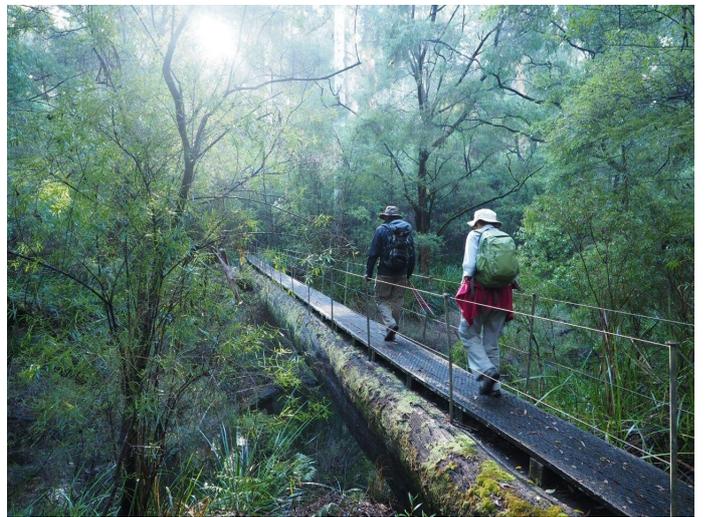


The **Inspiration Outdoors** Guide to **(almost)** everything you need to know about bushwalking in Australia

Also known as the IOGT(a)EYNTKABIA for short.



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About This Guide

Hello! That was the first of the about 600 exclamation marks you will find in this document. Why so many exclamation marks? Because it is exciting stuff! (that's 2 for those counting).

This guide is meant for the casual bushwalker. If you are planning on walking from Cairns to Geraldton, we highly recommend you seek additional advice... and maybe a good psychiatrist.

Now we have done a lot of bushwalking here at IO, but we don't know everything and as much as it pains us to say, there are people out there who are just plain smarter than us. If you are one of these people (smarty pants!), we would love your feedback so we can improve this document. You can email us at walk@inspirationoutdoors.com.au with your suggestions.

We hope you enjoy this guide and get something out of it.

Many thanks,

From the Team at Inspiration Outdoors (June 2017)

Bushwalking Safety Tips

Chances are if you're reading this, I bet you have been walking for a long time! For about 1 million years now we humans (I assume not many cats read our hiking blog) have been getting around thanks to bipedal power. Walking is not only a natural and safe thing to do, but thankfully a very enjoyable activity as well.

Now, bushwalking is not base jumping, we're unlikely to suffer really serious injuries. However, that doesn't mean there aren't risk involved. We hikers are generally not content to be walking around hospital car parks... "Hi Dr Hoffman, yes just going for a hike around the ER building again!"

No, hikers generally seek out experiences in nature away from Dr Hoffman and his team. The truth is that relatively minor injuries or sicknesses can have a whole range of consequences when we are out in the bush away from definitive care. Hopefully that didn't scare you into a lifetime of couch potatoing (sure, potatoes can be a verb) because there are some really simple things you can do to ensure that your next hiking adventure is not only safe, but enjoyable.

Tip 1. Know thyself and know thy trail

I imagine that is how Confucius would have said it... But ancient Chinese philosophers aside, this is an important rule for hiking. You have to know what your body is capable of, and have a good idea of what's in store for you on the trail.

Remember, walking the dog on a footpath is not the same as walking the Overland Track. Knees that felt fine on asphalt can go dicky walking over rocks. Hips that could make "Rover" heal may not get you to the end of the Cape to Cape.

We find that it is not people's fitness that lets them down, rather they are just not prepared for old injuries to flair up.

If you are going to be walking over uneven ground and you haven't done so for a while, take some time to look after old injuries. Stretches, strapping, strength exercises.

Tip 2. Take the essential safety equipment

Nobody likes to look like a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle on the trails, however these are the absolutely non negotiable when it comes to any hike of over 4 hours. If you can't fit these in your pack, you need a bigger pack!

- A map which shows not only the trail, but the surrounding area.

- A first aid kit tailored to the area you are walking. In Australia, we recommend as a start: plenty of gauze, compression bandages (which have lots of different uses) anti histamine as well as your favourite electrolyte.
- Plenty of water. Okay, I know it gets cold in Australia, but for the main part this is a warm and dry continent and you are going to need plenty of water. People lose about a litre a day just from breathing! If it's in the 30's you are going to lose up to a litre each hour. One of those little bottles from the airplane is definitely not enough.
- A mobile phone and a list of contact numbers. Seriously, why wouldn't you take a mobile phone? You don't have to turn it on. Most phones these days can double for a torch as well.
- A pen. Mightier, lighter and way more useful than a sword when bushwalking.

Tip 3. Key, Communication is

That was my poor attempt at irony not a Yoda impersonation. Communication is key doesn't mean you need to rush out to grab a satellite phone. Communication starts before you start walking. Let someone know where you are going and when you intend to return. Also, it's not good enough to carry a mobile phone. You need to know who to call! When out on the trail, if you are going off the trail to un-drink, let someone know.

****BONUS BUSHWALKING SAFETY TIP****

If you are going off track to go to the loo, leave your backpack on the track. It not only provides a point of reference for a rescuer if you get lost, but it will also announce to other walkers coming up the trail that someone may need a bit of privacy!

Tip 4. Keep an eye out on the sky

This goes hand in hand with the first point. Some trails are fine in any weather and some can be treacherous! Consider shade, slipperiness, as well as cliff tops (wind), river crossings (swell) and visibility (fog). Remember the higher up you are, the quicker the weather can change. Unless you live in Melbourne, in which case the weather seems to change every 7 minutes.

Tip 5. Don't rush

Whether you're planning the walk, packing your bag, or coming down the mountain. Brains work much better when they are relaxed and working to a plan.

