



# GETTING WALKING FIT FOR THE VIA FRANCIGENA

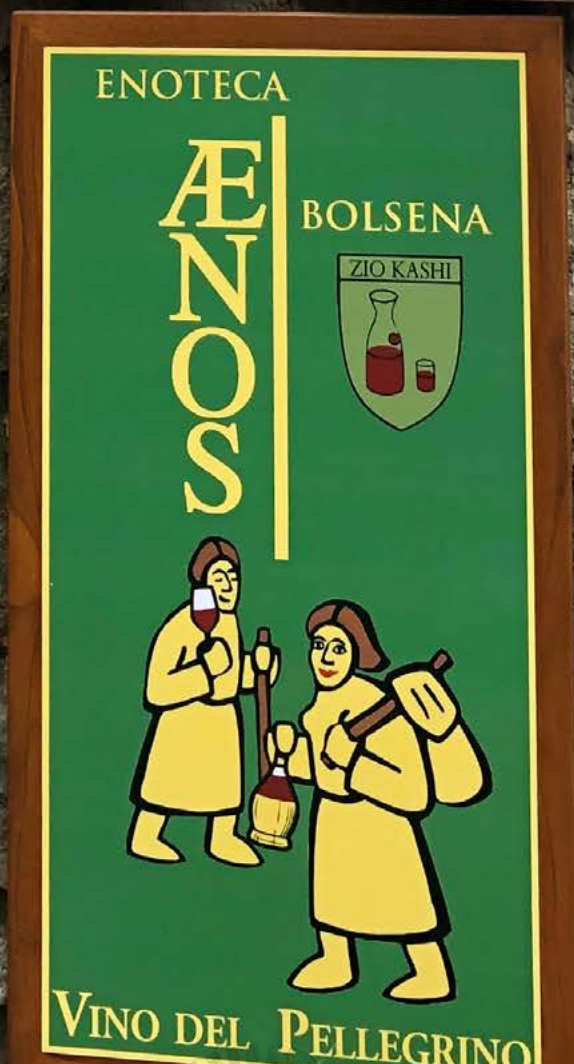
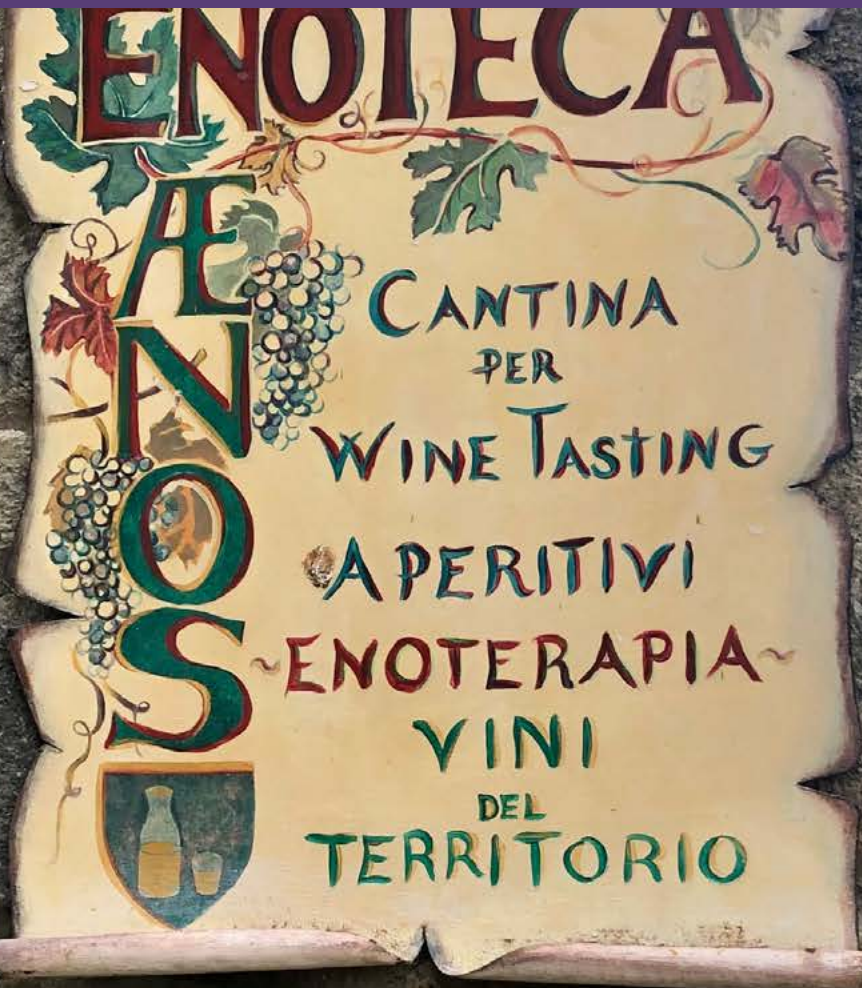
How to prepare for your multi-day trek

