

Hidden Italy Lazio self-guided walking tour, Cammino stage 3

8 days/7 nights

The last section of the Cammino of St Francis, this wonderful walk starts in Rieti and finishes 8 days and 100 kilometres later at the steps of St Peter's Basilica in the heart of Rome, taking you through protected forestlands, nature reserves, past archaeological digs and medieval castles and towns.

The route starts by crossing the Rieti plains then climbing into the hills of the Central Appenines, through an area known as Sabina. The area is dotted with small, proud towns, each with its own history traced back to the Romans and beyond. The hills gradually give way to the undulating farmlands of the Tiber River plain, taking you through two nature reserves before reaching the outer suburbs of Rome. The final walk takes a cycle path/greenway from the Monte Sacro district in northern Rome along the Aniene River and the glorious Tiber River, into the Vatican City via the Via della Conciliazione and the columns of Michelangelo's Piazza San Pietro to the stairs of St Peter's Basilica, one of the most spectacular buildings in the world, a moving experience (even for the not so religious!).

This independent walk is the second section of the Cammino of St Francis – in the spirit of the long-distance pilgrimage, we have sought to keep the costs down.

The walks:

Until reaching the outer suburbs of Rome on the penultimate day, the walk takes you through forested hills and rolling farmlands following predominantly unsealed roads and asphalted country lanes and is well-marked. There are a number of days that cover 20 kms over more, however, the route covers mostly hills and undulating plains without steep climbs – with notice, these walks can be shortened. This is a Grade 4 walk

The accommodation:

In the spirit of the long-distance pilgrimage, we have sought to keep the costs down. The tour starts on Day 1 in a 3-star hotel near the main square in Rieti and finishes in a lovely boutique hotel a short walk from the Vatican. Along the way, you stay in the best accommodation available: very attractive agriturismo's on Days 2 and 4; a private apartment on Day 3; a fantastic 3-star in the historic centre of a buzzy agricultural centre on Day 5 and a smart hotel in the Monte Sacro district of Rome on Day 6.

The food:

The food in regional Lazio is generally robust country cooking, dependent on seasonal offerings and influenced by the cuisine of the Capital, eg first courses may include bucatini or the famous carbonara (eggs, smoked pork cheek, pecorino and parmesan cheese). Apart from the standard offers of, seconds might include veal, beef, baccala (salted cod); oxtail stew; lamb and all types of offal. A generous breakfast each day is included in the tour cost. The dinner option includes a three-course meal.

Inclusions:

- Seven nights' accommodation
- All breakfasts and dinners (3 courses)
- Reading lists and historical and cultural notes
- Maps and detailed walking instructions
- Daily transfers of baggage between hotels
- 24-hour backup from local manager

Lazio self-guided walk, Cammino stage 3: Rieti to Rome

Day 1:

Arrival in Rieti, which is well-connected by rail to Rome. Pre-dating Rome, this small city was a long-time rival of the capital most famously remembered when the founders of Rome kidnapped its women, the 'Sabines', to help populate the new city. Under Roman rule it was known as Umbilicus Italiae (the belly-button of Italy) because it is the geographical centre of the peninsula. It has an interesting historical centre and is ringed by the Velino River.

Day 2:

A mostly flat and easy stage that takes you along creeks and through fields and forests, crossing a 4th century Roman bridge, before climbing up to a small farming town, whose ancient walls are over 2000 years old. You stay in a lovely 'agriturismo' on the edge of the town. (21 kms, 7 hrs)

Day 3:

Today's route takes you south along unsealed country lanes with spectacular mountain scenery and very pleasant walks through orchards, fields and farms, passing an historic village, two lovely Romanesque churches before arriving at an attractive farming village. (13 kms, 4 hrs)

Day 4:

Leading down from the mountains onto the Tiber Valley plain, this long and undulating itinerary on unsealed country roads stretches passes through rich farmlands and orchards. You stay in another lovely agriturismo, with a swimming pool overseen by a large medieval castle. (17 kms, 5 hrs)

Day 5:

Passing through a number of pretty towns, today's walk takes you down onto the plains, passing through a nature reserve, following gravel and asphalt roads before finishing in a buzzy hill-town, famous for its passeggiata and an 18th century Orsini palace. (25 kms, 6 hrs). *It is possibile to break this leg of the walk into two, staying in a small village along the way (12 kms then 13 kms).*

Day 6:

The first half of the day is a very pleasant walk through farmland and another nature reserve, while the second half transitions into the busy outer suburbs of Rome finishing at lovely 4-star hotel in the Monte Sacro district. (19 kms, 6 hrs).

Day 7:

While there is a nearby station that can take you directly to the Vatican, today's walk is well worth the effort, following a cycle path/greenway that winds along beside the Aniene River before crossing the famous Milvio Bridge then following the Tiber River past eight more bridges to the Castel Sant'Angelo and St Peter's Square. (15 kms, 4,5 hrs)

Day 8

After breakfast, you are free to continue your holiday.