All of this stuff is easy! And everyone loves a list... lists give us confidence because we can tick them off and move on. Hopefully our Bushwalking Safety Tips give you the confidence to get out there and enjoy the wonderful trails that Australia has to offer.

How To Get Motivated To Exercise

Spending too much time on the couch with the ice cream tub? Finding it hard to get motivated to stay in shape? You are not alone! Winter provides us with a convenient excuse to stay warm inside watching Masterchef and summer is too bloody hot!

Here are a couple of tips to help motivate you to get the blood pumping and the heart thumping.

Tip 1. Reward yourself

...But not with food!!! Having a positive reward for doing something hard is a great couch crowbar. A massage, a bunch of flowers, an hour reading a book. It doesn't have to be big but the reward should be connected to the work. No cheating!

Tip 2. Join a group

There is a great Chinese proverb that goes something like, "if you want to finish books, you should borrow them". Subtle (or overt) social pressure is a great motivator when it comes to exercise as no one wants to let their friends down. There are community centres, casual sports teams, friends, family. Even the dog's longing gaze at the lead hanging in the laundry is a good motivator.

Tip 3. Positive thinking isn't enough

Devotees of positive thinking will tell you to imagine the sun shining on your face as you walk through the streets, or the smell of the neighbours roses in order to get motivated. This might make you feel good but it is really just day dreaming. What you really need is a plan. Book your exercise into the diary. Boom!

Tip 4. Mix up your activities

We are walkers here at Inspiration Outdoors but we are in to everything. Mixing up your exercise activities can make it a lot more fun... and if it is fun you are more likely to be motivated. Walking, swimming, cycling, weights at the gym, a few sets of stairs (our favourite for preparing for a long hike), kayaking, gardening. The list is endless.

Tip 5. Don't focus on weight loss

The benefits of exercise far exceed mere weight management. It is good for every organ in your body including your brain. In fact many people put on weight when they exercise more as they build new muscles (which are much denser and heavier than fat). If you want a measure something as a motivator, go for skin fold or simply measuring your waist line with a \$2 measuring tape.

Tip 6. Put your exercise clothes on early in the day

I do this one all the time. I may not know when I am going to exercise but that dodgy short and sneaker combo is not coming off until I have done a work out. And spend a few dollars on a couple of good exercise outfits. You are more likely to want to put it on if it looks and feels good.

Exercises To Prepare For Bushwalking

One way to make sure you get the most out of your walking holiday is to prepare your body physically. Apart from walking, walking and walking some more, it's also great to do some specific strength and balance exercises. We've already brought you ['the squat' in a previous blog post](#). By now, you've probably mastered that so here are some more great exercises to try at home:

Exercise For improving Balance



If you're going to be walking on uneven ground it'll be much easier, and safer, if you've got good balance and strong stabilising muscles in your feet and ankles.

One of the easiest ways to develop those stabilising muscles is simply to stand on one leg. Start on flat ground, counting to 30 on each leg.

When you've mastered that, it's time to practice on sloped or uneven ground. The next step is to close your eyes while balancing on one leg – see how long you can stay balanced on each leg. Finally, there's nothing like practicing your balancing skills on the edge of a cliff, as Emily is demonstrating here on Mount Bruce in the

Pilbara 😊

Improve your getting up hills muscles: Hip raises

Hip raises are an excellent way to strengthen your 'getting up hill' muscles – particularly your glutes and hamstrings. Start with the basic version below:



Technique:

1. Lie on your back with your arms at your sides and your knees bent with your feet on the floor, about hip width apart.
2. Lift your hips toward the ceiling. Hold for one count, and then lower back down.
3. Repeat the lifts for a minute or so, squeezing your glutes and hamstrings at the top of the range of motion. Be careful not to overarch your spine.

Once you've mastered the basic hip raise, you can make it more difficult (and more effective at building muscle) by doing it with one leg in the air. Raise and lower for 30 seconds on each leg, holding for a count of one at the top of each repetition. Keep an eye on your grounded leg on this one, don't let your knee move out to the side when you're pushing up.



Build up those pegs: Lunges

Lunges can help tone your whole leg. They mainly work your glutes (bum) and your hamstrings and quads in your thighs. Your calves and abs help you keep balanced so they get a bit of a work out too.



Technique:

1. Stand up with your legs together and your arms at your sides.
2. Step about two feet forward with your right leg.
3. Bend both of your knees to lower yourself down into a lunge. Each knee should create a 90-degree angle. Don't extend your right knee any further forward than you toe or you may strain your knee. Push off with your right leg and return to the starting position. Repeat with your left foot stepping forward.

These exercises are a great way to build the muscles you'll need for walking on the uneven surfaces and hills we find everywhere in nature. They're also pretty handy for creating better health in general. So why not pump out a few right now? And then again tomorrow...

The Best Way To Dress For Hiking – Our Tips From Head To Toe

So, you are heading out to the hills an hour away from home in a climate controlled car. You are wearing jeans and a shirt and feeling quite comfortable as the suburbs disappear and the trees get thicker.

You step out of the car and are hit by a wall of cold. The jumper comes out because you don't want to be cold for your 3 hour walk.

10 minutes into the walk, the jumper comes off.

30 minutes later you are wondering if anyone else is on this walk trail because you are seriously considering shedding the jeans!

Getting the right clothing for hiking is not a trivial or vain. It is important to get it right so that you will be comfortable and enjoy the experience... otherwise, what is the point!

Tip 1. Peaked caps for rain, Broad brimmed hats for sun – but....



I wear a hat in the middle of winter. Not for the sun and not for the warmth, but for rain. When the rain comes I put on my hood (either from my jacket or poncho) and without a peaked cap I can't see a thing. The hat gives the hood some shape and allows me to retain a bit of peripheral vision.

