

active earth Adventures | HIKING New Zealand

SOUTHERN MASTERPIECE

ITINERARY





From the golden shores at the top of the South Island, to the majestic snow-capped mountains of Milford Sound in the far south, you'll explore the breathtaking diversity of our landscape. You'll walk beneath our highest peaks, kayak crystal-clear waters and hike our famous Great Walks. Find yourself gazing up at towering alpine peaks and glaciers, walking through lush native forests, and exploring remote coastlines.

With expert guides leading the way, you'll truly connect with the land and our people. Everything is taken care of, allowing you to relax and immerse yourself in the beauty, history, and culture of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Explore each day with your feet on the ground, experiencing the real New Zealand in a way that few others do. Leave the tourists to the bus tours and the campervans and join us on a journey of a lifetime in this incredible place we are lucky enough to call home.

LENGTH	14 days	
GRADE	B (reasonable standard of fitness required)	
START	8.15am - Millennium Hotel Queenstown, 8.45am - La Quinta Queenstown, 9.00am - Queenstown Airport	
FINISH	4.00pm - Queenstown Airport, 4.15pm - La Quinta Queenstown, 4.45pm - Millennium Hotel Queenstown	
DEPARTURES	**2026 - 2027** November 2026: 9, 16, 23, 30 December 2026: 7, 21, 28 January 2027: 4, 11, 18, 25 February 2027: 1, 8, 15, 22 March 2027: 1, 8, 15, 22, 29	**2027 - 2028** October 2027: 5, 25 November 2027: 8, 22 December 2027: 6, 20 January 2028: 10, 17, 24, 31 February 2028: 14, 28 March 2028: 13, 27 November 2028: 6, 20 December 2028: 4, 25
PRICE	1 Jul 2026 - 30 Jun 2027 Adult NZ$16,199.00 Single supplement NZ$3999.00 **NZ$ price at time of printing*	

"EXCEEDED OUR EXPECTATIONS"

We truly enjoyed our Masterpiece Tour with Rachael and Emma. It met and exceeded our expectations. New Zealand is a beautiful country and during this tour we get to see so much of the South Island. The size of the group was a perfect size.
~ Lise Snider, April 26 ~

"WONDERFUL"

The trip was wonderful! The views are unparalleled, and our guides were knowledgeable, kind, funny, and engaging.
~ Michelle Weyhaupt, April 26 ~











ITINERARY

DAY 1 QUEENSTOWN TO AORAKI/MT COOK

5.5 km (3.3mi), 1-2 hours hiking, +/-6m (19ft) elevation

Meet your guides and fellow travellers, we'll head out for a dose of fresh mountain air on a scenic walk. As part of your introduction to New Zealand, we'll travel to the historic Arrowtown, a quaint old gold-mining settlement just a short drive from Queenstown. Today you'll be walking the Arrow River Bridge Trail, a favourite weekend walk for locals. While you are walking the Arrow River Trail, you'll have the opportunity to plant a native seedling and leave a small legacy of your own here in New Zealand.

After a morning of exploring, we'll head to Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park, the home of New Zealand's highest peak standing tall at 3,724m (over 12,000 feet). Along the way, we'll travel over the Lindis Pass and down into wide open valleys before catching our first glimpse of Aoraki/Mt Cook, 'the cloud piercer' as it's known in Māori. This area is a UNESCO International Dark Sky Reserve, which means all you need do is step outside and look up for some world-class star-gazing this evening. *Includes lunch and dinner.*

DAY 2 AORAKI / MOUNT COOK NATIONAL PARK

Up to 4 km, 3-4 hours hiking, elevation +/- 540m (1772ft)

After a sound night's sleep and a hearty breakfast, it's time to set foot on the trails this morning. Boasting views normally reserved for serious mountaineers, our hikes today take us into the heart of the National Park and provide jaw-dropping vistas for our efforts. Home to not only its namesake, Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park boasts a further 19 peaks topping more than 3,000 metres. This morning you'll have a choice of hiking to either Sealy Tarns or Kea Point or you can book an additional activity - a glacier heli-hike or a boat tour to replace the morning hikes. In the afternoon you will hike the Tasman Glacier View Track and Governors Bush Track.

