't 100% dry the next day, than to blast them and end up with hard crinkly boots which no longer fit your feet as well.

9. Store your boots properly if you aren't using them regularly

Storage itself can age and damage boots. Don't just assume you can take your old favourites out of the cupboard and wear them on a trek without checking them over. In the case of leather boots, they will need a pre-use treatment with suitable wax or cream. For all boots (especially if you live in a hot humid zone) check that the sole isn't becoming detached from the upper.

10. Check the grip on the soles of your boots

Regardless of the state of the uppers, if you have worn the soles down to the point where there is little grip, you either need them re-soleing (proper Vibram or similar soles, no compromises) or you need new boots.





PREVENTING BLISTERS

The key to preventing blisters and avoiding unnecessary pain is to eliminate friction. Different things work for different people, but one thing's for sure: blisters can be prevented with a little bit of effort.

Here's a range of blister prevention strategies for you to test on your training walks.

1. Buy comfortable, well-fitting walking boots (see p18).
2. Toughen up. Condition your feet by walking, gradually building intensity, pace and distance. Remember to moisturise your feet with a good quality foot cream after showering.
3. Adjust your laces during your walk so that your shoes fit just right. Foot swelling and different temperatures and terrain will affect the fit of your boots.
4. Slather your feet thickly with a lubricant like Vaseline. You'll need to reapply it, and it doesn't wash easily out of socks.
5. Put cornflour or talcum powder in your socks to keep your feet dry.
6. Keep your toenails short.

7. Invest in good socks. Use moisture-wicking socks and consider double-layers. Experiment with the thickness of your socks, and change them whenever your feet get wet.
8. Apply tape (such as Fixomul) or dressings to reduce friction. It can be difficult to perfect the technique and can be time consuming, so you'll need to practise.
9. Always carry blister pads in your daypack. The cushioned gel pad immediately reduces pain and promotes fast healing. You can even use them to prevent blisters.
10. See a podiatrist if you think the way you walk might predispose you to blisters. You might need orthotics.

BLISTER TREATMENT

Broken blisters that are leaking fluid should be disinfected and bandaged. Small blisters that are not painful should be left alone because the best protection against infection is the blister's own skin. These will heal by themselves and will be reabsorbed in a few days. If you do have blisters, shower in the evening to allow your feet to be fully dry when you dress them and set off in the morning.



TREKKING POLES



Trekking poles lessen the pounding on your precious joints and can help reduce muscle soreness. They will give you a feeling of security and balance on narrow or rocky trails and can help prevent ankle and knee injury on steep ascents and descents. This allows you to more fully appreciate the views around you. They are also helpful if you get tired or injured.

Trekking poles can be beneficial if you have had issues with sore knees, ankles or hips, or are not used to walking with a backpack.

Trekking poles are not needed on all RAW Travel trips, especially if the terrain is fairly flat. They really come into their own on steep terrain. If in doubt, ask one of our Destination Specialists whether you will need them for your particular walk.

Used correctly, trekking poles take between 10 and 15% of the load from your lower body and redirect that load to your shoulders and upper arms, meaning there is a more even load distribution over your frame. This will significantly help your joints, especially over an extended walk of several days.

If you suffer from arm or shoulder joint issues you may find that trekking poles exacerbate these. It's still worth trying poles, however, as you are likely to find the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

Trekking poles are good for burning extra calories as they make you exert yourself more than usual and they do a fantastic job of taking the strain off your lower body, but they will not make you fitter. There are no short-cuts to getting walk-fit, so don't use them as a way to skimp on your training.

WHAT TYPE OF TREKKING POLES SHOULD I BUY?

You can spend a small fortune on trekking poles but it's not necessary. Cheaper poles will probably be more robust, and if you

accidentally leave them behind on the trail, you won't be so upset.

There are three main decisions to make when buying poles:

1. Do I want spring-loaded for shock absorption?

Spring-loaded shock-absorbing poles (such as the original Leki poles) are heavier than the 'normal' ones and are a little trickier to re-thread if they come undone. They are, however, very useful for people with particularly troublesome knee or ankle issues.

2. What type of locking mechanism do I want to hold my poles in place once I have extended them for use on a hill?

You will need to adjust the size of your poles when going from uphill to downhill and vice versa, so you need to be able to adjust your poles quickly and efficiently.

Generally, poles consist of three separate sections which slide down and fit together for ease of carrying, but can be extended for walking. Overall, we favour a simple metal or plastic lever at the two pole extension points because they are easier to use with cold/wet/gloved hands and often simpler to adjust if they start to get a bit loose.

