

Hidden Italy Umbria 2 self-guided walking tour

7 days/6 nights

The second leg of the 'Cammino of St Francis', this beautiful seven-day walk takes you far from the madding crowd to explore the 'green heart of Italy', following well-marked trails through forests, along river valleys and past lakes to Rieti, home of the Sabines and an ancient rival of Rome.

Leaving Spoleto via the 13th century Ponte delle Torri bridge, you finish a week later, staying in an elegant 4-star hotel overlooking the main square in Rieti. Along the way, you will visit some extraordinary places including one of central Italy's finest abbeys (founded in the 8th century); one of Europe's highest waterfalls (created by the Romans in the 3rd century BC); some gorgeous hilltop villages that date from the Dark Ages; a dreamy lake that is home to the Italian rowing team and a thousand year old tree believed to have been blessed by St Francis himself. The most memorable feature of this itinerary, though, is the peaceful, unspoilt nature you walk through: the evergreen forests of the Monteluco National Park, the meadows along the banks of the Nera River, the lake shores and the woods overlooking Rieti. While the trails are good and the markings regular and clear, there are some long sections and a couple of steep climbs, so you'll need to have a good level of fitness. This is a Grade 4 walk.

This independent walk is the second section of the Cammino of St Francis – in the spirit of the long-distance pilgrimage, we have sought to keep the costs down.

The walks:

The walks follow clear and well-marked trails and much of the walk passes along river flats and over undulating farmlands, however, there are several long days (18 kms or over) and some long climbs (on Day 2 and on Day 5) although with notice these walks can be shortened. This is a Grade 4 walk.

The accommodation:

In the spirit of the long-distance pilgrimage, we have sought to keep the costs down. The accommodation in between is the best available in each places including a 4-star hotel, a simple family-run agriturismo, a private apartment and modern lake-side hotel. All the accommodation is clean, comfortable and welcoming and each room has an en suite bathroom.

The food:

Being far from the standard tourist trails, the food is excellent local fare: fresh, seasonal and lovingly prepared. The signature dish is deboned, slow-roasted suckling pig. The Umbrians are Italy's most passionate hunters, and fresh game is cherished. You are in truffle country, both black and white (tartufo nero and bianco) are popular, eaten most commonly on pasta or shaved over scrambled eggs or roasted meat. A generous breakfast is included each day in the tour cost. The dinner option includes a three course meal.

Inclusions:

- Six nights' accommodation
- All breakfasts and dinners (3 courses)
- Reading lists and historical and cultural notes
- Maps and detailed walking instructions
- Daily transfers of baggage between hotels
- 24 hour backup from local manager

Section 2: Spoleto to Rieti

Day 1:

Arrival in Spoleto, well-connected to Florence and Rome. This charming city has a long and fascinating history including being besieged by Hannibal and his elephants, being the seat of a Lombard duchy and having the 19 year old Lucrezia Borgia as it's governor. These days it is best known for its summer festival, the Festival dei Due Mondi, Italy's largest international arts event.

Day 2:

After a steep climb to the Franciscan convent of Monteluco (built around a cave in which St Francis lived), this walk crosses forests, along paths that traverse mountain-sides with breath-taking views of the Tiber and Nera River valleys. After a steep downhill path, you arrive at a hamlet, staying in a family-run agriturismo on the Nera River. (20 kms, 6 hrs)

Day 3:

Today's walk takes you along a flat trail that passes through the Parco Fluviale del Nera national park alongside Nera River to a pretty medieval village sitting on a rocky pinnacle above the river. Along the way, you will be able to detour to visit a spectacularly sited abbey, considered one of the most beautiful in central Italy', where you can have lunch and enjoy the views. (13 kms, 3.5 hrs)

Day 4:

A spectacular waterfall created when the Romans drained the marshlands of Rieti in 267 BC and the serene Lake Piediluco are the highlights of today's walk. The undulating trail follows the Nera River along quiet country roads and marked pathways to the lake, where you'll stay in a hotel on the lakeside. (15 kms, 5 hrs).

Day 5:

The day's walk is probably the most demanding of the week, but also one of the most spectacular. It starts by crossing the border from Umbria into the region of Lazio, then a steep climb up to an ancient village perched high above the lake, which one of the unspoilt gems of the pilgrimage. It then continues uphill to the remote "Beech Tree of St Francis" (an ancient tree that gave the saint shelter during a storm). The long downhill walk is rewarded with an overnight in a medieval village which has beautiful views across the Rieti valley. (22 kms, 7 hrs).

Day 6:

Today's walk includes a lovely walk through forests, fields and farms to another charming town followed by a visit to a 13th century sanctuary where St Francis took refuge in the later stages of his life. It finishes in the buzzy centre of Rieti, with shops, restaurants, a rich history and a beautiful cathedral. (18 kms, 6 hrs)

Day 7:

Rieti is well connected by regular train to Rome and the rest of Italy.