

## Italy: The Dolomites

### Tour-Only Itinerary

Cowbells clang in the distance as you inhale the cool mountain air atop Pütia saddle. The trail ahead winds through lush grassy slopes dotted with hay barns towards distant rocky spires. Across the next meadow lies a wood-timbered mountain refuge with forest-green shutters, vibrant red geraniums, and delectably sweet *Kaiserschmarren* pancakes. Of course, indulging your taste buds requires no excuse on this Dolomites hiking tour. Admiring the scenery can wait. You've got hours before the setting sun casts its *enrosadira* (alpenglow) over the limestone peaks. For now, enjoy the Dolomites' heavenly human touches: a south Tyrolean farm family's warm welcome, cappuccino, strudel, and homemade dumplings with cheese from the dairy next door.



### Highlights

Stop at an Alpine *rifugio* to recharge your energy with a plate of *canederli* (dumplings with cheese) and a refreshing Forst beer.

Tour the remains of World War I bunkers and tunnels, learning about the area's fascinating history with your knowledgeable guides.

Follow a path of gradual switchbacks carpeted with junipers to Limo Pass, where Lake Limo sits within a natural amphitheater, surrounded by wind-carved karst formations.

Spend three nights in luxury in Cortina d'Ampezzo and discover the reason this unique town has a 1,000-year history as a tourist destination.

## 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 moderate to challenging, with an average of 5 to 7 hours (5-7 Alpine miles) of hiking per day and limited options. This tour is more of a hiking experience than a walking experience. There are significant ascents and descents of between approximately 1,100 and 2,100 feet per day. The highest walking altitude on the tour starts at approximately 8,000 feet, at a site which is accessed by cable car. Trails are a range of worn paths, gravel roads, and some stony stream crossings, and the footing varies from packed dirt to loose gravel, rocky sections, and steps on steep slopes. There might be roots that can be slippery when wet. The pace on this tour is steady, yet comfortable, with full days on the trail and transfers between 30 minutes to one hour. On several days,

guests can choose to participate in a half- rather than full-day walk by shortening the walk with a cable car, gondola, or jeep shuttle, and instead exploring the towns of San Vigilio di Marebbe or Cortina.

## DAY 1

### Join your *Italy: The Dolomites* tour

Mount Plöse; 4 miles, easy to moderate

Your guide(s) will meet you at 1:30 p.m. (after lunch on your own) in the lobby of Hotel Goldener Adler in Bressanone/Brixen, Italy. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt.

The tour begins in the charming medieval town of Bressanone (as it is known in Italian; in German, it's Brixen), located just 28 miles south of the Brenner Pass, the border between Italy and Austria. Bressanone is located in the South Tyrol, the part of Italy encompassing the Trentino and Alto Adige areas, and a bilingual region that belonged to Austria until 1918. In fact, locals speak more German than Italian. This "Ancient Bishop's City" is nestled between two rivers and enveloped by mountains sloping down to vineyards and lush orchards, with a pleasant center of narrow cobblestone streets, pastel-colored houses, and lovely buildings and bridges.

Following a brief orientation at your centrally located meeting point (also your first night's hotel), you set out for an afternoon walk at the neighboring ski area, Mount Plöse. A scenic 10-minute gondola ride high above Bressanone and the Isarco Valley brings you to the start of your loop walk at an altitude of 6,700 feet. You follow a well-maintained panoramic trail with spectacular views over the Odle peaks, the site of tomorrow's walk, before a return gondola ride to the base of the mountain. (An alternate walk of equivalent mileage along the "Chestnut Trail" from Velturno to the Abbey of Sabiona and Chiusa is offered in case of inclement weather.)