Whichever option you decide on, you won't be disappointed. After a full day of activities, we'll meet up and return to our accommodation for a delicious meal and a chance to trade stories from the day or do some more stargazing. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

Hike to Sealy Tarns

This route is one seriously rewarding leg workout. Known fondly as the 'stairmaster' or the 'stairway to heaven', you'll pull yourself up exactly 1,882 steps to Sealy Tarns where the views out over the Mueller and Hooker Lakes are out of this world. It's the most challenging option today and involves a steep but steady climb on a well-formed track. The views are worth every drop of sweat.

Hike Kea Point & Hooker Valley Lookout

For those seeking a more relaxed option, you'll walk to Kea Point and the Hooker Valley Lookout. On this well-formed track, you'll enjoy a steady climb on a gentle gradient as you make your way to the Hooker Valley lookout. From here you'll be able to take in Aoraki/Mt Cook and the Hooker Valley in all their glory.

Optional Extras

Glacier Heli-Hike (NZD$945),

Take a helicopter up to land high on the Tasman, New Zealand's longest glacier, and in the company of an experienced guide, don crampons to explore the dramatic ice caves of this frozen wonderland. If you book this additional activity, it will replace this mornings hike.

Glacier Lake Boat Tour (NZD$209)

Hop aboard a Zodiac boat and set off across the iceberg-filled lake for an up-close encounter with the Tasman Glacier's terminal face. If you book this scenic boat tour, it will replace his mornings hike.

DAY 3 AORAKI MT COOK TO CHRISTCHURCH

Up to 4.2km (2.6 mi), 1 hour hiking, +/- 82m (269ft) elevation

Today's journey takes us from mountain to ocean as we head through the fertile plains of Canterbury towards the East Coast. We'll begin the day with a short hike along the shores of Lake Pukaki admiring it's beautiful turquoise waters accompanied by views of the beautifully desolate Mackenzie Country. After our hike we'll make our way towards Tekapo on our way to Christchurch. We'll take our time, stopping at some of our other favourite spots along the way to stretch our legs and capture the glorious views.

This morning, we'll enjoy the stunning views across Lake Pukaki and the surrounding mountains. The Pukaki Kettle Hole Track is a scenic walk set along the shores of Lake Pukaki. The trail winds through golden tussock to a collection of ancient kettle holes; shallow depressions left behind by retreating glaciers. After our walk, we'll continue on towards Christchurch, watching the scenery shift from tussock and mountains to the fertile Canterbury Plains.

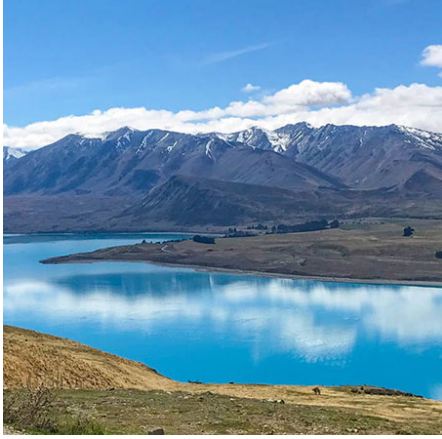
The city of Christchurch is a lovely spot with a mix of green parks and state-of-the-art architecture. The Avon River weaves its way through a city in the process of regeneration with plenty to see including the colourful Spanish Mission architecture of New Regent Street, curious cardboard cathedral and lush botanical gardens. Discover amazing street-art and innovative projects as the new urban heart of the city blends with the garden-like greenery of the old. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 4 CHRISTCHURCH TO KAIKŌURA

7.1km (4.4mi), 2 hours hiking, +/- 148m (485ft) elevation

After a relaxed breakfast, we'll enjoy a coastal walk on the Godley Head Track. This offers stunning coastal views and a bit of history too, this remote headland once served as a World War II coastal defence site. On a clear day, you'll spot the Southern Alps to the west and the vast Pacific stretching out to the east.

