

Best foot FORWARD

From a light stroll to somewhat tougher trekking, exploring on foot is no doubt the best way to see and experience more of a destination. Here we choose just a few of the many available in the Audley programme.



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The Argentinian Wetlands

The Esteros del Ibera wetlands of north-east Argentina receive little coverage but add a fascinating facet to a trip to this diverse country. For a long time this immense area of swamps, lakes and streams was regarded as Argentina's least known and frequented area, and also its wildest - and this in a country renowned for remote Patagonia. Ideal for wildlife lovers, one of the nearby estancias makes a perfect base from which to explore, and they can organise walks along the myriad trails, as well as biking and canoeing. Walking is ideal for the intimate observation of the wildlife, which includes the world's largest rodent, the capybara, the caiman and over 350 species of bird.

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Taman Negara National Park, Malaysia

Taman Negara National Park, just a few hours' drive north of Kuala Lumpur, has a wealth of trails best explored with one of the excellent guides. A favourite is the walk to the top of Tersik Hill where there are stunning views of the rainforest and, on clear days, across to peninsular Malaysia's highest point, Mount Tahan. For an 'up-close' perspective you can return via one of the 450 metre long aerial walkways high up in the rainforest canopy, a humbling experience. Other walking options in the park include hikes to caves and the chance to encounter nomadic Batek tribes, while night walks reveal the nocturnal fauna including the tiny mouse deer.

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Stanley's Camp, Botswana

In the eastern parts of the Okavango Delta the small but beautiful Stanley's Camp offers walking safaris with a difference. You are accompanied not only by a guide and scout but by three orphaned elephants. Before setting off into the bush you are introduced to the three and their history. Walking alongside the elephants, Thembi, Jabu and Marula, is a fascinating experience, especially as they have a penchant for resting their trunks on your head and knocking off your hat.

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Kiso Valley Nakasendo walk, Japan

During the Edo period the Nakasendo Highway was Japan's most important route, linking Kyoto with Tokyo on a winding route through heavily wooded mountains. As more direct routes evolved a part of this ancient way, the scenic Kiso Valley, fell into disuse. In recent times the beautiful traditional architecture of the ancient post-towns along the route has been restored and an excellent, gentle hiking route established linking the picturesque towns of Magome and Tsumago. The route is well signed and winds through delightful rural scenery, offering romantic views of the distant mountains.

Zoe Woods

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Cradle Mountain, Tasmania, Australia

There are many beautiful walks around Cradle Mountain of varying lengths and levels of difficulty, each with its own unique attractions. One of the best circuits is undoubtedly Dove Lake. This rambling six kilometre walk around the stunning lake, in two leisurely hours takes you beneath the towering spires of Cradle Mountain and through native woodland. Enjoy the wildlife and scenery and keep your eyes peeled for the resident echidnas, wallabys and wombats amongst the ancient endemic Pencil pines. This moderate walk follows a rugged path involving one short hill and is a great taste of what this area has to offer.

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Fugitives Trail, South Africa

Drawing on the theme of Cate's piece regarding the unexplored aspects of South Africa's KwaZulu Natal in South Africa (see pages 14/15), Fugitives Trail is a more intimate and involved way to get to grips with the colonial history of the province. Starting at Isandlwana, in the company of your Zulu guide, you walk down the escape route used by soldiers fleeing the carnage of the battle, desperately trying to get back across the Buffalo River and the British colony of Natal. Clusters of stone cairns mark the site of where desperate rearguard actions were fought, before, on the far side of the Fugitive's Drift over the river, you come to the graves of Lts. Coghill and Melville who died trying to prevent the Queen's Colour from falling into enemy hands, thus earning themselves the first posthumous Victoria Crosses.

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Kerala, India

The rolling hills and tea plantations of Munnar provide some of the highest vistas in southern India and are ideally suited to walking and trekking. Trekking options are available at all levels and lasting from two to five days, plus two centre treks which incorporate the Periyar region to the south of Munnar. Your starting point for a two-day trek is around 18 kilometres from Munnar at an altitude of 1,500 metres. You gradually climb to a height of over 2,500 metres passing through protected forests and reserves which are home to wild elephants, sambar, sloth bear and the endangered nilgiri tahr. You overnight in high quality tents and warm sleeping bags are provided as temperatures fall in the night.

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