

Guided Walking Tour of Venice and the Italian Lakes 2019

(13 days / 12 nights) - \$6,690 AUD per person

The tour starts in magical Venice and finishes in elegant Turin. Strung along the foot of the Alps, for millennia the Italian Lakes have been a gateway to the colour and life of the Mediterranean world for the pilgrims, traders and armies who marched across the Alps on foot. The walks on this marvellous tour follow these same routes, ancient stone paths that wind high above the lakes far from the madding crowds, passing through forests and isolated hamlets all with spectacular views across to the mountains and valleys on the other shores.

The walks:

The seven guided walks that are included in this tour follow stone paths that have been used for centuries - the views over the lakes and mountains along the way are breath-taking. They are from 8 to 12 kms and take from 3 to 4 hours, ranging from easy lake shore strolls to more demanding walks above the lakes - several of these involve steep climbs at the beginning so you will need to have a good level of fitness. In some cases it is possible to shorten the walk or to opt out and join the walkers for lunch.

The accommodation:

The accommodation for the tour is in 4-star boutique hotels: in a quiet corner of Venice Venice; tucked away on the edge of Lake Como, with breakfast terrace and rooms looking over to Bellagio; in a quiet cul de sac in the pedestrian heart of Turin. The exception is during the four days in Ticino, where we stay in a small, 400 year-old, family-run hikers hotel in the centre of our village.

The food:

The food during the tour celebrates the culinary diversity of northern Italy: seafood beside the canals of Venice, elegant dinners looking the twinkling lights of Lake Como, picnics in the mountains, robust lunches at country trattorie and a final dinner in Turin at one of the most celebrated restaurants in Italy. Wine is included with all meals. With its mild days and cool, autumn is ideal.

Tour Dates: 30 August to 11 September 2019

Tour Size: 7 to 15 people

Tour Cost: **\$6,690 AUD per person**
(two people sharing a double room)
(single supplement for a double room for single use \$850 AUD)

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

Venice and the Italian Lakes Walking Tour Itinerary

Day 1

The Venice and the Italian Lakes walking tour starts in Venice. We meet in our hotel (on a canal in a quiet residential area) on the first night for a short stroll around the neighbourhood and dinner in a nearby restaurant. (Dinner).

Day 2

This morning we take a four hour walk along some of the smaller canals, through hidden lanes and squares, exploring some of the less visited parts of the city. After a traditional lunch on a quiet canal on Dorsduro, the afternoon is free. (Lunch).

Day 3

This morning we leave Venice by water taxi, crossing the lagoon to be then taken by private bus to a gorgeous town on the shores of Lake Como opposite Bellagio our base for the next four days, staying in a 17th century villa, with famous gardens. On the way, we stop for lunch in a celebrated osteria that has been in the same family for four. The evening is free. (Lunch).

Day 4

This morning we take the ferry across the lake. This spectacular walk climbs up to a charming church with glorious views over the lake, where we have a picnic lunch. From here we loop around and walk down to Menaggio, from where we take the ferry back to our base where the rest of the day is free (4 hours). (Lunch).

Day 5

This morning we visit one of the finest villa's on the shores of Lake Como (for better or worse, the set for a number of Hollywood blockbusters, including Star Wars and James Bond). A pleasant ferry ride down the lake towards Como city, the villa sits on the tip of a forested peninsula and is one of the highlights of the tour. It the original building dates from the 12th century but was transformed over successive centuries. A private guided tour will take us through the gardens and the villa itself, with its wonderful historic collections. After the visit, we take the ferry back to our base, stopping at neighbouring Bellagio, one of the 'most beautiful villages in Italy' on the way. You'll have the afternoon free in Bellagio. In the evening we'll rejoin for a candle lit dinner overlooking the lake. (Dinner)

Day 6

Today's walk takes up to the castle above our town, and then along the face of the mountains following stone trading paths that have been used since Roman times, with breath-taking views over Lake Como and the mountains to Switzerland. We break for morning tea (coffee?) in the next village before continuing on to our destination, where we join local families for a robust Sunday lunch in a small osteria, or inn, that has been servicing walkers on the track for centuries and specializes in traditional 'comasco' cooking (3.5 hrs). There is a steep start of the walk but you'll have the possibility of shortening the walk or skipping it altogether and joining the walkers for lunch. After lunch we have a pleasant ferry back to our base where the

Day 7

This morning we leave Lake Como, crossing the nearby Swiss border into the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino and driving through the mountains to the northern Swiss end of Lake Maggiore. Along the way we stop for a short lake side walk and lunch in the elegant financial city of Lugano. Our base for the next four nights is a charming 400 year old mountain hotel tucked away in the valleys above Locarno at the northern tip of Lake Maggiore. After settling into the hotel, you'll be taken on a guided walk around this very interesting small town. We'll have dinner at a lovely traditional restaurant on the edge of town. (Dinner)

Day 8

Today's walk takes us into a neighbouring valley, known to the locals as the valley of the sun. Climbing up to a small chapel, we follow stone paths through a narrow gorge and into a valley, passing through chestnut and oak forests, past goat farms and a tiny hamlet before descending to the valley floor, finishing at a comfortable bar, overlooking a white stone river. We'll have a picnic lunch along the walk. (4 hrs). The evening is free. (Lunch)

Day 9

Today is a free day, with a variety of options (your guide will be available to help with advice and making the arrangements) including: taking the electric train into Locarno (15 minutes) to shop and/or take a ferry ride on Lake Maggiore, visiting the botanical gardens on the Brissago islands; do an easy walk into Locarno, following the river (2 hours); or take the little train for the celebrated ride all the way through the very beautiful valley, back into Italy, where you can get off for lunch before catching the train back to our base (3 hour round trip); or chill out at the hotel, reading a good book and exploring the village. Dinner tonight is a treat - eating at the town's best restaurant, a gourmet delight. (Dinner)

Day 10

This morning's walk takes you length of the beautiful valley we are staying. We start by taking the small narrow-gauge train into the spectacular valley (one of the classic train rides) to a pretty village on the Italian border and then follow a well-marked ancient trail above the river all the way back to our base. Along the way back we pass through a number of pretty villages, stopping at one for lunch. It is possible to shorten the walk here, taking a train back to base (5 hrs). (Lunch)

Day 11

Today we leave Switzerland and drive down the shore of the lake, crossing the border into Italy and heading for Turin, a surprisingly gracious city of wide boulevards, elegant arcades and grand public buildings, looking its best since the 2006 Winter Olympics. On the way we visit arguably the most enchanting of all the Italian lakes, tiny Lake Orta. After a short walk around the shores of the lake (0.5 hrs) we'll visit the gorgeous village of San Giulio d'Orta and have lunch before continuing on to Turin. After settling into the hotel, you'll have the time to explore the city and do a little afternoon shopping. The evening is free. (Lunch)

Day 12

This morning you will be taken on a guided walk through Turin's centre visiting some of the city's Baroque splendour, the legacy of the Savoy kings who ruled from here for nearly six centuries (4 hrs). The afternoon is free. In the evening we take a short walk through the heart of the city, have an aperitif and have dinner in one of the city's fine restaurants. (Dinner)

Day 13

After breakfast, you will be able to continue your holiday - Turin has a local airport, a shuttle service to Malpensa international airport and is well connected by train to all major Italian cities and to the rest of Europe.