



The Cammino of St. Francis walking through the 'Green Heart of Italy'

Along medieval pilgrim paths from Assisi to Rieti



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INTRODUCTION

Italy has a 'Green Heart' where it is a real pleasure to walk through the lovely countryside – not as famous as the Tuscan landscape, but perhaps more authentic and at least as beautiful and with a very interesting history!

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 little medieval towns like Trevi, Spello and Ferentillo, and of course the wonderful Roman & medieval town of Spoleto. You have ample time to visit these historic towns, the castles and also the many beautiful medieval monasteries along the pilgrim roads (and for two nights you can stay in one of the most beautiful monasteries). However the emphasis of the tour is on the countryside, the beautiful forests, 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. Eastern Umbria and northern Lazio are areas where you can still feel the genuine heart of Italy. You'll walk at an easy pace from highlight to highlight, taking in the best of the area!

You'll start your tour in the amazing city of Assisi, intimately linked to the figure of St. Francis. Here of course you'll have to visit the cathedral of St. Francis, with the amazing fresco's by Giotto, but also the rest of the centre and its surroundings make up from a great daywalk (an extra day is therefore recommended!). From the city of Assisi you start walking from village to village in the Valle Umbra, the heartland of Umbria, a full immersion in the mythical Umbrian landscape. You'll walk through forests and vineyards, and through the rolling hills covered with olive groves. From Assisi you walk to Spello, deemed one of the most beautiful villages, with again a stunning medieval centre, built on the Roman remains and on to the spectacular hilltop town of Trevi, in a spectacular position above the valley.

Of course you'll spend time in Spoleto, in the south-eastern part of Umbria. Spoleto is one of central Italy's most fascinating art towns, with a very interesting history, which left beautiful traces. An important fortified Umbrian settlement, Spoleto became a Roman colony and was taken over first by Theodoric, king of the Visigoths, and then by the Byzantine Belisarius. In the early Middle Ages, it became the capital of the Lombard Duchy of Spoleto, and after it became an important town in the Papal State. Near Spoleto, the "sacred wood" of Monteluco, densely grown with evergreen ilexes, is a beautiful natural and spiritual area and a great area to walk.

From Spoleto you'll walk into the Valnerina, until recently an isolated area, which boast several nicely preserved medieval villages and a stupendous nature. Highlight of your visit is the walk to and through (!) the incredible Marmore waterfalls, or 'Cascata delle Marmore', 'built' by the Romans. They stand at 165 m.in height with 3 massive drops making it Italy's biggest man-made waterfalls. The first person to write about the cascade was the Roman poet Virgil, but they rose to fame later, especially with the 17th century romantic movement. Lord Byron is known to have been sitting here, contemplating the falls.

From the Waterfalls you'll cross the 'border' with Lazio and enjoy some time at the Lake of Piediluco, before continuing through the valley of Rieti, a peaceful area, loved by St. Francis. The tour finishes in the city of Rieti, the capital of the 'Sabina' area, a beautiful small city, yet virtually unknown to tourism.



This is a moderately easy tour which is suitable for those who have some experience of walking and a good general physical condition. You walk through the extensive footpath network of the area, roughly following the traces of the medieval pilgrim path from Assisi to Rome.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Optional extra day – Perugia

It's worth it to spend an extra night in Perugia, the region's capital and one of the most lively and international cities, thanks to its 'Università per Stranieri', the best place to learn Italian. It is an amazingly beautiful city with a very charming medieval town centre, fortresses. You can opt to walk to Perugia directly from Assisi (luggage transport on request), but of course it is also possible to travel by public transport (optional taxi) to Perugia and make a great roundwalk there, through the town and its surroundings.

Accommodation: Perugia, Hotel */*****

Day 1 – Arrival in Assisi

Arrival by train in Assisi and transfer to the hotel (either by private taxi or public transport). Your hotel is located in the heart of the old town, known for its beautiful churches and many monuments. It is also a very pleasant town for an afternoon walk or evening stroll. Depending on your arrival time, you could go for a quick visit to the town centre. In the evening you eat at the hotel restaurant.

Accommodation: Assisi - Hotel ***

Approx. walking time: 1 hour + sightseeing time.

Optional extra day – Exploring Assisi

After breakfast you can take your time to look around. The town is full of highlights, among which, of course, is the World Heritage Site Basilica of San Francesco d'Assisi (St. Francis), with its wonderful frescos by Giotto. But the other churches, the Greek temple in the central square and the underground Roman Forum are all worth a visit too. For those who want to do another short walk to conclude their walking holiday in style, we recommend taking the bus to the Eremo delle Carceri where you can start climbing up Mt. Subasio. Here a beautiful roundwalk around natural springs and small chapels can be made, before heading back down to the historical heart of Assisi.

