

HIKING FOR BEGINNERS



CHOOSING A HIKING TRAIL

Hiking should always be enjoyable and match your skill level. So, pick a well-maintained trail that is clearly marked and manageable for where

your skill level is now, not where you think you should be. You don't have to be a marathon runner or a serious athlete to start hiking, but if you pick a trail that is way above your pay grade, you won't enjoy it and might never hike again.

Before you start your search for the perfect hike, ask yourself beforehand... How far should you go? How much elevation is too much? 300 metres might not sound like a lot, but in terms of hiking for beginners, 300 metres could prove to be pretty challenging. Start small and as you build confidence, work your way up.



Here are a few things to consider:

- **Distance:** Think about how many kilometres and hours you're comfortable hiking. An average walking pace is about 5 km/ph, but your hiking pace may be slower than that depending on terrain, elevation gain and how much weight you're carrying on your back.
- **How much time you have:** Do you have a couple hours or a full day? The amount of time you have can determine where you go. Don't forget to factor in how long it takes to get to and from the trailhead (the point at which the trail begins).
- **Time of year and weather:** Winter and autumn months the sun sets earlier, plan accordingly so you're not caught out after dark unexpectedly. Always check the weather forecast before heading out so you can dress and pack appropriately.
- **Elevation gain:** The amount of elevation gain on a hike is one factor that determines the difficulty. With a little experience, you'll come to know how much elevation gain you can comfortably handle and what is too much. For a point of reference, if a trail gains 300 metres in 1.6km (1,000 feet in one mile), that is considered quite steep. Also, a general recommendation is that for every 300 metres (1,000 feet) of elevation gain, add one hour to your trip.
- **Logistics:** Certain hikes require a bit more planning. For instance, if you end up doing a hike that starts and finishes at different places, you'll need to shuttle cars to your start and end points.
- **Your fitness level:** Honestly assess what kind of shape you're in. You want to have an enjoyable time out there rather than suffering through a long, strenuous hike that you're not prepared for. If you're not in the shape of your life, don't be dismayed: There are hikes for everyone.

Easy ways to find a trail that will meet your needs:

- **Word of mouth** – If you have friends who like to hike, ask them to suggest some locations for you.
- **Talk to locals** – Contact local hiking groups. Google/Facebook – search or contact trail managers in your area.
- **Websites and Apps** – These are great resources because you can get all the stats you need such as trail difficulty, distance, elevation gain, directions, water sources, trail features and whether dogs are allowed. These often display recent trip reports that may give you a sense for what current trail conditions are like. The "AllTrails" app and website is a great place to start.

SOLO OR NOT



As a beginner hiker, having a few friends to get outside with is a great way to enjoy yourself and get used to hiking without having to go it alone. Don't worry if you don't have anyone to hit the trail with just yet. Recruit your friends and family with whom you'll be able to share all your hiking 101 knowledge with so they have a great first-time experience as well. Go on an organised hike or join a hiking club.

If you're new to hiking, we recommend finding a companion to keep you company. That person will also be there to lend a hand if you happen to get

hurt. If going alone really is your only option, then start out with short trips to popular hiking destinations and make sure someone always knows where you're going and how long you plan to be gone.

SOLO – Experiencing the outdoors by yourself can give you a sense of freedom and adventure that are hard to find elsewhere. But it can also be intimidating and lonely at times. Here are a few hard and fast rules for staying safe on



a Solo hike:

- Always stick to a well-marked trail.
- Check the weather and trail reports before you go.
- Tell someone where you are going, when you leave, and when you'll be back.
- Know your limits and trust your instincts.
- Be prepared. Always bring the Ten Essentials, listed further down (give or take a few).

HIKING WITH KIDS – Sharing the wonder and beauty of the outdoors with children is a special experience. Kids of almost any age can go hiking, from infants in baby carriers to grade-schoolers who hike on their own two feet.

Tips:

Keep kids dry, warm and fed.

Choose a short hike and stop often to look at plants, rocks, animals, etc.



HIKING WITH DOGS – If you have a four-legged friend that you're comfortable hiking with, the first step is to find out if dogs are allowed where you're going. Most nature reserves, for example, do not allow even a leashed dog to share the trail. Leashes are mandatory almost everywhere though.

Tips:

Have your dog carry its own food and water in a dog pack.

Stop often for snacks and water.

Always bring poop bags. Also, while you're hiking, it's poor form to leave a poop bag on the side of the trail for later pickup.

TEN ESSENTIALS

Backpack – A typical day hiking pack ranges from 20-35 liters. This is enough to hold your extra layers and all of the other day hiking essentials.

Layered Clothing – Start with a sweat-wicking base layer that's breathable and regulates body temperature. Then a fleece or insulated jacket and lastly a lightweight raincoat that you can stuff in your pack.

Footwear – Choose a pair of sturdy hiking boots.

Sun Protection – At least UPF 30 and won't come off when you sweat. Sun glasses and brimmed hat.

