

Italy: Tuscany & Umbria

Tour-Only Itinerary

Far below Mount Subasio's high slopes glints Assisi's Basilica, where you recently stood before Giotto's frescoes of St. Francis preaching to the birds. Just downhill is the hermitage where Francis often meditated, subsisting on roots and sleeping in caves. Thankfully, your prospects today are less austere. In fact, a sumptuous home-cooked lunch awaits in nearby Collepinio. Bruschetta, grilled meats and veggies, local wine, and olive oil. This is the flavorful fare you've grown accustomed to after days of rambling on this walking tour through Tuscany and Umbria's hills and vineyards. Central Italy's beauty will stay with you forever—Siena's seashell-shaped piazza, Pienza's harmonious Renaissance architecture—but today's greatest gift is the blessed sense of peace.



Highlights

- With an expert guide, discover Giotto's 28-part fresco, The Life of St. Francis, which graces the walls of Assisi's iconic Basilica of St. Francis.
- Savor an unforgettable meal of traditional cuisine as you peer through the glass bottom of a remarkable restaurant that sits atop excavated Roman ruins.
- Trek a dramatic path through an isolated valley of wheat fields and olive groves to the 12th-century, Romanesque Abbey of Sant'Antimo.
- Experience the architectural beauty of Siena's famous Piazza del Campo (home to the world-renowned Palio horse race), as your local guide regales you with stories.
- Hike the slopes of Mt. Subasio, amidst grazing sheep, Chianina cows, and semi-wild horses



(before reaching a charming hamlet and your rewarding lunch stop).

On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 4 to 8 miles per day, with shorter and longer options on some days. There are daily ascents and descents, with an average elevation gain of up to 500 feet (and maximum elevation gain of 1,220 feet). Most of the hills

are gradual as opposed to short and steep. The terrain includes cobblestone streets, narrow gravel roads, springy turf, packed dirt trails, and a few stretches of loose gravel. The pace on this tour is leisurely to allow for stops en route to explore villages or to visit cultural and historical sites.

DAY 1

Join your *Italy: Tuscany & Umbria* tour

City tour of Siena; 2-2.5 hours (approximately 3 miles), easy

Your guides meet you at 9:00 a.m. in the lobby of Hotel de la Ville in Florence. They'll be wearing Country Walkers shirts. Please be dressed for city walking. Comfortable walking shoes are required.

After meeting in Florence, you travel to Siena. The week begins with a walking tour of the historical center of Siena, an atmospheric Tuscan city. With its mixture of Gothic and Romanesque architecture dramatically set on three hills, Siena rivals Florence in beauty and culture. Following a light lunch of Sienese specialties, you explore the world-famous Piazza del Campo, presided over by its impressive town hall and tower. The Campo is the setting of the celebrated Palio horse race. Your engaging local guide leads you to the Duomo, the town's main cathedral, to view its striking marble façade.

Later, you drive to San Quirico d'Orcia, one of the pilgrimage routes that connected northern Europe to Rome, and your home for the next three nights. An essential stop during medieval times along the Via Francigena, San Quirico is a charming, walled, hilltop town surrounded by vineyards that produce three great Tuscan wines: Montepulciano, Brunello, and the Orcia DOC. Magnificent medieval architecture adorns its streets, and your boutique hotel is located just outside one of the town gates. A warm, wood-beamed restaurant in the heart of town welcomes you to dinner. Here, a glass of Brunello paired, perhaps, with a *bistecca fiorentina* (local grilled beef) is the perfect start to the week's culinary delights.

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2

Torrenieri to Pienza and Bagno Vignoni to San Quirico

7 miles, easy to moderate, 550-ft. elevation gain; optional 3-3.5 miles, easy to moderate (with challenging sections), 750-ft. elevation gain

Today's exploration begins on the outskirts of San Quirico. After an initial short drive to the village of Torrenieri, step onto a quiet gravel road that meanders along rolling terrain between the Orcia Valley and the Crete Senesi (Sienese hills) toward Pienza, the morning's destination. This spectacular walk features postcard views of the hill towns and surrounding villas, dotted with cypress and walnut trees. In the spring, expect to see wildflowers in bloom.

Lunch awaits at an old Tuscan farmhouse, where your hosts welcome you with an assortment of local *pecorino* (sheep's milk cheese), cold cuts, salads, frittatas, and pickled vegetables accompanied by their olive oil and house wine. After lunch, you are driven a few minutes away to Pienza, the birthplace of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, elected Pope Pius II in 1458. Envisioning the creation of the "ideal Renaissance town," Pius II had the village renamed and entirely redesigned by Florentine architect Bernardo Rossellino. The village's restructuring came to a halt following Pius II's death, and the only part of the urban plan that had been completed was the town center, Piazza Pio II. Here, the main monuments lie harmoniously along the town's central axis, with the town hall opposite a 15th-century cathedral.

An optional afternoon walk departs from the tiny spa village of Bagno Vignoni, where you can soak your feet in the warm waters flowing out of the town's picturesque main square. This pool is the only one in Italy that is, in fact, a thermal pool. Your route is marked by a long (45-minute) climb along a trail with loose rocks and gravel. It then transitions to gravel road and eventually pavement—culminating at a small hamlet with pretty views over the valley. Upon returning to the hotel in San Quirico, you have time to relax before enjoying dinner on your own at one of the fine local eateries in town, with recommendations from your guides.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3

Montalcino to Sant'Antimo Abbey

4-7 miles, easy to moderate

Today you depart San Quirico and walk through gentle hills in the shade of old-growth woods, skirting vineyards where the famous Sangiovese Grosso grape is grown for the world-famous Brunello wine. You might stop to visit an ancient Etruscan settlement, still under excavation. Then continue through farmland, ancient dwellings, wineries, and olive groves before making the dramatic descent to the isolated

Romanesque Abbey of Sant'Antimo.