Just north of Christchurch lies the small coastal town of Kaikoūra. The Kaikoūra Peninsula is a striking area set on the edge of a deep continental shelf where towering cliffs meet an ocean floor that plunges even further in the other direction. The nutrient-rich water and startling topography has created a unique mecca for an abundance of marine life. Whales, dolphins, fur seals and more are thriving in ideal conditions and are a regular sight in the waters off the mainland. Tonight, if we're lucky we'll catch an impressive sunset over the ocean as we enjoy a delicious and quintessentially Kiwi dinner of fish and chips on the beach. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*





















DAY 5 KAIKŌURA TO QUEEN CHARLOTTE SOUND

Today's an unforgettable day and a dream come true for wildlife lovers. The early start is well worth it for the best chance at meeting some of the local wildlife that calls this area home. We'll don wetsuits to swim with a pod of dolphins in their natural environment. Of course, this is dependent on whether the dolphins cooperate, but they usually do! These dolphins are totally wild and it's their choice whether they interact with us or not, however, these dusky dolphins are well-known for their interactive behaviour as well as their acrobatic feats and usually love to put on a show for us. The tour is an educational experience that is designed not to interfere with the natural behaviour, routines or habitat of the dolphins. There are strict regulations in place to protect and respect the dolphins and to keep you safe in the water. The boats are well-equipped with swimming/snorkelling platforms. Whether you opt to get in the water or watch from the boat, it's a joyful experience for all. Many of our guests have told us this is one of the highlights of their New Zealand adventure tour.

We'll carry on to the town of Picton, where we water taxi across Queen Charlotte Sound to our accommodation for the night, where you can explore some of the world-famous Queen Charlotte Track. Set amongst a landscape of native plants and abundant birdlife, with views of the glistening bay, you'll enjoy an excellent meal and the chance to truly relax in this remote but well-equipped location. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 6 QUEEN CHARLOTTE SOUND TO NELSON

Up to 8km (5 mi), 4 hours kayaking

After a nourishing breakfast at the lodge, we'll take to the water in our kayaks and paddle back to Picton, exploring some hidden coves and bays along the way. Gliding along on the water is a lovely way to spend the morning while you check out the beautiful coastline.

Home to some of New Zealand's best vineyards, the Marlborough region is famous for producing excellent wines savoured around the world. We will sample some impeccable wines from this region, before carrying on towards Nelson and our accommodation for the next two nights. *Includes breakfast and lunch.*

DAY 7 EXPLORE NELSON

Today is yours to enjoy as you wish. Nelson, "the sunniest place in NZ" and the gateway to Abel Tasman National Park, is famous for its arts scene, award-winning wines, craft beers and fruit orchards, with plenty to keep you entertained within walking distance. Many of our guests are happy to spend a relaxed day exploring Nelson, browsing the shops and galleries, strolling along the beach or reading a book, it's a lovely place to re-energise yourself for the rest of your adventure. There are over 350 local craftspeople and artists creating Māori, traditional and contemporary art in the area, so it's also a chance to discover what inspires New Zealanders creatively.

If you'd prefer something a little more active on your free day, we can help you book a tour to explore Abel Tasman National Park on foot or by kayak. Abel Tasman is famous for its glorious coastline, where golden sand beaches meet clear blue seas.











DAY 8 NELSON TO PUNAKAIKI

10.8 km (6.7 mi), 3-4 hours hiking, +/- 361m (1184 ft) elevation

Today we'll leave Nelson and begin our day by making our way to St Arnaud for a hike in Nelson Lakes National Park. Nelson Lakes National Park encompasses the northernmost ranges of the Southern Alps. This 101,733 hectare national park is abundant with mountain ranges, beech forest, rivers and glacial lakes. This morning we'll walk alongside Lake Rotoiti to the hidden Whiskey Falls, the 40m waterfall is surrounded by thick walls of moss and fern and is the perfect spot for a picnic.

Our next destination takes us to the wild West Coast, a journey rated by Lonely Planet readers as one of the best coastal drives in the world. Rainforests, rivers and glaciers meet deserted beaches and crashing waves, making for a unique and sometimes stark coastline. Sunsets on the West Coast are incredibly special and tonight you'll see just why. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 9 PUNAKAIKI TO FRANZ JOSEF

4.3 km (2.7 mi), 1-1.5 hours hiking, +/- 123m (403ft) elevation

We'll hike the Porarari Loop Track this morning through Paparoa National Park, a visually rich area made up of dense sub-tropical forest and limestone cliff gorges. You'll also have the chance to check out an interesting geographical phenomenon in the town of Punakaiki – the curious looking but aptly named Pancake Rocks. The surge of the incoming sea is forced into chambers creating a geyser-like explosion through rock blowholes. The unusual limestone formations, overlaid with soft mud and clay, have been forged over millions of years by the immense pressure of the sea, wind and rain, creating the pancake effect we see today.