Accommodation: Assisi - Hotel ***

Day 2 – Along Mt. Subasio from Assisi to Spello

From Assisi you'll walk to the Roman town of Spello, considered to be one of the most charming in the area. You first walk (optional transfer) to the stunning Eremo delle Carceri, the place where St. Francis, and many others after him, sought spiritual relief - now a beautiful little monastery with a nice surrounding garden. Take your time to visit and then, depending on your energy levels you can opt either for the walk over the ridge of Monte Subasio, or stay at a lower level and walk through pleasant countryside (recommended), with great views over the valley. Depending on your energy levels you can opt either for the walk over the ridge of Monte Subasio, or stay at a lower level and walk through pleasant countryside (recommended), with great views over the valley. In the afternoon you reach the town walls of Spello, a stunning old town, located on a ridge. After passing the medieval town walls, you continue the walk downhill, all the way through the old town centre. Your hotel is located in the heart of the old town.

Accommodation: Spello - Hotel ****

Total walking distance: 13/17 km. Approx. walking time: 4/6 h. + sightseeing. Ascent & descent: + 800/100 m./- 600/300 m.

Optional extra day: From Spello along the Roman aqueduct to Collepinio

It's worth it to spend an extra night in Spello, by many considered to be one of central Italy's most beautiful villages. In that case you'll be brought from Trevi to Spello and after settling in your hotel in you can make a beautiful walk which brings you in the marvellous valley just behind Spello. You'll follow the old Roman aqueduct, with stunning views over the whole valley. Your goal for today is the charming village of Collepinio, where you can opt to have lunch.



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You can travel back to Spello by bus (optional transfer) and take your time to wander around in beautiful Spello. In alternative there is an option for a beautiful walk back to Spello.

Accommodation: Spello - Hotel * /******

Approx. walking time: 3 h. + sightseeing time.

Day 3 – From Spello through to Trevi

Today you first walk down to the old Roman gate of Spello, the 'Porta Consolare'. Then, through the plain – with some busier sections – you reach the nice town of Foligno, where you have the time for a coffee and can buy your picnic supplies. The route then continues through the plain and the outskirts of Foligno, before bringing you up into the hills. Your goal for today is the beautiful little town of Trevi, one of the most charming in central Italy, overlooking the Valle Umbra and famous for its crystal-clear spring water. Here you settle in at your hotel for the night. In the evening you can dine in one of the nice restaurants in the old town centre or at your hotel.

Accommodation: Trevi - Hotel * /******

Total walking distance: 12,5 km. Approx. walking time: 4,5 h. + sightseeing time. Ascent & descent: + 300 m./- 150 m.

Day 4 – Along the 'Sentiero degli Ulivi' from Trevi to Spoleto

The first part of the walk today goes through the rolling hills, covered with beautiful olive groves and scattered with remains of medieval castles and walled hamlets. If you wish you can also descend into the valley and discover the mythical springs of the Clitunno River, believed to be divine waters in Roman times. Towards the end of the afternoon you reach the walled town of Eggi. From here you can either continue along the official route through the outskirts of Spoleto, or take a local bus or taxi. In alternative, in case you still have enough energy, you can opt for a beautiful route along the old railway line. Be sure to be on time in Spoleto, a city which is definitely worth a prolonged stay!

Accommodation: Spoleto - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 20/25 km. Approx. walking time: 5-7 h. + sightseeing time. Ascent & descent: + 800 m./- 800 m.

Optional extra day – Round walk Spoleto & Monteluco

This day walk takes you through the whole of the historic town centre of Spoleto to its fortress. Then you walk across the impressive 'Ponte delle Torri' bridge, a unique aqueduct, to the other side of the valley, onto the hill of Monteluco. Here you make a very pleasant round walk through the forested hills, with wonderful views of Spoleto and its surroundings. The hill of Monteluco is considered a 'holy mountain' and many of the trails are linked to the spiritual history of the area. Here you can discover the 'holy forest' with its many grottoes, and wander around medieval chapels through a pleasant wooden landscape. Then you descend back into the valley of Spoleto again and return to the old town past the medieval chapel of San Pietro.

Accommodation: Spoleto - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 12 km. Approx. walking time: 4 h. + sightseeing time. Ascent & descent: +/- 450 m.

Optional extra day – along the old railway line to Norcia

Today's walk takes you on a great walk from the centre of Spoleto, along the old railway track, which once linked Spoleto to Norcia. You'll pass several beautiful churches and then walk through a pleasant countryside, alternated with forest. You cross several deep, impressive valleys, but being on a railway track, these can be crossed easily, and moreover with spectacular views over the whole plain of Umbria-. Upon reaching the medieval village of Eggi you have the time to look around, before returning to Spoleto (bus or taxi service available). The walk is relatively short, which allows you some time to wander around in beautiful Spoleto. There is an option to shorten the route if desired.

Accommodation: Spoleto - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 12 km. Approx. walking time: 4 h. + sightseeing time. Ascent & descent: +/- 550 m. (shorter options available)



Day 5 – From Spoleto into the Valnerina

After breakfast you begin your long walk, which will bring you into the Valnerina, the wonderful valley of the Nera River. First you cross the Ponte delle Torri again, but now you follow the beautiful path along the aqueduct, with great views of Spoleto. Then you follow the waymarked trail into the small valley of the Val Cieca, the 'blind valley', uphill towards the Castelmonte Pass. From here the path goes downhill into the beautiful Nera valley. In the early afternoon you reach the hamlet of Cese. Continue the walk through the forested hills and, towards the end of the afternoon, you reach the village of Macenano, known for the beautiful abbey of San Pietro in Valle, now a historical country residence. You'll be staying either here or in a nice hotel in the village. In the evening you have a nice meal at local restaurant.