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# INTRODUCTION

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Walking Italy's Via Francigena is an exciting adventure offering glorious walking and continuously changing vistas, from open fields and forest trails to vineyards and undulating meadows.

On this pilgrim route, daily walk distances range from between 13km and 25km on undulating terrain. You'll spend from 4 to 7 hours walking, depending on your pace.

While it is a low-intensity and hugely enjoyable route, walking over numerous days requires concerted physical preparation – for both your fitness and your feet. You will have a better experience if you:

- achieve a suitable level of physical conditioning before you leave home
- test all your equipment and clothing in different weather conditions
- get your feet and body accustomed to walking the same distances and terrain as your daily stages in Italy.

Perhaps the harder pilgrims of old would have laughed at the concerns of modern day peregrinos with their high-tech materials and shoes – but a blister is still a blister no matter what and can be an impediment to your

progress. Other common injuries from lack of preparation include shin splints, tendonitis, joint and muscle pain.

Whichever RAW Travel Via Francigena itinerary has inspired you, we suggest you start a training program at least 3 months prior to your departure. Train physically as much as possible on both flat and hilly terrain.

Also make sure that you and your equipment can cope with changing weather conditions. Depending on the time of year and the overall distance of your walk, you'll likely encounter days that are hot, windy, wet and cold.

One of the easiest ways to train on varied terrain is to do some hiking in Australia's beautiful national parks. They not only offer rugged pathways, but also mountains, rivers and valleys, which will help you prepare for what's in store on your Italian walking adventure.

This guide is jam-packed with expert advice and tips, along with basic training concepts, which you can integrate into your daily life and modify to suit your preferences, current fitness level, trip length and chosen itinerary.

Happy training!  
**RAW Travel**







# CONTENTS

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Walking Italy's Via Francigena	6
What's it like underfoot?	7
Essential equipment	9
RAW Travel trip gradings	10
Health benefits of walking	12
Getting started	13
Training essentials	15
How to train	16
Sample training program	17
Warming up and cooling down after walking	19
Buying the right boots	20
Preventing blisters	23
Trekking poles	25
Fuelling your body with proper nutrition	26

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# WALKING ITALY'S VIA FRANCIGENA

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## **Trip grade: Moderate with some challenging sections**

The Via Francigena's name is a nod to the fact that it travels through France, but during its history, the route was also known as the Via Romea (way to Rome) for the city where it ends.

We focus on the Italian section of the Via Francigena with itineraries that take you through the heart of Tuscany and continue onwards to Rome, on a journey that is spiritual, cultural and historical.

You'll find the trails on the Via Francigena to be significantly less busy than the sister Caminos in Spain and France.

From Lucca to Siena and then on to Buonconvento the route varies from stretches of flat walking to gently undulating hills, with the occasional steep section.

It is not particularly strenuous. The trail is mostly wide and well maintained; however,

there are some sections where the trail narrows to a single track. There are some short sections of road walking or walking alongside the road. Usually there is little traffic on these roads, however occasionally some short sections may be busier with narrow verges, so we recommend that you exercise particular caution on these stretches.

Our itineraries alternate one long walking day with a shorter day to give you a break and allow time to explore the fabulous towns that you will stay in.

The traditional markers of the Via Francigena are typically combinations of yellow, red and white and often feature the symbol of a pilgrim. They can appear on road signs, stone road markers, spray painted on walls or even as stickers on trees. Keep your eye out for these signs to keep you on track.

The route is well marked and together with our route notes, map and special app, you should have no trouble finding your way.



# WHAT'S IT LIKE UNDERFOOT

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On the Via Francigena you will experience a variety of terrain including paving, cobblestones, gravel, and dirt paths, some with loose rocks and/or tree roots. You will even come across remnants of original Roman roads thought to be over 1200 years old.

Walking poles are useful but not essential. They are good for balance and taking weight

off your knees on descents. There are a couple of sections that are tougher than others with more inclines, but generally, the level of walking is moderate.