After our hike, we'll visit the quirky town of Hokitika, and drop in on Pounamu (greenstone/jade) carvers at work. We'll spend a relaxed evening in the tiny town of Franz Josef, tucked into the Southern Alps right in the heart of Glacier Country. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 10 LAKE MATHESON TO WĀNAKA

4.2 km (2.6 mi), 1.5-2 hours hiking, +/- 126m (413ft) elevation

We kick-start our day with a walk around the stunning Lake Matheson, here you'll enjoy stunning views of Aoraki/Mt Cook and our towering Southern Alps, then travel south down the coast, exploring some of our stunning beaches before we head towards the Haast Pass to enjoy the famous Haast River Jet Boat experience. Jet boats were invented in 1954 in New Zealand by Sir William Hamilton for the shallow waters of our braided rivers. Most visitors only see this area from the roadside, our exclusive jet boat trip will get you deep into the heart of this World Heritage wilderness area.

This afternoon we travel on to the vast beauty and open spaces of Central Otago spend the next two nights in Wānaka, a charming lakeside resort snug amongst the mountains. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*











DAY 11 HIKE WĀNAKA

Up to 7 km (4.1 mi), 4 hours hiking, +/- 622m (2024ft) elevation
After a peaceful night in our lakefront accommodation, you'll have the option of having either a relaxed start to the day or joining your guides on a hike up Rocky Mountain for an exceptional outlook across Lake Wanaka and the surrounding peaks.

If you're feeling keen to lace up your hiking boots your day will start with a hike to Diamond Lake to appreciate the sweeping views out over the Southern Alps and Lake Wānaka. If you fancy more of a challenge, you can carry on up the Rocky Mountain trail. It's a steady climb and one that will no doubt get your heart pumping, but with each passing step, the scenery just gets better and better, making it all worth it at the top.

If you'd prefer to have a more relaxed morning, there's plenty to do in the town itself, from great coffee and boutique gift shops to a gentle amble along the beach and an obligatory photo in front of Wānaka's 'giant hand' sculpture. We'll regroup this evening for a delicious meal together in a local eatery. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 12 WĀNAKA TO TE ANAU

7.3 km (4.5 mi), 2.5 hours hiking, +/- 176m (577ft) elevation
Today we'll then make our way to the Kepler Track, and enjoy our first glimpse of Fiordland National Park. Breathe in the fresh Fiordland air with an afternoon walk along a pleasant section of the Kepler Track, one of New Zealand's 10 Great Walks. The Kepler Track is renowned for its vivid green moss, lush forest, and stunning mountains. We'll meander through native beech forest before emerging at a spectacular viewpoint over a beautiful wetland.

After a full day of spectacular views, we'll head to Te Anau - the gateway to the fiords - in preparation for our journey into Milford Sound tomorrow. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 13 MILFORD SOUND

Today's the big one! Milford Sound is calling. After spending the last two weeks exploring the best of New Zealand, we've saved something truly special for last.

This morning we'll journey deep into Fiordland National Park, where ancient rainforests, mirror-like lakes and towering granite peaks create a world unlike anywhere else on earth. The road to Milford is a highlight in itself. Keep your camera close and your eyes peeled for cheeky kea and sweeping alpine vistas around every bend.

Once we reach the water, it's time to experience Milford Sound from the water. You'll glide past towering cliffs and dramatic waterfalls as we cruise out toward the Tasman Sea. Look for seals lazing on rocks, penguins darting along the shoreline, and dolphins riding the bow wave. Rain or shine, Milford Sound always delivers. On a clear day, the reflections are mesmerising. But if it's raining, it's even better! That's when hundreds of waterfalls appear, tumbling down sheer rock faces in a dramatic show of nature's power. If you're feeling brave, head to the front of the boat and let the spray hit your face. It's a moment you'll never forget, a perfect ending.