If you are getting yourself a broad brimmed hat for sunny conditions (recommended), just remember to try it on when you wearing your back pack. I have made this mistake in the past and been stuck on a 7 day walk from [Albany to Denmark](#) with a hat that rubbed up against my back pack. Sounds trivial, but 6 hours into the second day, the pocket knife came out!

Another option is a legionnaires hat with the flap on the back. Whilst not often found on the cat walks of Milan, the legionnaires hat is good option for protecting your neck from sun burn.

Tip 2. You are probably going to be hotter than you think – take thin layers.

Ever been skiing? Every time I have been skiing, despite the freezing temperatures, I reckon I could have cooked half a dozen crayfish in my ski suit I have been so hot. It is the same with hiking. As soon as you start walking, the jumpers will come off. Chances are, even if you are walking in the snow, you are going to be much hotter than you think, especially so if it is hilly alpine country.

We recommend taking thin layers and not to wear anything that is too hard to take off. Thermals that you wear under your shirt are only for REALLY cold temperatures, as once you start walking you will be boiling with no option but to strip in order to get the blasted thing off!

Thin layers goes for wet weather gear as well. If you are buying a rain jacket, go for something lightweight. If you have to, you can always wear a jumper underneath, but if you go for something too warm, your only option to cool down is to take the rain jacket off and get wet.

Tip 3. Wear lightweight pants that don't require a belt.

Jeans are an absolute no no. They are hot and take forever to dry when wet. We recommend lightweight trousers with zip off legs. They are perfect in almost all conditions as they dry quickly, are not too hot and they protect your legs from scratches and even snake bites (if worn with long socks). If it is cold, put some thermal leggings underneath. If it is hot, zip off the legs.



We get plenty of Kiwi's on our walks and in wet conditions they often wear [Skin](#) leggings with a pair of shorts over the top and gaiters (more about gaiters later). I am also bit of a fan of this ensemble when there are for river crossings or I know it is going to be wet. In the rain, this get-up

And it also feels nice to look like a Kiwi and pretend just for a brief moment that our rugby team is any good.

As for the no belt thing, it may be comfortable when you try on your backpack at home, but chances are the belt and backpack combo will combine into a nice bruise after a few hours. Try to wear pants that don't require a belt if you can. If you must wear a belt, then go for something that is reasonably soft.

Tip 4. Doing the rounds in gaiters and two pairs of socks.



Next time you are in a generic supermarket, head down the garden care aisle and pick up a pair of ankle high cloth lawn mowing gaiters. These little guys are great for keeping sand and stones out of your boots as well as keeping your socks a little cleaner and drier. For \$3 you can't go wrong!

In my opinion, the big heavy canvas gaiters are only really good for muddy conditions. Lightweight pants are generally more than enough protection from spinifex or other scratchy vegetation and will even do you for snake bites if you combine them with long socks.

Two pair of thin socks is another great tip. This can reduce the chances of developing blisters significantly, as the socks wear against each other, rather than the shoe rubbing against you.

What To Buy In A Day Pack

Picture this: you're finally going to dust off those old walking shoes and go for a long nature walk with a friend. You grab your son's old school backpack that's been sitting in the cupboard for years (why is it that kids never actually move *all* the way out). You pack a couple of litres of water, some lunch, a camera. Better put in a rain jacket and some first aid supplies. All set.

Hmm, it's a bit heavy on the shoulders. But you'll get used to it.

By lunch time your shoulders and back are aching and you're walking with your hands under the shoulder straps to get some relief.

By the end of the day you're ready to throw your backpack off a cliff and book in for a neck and shoulder massage on the way home. **"Is this what it's supposed to feel like? Where did I go wrong?"**

Well, first you should have insisted that your son store his stuff in his own house or throw it out – he's 35 after all.

Second, that old backpack that hangs off the shoulders has some vital features missing.

The key to choosing a backpack for day hikes is to carry most of the weight around your hips, a little weight on your chest and a very small amount on your shoulders.

I like to imagine my backpack as an adorable little monkey hugging you from behind (the cuter your daypack is in your imagination, the less you'll want to throw it off a cliff). Here are some features to look for:

A **sturdy waist strap** is a really useful feature. The monkey's legs. Pull the strap in firmly, at about belly button height and just above the top of your hip-bones. Thick waist straps are better than thin ones and some padding around the back and sides of your hips can be a great comfort on a long walk.

The **shoulder straps** are the monkey's arms. Because he's also holding on with his legs, there isn't much pressure on your shoulders at all. The shoulder straps shouldn't pull down over your whole shoulder – often their point of contact is just above the collar bone and there's a small gap above your shoulder.

Sadly (although lucky for you), your monkey was in a terrible nuclear accident and sprouted two more arms. These are **sternum/chest straps**, which you should be able to adjust the height and width of to suit your body type. You want to feel some comfortable backwards pressure across your chest, about midway up your sternum.

Bonus tips when choosing a backpack for day hikes

- When you shop for a daypack, put some weight in it to see how it sits. All bags feel good when they're empty.
- Are there pockets on the sides that fit your water bottles? If you're not sure whether you're a [water bladder](#) or a [water bottle](#) person yet, it might be good to get a pack with side pockets just in case.
- One feature that many people are going for these days is a frame and mesh panel which holds the bag off your back and allows air to flow through the gap. Just be aware that this feature tends to reduce the volume of your pack and pushes your centre of gravity even further backwards.
- Side straps on the pack which pull the bag in when it's not full can be used to make it sit closer to your body. This means you'll have a more comfortable centre of gravity and you won't get as tired.
- Get a backpack with a waterproof cover that can zip out from underneath when the weather turns.

Walking Poles - Should I Use Them?



We get lots of people ask should I use walking poles on a walk? My answer is always yes! BUT, only if you learn how to use them.

Benefits to using walking poles

There are lots of benefits to using walking poles. Not only do they give you more stability and prevent falls, used properly they can reduce the wear and tear on your joints as well as improve your posture (which helps protect your back).

