**Headline:** The World’s Greatest Long Hikes

**Teaser:** For those willing to brave extended treks in nature, the world’s best long hikes offer challenges and amazing rewards.

By John Divinagracia

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**[Article Body:]**

Hiking is considered one of the most popular outdoor activities worldwide, offering numerous [mental and physical health benefits](https://health.clevelandclinic.org/9-benefits-of-hiking), and allowing us to connect with nature. Walking long distances, often through diverse biomes and habitats, was originally [a necessary means of survival](https://www.paliretreat.com/history-of-hiking/) since nomadic tribes followed seasonal migration routes and foraged for resources in diverse landscapes. When religions were founded, hiking became part of a [pilgrimage or an exodus](https://adventurehq.ae/blogs/expert-advice/exploring-the-past-a-glimpse-into-the-history-of-hiking), ranging from the [Hajj](https://www.britannica.com/topic/hajj), the Islamic pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, to the [Camino de Santiago](https://santiago-compostela.net/), also known as the “Way of St. James,” in Spain.

Even after hunter-gatherers evolved into farmers and settlers, many humans still felt the urge to go hiking through unexplored territories. The word “hike” originates from the [English dialectal word](https://www.etymonline.com/word/hike) *yike*, meaning “to walk vigorously.”

One of the [earliest examples of a person hiking recreationally](https://blog.silverlight.store/history-of-hiking/) rather than out of necessity is that of Petrarch, also known as Francesco Petrarca, a poet who wrote about his climb with his brother and two servants to the top of Mont Ventoux in southern France in April 1336.

It was only in the 18th and 19th centuries that the [Romantic movement in Europe](https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism) encouraged a newfound interest in nature. Once, poets, artists, and philosophers championed the tranquility and splendor of the vivacious outdoors. Many, mainly the middle and upper classes during this period, became smitten by the natural, rural, and untamed landscapes outside big cities and towns. This set off a trend of spending quality time in nature and exploring the wilderness through hikes.

Today, hikers can explore many routes, whether they prefer historic hikes or scenic nature trails.

**Inca Trail**

[The Inca Trail](https://www.alpacaexpeditions.com/inca-trail-treks/) winds through 26 miles of mountains and countryside in the Cusco region of southern Peru. Formerly [a vital artery of trade and transportation during the Inca Empire](https://www.alpacaexpeditions.com/inca-trail-in-history-how-the-ancient-road-shaped-incan-civilization/#:~:text=Functionally%2C%20the%20Inca%20Trail%20served,empire%20with%20its%20farthest%20reaches.), the Inca Trail now serves as a popular route for tourists and travelers as they traverse the majestic slopes of the Andes Mountains. This trail leads to the ruins of [Machu Picchu, the “Lost City of the Incas,”](https://www.britannica.com/place/Machu-Picchu) which sits high on a plateau overlooking the Andes Mountains and the Urubamba River Valley. You can also stop by other ancient landmarks like the Wiñay Wayna, an elegant ruin with terraces cascading down a steep slope, and [Runkurakay](https://www.alpacaexpeditions.com/inca-trail-sites/), a “semicircular construction… thought to have served either as a resting place for travelers and pilgrims, or a control post.”

The highest point on the Inca Trail, Dead Woman’s Pass (13,828 feet), is a challenging but rewarding destination that promises panoramic views of the surrounding valleys. Hikers here will experience several unique biomes and habitats found only in Peru, including [cloud forests and high-altitude mountain passes](https://www.salkantaytrekking.com/blog/charm-forests-peru-landscapes-biodiversity-nature). At the end of the Inca Trail is the Sun Gate (Inti Punku), where the first breathtaking glimpse of Machu Picchu is painted golden during sunrise.

With its perfect combination of adventure, culture, and stunning scenery, the Inca Trail attracts thousands of adventurers who wish to experience historical sites and breathtaking natural beauty.

**Camino de Santiago**

The [Camino de Santiago](https://santiago-compostela.net/) is one of the most popular pilgrimages in the world. It is a network of historic pathways across Europe culminating at the tomb of [St. James the Great](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-James-son-of-Zebedee) (Santiago in Spanish) in the city of Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain. The most popular trail in this network is the [Camino Francés](https://caminoways.com/camino-frances) (French Way), which starts in the municipality of Sarria and stretches across the Galicia region of Spain, passing through several market towns, including Portomarín, Melide, and Arzúa. No matter what path one takes, the destination is all the same: the [Santiago de Compostela Cathedral](https://catedraldesantiago.es/en/cathedral/), which is considered the final resting place of St. James the Apostle.

