

THE WALKING PARTY

ITINERARY FOR A TASTE OF ITALY: UMBRIA

Distance : 57 km max

Walking : moderate +



Day 1 You will be met in Rome at the Fiumicino airport at 16.10 by James and Diana and driven to the beauty of the hills of Assisi. Here you stay in a delightful hotel with stunning views over the hills back to Perugia. You stay here your first three nights.

Day 2 You awake to the beauty of the hillsides and a lovely breakfast. Warm cornetti (croissants filled with a little *crema*) and excellent coffee and of course orange juice from succulent blood oranges are the highlights. Otherwise cheeses, salamis and cereals, biscotti and home-made jams and yoghurts fill the table. After breakfast we move off on foot down hill through the oak forests with distant views of Assisi for the farmhouse of Ambrogio and Gentile. No mules yet as this is an easy gentle downhill walk (with just a few ups as well!). The farmhouse we will see is a totally rural Slow Food style affair with pigs, chickens, cows, sheep, rabbits. It is all well-ordered and totally self-sufficient. My goodness the quality of food that they eat there! We will meet Ambrogio and Gentile and picnic with Diana in the fields. In the afternoon there is a chance to take it easy in the beauty of your hotel to read, swim or paint or a chance to be driven to Perugia.

7km

Day 3 After an early morning breakfast, we leave by car for Assisi and the great Christian masterwork: San Francesco. We will have a look at the outstanding fresco cycles attributed to Giotto at the end of the 13th century and then, in the lower church, spend some time on the magical chapel of San Martino painted by Simone Martini a little later. We will see instantly the difference between the Sienese and Florentine schools. Both majestically beautiful but one more concerned with a two dimensional surface and the beauty of line and expression and

the other preoccupied with the sense of mass in space. We move on then by car for a walk to the pretty walled medieval village of Bevagna. Lunch here with the beautiful Assunta. An optional walk after lunch to Montefalco visiting at the end of the day the fresco cycle of Benozzi Gozzoli hidden away in a tiny whitewashed church. Return by car to your hotel for your last night here. *12 km*



Day 4 We leave in the vehicles for Spello prettily perched on the side of the whale back Monte Subasio. We will take a quick look at the delightful Pintoricchio frescoes in Santa Maria Maggiore before a wine tasting with one of the top wine agents of Italy. Here we will taste some absolutely delicious Italian wines with some regional delicacies and spend a wonderful time idling into lunch in the street sunshine. We will then continue by car after lunch to the drama of the Sibellini mountains famous for truffles, pork and nefarious necromancy! We will drive to be dropped off for an optional walk into the 13th century walled village of Norcia nestled at the foot of the mountains. There will be time in the evening to wander in the peaceful piazza before dining at the Grotta Azzurra. You will stay the next three nights at the Palazzo Seneca in the centre of this tiny town. It is a wonderful ancient hotel which has been recently modernised. We have a great welcome from Anna and Carlo Bianconi and this is the perfect place to start the Sibillini experience! *8 km*

Day 5 You awake to the peel of the church bells. After blood red orange juice and strong black coffee and all other breakfast delights we leave behind the curtain wall of Norcia and climb the mountains in the vehicles to meet our muleteer and the mules to set off for the mornings walk through the beautiful beech woods to Sant' Eutizio. This small abbey was a founding stone of the Benedictine movement and we will eat lunch in the tiny *ristorante* opposite. After lunch we will get to the top of the hill by driving! Then an easy long walk downhill with beautiful views towards the charming village of Visso. We will hopefully see many butterflies before we arrive for the joys of Visso gelato. Return by vehicle to Norcia. Dinner at the Beccofino restaurant hopefully outside in the Piazza where Signora Benafica has been cooking excellent Umbrian cuisine for forty years. *15 km*

Day 6 Our last breakfast at the Grotta Azzurra and a wonderful day of walking to the glacial crater of Castelluccio. This is indeed a marvellous sight. We are quite high here at about 1450 metres but the climbing is stunning and not too steep. The scrub hugs the hills like beize to a billiard table and spinneys of beech are scattered like sporadic limpets on a rock. The flowers are excellent, indeed the glacial crater can be turned into one of the great flower wonders of the world with a plethora of stunning colour hitting you as you walk over the top of the peak. Poppies, lentil flowers, meadow clary, orchids and peonies are high up on the list, even the thistles are lovely! We will walk up with the muleteer and the mules, before a well earned drink in Castelluccio. Then a picnic lunch with one of Diana's delicious Italian picnics and with fantastic scenery around before we continue on another circuit to see the stunning carpets of ox-eye daisies, poppies, cornflowers and innumerable other flowers. We drive back for a lesson on how to make tortellini in the stone vaulted kitchen with the head chef of the Grotta Azzurra. Dinner at the Grotta Azzurra. *15 km*

Day 7 We leave the beauty of the Sibillini mountains and drive to the beautiful abbey of San Pietro in Valle built by a Lombard Emperor who saw the light. We visit the abbey before driving into Spoleto, the ancient city republic which the Romantic poet Shelley called '*the most romantic city ever*'. We will lunch in one of the squares of Spoleto and take an afternoon off in siesta or shopping fashion. There will be time to relax and wander around the Spoleto streets before dinner. You stay in a four star hotel overlooking the great aqueduct built by Gattapone in the fourteenth century.

Day 8 We drive across the country in the vehicles for a chance to see the magnificent city of Orvieto which sits like the Acropolis in majesty on a dramatic rock outcrop dominated by its towering Gothic cathedral. This is one of the wonders of Italian medieval art and certainly the the way to finish the week. We lunch opposite the cathedral before continuing to Rome in the vehicles. Of course there is always the option to stay a couple of days in Rome and we would be delighted to help with that itinerary.



NOTE: *This tour starts & ends at the Rome airports of Fiumicino and Ciampino. The itinerary is subject to change according to local conditions. All mileages shown are approximate.*