



Hikers pause on the Island Trail, which circumnavigates Prince Edward Island, Canada's smallest province. Credit...Heather Ogg

# 2023 Is the Year of the Long Walk

The 500-mile Camino de Santiago has inspired a host of new treks in places from Canada to Bhutan that let travelers take the slow route. Here, a guide to the new trails.

**By Erin Vivid Riley**

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The idea of a walking holiday — a long-distance journey on foot, during which you lodge overnight and carry just enough clothing, food and water for each day's stretch — has long been popular in Europe. But within the last few years, these pilgrimage-style walks have sprung up all over the world.

After the pandemic years, embarking on a pilgrimage has new meaning, whether you're seeking discovery, a sense of purpose or to learn what you're capable of. "What might have seemed like a luxury before feels like a necessity now," said Dorji Dhradhul, director general of Bhutan's tourism council and chair of the association behind the new [Trans Bhutan Trail](#), about the rising popularity of long trails. While taking a week

or more off for a long walk might have felt like an indulgence before, Mr. Dhradhul believes more people are using travel to slow down and reflect.



A hiker and a local interact along the Transcaucasian Trail. It's first 535 miles opened in Armenia in 2021. Credit...via Tom Allen/Transcaucasian Trail Armenia

The real power of traveling on foot is that it encourages interaction. “Many of us will go to great lengths to avoid speaking with strangers, and this behavior has spilled over from our daily lives to the way we travel,” said Robin Lewis, who has walked the entire length of the [Michinoku Coastal Trail](#), a 637-mile route that traverses Japan’s northeastern Tohoku region. “These experiences remind us that the best way to know a place is through its people.”

As you’re preparing for your next trip, plan for spontaneous encounters. Pick a starting point and an end, line up a few stops and stays along the way, and let the rest follow. Here are seven new treks to keep in mind.

## The Pekoe Trail, Sri Lanka



The Pekoe Trail in Sri Lanka is scheduled to open in July. Its 186 miles use routes originally developed by tea farmers. Credit...via the Pekoe Trail

Before Sri Lanka became the tea capital of the world, its mist-shrouded forests were dotted with coffee plantations. In 1867, a few years before a disease largely wiped out that crop, a Scotsman named James Taylor developed the country's first commercial tea estate. Former coffee growers soon began traveling to the estate to learn how to cultivate and process tea, starting what would become a series of trails that formed the industry's transportation network.

More than a century later, those routes have been recovered to make the [Pekoe Trail](#), a 186-mile path that will open in July. Its development was funded by the European Union and the U.S. Agency for International Development to help boost Sri Lanka's tourism industry in the aftermath of the [2019 Easter bombings](#), the terrorist attacks in Colombo, the capital, which led to a [70 percent drop](#) in visitor numbers from the year before. The trail connects 80 hamlets and villages across the island's mountainous Central and Uva provinces, some in remote areas that see fewer tourists, others near historic sites, including Taylor's [Loolecondera Estate](#) and the famed Nine Arch Bridge, a scenic railway overpass and architectural wonder near the town of Ella.





A religious structure along the soon-to-open Pekoe Trail, which will connect 80 hamlets and villages. Credit...via the Pekoe Trail

At the route's northern end is the Buddhist stronghold of Kandy, a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Bandaranaike International Airport; at the other, the highland community of Nuwara Eliya. The journey was designed to take a leisurely 22 days, so that visitors could have half days to fill as they'd like, whether with long lunches of kottu roti, naps in restored colonial-era bungalows, or afternoons sampling teas and swimming in waterfalls.

The Pekoe Trail's [website](#) recommends mapping apps such as AllTrails and Wikiloc; Miguel Cuñat, the trail's creator, has created [a map of accommodations](#). For a guided experience, book a tour with [Sri Lanka Trekking](#) (from \$45 per day).

## The Island Walk, Prince Edward Island, Canada



Hikers make their way along the Island Walk, a coastal path on Prince Edward Island inspired by Portugal's Rota Vicentina network of trails. Credit...Heather Ogg

When Bryson Guptill walked Portugal's network of hiking trails known as the Rota Vicentina in 2019, its rolling hills, soaring cliffs and stuck-in-time villages reminded him of Prince Edward Island, where he'd been living for three decades. He wondered whether it would be possible to recreate the experience in his backyard. Over a month, he walked 435 miles around the entire island province, identifying ways to link up existing [Confederation Trail](#) routes, dirt roads and beach walks. Two years later, he introduced his map for the [Island Walk](#), a coastal path divided into 32 daylong sections, which range from 12 to 15 miles.

Prince Edward Island, which is about the size of Delaware, is Canada's smallest province, but it's also the most densely populated. You can't stroll more than an hour without seeing a country home or for more than 15 miles without coming upon a seaside village, many of which have charming bed-and-breakfasts and ocean-view restaurants serving oysters.





