



Wonders of Tuscany & Umbria

*A complete sightseeing, walking & discovery tour through
the 'Green Heart of Italy'*



TRIP NOTES 2019

© Genius Loci Travel. All rights reserved.



booking@genius-loci.it | www.genius-loci.it

GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit Of Italy



INTRODUCTION

Italy has a 'Green Heart', where it is a real pleasure to walk through the lovely countryside.

Through the extensive footpath network of the area, roughly following the traces of the Via Francigena, the medieval pilgrim paths from Northern Europe to Rome and from Assisi to Rome, as well as the Roman Via Flaminia, one of Europe's most important 'highways' in Roman times. You will walk from village to village, a full immersion in the world-famous Tuscan landscape. This is a perfect introduction to the region and, for people who love museums, galleries and Gothic and Romanesque architecture, there is plenty to see and do. You'll get plenty of time to visit all the beautiful medieval villages and historic towns along the Via Francigena: Monteriggioni– admired by Dante– San Gimignano, Colle Val d'Elsa and of course Siena, arguably the most perfectly preserved medieval town in Tuscany. This tour threads together some of the most attractive towns and villages in Tuscany in an eloquent procession.

However, the emphasis of the tour is to enjoy the countryside, the rolling vineyards, the poppies in spring and the wild cyclamen in autumn. Most of all, many of the views have barely changed for hundreds of years. The area north of Siena is an amazing landscape of rolling hills, alternating vineyards and forests, while cypresses line the way towards the distant farmhouses. The Val d'Orcia is perhaps the 'essence of Tuscany'. Walking here is an unforgettable experience!

Umbria is perhaps not as famous as Tuscany, but more genuine and at least as beautiful! Here you'll walk from village to village, a full immersion in the mythical Umbrian landscape. At first through forests and vineyards, then passing underneath the amazing Marmore waterfalls. Then through the holy forests above Spoleto, and finally through the rolling hills between the spectacular hilltop towns of Trevi, Spello and Assisi.

Moreover, Umbria is a land full of cultural treasures, ranging from the world-famous Assisi, with its impressive basilica dedicated to St. Francis, to lesser-known small medieval towns like Trevi, Spello and of course the wonderful Roman city of Spoleto. You have ample time to visit these historic towns and also the many beautiful medieval monasteries along the pilgrim roads. For two nights you stay in one of Umbria's most beautiful monasteries.

Central Italy is an area where you still feel the genuine heart of Italy. You'll walk at an easy pace from highlight to highlight, taking in the best of Tuscany & Umbria. Our tour finishes in the town of Spoleto, but can easily be extended with a day or more in Rome, or in Perugia, the region's beautiful and lively cultural capital.



Please note: this is a moderately easy tour which is suitable for those who have some experience of walking and a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are on good paths. Average walking times: approx 5 hours each day.



booking@genius-loci.it | www.genius-loci.it

GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit Of Italy



DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 0 Florence

The starting point of our tour is Florence, capital of Tuscany, and perhaps the world's most amazing Renaissance town.

Florence can easily be reached by plane (Pisa or Florence Airport) and train (from Milan, Rome). You can arrive here on the starting day of the tour, but you can also book an extra night hereof course, to allow some extra time for sightseeing in this beautiful city, full of world-famous museums and nice places where you can go for an easy stroll.

Day 1 Arrival – Florence

Today you arrive in the beautiful city of Florence. After settling in at your very special, recently restored hotel in the heart of the historical centre, you could go for a short stroll through the colourful streets, soaking up its atmosphere, or visit a museum. Towards the end of the afternoon you meet your tour leader and the rest of the group for a welcome cocktail in the hotel or on a terrace in the city. After a brief introduction to the tour, we will then go for a short roundwalk through the heart of Florence, and take in some of the 'highlights'. In the evening we dine in a nice restaurant in the heart of the city, close to the hotel.

Meals included: 1 dinner

Day 2 : From Florence to Colle Val d'Elsa and San Gimignano

Today our private minibus picks us up and brings us to the beautiful little town of Colle Val D'Elsa, perhaps not as famous as other Tuscan towns, but with a very interesting centre. First we walk through the whole town centre, located on a narrow ridge. Then we descend into the lower town, where we take some time to have a coffee and buy some picnic supplies. Then we start the real walk, which first takes us on one of the supposed routes of the ancient Via Francigena. Along this route, through a pleasant hilly landscape of vineyards and forests, we reach the little hamlet of Bibbiano. Another descent brings us down into the valley of the River Foci. This follows a short stretch through the river valley, and past an old watermill. Then we start to climb up along a comfortable track to one of Tuscany's most beautiful agriturismos, where we will spend the next two nights. Dinner at the private restaurant is included tonight.

Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner

Total walking time: around 3,5 hours + sightseeing time (4-5 hours with extra option).

