



Independent walking tour (VFS1)

Via Appia - 'Francigena del Sud'

From Rome to the mythical coast of Ulysses

Along the Via Appia through southern Lazio: along the Colli Albani, Monti Lepini, Terracina, Fondi & Gaeta to Formia



TRIP NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

This is a moderately challenging tour which is suitable for experienced walkers with a good general physical condition. Roughly following the traces of the Via Appia, one of Europe's most ancient 'highways', in Roman and medieval times, you walk from village to village, a full immersion in the southern part of the Lazio region, ending on the coast at Formia.

This first part of the Via Appia is perhaps the climax of the whole route, the part with the highest density of historical interest. This road for centuries has been the backbone of the Roman road system in southern Italy, and the gateway to its colonies in the southern and eastern Mediterranean. While born as a transport road, for soldiers, merchants and everybody else, in medieval times the road has been used intensively by pilgrims travelling from Rome, the Holy City, to the Middle East, the Holy Land, embarking at Brindisi.

Starting from the Heart of Rome, either at the Vatican City in case you are walking the 'religious' Via Francigena, or from the Forum Romanum or Colosseum, when you do the Via Appia, you'll be walking all the time through areas where the intriguing history of thousands of years is still alive. Here, more than 'only' walking over a medieval pilgrim's route you'll walk through the heartland of the Roman Empire, with the ancient roads not only still visible in many places, but intensively used as well.

There are of course still many traces of the Roman civilisation in this area, halfway Rome and Naples, which was the 'heartland' of the Roman Empire, often almost 'forgotten', due to the lack of interest (and there is just too much 'roman stuff' in Italy...). But you'll be walking as well on the traces of the mythical Greek hero Ulysses, and along the route you'll come as well across beautiful medieval towns, Renaissance palaces, including the Palace of the Pope in Castel Gandolfo, stunning gardens and as well some pre-Roman sites.

You'll be walking which features a great number of natural wonders, due to its very diverse nature. The first days you'll be walking through the 'Colli Romani', the Roman Hills of volcanic nature, with a number of beautiful crater lakes. Your route then continues through the limestone mountains of the Monti Lepini, high above the plain which one where the marshes, where malaria was a common disease only a century ago. From the Lepini Mountains you'll descend to the stunning Abbey of Fossanova, and after the stunningly beautiful traverse of the Campo Soriano, you'll descend to the coast at Terracina, a city where the Via Appia can still be admired, right in the town centre!

A last stretch of the Via Appia brings you along the Abbey of San Magno, the plain of Roman Fondi and the medieval town of Itri, to your final destination of this tour: the coastal town of Formia.

The route you'll follow will give you the 'best of both worlds': it is not always exactly along the Via Appia (avoiding the parts which are too busy), nor does it always follow the 'official' route of the Via Francigena, as this route 'forgets' about a number of 'must-sees' close to the route. 'Our' route is divided into 10 stages, but many other interesting options are also possible. In case you want to take in some more coastal scenery in this tour, and at the same time want to indulge in Roman history, you could add a few extra days 'on the traces of Ulysses', with a stay at the Mythical Circeo and a day in beautiful Sperlonga.

Please contact us to know about the actual possibilities.



Please note: this is a moderately difficult tour which is suitable for experienced walkers with a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are along good paths and small rural roads, sometimes on steep terrain. Average walking times: approx. 5 to 7 hours each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Extra Day

Rome is not only the departure point, the 'trailhead' of the southern Via Francigena, and the arrival point of the Via Francigena from northern Europe, but also a stunning city, where you can literally walk around for days, therefore we highly recommend an extra day here. We'll provide suggestions for walks, including the walk from St. Peter's Cathedral, the arrival point of the Via Francigena, to the gate of the Via Appia in southern Rome, from where you can start to walk the Via Appia, the Francigena del Sud'.

Accommodation: Rome, Hotel***

Total walking distance: about 10 km. Approx. walking time: 3-4 h. (several alternatives possible).

