

EUROPE WALKS | GUIDED TOURS

# On Trails Less Trodden

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

By ELAINE GLUSAC

Walking trips are the ultimate in slow travel, allowing tourists to take well-trod paths through Cinque 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-off is less service. But that doesn't have to be the case. For explorers seeking quiet pathways, a few outfitters offer pioneering routes 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 210-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 cliff-tops and empty beaches.

**THE OUTFITTER** The England-based company InnTravel 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, resuming Sept. 7 to Nov. 3; from £625, about \$937 at \$1.50 to the pound, per person, double occupancy, including hotel, seven breakfasts, four dinners, five picnic lunches and luggage shuttles. (44-1653) 617-000; inntravel.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 Colaneri of Spanish Steps, who divides her time between Aspen and Spain, has been leading trips along Spain's long-distance Camino de Santiago route for nearly 17 years. She now also operates a guesthouse in rural Asturias that serves 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 "boats" to "blisters") followed by 8 to 10 miles of hiking (usually three to five hours). Overnight stays at the eight-room converted farmhouse, Hotel Fuentes de Lucia, include cooking classes and trails outside your doorstep. There are also hiking programs for yoga aficionados and painters.

**DATES AND RATES** May 11 to 18 and June 15 to 22; 1,200 euros, about \$1,535 at \$1.28 to the euro, per person, double occupancy, including breakfasts and dinners. (877) 787-9255; 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



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM, HOTEL MONTE MULINI, EXODUS TRAVEL, CARLOS LORITE

Bocognano. Five days of the eight-day trip are taken up by guided walks in the Corsica Regional Nature Park that may include treks 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 Beausejour that overlooks a river valley and the imposing Monte d'Oro range.

**DATES AND RATES** Departures June 2, 9 and 16 and Sept. 1 and 8; from \$1,230, including breakfasts, dinners and five lunches. (800) 970-7299; intrepidtravel.com.

## Croatia

**THE ROUTE** The Istrian 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** Vermont-based CW (formerly Country Walkers) offers a new walk on the Istrian Peninsula designed for independent travelers who seek control over their itinerary but don't want the hassle of planning hotels, guides and transfers. Based at the seaside Hotel Monte Mulini in Rovinj, travelers spend four days exploring the peninsula, beginning with a two-hour guided tour of the historic port, once a part of the Venetian Republic. A driver-

guide spends the next day and a half with travelers, visiting interior hill towns, a winery and the Roman amphitheater in Pula and arranging optional coastal, vineyard or mountain walks like one on Mount Ucka whose summit offers panoramic views of Kvarner Bay.

**DATES AND RATES** Anytime; from \$1,998 per person, double occupancy, including breakfasts. (800) 464-9255; cwadventure.com.

## Romania

**THE ROUTE** Maramures, the rugged northwestern region that borders Ukraine, has dense woodlands, rustic farms and traditional villages with wooden churches and houses trimmed in elaborate wood carvings.

**THE OUTFITTER** Ramona Cazacu, an independent Romanian guide, leads custom-designed English-speaking village-to-village tours throughout the country, though she says she particularly likes remote Maramures, where walks offer opportunities to meet the locals out raking hay or wearing folk costumes en route to church on Sundays. Though none 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 Maramures 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 guest-

houses that serve traditional homemade meals.

**DATES AND RATES** Departures continuous, based on availability; seven-day trips, 990 euros a person, including lodging and most meals. (40-723) 191-755; myromania.com.ro.

## 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 variably 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 Kotalikova, 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 Jitrava, and later enters Dresden by boat on the River Elbe.

**DATES AND RATES** Departures are June 15 and 22, and Sept. 14 and 21; \$4,295 per person, double occupancy, all-inclusive. (800) 249-4620; thewayfarers.com.



Clockwise from top left, the Portuguese coast; Hotel Monte Mulini in Rovinj, Croatia, a base for exploring the Istrian Peninsula; near Bocognano, Corsica; mountainous Asturias, Spain.