This evening, at a nearby restaurant, you enjoy an *aperitivo* of local Alto Adige wines and cured ham (*speck*) and cheeses, before sitting down to a dinner of outstanding South Tyrolean cuisine. A first course may be handmade spinach-filled ravioli, followed by a main course or *secondo piatto* of river trout, local game, or lamb, and you toast the start of your adventure with a crisp local white wine. Dessert may be your first taste of the region's delectable apple strudel.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Goldener Adler, Bressanone

**Included Meals:** Dinner

## DAY 2

### Parco Naturale Puez-Odle: Val di Funes and Resciesa

Malga Zanes to Rifugio Brogles; 5 miles, moderate to challenging uphill section, 1,790-ft. elevation gain and 600-ft. elevation loss and Rifugio Brogles to Resciesa; 3.5 miles, moderate, 620-ft. elevation gain and 460-ft. elevation loss

You awaken to a generous breakfast buffet in your hotel's warm, wood-beamed dining room, including eggs to order, cheeses, speck, and an assortment of yogurts, cereals, juices, pastries, fruit, and, of course, cappuccino! Check out of your hotel, and board your private coach for a 45-minute drive to the green meadows of Malga Zannes in the Funes Valley—the Dolomites' northwest boundary.

The Parco Naturale Puez-Odle is a UNESCO World Heritage site covering an area of 10,200 hectares and is considered "the witness to the geological history of the Dolomites" as it is particularly interesting from a geological and geomorphological point of view, with many typical rock formations and strata that are characteristic of the Dolomites. The peaks of this group are often referred to as the "White Mountains." Today's walk is beautiful with dramatic views on the extraordinary peaks of the Odle that resemble a castle's battlements. This morning's, 3.5-hour trail climbs steadily through spectacular scenery, arriving to the Rifugio Brogles at 6,700 feet, for a well-deserved lunch. A "radler"—a refreshing mix of beer and lemonade—may hit the spot to accompany traditional Ladin specialties like a hearty bowl of pasta, soup, or polenta. The ancient Ladin culture developed in isolated mountain valleys from the time of the Roman Empire, and this small minority population living in the Dolomites speaks the Ladin language. In the summer, Ladini families climb to their summer cabins to relax, picnic, hay, and carve wood. At many of the cabins, refreshments or snacks are offered to hikers.

Satiated, you bid farewell to your local hosts, and depart on foot across the Val Badia towards Resciesa. Your afternoon trail traces a shorter, and less strenuous, route, and an easy descent via funicular brings you to Ortisei in the Val Gardena. Together with S. Cristina and Selva Val Gardena, Ortisei is well known for the caliber of carved wooden sculptures, another tradition of the Ladin culture.

A short transfer takes you to your home for the next two nights in the idyllic mountain village of San Vigilio

di Marebbe, where you are welcomed by the family that has been running their Art Nouveau hotel for generations. Surrounded by a crown of mountains, the hotel's garden is the perfect place to enjoy a cocktail and experience the *enrosadira*, the Ladin word for the pink sunset glow illuminating the peaks as the sun's last rays strike the white dolomitic limestone. You proceed to the hotel's dining room for the chef's fare of locally raised meat, fresh vegetables, and herbs picked from the garden.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Monte Sella, San Vigilio di Marebbe

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 3

### Parco Naturale Puez-Odle: Sass de Putia

7 miles, moderate with a one-hour challenging uphill section, 1,150-ft. elevation gain and loss

A sumptuous breakfast buffet fuels you for today's walk. Today's route is along the Sass de Pütia loop, which starts on a wide gravel path bordered with heather and bilberry. The path ascends gently past summer hay huts and small summer mountain cabins called *baita* belonging to the local Ladin people. Continuing through meadows, the trail narrows, skirting a mountain, and at this point, you encounter the day's greatest challenge—a 650-foot ascent of about an hour. Switchbacks make their way steeply up the hill, around large boulders, a trickling stream, and fields of Rhaetian poppies, with steps and timber traverses at the final push. The view from the top of the saddle, Pütia Fork, at about 7,700 feet, is well worth the effort. Take a deep breath as you admire rolling pastureland thick with yellow buttercups, gentians, pink mountain thrift, and views of the upper Badia Valley, the Fanes Range, and the Sella Group.

Rounding Pütia Mountain, the route then joins the famous Alta Via 2 (the second of a network of eight long-distance footpaths through the Dolomites, called Alte Vie, meaning "high paths"). These trails are weeklong routes and are served by numerous *rifugi* (alpine huts). The next mile or so is on a beautiful, level trail between green pastures and grazing cows, with views of the Sella group and the Odle. Soon, you'll see your lunch spot—the welcoming Rifugio Genova at 7,566 feet. Stunning views accompany a lunch of homemade mountain fare such as polenta with cheese, homemade noodles with mushrooms, and a local Forst beer. After lunch, you descend through sloping pasture to a valley of water mills—an open-air museum of sorts, complete with wooden sculptures—passing abundant wildflowers, while raptors soar overhead.