Buy comfortable, well-fitting walking boots and condition your feet by gradually building intensity, pace and distance. See p20 for more tips.









# ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

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- **Waterproof walking boots/shoes** – avoid sneakers. Choose boots with a good tread and ankle support. Make sure your footwear is well worn in and comfortable. We also recommend hiking socks as you will find they minimise the chance of getting blisters.
- **Trekking poles** – great for extra stability, especially when you are tired. We definitely recommend them if you have – or have had – any issues at all with sore knees, ankles or hips. They can also be used as a deterrent to stray dogs who can sometimes be a nuisance
- **Italian phrasebook** – your experience will be enhanced if you learn some Italian phrases. Italy is a surprisingly formal society. Greet people in shops, restaurants and bars with a 'buon giorno' (good morning) or 'buonasera' (good evening); for friends, kiss both cheeks and say 'come sta' (how are you).

- **Mobile phone** – on self-guided trips you should always carry a mobile phone. At times, you will be walking in remote areas so it is good to know that you have the ability to call for help should you need it. Mobile coverage is fairly consistent on the trail, though there may be the odd place where it cannot be relied upon.

Global roaming charges are very expensive and pre-paid cards such as Travel Sim are a good idea: [www.travelsim.com](http://www.travelsim.com) Some phone operators such as Optus offer low-cost travel packs – check with your operator for deals and coverage. Free Wi-Fi is available in most of the accommodations we book but in smaller places it can sometimes be intermittent or slow.

See the *Via Francigena Destination Guide* on our website for a full packing list.

[rawtravel.com/destinations/via-francigena/](http://rawtravel.com/destinations/via-francigena/)





# 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.





					
	<b>Introductory</b> Grade 1–2	<b>Moderate</b> Grade 3–4	<b>Challenging</b> Grade 5–6	<b>Strenuous</b> Grade 7–8	<b>Tough</b> Grade 9–10
<b>Fitness/ experience required</b>	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.
<b>Overview</b>	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.
<b>Daily hours/ km</b>	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.
<b>Terrain and path quality</b>	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.
<b>Max altitude</b>	Below 1000m	1500m	2500m	4000m	5500m
<b>Facilities</b>	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.
<b>Preparation required</b>	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

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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

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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 p26)

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

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Regular 5km walks around your local park plus some gym sessions will not adequately prepare you physically or mentally for 20km a day, up and down hills. 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

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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 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 p19) 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

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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

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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, 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 Gore-tex-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-soled (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 p20).
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 Fixomull) 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.

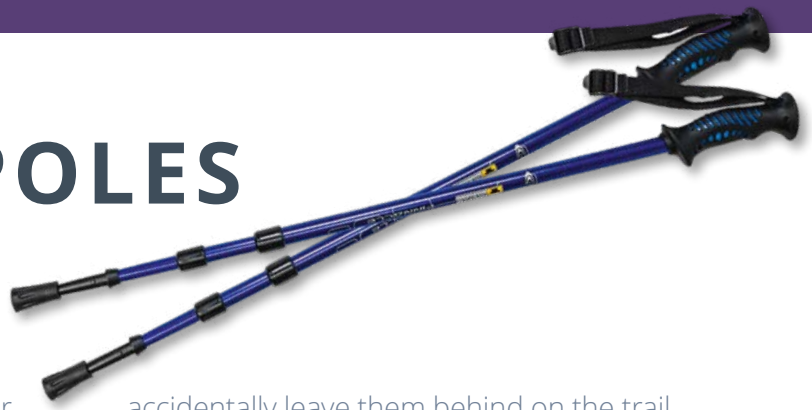








# TREKKING POLES



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.

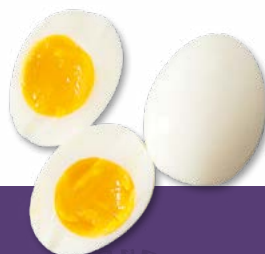
Preventing a sugar crash is fairly easy if you take greater care with your carb intake and change a few other habits, too. Focus on including a mix of complex carbohydrates, good fats and some protein.

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!

If you have dietary issues such as diabetes it's important to understand how your body performs under physical stress. If you have particular dietary requirements such as a coeliac disease or being vegetarian, it is best to prepare for this and take packaged snacks from home so you can ensure you have a good supply for the road.







## 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 breath 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.
- **Make your own protein balls.** Protein balls deliver a burst of high energy before or after training and they are easy to make at home.







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