



# EUROPEAN WALKING HOLIDAYS

2011

## HEDONISTIC GUIDED WALKING IN ITALY

8-day / 7-night Small group tours - Tuscany, Piedmont, Cinque Terre, Parma, Umbria, Gran Paradiso

Well-researched, comprehensive and high quality walking holidays to take you *off the beaten track* and to let you experience the heart and soul of quintessential rural Italy. See Tuscany, Cinque Terre, Piedmont, Chianti, Umbria, mystical Maremma or the mountains of the Gran Paradiso with beautiful accommodation and fabulous restaurants. These are guided walks and there is always a support vehicle allowing you to walk less if you prefer.

Our guides Jackie and Mick lead our tours with a passion and they live much of the year living on a rustic Tuscan farm, which they have called home for the past eight years. Mick and Jackie clearly have genuine empathy with the people, their history, culture and cuisine. Mick, as a qualified chef and passionate gourmand, delights in matching the fresh flavours of each region with a well-chosen wine. He will introduce you to the chefs and the wine-makers who have become his friends over the years. Jackie's insight into Italian culture and her enthusiasm for its artistic heritage add another dimension to your holiday.

These are small group walking tours. Limited places are still available on selected dates in 2010.

What is included?

- **Seven nights of beautiful accommodation** - all rooms with private bathrooms
- **Two experienced, knowledgeable guides** - who will look after your every need
- **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
- Comprehensive **pre- trip information.**
- Luggage transported for you so all you need to carry is a small backpack with water etc.

On these holidays you stay in a range of beautiful boutique accommodation. Often small family run hotels where you receive a warm welcome and enjoy a wonderful home cooked meal in the evening. Many of the hotels are historic buildings that have been lovingly restored - farmhouses or medieval villages. Location is important, our Parma Tuscany and the Cinque Terre holiday finishes on the coast in a stunning new hotel actually on the beach

*"I just wanted to let everyone know that our hike from Parma to the Ligurian Coast in September was sensational. Jackie is a wonderful guide, and her organisational skills, attention to detail; knowledge, professionalism and friendliness made it the best-organised holiday we have ever been on. The whole thing was great from start to finish, and it really was all-inclusive. The food and wines were wonderful.*

*Everything was made better by her extensive knowledge of the region and it's history"* Aileen, Australia



**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations**

# PARMA, TUSCANY AND THE CINQUE TERRE COAST

## 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. Walk part of the **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 villages of the Cinque Terre. There is also the opportunity to walk part of the **Cinque Terre** coastal path or travel the coast by boat.

**Departs:** 16<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2011

**Cost:** AU\$3725 per person twin share - Single room supplement AU\$370

**Walking:** Moderate Walking (shortest day: 8km, longest day: 21km)

There are 5 days of walking on the trip, totaling @ 70 - 80km, and one free day. There is always the opportunity to walk a half-day with van support for those who wish to continue to the hotel earlier. We walk on paved pilgrim trails, farm and woodland tracks and quiet tarmac roads. The region is in the foothills of the Apennines and therefore hilly, but not mountainous. There are some stony descents so sturdy walking boots, with good ankle support, are recommended. Walking poles would be an advantage, especially on steeper sections.

**Suggested itinerary:** The tour starts in Bologna and ends in Pisa from where there are flights to many destinations within Europe. Parma has an airport and is on a direct train line from Milan, Rome and Florence.

**Day 1** Meet Parma train station at @ 1.00pm. After a late lunch showcasing the famous cuisine of Parma we visit the cathedral and its fabulous marble baptistry. 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 (walking distance @ 6km). 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. (@ 21km)

**Day 4** Making our way up from a peaceful village, through ancient chestnut groves, we emerge onto open pastures in a magnificent amphitheatre of Apennine peaks. 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. (@ 8km)

**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. In the afternoon, a leisurely descent through beech woods crossing clear mountain streams to reach a characteristic village. (@ 18km)

**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. (@ 15km)

**Day 7** Free day with a boat cruise across the Gulf of Poets to the Cinque Terre. Opportunity to walk some of the stunning coastal path, 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 independent walking. The well-trodden paths are clearly marked and the villages are linked by train and boat. We will provide you with a trail map and suggestions for walking.