A short drive brings you back to San Vigilio di Marebbe, where there is time to relax, stroll through town, or schedule an Ayurvedic massage, before gathering for dinner in the hotel's dining room.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Monte Sella, San Vigilio di Marebbe

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 4

### Parco Naturale Puez-Odle: Colfosco and Altipiano de Crespeina. Travel to Cortina d'Ampezzo

4.5 miles, moderate, 1,280-ft. elevation gain and 3 miles, moderate, 1,935-ft. elevation loss

Departing San Vigilio after breakfast, you head south for an approximately 30-minute drive toward Cortina d'Ampezzo, your home for the next three nights. Today's walk takes place en route, in the area of the Gardena Pass, known both for Stone Age remains as well as its connection to World War I. The alpine world of *Passo Gardena*, as it's known in Italian, is truly awesome with dramatic peaks in all directions: Puez-Odle Nature Park to the north, the Sassolungo Group to the west and to the east the peaks of the Val Badia with the legendary Fanes range. A cable car ascent from the Plans-Frara station brings you to the Jimmi Refugio (at 7,300 feet) and the trailhead. Your path continues to the Crespeina saddle (8,300 feet) and down to Utia (or hut) Col Pradat, an enchanting lodge at the foot of Mount Sassongher. A hearty meal is served outside, perhaps you'll top your meal off with some kaiserschmarren (sweet pancake served with fruit compote), with outstanding views from the terrace to the Mittagstal, the Marmolada, the Cristallo, the Tofane, the Langkofel, and the Sassongher.

This afternoon, you descend to Colfosco via gondola and your waiting bus for the 50-minute drive to Cortina d'Ampezzo. Known as the "Pearl of the Dolomites," this is perhaps Italy's most beautiful—and stylish—ski resort town. Set in a valley ringed by 9,000-foot peaks, it is known for its miles of ski runs, as well as its bustling center full of chic cafés and shops. Your historical hotel is perfectly situated, just a short stroll from the heart of the pedestrian zone. After settling into your room, you regroup for dinner at a favorite local restaurant.

**Accommodation:** Grand Hotel Savoia, Cortina d'Ampezzo

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



## DAY 5

### Sesto Dolomites: Tre Cime di Lavaredo Circuit and Dolomieu Trail

6 miles, easy to moderate, 525-ft. elevation gain and loss with one steep/challenging 15-minute 280-ft. elevation gain and 2.5 miles, easy to moderate, 1,475-ft. elevation loss

This morning, a 45-minute drive takes you to the start of the day's walk, a circuit around the Tre Cime di Lavaredo, in the Sesto Dolomites Natural Park. These three distinctive peaks are some of the Dolomites' best-known landmarks—prized by rock climbers for their sheer rock faces, appreciated for their amazing pastel and vibrant red hues at sunset. They were also the site of some of the most intense mountain warfare of World War I. In fact, the range constituted the border between Austria and Italy up until 1918. Today's loop walk provides views at all angles, beginning with a drive up the beautiful Tre Cime Panoramic Road to the Rifugio Auronzo at 7,644 feet.

Once you've enjoyed a fortifying cappuccino, set off along a wide trail, a former military track, just beneath the peaks. You'll visit a chapel commemorating the First World War, and veer north, passing the Rifugio Lavaredo. Soon, breathtaking views of the Tre Cime open up, and you may spot rock climbers at seemingly impossible heights on the rock face. After dipping below the Mount Paterno ridge, which is still riddled with wartime tunnels, you follow a level traverse across a scree slope to the Rifugio Locatelli.

Take a short break, then follow a route that initially descends a series of switchbacks before traversing an undulating basin called the Pian da Rin. In this grassy, wildflower-filled meadow, you may hear whistling marmots. This tranquil trail offers spectacular views of the Tre Cime, surrounded imbued with a silence only interrupted by the dull clanging of cowbells. A steep but short ascent of 280 steps, probably the day's most challenging section, is soon over and followed by a flat stretch to a mountain dairy hut, where you may be able to taste fresh homemade yogurt or cheese.