For those who are walking for weight loss/management, walking poles can increase the amount of calories you burn ([source](#)) by as much as 20%! This is because you are using muscles in your arms, chest and upper back rather than just below the belt.



**ENTER
FROM
BELOW**



**THROUGH
THE STRAP**



**AND
DOWN**

When to use walking poles

Almost always. Great uphill, essential down hill, fantastic on the beach and good for river crossings. The only situation where I would not recommend them is when you need to use your hands i.e. going up or down on very rocky terrain or if you have problems with your shoulders.

How to use walking poles

First thing is to get the right grip. It is easy but counter intuitive. Thread your hand through the loop from the bottom, and then grip the pole, over the loop. It might feel a little strange at first, but this is the safest way of holding the poles. The reason it is safer, is because if you need to let go of the pole in a hurry in order to grab onto a hand hold, the pole won't be in your hands way.

See the picture on the left.



Okay, now when you start to walk I recommend to people to imagine you are cross country skiing. You want to feel like you are propelling yourself forwards.

When your left leg is forward, your right pole should be forward and vice versa. Take a look at the picture on the left. Do you see the angle that the poles are on? This is the most important aspect and the thing that most people get wrong. If your poles are vertical, then they are not going to be able to propel you forward. By catching the ground behind your hip, you can push yourself in a forward motion.

It is really easy and you will instantly know when your technique is correct as it will feel much easier.

What Next?

Before you buy a pair of walking poles, you need to consider where you are going to use them and what you want them for. If you are intending to take them on airplanes then there are lots of poles which either collapse or are telescopic. This is great for avoiding excess baggage! If you want walking poles for weight loss/

management then don't be put off by the heavier but better quality poles.

In general, you get what you pay for.

Water Bladders V Bottles

Water is heavy stuff. I have been racking my brain for years to work out a way to dehydrate it!

Alas, the technology seems to evade our bright sparks, but the good news is there are some pretty good ways of transporting this glorious liquid. The three main ways are water bladders, water bottles and uh St Bernards.

Here's our run down on the pros, cons and tips for these options.

Water Bottles

Pros: Know exactly how much water you have left at a glance so you can manage your water. This is really important when walking in hot conditions. Water bottles are less likely to leak and they are easier to fill up than bladders. It is also easier to pour from a water bottle into another container than it is from a bladder. This is important when you need to share water or make cups of tea out on the trail.

Cons: If you don't have pockets on the side of your bag, you have to stop walking to have a drink. I don't know how many times I have come home from a walk with a half full water bottle because I was too lazy to stop for a drink. On the other hand, a drink stop is a glorious thing sometimes and having bottles gives you an excuse to rest and take in your surrounds while you catch your breath.

Bottles can be hard to clean if they have a small mouth opening. You can get a scummy layer on the bottle and often the only way to clean it is with chemicals.

Other things to consider are that bottles don't reduce in size as they empty. They can also break quite easily if you drop them, leaving you in a potentially dangerous situation.

Tips for water bottles: If you're walking on a rocky trail, you're clumsy, or if you're concerned about chemicals from plastic, you might like to try a lightweight stainless steel bottle. Also look for a wide mouth for easy cleaning.

Water Bladders

Pros: Easy access. When you're panting at the top of a sand dune you can just grab at your water tube and start hydrating. It's nice not having to take your bag off or ask someone to help you every time you're thirsty. A bladder is usually easier to fit inside a backpack because it can mould itself into almost any space, or just lay on top. And, as you empty your bladder it will reduce in size. This is great if you're collecting rubbish along the way.

Cons: You can never be certain of how much water you've drunk without stopping to check. Sometimes you can think you've drunk lots but then you get home with 2 litres of water still in your bladder!

The water in the tube can often heats up while you are walking and it is a bit disconcerting to have a mouthful of hot water when you huffing and puffing at the top of a hill. That tube is also an easy place to grow mould because it's so hard to get completely dry between uses. We use a sterilising solution to clean our bladders and tubes but we've never been able to completely avoid mould.

Lastly, a bladder will leak in the end. There's no way of getting around it.

Tips for water bladders: Make sure you buy a bladder which you can get your whole hand into. It makes it so much easier to clean. And dry it between uses to avoid mould.

St Bernard

Pros: St Bernard's are very cute and they can be used to keep you warm if you get lost.

Cons: Not allowed into national parks. Plus, they slobber.



So what do we use?

Emily won't let me have a St Bernard so we mostly use bladders. I find that I will drink a lot more with a bladder. The brand I use is Source which are reasonably priced at around \$30. I can take the whole top off to get my hand in to clean it out. Usually, the bladder goes in a dry sack as well just to be sure it doesn't leak onto my camera or satellite phone – this is probably over kill, but I really love my camera!

So there you have it, water bottles vs bladders. What do you prefer to use? And why? Let us know in the comments below, we'd love to hear from you.

How To Purchase Hiking Boots

Choosing the correct hiking boot is the most important purchase decision for us walkers. Get it wrong and you will literally regret it every step.

Team Inspiration Outdoors goes through a fair few kilometres each year and we tend to push our gear to the limits. Here is what we have learnt about how to choose hiking boots.

1. Walk to the store

This is a simple but great tip. Your feet will swell up on a long walk, so when you put them on in the shop and they feel fine, will they feel the same after 5 kilometres? The only way to know is to walk to the store so that you have sufficiently swollen feet when trying the boots on for size.

2. Nothing is more important than fit

Buying boots is not like buying a pair of stilettos where you might suffer some comfort for fashion. You have to get the fit right otherwise it can ruin your holiday. Would you rather wear an overly tight pair of \$400 Gortex boots or a \$100 pair of joggers on a 20 kilometre walk? I would take the joggers any day of the week. The way to ensure you get the right fit is to test your prospective boots out vigorously. A proper outdoors shop will have some stairs or ramps for you to put your boots through their paces. In particular walk up and down stairs. Often boots feel good on the flat, but will slip or dig in going up and down stairs.

