

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

Wanted: A Peaceful Pace

Multiday walking trips don't have to be grueling—just ask these boomer travelers who swear by them



REST STOP Christine Harrold, a 59-year-old aficionado of walking trips, takes a break during a trek through Sweden she took in 2017.

BY STACEY LASTOE

AFTER HER first self-guided walking trip in 2011, Christine Harrold, 59, decided she was done taking do-nothing beach vacations. On the eight-day meander through Scotland with her teenage son, the now-retired school counselor discovered a love of adventure travel, sore muscles and all. It's persisted: In September, Harrold will embark on her 17th self-guided walking tour, an eight-day itinerary through Tuscany drawn-up by Macs Adventure, a company that organizes walking and cycling tours around the world.

Harrold is among the many American baby boomers and Gen Xers smitten with a style of travel that rejects lazing by the pool in favor of walking, sometimes for upward of 10 miles a day. According to the Adventure Travel Trade Association, trips that involve walking are trending more than other types—including food-focused vacations or safaris—with people over 45 years of age.

For its walking trips in Europe, Macs Adventure reports a 200% spike in bookings year over year. Niall Corcoran, founder of Wild Rover Travel, a Danish company that arranges self-guided hikes, says Americans constitute its second biggest customer base (after Danes). Most of these trekkers?

Couples in their 50s and 60s.

A "walking trip" might conjure images of tending to painful blisters, but treks can actually be soothing affairs. Travelers who prefer some independence might opt for the self-guided variety, where companies like Macs Adventure, Wild Rover Travel and Rydler-Walker Alpine Adventures provide the itinerary and navigational aids, book accommodations and can even arrange luggage transfer. Want more structure? With guided walking tours, everything's left to a pro.

Bob Henningsen, 73, a retired English schoolteacher living in St. Louis, saw self-guided walking

tours as a natural progression from his days backpacking and pitching a tent. Trips in Scotland, France and England let him and his travel companion, Steven Graves, connect with nature at their own clip and avoid lugging everything on their backs. Macs Adventure's baggage-transfer service from inn to inn sold Henningsen initially, though he admits that he and Graves, friends since high school, also came to love staying at bed-and-breakfasts and not in tents.

In October, Henningsen and Graves will walk through the Scottish Highlands on an eight-day Macs Adventure route, which

follows the footsteps of the outlaw Rob Roy past ancient stone circles and Roman ruins. Daily legs range from nine to 15 miles, but Henningsen says that when picking a trip, pay more attention to elevation than mileage: "How many climbs?"

Navigating your own way down narrow country paths can be intimidating. Harrold's first tour with Macs Adventure "was like a scavenger hunt," she said, with paper maps and route notes. But even the most directionally challenged traveler can undertake self-guided treks now, thanks to GPS technology. Both Wild Rover

Since the couple no longer has time to plan six-month trips through Southeast Asia as they once did, they appreciate how the guided tours by the company Classic Journeys take all planning out of the equation.

Michael, who has an autoimmune disorder, also finds guided trips reassuring; if something goes wrong, an expert can step in to help immediately. When a hike through North Africa's Atlas Mountains in 2009 became too much for him, a Classic Journeys guide arranged for a donkey to carry him the rest of the way.

Edward Piegza, 58, founder and CEO of Classic Journeys partly attributes the appeal of this kind of travel among health-conscious baby boomers to its fitness benefits. But it isn't just about reaching "those 10,000 steps," said Piegza. Rather, it's the "low-impact form of exercise that's connected to exploring new destinations."

For Harrold, the retired school counselor, however, walking trips aren't about hitting fitness milestones. She doesn't religiously upload all her walks to Strava or push herself to hit marathon distances. "Anything over 12 miles is no longer fun," she said. As a self-professed "very slow walker," Harrold does her share of smelling the roses: "I always average about 2 miles an hour because I will take a break and just sit in a spot and look around."



Classic Alpine views abound on the Dachstein Classic, a route in Austria.

'Anything over 12 miles is no longer fun,' said one committed walker.

Travel and Macs Adventure equip travelers with digital map tools featuring turn-by-turn directions easily accessed on their phones or other navigational devices.

Catherine and Michael Maywood (65 and 64), physicians in the San Diego area, like the way guided walking tours help them meet locals and explore the culture of a place, while still being comfortable. Also appealing: the five-star hotels and special access to tourist attractions that can come with some guided trips.

Make a Less-Hot Getaway

With heat waves cresting, vacations can become endurance tests. Here's how to cope.

IS THE CLASSIC | Carefree summer vacation facing extinction? Last year was the hottest summer on record in the Northern Hemisphere—Spain, the world's second-most-visited country, endured three heat waves in just four months. To ace a summer trip in 2024, you must do more than stay hydrated and diligently apply (and reapply) sunscreen. We asked pros how to navigate the new normal of sweltering travel.

Plan Ahead | When packing, focus on light-colored, loose-fitting clothes made from breathable fabrics. Also necessary? Accessories. Squeeze in a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, but also consider a rechargeable hand-held fan, a travel parasol and a bonnet you can soak in cold water when things get desperate. A fitness tracker can help you track vitals for symptoms of heat stroke and heat exhaustion. It's easy to forget to check in on your body when exploring a destination.

Look for a travel insurance policy that covers weather (not all do), though even those probably won't cover heat waves. **Sensible**

Weather, which describes itself as a "climate-risk tech company," reimburses travelers for certain bookings disrupted by weather. It recently partnered with the luxury resort Collective Hill Country in central Texas to offer a "high temperature guarantee" for an extra fee, letting guests get their money back if the temperature exceeds a certain threshold.

Be Flexible | In some of the world's sunniest places—southern Spain, Italy, Greece—the afternoon siesta is a way of life. Tourists would do well to follow the locals' lead, and shift outdoor activities to early morning and evening. Lee Thompson, co-founder of Flash Pack, an adventure travel outfit, says that the company always draws up contingency plans for hot weather. After a particularly hot summer biking trip in Colombia last year, Flash Pack tweaked the schedule for future tours so most riding happens right after breakfast.

Sometimes, you might need to cancel activities entirely—and that's OK, says Marta Segura, who, as Los



Angeles's first chief heat officer, leads efforts to build the city's heat resilience. In L.A., Segura said, if it feels too hot for a hike, call it off or "make it short, walk with buddies and get plenty of water, rest and shade."

Embrace Shoulder Season | Elizabeth Heath, owner of Umbria-based Villaggio Tours, refrains from offering tours in summer, even though it is the most popular time to visit. It

ally, "I just don't want to bring people over here to have them be uncomfortable," she said. In some big-ticket destinations, travel agents report that fall bookings are outpacing those for July and August.

Even in summer, consider skipping Mediterranean hot spots. Jessica Walker, owner of travel advisory Walks Around the World, says she's noticed more clients interested in northerly destinations in Scandinavia and the Baltics.

Check the Apps | Before leaving home, get a detailed weather app that covers your destination. Météo, for instance, monitors heat warnings across Europe, while Extrema—another app currently available in Athens, Milan, Paris and Rotterdam—indicates the coolest walking paths, nearby water fountains and monitors the heat index at popular landmarks. Similarly, Barcelona's Cool Walks app guides walkers and cy-

clists toward comfortable summer routes. In Italy, the Fontanelle and Waddy Wow apps help locate the closest potable water fountains.

It's a disconcerting truth that summer temperatures will only continue to climb, but tourists don't have to forgo summer vacations. As Heath put it, adaptation can go a long way. "Seek shade, seek water, and don't go out with the mad dogs in the midday sun. —Suchi Rudra