This pilgrimage offers a chance to pass by some of Spain’s many [exquisite landmarks](https://insiderstravel.io/symbolism-camino-de-santiago-scallop-shell-art/), such as the Puente la Reina, a beautiful Romanesque bridge, and the Cruz de Ferro, where pilgrims leave stones as a symbol of their burdens. The city of León, magnificent with its Gothic cathedral, and Burgos, home to the grand Cathedral of Santa María, are also notable stopping points on the way to Santiago de Compostela. The Camino de Santiago is a historically significant pilgrimage route, [listed](https://santiagoways.com/en/camino-santiago-world-heritage-site-unesco/) as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is frequented by both pilgrims and those seeking “[a unique experience, personal challenge, or a break from daily life](https://caminoways.com/walking-the-camino-de-santiago).”

**Torres Del Paine Circuit**

The [Torres del Paine Circuit, also known as the O Circuit](https://torresdelpaine.com/en/tour/o-circuit/), is one of the most challenging long-distance hikes for diehard explorers eager for arduous journeys in dynamic landscapes. Located in [Torres del Paine National Park,](https://www.pygmy-elephant.com/blog/the-history-of-torres-del-paine-park-the-crown-jewel-of-chilean-patagonia) Chile, this route spans more than 80 miles of Patagonia’s regional areas, including glacial valleys, windswept plains, pristine rivers, and jagged mountain peaks. Along the way, you might encounter some of South America’s most unique wildlife that have thrived in the high- and low-altitude environments, such as guanacos, condors, and pumas. This trail offers opportunities to rest in [several *refugios* (mountain huts) or campgrounds](https://backcountryemily.com/ocircuit-campground-guide/) scattered along the way.

Like many other famous hikes, travelers will find unforgettable landmarks and sights worth seeing, such as the three granite towers of Torres del Paine. At the [John Garner Pass](https://www.swoop-patagonia.com/chile/torres-del-paine/paso-john-garner), you can get a grand panoramic view of the immense Grey Glacier, an impressive wall of ice that stretches 30 meters high and is around six kilometers wide, looming over Lago Grey. Finally, you will end up at the [French Valley](https://torresdelpaine.com/en/tourist-attraction/french-valley/), a region flanked by hanging glaciers and rugged cliffs.

In this circuit, [founded](https://www.quasarex.com/patagonia/torres-del-paine) by British mountaineer John Gardner and two Torres del Paine rangers, Pepe Alarcon and Oscar Guineo, travelers will test their endurance while having an unforgettable opportunity to experience Patagonia’s varied and vivifying territory.

**Appalachian Trail**

In America’s dynamic heartland, the [Appalachian Trail](https://appalachiantrail.org/) winds a 2,190-mile snaking corridor that begins at Springer Mountain in Georgia and terminates at Mount Katahdin in Maine. Completed in 1937, the trail was the dream of conservationist [Benton MacKaye](https://placesjournal.org/article/an-appalachian-trail-a-project-in-regional-planning/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwv_m-BhC4ARIsAIqNeBsKQdyXvsrSOHIbebpcn39hgbYIhUvd-JJ3pq2XxKesgnX4spElBQUaAo0mEALw_wcB), who envisioned the Appalachian Trail as a “project in regional planning” and “a new approach to the problem of living,” according to a [2019 article](https://placesjournal.org/article/an-appalachian-trail-a-project-in-regional-planning/) by historical geographer Garrett Dash Nelson. The project was supposed to be a “thoroughgoing cultural critique of industrial modernity—a template for comprehensive economic redevelopment at a scale never before attempted in the United States.”

The Appalachian Trail traverses 14 states, and along the trail, you can stop at some of America’s most stunning landscapes and landmarks, including the [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](https://www.nps.gov/grsm/index.htm), the [Shenandoah National Park](https://www.goshenandoah.com/), and the [White Mountains in New Hampshire](https://www.outdoors.org/resources/amc-outdoors/outdoor-resources/a-beginners-guide-to-hiking-in-the-white-mountains/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwv_m-BhC4ARIsAIqNeBt4bX1-evbzKVOSk0KPN_TjocxNe3Sdr6dxLUgcYPBeUl-9x04_AswaAnj5EALw_wcB). Other extraordinary highlights include McAfee Knob, one of the most photographed spots on the trail; the Mahoosuc Notch, known as the “toughest mile”; and the Franconia Ridge, a promising vista filled with alpine sceneries. Whether tackling the complete thru-hike or exploring a small section, the Appalachian Trail [continues](https://placesjournal.org/article/an-appalachian-trail-a-project-in-regional-planning/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwv_m-BhC4ARIsAIqNeBsKQdyXvsrSOHIbebpcn39hgbYIhUvd-JJ3pq2XxKesgnX4spElBQUaAo0mEALw_wcB) to uphold Benton MacKaye’s ideals to “align the dimensions of regional planning with the geography of ecological zones rather than political jurisdictions.”

