

GREAT
COASTAL
WALKS
SOUTH WEST
COAST PATH,
UK

SALT OF THE EARTH

Great Walks explores England's South West Coast Path, a walk that inspired a bestselling novel and now a movie.

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The dramatic
Cornish coastline.

AT Mevagissey Harbour, I join a rowdy crowd for Friday night fish and chips, squeezed onto a bench as gulls hover overhead, eyeing any dropped chips. The sounds of laughter and conversation mix with the harmonies of a local barbershop quartet, who break into song just as I take my first bite. It's one of those unexpected travel moments that perfectly capture everything special about the South West Coast Path (SWCP) – connections, unpolished, unscripted, and full of life.

I have the privilege of walking the entire trail over 50 days – 45 days of hiking, with five days set aside for rest, recovery, and reflection. It's an experience I'll always cherish, blending stunning landscapes with a deep sense of connection to the past and quiet personal introspection.

At the movies

This May, with the release of *The Salt Path* film in Australia, renewed attention turns to the SWCP. The memoir by Raynor Winn, upon which the film is based, recounts the

deeply personal journey she and her husband, Moth, take along this very trail after losing their home, and his terminal illness diagnosis. For them, the SWCP is more than a scenic walk – it becomes a test of endurance, healing, and survival. The "salt" in The Salt Path carries a layered meaning: the tears they shed, the sweat of their effort, and the ever-present sea air. It's a poetic expression of the rawness of their journey, both emotionally and physically.

For Raynor and Moth, the salt symbolises their struggle, resilience, and the cleansing process of walking the path. It weaves together their grief, hope, and eventual renewal, with the natural world as their backdrop. As I think back on my own journey along the SWCP, I'm reminded of how this iconic trail holds unique meaning for every walker. For me, it's an adventure that challenges my physical limits. For others, like Raynor and Moth, it becomes a lifeline. The SWCP leaves its mark in different ways, but it never truly leaves you.

Scenery that stays with you
For me, the SWCP is a journey of deep

appreciation – of nature's beauty, the remote coastline, and the physical challenge that also provides moments of contemplation. For others, it might be a personal achievement, the pride in completing something truly significant. Whether you seek solace, adventure, or simply a stronger connection to nature, the SWCP offers something unique for every person who experiences it. I love every moment of it.

Choosing the most memorable stretch of the SWCP is like picking a favourite chapter from a beloved book. Each section holds its own wonders and surprises, but the experience as a whole lingers long after. There are moments when the vast coastline or towering cliffs make you feel wonderfully small, offering a fresh perspective on your place in the world. In those awe-inspiring moments, when the world feels both vast and intimate, you feel something within you change – a quiet realisation that you are part of something much larger.

From soaring cliffs to sweeping sandy beaches, each day brings something new – even the local ice creams that become a delightful

daily indulgence. The landscape shifts constantly – from dramatic coastal cliffs and turquoise coves to iconic landmarks like St Michael's Mount and the striking Bedruthan Steps. The Minack Theatre, perched above the sea, adds to the magic. Even now, after completing the path, I still find it difficult to pick a single standout section – each part has its own unforgettable charm.

The villages are just as enchanting. Mevagissey's quaint harbour, St Ives' artistic allure, the timeless charm of Port Isaac (with its connection to Doc Martin), and the tiny, picturesque Cadgwith with its colourful fishing boats. Lynton and Clovelly, perched dramatically on steep slopes, feel like they're tumbling into the sea. Plymouth's rich history, linked to the Mayflower, contrasts beautifully with the quieter, more remote hamlets. Each place becomes its own chapter in the journey, offering not only its unique beauty but a moment to pause – whether for a creamy scoop of local ice cream or a reflective conversation with someone met along the way. There's something about the rhythm of walking, the simple act of putting one foot in front of the other, that allows both the scenery and the memories to imprint themselves upon you.

Moments that shape you

Two moments along the trail stay with me, both with locals who bring unexpected warmth to my journey. One is a fellow hiker, the other is with an older local lady relaxing on her favourite bench. Each meeting offers its own unique warmth and connection.

The first moment I remember clearly is at Great Hangman, the highest point on the SWCP at 320m. I met a very elderly gentleman there, impeccably dressed in trousers and a collared shirt. He doesn't look like a typical hiker, and I immediately feel concerned for him. After saying hello, I ask if his family



knows where he is, worried that he might be lost or struggling. He smiles and explains that he and his wife have often climbed to the summit together. Now that she has dementia, he roams it alone, carrying her memory – and his grief – with him. That conversation stays with me, a reminder of the deep connections we share with both people and places, and how the path can hold those connections, even when life changes.

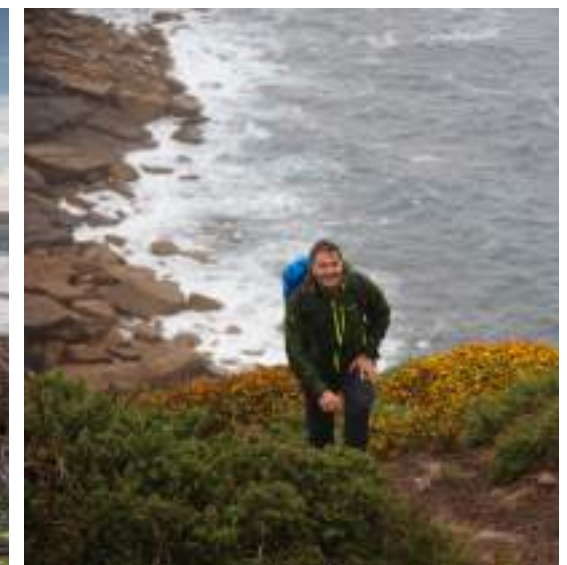
My second encounter is with an older lady seated on a bench overlooking the water near her Falmouth home. I'm eager to keep moving, but she stops me with a simple question: Where have I been? Where am I going? Politeness keeps me standing there, answering her queries, but it's the joy in her voice as she hears about my journey that makes me sit down. Her genuine enthusiasm for what I'm doing makes me realise that this moment, small as it seems, is far more important than the kilometres ahead.

