

THE WALKING PARTY

ITINERARY FOR A 'TASTE OF ITALY' : UMBRIA

Price: 2690 euros per person Single Supplement: 360 euros

Distance : 32 miles

Walking : moderate +



This is a week of mixing all the best things that Umbria has to offer. The green heart of Italy, as it is known, has an unending quantity of gems in each category be it gastronomic, floral, cultural or of just outstanding landscape beauty. Two of the great Christian saints were born here. You stay in Norcia the birthplace of St Benedict, nestled at the foot of the Sibillini mountains. You visit the resting place of St Francis, which is, much to Francis' chagrin, the most opulent monument of medieval art in Italy. Also colouring the week are the fantastic people and their food and three wonderful four star hotels.

Day 1 GARDEN DAY You will be met in Rome at the Fiumicino airport by James and driven to Vignarello After lunch we will visit the Castello Ruspoli and view the garden there as well as the family history and castle. It is all quite colourful and well worth lending an ear to! We shall then continue to a nearby garden which was restored after the visit of Salvador Dali and Man Ray in the 1960s. It is an extraordinary garden of Renaissance-carved stone monsters, dragons and mythological figures that all relate to an marvellous epic poem of the sixteenth century by Ariosto called *Orlando Furioso*. It is a 'Game of Thrones' affair and all about unrequited love. We will walk through the woods here before setting off for Assisi and our first night at the four star Romantik hotel of Le Silve. This has wide stretching views and 600 hectares of woodland. It is situated in the rolling hills behind the whale back mountain of Monte Subasio. It is a wonderful place to start your Umbrian experience. There are fifteen bedrooms all with bathrooms on suite. There is also a lovely swimming pool. Dinner will be at Le Silve.

Day 2 ASSISI 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 at Le Silve. After breakfast we move off on foot downhill 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 peasant farmer

affair with pigs, chickens, cows, sheep, and 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 in the fields. In the afternoon we leave by car for Assisi and the great Christian masterwork: San Francesco. We will walk through this glorious town before taking a look at the outstanding fresco cycles attributed to Giotto at the beginning of the 14th century and then, in the lower church, spend some time on the magical chapel of San Martino painted by Simone Martini only ten years later. We will see instantly the difference between the Sienese and Florentine schools. Both are 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. When this has all been devoured and enjoyed we shall return to Le Silve by car. Dinner Le Silve. *6 miles*



Day 3 FINE WINE DAY An early morning walk in the Le Silve estate for keenies before 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, Roberto Angelini. Here we will taste some absolutely delicious top quality and rare Italian wines with some regional delicacies and spend a wonderful time idling through lunch in the street sunshine. We will then continue by car after lunch to the drama of the Sibellini mountains famous for truffles, black pigs and wild boar and nefarious necromancy! We will drive to be dropped off for a walk through the beautiful beech woods to Sant' Eutizio. This small abbey was a founding stone of the Benedictine movement where the hermit Spes first gave Benedict holy ideas and aspirations. We do not visit this tiny abbey as it has suffered from the 2016 earthquake. We will drive from here to Norcia for your first night in this tiny walled village nestled at the foot of the Sibillini mountains like a tiny boat under the huge waves of a tsunami. The Palazzo Seneca has been recently renovated and is a four star hotel in the historic centre. It has all usual amenities and is charming and classy. It is the perfect place to appreciate the Sibillini experience! You will stay here for the next three nights. Dinner at the Granario. *6 miles*

Day 4 CASTELLUCCIO After a wonderful breakfast at the Palazzo Seneca we start our first wonderful day of walking to the glacial crater of Castelluccio. This is indeed a marvellous sight. We will be 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 Roberto and the mules,

before a well-earned drink and light lunch in Castelluccio before we continue on another circuit to see more innumerable flowers. Drive back then to Norcia for time to relax. Dinner at the Granario. *10 miles*

Day 5 CASTELLUCCIO Our last breakfast at the Palazzo Seneca and a wonderful day of walking back up in the glacial crater of Castelluccio. We climb in the car to start walking to the far end of the crater. This time we walk towards a picnic looking out over the far end hills. It is worthwhile getting twice into this beautiful part of the world otherwise the memory goes all too quickly. We will walk along the 1000 metre level with some softer ups and downs but with these beautiful views across the crater! After the picnic lunch with fresh Italian delicacies we shall drive back to Norcia for a lesson on how to make tortellini in the stone vaulted kitchen with the chef of the Grotta Azzurra. This is a light-hearted yet earnest attempt to become a real Italian chef! Everyone gets their hands dirty and you see just what it takes to get fresh pasta on the table! Dinner at the Granario. *10 miles*

Day 6 SPOLETO We leave the beauty of the Sibillini mountains and drive to the abbey of San Pietro in Valle built by a Lombard Emperor in the tenth century who saw the light. It is a charming tiny church in an isolated situation with dramatic steep hills all around. The cycle of frescoes here is not only wonderfully aesthetic but also historically important as a rare bridge between the Byzantine and Gothic styles. It is absolutely charming! 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 will stay in the four star Gattapone hotel with views over the dramatic fourteenth century aquaduct. Dinner in Spoleto in front of the spotlit cathedral weather permitting. This can seriously show you just how romantic Spoleto can be!

Day 7 ORVIETO An early start to Orvieto on our way to Rome Fiumicino after breakfast to see the extraordinary duomo cathedral with the bas-relief façade by Lorenzo Maitani and the important fresco cycle by Signorelli in the San Brizio chapel. Both these are extraordinary tours de force. The frescoes are supposedly and obviously an inspiration for Michelangelo's east wall of the Sistine chapel as Michelangelo stopped in Orvieto on his way down to Rome in the early sixteenth century. A light lunch in Orvieto before driving to arrive in Rome Fiumicino.



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