Day 3 : San Gimignano & its countryside

We start an amazing roundwalk from the agriturismo, through the world-famous Tuscan countryside, in the direction of San Gimignano. First we make our way up along the ridge to the little hamlets of Ciuciano and San Donato, going past several old 'pieve' (countryside churches) and villas, often with wonderful views of the San Gimignano skyline. This wonderful medieval town – sometimes referred to as having the only "skyscrapers" in Tuscany – is an absolute must, with its picturesque vineyards, and olive and cypress groves on either side. Upon arrival we will have ample time to explore this romantic old town with its medieval towers, of which there were once 52 (there are now less than a dozen). Wealthy, prominent families would use the height of these towers to distinguish themselves, and the towers also served to alert the inhabitants of this walled town of approaching friends and foes. We also take a nice stroll around the impressive medieval town walls. In the town itself there are numerous places where we can enjoy lunch. Then we follow the Via Francigena back to the agriturismo: first to the convent of Monte Oliveto, located on a wide ridge, then down to a small stream, which we will have to cross, before climbing back up to your agriturismo. Towards the end of the afternoon we return here to relax at the beautiful 'agriturismo'. Here we will have yet another great meal tonight.

Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner

Total walking time: around 4,5 – 5 hours (+ circa 1 h. in San Gimignano - various options).



#GeniusItaly

booking@genius-loci.it | www.genius-loci.it

GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit Of Italy



Day 4 : Siena & the Val d'Orcia

Today we leave your agriturismo, heading for Siena, one of Italy's most beautiful medieval towns. Its heart is the perfect, shell-shaped Piazza del Campo, scene of the famous horse race, the 'Palio'. Here we will admire the Palazzo Pubblico, with some stunning frescoes. Nearby is the remarkable black-and-white marble 'Duomo' and the Church of Saint Catherine. We make a short roundwalk to get your bearings and then have some free time to either explore or relax.

After lunch our bus picks us up and we head to the beautiful little town of San Quirico. From here we make a great afternoon walk: through the medieval town gate we leave San Quirico in the direction of Pienza. We will mainly follow so-called '*strade bianche*' through the archetypal Tuscan landscape, and, towards the end of the afternoon, we reach Pienza, a small, perfectly laid-out Renaissance town. Pienza is often described as the "ideal city" or the "utopian city". It is certainly one of the best-planned Renaissance towns, where a model of ideal living and government was attempted. Its location in the centre of the Val d'Orcia, a wonderfully harmonious valley, helps the town to embody the fundamental principle that humanistic architecture attempted to create: a balanced relationship between Man and Nature. You have time to explore, and perhaps visit the beautiful museum, inside the Palace of Pope Pius II. After our visit we settle in at a beautiful and welcoming hotel in an old cloister, just a few steps from the main square.

Meals included: 1 breakfast

Total walking time: around 3-4 hours. Total driving time today: around 1,5 hours.

Day 5 : Through Assisi, Mt. Subasio & Spello into the Valnerina

Today we head into Umbria. Here we will visit the beautiful town of Assisi, yet another highlight of this tour. The town is full of highlights, among which is a World Heritage Site: the Basilica of San Francesco d'Assisi (St. Francis) of course, with its wonderful frescoes by Giotto. But the other churches, the Greek temple in the central square and the underground Roman Forum are all worth a visit too. After an extensive visit to the centre itself, we have a beautiful walk down into the valley. Our path brings us through the woods (the 'Selva di San Francesco'), to a settlement of Benedictine nuns, founded in the 13th century. Here we can also admire the "Third Paradise", a stunning example of Land Art. Then our bus picks us up and takes us around Mt. Subasio, leaving us in the sight of the amazing Spello, arguably one of the most beautiful little towns in central Italy. A wonderful short afternoon walk along a Roman aqueduct brings us through the olive groves straight to Spello. Here we will have time to visit this old Roman town and enjoy a relaxed drink on one of its terraces. In the late afternoon our bus will take us into the Valnerina, where we will stay the next two nights in a beautiful medieval abbey. In the evening we have a great meal on the premises of the abbey, based on good local produce.

Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 lunch, 1 dinner

Total walking time: around 4 hours. Total driving time today: around 2 hours.

Day 6 : Through the Valnerina to the Marmore Waterfalls

After breakfast today we will leave the abbey on foot, heading west through the narrowest part of the Nera valley, which, until quite recently, was almost completely cut off from the outer world and therefore virtually untouched. We will first walk up to the intriguing abandoned village of Umbriano, considered by many to be 'one of Umbria's most romantic spots'. Then we will walk through several charming hamlets, following the pilgrim trail from Assisi to Rome. Around lunch time we will reach one of the wonders of central Italy: the Marmore waterfalls. These waterfalls, about 165 metres tall, offer a unique visual and acoustic experience. And the most intriguing fact about them is that they were actually man-made in Roman times... We can make a wonderful roundwalk in the waterfalls area, walking from viewpoint to viewpoint. There is the option of walking all the way up to the top of the waterfalls. Alternatively, you can opt to just sit down and look at this incredible sight, just like Lord Byron did. After some time for contemplation or a drink at the waterfalls, we return by bus to our base at the abbey. You are free to make your own dinner arrangements tonight. You can



booking@genius-loci.it | www.genius-loci.it

GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit Of Italy



choose to have another great meal at the abbey or go down to the village to a small local restaurant for your pasta or pizza – or perhaps something different...

