

HIKING TRAILS

SLOW TRAVEL EUROPE

HIKING TRAILS

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL LONG-DISTANCE HIKES
IN 18 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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FOREWORD

The magic of long-distance hiking

Ten years ago, I found myself in Nepal with an old 80-litre backpack. It was hot, it was raining, and I was alone. I was also completely lost. With 44 pounds (20 kilos) on my back and no real plan, I set off on a 125-mile (200 km) trek through the Annapurna Mountains. Along the way, I met other hikers and started walking with them, gradually shedding more of my gear at each guesthouse we stayed in. Most of it, unsurprisingly, was unnecessary. After days of blisters, some hard lessons, and a few tears, I reached the end of the trail, with one thing abundantly clear. I had fallen in love with long-distance hiking.

What I didn't realise then was that you don't need to travel far to find great trails. They're often closer than you think, and as varied as Europe itself. Bit by bit, I began exploring what lay just beyond my doorstep. I walked from coast to coast and across mountain ranges, climbed to huts at 10,000 feet (3000 m), followed fjords

and pilgrim paths, and passed through forests, villages, and valleys I'd never heard of. I slept in tents, mountain shelters, hostels, hotels – and now and then, in the homes of strangers. Some trails took three days; the toughest lasted forty. Most fell somewhere in between. Whether it was a wide gravel track or a narrow ridge, Europe's trails never failed to deliver.

With every journey, I was struck by how much the landscapes and cultures changed, and yet how naturally they seemed to blend into one another. Borders might be marked by a stone here or an old barbed wire fence there, but more often than not, there's nothing at all. Europe feels connected. It feels whole. And to me, that's how it should be. Today, this network of trails still links people, regions, and countries, just as it did centuries ago when merchants used them to carry their wares.

This book brings together 2,175 miles (3500 km) of walking routes across 18 countries in Europe. I've walked them all, sometimes solo, often with my friend Jochem, a photographer. One trail, through Poland's Beskid Mountains, is described by my friend and fellow solo hiker, Shanna.

TRAVEL SLOW, THEN A LITTLE SLOWER

Eat, hike, sleep: that's the hiker's mantra. For days, weeks, sometimes even months, that rhythm takes over. How do I get from A to B? Do I have enough food and water? One last glance at the map or GPX track, and off you go. Life becomes simple again. You spend your days outdoors, moving constantly. The rush of everyday life fades – no constant messages, no endless scrolling – and you return to something quieter. It sounds idyllic, and often it is. But make no mistake: hiking can be tough. It's physically demanding, and your body will complain as you climb, descend, and carry your pack for hours on end.

But it's the mental side that's often harder. You can get lonely, homesick, or stuck in your own head. Those moments test you, and you might even consider giving up. But if you keep going,

something changes. You get stronger. That's the magic of long-distance hiking. The pain fades. The memories, the friendships, the sense of achievement – those are what stay with you. And chances are, you'll want more. There's something about the trail that just gets under your skin.

TRAIL MAGIC

If there's one thing you can always count on, it's trail magic (an idea that comes from the US, but that's just as alive in Europe). It's those unexpected moments that lift your spirits right when you need it most. Maybe it's something small, like a stranger handing you a cold drink after a long, grueling day. Or something bigger, like the time someone offered me a place to sleep when I found the mountain hut closed. These moments give you a boost. They help you through the toughest stretches and remind you that even on the most remote trails, you're never truly alone.

I hope this book inspires you to set out on a long-distance hike, whether it's your first or one of many. However far you go, you'll discover Europe at its most beautiful on foot, one step at a time.

Happy trails!

Follow our adventures on Instagram @_hiking_trails and find all the trails from this book, including GPX files, on hiking-trails.com.







01 NORWAY



LOFOTEN CROSSING

Trekking above the Arctic Circle

The Long Crossing of the Lofoten Islands is the only unofficial hiking trail in this book. Created by a couple of keen hikers, it links the best routes of the Lofoten (pronounced Loff-ooten) Islands into a true thru-hike from west to east. Crossing the archipelago's four largest islands, all north of the Arctic Circle, the route takes you through rugged, remote terrain. At times, you'll need to hop on a ferry to reach the next island, sailing through the fjords of northern Norway.