However, trekking poles with the original twist-lock system are absolutely fine when you get used to the mechanism.

We are not huge fans of the pop-up metal stud fastenings. They can be problematic in very cold weather and are a bit fiddly to use.

3. How tall am I and how long do I need my poles to extend to?

If you are tall be aware that some lightweight/compact poles only extend to 125cm (or sometimes even less!). Look for poles that extend to 130 or 135cm.

FUELLING YOUR BODY WITH PROPER NUTRITION

What you eat and drink is just as important as your physical training. When you are training, a good diet can help you get the best fitness results.

HOW TO SUSTAIN ENERGY THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Blood sugar (aka glucose) provides the energy that keeps your brain buzzing and your heart ticking, and all your other muscles and organs functioning nicely.

If you eat a varied diet and regularly throughout the day, you'll be able to keep your blood sugar within the normal range, giving you sustained energy during and after training. Good nutrition will also allow your body to recover and repair each day.

When you don't fuel your body properly, your blood sugar can plummet and you can experience a range of unpleasant symptoms, from a mid-morning/afternoon slump, to headaches, agitation and crankiness.

Preventing a sugar crash is fairly easy if you take greater care with your carb intake and change a few other habits, too. Focus on including a mix of complex carbohydrates, good fats and some protein.

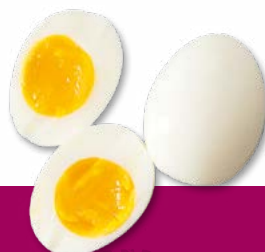
Remember also that exercise can drag your blood sugar down, so you need to compensate for some of the calories your body is using up.

Here's some good tips to help you sustain your energy levels while you are training.

- **Start with breakfast.** Include protein and a little fat at breakfast, both of which delay the absorption of sugar into the blood, take longer to digest and make you feel fuller than eating carbohydrates alone. Try pairing orange juice with eggs, muesli or a dense wholegrain bread with peanut butter.
- **Take the same mix-and-match approach to lunch, dinner, and snacks.** Meals with a combination of foods will create a slow, steady release of sugar into the bloodstream, keeping you on an even keel. Choose lean protein sources like turkey breast, fish, chicken, cottage cheese and legumes.
- **Don't let yourself get too hungry.** Going hours without food sets you up for a sugar-heavy snackfest. Try and eat every 2 to 3 hours. Snacks like nuts with dried fruit are easy to carry and will boost and sustain your energy levels.
- **Stay well hydrated.** Dehydration can have a major effect on mood and exercise performance, so be sure to drink water before, during and after you exercise to stay well hydrated. People require different amounts of fluids during exercise and the best gauge is the color of your urine. If this is concentrated – you are not drinking enough!

THE EUROPEAN DIET

Be prepared to eat differently while trekking in Europe, particularly breakfast, which is light and continental. For lunch you can expect pre-prepared sandwiches, fruit and trail mix (you'll be on top of a big mountain). As in Australia, you can expect a hearty dinner in the evening.





CARBS, FATS AND SUPPLEMENTS

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the key to sustained energy when you are walking on a trail. Carbs will give you fast fuel, so eat wholegrains before your walk and snack on boiled eggs, bananas, protein balls, or trail mix. Your body only stores limited amounts of carbohydrates, so it's essential to replace them. Plan when you'll eat. It's often hard to replenish carbohydrates once you've 'hit the wall'.

Good fats

You only need a small amount of dietary fat, so you don't need to increase it during training. Not all fats are created equal. Avocado, nuts and seeds are a great source of good fats.

Green powder supplements

In an ideal world we would all eat organic food, drink purified water and breathe clean air, but because we don't there is a place for green supplements in a healthy diet. Green

powder supplements offer all the vitamins and minerals of a multi but with added nutrients such as probiotics, prebiotics and disease-protective antioxidants. Green powders were once the domain of health-food stores, but you can now buy them in supermarkets and chemists. You need to take the recommended dose consistently to get any health benefits.

MORE USEFUL TIPS

- **Practise drinking water and snacking while walking.** During training it's a good idea to drink water and snack so that you know how your body responds to food and fluid during activity.
- **Always carry food (and of course, water) with you, just in case.** Find out what's available to eat when you are on your trip. If you need advice, ask our Destination Specialists for more information.

Overall the main aim is for you to enjoy the destination you are visiting and also experience some of the many culinary highlights our destinations offer.





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