

One step at a time - the ancient trails making Italy Europe's greatest walking destination

Italy is proving that the best way to travel might just be one step at a time

Some holidays are about ticking landmarks off a list. Others are about slowing down enough to actually remember where you've been.

Long before Google Maps, pilgrims, monks and merchants crossed Europe on foot towards Rome, following paths through forests, vineyards, mountains and tiny stone villages.

Centuries later, those same routes are enjoying a revival among travellers. There are five extraordinary walking routes that all eventually lead to Rome: the Via Francigena, the Way of Saint Francis, the Way of Saint Benedict, the Romea Strata and the Via Romea Germanica.

The Via Francigena

The Via Francigena is the most famous of Italy's pilgrimage routes, following the footsteps of Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury, who documented his return from Rome in 990 AD.

Today, the Italian section stretches for around 1,000 kilometres from the Great St Bernard Pass to St Peter's Basilica, but many walkers say the real magic happens in Lazio.

Here, the route winds through the Tuscia countryside of Viterbo, passing volcanic lakes, medieval towns and cinematic scenery. Highlights include Lake Bolsena, Montefiascone's Fortress of the Popes, Viterbo's medieval quarter of San Pellegrino and Sutri, where a Roman



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Five historic walking routes, one unforgettable destination - discovering Italy on foot

amphitheatre is carved directly into the rock.

The final stop before Rome is La Storta, and after days spent walking through the Lazio countryside, arriving at St Peter's Basilica tends to make even non-religious travellers surprisingly emotional.

Following Saint Francis

For something quieter and more reflective, the Way of Saint Francis has a completely different energy.

This route retraces the life of St Francis of Assisi, crossing Lazio over 13 stages and around 300 kilometres through the Sabina countryside and the peaceful Sacred Valley of Rieti.

It is also home to some of Italy's most important Franciscan sanctuaries. In Greccio, Francis created the first Nativity scene in history in 1223, while Fonte Colombo, La Foresta and Poggio Bustone preserve key moments from his spiritual life.

Pilgrims receive the Testimonium certificate in Assisi, but most leave with something even better: a sense of pure calm.

The route with monasteries and mountains

Then there is the Way of Saint Benedict, perhaps the most underrated of the five routes.

Following the life of St Benedict of Norcia, founder of Western monasticism and Patron Saint of Europe, the trail stretches for around 300 kilometres across Lazio and Umbria, linking Norcia, Subiaco and Montecassino Abbey.

One of the route's highlights is Sacro Speco in Subiaco, an extraordinary monastery built dramatically into the cliffside around Benedict's cave retreat. Nearby stands the Abbey of Santa Scholastica, home to Italy's first printing press.

The final stop is Montecassino Abbey, one of Europe's most important monastic sites and a spectacular ending to a route that feels like travelling back in time.

The routes less travelled

The Romea Strata and Via Romea Germanica bring even more adventure into the story, and far fewer crowds than Italy's classic tourist trail.

The Romea Strata is the newest of the five routes, officially recognised by the Council of Europe in 2025. Stretching more than 4,000 kilometres across seven countries, it once guided pilgrims from Central and Eastern Europe all the way to Rome.

In Lazio, the route joins the Via Francigena through the Tuscia countryside, where ancient tuff villages and rolling landscapes make the final approach to St Peter's Basilica feel genuinely unforgettable.

Five different routes with one iconic destination: Rome.

The grand finale - Rome

No matter which route travellers choose, they all eventually lead to Rome. And arriving on foot changes the city completely.

After days spent crossing countryside, villages and mountain trails, the sight of St Peter's Basilica feels less like sightseeing and more like crossing a finish line.

Whether you choose the Via Francigena through the Tuscia countryside, the Franciscan sanctuaries of the Rieti Valley or the medieval paths of the Via Romea Germanica, Italy's historic walking routes offer a journey unlike any other.

Find out more and plan your walk at italia.it

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