99 MILES (160 KM) | 8 STAGES | STRENUOUS | 21,900 FEET (6680 M)†



The Lofoten Islands stretch for around 110 miles (180 km) north of the Arctic Circle in the Norwegian Sea. The landscape is dramatic – steep peaks rising straight from the sea, deep fjords, white-sand beaches, green valleys and old fishing villages. The four main islands are Austvågøya, Vestvågøya, Flakstadøya and Moskenesøya, and they're surrounded by dozens of smaller ones. Lofoten has a rich fishing heritage dating back to Viking times. Cod is still dried on wooden racks here, and traditional fishing remains a vital part of local life.





Hiking in these parts feels a world away from the well-marked trails of the Alps. The paths are often rocky and unmarked. Every now and then a red dot of paint offers some reassurance. Navigation is mostly digital, using GPX routes and hiking apps. Thanks to Norway's *allemandsretten*, the right to roam, wild camping is allowed, meaning you can wake up in some of the most beautiful places imaginable.

I decide to walk the trail with a few friends and after some planning, the four of us head north to Lofoten. We're camping, and shops are few and far between, so packing takes some thought. We carry freeze-dried meals for breakfast and dinner, plus snacks and fruit to get us through the first stretch. Rain gear sits on top: the weather up here can get pretty rough.



We travel by boat from the coastal town of Bodø, passing small islands scattered across the Vestfjorden. The ferry drops us in Svolvær, the gateway to Austvågøya, the largest and easternmost island of the archipelago, where a taxi takes us to the Matmora trailhead, where we'll begin hiking the next morning.

From sea level, we climb straight into the forest. With a full pack of food, water and camping gear, the adjustment is tough – mine weighs well over 22 pounds (10 kilos). Step by step, we rise above the tree line. The sea slowly comes into view, with mountain peaks all around. Matmora, our first summit, looms ahead. The trail winds along the mountainside and over boulders. It's a promising start.

Weather in Lofoten can change quickly, and we get a taste of it straight away. As the locals say, you get four seasons in a day. One moment it's sunny, the next we're walking through rain and hail, then sun again. We find shelter, change into dry clothes and warm up with some hot pasta bolognese in the tent. After a full day on the move, it tastes amazing.

The next morning the sun is back, and we press on through the mountains. The path hugs a steep ridge as we pass Svolvær, then climbs sharply again. A large steel pipe runs alongside the trail, carrying fresh water from a lake above. In the steepest sections, ropes offer extra grip – weathered but helpful. At the top we reach a small mountain hut, basic but welcoming, with just a bunk bed and a table. It's already taken, so we carry on a little further and put our tents up nearby.

The weather turns again the following day. We've planned a tight itinerary, but the rain makes the trail too dangerous to continue. We cover only a few miles before stopping in Leknes and booking an Airbnb. The delay means we'll have to cover 25 miles (40 km) the next day to stay on track.





Moments like this are a good reminder that it's always wise to build a buffer day or two into your itineraries. We learned our lesson the hard way.

The next stretch winds along fjords until we reach the village of Nusfjord, one of Norway's oldest fishing villages, with traditional red and yellow wooden houses on stilts. Fishing, especially for cod, is still an active industry here. Tourism also plays a growing role, and you can even stay in a typical fisherman's cabin. After more than ten hours (!), we reach Fredvang Bridge, exhausted but exhilarated. This sleek white structure is surrounded by the soaring mountains of Lofoten, and we're treated to a spectacular red and orange sunset. The sight lifts our spirits. It's nearly midnight by the time we set up camp and heat up some food, but the light lingers. In summer, it never gets fully dark.





After a deep sleep, we continue towards Kvalvika Beach, one of the highlights of the trip and of the whole archipelago. It looks almost tropical, with turquoise water and white sand, though the air is crisp and the setting framed by fjords and sharp ridges. It's a bit busier here, popular with tourists. From the beach, the trail climbs again, and we cross another pass with wide views across the coastline. The scenery never gets old.

