

Independent walking tour (DOL1)

The Ultimate Dolomites Experience

Walking from Cortina into the Alta Badia & Val Gardena, along well-marked trails through fairytale landscapes



TRIP NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

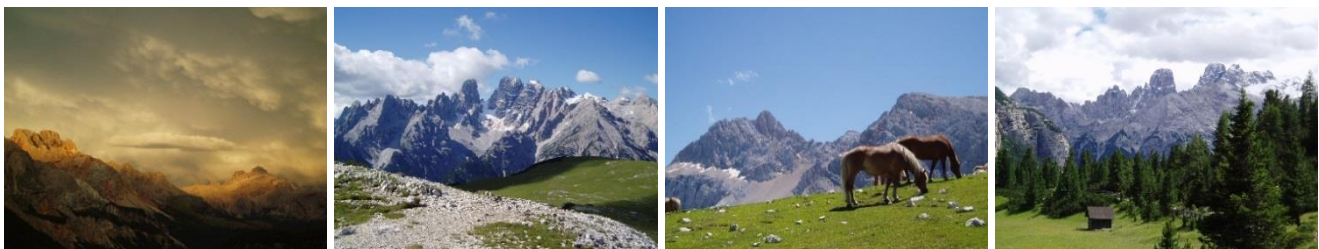
This is a moderately challenging tour which is suitable for those who have some experience of mountain walking and a good general physical condition. No mountaineering skills are required as the tour does not follow any 'technical' trails ('vie ferrate'). Through the extensive footpath network of the area, you will discover the most beautiful parts of the several ranges which make up the Dolomites. All beautiful and all different! Unlike many other tours you don't just see one range, but several of the most beautiful, making the tour much more varied, and much more interesting!

The majestic Dolomites are probably Europe's most beautiful mountain chain. Ancient coral reefs, consisting of thick layers of the mineral 'dolomite', similar to limestone, the Dolomite peaks are gigantic, chiselled monuments to the forces of the Earth, the crowning glory of Italy's northern border. Continuous sheer cliffs flank most of the peaks. Although not exceptionally high (the highest peak is Marmolada at 3342 m.), they are amongst the most striking of all European mountains, coloured in weathered hues of rose, yellow and grey and rising up in steep spires of fantastic shapes. Below lie bright green meadows alive with wildflowers all summer. And in the lower valleys orchards, vineyards and a chequerboard of cultivated fields.

The area is on the border between Latin and Germanic cultures, and the region was heavily fought over in the past, especially in World War I. Nowadays, in more peaceful circumstances, you can enjoy a beautiful trek through this fairyland where lush meadows nestle against towering limestone peaks and charming little towns in the valleys, with their beautifully coloured houses. Still, the different cultures, the Italian and Austrian influences, and the local Ladino culture are noticeable in the food, the language and the architecture. Small hotels and comfortable 'rifugi' (mountain huts) welcome grateful hikers with delectable cuisine, the ubiquitous grappa, strudel and steaming cappuccino. Drink in this dramatic limestone setting as you make your way through the different parts of this majestic mountain range.

You'll spend the first few days in charming Cortina d'Ampezzo. From here you hike up to what are perhaps the most famous peaks in the area, the beautiful Tre Cime di Lavaredo. At the end of this walk you descend to Lake Misurina before heading back to Cortina again. You'll discover the impressive Tofane mountains just west of Cortina. Then travel into the Fanes-Sennes range to explore the different parts of these mountains, perhaps the prettiest part of the Dolomites. Here you'll hike along well-marked paths that lead through majestic mountain scenery. Stroll through alpine meadows carpeted with wildflowers, where by day you soak up the invigorating mountain air on a unforgettable ascent towards alpine bliss, and by night relax in the warm embrace of an alpine lodge, savouring hearty gourmet cuisine. This overnight stay here in a comfortable mountain hut makes the mountain experience complete.

Then you descend into the Alta Badia valley, heartland of the Ladino culture. From your base there you make walks onto the wonderful Puez range, certainly one of the most scenic parts of the Dolomites and travel around the Sella group, along the most famous passes in the area. Then you have a last memorable evening in your renowned mountain hotel, before travelling back by bus to Venice or Trento.



Please note: this is a moderately easy tour which is suitable for those who have some experience of walking and a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are on good paths, most of them waymarked. Average walking times: from approx.. 4 to 6 hours each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in Cortina

Arrival in Cortina d'Ampezzo, where you settle in at your comfortable hotel. If you arrive early several options are available to discover the charm of the Cortina d'Ampezzo valley, a famous resort for the Italian jetset. You could go 'downtown' for a drink, but also go for a first nice hike in the beautiful and relaxing surroundings!