Day 1 – Arrival in Rome

Arrival in Rome. Depending on your arrival time, you can go for a short visit to this stunning town.

Accommodation: Rome, Hotel***

Approx. walking time: 1 h. + sightseeing time

Day 2 – From Rome along the Appia Antica to Castel Gandolfo

Today starts with one of the most exciting stretches of what nowadays is known as the 'Via Francigena del Sud'. You will follow the Roman 'Via Appia', perhaps the most famous road of the Roman Empire, a real walk through history, touching some of the most famous monuments in the world. You'll start in the heart of Rome (*we suggest starting out at the Colosseum*) and from there walk in southern direction towards the Porta San Sebastiano, one of the old Roman town gates. Here you leave the heart of the city and walk onto the Via Appia Antica, plunging into a unique landscape. You'll walk on ancient pavement of the Appia Antica which will accompany us for few kilometres to exit Rome. For the next 10 km we proceed through ancient vestiges of the Rome's glorious past: Geta's Tomb, Sepulchre of Priscilla, Mausoleum of Cecilia Metella etc. until we reach the town of Frattocchie, where the route leaves the old 'Via Consulare' and proceeds in the direction of Castel Gandolfo, summer residence of the Popes and the end point of today's stage.

Accommodation: Castel Gandolfo, B&B

Total walking distance: 20-26 km. (depending on starting point). Approx. walking time: 5-7 h. Ascent & descent: + 450 m./- 50 m.

Day 3 – From Castel Gandolfo to Velletri

Leaving the Palace of the Pope and the historic centre of Castel Gandolfo behind, we walk entirely along the Via Pio XI and Via Galleria di Sopra, maintaining on the left side a splendid view of Lake Albano and the surrounding woods. At the Roman Amphitheatre, go down to the right towards the centre of Albano Laziale. After Albano, we enter a dense wooded area that runs along Lake Albano, here and there on the path emerge ancient remains, presumably canalizations in *opus reticulatum* (diamond-shaped bricks of tuff), continuing for about 5 km until they intersect the provincial road. Taking another path in the woods, we continue in the directions of Nemi, a town that rises on the homonymous lake. We continue south on a comfortable sidewalk of the provincial road, turn left at Clivo Formello and cross the forest for 5 km until reaching Velletri. Here you'll settle in your centrally located accommodation.

Accommodation: Velletri, B&B

Total walking distance: 20 km. Approx. walking time: 5,5 h. + sightseeing time. Ascent & descent: + 450 m./- 500 m.

Day 4 – From Velletri to Cori

After a relaxed breakfast you leave Velletri in eastern direction. There would be two possible 'Via Francigena' routes in this area, including the ancient Via Appia, which goes down to the plain, but as the plain is nowadays heavily trafficked, we'll opt for a beautiful route which brings you into the stunning Lepini Mountains. We leave Velletri and walk in eastern direction. We pass near the lake of Giulianello and cross the homonymous town. Then we continue



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towards Colle Illirio to take a picturesque road that goes between farms which will take us to the slopes of the hill where the ancient city of Cori and its beautiful Temple of Hercules rise, the destination of this stage.

Accommodation: Cori, B&B

Total walking distance: 22-25 km. Approx. walking time: 4-6 h. + sightseeing time. Ascent & descent: + 350 m./- 300 m.

Day 5 – From Cori to Norma, past Ninfa and the Abbey of Valvisciolo to Sermoneta

Today's route brings you to one of the most interesting parts of Lazio, on the edge of the Lepini Mountains and the plains. We leave Norma, descending from the hill where the town is located, using an ancient paved path.

Once on the provincial road, we will continue in direction of the Cistercian Abbey of Valvisciolo, a splendid example of Romanesque-Gothic religious architecture. We continue then on Via Vigna Riccelli and Via Sermonetana, and then take the ancient path that climbs up the hill where the beautiful medieval village of Sermoneta stands. Once in town we will continue along the alleys of the historic centre until we reach the imposing Baronial Castle Caetani with its mighty ramparts.