On day six, we catch a ferry to the last island, Moskenesøya, and ask the captain to drop us off in Forsfjorden Bay. Even the boat ride through the fjords is an experience in itself, and we prepare for the day ahead. Today we're climbing Hermannsdalstinden, the highest peak in Lofoten. Since we plan on returning the same way, we leave our heavy packs at the bottom and begin the steep, technical climb. Ropes and chains help in the trickier parts, and eventually we reach the summit at over 3,200 feet (1000 m). The 360-degree view is astonishing: fjords, peaks, villages and sea stretching in every direction. I even manage a quick power nap at the top, soaking in the silence.

Our final two days take us to the western edge of the crossing, Stokkvika. We first stop in Moskenes, where we finally get to shower at a campsite. It feels brilliant to wash off the grime. That evening, we reward ourselves with fish burgers at the café, a huge upgrade after days of freeze-dried food.

On the final day, we cross one last mountain pass, descend one final slope and follow the trail as it hugs the cliffs above the sea. We pitch our tent for the last night in this wild Norwegian landscape. Boiling water for one more meal, we opt for cowboy camping: sleeping under the open sky, no tent, just a mat and sleeping bag. There's something incredibly liberating about it. The sunset is glorious, and a quiet satisfaction creeps over us as we watch the light fade and say goodbye to the trail.

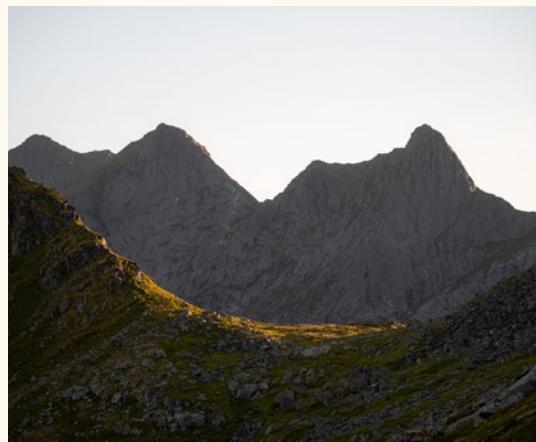
01 NORWAY

LOFOTEN CROSSING



Know before you go

The Long Crossing of the Lofoten Islands isn't an official trail but a tough route linking several hiking paths. It crosses steep ridge lines and rugged alpine terrain. Attempt it only if you're an experienced mountain hiker with confidence in exposed and remote terrain.



PRACTICAL INFO

Country: Norway

Start and end point: Matmora to Stokkvika

Distance: 99 miles (160 km)

Duration: 7-11 days

Difficulty: Strenuous

Best time to go: June to September

Terrain: Mountains, coast, fjords

Elevation gain: 21,900 feet (6680 m)

Our suggested stages

- Matmora trailhead to Botnvated | 12 miles (20 km)
- Botnvated to Olderfjorden | 15 miles (25 km)
- Olderfjorden to Kringbotsnavet | 14 miles (22 km)
- Kringbotsnavet to Leknes | 6 miles (10 km)
- Leknes to Fredvang camp | 25 miles (40 km)
- Fredvang camp to Fageråvatnet | 11 miles (18 km)
- Fageråvatnet to Moskenes | 14 miles (23 km)
- Moskenes to Stokkvika | 11 miles (18 km)

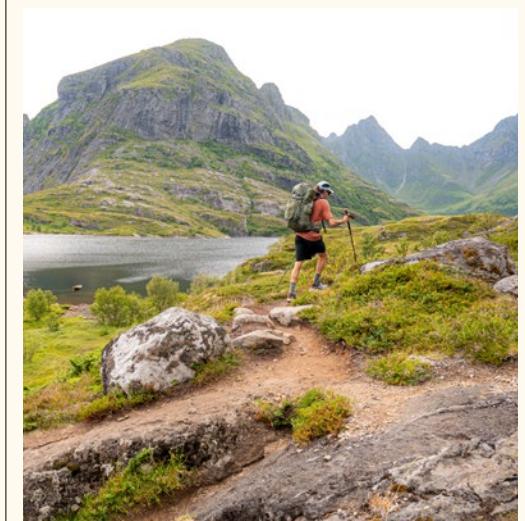
Wild camping is allowed here, so you can walk as much or as little as you like each day. There's no need to stick to a set schedule, so let the weather and your own pace decide the distance. After reaching the endpoint at Stokkvika, just follow the trail back a short way to return to civilisation.