## **A WEEK IN TUSCANY - THE BEST OF CHIANTI**

### **Chianti, Castles and Tuscan Cooking**

A relaxed walking holiday, we stay in two beautiful and luxurious hotels in the heart of Tuscany. A beautiful villa accommodation in the heart of Chianti, Borgo Pretale is a 4-star hotel converted from a remote medieval village in an idyllic, peaceful location near **Siena**. Also a 4-star, Palazzo Leopoldo is a former manor house situated in the small, yet vibrant village of Radda-in-Chianti.

This guided walking holiday brings you the **best of Chianti**. Superb guided hikes taking you off the beaten track. Visit Tuscan gardens and castles, drop in to wine estates, chat to the winemakers and taste their wines and olive oil. Enjoy delicious meals, accompanied by fabulous local wines, showcasing the wonderful fresh produce that is at the heart of Tuscan cooking. A cooking demonstration at the villa with a local Tuscan chef.

**Depart:** 15<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 25<sup>th</sup> September – 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2011  
**Cost:** AU\$3725 twin share - Single room supplement AU\$385  
**Tour includes:** 7-nights beautiful accommodation  
**Walking:** Shortest day: @ 9km, longest day: @ 20km

There are 5 days of walking on the trip. We walk on *strade bianche* (gravel roads), through vineyards, along woodland tracks and quiet tarmac roads. There is always van support with the opportunity to walk a half-day and spend the afternoon at Podere Patrignone. This area of Tuscany is one of rolling hills with some significant ups and downs. Sturdy walking boots, with good ankle support, are recommended. Walking poles would be an advantage, especially on steeper sections.

**Suggested itinerary:** The tour starts and ends at Pisa Airport

**Day 1** Meet Pisa Airport at 1pm. Drive (2-hours) to Borgo Pretale, our hotel converted from a medieval hamlet, where we stay for 4 nights. Time to settle in and relax before we meet for a welcome drink in the gardens followed by a delicious dinner.

**Day 2** Walk in the wooded hills of the Montagnola, past the Renaissance gardens of Villa Cetinale and the beautiful garden at Celsa Castle. Picnic in the open countryside with views across to the towers of Siena. (walking distance 16km). This evening we visit the pretty hilltop town of Casole d'Elsa near our hotel where we have dinner.

**Day 3** Beautiful walk through the hills near Siena, discovering some the evocative churches and abbeys hidden in the woods, which tell of a time when the trails were busy with merchants and pilgrims. A picnic lunch in the open countryside (@ 9km). Later in the day experience a cookery demonstration of Tuscan cuisine with a private chef at a nearby country house, with plenty of opportunity for hands-on involvement.

**Day 4** After a relaxed start to the day, we drive to Siena and have time to explore this beautiful medieval gem of a city. Discover some of the lesser-known artistic gems and enjoy a fabulous lunch at a lively trattoria in the heart of the city. Time to relax by the pool in the afternoon before a light dinner in the hotel.

**Day 5** We depart Borgo Pretale and drive to the heart of the Chianti Classico region to visit one of the oldest churches in Chianti near the village of Panzano before walking through vineyards and woodlands to a local organic farm. Private tour of their cellars to taste their wines and olive oil before a picnic lunch on the estate. In the afternoon, opportunity to continue on foot to the market town of Greve-in-Chianti. We stay the next 3-nights at the 4-star Palazzo Leopoldo in the village of Radda-in-Chianti (@ 13km). Dinner is in Radda this evening.

**Day 6** Starting above the village of Radda-in-Chianti we climb up to the ridge of Monti dei Chianti and the highest point in the region, Monte San Michele. From here you have views to the Arno valley and beyond to the ridge of the Apennine Mountains. Fabulous leisurely lunch at the renowned Ristorante Lamole high in the Chianti hills before returning to our hotel. Time to relax before a light dinner (@10km).

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**Day 7** Magnificent final walk in Tuscany in the more rugged region of Eastern Chianti. We pass through perfectly preserved villages en route to the magnificent Brolio Castle, owned by the Ricasoli family since the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Brolio Castle provides stunning views to Siena, the Tuscan Crete to the south and to the Chianti hills to the west. Visit the gardens and family chapel before returning to our hotel for a memorable last night dinner (@ 16km).

**Day 8** Return to Pisa Airport at @ 11.00am.



## THE JEWELS OF THE PIEDMONT

### A Celebration of *Slow Food*

Let your taste buds do the walking as we immerse you in the enogastronomic wonders of this region. **Barolo wine**, the legendary **white truffle** of Alba, porcini mushrooms, Parmesan and prosciutto. Beautiful hotels, stunning walks, fascinating history and culture plus exceptional food and wines.

