

A generation brought up on sun, sand and sea has moved on in a major shift which has caught many package tour operators by surprise. Ecotourism, themed holidays, archeological explorations, historical tours, mountain ascents, rain forest trails - all these variations on walking holidays are eroding traditional holiday spending.

Those taking walking holidays are often higher income explorers who enjoy history, local customs, spectacular scenery, and learning something new every day. Walking holidays range from rambles along well-marked routes to major expeditions with professional guides across the Himalayas or even to the North Pole.

Serious walkers are likely to have no children or are empty-nesters who are enjoying new-found freedom to do all the things they have been unable to consider for the previous 15-20 years. Pace and distance can be varied to suit the most energetic and fit young adults, and those who are well into retirement. You can carry all your personal needs on your back, or have porters do the work, or use local transport to manage the hops between each night's accommodation.

Energy consumption during walking holidays

Calories and Weight

Walking is a low impact activity - unlike running - which improves muscle tone, bone density and heart function. Walking, like all exercise, also releases endorphins in the brain (naturally occurring opiates or heroin-like neurotransmitters) which creates a sense of mild euphoria and well-being in those who have walked a lot during the day - which helps offset aches, pains and physical tiredness.

What about weight loss? A pound of fat equals around 3500 calories. To lose 1 pound in walking, you will need to use up 3500 more calories than you eat during the holiday, whether through increased activity or decreased eating or both.

You may use up enough energy to be able to enjoy more luxury food than normal and keep your weight stable or even lose some. Losing 1-2 pounds of fat a week is not hard if you are taking a lot of exercise. So how much extra exercise would you need to take to lose a couple of pounds or a kilogram?

Your weight x distance = energy used walking. Time does not matter as much as distance. If you speed up to walking a mile in 13 minutes or less, you will certainly burn more calories in each mile. A simple rule is 100 calories per mile for a 150 pound or 70 kilogram person.

So if you are walking an average of ten miles a day, you will use up 7000 calories a week - and lose 2 pounds. But it could be more than that since your general metabolic rate will rise and you will carry on burning up energy at a higher rate than normal even when resting. If you are carrying a back-pack, your energy levels may be more than 50% higher depending on the weight - and remember that even standing around looking at the view or exploring a site you will use up far more energy than sitting at a desk doing e-mail.

Pole Walking - increased safety and energy consumption - and all round exercise

Nordic Walking, (walking with poles) was first used by cross-country skiers as a summer training method. It was then developed into a fitness exercise for all with specific training equipment by the Finnish sports equipment manufacturer Exel Oyj, researchers in sports medicine, and other fitness professionals.

Nordic Walking improves endurance fitness, strengthens the various muscles of the upper body and improves the mobility and blood circulation of the neck and shoulder area.

According to a poll conducted by Gallup Finland Ltd. Published on 22 November 2000 the number of persons participating regularly in Nordic Walking has increased by some 200, 000 persons during the last year in Finland. As many as 480,000 Finns now walk regularly with the poles. Some 30% of Finns (1,200,000) tried Nordic Walking at least once during the last year. In addition to Finland Nordic Walking is coming increasingly popular in Sweden, Switzerland, Austria and Germany. At present Exel is launching Nordic Walking in Japan and the U.S.A.

Nordic Walking burns more calories than regular walking

The Cooper Institute studied the effectiveness of Nordic Walking both in laboratory and field conditions in autumn 2000. Study results show that Nordic Walking significantly increases oxygen and energy consumption.

On average there is a 20% increase in caloric expenditure and in oxygen consumption in a study group when using the poles. Additionally there is a 6% increase in heart rate when using the poles.

However the participants do not find walking with poles more strenuous. Individual variations in the results were remarkable. Some individuals increase as much as 46% in oxygen consumption and just about the same in caloric expenditure."

It is just another variation on the possibilities of a walking holiday - but poles can also be a life-saver on difficult terrain over long distances, preventing falls both in ascent and descent.