



FRANCE, ITALY,
SWITZERLAND
Distant Journeys
(888) 845-5781,
distantjourneys.com
From \$3,175 for a
12-day trip, including
lodging and most
meals.

Trail Mix

The Vény Valley stretches out below La Casermetta, a hikers' information center near the French-Italian border.

Last summer, Tim and Kathy Turner took a break from the Mont Blanc hiking circuit for a night at Refuge des Mottets, a French backcountry lodge decorated with cowbells and old iron cookware. The Turners, from the United States, were the only trekkers there besides the jovial members of a French hiking club. All enjoyed a hearty, family-style dinner of beef bourguignon, tomato salad, and homemade bread. After the meal, the lodge's owner pulled out an accordion, and the club burst into song. "Everyone was swaying back and forth, locked arm and arm," says Tim. "These were classic French anthems—tunes that every Frenchman knew."

For more than 200 years, hikers from Europe and farther abroad have explored the ancient hunting and trading routes that make

up the 112-mile Mont Blanc trail. Named after the highest peak in the Alps, the trek winds through France, Italy, and Switzerland, looping around the Mont Blanc Massif range, past conifer forests, glacial waterfalls, and alpine meadows covered in bright blue gentians and golden buttercups.

The co-owner of tour company Distant Journeys, Andrea Ellison Mulla, led the Turners on the 12-day trip. "Andrea often knew three generations of locals at spots along the route—the grandmas, mothers, and daughters," says Kathy. "We'd stop by a hotel or shop whether we needed to or not, just to say hello or have a coffee." At night, the travelers stayed in comfortable mountain village lodges, some with wooden balconies draped in red and pink geraniums, or at rustic, family-

owned refuges. Tim recalls, "Cultural barriers break down very quickly at the refuges. Everybody comes together to wash the day's hiking clothes in tubs and string them up on clotheslines. Then you sit down at big, communal tables for a meal of risotto or polenta, plus plenty of beer and wine." As the Turners experienced, sometimes a spirited round of singing follows.

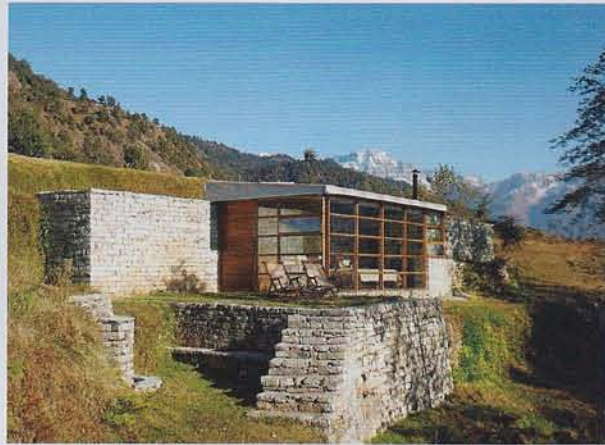
What the couple will remember the most, though, is the way the Europeans approached the trail. "They know how to hike. They just slow down and enjoy it all," says Tim. "In the States, we're too damn fast. You don't need to get there as quickly as possible. Talk to people along the trail. Stop, take off your backpack, have a snack. You're on vacation." **A**



Peru



Oregon



India

Other Hikes Worth Taking

INDIA
Shakti
 (866) 401-3705,
shaktihimalaya.com

An overnight train from Delhi delivers travelers to the tranquil Kumaoni foothills of the Himalayas. With local guides, hikers explore rural Indian villages, terraced rice paddies, and Hindu temples. At night, travelers settle into authentic village houses outfitted with cozy beds and woven mat floors. For a post-hike retreat, tuck on three nights at 360° Leti, a lodge at 8,000 feet, surrounded by rhododendron bushes and wild cherry trees. Here Shakti operates four teak-and-slate cottages, each with two walls of windows that frame the Himalayas' snowy summits. While there, learn to make a traditional dish, such as Parsi curry chicken with apricots, with chef Yeshi. From \$3,070, for an eight-day trip, including meals, lodging, and three nights at the 360° Leti.

MOROCCO
Kasbah du Toubkal
 33/(0) 5-49-05-01-35,
kasbahdutoubkal.com

The six-day Trekking in Style excursion in Morocco's High Atlas Mountains begins 80 minutes south of Marrakech at the Dar Imilil lodge, where you'll take day hikes around the wildflower-filled Imilil Valley accompanied by a Berber guide. Spend two nights at the lodge and dine on tagine, an aromatic, slow-cooked Moroccan stew. Then hike to the Azzaden Trekking Lodge, taking the course of your choice: along a country road through juniper forests or up steep mountain passes (a mule carries your bags). The refuge, built partially with walnut wood sourced from old Berber houses, sits at an altitude of almost 6,000 feet. Views take in panoramas of the snow-covered Toubkal Massif, North Africa's highest peak. From \$1,286 for a six-day trip, including meals and lodging.

NEW ZEALAND
Wilderness Guides
 64/(0) 3-573-5432,
wildernessguidesnz.com

The deep blue Marlborough Sounds are almost always in view on this 43-mile trek across New Zealand's Queen Charlotte Track. The track (Kiwi for trail) covers a section of the South Island's northeastern coast broken up by fingerlike waterways. Though you arrive at the Ship Cove trailhead by boat—just as Captain Cook did when he anchored here in 1770—the rest of your journey is foot-powered. As you walk among beech trees, ferns, and manuka shrubs (known for their dark, rich honey), your guides share Maori bush lore. Each day ends at an upscale lodge such as the oceanfront Furneaux, originally a homestead built by Scottish immigrants in 1906. During dinners of scallops and green-lipped mussels, guides will act as unofficial sommeliers, steering you toward vintages from boutique wineries. From \$1,237 for a four-day trip, including meals and lodging.

UNITED STATES
Rogue Wilderness Adventures
 (800) 336-1647,
wildrogue.com

In the late 1800s, a band of gold miners cleared a trail deep into southwest Oregon's Rogue River Canyon, along the charging river and through old-growth Douglas fir forest. This is the route you'll hike during Rogue Wilderness Adventure's four-day, 40-mile journey. Guides, all certified naturalists, ferry your luggage by raft from one remote lodge to the next. Every morning begins with a briefing on the day's route. After a peaceful solo hike through the woods, your guides meet you along the trail for a picnic lunch. Each evening you share a home-cooked dinner at one of the lodges. (Don't miss Black Bar's sourdough biscuits and jam.) Later, the guides will regale you with tales of Bigfoot sightings. From \$989 for the four-day Raft-Supported Wilderness Lodge Trip, including meals and lodging.

PERU
Mountain Lodges of Peru
 (877) 491-5261, mountainlodgesofperu.com

Trek through the Andes to the 15th-century Inca ruins of Machu Picchu on the lesser-traveled Salkantay Trail. Four luxurious lodges—three with outdoor hot tubs at the foot of craggy peaks, the last in a lush avocado orchard—will serve as your accommodations. At the first, Salkantay Lodge, men from the Quero area give offerings to Pachamama (Mother Earth) to ensure your safe passage. Along the 39-mile guided hike, you pass icefalls and glacial lakes, climb up mountain passes circled by Andean condors, and walk through coffee plantations and orchid-filled forests. Then, from the Inca archaeological site of Llactapata, you'll spot mystical Machu Picchu in the distance. From \$2,560 for a seven-day trip, including meals and lodging.

A Have you been on a hut-to-hut hike?
 Share your experience: afar.com/Mag/Hiking