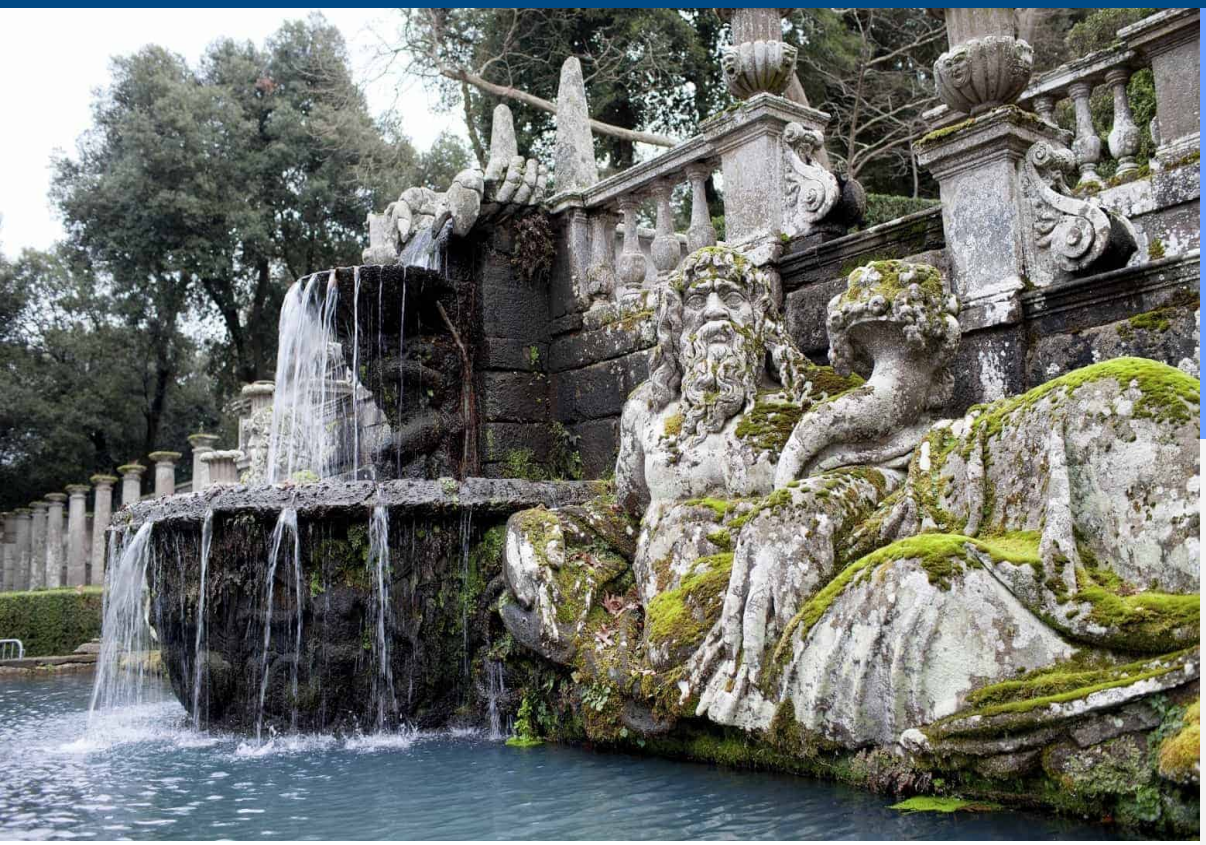
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Duration

Italy, Switzerland
Destination

Level 3 - Moderate to Challenging
Activity

Via Francigena Walking Tour: Great St. Bernard Pass to Rome

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Apr 01 2024 to Apr 18 2024

Via Francigena Walking Tour: Great St. Bernard Pass to Rome

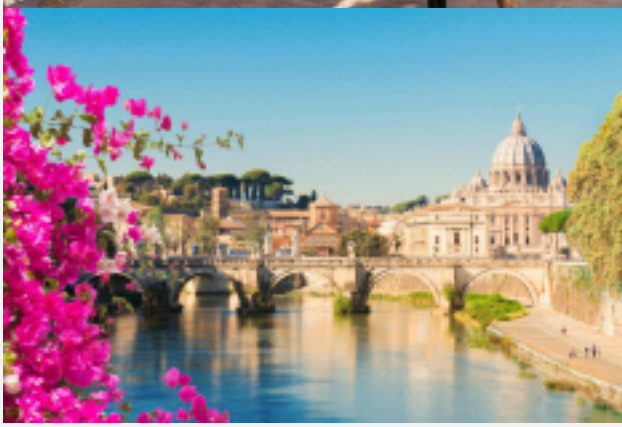
Odyssey offers easy, convenient, and relaxed escorted small group tours across Western Europe and beyond. We explore Italy's natural beauty, its ancient Roman, and Imperial heritage, its World Heritage Sites, and world famous cities, all with some truly spectacular scenery

along the way. This and more is all waiting to be explored on one of Odyssey's small group tours of Italy with like minded people designed for the senior traveller.