If you have trouble finding shoes that fit, always err on the too big side. You can always double sock but shrinking the feet requires an awkward trip to the witch doctor!

3. Pay attention to the little things

The way boots are made these days (and all clothing for that matter) is the manufacturers identify what part of the boot will break first, and then they reduce the quality of everything else so that everything breaks at the same time. The manufacturers are assuming that people don't repair items any more, they just buy a new pair/item.

Let me explain.... If a company thinks that the first thing to go on their boot is going to be the sole after let's say 1,000kms of walking, there is no point of having the tongue, lace eyelets, cushioning etc last for 10,000kms. Otherwise you end up with a perfectly good shoe tongue in the tip.

It really pays to look closely at the prospective boot, the stitching, eyelets for the laces, glue on the sole, the material itself.

Ask yourself (or the customer service person) what is going to break on these things first? The answer should always be, I will wear the sole off before anything else breaks. Otherwise, choose another boot.

4. Ankle support or not

I am not really sure why they make low cut walking boots. I always recommend a mid or high cut. You don't have to be scaling mountains or rock hopping on the Larapinta to benefit from some additional ankle support. High cut boots won't necessarily prevent slips and trips but they will certainly mitigate the effects.

One thing that people tend to ignore is you can improve your ankle support (on a mid/high cut) just by ensuring the boot is done up nice and tight at the ankle. In fact this is how I lace up my boots always. Tight at the ankle and looser over the top of the foot.

5. Water proofing

Unless you live in the tropics where the walking season is the dry, you are going to want some level of water proofing for your boots. Some boots have a lot of thin, porous mesh on them which just lets the water in. Why do they do this!?? Go for a boot that has mostly non porous surface. It is never going to prevent water getting in if you are crossing a river, but it will stop the rain from getting in.

The final word on how to choose hiking boots

A good pair of boots should last at least 2,000 kilometres. My first pair of Solomon boots did more than double this and only died when I left them too close to the fire. I still cry about this from time to time (my second pair of Solomon boots lasted less than 500km and were very disappointing).

Really take your time to look at the boot and decide, “are these made to a high quality?” Remember, you will push these boots a lot more than a standard sneaker which you wear around the burbs.

There are some okay quality boots around the \$150 mark but if your budget can’t stretch to this, then I would just go for a good quality jogger instead.

Synthetic V Leather Hiking

Boots! Unless you live in Fremantle (as we do) or Nimbin, you are fairly likely to want to put something on your feet when you go hiking. We have written before about [how to choose hiking boots](#) but this time we thought we would cover the topic of leather v synthetic.

When assessing a boot, the things you want to take into consideration are weight, durability, comfort, price, waterproofing and warmth. Now you can decide for yourself which consideration is most important for you. I know for me, durability and comfort are right up the top but I don’t want to go broke on a pair of boots either!

Consider the Weight:

Leather boots are generally, significantly heavier than synthetics. There are exceptions of course, but my Leather Scarpa’s clock in at a hefty 1.2kgs! This is twice the weight of the usual synthetics. I really feel the weight when we doing our [Cape to Cape tours](#) and I am walking on the sand. It doesn’t tend to affect me as much on the slopes but I could see how it would.

Winner = Synthetic

Which type are more durable:

The synthetics have a long way to go as far I am concerned when it comes to durability. I have gone through 4 pairs of synthetics in 2 years. It is so often the little things which break even on relatively expensive (+\$200) pairs. Leather boots on the other hand are much more long lasting (again, in general).

Winner = Leather

More Comfortable:

There is a bit of misnomer that leather boots are uncomfortable, however nothing could be further from the truth. The problem is that they need to be worn in. For the first 2 weeks in leather boots, it feels like you are wearing two small milk crates on your feet... but after that, they are great. In contrast, the synthetics are very comfortable from day one.

As long as you get the fit right, they can be better than sneakers.

Winner = Synthetic (but only because of the initial comfort)

Which type win on price:

There is a big range of prices now. Traditionally the leather boots were the more expensive options but more and more, we are finding some very top end synthetics out there. That said, the leather boots tend to start at around \$250 where as you can get synthetics for less than \$150 (but how durable are they??)

Winner = Synthetic

Water proofing:

It's all a hoax. Eventually water always finds a way in. I have never had a boot that haven't eventually let water in. We recommend adjusting your expectations on this. Leather boots definitely take longer to dry though but it takes forever for them to dry. If you are doing a multi-day soggy walk, this is definitely an important factor to consider.

No winner

Which type are warmer:

There is no doubt that the leather boots are pretty warm. Remember, this isn't always a positive – in fact, up in [the Kimberley](#), it's a bad thing. I have never really suffered from hot feet but I have certainly got cold feet (not at our wedding thank goodness) on a hike or two. Leather boots win hands down.

Winner = Leather

Overall Winner:

There is no winner. Ultimately it comes down to the factors that are important for you. I spend a lot of time in my boots, so durability and comfort are key and price is last. But you will have your own priorities.

I hope that helps!

Hiking Gaiters

If I say hiking gaiters, do you think of [large reptiles walking through the Florida everglades](#)?

If so, you definitely need to read this guide.

Depending on where you are from, hiking gaiters are either essential gear or bothersome annoyance. It probably doesn't surprise you though, that there are different types and what is important is choosing the right gaiter for the walk. I have done walks before with the wrong gaiters and it is horrible. Enough to turn me off them forever.

Here is what I have learned.

Firstly, what is a hiking gaiter? Why wear them?

Gaiters are garments that wrap around the lower leg. Often, they go over the actual boot and attach into the laces with a hook. Gaiters were originally made for protecting horse back riders leg's against the constant rubbing of stirrups and and other saddle parts but subsequently used by infantrymen in the army.