Meals included: 1 breakfast

Total walking time: around 4-5 hours.

Day 7 : Over the Monteluco to Spoleto

After breakfast this morning, our bus brings us onto the hill of Monteluco, which separates the Valnerina from the valley of Spoleto. The hill of Monteluco is known to be a 'holy mountain', and many of the trails are linked to the spiritual history of the area. Here we make a very pleasant roundwalk through the forested hills, with wonderful views of Spoleto and its surroundings. The first stretch is uphill (though our bus will bring us halfway to the top anyway), but soon we will be walking along a level aqueduct. Once we reach the top, we can discover the 'holy forest' (a protected nature area since Roman times!) with its many grottoes, and wander past medieval chapels through a pleasant wooden landscape. Of special interest is the beautiful monastery. We will have a nice warm lunch at a small restaurant and then start the descent towards Spoleto. Along the stunning 'Ponte delle Torri' bridge, a unique aqueduct, we will reach the impressive fortress on the other side of the valley. From here we walk right into the Roman & medieval town centre. There is, of course, time for sightseeing and a drink in relaxation, before settling in at our beautiful family-run hotel, right in the heart of town. In the evening we all join together for one last evening meal, in a nice restaurant close to our hotel.

Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 lunch, 1 dinner

Total walking time: around 3,5-4,5 hours; approx. walking distance: 9-11 km.

Day 8 : Departure from Spoleto

This morning after breakfast, our journey ends. You can of course opt to spend some more time in Spoleto if you want. From Spoleto there are many direct trains to Rome (or Florence). There are (shuttle) buses to the train station at walking distance from the hotel. A taxi transfer to any destination can be arranged at any time.

Meals included: 1 breakfast



TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in beautiful, characteristic hotels & agriturismos, mostly historical buildings (generally 4-star level). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

All accommodations include breakfast. Most evening meals are included, for which we have selected the best available restaurants. On two nights you are free to choose from the wide choice of restaurants in the area. Your guide can give you good tips.

Also some (picnic) lunches on walking days are included in the tour price. On other days you are free to have your own lunch. Here you have the option of having your lunch in a nice restaurant, or purchasing your supplies for a picnic lunch.

Night 1 : The first night is spent in Florence. Your accommodation is a 4-star hotel in a historical palace, beautifully restored, in the heart of the historical centre.

Nights 2 & 3: These two nights you stay in a beautiful agriturismo near San Gimignano, a carefully restored historical building on the route of the *Via Francigena*, where you can indulge in local, often homemade specialties.

Night 4: For one night you stay in a great 4-star hotel right in the heart of Pienza. Our hotel is a beautifully restored old monastery.

Nights 5 & 6: These two nights you'll stay in a very special place, a beautifully restored 11th-century abbey in the heart of the Valnerina.

Night 7: The final night is spent at Spoleto. Your very good, welcoming hotel is located in a central position, right in the historical heart of the city.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Easy (2): Mostly easy walks, though some include walking uphill, sometimes on paths with rough surfaces. On most days shortcuts are possible (as well as occasional extensions).

Fitness: High standard of fitness is not necessary but you should be able to walk for up to 4 hours a day in hot sun on dusty or stony tracks.



INCLUSIONS

- Private English-speaking tour leader for 8 days
- Accommodation: 1 night Florence - 4**** hotel; 2 nights San Gimignano in a beautiful *agriturismo*, 1 night Pienza 4**** hotel, 2 nights historical abbey , 1 night Spoleto 3*** hotel
- Meals: 7 breakfasts, 5 dinners (good restaurants!), 1 warm lunch, 1 picnic lunch
- All private & public transfers as indicated throughout the entire itinerary
- Entrance fees of all sites along the itinerary
- Special activities as outlined in the day-by-day itinerary
- Guest experts for special places
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transport
- All gratuities for baggage, porters & hotel service

Not Included

- Departure taxes
- Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in FLORENCE, a city with an international airport.

A taxi pick-up service can be arranged either from FLORENCE or PISA airport, or train station.

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast in SPOLETO on day 8. A frequent train service can bring you from here to either Rome or Florence. Several taxi services are available to bring you directly to your next destination.



TOUR VARIATIONS

It is possible to include some extra nights before or after your tour.

For those who have never been to Florence an extra day here is strongly recommended. The tour can easily be extended with a few days in Spoleto, or elsewhere in Umbria. Several good accommodations are available. Details and prices on request.

Bespoke Adventures

Many of these tours can be turned into Private '[Bespoke Adventures](#)' to accommodate private group travel. We can organise both "off the shelf" itineraries, as well as create custom itineraries to meet your special needs. Book the dates you want, with the family or friends you wish to bring along!

Longer and shorter versions of this tour are also available. Prices on request.

© *Genius Loci Travel. All rights reserved.*

