

Loving the Blue Mountain views.



# MOUNTAIN PRIDE

Sara Freeland of the Freeland Hiking Co loves to share the beauty of the Blue Mountains.



**MY** earliest bushwalking memory is walking the Grand Canyon Track in the Blue Mountains. My family used to holiday in Leura once a year, and I must have been only 7 or 8 when we walked it for the first

time. I remember the incredible greenness of everything and the magical-like fairy grottos of the fern gullies and how small I felt standing in the canyon. I also remember lots of stairs.

I got into the walking tour business after having the standard quarter-life crisis a few years back and took some time off work to walk Tassie's Overland Track on a guided trip. I'd recently discovered my love for mountains, but I wasn't at all equipped or skilled enough to do something on my own, so a guided tour was the perfect chance to get out for a week and (perhaps) figure out what I was doing with my life.

Lucky for me, my two guides were fabulous, and they both took the time to share their personal experiences of their job and lifestyle as a guide. Not only was the walk breathtaking, but it was a huge catalyst for change in my life and launched my career in the outdoors. I found out that there was an Adventure Tour Guiding course starting in Hobart in two weeks, so I applied, got accepted, packed up my life in Sydney and moved – all in less than 10 days.

It was without a doubt, the best eight months on my life – an incredibly eye-opening, brain-expanding experience. I finally found where I belonged, and I was even so passionate and enthusiastic about the course that I was awarded Student of the Year!

The primary destination for Freeland Hiking Co. tours is the Blue Mountains in NSW. It's such a majestic landscape, with near perpendicular cliffs, deep valleys and wild rivers. It's home to over 250km of walking tracks spread out over 250 million hectares of wilderness. You can find an incredibly abundant array of flora and fauna and there is also some superb (literally, with the superb lyrebird a common sight) birdlife for the twitchers out there.

The Blue Mountains is well-covered regarding tours and guided experiences, but Freeland Hiking Co. is the first dedicated expedition style hiking company. We don't offer day trips, but instead take people deeper into nature, with trips ranging from 2-5 days in length. The lookout at Echo Point and Scenic World offer fantastic glimpses of the landscape but don't allow you to develop that more profound connection with the bush, or to really switch off and enjoy the silence. I believe the only way to truly experience a destination, is to weave through it on foot and spend a night out underneath a blanket of stars.

People often underestimate their own strength and abilities, or they are nervous about wearing a pack, etc. But hiking is one of the most fundamental human movements and our bodies are designed to walk long distances and carry weight on our backs. When people reach the top of any mountain, it's fantastic to see their face light up as the overwhelming sense of achievement starts to flood their body.

I don't run boot-camp style tours. Instead, we move at a slow pace and spend a lot of the day watching, listening and just experiencing the beauty of nature. It's not uncommon

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for people to ask things like “when are we leaving?”, “when do we get to camp?” or “what are we doing next?”.

They simply can't resist trying to plan the day in their heads and struggle to relinquish control of their time. I'm the same. It takes me at least a few hours every time I go into the bush to really relax and start to enjoy the silence. This is why I wanted to focus on offering overnight tours only, so everyone can spend at least one night out underneath the stars and experience the incredible inner stillness that comes from spending time in nature. 🌀

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