On Trails Less Trodden

Discovering less-celebrated regions and a comfortable place to put up your feet.

By ELAINE GUSCAR

Walking trips are the ultimate in slow travel, allowing tourists to take well-trodden paths through Croque Terre in Italy or around the Ring of Kerry in Ireland at their own pace. Strollers seeking more solitude who try Europe’s less celebrated regions often find that the trade-offs are less service. But that doesn’t have to be the case. For explorers seeking quiet pathways, a few outfitters offer pioneering travel, and a comfortable place for you to put up your feet at day’s end. Here are a few.

Portugal

THE ROUTE: Rota Vicentina, a 219-mile-long Atlantic coastal path from Santiago do Cacém in Alentejo to Cape St. Vincent in the Algarve, was completed last May. It connected local footpaths that trace rural cliffs and empty beaches.

THE OUTFITTER: The England-based company IonTravel organizes self-guided inn-to-inn walks on the Rota Vicentina over seven nights. The route passes small villages, offshore sea stacks, wave-bashed headlands, sand dunes and fishing harbors. Hikers travel 6 to 11 miles a day, averaging about four to six and a half hours on foot. Each morning the service sends your luggage forward to the hotel where you’ll stay that night, freeing you to amble with just a day pack.

DATES AND RATES: Anytime until June 9, reserving Sept. 7 to Nov. 3; from Oct. 25, 6 nights, $937 at $150 to the pound, per person, double occupancy, including hotel, seven breakfasts, four dinners, five picnic lunches and luggage shuttles. (44-155) 671-000; iontravel.co.uk.

Spain

THE ROUTE: The northwest region of Asturias encompasses the rocky highs and river valleys of the Cantabrian Mountains and lush pastures and lakes protected by Somiedo Natural Park.

THE OUTFITTER: Judy Colaresi of Spanish Steps, who divides her time between Aspen and Spain, has been leading trips along Spain’s long-distance Camino de Santiago for nearly 17 years. She now also operates a guesthouse in rural Asturias as well as the base of “walk and talk” language-learning vacations. Instructors begin the day with a lesson over breakfast highlighting terms that might be encountered (from “walking-sticks” and “boots” to “distances”) followed by 8 to 10 miles of hiking (usually three to five hours). Overnight stays at the eight-room converted farmhouse, Hotel Fuentes de Luchín, include cooking classes and travel outside your doorstep. There are also hiking programs for yoga aficionados and painters.

DATES AND RATES: May 5 to 11 and June 15 to 21; 1,000 euros, about $1,350 at $1.36 to the euro, per person, double occupancy, including breakfast and dinners. (877) 766-9265; spanishstepsretreats.com.

France

THE ROUTE: Walks in the Mediterranean island of Corsica cover diverse terrain, from rugged mountains and pine forests to pocket beaches.

THE OUTFITTER: Intrepid Travel’s new walking trip focuses on nature from a highland base in the central Corsica village of Bocognano. Five days of the eight-day trip are taken up by guided walks in the Corse Regional Nature Park that may include trails beneath granite peaks, through chestnut forests or across mountain meadows, depending on the group’s interest and the conditions. Most walks depart from the village itself, though they occasionally begin with a mountain railway ride in order to reach more remote areas of the island. Participants, a maximum of 16, spend each night at the family-run Hotel Beaumejour that overlooks a river valley and the imposing Monte ORO range.

DATES AND RATES: Departures June 2, 9 and 16 and Sept. 1 and 8; from $2,130, including breakfasts, dinners and five lunches. (800) 792-7206; intrepidtravel.com.

Croatia

THE ROUTE: The Istran Peninsula in northern Croatia, across the Adriatic from Venice, includes Roman ruins and hill towns encircled by vineyards that bring Tuscany to mind.

THE OUTFITTER: Veronika Cvetkovic, an expert Croatian guide, leads custom-designed English-speaking village-to-village tours throughout the country, though she says she particularly likes remote Maranara, where she offers opportunities to meet the locals out raking hay or wearing folk costumes en route to church or markets. Though not of the walks are extreme and they largely take place amid rolling hills, most of the paths are unmarked, making a guide vital. A week’s tour of Maranara for up to 14 travelers involves walking and occasional driving between rural villages with stops to meet a wood carver and visit churches or cafes. Travelers mainly lodge in private guesthouses that serve traditional homemade meals.

DATES AND RATES: Departures continuous, based on availability; seven-day trips, 596 euros per person, including lodging and most meals. (00-385) 191-755; myromania.com.

Czech Republic/Germany

THE ROUTE: From Prague to Dresden, the mountainous Czech-German border area contains lightly traveled historic regions and dramatic scenery of Bohemia and Saxony between its urban end points.

THE OUTFITTER: This new eight-day itinerary from Wayfarers Walking vacations travels through regions variously called Czech Switzerland or Saxon Switzerland, depending on which side of the border you’re on. Paths pass timber-frame houses, medieval monastery ruins and the haunting towers, arches and gorges of the Elbe Sandstone Mountains that inspired artists of the Romantic Movement. Jana Kotalíková, who is an art historian, leads groups of up to 16, covering seven to nine miles per day. Though the heart of the trip involves walking, the group travels roughly 75 miles north by car from Prague to start the walk in rural Jirkova, and later enters Dresden by boat on the River Elbe.