Navigation Tools – Download a few on your phone and bring a paper map so you don't have to rely solely on battery-operated gear.

Water & Snacks – In any weather, staying well hydrated can help you avoid dehydration or even altitude sickness. Nutritional snacks that are packed with nutrients are best.

Emergency Kit – While it's unlikely that you will have an emergency, things like blisters, cramps, and minor cuts can happen.

Flashlight – Headlamp is best.

Multi-tool – and mini repair kit

Trekking Poles – If you're a beginner hiker or you're tackling steeper, more challenging terrain, trekking poles can be extremely helpful.

TRAIL ETIQUETTE

Whether you've been hiking for years or you're gearing up for your first trek, it's valuable to know some basic trail etiquette. Following these rules of the trail can help everyone get along:

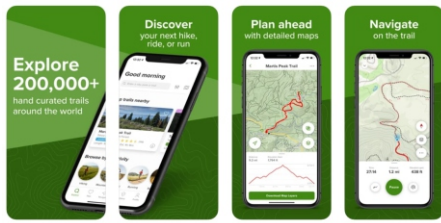
Hikers vs. Hikers – Hikers going uphill have the right of way. You may see uphill hikers let others come downhill while they take a breather, but remember that's the uphill hiker's decision.

Hikers vs. Bikers – Mountain bikers are generally expected to yield to hikers. However, because mountain bikers are usually moving faster than hikers, it can be easier for hikers to step aside and yield the right of way.

Hikers vs. Horses – Horses get the right of way. If you're sharing the trail with equestrians, give them a wide berth when you're passing each other and don't make abrupt movements. It's generally recommended to step off the trail to the downhill side while yielding to a horse.



HOW TO NAVIGATE ON THE TRAIL



You should always carry some sort of trail map on your hikes and know how to read it. This is a classic skill to learn in your hiking for beginner's journey. Improving your trail navigation skills will boost your confidence and keep you safe, so take some time to familiarize yourself with a map. And be sure to spend a little time reading about the trail ahead of time, including any recent trip reports logged by fellow hikers.



If it's a short 5km hike, downloading a trail map to your phone should be good. You can use an app like AllTrails or a more advanced GPS app like Gaia to see your whereabouts. Just make sure you download the map for offline use if you will be out of cell service.

SOME BASIC RULES OF THE TRAIL

“Leave no Trace” – Having an awareness of yourself and your impact while you're outside is basic hiking 101 and key to having a good experience as a beginner hiker. While most of us don't intend to harm our natural surroundings, we may not know how to preserve them. First, learn the seven principles of Leave No Trace, a set of guidelines that apply not only to hikers, but outdoor enthusiasts of all kinds. These ethics ensure the natural places you enjoy visiting will stay that way for years to come.

1. Plan ahead and prepare.
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
3. Dispose of waste properly.
4. Leave what you find.
5. Minimize campfire impacts.
6. Respect wildlife.
7. Be considerate of other visitors.

Going to the Bathroom – If you just have to pee, simply find a place that's well away from the trail and at least about 70 steps from water sources. Women hikers who prefer not to “shake dry”, place used toilet paper into a zip lock bag and take it away with you.

Most day hikers take care of their other business before they head out. But if the urge strikes make sure you go off the trail and at least 70 steps from water. Then, dig a hole about 10cm wide and 15–20cm deep to bury your poop. A small garden spade or camp trowel can help with the digging. Experienced hikers might wipe with natural objects, such as large leaves (make sure they're not poisonous), smooth stones and even snowballs, but you can also use toilet paper and bury it in the hole.

After you're done going to the bathroom, use some hand sanitizer to “wash” your hands.



PERSONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

First Aid – You don't need to be a medical pro to take a hike, but it's wise to know some basic first aid. Always carry a first-aid kit and know how to use it. The farther afield you go, the more important it can be to have medical training.

Safety – Always leave a detailed itinerary with a friend or family member. Leaving a note with your route plans inside your vehicle is a good way to inform search-and-rescue folks of your plan if they come looking for you (just don't leave the note in plain view for trailhead thieves to see).

If you're travelling solo or to very remote locations, you might consider carrying a personal locator beacon (PLB) that allows you to send an SOS if something serious happens.

Fitness and Breathing – Another thing that used to bother me as a beginner hiker was I'd always be so out of breath on the trail. I felt embarrassed, and it prevented me from hiking with people who I knew were in better shape than me. Even now, if I let my routine slip, I still get out of breath very easily. I've learned that it's nothing to be ashamed of, and for many people, it's completely normal. With that said, if you find it uncomfortable and want to get in control of that heavy breathing, you can learn some simple exercises and steps you can take to improve your lung capacity. But remember, simply being out on the trail will help you get in shape.

Dealing with Aches and Pains – Hiking is hard work, and it can leave your body and joints tired and achy. Beginner or not, if you have weak knees or sensitive feet, there are proactive steps you can take to take to prevent hiking from taking a big toll on your body.