Interestingly gaiters are part of the standard garb for Anglican Bishops! As Bishops were in charge of large areas, back in the day they were often visiting their congregation on horseback and needed the protection of gaiters. Nowadays the gaiters are purely symbolic.

Hikers use gaiters for a number of reasons.

- prevent cuts and scratches
- stop mud getting on to the pants
- prevent sand from going in to the boots
- stop rain/water from filling up the boots
- protect from snake bites
- to look really cool... maybe not.

Different Types of Hiking Gaiters

In my experience, hiking gaiters come in a few main types.



Nylon, cheap and sweaty

These are reasonably priced, maybe \$30-\$50 for a pair and provide excellent protection. However, unless you are going to be in cold conditions, you will wish you had spent more. The nylon hiking gaiters don't breath at all. Consequently, the hiker will sweat like no one's business.

It really needs to be less than 15 degrees for these to be comfortable. I have used these walking at Lake St Clair in [Tasmania](#) on a cold day and they were great. I have also used them whilst walking the [Bibbulmun Track](#) and they were hot enough for me to cook a couple of crayfish!



Canvas, more expensive but breathable

The canvas gaiters are typically heavier, more expensive but they are much more breathable, meaning you can wear them in a greater range of temperatures. They are still warm, but you won't sweat as much in these in mild conditions. You will pay anywhere from \$70-\$130 for a good quality pair of canvas gaiters, but if you are walking through spinifex in the [Pilbara](#), you will be glad you have them.



Sock protectors

Check out these fashionable items! This style of gaiter barely goes over the ankle, but they are used to stop sand and seeds getting in to your boots/socks. You can pick up the lawn mowing cloth gaiters for just a few dollars at Woolworths or Bunnings. Or you can find some fashionable ones like those pictured for about \$14.

On the Cape to Cape or Great Ocean walk, these types of gaiter are excellent. Every time your back foot passes your front, you will spray a few dozen grains of sand into your socks and these little guys will stop you from being a sandbag. Hurray!

A point about snakes and hiking gaiters

We often have people ask if they should wear gaiters to protect against snake bites. If you are struck by a snake in the Australian bush, you are definitely going to wish you were wearing gaiters. Chances are, the snake was highly venomous and the gaiter will definitely stop the snake from puncturing the skin.

Just bare in mind however, that it is really difficult to be bitten by a snake in Australia unless you are trying to catch it. There is a mis-conception about our snakes. Sure, the venom is often highly toxic but they are very shy creatures and did you know that Australian snakes have tiny fangs. In most cases only 3mm! A pair of light weight pants and some thick socks will provide enough protection in most cases. Also, it has been proven that our snakes will only inject venom in one in ten “defensive bites”.

As I said before, if you are bitten by a snake, you will wish you were wearing hiking gaiters. However, if you follow good snake protocol whilst out hiking, the chances of being bitten by these shy and non-aggressive creatures are virtually zero.

First tip... don't go to Tasmania in winter. Only kidding, [Tasmania is beautiful](#) at any time... but it can get seriously cold in those mountains. Hiking in winter can be glorious on a calm sunny day. We often say, the best hiking weather means that you will be cold when you stop and comfortable when walking. There are some really easy things you can do to prepare for your next winter walk.

The Best Hiking Snacks

The humble hiking snack has to tick a number of boxes to make it into our backpacks.

The best hiking snacks are light weight, low in sugar, un-squishable, ambient, low packaging and let's not forget delicious.

Muesli bars have been the staple for hikers for years, but most of them are so full of sugar they are likely to spontaneously combust in your backpack!

Trail mix is just what the marketing people renamed the “boring bag of mixed nuts” ... and I don't know how many times I have found a half liquid apple in the bottom of my bag.

No! We demand more from our snacks. Here are a few ideas for your next venture out in the bush



Beef Jerky

This one ticks all of the boxes. There are lots of commercially available brands of jerky out there. Some are a little salty for our liking but luckily jerky is really easy to make.

It is best done in a dehydrator, but you can also do it in the oven.

The trick is to use meat with very little fat and cut it nice and thin. Partially freezing the meat makes it much easier to slice. I have always found simply putting dry spices on the raw meat works really well, but the internet has 270,000 marinades for you to experiment with.

Coriander seeds are the key (to general happiness in your life).



Tuna Satchets

Tuna comes in a tin right? Not any more! Tuna packaging technology (TPT for short) has come a long way in recent years. No longer do we have to deal with a potentially life-threatening tin can cut to get your delicious tuna whilst out on the trails. Seriously though, tin cans are a pain when you are hiking. We like our meals to get smaller after we consume them – not just messier. Low in sugar, high in protein, delicious ... perfect.

90% Cocoa Chocolate

Yeah okay, it's got a little sugar in it, but it's not too bad. And it doesn't taste sweet which definitely makes a difference. Ever tried eating just one of those jelly snakes?! I am sure they put some sort of addictive drug in those things. High cocoa chocolate not only has a good amount of fat (yes that's a thing when you are active) but a little bit of caffeine doesn't hurt on the last leg of a 20km walk. If you use a [water bladder](#), tuck the block of choc right in next to the bladder. It won't keep it cold, but it will stop it from melting.



A spicy roasted seed mix

Now before you say it, this is no boring trail mix with a lick of paint. If 4.5 years at university taught me anything, it is a seed is not a nut (and spending less time at the Tavern can save 0.5 years of your life).

Seeds + spices = stunning snack or SS = SS. Who can argue with that maths!

The trick with these guys is to roast the seeds individually. Pepitas don't cook as fast as linseeds and Sunflower seeds are an enigma to me. In terms of spices, I put smoked paprika on almost everything these days, and it goes perfectly with spicy seeds. A little salt and you have a one of the best hiking snacks.