Accommodation: Sermoneta, B&B

Total walking distance: 17-24 km. Approx. walking time: 5-7 h. Ascent & descent: + 250 (550) m./- 400 (700) m.

Day 6 – From Sermoneta to Sezze (with an optional loop through Bassiano)

Today is only a short walk, but there is a beautiful long walking option, the loop through the historical village of Bassiano, a great walk, mostly along easy, quiet roads. At the exit of the historical centre of Sermoneta, you have the choice to take a dirt road that will lead you through the hills - beautiful landscapes covered with sunflowers with grazing cattle herds around all the way towards the centre of Sezze, overlooking the plain until the mythical headland of the Circeo. Also the origins of this town have their roots in myths; it is told that it was Hercules who founded the town when he arrived at Sezze after conquering the Lestrignons. The town probably had Latin origins in Volsci territory and then passed under the direct control of Rome. Sezze had numerous battles with the neighbouring towns, especially against Priverno and this was why it was fortified by the Romans. In 382 B.C. the town became a Latin colony. where, having reached the end of the stage, we will be able to visit the Municipal Archaeological Museum.

Accommodation: Sezze – B&B

Total walking distance: 15-24 km. Approx. walking time: 5-8 h. Ascent & descent: + 350 (700) m./- 300 (650) m.

Day 7 – From Sezze to Fossanova

Also today is a short walk, but there is a lot to see along the road! At the exit of the town of Sezze, you take a dirt road that runs along the mountain slopes, from where you have great views over the landscape of the plains of Latina province up to the Tyrrhenian coast. We continue for about 3 km to the town of Madonna del Colle, from here we take another dirt road: walking along the bushes in the beginning we will find pavement of Via Sorana after 1km hike. We cross villages of urban communities of Colle Rotondo and Ceriara, following a path that runs along a canal, until we reach the town of Priverno. From there a short downhill section brings you to the beautiful Abbey of Fossanova, visible from far away. A splendid example of Gothic architecture, the Cistercian abbey of Fossanova has its roots in the 12th century and is worth a prolonged visit (on request it is possible to sleep here). After the visit to the abbey, you continue for a few more km. in the direction of Sonnino. Your accommodation for tonight is close to this village.

Accommodation: Fossanova/Sonnino – Agriturismo/B&B

Total walking distance: 21-25 km. Approx. walking time: 6-7 h. Ascent & descent: + 100 m./- 400 m.

Day 8 – From Fossanova into the mountains of Sonnino and down to Terracina

After breakfast you start a gradual ascent towards the charming village of Sonnino. After a short visit you'll continue your walk through enchanting mountain landscapes, forests and untouched nature. You have two options today: either you can walk directly to Monte San Biagio (shortcut - see below), or you can walk through the enchanting forest to



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the beautiful seaside town of Terracina. This walk will bring you through the forest to one of the most interesting geological features of the area, the rock outcrops of Campo Soriano. You then continue in southern direction and start descending towards Terracina. You'll settle in the old town of Terracina, where the main street is still the Via Appia, the ancient Roman road. If you have the time you can also go for a stroll along the seaside boulevard.

Accommodation: Terracina, B&B/Hotel***

Total walking distance: 20 km. Approx. walking time: 5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 50 m.

N.B. In case you want to walk directly to Monte San Biagio you will have to walk up to the mountain pass underneath the Monte delle Fate (the 'Fairy Mt.'), after which you gradually descend through the valley to the village of Monte San Biagio. From here it's only a short walk to the beautifully located agriturismo at the monastery of San Magno, your accommodation for tonight.

