

TREK STARS



We meet mountain man Doug the next morning, early. Too early. As a professional guide Doug has trekked most of Europe and North America and now he is guiding us. Doug specialises in Leave No Trace practice which basically means we have to ablate into a canister that will be stored and brought back after the two day trek. I can hear Mary Millionaire screaming.

Mountain Man sorts through our packs, discarding any unnecessary items. We have our own superhuman Stuey who will be transporting our packs into the backwoods. I wish it were me. Sherpa Stu was transporting as we cross the Snowy River barefoot, trek boots hung by laces around our necks.

Nolen Oadya of Kosciuszko Alpine Guided Walks understands me. He knows my idea of roughing it is having domestic champagne. So he has seduced me into a two night summer trek in Australia's Snowy Mountains with promises of Bedouin tents and gourmet food and like all good seductions the bait is not what it seems.

Nolen has lived in Jindabyne for the past twenty years and as a world cup skier, photojournalist and ski coach he makes a fine front man for the area's summer guided walks.

The first night is spent at Novotel Lake Crackenback in the Kosciuszko National Park which keeps my alter ego, Mary Millionaire, satiated with its lake side location, open fires and indoor swimming pool.

We are doing the "easy path" that winds around the ranges. It guarantees to provide photo opportunities without muscle tearing. My fellow four trekkers are all female (groups are limited to six to keep it personal), one a marathon runner, and I make a mental note not to follow her lest I end up in Boston or New York.

It is said that walking is meditative. As we climb the paved hill I am aware of every breath and every step and as the climb gets longer I hit a rhythm that once reached allows me to take in the scenery of snow spotted summer hills and sparse terrain. The Snowy Mountains are primarily known as a winter ski destination but when the snow clears the beauty of the alpine landscape is revealed. Alpine Marsh Marigolds in shades of purple and yellow and Snow Buttercups in white dot the scrub.

Kosciuszko National Park is home to the country's highest glacial lakes and the nation's tallest mountain, Mt Kosciuszko at 2228 metres. Day one we explore the natural crater of Blue Lake, its sheer granite cliffs filled with ice waterfalls giving way in the heat.

It's an impressive sight, even more so when lying on my back as we decramp our muscles and inhale picnic lunch. Next stop, base camp for home cooked food and river chilled wine. We just have to walk another two hours to get there.

Sherpa Stu has done a good job of setting up camp in a sheltered outcrop. Two canvas teepees represent the kitchen and the bathroom thankfully placed on opposite ends of camp. One-man cocoon tents are scattered around the mother Bedouin tent where we meet for home baked meals.

It is important to note that I have never been camping. If I had then I may have settled into slumber more easily. As it was, curled up and zipped in to my sleeping bag I tossed and turned throughout the night, convinced there were bogeymen in the moors around me. My tent had no double locking system, no bars on the windows, no smoke alarm. The only thing that saved me was the smell of pancakes at sunrise.

Over breakfast, Doug tells us tales of Laurie Seaman, who perished in a blizzard on the way to the Kosciuszko summit in 1928. His mate Evan Hayes was lost in the snow behind him and found dead lying on his skis when the weather broke. Seaman waited for his mate but died waiting. The Seaman's Memorial Hut marks the spot along the trail to the nation's summit.

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After six kilometres of morning trekking I am happy to set my eyes on the Hut but there is a mountain to conquer and three more kilometres to go. It's cold in the wind, despite the cloudless sky but we all take a moment to mark the occasion as we set foot on the Mountain peak.

The majority of the trek from Mt Kozzie to Thredbo is well paved with wooden decking. Our first sight of fellow humans takes place along this way and we are soon inundated with tourists doing the half-day from Thredbo return. I am surprised how disappointed I am to see them despite my lack of sleep. The solitude of outdoor life has crept up on me but it's all down hill from here and I can hear the cappuccinos of Crackenback a calling. It's amazing how much energy you have left when the end is in sight and for the first time I overtake the marathon runner. 

STORY & PHOTOS
BY RACHAEL OAKES-ASH



FACT FILE

Kosciuszko Alpine Guided Walks operate from November to the end of April. One day, overnight and two night walks are available in easy, moderate and advanced.

Novotel Lake Crackenback has the following package available (at time of print): Two nights in a luxury lakeside apartment, hot breakfast and a two day overnight guided walk \$549 per person.

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