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## Italy: The Dolomites

### Travel Style - Guided Walking Tour

This small-group Guided Walking Adventure offers an authentic travel experience, one that takes you away from the crowds and deep into the fabric of local life. On it, you'll enjoy 24/7 expert guides, premium accommodations, delicious meals, effortless transportation, and local wine or beer with dinner. Rest assured that every trip detail has been anticipated so you're free to enjoy an adventure that exceeds your expectations.



With its distinctive limestone spires, wind-etched cliffs, rustic villages, and verdant valleys, the Dolomite Mountains are a naturalist's dream. Here, you stroll through vast Alpine basins and wildflower-dizzy meadows, passing dairy cows, timber chalets, and pristine pine forests. Gaze upon some of the Dolomites' most imposing peaks—Tre Cime di Lavaredo, Tofane, and the deep red of Croda Rossa. From the cathedral and cloisters of Bressanone to the cobbled lanes and mountainside vineyards of Tyrolean hamlets, delight in the cultural treasures to be found in the foothills of the Alps, enjoying a fascinating window into the vibrant Ladin culture flourishing here. Savor cuisine reflecting the region's unique cultural blend: hearty Austrian-influenced mountain fare combined with lighter Italian dishes...all made from fresh local ingredients. In the chic resort town of Cortina d'Ampezzo—the “Pearl of the Dolomites”—relax with a glass of *vin santo* (holy wine), and savor the rosy light of the *enrosadira*, the gorgeous sunsets that paint the surrounding white-stone summits.

## Tour Only Itinerary - 2019

### Day 1

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

*4 miles, easy to moderate*

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 regions, a bilingual region that belonged to Austria until 1918. In fact, German is spoken more than Italian by the locals. 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.



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Following a brief orientation at your centrally located meeting point and 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, site of tomorrow's walk, before a return gondola ride to the base of the mountain.

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 (or equivalent), Bressanone**

The historical, family-run Goldener Adler is located among the cobblestoned streets of Bressanone's historical center, just steps away from the town's Baroque cathedral. This four-star property offers well-appointed river view rooms, an elegant bar and restaurant, charming outdoor courtyard, as well as a spa and wellness center with sauna, steam bath, and massage facilities.

## Day 2

### **Parco Naturale Puez-Odle**

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

You awaken to a generous breakfast buffet in your hotel's warm, wood-beamed dining room—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 one-hour drive through the Funes Valley—the Dolomites' northwest boundary—and on to the Passo delle Erbe, roughly "the Grassy Pass," where you can see the extraordinary peaks of the Odle that resemble a castle's battlements.

Today's route is along the Sass de Pütia loop, which starts out on a wide gravel path bordered with heather and bilberry, and ascends gently past summer hay huts and the local Ladin people's small summer mountain cabins called *baita*. This ancient culture of a small minority population living in the Dolomites and speaking the Ladin language developed in the isolated mountain valleys from the time of the Roman Empire.

In the summer, Ladini families climb to their summer cabins to relax, picnic, hay, and carve wood, and, at many of the cabins, refreshments or snacks are offered to hikers. 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, through large boulders, a trickling stream, and 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—rolling pastureland thick with yellow buttercups, gentians, and pink mountain thrift, and views



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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* (“refuge 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, your lunch spot comes into view—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, raptors soaring overhead.

A short transfer takes you on 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

An intimate, Art Nouveau, turn-of-the-century Tyrolean hotel nestled in a small mountain village. Run by the same family for generations, this welcoming, four-star property boasts inviting guest rooms, as well as an indoor pool and Ayurvedic spa and wellness center offering an array of treatments, massages, and sauna facilities.

## Day 3

### **Parco Naturale Fanes-Senes-Braies: Pederü to Capanna Alpina**

*5 or 8 miles, moderate to challenging, 2,045-ft. elevation gain (or 367-ft. gain if choosing 5-mile option) and 1,485-ft. elevation loss*

A sumptuous breakfast buffet fuels you for today’s walk in the Fanes-Senes-Braies Park. That being said, instead of a long but gradual ascent at the start, a very convenient option would allow you to take a jeep ride to meet the group at lunchtime, and then enjoy the afternoon’s five-mile walk. For those who choose the morning walk, a short drive brings you to the eastern end of the Val Badia and the glacially carved Pederü Valley. From the Rifugio Pederü at 5,079 feet, a long, wide mountain road over gradual switchbacks climbs for 2½ hours (elevation gain of 1,680 feet), larch trees lining the way.