The rugged terrain makes the hike challenging, and while “more than 3,000 people attempt to walk the entire Appalachian Trail every year, only about a quarter of them succeed,” [according](https://www.outsideonline.com/adventure-travel/destinations/north-america/beginners-guide-to-the-appalachian-trail/?scope=anon) to a 2024 article in Outside Magazine.

**Tour du Mont Blanc**

The [Tour du Mont Blanc](https://www.autourdumontblanc.com/en/) circles one of the highest peaks in Western Europe, [Mont Blanc](https://www.britannica.com/place/Mont-Blanc-mountain-Europe), located on the Franco-Italian border in the Alps and rising approximately 15,775 feet. The Tour du Mont Blanc spans around 105 miles of rural and near-urban countryside through the European nations of France, Italy, and Switzerland. This immense trek, officially established as a walking route in the 18th century after Swiss geologist and physicist Horace-Bénédict de Saussure made it [public knowledge](https://www.muchbetteradventures.com/magazine/the-beginners-guide-to-trekking-the-tour-du-mont-blanc), was originally a series of ancient trade and shepherding paths that continue to offer impressive mountain and valley scenery in Europe’s untamed wilderness.

Along the way, you will be sojourning through some of the Alps’ most exquisite landmarks like the Aiguilles Rouges Nature Reserve, the dramatic Col du Bonhomme, and the picturesque Lac Blanc, renowned for its mirror-perfect reflections of Mont Blanc. Trekkers will also pass through charming alpine villages, such as Courmayeur, Champex-Lac, and Les Contamines, where they can enjoy local cheeses, wines, and warm hospitality. With its fusion of frigid mountain passes, glacial valleys, and meadowed small towns, the Tour du Mont Blanc is as physically demanding as it is rewarding. Unlike more remote long hikes, this route offers a variety of accommodations, including mountain refuges, resorts, and luxury lodges.

**Milford Track**

Within New Zealand, you can undertake your own epic journey similar to the ones you see in *The Lord of the Rings* by traversing the [Milford Track](https://www.newzealand.com/ca/feature/milford-track/), known as the “finest walk in the world.” The track runs along 33 miles of terrain and goes through [Fiordland National Park](https://www.fiordland.org.nz/visit/fiordland-national-park/) on New Zealand’s South Island. Established in 1888, this historic route was used by Māori to gather [*pounamu,* also known as greenstone](https://www.newzealand.com/ca/feature/new-zealand-greenstone/), which is used in New Zealand’s Indigenous cultures to make spiritual ornaments and jewelry. When European explorers [arrived](https://newzealandtrails.com/news/hiking-milford-track/) in New Zealand, they used the Milford Track to seek safe passage into Milford Sound.

Those wishing to traverse this historic route can begin their adventures at Glade Wharf, which winds through ancient rainforests, alpine passes, and glacier-carved valleys. Hikers will encounter some of New Zealand’s most stunning natural landmarks, notably Mackinnon Pass, where one can catch panoramic views of the surrounding mountain peaks. Similarly, you will discover Sutherland Falls, one of the tallest waterfalls in the world, at 1,904 feet. The Milford Track is not just a hike; it’s an unexpected adventure through one of the most breathtaking corners of the world.

**The Great Wall of China Trail**

The [Great Wall of China](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Great-Wall-of-China), one of the most significant artificial structures on Earth, is also one of the world’s most extended hikes worth traversing. Stretching more than 13,000 miles across China’s countryside, the Great Wall was a [monumental engineering project](https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/great-wall-china/) that spans from Mount Hu, near Dandong in southeastern Liaoning province, to Jiayu Pass, west of Jiuquan in northwestern Gansu province. Although much of the wall’s bulwarks lay in ruins, several sections provide incredible trekking opportunities through history and breathtaking landscapes.

Popular hiking routes include the Jinshanling to Simatai section, known for its well-preserved watchtowers and stunning views of rolling mountains. The Jiankou section, meanwhile, offers a more rugged and adventurous trek with its steep, wild, and unrestored paths. The Mutianyu section features many restored segments of the Great Wall, which wind and weave through lush forests. Finally, the Gubeikou section, having remained unharmed for centuries, offers hikers insights into the wall’s historical significance and past battles.

Unlike traditional long-distance trails, the Great Wall of China trek offers a more historically immersive experience as you walk in the footsteps of ancient warriors who protected China's northern border. It endures and regales visitors by being one of the most significant monuments of man’s engineering and architectural capabilities.

**Hiking: Connecting With Yourself and Nature**

Often, we need to break out of our comfort zones and seek new things, worlds, and opportunities. Movement breaks the monotony of boredom and the staleness that comes with sitting still and being idle. Hiking is one of the best ways for everyone to reconnect with themselves and nature.

Whether you are taking the road less traveled or are on popular hiking routes, you will be enamored by the world’s greatest long hikes. So pack appropriate gear for the weather, bring friends or family along, and prepare yourself for a journey of a lifetime that will help you feel healthier from the inside out.