Highlights

- Climbing Hermannsdalstinden, Lofoten's highest peak
- Wandering along the golden sands of Kvalvika Beach
- Eating *kanelboller*, Norwegian cinnamon buns
- Taking the ferry across the fjords to Fjordfjorden

Sleep and shelter

Norway's *allemandsretten* (right to roam) allows you to wild camp almost anywhere. Take full advantage of good weather days, and don't hesitate to slow down when conditions turn. The terrain can become slippery and hazardous in rain.



MORE MULTI-DAY HIKES IN NORWAY

Jotunheimen Traverse | 58 miles (94 km)

Walk along ridges and valleys in Jotunheimen National Park. Sleep in a tent with fjord views or stay in a mountain hut.

Finnskogleden Trail | 150 miles (240 km)

Follow the quiet trails of Finnish immigrants from the 1600s along the Sweden-Norway border. Remote, peaceful, and steeped in history.

St. Olavsleden | 260 miles (580 km)

Often called "the Camino of the North," this pilgrimage trail spans from Sweden's Baltic Sea coast to Norway, ending in Tromsø. Walk in the footsteps of King Olav Haraldsson.



02 SCOTLAND



WEST HIGHLAND WAY

Lochside walking in the Scottish Highlands

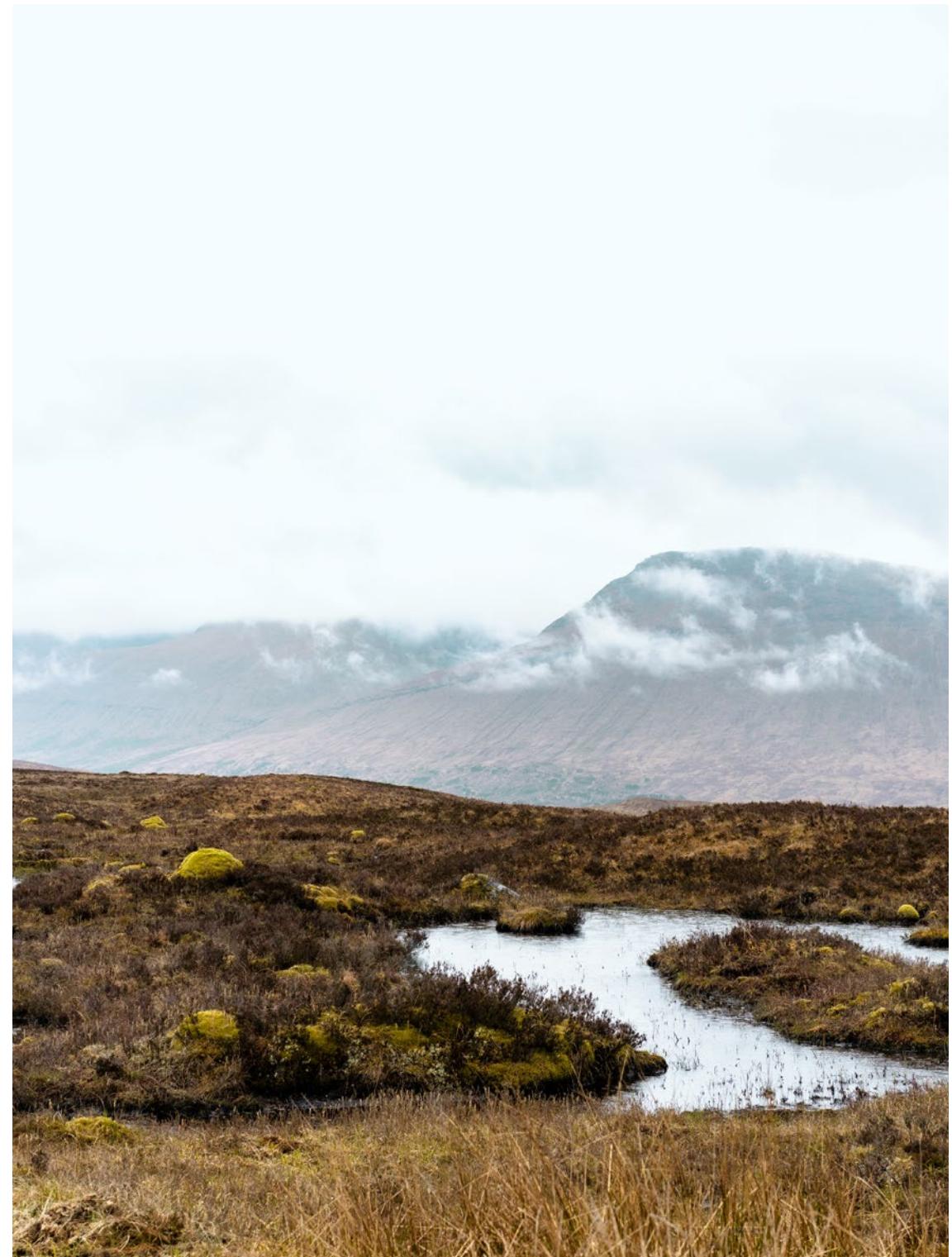
The West Highland Way is one of Europe's most popular long-distance walks, and for good reason. This five to seven-day trail weaves through glens, past lochs, and through a dramatic Highland landscape, offering something for beginners and seasoned hikers alike.

