



Walks reveal Italy's hidden treasures

SIMON Tancred's footprints on the walking trails of Italy were planted long before launching his niche guided and self-guided walking tour business Hidden Italy in 1993.

Simon spent six years living and working in Milan in the 1980s. On weekends he would escape the city for walks in the surrounding countryside, along the rivers on the Po plains or coastal paths of the nearby Cinque Terre.

"My first walk there started with a ride up to Breglia on Lake Como, 85km uphill on a single-gear bike, and then a two-hour walk up a cobbled path through forest to Rifugio Menaggio, a mountain hut 1000 metres above the lake," he said. "The perfect combination of fresh air, ancient trails, local characters and rustic food got me in and I've been doing it ever since."

Simon has worn out five pairs of hiking boots, walking well over 15,000km throughout Italy, from the snowy trails of the Alta Via in the German-speaking Dolomites in the north, to the country lanes of central Sicily.

Today, all Hidden Italy's routes focus on a single region

to walk, not hike, at a pace relaxed enough to really get to know and understand the place.

Self-guided tours of central Sicily are offered year-round, along with walks through the Riviera, Tuscany, Umbria, Amalfi, Lake Como, Provence and a new Piedmont route around Alba and the Langhe Hills wine area, south of Turin.

Independent walkers follow clearly marked paths that have been used for centuries, walking to different hotels each day, while their bags are transported ahead.

"For me, there are still few great pleasures than entering the walls of an ancient Italian town after a good day's walk, with the prospect of a fine meal and a warm bed in front of me," Simon said.

A nine-day hike across the Italian Alps in August will follow the footsteps of four Aussie POWs who escaped a fascist prison camp in 1943. With the same statistics as the Kokoda Track (96km; elevation gain of over 5000 metres) the route includes a side trip up (with funiculars) to the base of the peak of Mt Rosa, the second highest mountain in Europe. ■ www.hiddenitaly.com.au