Join Odyssey Traveller on a small group package tour for mature and senior travellers, as we walk sections of the ancient pilgrimage route Via Francigena, or The Way Through France, a journey that takes us from Geneva, Switzerland, through the Great St Bernard Pass and several Italian towns, until we reach Rome, the Eternal City. These Walking tours are suitable for couples and solo travellers with a reasonable level of fitness.







About the Via Francigena

The Via Francigena became a European Cultural Route in 1994. The European Cultural Routes were created by the Council of Europe, the oldest international organisation in the continent, in order to demonstrate Europe's shared cultural heritage and collective memory through these journeys that traverse borders and histories. It launched the Cultural Routes programme in 1987 with the Camino de Santiago, the pilgrimage route that runs across northern Spain from the Pyrenees to the shrine of St. James the Apostle in Santiago de Compostela.

Traditionally, Via Francigena connects Canterbury to Rome and goes through half the continent of Europe and four countries: England in the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, and Italy. Sigeric, the 10th century Archbishop of Canterbury, took this route to receive his pallium (liturgical vestment) from the Pope in 990, and wrote down his itinerary upon his return. It is this account of his journey that modern travellers follow to take the same route. It is one of Europe's most challenging pilgrimage walks, but a rewarding adventure for those who are eager to see more of what the continent can offer. For Odyssey Travellers these are small group tours for mature and senior travellers with an age relevant good level of fitness attained. This walking tour is suitable for couples and solo travellers.

Our Tour: Great St. Bernard Pass to Rome

For this tour, instead of beginning in Canterbury, we begin with a drive through the Great St Bernard Pass, the third highest road pass in Switzerland which connects it with the Aosta Valley in Italy. This will be a beautiful hour-long drive with views of the snow-covered Alps. Our walks will then commence in Italy, primarily through the beautiful region of Tuscany and neighbouring Umbria. This will involve riding a coach to an easier starting point from a base city, and walking anywhere from 5 to 14 kilometres.

We will walk along a beautiful mountain lake (Great St Bernard Lake) and through breathtaking mountain scenery with a view of the Apennines and the Apuan Alps, through verdant fields dotted with vineyards and agricultural lands. We will pass through Crete Senesi (“Senese clays”), dotted with medieval villages, woods, and the grey clay knolls caused by erosion that give this region its name. We will visit medieval towns perched on hilltops which once wh, designed for the senior traveller, and led by experienced, and enthusiastic like minded people.

ere the home of the Etruscans, Romans, and Tuscan rulers, before entering St. Peter’s Basilica in the Eternal City.

We will spend nights in:

- Geneva
- Lausanne
- Aosta
- Pavia
- Piacenza
- Lucca
- San Gimignano







- Siena
- Orvieto
- Rome

Tour Highlights

St Peter's Cathedral in Geneva

We will visit Geneva's Old Town (Vieille Ville) to have a feel of ancient Geneva. The historic district is dominated by St Peter's Cathedral (St Pierre Cathedral), where Protestant Reformation leader John Calvin once preached in the 16th century. We will visit the cathedral and will also have a chance to go up its two towers (96 steps up the northern tower and 60 steps up the southern tower) for a panoramic view of the city.





Lake Geneva cruise

We transfer to Lausanne, Switzerland's fourth largest city, and noted for its wine and for being the home of the International Olympic Committee. Here we will go on a cruise of Lake Geneva, the largest lake in Switzerland.

St. Bernard Monastery

We will take a short walk along the beautiful mountain lake, Lac du St Bernard (Great St Bernard Lake) and visit the St Bernard Monastery (Great St Bernard Hospice), which dates from the 9th century. Located high in the Alps (2,400 metres), it is well known as the home of the large Saint Bernard dog breed, which the monks acquired in the 17th century as their companions and as watch dogs who can rescue people lost in the snow.