A hiker passes through a forested section of Prince Edward Island's new long-distance trail. Credit...Heather Ogg

If you don't want to walk the entire trail, head north to experience the province's only [national park](#) and scenes that inspired L.M. Montgomery's "Anne of Green Gables" books. For warm-water beaches, pastoral landscapes and lobster suppers, explore the east. For a taste of Acadian culture and sweeping views of the Northumberland Strait, go west. And for more action, visit the south, where the fishing village Victoria-by-the-Sea has become an artists' enclave, with a [chocolate factory](#), theater and pottery studios.

*The Island Walk's [online resources](#) include sample itineraries and a list of [B & B partners](#) that offer scheduled pickups, drop-offs and luggage transfers, which means you don't need a guide. The outfitter [Experience PEI](#) can help make arrangements.*

## The Transcaucasian Trail, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan



The view from a medieval defense tower in Svaneti, Georgia, which is one stop on the Transcaucasian Trail. Credit...via Tom Allen/Transcaucasian Trail Armenia

When Tom Allen, a British adventurer and filmmaker, first moved to Armenia in 2008, he looked up at the peaks of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains and saw a hiker's dream. Across the border in Georgia, Paul Stephens, who was volunteering with the U.S. Peace Corps, had begun envisioning a trekking route across the entire Caucasus range. When Mr. Allen went to purchase the domain name [transcaucasiantrail.org](https://transcaucasiantrail.org) in 2015, he found that it had already been registered — to Mr. Stephens. The two met and got to work.

In December 2021, after years of building new routes and unearthing ancient footpaths, the pair, in collaboration with the nonprofits [Hike Armenia](https://hikearmenia.org) and [Trails for Change](https://trailsforchange.org), debuted the first section of the Transcaucasian Trail: 535 miles through Armenia. The north-south path showcases the diversity of both the country's landscape — bucolic pastures, red-earth formations, cloud forest — and its history, with stops at ancient Christian monasteries, medieval fortresses and Silk Road-era roadside inns. Since then, 133 miles in Georgia and 124 miles in Azerbaijan have opened.





A cliffside trail overlooks the province of Vayots Dzor, in Armenia, and forms part of the greater Transcaucasian Trail. Credit...via Tom Allen/Transcaucasian Trail Armenia

Guesthouses, often modest extensions of people's homes, have started popping up along the route. Expect feasts of grilled meats, salads and khachapuri, a traditional cheese-filled bread, plus leftovers packed for lunch on the trail.

The region's history of conflict, including recent tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, has created challenges for the trail's development. While it doesn't currently pass through any breakaway territories or areas of conflict, visitors should be aware of these zones and check government warnings before travel.

*The Transcaucasian Trail's [website](#) has many resources, including maps and apps. For a guided experience, consider the [Georgian Mountain Guides Association](#) (from \$220 for two days).*



## The Michinoku Coastal Trail, Japan



Cherry trees line a walkway in Kamaishi, a city on the northeastern coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, which the Michinoku Coastal Trail passes through. Credit...Koji Iwama

After the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that devastated the Tohoku region of northeastern Japan, the country's environment ministry saw an opportunity: Bringing more visitors to the sparsely populated area could help bolster the reconstruction efforts. A decade later, a hiking trail hugging the area's coastline has helped that effort.

Connecting the city of Hachinohe in Aomori Prefecture, near the northern tip of Honshu, Japan's main island, with Soma in Fukushima Prefecture, 637 miles south, the Michinoku Coastal Trail winds through tiny fishing villages, white-sand beaches and chalky black cliffs that rise from the Pacific Ocean. Along the way there are already restaurants offering discounts to hikers and accommodations including hotels, traditional bed-and-breakfast inns called ryokans and more affordable home stays known as minshuku.

Local residents serve as informal trail angels, offering hikers cups of tea and inviting them into their homes. All along the route are signs promoting fisherman-run boat tours, educational hiking tours and in-home cooking classes. If the economic gain is important, so too is the emotional benefit. "Not only are visitors able to hear firsthand about the resilience of these communities, but there's also a lot of catharsis that follows from sharing their stories," said Robin Lewis, creator of Michinoku Trail Walker, a free guide to the experience.

*Michinoku Trail Walker has many resources, including a [map of accommodations](#), to help with an unguided hike. Or sign up for a [tour](#) with the outfitter Walk Japan (from \$2,066 for a nine-day, self-guided itinerary, with lodging and meals).*

## The High Road, Massachusetts



Hikers take in the view from Yokun Ridge along the first segment of the High Road in western Massachusetts. Credit...Gabrielle K. Murphy

The Berkshires, in western Massachusetts, have long encouraged contemplative walking. They're said to have inspired Edith Wharton and Herman Melville, and the Appalachian Trail has wound through them since the 1930s. Now, a new long-distance path, [the High Road](#), will provide a slow-paced, inn-to-inn experience that will eventually traverse the entire region.

