Italy: The Dolomites

Air Package 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 *Kaiserschmarrn* 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 doors

Highlights

- Tour the remains of World War I bunkers and tunnels, learning about the area's fascinating history with your knowledgeable guides.
- Admire the colossal pinnacles of the Tre Cime di Lavaredo trail, one of the most iconic landmarks of the UNESCO-preserved Dolomites.
- Experience authentic South Tyrolean hospitality and traditional Ladin culture and personalized attention from the Cristofolini family, owners of this truly unique historic hotel in the heart of the Dolomites.
- 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 chic Cortina d'Ampezzo and discover the reason this unique town has a

1,000-year history as a tourist destination.



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 2,800 feet per day. The highest walking altitude on the tour starts at approximately 8,000 feet, at a site

that 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 transportation time 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 explore the towns of San Vigilio di Marebbe or Cortina.

FLIGHT DAY

Depart from the United States or Canada

Your vacation is about to begin! Spend your first night aloft and arrive ready for an unforgettable trip.

ARRIVAL DAY

Arrive in Innsbruck, Austria

Start off your first day in Innsbruck right by having a Country Walkers representative greet you at the airport. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your centrally located hotel. From here, you are perfectly positioned to explore this charming city at your leisure.

DAY 1

Join your Italy: The Dolomites tour

Mount Plose; 4 miles, easy to moderate

After enjoying an included breakfast at your hotel a representative will meet you at 9:00 a.m. in the lobby for the transportation to Bressanone/Brixen, Italy. Your guides will meet you at 1:30 p.m. (after lunch on your own) in the lobby of Adler Historic Guesthouse (similar in name to your Innsbruck hotel) in Bressanone/Brixen, Italy. They will be wearing Country Walkers shirts.

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 Plose. 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 Veltruno 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 2

Parco Naturale Puez-Odle: Val di Funes and Seceda

5 miles, moderate to challenging, 555-ft. elevation gain and 1,650-ft. elevation loss or 7 miles, moderate to challenging, 555-ft. elevation gain and 2,820-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 40-minute drive to the pretty village of Ortisei in the Val Gardena where you take a gondola bound for Seceda (at an altitude of 8,200 feet). On arrival you are greeted with one of the most stunning views in the Dolomites, a 360-degree

panorama across several Dolomitic mountain groups—Sella, Marmolada, Pale di S. Martino, Sassolungo-Sassopiatto, Alpe di Siusi, Sciliar, Catinaccio, Plos, Putia, Odle Puez and the Austrian Alps!

The Parco Naturale Puez-Odle, a UNESCO World Heritage site covering an area of 10,200 hectares, 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. Today’s hike is invigorating with dramatic views on the extraordinary peaks of the Odle that resemble a castle’s battlements. This morning’s trail traces the Seceda ridgeline, overlooking the Funes Valley and with spectacular views of the vertical Odle rock faces. You traverse pastures scattered with wooden huts and enter the Puez-Odle Nature Park. At many of these cabins, like the Pieralongia *rifugio* (alpine hut), where you’ll stop, refreshments or snacks are available to hikers. The trail continues through a boulder field where you encounter the impressive Pieralongia rock spire, or needle, after which you descend to the Firenze hut (at 6,685 feet). Built in 1888 as one of the first mountain huts in the Val Gardena, it offers a stunning view of the Sassolungo and Odle mountains. Here you will enjoy 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.

Satiated, you bid farewell to your local hosts, and climb gently uphill to Col Raiser (at 6,900 feet) where you may opt to descend to Santa Cristina Valgardena via gondola. Those who opt to continue on foot (for the additional two miles) trace an initial steep section on a well-maintained dirt trail which gives way to a wide gravel path, the Sentiero degli Scoiattoli, (or *Trail of the Squirrels*) through the woods with views that open up on Sella and Sassolungo-Sassopiatto.

From Santa Cristina, a 75-minute drive 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3

Parco Naturale Puez-Odle: Sass de Pütia

7 miles, moderate, with a one-hour challenging uphill section, 1,300-ft. elevation gain and 2,460 elevation 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 900-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 Puez group, Conturines group with Sasso della Santa Croce, the Fanes Range with Lagazuoi, and in the distance, Pelmo.