Accommodation: Cortina - Hotel * – Meals included: 1 dinner.**

Total walking time: around 1 h. + sightseeing time

Day 2 – Roundwalk Dreizinnen

Your first easy day walk takes you directly to one of the most famous spots in the Dolomites: the *Tre Cime di Lavaredo* or *Dreizinnen*. A short bus journey brings you past Lake Misurina up to the hut at Auronzo. From here you first walk an almost level trail along the southern side of the three mountain peaks of Lavaredo towards the Rifugio Lavaredo, then you start to climb along a real mountain path to reach the Rifugio Locatelli (Drei Zinnen Hütte). From here you enjoy an excellent view of the northern faces of the Tre Cime ('three peaks') of Lavaredo, one of the most famous postcard images of the Dolomites. Along the northern side you return to the Rifugio Auronzo, where you can take the bus back to Cortina. The real walkers can also opt to descend all the way down to Lake Misurina and catch the bus there. In the evening there are several options for a nice dinner.

Accommodation: Cortina - Hotel * – Meals included: 1 breakfast.**

Total walking distance: 11 km. Approx. walking time: 4,5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 500 m.

Day 3 – Hike into the Fanes-Sennes mountain range

Enjoy your hearty breakfast in the hotel to prepare you for your hike up into the Fanes-Senes range. A short bus journey takes you to the Passo Falzarego, where you take the incredibly scenic cable car trip up to the Rifugio Lagazuòi (2773m) which is awesomely sited, with world-class mountain views. The area here is full of memories of World War I, bitterly fought in this area, and many remains have been restored, to make up an impressive 'open air museum'. An easy path brings you down to the shores of Lake Lagazuòi. This part of your journey sees you enter the real world of the Dolomites with the presence of the great mountains – Cima Scotòni and Cima Fànes Sud. You now hike the 'Alta Via' of the Dolomites (also called the 'High Route' n.º1), a long-distance footpath that traverses the Dolomites, alongside some of the most impressive scenery of the area. From the lake you can either opt to walk up to the impressive Lech Pass – a very steep, but well-maintained path – or to walk around the peaks, perhaps making a short stop at the Rifugio Scotoni. Then you continue along the 'Alta Via' in a northern direction. At the end of the afternoon you reach the small lake of Limo. From here you descend into the quintessential alpine setting of the Fanes valley, with its two spectacular alpine lakes. The walk ends at the luxurious mountain hut of Fanes.

Accommodation: San Vigilio - Mountain Hut – Meals included: 1 breakfast.

Total walking distance: 13 km. Approx. walking time: 5,5 h. Ascent & descent: + 500 m./- 1000 m.

Day 4 – Down into the Val Badia

Today's hike starts right from the front door of your hut after a good breakfast. After a warm-up hike through the valley around the small lakes, you reach the Lavaredo hut, where you start the long climb up towards the Antonius Pass (2466 m.); a walk that offers spectacular views over the whole valley. The pass, below the towering Piz de Sant'Antoine (2655 m.), is the highest point of today's journey. From here, it is a very scenic descent into the Spessa



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Valley (or Wengental, as it is called in German). The first part of the descent is still bare rock, then you enter the beautiful pine forest, and finally you reach the 'civilisation': the first wooden huts, meadows full of cows, and houses with flowering balconies. Just like the Alps are supposed to be! You descend all the way down the valley, through the charming little hamlets which make up the village of La Val/Wengen, where you stay for the next two nights.

Accommodation: La Valle - Hotel * – Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 picnic lunch, 1 dinner.**

Total walking distance: 8 km. Approx. walking time: 3,5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 500 m.

Day 5 – From La Val to Monte Croce

After breakfast this morning, you have a number of options: you can opt for a relatively easy walk through the Badia Valley (or Gadertal), or a roundwalk in which you return over the ridge of Mt. Gropa, with fabulous views and a good chance to see wild deer. The other option for today is more challenging: the climb to the top of the Paresberg and the Kreuzspitze. Views over the whole Badia Valley, with the Puez chain in front of you, are unforgettable. Of course you can also take the chance to recover a bit from the walking, relax in the nice surroundings and discover the charming hamlets belonging to the Wengen Valley.

Accommodation: La Valle - Hotel * – Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner.**

Total walking distance: 8 km. Approx. walking time: 3,5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 500 m.

Day 6 – Along Santa Croce to La Villa

A nice day walk takes you into the southern part of the Badia Valley today. The first part of the walk takes you through beautiful alpine meadows, with the silhouette of the Kreuzkofel towering above you. Halfway through your walk you reach the Crusc (Holy Cross) mountain hut, where you have the chance to buy some lunch. Then it's an easy, almost level panoramic walk, high above the valley. Towards the end of the walk you descend to the village of La Villa and walk alongside the river to your beautiful hotel, where you can enjoy a nice sauna and a good meal.

Accommodation: La Villa - Hotel * – Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner.**

Total walking distance: 15 km. Approx. walking time: 5 h. Ascent & descent: + 700 m./- 600 m.