The [first segment](#), which opened in 2021, runs eight miles from the vibrant arts-centric city of Pittsfield to the traditional New England town of Lenox. It follows most of the Yokun Ridge, a series of peaks covered in deciduous forest that offer views of red-barn farms, bucolic ponds and 3,491-foot Mount Greylock. The next portion, expected to be completed by 2025, will traverse southern Berkshire County, from the wetlands of [Threemile Hill](#) to the 267-acre [Thomas and Palmer Brook](#) reserve, and link up to the charming town of Great Barrington.

Behind the effort is the [Berkshire Natural Resources Council](#), which is using existing preserves as footholds for the route. Half the trail is expected to be complete in the next three to five years, and as each new segment opens, so will tributary paths that connect



it to nearby villages. Along with providing easy access to pristine wilderness, the High Road will showcase the region's cultural highlights, allowing walkers to incorporate afternoons at destinations like [Tanglewood](#) and [Jacob's Pillow](#).

*The Berkshire Natural Resources Council has a [trail map](#) of the High Road's first section on its website. The operator [Berkshire Camino](#) offers guided walking tours (from \$75 for two and a half hours) throughout the region.*

## The Trans Bhutan Trail, Bhutan



A shop on the Trans Bhutan Trail, a path that travels 250 miles from the developed western district of Haa to the rural and remote eastern area of Trashigang. Credit...via the Tourism Council — Bhutan

The legend of Garp Lungi Khorlo has been passed down for generations in Bhutan. He was known as the fastest court messenger in the kingdom, and was said to have once traveled 50 miles on foot in a single day. The trail he would have traveled was, for centuries, the only link between the country's nine main districts, used also by monks, pilgrims, royalty and traders.

The revitalized route opened in September as the 250-mile Trans Bhutan Trail. Walking it can feel like traveling through time — many villages along the Trans Bhutan have been isolated since the introduction of highways in the 1960s. Expect to pass intricate chortens, dome-topped stone structures that once acted as trail markers and shelters for travelers; to hike through dense forests that open up to views of the

Himalayas; and to hear chants echoing from monasteries lined with colorful prayer flags.



A suite at Six Senses Thimphu, one of five properties the hotel brand has along the Trans Bhutan Trail. Credit...via Six Senses

Days average nine miles, and most end at a village with a home stay or a well-appointed campsite, plus the occasional luxury hotel ([Six Senses](#) has five properties along the trail, and [Como Hotels and Resorts](#) has two). The western sections of the path are dotted with tourism council-certified hotels and guesthouses, the only properties permitted to host international visitors. Along with requiring travelers to pay a daily sustainable development fee, which increased to \$200 from \$65 last year, the tourism council makes it compulsory to hire a guide.

*Guided tours can be booked through the [Trans Bhutan Trail](#) and start at \$297 for a two-day trip, excluding the country's daily tourism fee.*



## The Walk of Peace, Slovenia and Italy



The Piazza Unità d'Italia in the Italian town of Trieste, the end of the Walk of Peace trail, which starts in Slovenia's Julian Alps.Credit...via Marco Milani/PromoTurismoFVG

As described in Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms," the Soca Valley is a place of catastrophe, unrecognizable from today's serene setting of roaring waterfalls, deep gorges and turquoise rivers. Still, throughout the corridor, which connects northwest Slovenia to Italy's Adriatic coast, are an untold number of vestiges from World War I's Isonzo Front, where a dozen battles between the Kingdom of Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire took close to 1.5 million lives.

In an effort to showcase this history, the [Soca Region Foundation](#) has turned the former front line into a 310-mile network of treks. The main route, which opened in 2020, has expanded to include offshoot paths to marked historical sites. Starting in Slovenia's Julian Alps, within the spectacular [Triglav National Park](#), the main trail passes the mountain town of Bovec and the [Ravelnik](#), an outdoor museum of trenches and tunnels, before spilling through the Soca Valley, where more than 200 World War I monuments stand. There, the tiny town of Kobarid is home to the [Walk of Peace Visitor Center](#), a starting point for a self-guided history tour of the area.



The Walk of Peace trail follows the former frontline of World War I's Isonzo Front, connecting charming Slovenian towns and historical monuments. Credit...via Mitja Sodja/TIC Kanal

The route then follows the Slovenia-Italy border and the Soca River into the hilly wine country of Slovenia's Brda region. Next, a segment takes you through the Kras region, where thousands of limestone caves — many once used as hide-outs by troops — dot the plateau. The route finally reaches the Italian coast at the resort town Trieste. Walking an average of 10 miles a day makes this a 30-day expedition. Along the way, family-run homestays and apartment rentals offer a place to stay at the end of most of the trail's stages.

*The Walk of Peace website has a [map](#) that you can customize according to interest points and trail difficulty. The foundation can help arrange a private guide or the outfitter [Visit Good Place](#) offers a 13-day tour (from \$2,640 for a guide, lodging, meals and luggage transfers).*

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