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*. The next mile or so is on a beautiful, level trail between green pastures and grazing cows, with views of the Puez, Fanes and Conturine groups and the Odle, with Civetta appearing in the distance. Soon, you'll reach your lunch spot; pause to refuel and reward your efforts over local specialties. Perhaps you'll try a hearty bowl of pasta, soup, or polenta. 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4

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

5 miles, moderate, 1,280-ft. elevation gain and 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 and to the south, majestic views of the Sella group. A cable car ascent from the Plans-Frara station brings you to the Jimmi Rifugio (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 (weather permitting), perhaps you'll top your meal off with some *kaiserschmarrn* (sweet pancake served with fruit compote), with outstanding views from the terrace to the Mittagstal, the Marmolada, the Civetta, 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 alpine hotel is perfectly situated, just a short stroll from the heart of the pedestrian zone. After settling into your room, you enjoy dinner on your own, at one of the hotel's dining venues or perhaps in town at a local restaurant. (Recommendations will be provided by your guides.)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5

Sesto Dolomites: Tre Cime di Lavaredo Circuit and Dolomieu Trail. Independent exploration of Cortina d'Ampezzo

6 miles, easy to moderate, 525-ft. elevation gain and loss with one steep/challenging 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, 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 Misurina, where you are free to choose from a few lakeside restaurants for a satisfying lunch—and an opportunity to sample homemade *canederli* (bread balls with cheese) or a plate of *patate all'ampezzana* (pan-cooked potatoes and onions flavored with local *speck* ham).

Returning to Cortina mid-afternoon, 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 Faloria (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.

Or, you may wish to explore town on your own, perhaps visit one of its numerous museums or browse its enticing shops. Another option is to relax at the hotel with a plunge in the indoor swimming pool or indulge in a treatment at the spa before venturing out on your own to dine at one of the town's many fine restaurants.

Included Meals: Breakfast

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 walk is considered one of the finest routes in the Dolomites for its 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 30-minute drive to where you catch the Cinque Torri chairlift to the Rifugio Scoiattoli. Built by the mountain guide Lorenzo Lorenzi in 1969, this alpine hut marks the start of today's walk. 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. Your walk today is along a well-established circuit beneath the Monte Nuvolau, a natural balcony with views over the Tofane range, Mount Lagazuoi, and the Falzarego Pass. Along the route, you may be lucky enough to spot sure-footed chamois on the rocky slopes.

Making your way along the dramatic scenery of mountainside, rock faces, and waterfalls, you reach the Averau Rifugio (at 7,926 feet), a coveted milestone along the Alta Via, where you stop for lunch. While dining at the "Restaurant at the Edge of the Universe" (as The Sunday Times refers to this family-run alpine chalet), you enjoy stunning views of the surrounding peaks of Civetta and Marmolada while savoring exquisite traditional dishes such as smoked roast beef with arugula and fresh homemade pasta

prepared by Paola and Sandrone. Fueled for the final leg, you continue to the chairlift for the descent back to the valley and the 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7

Your Italy: The Dolomites tour concludes

After your included breakfast, complimentary transportation is provided to the Venice Airport, where you bid farewell to your tour guides. A Country Walkers representative escorts you to a waiting water taxi for transportation to the Duodo Palace Hotel for your post-tour night. (Please note that you are required to transport your luggage a short distance to the boat launch and from the boat launch to the hotel.)

Lunch and dinner are on your own. We provide detailed city information to help you plan your day.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DEPARTURE DAY

Departure

After an included breakfast this morning, a short walk leads you to the boat launch for complimentary transportation via water-taxi to Venice's Marco Polo Airport based on your departure time. Please keep in mind that you are moving your own luggage this morning, so pack light!

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included	Air Package	Tour Only
Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓	✓
13 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 4 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	✓	✓
Roundtrip airfare	✓	
One extra night in Innsbruck and one extra night in Venice	✓	
Airport car service for arrival and departure	✓	
Pre- and post-tour breakfasts	✓	
Business-class upgrades available	✓	