After passing a rocky gorge, you emerge onto the level Fanes Pasture. You amble past green pastureland, yellow wolfsbane, rushing rivers, and grazing cows en route to the family-run Rifugio Fanes, a backcountry lodge of wood and stone with a huge deck overlooking the natural bowl of the Sasso della Croce and the Cunturines groups of mountains. The unique stratified rock layers and



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solitary pines in the horizon are known as the “Marmots’ Parliament,” part of the rich Ladini folklore of stories and legends about these mountains. A “Radler”—a refreshing mix of beer and lemonade—may hit the spot to accompany lunch, a hearty bowl of pasta, soup, or polenta.

After lunch, a 15-minute ascent (367 feet) of gradual switchbacks through a carpet of junipers brings you to Limo Pass (at 7,126 feet, the highest point of the day’s walk). The trail then levels out at azure Lake Limo, gently undulating into a wide natural amphitheater, as you enjoy the Fanes high plateau with its typical karstic limestone landscape of wind-carved rock formations, caves, fissures, underground streams, and small lakes. A growing population of fox, deer, chamois, mountain goats, and eagles thrive under the park’s protection.

After a final stunning view at the Forcella Col de Locia, a steep and narrow descent of steps brings you to the Capanna Alpina (5,643 feet), where you are rewarded with a refreshing drink or snack. 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

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## Day 4

### **Badia Valley: La Val to Rifugio Santa Croce and Santa Croce to San Cassiano**

*4 miles, moderate, 1,315-ft. elevation gain and 3 miles, moderate, 1,640-ft. elevation loss*

Departing San Vigilio after breakfast, you head south for the approximately 45-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 Badia Valley—a picturesque Alpine basin that is home to dairy cows, pine forests, and timber chalets—viewed as the heart of the Ladin culture. Set 6,709 feet above sea level, the 15th-century Santa Croce Sanctuary (or “The Crusc,” as locals used to call it) is integrated into the Fanes-Senes-Braies Natural Park and offers splendid views of some of the Dolomites’ most majestic peaks: Lagazuoi, Lavarella, and Sasso della Croce. Following an initial gentle ascent (with some steep sections) of 2½ hours, you reach the church (a pilgrimage site) and mountain hut (or *rifugio*), a family-run business for over five generations. A hearty meal is served outside (weather permitting) or in the wood-paneled dining room, perhaps topped off with some *kaiserschmarren* (sweet pancake served with fruit compote).

After lunch, you descend gradually along an easy trail to the charming mountain village of San Cassiano and your waiting bus for the 45-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 appreciated for its miles of ski runs, as well as its bustling center full



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of chic cafés and shops. Your historic 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

This historic luxury hotel boasts an ideal location just a short stroll from the historic heart of Cortina. Steeped in tradition, the property offers guest rooms with contemporary decor, a full-service spa with indoor pool, sauna, fitness room and tea bar, and an elegant restaurant and piano bar.

## Day 5

### **Sesto Dolomites: Tre Cime di Lavaredo Circuit**

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

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. The distinctive three peaks are one 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, and historically the site of some of the most intense mountain warfare of World War I. In fact, the range constituted the border between Hapsburg, 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.

After a fortifying cappuccino, you set off along a wide trail, a former military track, just beneath the peaks. After visiting a chapel commemorating the First World War, you 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, a grassy, wildflower-filled meadow where you may hear whistling marmots. This tranquil trail offers spectacular views of the Tre Cime, surrounded by a mountain quiet 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 incredibly 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).

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



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## Day 6

### **Parco Naturale delle Dolomiti Ampezzane: Monte Nuvolau circuit**

*4-5 miles, moderate, with an easy to moderate elevation gain of 1,082 feet and loss of 820 feet*

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.

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

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### Day 7

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

Departing shortly after breakfast, a scenic two-and-a-half-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. Say goodbye to the Country Walkers guides at Venice's Marco Polo Airport, at 12:00 p.m.