Extra Loop through the Circeo National Park (Days 8 - 9)

Although not on the route of the Via Appia, the beautiful Circeo National Park, is definitely worth a visit, especially for those with a classic background. The 'Promontorio del Circeo' is the mythical headland, almost an island in the middle of the marshes, mentioned in Homer's Odysseus. There is a great roundwalk to be made here: first you pass through the charming old town of San Felice Circeo, a city founded by the Templar Knights, but inhabited since ancient times, as proved by the presence of the polygonal walls. From the old town from where you can walk all the way to the top of the promontory. At the time it was believed to be an island, and once you reach the top you can easily see why: you are standing in a stunning position on an isolated mountain rising high above the surrounding sea, plain and lakes. You then walk down along the sunny side of the mountain, straight to the beautiful Mediterranean Sea. The final part of the roundwalk is along the coast, where you can visit a number of stunning grottos, with the possibility to go for a swim. The Circeo National Park can easily be reached from Terracina for a day trip – or you might want to stay overnight at the foot of the promontory.

Accommodation: Terracina or San Felice Circeo - Hotel*/******

Day 9 – From Terracina to the Abbey of San Magno and Fondi

Today you'll have a relatively short walk, so you have some time to explore the town if you wish. It is worth it to make a stop at the temple of Giove Anxur, also for its stunning views over the town and the Mediterranean. Then you leave the town of Terracina in northern direction today, either along the coastal route – on the traces of the Via Appia Antica- or slightly more inland. You'll be walking mostly on the mountain edge, with views on the plain of Fondi, with its characteristic lake in the middle. What now is one of the most fertile and productive agricultural areas used to be marshland in medieval times, where buffaloes roamed around (and yes: they still make local buffalo-mozzarella!). You'll walk through the village of Monte San Biagio and from there continue to the abbey of San Magno, nestled in the mountain edge, just above the city of Fondi. Here you should take your time to look around, before you walk the last few km. down to the Roman town of Fondi, where you settle in a beautiful B&B.

Accommodation: Fondi – B&B

Total walking distance: 22-27 km. Approx. walking time: 6-7 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 400 m.



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Extra Loop through Sperlonga

On the coast, just below Fondi and Itri, lies beautiful Sperlonga, a whitewashed village on a headland surrounded by sandy beaches. It's famous not only for its nice medieval town centre and beautiful beaches, but above all for the nearby villa of the Roman Emperor Tiberius and the museum with the enormous marble statues depicting the story of Ulysses. It's possible to walk here, but another option is to book just an extra day of relax – and walk along the beach to Tiberius' villa. You can easily reach Sperlonga from Fondi for a day trip. Or in case you might want some more time – also to relax – you might consider to stay overnight in a hotel in Sperlonga for 2 nights.

Accommodation: Sperlonga - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 21 km. Approx. walking time: 5,5 h. + sightseeing time

Day 10 – Along Roman Fondi to medieval Itri

After breakfast you start today's walk with a descent into the city of Fondi. You'll definitely need some time to look around in its Roman town centre and visit the small museum on the Via Francigena. Your walk then continues through the plain, roughly following the traces of the Via Appia. After a busy section, your route will bring you into the mountains again, and here you'll be following one of the most beautiful stretches of the Via Appia. The final destination for today is the medieval town of Itri, dominated by its big castle. You'll settle in a nice B&B in the town centre, and have the time to look around in the old town. The area is known for the good quality of its table olives, so try some with your *aperitivo*. There is a good choice of nice restaurants for tonight.

Accommodation: Itri, B&B

Total walking distance: 15 km. Approx. walking time: 4 h. Ascent & descent: + 300 m./- 150 m.

N.B. You can also skip Itri and walk directly to Gaeta.