Pietrasanta and Pisa

We will walk with views of the Apuan mountains to the fine buildings and sculptures of Pietrasanta. The town sits between the Mediterranean and the Apuan Alps, and has attracted artists such as Michelangelo to work

with marble, making the town feel like an open-air museum.

In the afternoon, we transfer to Pisa for a walking tour. We will also gain entrance to the Leaning Tower of Pisa.





Florence

Florence is the capital and most populous city in Tuscany, and attracts millions more people each year. It has been ranked as one of the most beautiful cities in the world, owing in part to its artistic and architectural heritage. Florence was a centre of medieval trade in Europe, and is considered the birthplace of the Renaissance.

On this sightseeing tour, we will visit the city's main sights, including:

- **Uffizi Gallery** – "offices", once the offices of the Florentine magistrates, now housing a large collection of art commissioned or owned by the Medici family, which ruled Florence for the most part of 1434 to 1737
- **Ponte Vecchio** – a medieval bridge that is the only bridge across the Arno River left intact after World War II
- The iconic **Duomo**, or the dome of the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore

Orvieto

Orvieto dates from Etruscan times, became a Roman city (Urbs Vetus), and fell under Lombard and Tuscan rule. We will explore this history and more on a walking tour. Our tour includes entrance to the Orvieto Underground, a subterranean maze of tunnels that began with the Etruscans' building of cisterns in order to collect rainwater; subsequent inhabitants then continued to dig and add spaces until Orvieto had a network of 1,200 underground structures. We will also see Orvieto's Cathedral, a Gothic masterpiece.

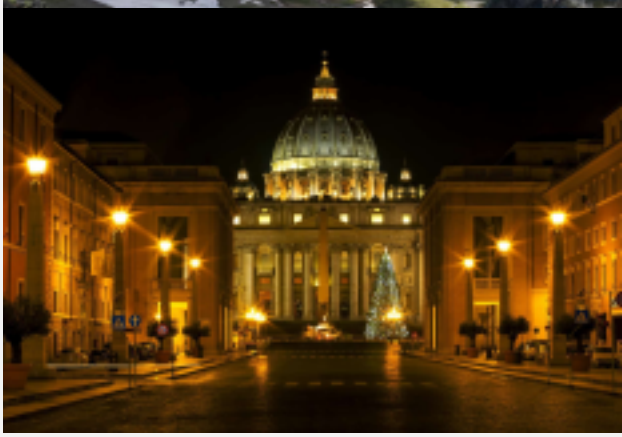
Viterbo

Viterbo is a central Italian city located at the foot of the Cimini Mountains. It once rivaled Rome as the papal residence in the mid-13th century. Viterbo's walled medieval centre is beautifully preserved, showcasing 13th- and 14th-century houses and palaces.

We will visit the acclaimed Villa Lante, a harmonious garden paradise, lauded as the zenith of Mannerist garden design in Italy. It was designed in the 16th century by Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, for Gianfrancesco Gambara (1533–1587) shortly after the latter's appointment as cardinal by Pope Pius IV.

We will also visit the Palazzo dei Papi di Viterbo, a former bishops' palace that was enlarged to serve as a papal residence. The Pope's residence was moved here in 1257 due to hostility and urban violence in Rome. Viterbo would remain the papal seat until 1281.





Rome

The famous dome of St Peter's Basilica was designed, in succession, by Michelangelo, Giacomo Della Porta, and Carlo Maderno, and is a distinctive landmark in Rome. Upon entering the lavish interiors of the basilica, we will be greeted by Michaelangelo's moving *Pieta* and the statue of St. Peter sitting on his throne. The right foot of St. Peter's statue has been worn down from the touches of the hundreds of thousands of visitors and devotees. If able, we may also choose to climb up to the top of the dome to see a stunning view of St Peter's Square and, on a clear day, the rest of the city.

We will also visit the Vatican Museums, which feature art collections built over centuries by the Popes. The Vatican Museums' most notable feature is the wondrous Sistine Chapel.

For more details, click the 'Top 5' or 'Itinerary' buttons above! If you're keen to experience this tour, please call or send an email. Or, to book,

simply fill in the form on the right hand side of this page.

For more hiking and walking tours, click here.