Day 7 – The Puez Plateau

After breakfast this morning, you hike up (optional lift) onto the Puez Plateau. Here you make a beautiful roundwalk towards the 'Rifugio' (or 'Utia', in local dialect) of Puez. You walk along the impressive Ciampani Mountain, partly following the 'Alta Via delle Dolomiti'. Somewhere near the mountain hut you enjoy a picnic lunch in the mountains. Then, along the edge of the Vallunga and the Col Dalla Sone, you continue the walk on the high plain. You then reach the Gherdenacia Pass, where you'll experience one of the world's finest views: the surrounding valleys disappear into the shadows, accentuating the rock pinnacles which—still exposed to sunlight—take on an extraordinary palette of ever-changing colours. Then the long descent starts, first down to the Gherdenacia hut, and then all the way down to your hotel in La Villa.

Accommodation: La Villa - Hotel * – Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner.**

Total walking distance: 12 km. Approx. walking time: 5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 550 m.

Optional extra day

After the challenging walks of the last two days you have the chance to recover. Following a leisurely breakfast you can take the public bus which goes all around the Sella Range, which can be considered the heart of the Dolomites. The round trip takes you over the most famous passes in the Dolomites, such as the Sella Pass, the Gardena and the Passo Pordoi, known for hosting many stages of the Giro d'Italia.



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Several options for shorter or longer walks en-route are available. You can hop on and hop off the bus where you like to discover the beauty of this part of the Dolomites. Those who feel like it can also travel by cable car to the top of the Pordoi, to enjoy one of the most extraordinary views of the whole Dolomites area.

Accommodation: La Villa - Hotel ***

Total walking time: around 3,5 hours + sightseeing time (5,5 hours with extra option).

Day 8 – Departure

This morning after breakfast, the tour ends. There are frequent buses back to Trento and to Venice. Private transfers can be arranged at any time. Meals included: 1 breakfast.



TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

Accommodation is on a bed and breakfast basis in 3-star hotels and a comfortable mountain hut (comparable to a 3-star hotel). All rooms have en-suite facilities. You will have some dinners included, on other evenings you will be free to organise your dinner from the wide choice of restaurants in the area. No picnic lunches are included in the tour price (except for day 5), but these can be prepared for you or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages where you stay.

Night 1 & 2: The first two nights are spent in Cortina d'Ampezzo, in a nice 3-star hotel in the heart of the famous valley, which is a prime destination for Italy's jet set.

Night 3: You stay in a comfortable and luxurious mountain hut, beautifully situated in the picturesque valley of Fanes, with spectacular views of the two alpine lakes here.

Night 4 & 5: For two nights you stay in the small village of La Val/Wengen, at the bottom of the valley.

Night 6 & 7: The last two nights are spent in a beautiful hotel with sauna in the small village of La Villa.



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UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

It is possible to book an upgrade in some of the places en route. Details and prices on request.

INCLUDED

- 2 nights in Hotel *** Cortina d'Ampezzo - 1 HB + 1 BB
- 1 night in mountain hut *** in Fanes - BB
- 2 nights in Hotel *** in La Val/Wengen - HB
- 2 nights in Hotel in La Villa – HB
- 1 picnic lunch (Day 4)
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1:25.000 scale
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transport
- Private transfers as specified

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips
- Items of personal nature

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderately easy (2-3): Mostly easy walks, though some include walking uphill, sometimes on paths with rough surfaces. On some days extensions or shortcuts are possible.

Fitness: High standard of fitness is not necessary but you should be able to walk for up to 5 hours a day in the hot sun on dusty or stony tracks

FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

Footpaths: Most paths are well maintained, but the journey involves some walking uphill, sometimes on paths with rough surfaces.

Waymarking: A large part of the route is waymarked; elsewhere you have to follow the route descriptions provided together with the maps.



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ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in CORTINA D'AMPEZZO connected by a regular shuttle bus service with Treviso and Venice, the nearest cities with international airports. Regular trains run from Venice, Bolzano and Innsbruck to Calalzo di Cadore, the nearest train station. A pick-up service can be arranged from Calalzo, or from the airport.

Departure: The tour ends in VAL BADIA. A transfer can bring you back to Cortina (or the Calalzo train station), from where you travel on to your next destination (Venice and Innsbruck can both be easily reached), or alternatively you can get one of the frequent buses to Trento or Venice.

TOUR VARIATIONS

Optional extension can be booked to the charming little town of Trento, with its wonderfully decorated houses and impressive castle, where you can discover the Brenta Dolomites - a minor, but no less interesting chain.

EXTRA NIGHTS

Extra days can be booked in any of the accommodations 'en route'. Extra walking options will be provided!!

- It is possible to extend the tour with a few days in Trento, 'capital' of the region and a very lively and interesting city. From here walks can be made onto the plateau of Monte Bondone and in the Brenta Dolomites - a less well known, but equally beautiful range (see below).
- It is possible to extend the tour with few days in Val di Fassa, where the Marmolada and the Rosengarten ("Rose Garden") ranges can be discovered.
- It is possible to extend the tour with a return walk back to Cortina, from where the return to Venice is easier.

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