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Tonight, back in Te Anau, you'll enjoy your final evening with your fellow travellers, now fast friends. After 13 days of unforgettable adventure, stunning landscapes, and more than a few laughs, you've truly experienced the best of New Zealand's South Island. Sleep easy tonight, knowing you've made the most of every moment. *Includes breakfast lunch and dinner*

DAY 14 QUEENSTOWN

10.6 km (6.5mi), 3 hours hiking, +/- 31m (101ft) elevation

On the last morning of the trip, we'll make our way back to Queenstown, marvelling at the incredible views en route. After lunch you'll have a chance to head out for one last stunning walk from Jack's Point to Kelvin Heights (a favourite amongst locals), before saying our fond farewells at the airport or your accommodation.

Our last journey together is a scenic trip through small farming towns, before tracing the shoreline of the impressive Lake Wakatipu back to Queenstown for the last hike of the trip. The Jack's Point to Kelvin Heights walk traces the shores of Lake Wakatipu and offers incredible sweeping views of swaying tussock and The Remarkables mountain range.

This afternoon we'll finish our adventure in Queenstown, and it's time to say goodbye to your guides, travel companions and new-found friends.

LIFE ON THE TRAIL

GRADE B

- Up to 4-5 hours of physical activity per day
- At times carrying a backpack of 4-5kgs
- Tracks generally in good condition
- Altitude gains of up to 600m (2000ft) on harder days
- No hiking experience necessary

GUIDES AND SAFETY

Your guide is a hand-picked, experienced and passionate Kiwi. From spotting native wildlife to bringing the past alive with stories from the land, adjusting gear on hikes or providing that little extra encouragement during the last mile, the connections you make with your guide will last a lot longer than the duration of this tour.

Safety is always our top priority. We take great pride in our impeccable safety record and our safety management plans. Your guides are highly experienced outdoors professionals who are first aid qualified and fully equipped with a satellite phone, personal locator beacon; and first aid kit. Our trips have direct access to our highly experienced operations team and other outside services 24 hours a day.



FOOD

A great deal of care goes into ensuring the high standard of food and wine on your trips is as varied as the scenery, and fuels your incredible experiences. Depending on the trip you choose, we'll take you to our favourite restaurants or your guide will host a dinner party and cook for you.

We start our days with a healthy breakfast with lots of choices and awesome coffee served at your accommodation before heading off for the day's activity! Lunches are either in the best little cafes or restaurants en route or your guide will organise a wholesome packed lunch to last you all day on your activities. Dinners are in our favourite local places or your lodgings, using the best fresh local ingredients with a strong emphasis on introducing you to New Zealand specialties. When we dine out at restaurants you'll be able to purchase beverages from a great selection of local wine, beer or non-alcoholic drinks.

TRANSPORT

What transport is used on the Southern Masterpiece?

On your trip, you will generally travel in a late-model Mercedes Benz Sprinter vehicle. They are the top-of-the-line vehicles of their size in New Zealand and have been chosen for their high safety and comfort ratings.

ACCOMMODATION

What accommodation is used on the Southern Masterpiece?

On the Masterpiece trip, you'll sleep soundly in comfortable accommodations that we have chosen specifically for their fantastic locations. You'll meet friendly hosts and have a private ensuite room each night.



INCLUSIONS AND ADDITIONAL COSTS

What is included in the price?

All meals except dinner the night you arrive in Nelson and breakfast, lunch and dinner on your free day in Nelson when guests like to explore the outstanding local restaurants and cafés.
Activities, hikes and guides as shown in the itinerary.
Accommodation as shown in your final itinerary.
New Zealand is not a tipping culture. If you'd like to show your appreciation to your guide with a tip it is very much appreciated but not an expectation on our trips.

What additional costs can I expect?

Airfares to and from New Zealand. Airfares between the North and South Island of New Zealand if you are joining our Sweet North trip.
Airport transfers.
Travel insurance.
Visas
Non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages with lunch and dinner.

LIFE ON THE TRAIL

Payment
For bookings four or more months before the departure, a 25% deposit can be paid with the remainder due 95 days before your trip. For bookings within four months of the departure, full payment is required.