*Slow Food is a non-profit, eco-gastronomic member-supported organization that was founded in 1989 to counteract fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world*

**Dates:** 17<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> June or 8<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> October 2011  
**Price per person:** AU\$3725 twin share Single supplement AU\$325  
**Tour includes:** 7-nights beautiful accommodation (in 3 different hotels)  
**Walking:** Shortest day: @ 7km, longest day: @ 15km

There are 5 half-day walks offered on the trip. We walk on farm and woodland tracks, through vineyards and along quiet tarmac roads. Day three's walk is on a well-graded mountain path. Although the walks are relatively short we recommend you wear sturdy walking boots, with good ankle support.

*"Both Mick and Jackie put themselves out to ensure that we had the best possible time – really wonderful hosts" C. Bamford, London*

**Suggested itinerary:** The tour starts and ends in the regional capital of Turin, home to the 2006 Winter Olympics. Superb and varied walking: Alpine pastures teeming with wildflowers in spring, pristine lakes surrounded by mountains, pretty vineyards and delightful villages. A slow-paced itinerary staying in two delightful hotels. Opportunities to meet with chefs, winemakers and local producers. On occasions we will have our main meal at lunchtime with a lighter meal in a trattoria or winery in the evening.

**Day 1** Meet Turin Airport at 11.30am or Turin Central Station at 12.30pm. Drive (@ 1.5 hours) to the medieval town of Saluzzo, the artistic jewel of Piedmont nestled at the foot of Monviso (3841m). En route we stop to visit Racconigi, the summer palace of the Royal House of Savoy. We spend the next 4 nights in a very comfortable, and peaceful, restored Cascina (farmhouse), Antico Podere Propano, just on the edge of the town. This evening we explore the medieval town on foot before dinner in a local restaurant.

**Day 2** In the morning a gentle walk along quiet country lanes and farm tracks leads us to the 12<sup>th</sup> century Cistercian abbey at Staffarda. After a picnic lunch we drive to Manta and enjoy a fascinating tour of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Castle with its delightful frescoes. Optional walk back to Saluzzo in the afternoon, or return to the hotel by van (walking distance @ 7km + 7.3km). A fabulous dinner tonight at the Abbey of Staffarda.

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**Day 3** A beautiful drive up the fertile Po valley takes us to the foot of Monviso and the pristine source of the river at 2020m. From a mountain refuge we follow good trails up past mountain lakes with impressive views of Monviso and the Ligurian Alps. Time to relax in the afternoon (@ 7km - total ascent 360m). Time to explore the medieval town of Saluzzo before dinner at a local restaurant.

**Day 4** We drive to the Colle di Sampeyre at 2285m from where we descend through open meadows, full of wildflowers in spring, to the 15<sup>th</sup> century church of Elva with its outstanding frescoes. Mountain and woodland tracks pass through dramatic scenery that is dotted with hamlets suspended in time and lead us down to the pretty Maira valley (@ 11km). We are welcomed for dinner at a farm in the hills near Saluzzo.

**Day 5** A short drive takes us to the pretty medieval town of Cherasco - famous for its many churches, chocolates and snails. Continue to La Morra where we indulge in a leisurely lunch at an award-winning restaurant with views over the vineyards. We stay for 3-nights at the charming Corte Gondina Hotel in La Morra. This evening we meet a local winemaker for an introduction to the fabulous wines of this region.

**Day 6** Our walk leads us from La Morra, along a ridge with open views to the pretty villages of Vergne and Novello. We descend through vineyards to the village of Barolo where the world-class wine of the same name was created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Visit the cellars of one of the local producers and taste their range of wines. October trip: Later in the day we head into the woods with a local truffle hunter to search, with his dog, for the prized tuber (@ 10km)

**Day 7** Starting from a village in the foothills of the Alta Langa, we walk through hazelnut groves and vineyards with panoramic views of the Langhe and the snow-capped Alps beyond. We are welcomed for lunch at a local farm producing wine and an incredible range of cheeses, near the town of Monforte d'Alba. Time to relax in the afternoon before visiting the pretty regional capital of Alba to experience the passeggiata and an aperitif followed by dinner at a local Slow Food restaurant. (@ 10km)

**Day 8** Return to Turin at @ 11am.



## VOLTERRA AND THE MAREMMA

### Secret Tuscany

A spectacular trip hiking through a lesser-known area of Tuscany to the Mediterranean Sea. In medieval times this region belonged to the "contado" of Siena and the small towns and villages boasted great wealth and witnessed a lively history. Enjoy wonderful spring flowers, natural beauty and **spectacular views** as you step back in time off the beaten track.