WIN A TRIP FOR 2 ON THE SOUTH WEST COAST PATH

To celebrate the Australian release of *The Salt Path* movie on 15 May, hiking specialist RAW Travel is giving away a 7-day self-guided walking adventure for 2 people on the magical South West Coast Path valued at \$3500! Prize includes luggage transfers, hand-selected accommodation, on-trail navigation app, daily breakfasts, pre-trip guidance and more. To enter, visit [rawtravel.com/the-salt-path](https://www.rawtravel.com/the-salt-path) or scan the QR code. T&Cs apply.



“THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN THE VAST COASTLINE OR TOWERING CLIFFS MAKE YOU FEEL WONDERFULLY SMALL,”



Clockwise from left: The wild and brooding landscape around Zennor is filled with magic and myths.

Ancient standing stones; history abounds on this much-loved trail.

Sunset at Rinsey Head near Porthleven.

Dawn at the harbour in Padstow, a historic fishing town on the north Cornwall coast.



NEED TO KNOW

Cost: RAW Travel offers self-guided walks on the South West Coast Path; itineraries range from 8-22 days and start at \$1995pp (twin share). RAW can also customise an itinerary to suit your exact needs.

Inclusions: Pre-booked accommodation, daily cooked breakfasts, seamless luggage transfers, expert pre-departure advice, walking app with route guidance and trip info in one handy place, and local support in the UK.

Daily distances: 15-25km (5-7 hours walking)

Accommodation: Charming B&Bs, guest houses and small hotels.

Best times to walk: Late April to June and September to October

More info: <https://rawtravel.com/destinations/south-west-coast-path/>

“THE SOUTH WEST COAST PATH ISN'T JUST A TRAIL; IT'S A PILGRIMAGE”

We talk about life, adventure, and how extraordinary she thinks my journey is. She's fascinated by the idea of walking the whole path – her eyes light up with excitement, her admiration reminding me of the significance of the journey. Our slow, thoughtful conversation is a gift – a reminder to pause and savour the human connections that often surprise us along the way.

Then there's an unexpected cream tea stop – a moment of pure trail serendipity! I'm enjoying an easier section of the trail, strolling along, when I see a sign outside a charming church offering cream teas. Who can resist cream tea? I wander over – or maybe saunter toward the cheerful group of ladies who greet me with a steaming cup of tea, a warm scone topped with thick, local clotted cream and

jam and the kindest smiles. One of the ladies pats an inviting chair beside her, and they make space for me to sit. We chat – about life in these tiny Cornish villages, how some have embraced tourism, while others have kept their quiet, unspoiled charm. It is such a delightful, impromptu conversation that I am reminded again: sometimes, it's the unplanned moments – those simple, spontaneous connections – that make a journey truly unforgettable.

A path for reflection

Hiking the SWCP isn't just a physical challenge; it becomes a deeply personal journey. During my trek, I receive news of my brother-in-law's passing – someone my age – and it makes me reflect on how much I value



the chance to traverse the trail. Having lost my mother and brother a few years ago, their memory is ever-present. I realise that while I have the privilege to roam this path, others no longer have that chance. The trail becomes a space for reflection – where grief coexists with gratitude, encouraging me to travel and explore the world while I still can. I often think about how fortunate I am to walk when others can't, and how I want to live a fuller life in honour of those who have lost that opportunity. Free from daily routines, deadlines, and distractions, the simplicity of the trail gives me space to simply be. It's a beautiful bubble of happiness, where each day offers new sights, quiet moments of joy, and meaningful connections. In many ways, I feel like I'm walking it for them – living the life they can't.

Small joys along the way

Along the way, the simplest pleasures often bring the most unexpected joy. Another food memory that stands out is dinner at an unassuming B&B, where the host serves clotted cream and fresh raspberries for dessert, picked straight from his garden. The meal is simple and satisfying, but those raspberries are by far the most delicious I've ever tasted! It's not just the food that makes the evening special – it's the warmth and hospitality of the host. That day is significant not just for the meal but because it's also the day I meet the elderly gentleman whose wife has dementia. A day full of meaningful connections, where a heartfelt conversation, a warm meal, and those incredible raspberries weave into a cherished memory I'll always hold close.

An invitation to walk

The South West Coast Path isn't just a trail; it's a pilgrimage into beauty, history, and self-discovery. With every step, you become part of something greater – a landscape shaped by time, tide, and countless footsteps before yours.

Whether you walk a short section or commit to the full challenge, the experience stays with you – etched into your stories, your steps, and the memories you carry long after you've left the coastline behind.

As The Salt Path film brings this experience to screens across Australia, I hope it inspires more people to lace up their boots and explore this extraordinary stretch of wilderness. There's something about trekking along the edge of the land, where the craggy coastline meets the endless horizon, which offers a rare sense of perspective.

For me, the SWCP isn't just a place – it's a touchstone. A path where I find not just breathtaking views, but the space to reflect, connect, and gather memories that stay with me for life. It's a trail that challenges and rewards in equal measure, offering both solitude and camaraderie, quiet contemplation and unexpected encounters. It gives more than it takes, and for that, I'll always be grateful. 🌀

Clockwise from above: Much-loved St Ives, famous for its galleries and fine dining.

On a stretch between St Ives and Pendeen, Cornwall.

The 1016km South West Coast Path is popular with walkers from around the world.

Picturesque Looe in southeast Cornwall is rich in maritime history.