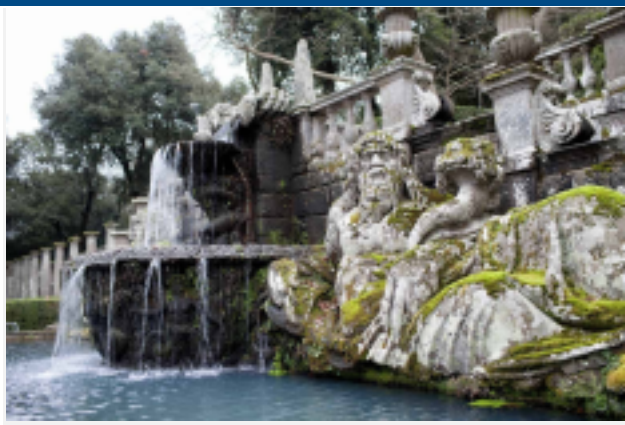


Articles published by Odyssey Traveller for Walking and Hiking tours for seniors

- Selecting walking shoes for women
- Footwear and walking shoes
- What to pack when travelling
- Maintaining muscle fitness in senior and mature age travellers
- Selecting socks for walking
- Six great short walks in Britain
- Preparing for a walking holiday
- Pilgrim walks in Europe
- Nine European Pilgrimage Routes

Articles about Italy published by Odyssey Traveller

- Questions About Italy
- History of a City: Florence, Italy
- The Sicilians and their Kings
- Empires Crossing the Mediterranean: 1130-1300
- Secrets of Venice: A History of Espionage
- Secrets of Florence: The Definitive Guide for Travellers
- The Roman Empire



- Who were the Roman Emperors? The Definitive Guide for Travellers
- Key Figures of Renaissance Florence
- Italian Renaissance Families: The Medicis
- About Malta, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica: islands of the western Mediterranean
- Trip advice for travellers going to Italy
- as well as more articles on Italy here

For all the articles Odyssey Traveller has published for mature aged and senior travellers, click through on this link.

External articles to assist you on your visit to Italy

- Italy's many UNESCO World Heritage sites
- The 10 dishes you cannot leave Italy without eating
- From Lucca to Siena: stops and legends along the Via Francigena
- A 1,000-year-old road lost to time

Highlights

1. Drive through the Great St Bernard Pass, the third highest road pass in Switzerland.
2. Visit the St Bernard Monastery (Great St Bernard Hospice), located high in the Alps (2,400 metres) and home of the large Saint Bernard dog breed.
3. Enjoy a full-day sightseeing tour in Florence, birthplace of the Renaissance.

4. Visit Viterbo, which once rivaled Rome as the papal residence in the mid-13th century.
5. See the wondrous Sistine Chapel and other breathtaking artwork in the Vatican Museums.

Itinerary

Day 1

Locations: Geneva

Overview:

We make our own way to our hotel in Geneva. The group will meet with the Odyssey Program Leader and sit down for our welcome dinner at the hotel.

(D)

Accommodation:

Ramada Encore Genève

Day 2

Locations: Geneva - Lausanne

Overview:

Today we will be travelling from Geneva to Lausanne, but first we will have a half-day tour of our base city. Geneva, Switzerland's second largest city, is home to the headquarters of international organisations including the World Health Organisation, and a rich and vibrant counterculture made up of artists and creatives.

We explore its main sights with our local guide and on our touring coach. We will visit Geneva's **Old Town (Vieille Ville)** to have a feel of ancient Geneva. The historic district is dominated by **St Peter's Cathedral (St Pierre Cathedral)**, where Protestant Reformation leader John Calvin once preached in the 16th century. We will visit the cathedral and will also have a chance to go up its two towers (96 steps up the northern tower and 60 steps up the southern tower) for a

panoramic view of the city.

We transfer to Lausanne, Switzerland's fourth largest city and noted for its wine and for being the home of the International Olympic Committee. Here we will go on a cruise of Lake Geneva, the largest lake in Switzerland.

We will have dinner at our accommodation in Lausanne.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Swiss Wine Hotel or similar

Day 3

Locations: Lausanne - Montreux - Col du Grand St. Bernard - Aosta

Overview:

Today we will be beginning our journey on the Via Francigena.

But first, we will transfer to Montreux to have a guided tour of **Chateau Chillon**, a medieval island castle located on Lake Geneva. The castle was first documented in 1150, a fortification of the Counts of Savoy. Chateau Chillon had an excellent location between the Vaud Riviera (towards Germany and France) and the Rhone Valley, a quick access to Italy. The Counts of Savoy ruled over states that later formed the Kingdom of Italy.

After our tour of the castle, we will travel to **Col du Grand Bernard (Great St Bernard Pass)** on the Via Francigena. The **Great St Bernard Pass** is the third highest road pass in Switzerland connecting Martigny in Switzerland to Aosta in Italy. This will be a beautiful drive with views of the snow-covered Alps.