Hiking In Winter - Hints And Tips

Tip number bleeding obvious: Keep an eye on the weather

Every year in Australia we see stories in the news of people getting lost while walking in mountains or out in bush land near our capital cities. Soon enough, (and a \$350,000 helicopter and man hunt later), commercial television gives us an interview with a tired looking bushwalker who exclaims "we set off in blue skies and then the weather just came in around us!"



Of course this won't happen to you because of the magic of weather forecasts! You can open up your favourite search engine and type "my local weather" or "weather near me" ... you can even type "today's whether forecast" and you will be returned approximately 426,000,000 results in 0.74 seconds! From there you can make an informed decision whether it's a day out on the trail, or a day with Dan Brown on the couch.

This internet thing is great. Do you think it will catch on?

Tip number poncho: Be prepared for a change in the weather

Sometime you can set out in blue skies and the weather can come in around you really fast!

Sorry, I couldn't resist.

But seriously, it pays to be prepared. Cold and wet is not fun.

Tip number mittens: Look after your extremities

When hiking in winter, I often find that it is my hands and feet that can get really uncomfortable.

If you are a user of hiking poles, then this goes doubly. Gloves are essential as your hands are likely to be exposed the whole time and they can get freezing with a bit of water on them.

A spare pair of socks (and a plastic bag for the wet ones) can also be heaven sent if those old boots of yours spring a leak.

Tip number not so obvious: Wear layers and nothing too hard to take off



If you set out early in the morning, it may be 10 degrees cooler than it is going to be at lunchtime. It pays to remember that you are going to heat up when you are hiking in winter, and that your merino, thermo nuclear undergarment may become really hot.

Everyone has there own individual thermostats but I find that on a moderately strenuous walk it has to be less than 10 degrees in the middle of the day for me to need thermals as well as the other layers. That's in dry conditions mind you.

Tip number curry pumpkin: Liquids are still important

Just because you are cold doesn't mean that you don't need to remain hydrated. I know you probably won't feel like drinking as much when hiking in winter (and lord knows that de-layering for un-drinking can be a real pain) but you will feel much better if you remain well watered.

The first organ effected by dehydration is your brain! The consequences of mild dehydration in cold conditions are not nearly as severe as somewhere warm like [the Kimberleys](#), but a headache and that "out of it" feeling are unpleasant even if they are not necessarily dangerous.

Consider a flask of hot water as well – it can be a spiritual experience atop a chilly mountain in winter... And a thermos of curry pumpkin soup may be as close as I will ever get to Nirvana.

Tip number singing in the rain: You don't need fancy rain gear, just the basics

I should say, there is rain, and there is "cats and dogs, where is the 'ark' type rain. If you are planning on going out in a downpour, then you might just want some fancy gear. For the more mild mannered but still adventurous souls, we can afford to keep it simple.

- A peak cap. The advantage of a peak cap is that you can wear a rain hood over it.
- Rain jacket or poncho. Ponchos are generally pretty terrible when it is windy, but if they are big enough to go over your pack as well, they can be great.
- Rain pants... but only if it is cold. There is no quicker way to overheat than cheap rain pants in mild conditions going up a slope. Whew!
- Gloves. Aforementioned.

How To Prevent Blisters When Hiking

1. Get boots a half size bigger than your usual size

We have had a bit to say on [How to Choose Hiking Boots](#) before. Fit is everything. We recommend going that half size bigger and then wearing either two pairs of socks (more to say on that later) or nice thick socks. The reason? Feet swell. They may feel snug after a kilometre, but what about 10km? Or 20km?

2. Get some fixomull

Fixomull is every walkers best friend. It's pretty expensive but it is worth every dollar. Fixomull is an adhesive tape which lets moisture out but not in.

Originally developed for burns it is used all over the world by blister aware walkers. We recommend taping up your known hotspots. For most people this is the heel, the big and the little toes. Do this before every hike of decent length. As you walk if you start to feel a "hotspot" stop and put some fixomull on immediately. It will prevent a blister if you get in early.



You don't have to go to the extent of one of our walkers whose identify will be kept secret (until we need to blackmail her), but she got the idea!

Fixomull is available from every pharmacy. They may sell you a different brand (which is generally okay) however the genuine stuff is the best.

3. Wear two pairs of socks

Why? If something is going to rub, then it is better the two socks rub together rather than something biological rubbing. This works. We would recommend a thin pair of socks on the inside with a thicker "explorer" type sock over the top.

Another tip relating to socks is if there is a chance your feet will get wet, then bring a spare pair/s of socks so you can change them out half way through the day. Don't forget a plastic bag for the wet ones!



4. Rest and Elevate

As I said before your feet will swell as you walk and this can cause your boots to rub in unusual places... like your patience!

The quickest way to reduce this swelling is to take your boots off, lay down and elevate your feet. If you are doing a full day's walk then we recommend getting the shoes off at lunch and getting them up in the air resting on your back pack.

This will not only energise you for a wonderful afternoon, but it will put the feet back in shape and have you feeling great.

Bonus tip: If you are anywhere near water, an ankle deep paddle at the end of the day's walk will reduce swelling really quick. Definitely recommended!

5. Keep sand out

Sand causes blisters faster than a speeding hiker! You need to keep it out of your boots and your socks. The best way to do this is little ankle gaiters. More on that in our guide on [what to wear when hiking](#).

6. Plug the gaps with hikers wool

Do you want to know why god spent his rest day making fixomull? It is because he knew that shoe makers would never be able to account for every individual foot shape. Some times you just need to stuff something into your boots and fill the space... and the stuff is [Hikerswool](#). Hikerswool is ultra fine, high quality wool that you can put into your sock at any point of friction. It acts like a little wooly cushion and due to the high oil content it retains its spring.... so you can keep a spring in your step!

So there you have it, our guide to how to prevent blisters. Remember that prevention is key. Once you have a blister only time will heal it.