*"Mick and Jackie made us feel totally pampered and very special. This trip far surpassed our expectations, which were quite high to start with. I would enthusiastically recommend Hedonistic hiking to anyone who wants a first-rate active vacation."* T.S. Davis, CA

**Includes:** 7-nights' beautiful accommodation (2 different hotels)  
**Dates:** 8<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011  
**Price:** AU\$3725 per person twin share - Single room supplement AU\$460  
**Walking:** Moderate - shortest day: @ 10km, longest day: @ 21km

There are 5 days of walking on the trip. We walk on *strade bianche* (gravel roads), woodland tracks and quiet tarmac roads. This area of Tuscany is relatively hilly, with some significant ups and downs, but not mountainous. The walking is fairly rugged in sections so sturdy walking boots, with good ankle support, are required. Walking poles would be an advantage, especially on steeper sections.

**Suggested itinerary:** Trip starts and ends in Pisa from where there are flights to many destinations within Europe. There are direct train services from Pisa to Rome, Florence, Milan and Genoa.

**Day 1** Meet Pisa airport at 1.00pm and drive (@ 1.5-hours) to Agriturismo Lischeto; a delightful farm producing organic cheese, honey and olive oil, overlooking the medieval town of Volterra. Time to settle in before a welcome drink and dinner at the Hotel.

**Day 2** Today we walk across the fields to Volterra for a guided visit of the town with its fascinating Etruscan and Medieval history. Explore the many museums before continuing our walk, which takes us out into the countryside where we can visit one of the Etruscan tombs hidden in the hills. Dinner this evening at a local restaurant (walking distance @12km)

**Day 3** A short drive takes us towards the coast where we walk to the pretty village of Bolgheri, now regarded as one of the most exciting wine regions in Tuscany. Enjoy a leisurely lunch in the village before returning to our agriturismo. Time to relax in the afternoon. Later in the day we enjoy a private wine tasting of some of the region's fabulous wines at a renowned local *enoteca* (@ 10km)

**Day 4** A spectacular hike through farm and woodland to emerge at the famous medieval towers of San Gimignano. We visit the beautiful collegiate with its outstanding frescoes before returning to the agriturismo for dinner (@ 18km)

**Day 5** We depart our Agriturismo this morning. Our walk takes us through the beautiful open landscape of the *Colline Metallifere*, the "metal-bearing hills" which brought great wealth to the region in ancient times. We pass the delightful village of Casole d'Elsa and visit its small museum and Romanesque church. We stay the next 3-nights in Villa il Tesoro, a luxury hotel converted from a medieval village, surrounded by olive groves and vineyards (@ 15km)

**Day 6** Free day. There is an opportunity to visit the beautiful city of Massa Marittima with its fortress, cathedral and many fascinating museums. Dinner this evening is in a local restaurant in the town.

**Day 7** Our final hike follows the old stock route of the Maremma cowboys through woodland, pasture and hills. We pass remote medieval villages en route to the Cistercian Abbey of San Galgano, whose Monks were once the bookkeepers for the City of Siena, and the adjoining hermitage of Montesiepi (@ 21km)

**Day 8** Return drive (@ 2.5 hours) to Pisa Airport for @12.00pm

## TUSCANY AND UMBRIA

### In the Footsteps of Francis of Assisi

Discover the magical Casentino region in eastern Tuscany. Visit the sights, experience the majestic views and hike through the countryside that inspired St Francis of Assisi in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. See stunning medieval and Renaissance art created by some of Italy's greatest masters. Hike some of the Apennine ridge, follow evocative pilgrim trails and walk along pretty woodland paths. End the walking holiday at a restored Abbey near Gubbio in Umbria.