Cancellations:
90 days or more: loss of deposit, or transfer to a future departure date should you elect to change your booking in place of cancellation.
89 to 60 days: 50% of tour price forfeited.
59 days or less: 100% of tour price forfeited.

There will be no partial refunds or credits for unused services within a tour. Any unpaid forfeited amount may be pursued as a debt. Please indicate when booking if you would like to participate in the Glacier Heli Hiking or the Glacier Lake Boat Tour (Day 2). For logistical reasons, there may be small changes to our itineraries or accommodation from time to time.

The nature of our trips and travelling in the outdoors means that itineraries are subject to change and should be treated as indicative only. The operator reserves the right to amend itineraries before or during any trip. This is sometimes necessary due to the nature of the New Zealand great outdoors and weather events, for example. Some trips are dependent on external suppliers for some activities, and the cancellation or substitution of any given activity does not give rise to a breach of contract and is not considered a cancellation by us.

Travel Insurance
It is suggested that clients take out comprehensive travel insurance.

Disclaimer
The safety of guests and guides is our number one priority, and we have a robust and independently reviewed Safety Management System to manage risks, dangers and hazards on our trips. As our trips operate in the outdoors, they do include an inherent element of risk, along with potential exposure to dangers and hazards. Those risks, dangers and hazards include, but are not limited to: slips, falls, varied terrain, changing weather conditions, physical and mental fatigue, acts or omissions of the public or other participants, accident, or illness in remote areas without the possibility of immediate evacuation or availability of medical suppliers or facilities, natural events such as earthquake, avalanche, or landslides, and accidents during travel on the trip, including travel in vehicles, boats and aircraft operated by us or third parties. Encountering these risks, dangers and hazards could result in physical or mental injuries, damage to personal property, or death. You understand that it is impossible for us to list in this agreement every possible inherent risk, danger or hazard, but you understand and accept you may encounter these and any other inherent risks, dangers, and hazards not specifically listed in this agreement at any time.

This trip is run in conjunction with another operator.

PACKING LIST

ESSENTIAL ITEMS

- ☐ A good waterproof rain jacket and pants (Gore-tex or similar)
- ☐ 2-3 non-cotton base layers (top and bottom); polypropylene, or merino. We use and recommend Merino wool
- ☐ Long sleeve polypropylene or merino
- ☐ Polar Tec or similar windproof fleece jacket / sweater
- ☐ Down jacket
- ☐ Waterproof rain pants (optional)
- ☐ 2 lightweight, quick dry long pants or shorts (no denim)
- ☐ 1 pair hiking boots or strong walking shoes (waterproof, with ankle support)
- ☐ 3 pairs thick walking socks
- ☐ Warm hat (beanie/toque) and Gloves
- ☐ Sunhat/cap
- ☐ Water bottle or camelbak - minimum 2 litres (1 or 2 bottles)
- ☐ Dry bag for clothes / valuables
- ☐ Midsized backpack - You can bring one large suitcase or duffel bag (15kg (33lb) - 30kg (66lb)) that will go in the vehicle when we travel between locations – this will be whatever bag you check in for your flight. You should also bring a day pack, this is a small hiking pack around 25L – 30L. It should fit your water bottle, camera, wallet, suncream, medication, warm layers, rain protection, lunch & anything else you may want to take on your day hikes.
- ☐ Walking poles (if you use them)

CASUAL CLOTHING

- ☐ 1 pair jeans or other casual trousers
- ☐ 1 pair shorts (or a skirt)
- ☐ 2 tops/shirts and 2 button up front long sleeve shirts
- ☐ 1 sleep shirt; sleep shorts (or whatever you sleep in)
- ☐ 1 light sweat shirt or long-sleeve t-shirt
- ☐ 1 swimming suit
- ☐ 3 pairs socks both thin and thick
- ☐ Underwear
- ☐ 1 pair sport sandals (like Teva's) and 1 pair casual trainers
- ☐ Toiletries/medications
- ☐ Sunscreen, insect repellent and lip balm
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Camera and binoculars
- ☐ Spare bootlaces
- ☐ Reuseable coffee cup

This clothing will keep you warm and comfortable during outdoor activities - cotton clothing is not suitable for hiking in.