Walking Meditation Techniques

Meditation can be hard. The tendency is for the mind to look for stimulation and for most people they are doing a mental shopping list, within a minute or two. However, walking meditations are a great because they are stimulating, making it much easier to maintain focus.

Below are three different techniques you can try out on your next walk.

Walking Meditation; Before you start walking

Prior to setting off, take one minute to prepare. Stand still, close the eyes and smile. Even if you are not feeling particularly happy, the physical act of smiling (even if it is fake) will make you feel better.

Now take in a few deep breaths holding the breath for a short moment at the top of the inhalation and the bottom of the exhalation. Exhale slowly. With each exhalation try to let go of a bit of tension in your body. A good way of doing this is to say in your mind, "Let go", or "relax" as you exhale. Allow your breathing to return to normal and you will feel a little more relaxed almost instantly.

Technique One; Being mindful of the body

This is a really great walking meditation for those with a very active mind and the technique we recommend starting with. It is simple. Start off by walking and being conscious of your breath. Your breath might be faster than during a normal meditation, but that is absolutely okay. Just observe the inflow, and outflow for ten breaths.

Next, shift your attention to the soles of your feet whilst still being mindful of the breath. You are not looking for discomfort or to label the sensations in the soles, but just to notice what you are feeling. It could feel dull, or warm, or you might notice your foot rolling as it makes contact with the ground. Whatever the sensation, do not try to change it, just pay attention to it.

After a minute or so, shift your focus to your knees. You can alternate between the two knees or concentrate on just one, it is up to you. Really go inside the knees and go for the detail. Notice the ligaments and the sensation at the back of the knees.

You can then shift your focus to the hips, then back, then finger tips and shoulders. All will provide a myriad of sensations to hold your focus. Once at the shoulders you can then head back down the body, or change to a different walking meditation technique.

Technique Two; Getting the rhythm

This is a slightly more advanced technique as there are less things to focus on, however the technique is still very simple. Again, start by being mindful of the breath. Then start to count the steps for each cycle of breath. Begin counting at the bottom of the inhalation and then start the sequence again at the end of the exhalation. If you are walking fast and breathing slow this might be as many as 10 steps for each breath, however it could be as short as 2-3. Soon you will be in a rhythm with both your steps and your breath. You can continue this walking meditation technique for as long as you like.

Technique Three; Mindful of your surroundings

This is the most difficult technique to maintain your focus however it is also probably the most rewarding. We recommend trying it after you have done a bit of either technique one or two.

Again, start by being conscious of the breath. Once you are relaxed and lightly focused on the breath, shift your focus onto the world around you. There should be no shortage of things to look at. The trick is not to allow the stimulus to trigger thoughts. The aim is to observe the details in what you see without generating any mental traffic.

I have had most success with this technique in natural settings whilst shifting my attention between the smallest, and then largest details. For example, I will start by looking closely at a leaf, or bark and then shift my focus to the view. Then back to a flower or a rock. You can also include smells, sounds as well as textures into this technique.

This technique is best done slowly. Don't stare for too long at any one piece of stimulus as you don't want to allow the mental traffic to start. Look for the details with trying to name them or look for explanations, just merely observe. If you do get invade by a pesky thought, just let it go and return to the detail of the world around you.

At some point you may also find it helpful to include some positive affirmations, such as "everything is beautiful" or "everything is connected". Anything that resonates with you.

Guided V Self Guided Tours

Are you considering guided or self guided tours? This is our guide to help you find out which is the best for you.

Options, options, options. It has never been so convenient to compare all of the travel options out there... it has actually become overwhelming.

Very few of us refer to professional travel agents now. These days we rely on TripAdvisor ([take a look at our listing](#)) and the like to help us assess the quality of tour companies, hotels and restaurants. The problem with this approach is that every one has different values.

When deciding on a guided tour v self guided tour, you need to determine what you value and then the pros and cons of each type of tour. Here is our thoughts.



How flexible are you with time?

If you are *not* flexible with your departure dates, a self guided tour might be the best option for you. You might be lucky and there is a tour departing on the exactly the day you need to travel, but generally speaking, self guided tours offer more flexibility in deciding on the departure date.



Are you travelling solo?

Some people love to walk alone. I find it boring for more than a day or two. In years gone by I thought that I might find some sort of enlightenment walking alone, but nowadays I would just prefer to have a laugh or a decent conversation about my idea to replace half of the politicians with pot plants and see if anyone notices.

If you are travelling alone, guided tours are the way to go. Safer, more fun and most self guided tours are much more expensive if you are travelling alone.



Are you an experienced walker? How remote will you be?

Walking with a group is a great way to get experience. Learn from everyone else and learn from your guides.

Already experienced? Then how remote will you be? If you are travelling to a built

up area like the Camino di Santiago or the Cinque Terra walking self guided is going to be really safe. In fact you are in more danger of being pick pocketed than getting lost and falling off a mountain.

Want to walk in the [Kimberley](#), or the [Larapinta](#)? That's a different story all together. A group is essential.



Are you a “fitness walk” who walks fast? Guided v Self Guided Tours

Do you love to stride out and try to smash the day's walk as fast as possible? Then a guided tour is no good for you.

You will be frustrated, the guides will be frustrated and the orchid/bird/photography lovers will want to put an anchor in your backpack.

Are you slow? Tours are usually okay for slow walkers.



Do you like to learn about the environment?

Most self guided tours do offer a bit of commentary but nothing like the guided options. If you are interested in learning about the land through which you will be walking, the tour guides as well as the other walkers can enhance your experience to no end.

Just want to see pretty landscapes and get away from it all? Self guided will suit you down to a “T”.



Are you comfortable navigating?

Most trails in Australia are fairly well marked, but if you are responsible for working out where to go, you are still going to need to refer to maps and trail notes.

Does the thought of keeping you on track turn your knees to mush?? Maybe you are a guided tour kind of person!!