Day 11 – From Itri down to the coast at Gaeta or Formia

Today is the last day of this stage, which will bring you from the town of Itri down to the sea. The shortest route will bring you down directly from Itri to Formia, a main hub on the railway line between Naples and Rome – but we recommend to make a detour and visit the beautiful town of Gaeta as well (and possibly book an extra night here!). Gaeta is a beautiful medieval town, dominated by a grand castle and which offers also beautiful walking through the nature reserve of Monte Orlando, not only rewarding for its great views over the Mediterranean, but also for its Roman vestiges. Also Formia, although it does not look attractive from the outside, has a very interesting centre, built on Roman foundations. You'll have the choice to either stay in Formia or Gaeta for tonight.

Accommodation: Formia/Gaeta, Hotel*** /**** (many options possible)

Total walking distance: 15-25 km. Approx. walking time: 4-7 h. Ascent & descent: + 50 (250) m./- 200 (400) m.

Day 12 – Departure

End of the tour. From Formia you can take the train back to Rome (or travel on to other destinations).



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TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in beautiful, characteristic family-run hotels (generally 2/3-star; 4/5-star on request) and beautiful *agriturismo*'s. All rooms have en-suite facilities.

On all nights you will be free to make your own dinner arrangements. You can choose from the wide choice of restaurants in the area. Your accommodation holder can give you good tips.

No picnic lunches are included in the tour price, but these can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages where you'll be staying. On some occasions you have the option to have your lunch in a restaurant along the way.

INCLUDED

- 11 nights' accommodation – BB
- 1 night in Roma – BB
- 1 night in Castel Gandolfo – BB
- 1 night in Velletri – BB
- 1 night in Cori – BB
- 1 night in Sermoneta– BB
- 1 night in Sezze Romano – BB
- 1 night in Fossanova/Sonnino – BB
- 1 night in Terracina – BB
- 1 night in Fondi – BB
- 1 night in Itri – BB *N.B. You can also skip Itri and walk directly to Gaeta.*
- 1 night in Gaeta – BB
- 1 night in Formia - BB
- Route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- GPX – tracks with the best possible route (and alternatives)
- Maps at 1: 25.000 scale or better
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transfers

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



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ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in ROMA, a city with two international airports and frequent trains to all other cities in Italy.

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast in FORMIA, halfway Rome and Naples. A frequent train service can bring you to these cities, which both have an international airport. There are also frequent trains to other cities in Italy.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderate (3): Mostly moderately easy walks, with some long stages, involving some steep uphill walking, sometimes on paths with rough surfaces. On some days extensions or shortcuts are possible.

Fitness: High standard of fitness is necessary: you should be able to walk for up to 7 hours a day in the hot sun on dusty or stony tracks.

N.B. During summer the difficulty of this tour definitely increases due to the heat. We therefore advise against booking this tour during the period between about 14th July and 20th August.

FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

Most paths are relatively well maintained; you'll follow most of the time the official route of the Via Francigena, well maintained. A large part of the route goes along so-called *strade bianche* (unsurfaced roads), easy to follow and very unlikely to get overgrown (*we continuously check our routes – please help us by providing your feedback on the quality of the paths*).

Waymarking: A large part of the route is waymarked with the signage of the 'Via Francigena', but on some occasions we have found more interesting routes than those actually waymarked; therefore, you should follow the route descriptions provided together with the maps. With these you will always be able to find your route.

TOUR VARIATIONS

It is possible to include some extra nights in your tour, in any of the accommodations 'en route'. For those who have never been to Rome an extra day here is strongly recommended.

Halfway the tour the tour can be extended with an extra 'loop' through the area of the **Circeo National Park**, a stunning mountain outcrop between the sea and the plain (Ulysses thought it was an island) park scattered with many Roman vestiges. Also a day in charming Sperlonga can be included, to allow for some relax near the beach.

At the end of the tour there is the opportunity to stay an extra night in beautiful **Gaeta**, close to Formia. It's a beautiful old town and offers also some nice beaches. Also an extra day in the Monti Lepini or the Monti Aurunci (above Formia), is strongly recommended. These are stunning mountain ranges, not yet discovered by mass tourism.

Longer and shorter versions, as well as guided versions, of this tour are also available. Details and prices on request.

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