We will take a short walk along the beautiful mountain lake, **Lac du St Bernard (Great St Bernard Lake)** and visit the **St Bernard Monastery (Great St Bernard Hospice),** which dates from the 9th century. Located high in the Alps (2,400 metres), it is well known as the home of the large Saint Bernard dog breed, which the monks acquired in the 17th century as their companions and as watch dogs who can rescue people lost in

the snow.

We then continue to Aosta, Italy, where we will stay for the night.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Hotel Express Aosta East or similar

Day 4

Locations: Aosta - Chatillon - Verres - Ivrea - Pavria

Overview:

Today we will be walking a section of the Via Francigena with our local guide, walking from Chatillon through the Aosta Valley to **Verres** (14 kms., approx. 3 hours). This walk will take us through medieval ruins and a part of the ancient Strada Delle Gallie, an old Roman road that used to connect Paris to Rome.

We will take the touring coach to **Ivrea**, with a stop to appreciate this 20th-century industrial city developed for Olivetti, manufacturer of typewriters, mechanical calculators and office computers. It was inscribed in 2018 on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

From Ivrea we continue on to **Pavia**. We will have dinner in our hotel.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Hotel Excelsior or similar

Day 5

Locations: Pavia - Belgioso - Miradolo Terme - Piacenza

Overview:

From our hotel in Pavia we transfer to Belgioso, where we begin our walk to **Miradolo Terme** (10 km, approx 2 1/2 hours), passing through fields dotted with vineyards before arriving at the city centre.

From Miradolo Terme, we ride by coach to **Piacenza** (“pleasant abode”). Piacenza was originally founded as a Roman military colony (Piacentia, 218 BC) and became the site of the Council of Piacenza. It

has notable cathedrals and palaces.

We will have dinner at a local restaurant and stay for the night.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Stadio Hotel or similar

Day 6

Locations: Piacenza - Fornovo di Taro - Ozzano Taro - Lucca

Overview:

From Piacenza, we move to **Fornovo di Taro**, where we will begin our walk to **Ozzano Taro** (6 kms., approx. 3 hours) through beautiful mountain scenery with a view of the Apennines.

We transfer to Lucca. The charming town of **Lucca** located at the foot of the Apuan Alps. Colonized by Rome in the early second century BC, Lucca retains its Roman influences in the numerous marble columns of the city's main square, Piazza San Michele, and in the church of San Michele in Foro from which the piazza takes its name. The church, founded in the 8th century, has an imposing marble statue depicting the archangel Michael defeating a dragon with a spear.

We will have dinner at a local restaurant and stay for the night.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Alla corte di Angelie or similar

Day 7

Locations: Lucca - Massa - Pietrasanta - Pisa - Lucca

Overview:

We travel from Lucca to **Massa**, to begin our walk to **Pietrasanta** (12 kms., approx. 3 hours), a town on the northern Tuscany coast. This walk will take us from Massa's marble monuments, through a hike with views of the Apuan mountains, and to the fine buildings and sculptures of Pietrasanta. The town sits between the Mediterranean and the Apuan Alps, and has attracted artists such as Michelangelo to work with

marble, making the town feel like an open-air museum.

In the afternoon, we transfer to **Pisa** for a walking tour. We will also gain entrance to the **Leaning Tower of Pisa**.

We return to Lucca for the night.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Alla corte di Angelie or similar

Day 8

Locations: Lucca - Florence - Lucca

Overview:

Today we will have a break from walking the Via Francigena to enjoy a full-day excursion to Florence.

Florence is the capital and most populous city in Tuscany, and attracts millions more people each year. It has been ranked as one of the most beautiful cities in the world, owing in part to its artistic and architectural heritage. Florence was a centre of medieval trade in Europe, and is considered the birthplace of the Renaissance.

On this sightseeing tour, we will visit the city's main sights, including:

- **Uffizi Gallery –** "offices", once the offices of the Florentine magistrates, now housing a large collection of art commissioned or owned by the Medici family, which ruled Florence for the most part of 1434 to 1737
- **Ponte Vecchio –** a medieval bridge that is the only bridge across the Arno River left intact after World War II
- The iconic **Duomo**, or the dome of the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore

We return to Lucca for the night.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Alla corte di Angelie or similar

Day 9

Locations: Lucca - Fuccechio - San Miniato - San Gimignano

Overview:

From Lucca we transfer to Fuccechio. From there we walk to San Miniato (8 kms., approx. 2 hours), a medieval town halfway between Pisa and Florence, perched on top of three hills overlooking the verdant fields of the Arno Valley.