You continue on to the attractive hilltop town of Montalcino, where you have time to stop into one (or more!) of the town's *enoteche* (wine bars) or restaurants, for a tasting and lunch on your own. Stroll through town, perhaps shopping for local products, perusing galleries, or snapping photos from the ramparts of the Rocca (the 14th century fortress that affords views towards Monte Amiata, Siena, and the hills of Maremma), before a mid-afternoon return to San Quirico. You have time to explore or relax (or perhaps indulge in a spa treatment at your hotel's nearby sister property) before gathering for dinner. You may want to step out for a pre-dinner stroll and a visit to the Horti Leonini—a wonderful example of classic Italian-style gardens, built by Diomedede Leoni in 1540. This evening, reunite with your guides and fellow travelers for a casual meal served family style, perhaps featuring homemade ravioli and a *tagliata* with porcini mushrooms (accompanied by a glass or two of vino) at a local osteria.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4

Travel to Umbria: Assisi city tour and optional Spello countryside. Independent exploration of Spello

3 miles, easy; optional 3 miles, easy to moderate

This morning you bid farewell to southern Tuscany as your drive winds through the rolling hills and medieval hilltop villages of the Crete Senesi, descends on the plains surrounding Lake Trasimeno, and enters the central valley of Umbria, a region known as the “Green Heart of Italy.”

Your morning is devoted to a (three-hour) exploration of Assisi. This stunning town sits in a commanding position on the slopes of Mount Subasio and has retained its charming medieval qualities and strong associations with St. Francis. The intriguing history of Assisi's city center and the Basilica of St. Francis come to life with interpretation from your guide. Afterward, enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

The afternoon offers several options. You may travel to Spello, your home for the next three nights, to stroll its picturesque alleys or relax by the hotel pool or in the *hammam* (Turkish bath). Alternatively, an easy walking option is offered—leading out of Assisi into the lush, surrounding countryside and olive groves all the way back to Spello. Enjoy an independent dinner this evening at your hotel's restaurant or at one of the charming trattorias in town. Your guides will provide recommendations.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5

Gubbio

5-7 miles, easy to moderate (with challenging sections), 1,220-ft. elevation gain

After breakfast, depart for Gubbio, the medieval masterpiece of Umbria that charms with its intimate alleys and surprisingly spacious panoramic piazza, flanked by the stunning *palazzo comunale*. Following a scenic drive, the morning walk's destination is the Church of Saint Ubaldo, perched high on the mountainside overlooking Gubbio. The church is the endpoint of the annual "Race of the *Ceri*," a colorful historical festival where locals race *ceri* (giant heavy wooden structures that resemble candlesticks). The walking route passes by limestone outcrops and a tiny chapel, then meanders through woods, along a creek, and up a narrow gorge that includes some challenging rocky sections.

After visiting the church and admiring the three *ceri* contained within, enjoy a scenic funicular ride descending into town, where you are free to explore (and refuel!) savoring lunch at an osteria of your choosing. After lunch, you return to Spello, with an optional walk en route that traces ancient oak-lined farm roads leading all the way to the hotel. Your guides provide ideas for dinner on your own in town; many restaurant and trattoria menus offer typical dishes such as chickpea soup drizzled with olive oil, bruschetta, or *strangozzi*, the regional square-shaped ribbon pasta (literally *shoestring-like*).

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6

Assisi to Spello via the Natural Park of Mount Subasio and Collepio to Spello

5-7 miles, easy to moderate and optional 2.5 miles, easy to moderate

After breakfast, you embark on a short drive to the Natural Park of Mount Subasio, a protected area with serene paths meandering through open meadows and oak and pine woods. Mount Subasio is the sprawling mountain on whose flank Assisi is built. A haven of subtle beauty and spirituality, it was here that St. Francis preached to the birds as they gathered on tree branches. Hiking in the meadows along the summit of the mountain, you are likely to see grazing herds of sheep, white Chianina cows, and semi-wild horses before descending (445 feet) to lunch in the small, charming hamlet of Collepio. The waiting table is spread with an ample antipasto of assorted bruschetta, followed by grilled meats and vegetables.

After lunch, you may choose to return to Spello by van or descend on foot, continuing through forest along a well-maintained trail and through olive groves and alongside an ancient Roman aqueduct. This aqueduct once brought drinking water into town along the eastern side of the mountain.

This evening's farewell dinner is at an extraordinary venue in Assisi: a restaurant built on top of a glassed-in site of remarkable Roman ruins. You dine on the finest local cuisine and toast your week's adventures with a glass from the restaurant's world-class wine cellar.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7

Your *Italy: Tuscany & Umbria* tour concludes

After a leisurely breakfast, you depart Spello for Rome. You arrive at Hotel dei Mellini at approximately 11:30 a.m. Your tour guides provide a brief (45-minute) orientation walk on arrival. Afterward, you bid farewell to your guides and make connections for onward travels.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
13 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 3 dinners	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour	✓