

# Verona and the Dolomites Walking Tour 2019

*“The Dolomites National Park protects a series of highly distinctive mountain landscapes that are of exceptional natural beauty, extraordinary in a global context, and amongst the most beautiful in the world...”* – UNESCO World Heritage Listing, June 2009

The Dolomites are a unique range of mountains: towering limestone pinnacles and spires, some over 3000 metres high, rise dramatically above deep green valleys of pine forests and rolling meadows scattered with centuries-old villages, Gothic churches and isolated timber farmhouses. It is a beguiling blend of German and Italian cultures. Our beautiful walks follow winding trails that have criss-crossed the mountains linking hamlets and villages for centuries.

## The walks

The seven walks during the tour are straightforward, following well-marked and well-maintained paths with no dramatic climbs or descents (where necessary, we take cable cars to the start of the high walks) and follow good tracks across alpine meadows to the valleys below, stopping at mountain huts along the way for breaks and lunch (even for an occasional mid-morning capuccino).

## The accommodation

The accommodation is in lovely 4-star hotels: in Verona a classic hotel (Maria Callas stayed here) in the pedestrian precinct, around the corner from Piazza delle Erbe; in the valleys we stay in spacious Tyrolean-style, family-run hotels; and in Cortina d'Ampezzo in a classic mountain-style hotel in the pedestrian centre of the town. The last two nights will be in a beautiful new 4-star hotel a short walk from Cortina.

## The food

Food, of course, is one of the highlights of the trip. The people of the Dolomites are extremely proud of the produce of their beautiful territory (fruit, vegetables, cheeses, hams and a wide variety of breads etc) and the local cuisine is a fascinating combination Italian and Austrian cooking. The Alto Adige/Sud Tirol is particularly famous for its high altitude white wines. Wine is included with each wine.

**Tour Dates:** 13 September to 25 September 2019

**Tour Size:** 7 to 15 people

**Tour inclusions:** 12 nights accommodation in boutique hotels (see itinerary for details)

All breakfasts, and all lunches and dinners listed in the itinerary

All land and lakes transfers listed in the itinerary

All taxes and service charges at the hotels

All paid admissions during the tour

7 guided walks

Full-time services of a fully experienced bi-lingual guide

# Verona and the Dolomites Walking Tour Itinerary

## Day 1

The tour starts in Verona, one of the most beautiful and romantic towns in Italy. After an aperitif in a central piazza, we'll have a traditional dinner in one of the town's finest osterias, founded in 1890. Dinner.

## Day 2

This morning we'll go on a guided walk around this fascinating city, which has been an important military stronghold guarding the access to the Alps since Roman times. We'll finish with a light lunch in a local trattoria. The rest of the day and evening are free. Lunch.

## Day 3

Today we drive north, into the heart of the Dolomites. Following the 'wine road' beside the banks of the Adige River, we will stop to visit a vineyard before having a light lunch at a nearby restaurant with beautiful views down the valley. We then continue into the Dolomites. Our base for the next four nights is in a lovely family-run hotel on the edge small town at the far end of a spectacular valley. Dinner will be at our hotel. Lunch and dinner.

## Day 4

Our first walk in the mountains is a spectacular introduction to the Dolomites. We take a cable car to the top of the northern side of the valley (2,500 metres) from where you have breathtaking 360 degree views over the whole mountain range, stretching to the horizon on all sides. From here we take a good path across alpine pastures, through pine forests and back down to our village, stopping for a light lunch in a mountain hut along the way. (4 hours). Dinner is at the hotel. Lunch and dinner.

## Day 5

Today we drive to Bolzano, the capital of the Alto Adige, a pretty town on a river with a long history and strong Austrian feel. We stop in the hills above Bolzano for a lovely short stroll in forests before taking a cable car down to the town. After a walk through the town centre and lunch we visit one of the highlights of the region: the excellent museum dedicated to Otzi, the 5000 year old 'Iceman' found in 1991 before returning to our valley. Dinner is at our hotel. Dinner.

## Day 6

The walk today starts with another cable car ride, this time up the southern side of the valley (2,000 metres) from where we walk across the beautiful rolling pastures, a vast undulating amphitheatre of alpine meadows surrounded by some of the most spectacular ranges in the area. After a picnic lunch, we continue under the cliffs of the Sassolungo range, where we'll be picked up and taken back to the hotel (4 hours). For the energetic, there is the option back of continuing on down through forest and into the valley to our base. (1.5 hours). Lunch and dinner.

## Day 7

Today we leave the valley, driving over a nearby pass, descending into the neighbouring valley and heading north through idyllic countryside towards the Austrian border 40 kilometres away. Our base for the next 4 nights is in a smaller tributary Ladino speaking valley, one of the most secluded and spectacular in the Dolomites. We stay in its most charming village at the foot of the Fanes highlands, in a lovely family-run chalet, surrounded by pastures filled with lowing cows and frolicking donkeys, with views over the village. We have dinner at our hotel. Dinner.

### **Day 8**

Today we drive up to the southern side of the valley, picking up an unsealed forestry road that takes us through pine forests, over the ridge and into the neighbouring valley, stopping for a picnic lunch on the way. On the way down the other side, we pass through a number of 'viles', clusters of ancient timber farmhouses and barns that have survived from another era. After well-earned refreshments at the local village, we'll be picked up and driven back to our base, stopping to visit a recently restored 14th century castle which houses a fine ethnographic museum. Dinner at our hotel. Lunch and dinner.

### **Day 9**

Today you have two options. Option 1: drive across the Brennero Pass into Austria to visit the marvellous city of Innsbruck (formerly an important centre of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Innsbruck remains the capital of the Tyrol regional, of which the Dolomites were part for 400 years until 1919 when they were annexed to Italy). Option 2: have a relaxing day in our valley, including a morning walk and lunch. We'll regroup in the evening for dinner (Dinner).

### **Day 10**

This morning we drive to the head of our valley, transferring to jeeps to be taken up a steep winding road into the rugged beauty in the heart of the National Park, to a mountain hut which is perched on a plateau surrounded by soaring mountains. We'll spend the day exploring this area including an easy walk to the 'green' lake to see the 'parliament of marmots', a colony of furry mountain critters and the site of one of the most famous Ladino legends. We'll have lunch in the hut before taking the jeeps back down. Dinner at our hotel.

### **Day 11**

Today we leave the valley, picking up the famous Strada delle Dolomiti (the Great Dolomite Road) which was built by the Austrians in the early 1900s and is one of the most beautiful roads in the Alps. On the way we pass under the Marmolada group, the highest peaks in the Dolomites, where we'll stop for lunch, before descending to the town Cortina d'Ampezzo, the 'Queen of the Dolomites' and host of the 1956 Winter Olympics. A little faded from its heydays in the 1960s and 70s, Cortina still has a lot of charm and a wonderful setting in a sunny upland basin, with magnificent views of the mountains on all sides. Our 4 star hotel is in the heart of the town. Dinner is at our hotel. Dinner.

### **Day 12**

The final walk is one of the most famous and spectacular in the Alps - a circular walk around the Tre Cime di Lavaredo, a 40 minute drive from Cortina. The walking route follows a mountain path that loops around the base of this extraordinary formation, three jagged peaks rising over 3000 metres – a fitting grand-finale to our tour. After a picnic lunch, we return to Cortina. Our farewell dinner will be at our hotel. Lunch and dinner.

### **Day 13**

After breakfast, we will be transferred to Venice, 1.5 hours away, which has national and international rail and air connection (arriving at the airport by 10.00 and Mestre station by 10.30).