**Includes:** 7-nights' beautiful accommodation (in 4 different hotels)  
**Dates:** 5<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> June, 4<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> September 2011  
**Price:** AU\$3725 per person twin share - Single room supplement AU\$260  
**Walking:** Moderate - shortest day: @ 10km, longest day: @ 19km

There are 5 days of walking on the trip. We walk on *strade bianche* (gravel roads), through vineyards, along woodland tracks and quiet tarmac roads. There is always van support with the opportunity to walk a half-day and spend the afternoon at the hotel. This area of Tuscany and Umbria is one of rolling hills with some significant ups and downs. Sturdy walking boots, with good ankle support, are recommended. Walking poles would be an advantage, especially on steeper sections.

**Suggested itinerary:** The walking tour starts and ends in Florence, the cradle of the Renaissance. We begin walking in the Casentino National Park in eastern Tuscany and wind our way south in the shadow of the Apennines to Gubbio in Umbria.

**Day 1** Meet Florence Airport at 12.00pm or at Florence Santa Maris Train Station at 1.00pm. Drive (@ 1.5-hours) to Poppi in eastern Tuscany. We stay for the next 2-nights in the delightful family-run I Tre Baroni in the Casentino National Park. Time to settle in before a welcome drink and delicious dinner in the hotel restaurant.

**Day 2** We walk through a thousand-year-old forest in the Tusco-Romagnola Appennines to the hermitage and monastery of Camaldogli, founded by the Benedictine monk St Romauld in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. After a picnic lunch in a peaceful spot in the woods we continue our hike through the National Park. Delicious dinner in the hotel restaurant (walking distance @ 10km)

**Day 3** Starting above Poppi we follow trails through chestnut and beech woods at 1200m, passing small villages with beautiful views to the valley. We stop for a delicious picnic en route and, in the afternoon, emerge at La Verna, the site of the cave where St Francis was once a hermit. Visit the sanctuary before a short drive takes us to the tiny village of Caprese Michelangelo, the birthplace of the great artist Michelangelo Buonarroti. Stay in the village for one night and enjoy a classic Tuscan meal at the hotel restaurant (@ 17km).

**Day 4** We leave Caprese Michelangelo and walk on country lanes and farm tracks to reach the delightful medieval village of Anghiari. Visit the town immortalized in the infamous painting by Leonardo di Vinci, which was commissioned by the Florentine government to hang in their Palazzo Vecchio in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Stroll the perfectly preserved medieval streets and explore its buildings before a short drive takes us to Sansepolcro, the birthplace of Piero Della Francesca. Stay for two nights in a converted *palazzo* in the centre of the town. This evening we eat in an award-winning restaurant in the town (@ 14km).

**Day 5** We start the day with a visit to the town's museum to see the renowned works by Piero della Francesca. Then we drive up above the town for a beautiful hike following the high Apennine ridge of the Alpi Della Luna with views across the Tiber Valley. We descend through woods and meadows to the Franciscan convent and hermitage at Monte Casale. In the afternoon we continue through pretty countryside to arrive at the fort and roman gate of Sansepolcro (@ 14km). Dinner tonight in a local restaurant.

**Day 6** A short drive takes us into Umbria and the important artistic city of Citta di Castello. We start our walk high above the town and hike through open farmland and woods, passing abandoned stone houses and a dramatic fort before arriving at the stunning Abbazia San Faustino, a beautiful small hotel converted from a former abbey. Time to relax in the gardens or swim in the pool before dinner (@ 16km).

**Day 7** We visit Gubbio with its beautiful churches, open squares and museums. A leisurely lunch showcases the wonderful Umbrian cuisine. Explore the shops or take in the atmosphere at an open-air café. In the afternoon there is time to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of San Faustino before a wonderful last night dinner.

**Day 8** Return to Florence Airport for 1pm (@ 2-hours). We will also drop off at the Florence Santa Maria Novella train station if required.

## **GRAN PARADISO AND VAL D'AOSTA - THE ITALIAN ALPS**

### **Mont Blanc and Alpine Meadows**

Hike through flower-filled alpine meadows and enjoy spectacular views of Mont Blanc and the majestic peaks of the Italian Alps. Visit ancient castles and follow the routes of the Roman armies, medieval pilgrims and Napoleon Bonaparte. See alpine fauna in their natural habitat and enjoy the fabulous hospitality and delicious cuisine of the smallest region of Italy.

