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Winter walking holidays

Pack your shorts and take your marching orders

Winter sun walking

Liz Edwards and Nicky Symington, **The Observer** Sunday December 5 2004

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The levadas of Madeira.

If an avalanche transceiver doesn't sound like a fun holiday accessory, there are plenty of opportunities for walking in the sun.

Classic winter destinations such as Madeira, the Canaries and Cyprus offer a great range of walks from leisurely strolls to full-on mountain hikes; similarly Morocco and Jordan provide excellent trekking opportunities through stunning mountain terrain. Desert fans will find that there are certain destinations, such as Death Valley, that can only be hiked in winter (the name gives a strong hint as to what can happen if you try in the height of summer).

Cuba and Dominica offer intriguing jungle itineraries though unspoilt, lush landscapes. And for walks on the wild side, a stroll along the South African coast beats all.

Morocco

Spend 10 days trekking along cliffs and through gorges in the beautiful Jebel Sahro region between the Atlas Mountains and the Sahara. The 15-day trip (which includes two days in Marrakesh and a day in both Ouarzazate and Ait Benhaddou, the spectacular location for Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*) costs from £599pp including flights, transfers, B&B (some camping) and most meals, with the Adventure Company (01420 541007; adventurecompany.co.uk). Departures fortnightly until April.

United States

Trek America (0870 444 8735; trekamerica.co.uk) has a 10-day Desert Sun Walk tour through the American south west, leaving Las Vegas on four dates between 21 December and 22 March. It takes in the Golden and Titus canyons, Joshua Tree National Park, and the new-age mecca of Sedona before returning to Las Vegas, and costs £449pp, including accommodation in lodges and some camping, transport, access to national parks and the services of the tour leader. Flights are extra.

Dominica

Dominica is one of the Caribbean's most pristine islands; a tailor-made week walking its jungle trails to waterfalls and up mountains costs from £899pp including flights, transfers and accommodation in a hotel built around the walls of an 18th-century fort, with Tropical Locations (020 7229 9199; tropical-locations.com)

Madeira

Try a week's independent walking on the lush Atlantic island of Madeira, following levadas (the ancient irrigation channels across the mountainsides) as you cross the island's southern part from east to west, hotel hopping as you go. The trip costs from £775pp including flights, transfers, half-board accommodation in a range of hotels (including two elegant quintas), walking maps and notes, with Inntravel (01653 617906; inntravel.co.uk).

South Africa

Follow Xhosa community guides on a moderate seven-day trail that takes you along cliff tops and beaches, staying in quaint family-run hotels along South Africa's spectacular Wild Coast. From £1,295pp including flights, accommodation, transfers all meals and porters with Rainbow Tours (020 7226 1004; rainbowtours.co.uk). Groups can be from two to 12, with departures daily throughout the season.

Cuba

An 18-night escorted group tour of Cuba includes gentle half- and full-day hikes in the lush south-east of the island around Baracoa, the Sierra Maestra mountains and National Park. The cost is from £1,594pp, including flights, transport, accommodation and excursions with Journey Latin America (020 8747 8315; journeylatinamerica.co.uk). Trips depart on 17 December, 4 February and 11 March.

Croatia

Spend a week wandering the Adriatic coast around Split in Croatia, from £417pp with Ramblers Holidays (01707 331133; ramblersholidays.co.uk). Neighbouring

islands Brac and Hvar provide ample walks and rich history.

Costa Rica

The wildlife of this Central American country is famously rich. See monkeys and sloths in their natural habitats as well as rare birds and plants on a 12-day Wildlife Walk with Headwater Holidays (01606 720033; headwater-holidays.co.uk) from £1,789 per person. Prices include flights, accommodation, most meals and transfers. Until 26 April.

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