Along the way, you'll tackle the Devil's Staircase, wild camp in some of the most breathtaking spots (or opt for a cosy local hotel), and often find yourself swapping stories with fellow walkers and locals over a pint in a pub.

96 MILES (154 KM) | 7 STAGES | MODERATE | 9,842 FEET (3000 M)†



When I told some friends I was planning to walk the West Highland Way, they jumped at the opportunity to join me. Surprisingly, they wanted to go all in, wild camping included. It was their first long-distance hike, but I must've painted an appealing picture. We start in Milngavie, just a short train ride from Glasgow, at the official starting point (marked by a stone pillar), and after stocking up at the supermarket, we take a quick photo and set off.





Heavily loaded, we make our way through the village and out into the countryside. Along the path, honesty boxes with drinks and snacks (which you pay for by leaving money in a postbox) tempt us. Maybe we didn't need to carry quite so much after all? The trail takes us past a local whisky distillery, and when the rain starts, we take shelter at the Beech Tree Inn, the first of many welcoming pubs we'll visit along the way.

Finding a spot to pitch our tents on the first night takes a bit of trial and error. In Scotland, wild camping is generally allowed – just not on farmland, near houses or roads, or in protected nature reserves. Eventually, we settle on a quiet spot in the woods, heat up some freeze-dried meals, and crawl into our sleeping bags.

The next day, we tackle a steep climb up Conic Hill. It's a brilliant place to camp, if you can manage the 19-mile (almost 30 km) trek to get there.

The landscape feels quintessentially Scottish: barren hills, wandering sheep, a lone leafless tree. From the summit, we gaze down over Loch Lomond, nearly 700 feet (200 m) deep, carved by glaciers during the last ice age. After descending, we follow the lake's eastern shore, take a dip in its icy waters, then camp near the hostel in Rowardennan, where we shower and grab a beer from the Loch Lomond Brewery.

Day three brings the toughest stretch: a long, technical path along the loch through sparse, misty forest. It's pouring and the rocks are slippery underfoot. We're constantly climbing up and down, making slow progress. It's hard going, but it's beautiful. We decide to stop, like many others, at the Inversnaid Hotel, and it's the perfect mid-hike pick-me-up. It gives us the boost we need, and before long, with Loch Lomond behind us, we reach Beinglas Campsite where we reward ourselves with a well-earned pint and toast to surviving the long day.

