



HEDONISTIC HIKING

Parma, Tuscany and the Ligurian Sea - 8 days Prosciutto and Parmesan, Pilgrims and Poets

Walk the area immortalised by writers and poets over the centuries. Visit beautiful **Parma**, the undisputed gourmet capital of Emilia Romagna and experience the *Sagra del Fungo Porcini* (Porcini Mushroom Fair) at Borgotaro. Walk part of the ancient **Via Francigena** pilgrim route and discover an **untouched area of Tuscany** before descending to the Gulf of Poets on the Ligurian coast to explore the quaint village of Lerici. The final day is free to take a boat across the bay to Portovenere and the charming villages of the Cinque Terre.

What is included?

- **7 nights beautiful accommodation** (3 different hotels)
- **Two experienced and knowledgeable guides** who will look after your every need and bring this stunning area to life
- **All meals including wine.**
- **Gourmet picnic lunches** each day and snacks en route
- Dinner in a variety of **superb restaurants.**
- **Support vehicle**, enabling you to walk as little or as much of the trail as you please
- **Transport** to/from Parma (start) and Pisa (end) in air-conditioned minibus
- Comprehensive **pre-trip information.**
- Luggage transported for you so all you need to carry is a small backpack with water etc.

Itinerary

The tour starts in **Parma** (train connections to major Italian cities) and ends in Pisa from where there are flights to many destinations within Europe. Parma also has a small airport (served by Ryanair and national carriers) and is on a direct train line from Milan, Rome and Florence. There are also airports at the nearby cities of Bologna, Florence and Milan.

Day 1

Meet **Parma train station** at 12 pm. After our lunch showcasing the famous cuisine of Parma we visit the cathedral and its fabulous marble baptistery. We continue (1hour) to Borgo Casale, our luxury hotel nestled in the Romagnola hills, encircled by the peaks of the Apennines. Time to settle in before dinner in the hotel restaurant.



Day 2

Today we learn how the famous parmesan cheese is produced when we meet a local producer. We then drive high into the hills, on the border between Liguria and Emilia Romagna, for a fabulous ridge walk. (5.4km/3.4miles). Time to relax in the afternoon before we visit the town of Borgotaro – awarded the accolade *Citta Slow* (Slow Food City) – to experience the Annual Porcini Mushroom fair before a relaxed dinner at a delightful organic farm.



Day 3

From the Passo della Cisa (1041m) we follow the Via Francigena through beech and chestnut woods, over ancient stone bridges and through charming villages before descending to Pontremoli. We stay in a beautiful agriturismo (with pool) converted from a 16th century hamlet, which overlooks the town. We use this as our base for 3 days whilst exploring the Lunigiana, an untouched part of Tuscany nestled between the Apennines and the Mediterranean. (20.5km/13miles)

Day 4

Today a more leisurely hike takes us into the hills above our agriturismo to a remote hamlet suspended in time with lovely views over the Magra valley. Relaxing afternoon with the opportunity to explore Pontremoli. The town lies in a strategic position on the river Magra and it was an important stopping place on the Via Francigena. The 14th century castle houses a fascinating museum of menhirs found in the Lunigiana. (7.9km/5miles)



Day 5



Starting above Pontremoli we climb up through beautiful open woods and wild moorland, passing an evocative hamlet, to reach a high pass (1363m) with spectacular mountain views on the border of Emilia Romagna, where we have our picnic. In the afternoon, a leisurely descent through beech woods crossing clear mountain streams to reach a characteristic village. (18km/11.3miles)





Day 6

Enjoy sweeping coastal views as we walk to Fosdinovo where we visit the imposing castle of the Malaspina family. After visiting a small wine producer in the village we descend through vineyards and olive groves, past rustic farms, to the fortified town of Sarzana. Continue to the pretty coastal town of Lerici, once home to Lord Byron, where we stay for two nights in a stunning new hotel with breathtaking sea views. (14.9km/9.4miles)

Day 7

Free day with a boat cruise across the Gulf of Poets to the Portovenere with the opportunity to walk some of the stunning coastal paths of the Cinque Terre. Swim or explore the lovely town of Portovenere and the small island of Palmaria.



Day 8

Return to Pisa Airport for 10.30am.

Extend your trip

The Cinque Terre is one of the best areas in Italy for self-guided walking, as the well-trodden paths are clearly marked and the villages are linked by train and boat. Visitor numbers in peak season are high and in 2016 you are advised to book ahead if you plan to do the trails. Visit www.cinqueterre.com for more details.

Walking

Shortest day: 5.4km/3.4miles

Longest day: 20.5km/13miles



There are 5 days of walking on the trip and 1 free day. We walk on paved pilgrim trails – specifically on day 3 (which can become slippery after rain), farm and woodland tracks and quiet tarmac roads. The region is in the foothills of the Apennines and therefore hilly, but not mountainous. There is always the opportunity to walk a half-day with van support for those who prefer not to hike the full day. There are some stony descents so sturdy walking boots, with good ankle support, are highly recommended. Walking poles would be an great advantage, especially on steeper sections.



Weather:

Average daily temperature: 13°-25°

Monthly rainfall average:50mm

Hours of sunshine:6½hours/day

Dates: 16th - 23rd September 2016

22nd - 29th September 2017

Cost: €2,625 per person Single supplement €200

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