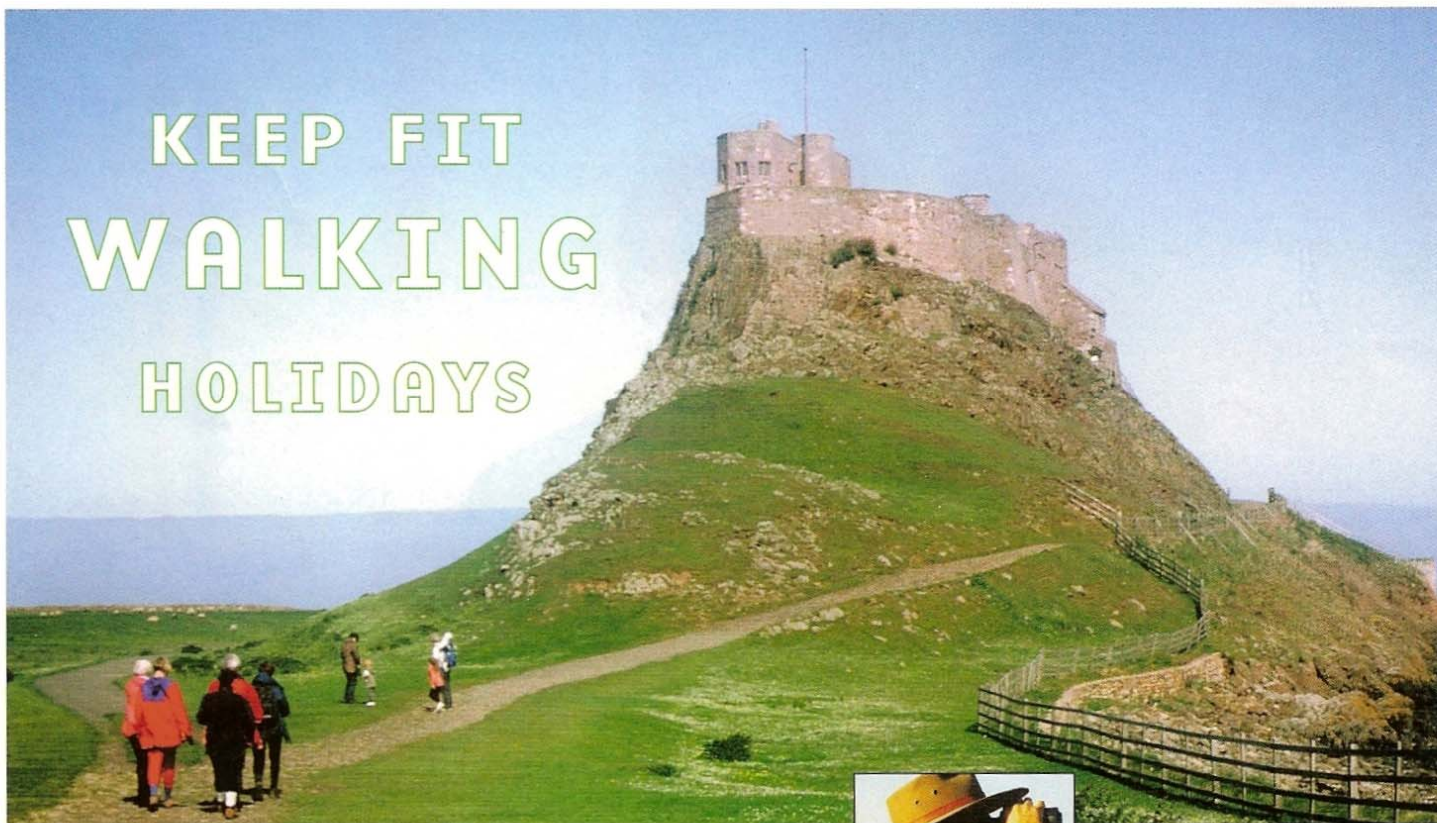


# KEEP FIT WALKING HOLIDAYS



## A Walker's World

After more than 30 years in the travel industry, Jill Grant began her business with Walkabout Gourmet Adventures. Six years later, A Walker's World is general sales agent and / or representative for about a dozen products in Europe, Africa, South America, the United States and Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

At the start, Walkabout Gourmet Adventures, which focuses on regional cuisine and wine as well as the must-sees, drew most interest from rural clients. City dwellers couldn't do without "that great travel accessory - the rental car", she said, but it's evened out as we've become aware of the health benefits of walking.

Forget age groups. Although most clients fall into the late 30s to 60s, a 70-year-old can be as fit as a 28-year-old - it's an attitude. Walks are graded and some require reasonable fitness. But if they're booking three or four months out, there's time to improve. The same goes for cycling. Recently, a 66 and 70 year old couple took off for their cycling holiday in the Loire Valley.

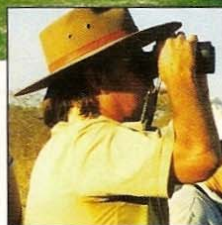
People want to know what a walking holiday is like. They might associate it with uphill trails, carrying a backpack, nights in a hut and cold showers. They're pleasantly surprised to discover that they can go at their own pace on paths matching their fitness level. They don't have to carry anything except a light day pack. Accommodation is comfortable. Showers are hot and there's a gourmet meal at the end of the day.

Cooking and walking tours incorporate three afternoons of tuition with Cordon Bleu chef Gabriela Clarke, held in Provence and Lazio, between Tuscany and Rome, incorporating visits to markets, wineries, olive mills, cheese factories and truffle hunting.

The 14-day Coast to Coast in Britain is popular and offers a huge sense of achievement, according to Jill. The trail through quintessential British countryside takes you away from the crowds. At eight to nine hours a day, it's graded as "energetic". Instead of tackling the whole thing, clients can do portions - the Lake Districts or the North York Moors.

Our love affair with Tuscany continues, fuelled by travel and cookery books. France is ever-popular. Spain is attracting more interest, as is Basque. Jill attributes this to curiosity, the wild landscape and the famed cuisine, a mixture of French and Spanish influences. Their Pyrenees trip was the first to be booked out this year.

Her favourite and the most popular European walk is Italy's Cinque Terre, a cliff-edge ancient pathway linking five villages along the Liguarian Coast. The views are spectacular. It's like stepping back in time, she said. Accommodation is "rustic" and the walk is graded energetic.



**Walking or cycling holidays give a different and unique perspective on places. It's also a great way for repeats to get into the countryside, experience the culture, meet the locals and discover the history. MICHELLE QUIRKE talks walkabout.**