Accommodation: Ferentillo, San Pietro in Valle - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 15/20 km. Approx. walking time: 6 h. Ascent & descent: + 1000 m./- 1050 m.



Day 6 – Through the Valnerina to the Marmore Waterfalls

Today you head West, through the narrowest part of the Nera valley, which until not long ago was almost completely cut off from the outer world and therefore virtually untouched. Past several charming hamlets, following the pilgrim trail from Assisi to Rome, you reach one of the wonders of central Italy: the stunning Marmore Falls. These waterfalls, about 165 metres high, offer a unique visual and acoustic experience. And the most intriguing fact about them is that they are actually manmade, built in Ancient Roman times... You can make a wonderful roundwalk in the area, walking from viewpoint to viewpoint. After some time for contemplation or a drink you leave the falls behind you and you settle in a nice hotel near the lake of Piediluco.

Accommodation: Piediluco - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 20 km. Approx. walking time: 4,5 h. + sightseeing time. Ascent & descent: + 450 m./- 50 m.

Day 7 – Along the Lake of Piediluco into the hills of the Sabina

Today's route starts with an easy stretch along the Lake of Piediluco, the remains of what once was an immense area of marshes and lakes, then drained by the romans with the creation of the canal which gives birth to the marmore waterfalls. After about 10 km. though, the route starts to climb up into the hills. Your destination for today is the nice little town of Poggio Bustone, a very charming medieval town, overlooking the Valle Reatina, the plain of Rieti. You'll stay at a charming B&B and in the evening you can dine in one of the nice restaurants in the old town centre.

Accommodation: Poggio Bustone – B&B ***

Total walking distance: 23 km Approx. walking time: 6 h. Ascent & descent: + 750 m./- 400 m.



Day 8 – From the Sabine Hills down to Rieti (optional continuation to Rome)

Today you'll make a relatively short walk, and mostly downhill, which will give you the time to explore Rieti, the capital of the Sabina area, and destination for today. The first part of the walk goes through the hills, while the last 5 km. bring you down to the old heart of Rieti, which is considered to be the exact centre of Italy! Leave your luggage at your centrally located hotel and then take your time to explore the town and stroll along the Velino River. Rieti was originally a major town of the Sabine nation well before the foundation of Rome. According to the legend, when Romulus founded Rome, Romans kidnapped Sabine women in order to populate the town of Rome (The Rape of the Sabine Women). Also in Medieval times Rieti remained an important town, which shows in its many monuments. Today it's a quiet provincial town, with almost no tourism, where the real Italian life can still be lived.

Accommodation: Rieti – Hotel***

Total walking distance: 16 km Approx. walking time: 4 h. Ascent & descent: + 250 m./ - 600 m.

Day 9 – Departure from Rieti (optional continuation to Rome)

End of the tour. From Assisi town centre there are buses to the train station (down in the valley), where you can find regular trains to Perugia, Rome and Florence.

TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

Accommodation is on a partly half-board, partly bed & breakfast basis in good 3/4-star hotels and a few nights in a B&B (3-star level). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

Dinners are included on the arrival night in Assisi and the night in Macenano / the abbey of San Pietro (in a fine restaurant). On the other nights, you will be free to make your own dinner arrangements.

No picnic lunches are included in the tour price, but these can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages where you'll be staying.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

It is possible to book an upgrade in some of the places en route. Details and prices on request.

INCLUDED

- 1/2 nights in Assisi*** - 1 HB + 1 BB
- 1 night in Spello**** - BB
- 1 night in Trevi*** - BB
- 1/2 nights in Spoleto*** - 1 HB + 1 BB
- 1 night in San Pietro in Valle*** - HB
- 1 night in Piediluco*** - BB
- 1 night in Poggio Bustone*** - BB
- 1 night in Rieti*** - BB
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information



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- Maps at 1 : 25.000 scale (or better)
- GPS tracks for each day
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transport (if requested)
- Private transfers as specified

NOT INCLUDED

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

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderate (2/3): Mostly easy walks, though some involve uphill walking, sometimes steeply and on paths with rough surfaces. On some days there are stretches that are difficult for those suffering from vertigo (but NOT dangerous!). On these days alternative options are available. Extensions or shortcuts are also possible on many days.

Fitness: High standard of fitness is not necessary but you should be able to walk for up to 5 hours a day in the hot sun on dusty or stony tracks.

FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

Footpaths: Most paths are well maintained, but during the season some paths can get overgrown. The journey involves some walking uphill, sometimes on paths with rough surfaces.

Waymarking: A large part of the route is waymarked – with different signs, explained in full in the route notes. Elsewhere you need to follow the route descriptions provided together with the maps. With these you will always be able to find your route.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in ASSISI. Assisi can be reached by train from Rome or Florence. A pick-up service can be arranged from the station to the hotel (about 10 minutes away).

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast in RIETI on day 9.

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