**Includes:** 7-nights' beautiful accommodation (in 2 different 4-star hotels)  
**Dates:** 25<sup>th</sup> June – 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2011  
**Price:** AU\$3975 per person twin share - Single room supplement AU\$545  
**Walking:** Moderate - shortest day: 6km, longest day: 6km

There are 6 days of walking on the trip. We walk on well-graded mountain paths, woodland tracks and quiet tarmac roads. Although the distances are short there is more ascent and descent than on our other tours. The Val d'Aosta is a mountainous region and on several days we hike at an altitude of 2000m or more. Nevertheless, it is mountain **walking not climbing**. Where possible we make use of chairlifts and cable cars to take us to the best areas for walking. A few sections of the walk could be considered vertiginous, please contact us if you have any concerns about this. On occasion, where there is no van access en route, both members of staff will accompany the group to provide extra support and to carry the lunch for you. Sturdy walking boots, with good ankle support, are essential. Walking poles are recommended, especially on steeper sections. These can be purchased locally – although not on the first day of the tour.

**Suggested itinerary:** The tour starts and ends in Turin. We stay in two towns in the Aosta Valley, Bard at 350m and Cogne at 1550m. Most of the hiking is at an altitude of between 1500m and 2500m. Nevertheless it is a hiking holiday and not a climbing expedition so no technical skills whatsoever are required. Where possible we make use of chairlifts and cable cars to take us to the best areas for walking.

**Day 1** Meet Turin Train Station at 11.30pm or Turin Airport 12.30pm. Drive (@ 1-hour) to Pont St Martin, the gateway to the Aosta Valley. Starting at the Roman bridge in the village we follow, on foot, the ancient route of the Roman armies past vineyards clinging to the hillsides to pick up the paved Roman road which brings us to the town of Bard. We stay in a delightful hotel with spa facilities for the next 4-nights. Welcome drink and dinner in the hotel restaurant (walking distance @ 6km).

**Day 2** We drive up the valley towards Cervinia and take a cable car and chair lift high up above the tree line. We walk down through flower-filled pastures, stopping en route to enjoy a delicious picnic lunch, to the small village of Chamois. Later in the day we visit the dramatic fortress at Bard, which played a crucial part in Napoleon's advance into Italy in 1800, overlooking our hotel (@ 5km).

**Day 3** Today we explore the remote Gressoney valley with its fascinating *Walser* heritage. We follow a trail overlooking the valley, past tiny hamlets with characteristic stone and wood houses, to a mountain refuge where we have lunch. In the afternoon we descend to the valley and visit the fairytale castle of Queen Marguerite of Savoy, Queen of Italy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (@ 6km).

**Day 4** A beautiful drive takes us to the Champorcher valley, carved out by glaciers millions of years ago. Our hike starts along the route used by Victor Emmanuel II, the first King of Italy, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when escaping the court to go hunting in the mountains. We follow small trails past beautiful lakes encircled by snow-covered peaks and enjoy stunning views down into the valley as we descend (@ 7km).

**Day 5** Today we leave Bard. In the morning we visit a small producer of the famous *Lardo d'Arnad* to learn about the intricate process involved in making this renowned delicacy. After a tasty lunch of local specialties we continue up the valley to the regional capital of Aosta. Time to visit the town and see many of the important Roman monuments. In the afternoon we drive to Cogne, the gateway to the Grand Paradiso National Park where we stay in a historic family-run hotel set amongst lush pastures in the heart of the village.

**Day 6** This morning we take a cable car above the village to 2081m. A small trail leads around Mont Seuc offering spectacular views of the village, the peak of the Gran Paradiso at 4061m and the Mont Blanc Massif in the distance. We return to the valley by cable car and are welcomed at a characteristic *baita* for a barbecue lunch. Opportunity to walk along the pretty Valnontey valley in the afternoon (@ 3km + 4km)

**Day 7** We start our walk at the pretty village of Gimillan (1788m). We follow the river valley, passing shepherds' huts and tiny hamlets – accessible only by foot. The peace is only disturbed by the chimes of the cowbells as they savour the lush grass of the hills. We picnic by a pristine mountain lake before descending once again to Gimillan (@ 7km). Our final dinner is at the hotel's Michelin-starred restaurant.

**Day 8** Return to Turin Airport for @ 11.0am.



For a range of small group guided walking holidays with quality accommodation and dedicated, experienced guides that take you off the beaten track and let you experience the heart and soul of Italy, France, Spain or England.

Contact us at Outdoor Travel for more details, travel brochures and reservations:

- Call Toll free: 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 or Fax (03) 57501020
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