You then round the south side of the Tre Cime at the Col di Mezzo pass and close the loop back at the starting point, the Rifugio Auronzo. A short drive delivers you to a traditional restaurant for a satisfying lunch—perhaps homemade *canederli* (bread balls with cheese) or a plate of *patate all'ampezzana* (pan-cooked potatoes and onions flavored with local speck ham). After lunch return to Cortina, where, weather (and energy) permitting, you may wish to join your guides on an optional panoramic hike dedicated to Deodat de Dolomieu, a French geologist after whom both the mineral and the rock dolomite were named. This trail begins at the Rifugio Falaria (6,965 feet), reached by cable car from the center of Cortina. It

traces a ridge with rocky peaks and then continues into a forest of larch, stone pine, and fir and becomes a rough road as it descends to the hamlet of Rio Gere—and affords spectacular views of the Tofane and Pomagagnon ranges, Cristallo and the Ampezzo Valley. From here, catch either a cable car, or continue on foot, to Cortina.

This evening, you are free to explore Cortina on your own, perhaps browsing its enticing shops, before venturing out on your own to discover one of the town's many fine restaurants.

**Accommodation:** Grand Hotel Savoia, Cortina d'Ampezzo

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 6

### Parco Naturale delle Dolomiti Ampezzane: Lagazuoi to Rifugio Dibona and Cinque Torri

4-5 miles, moderate, 655-ft. elevation gain and 2,790-ft. elevation loss

Today's walks are considered some of the finest routes in the Dolomites for the variety of scenery—high peaks, remote wild areas, and significant evidence of World War I warfare. After breakfast at your hotel, you board the coach for the 25-minute drive to Passo Falzarego where you catch the gondola to the Rifugio Lagazuoi, the midpoint between Cortina d'Ampezzo and the Badia Valley. At an elevation of 9,020 feet, this refuge is the highest and largest mountain hut in Cortina d'Ampezzo, boasting the most spectacular panoramic terrace in the Dolomites. From here, descend along a zigzag trail to the Rifugio Dibona (6,685 feet), built in honor of the great alpine guide from Cortina, and located at the foot of the majestic Tofana di Rozes mountain. Along the route, you may be lucky enough to spot sure-footed chamois on the rocky slopes. Savor a lunch of typical Garganelli pasta sauteed with radicchio and sausage, topped off with a piece of their legendary apple strudel.

Fueled for the afternoon, enjoy a drive to the Cinque Torri chairlift which provides a speedy (6-minute) ascent to the Rifugio Scoiattoli. Built by the mountain guide Lorenzo Lorenzi in 1969, this alpine hut marks the start of this afternoon's exploration. From the refuge's terrace (at 7,300 feet), you're on top of the world, with 360-degree views overlooking the Dolomites' impressive peaks, such as the Croda da Lago and the Cinque Torri. These mountains contain thousands of feet of tunneling, a result of the fierce fighting between Austrians and Italians during World War I, to control the peaks and surrounding territory. Other



wartime remnants are still ubiquitous, such as barbed wire, shell fragments, and building rubble. The tunnels and trenches have been restored and comprise part of the Great War Outdoor Museum of the Cinque Torri—the largest World War I open-air museum.

After exploring this open-air museum, descend back to the valley, and return (30-minute drive) to Cortina.

This afternoon, you have time to relax, pack, and do any last-minute shopping before gathering for your farewell dinner on the outskirts of town. You are welcomed with a glass of sparkling prosecco on the deck of the inviting chalet restaurant set on a small lake at the base of the Croda da Lago peak. In this intimate locale, the first course, or *primo piatto*, may be the Cortina specialty of handmade, crescent-shaped ravioli stuffed with tender red beets and topped with melted butter, poppy seeds, and a generous dusting of parmesan cheese. Tonight's main course may be fresh lake trout, grilled to perfection, as you toast your discovery of the beauty of the Dolomites.

**Accommodation:** Grand Hotel Savoia, Cortina d'Ampezzo

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 7

### **Your Italy: The Dolomites tour concludes**

Departing shortly after breakfast, a scenic 2 ½ -hour drive brings you to Venice, where you can conveniently explore this magical city on your own, or make flight and rail connections for onward travels. Bid farewell to your Country Walkers guides at Venice's Marco Polo Airport at 12:00 p.m.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## What's Included

### Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals except 1 dinner	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz	✓