We transfer to San Gimignano, where we will stay for the night.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Fattoria San Donato or similar

Day 10

Locations: San Gimignano - Siena

Overview:

San Gimignano has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1990, and we will have the opportunity this morning to explore the rich architecture and history of this medieval hill town. San Gimignano served as an important relay point for pilgrims travelling on the Via Francigena. We will be able to view the towers that dominate San Gimignano's landscape. These towers, were built by the families that controlled the town as a symbol of their wealth and power. Of the original 72 tower-houses, 14 survived the test of time.

We then begin our walk to Colle di Val d'Elsa ("Hill of Elsa Valley", 11 km), leaving San Gimignano behind to pass through three valleys dotted with agricultural land and vineyards. Colle di Val d'Elsa is renowned for its crystal glass production, and its historic centre dating from the Middle Ages, perched on top of a hill offering views of Tuscany.

We transfer to Siena, where we will stay for the night.

In Siena, we will be treated to the city's magnificent Gothic architecture, preserved through the centuries. Established as the military colony Saena Julia in the first century BC, Siena is a well-loved tourist attraction and home of the famous Palio de Siena, a horse race held twice a year. At the heart of the city is the fan-shaped Piazza del

Campo, at the central intersection of the city's three hillside communities. Siena has the Siena Cathedral (Duomo), with its intricate façade and equally impressive interior decorated with striped marble, and the Santa Maria della Scala, a former hospital now turned museum with an emphasis on its legacy for caring for pilgrims travelling the Via Francigena.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Garden Hotel or similar

Day 11

Locations: Siena - Rigomagno - Lucignano - Siena

Overview:

Today we will transfer to Rigomagno, our starting point for our walk to Lucignano (5 km., approx. 2 hours). Lucignano is a beautiful medieval walled town situated on a hill between Siena and Arezzo, and was the subject of battles between these two cities in the Middle Ages.

We return to Siena after our walk.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Garden Hotel or similar

Day 12

Locations: Siena - Ponte d'Arbia - Sant'Antonio - Orvieto

Overview:

From Siena, we travel south by coach to Ponte d'Arbia. This drive will take us through Crete Senesi ("Senese clays"), dotted with medieval villages, woods, and the grey clay knolls caused by erosion that give this region its name.

Ponte d'Arbia is named after a five-arched bridge spanning the Arbia, a tributary of the Ombrone River, and is a small part of the municipality

Monteroni d'Arbia.

From Ponte d'Arbia, we begin our walk to Sant'Antonio (5 km.), and finish the day in Orvieto, a town located on a 195-metre rock above the junction of two rivers.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Oasi dei Discepoli or similar

Day 13

Locations: Orvieto

Overview:

Orvieto dates from Etruscan times, became a Roman city (Urbs Vetus), and fell under Lombard and Tuscan rule. We will explore this history and more on a walking tour. Our tour includes:

- Entrance to the **Orvieto Underground –** a subterranean maze of tunnels that began with the Etruscans' building of cisterns in order to collect rainwater; subsequent inhabitants then continued to dig and add spaces until Orvieto had a network of 1,200 underground structures
- Orvieto's **Cathedral** – a Gothic masterpiece

The afternoon is free to spend at leisure.

(B)

Accommodation:

Oasi dei Discepoli or similar

Day 14

Locations: Orvieto - Viterbo - Rome

Overview:

From Orvieto we will be travelling to Rome, the end of the route of the Via Francigena.

Along the way, we will stop at Viterbo, a central Italian city located at the foot of the Cimini Mountains. It once rivaled Rome as the papal residence in the mid-13th century. Viterbo's walled medieval centre is beautifully preserved, showcasing 13th- and 14th-century houses and palaces.

We will visit

- **Villa Lante** – a harmonious garden paradise, lauded as the zenith of Mannerist garden design in Italy; it was designed in the 16th century by Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, for Gianfrancesco Gambara (1533–1587) shortly after the latter's appointment as cardinal by Pope Pius IV
- **Palazzo dei Papi di Viterbo –** a former bishops' palace that was enlarged to serve as a papal residence; the Pope's residence was moved here in 1257 due to hostility and urban violence in Rome; Viterbo remained the papal seat until 1281

After our tour of Viterbo, we move to Rome, where we will have dinner and stay the night.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Hotel Quirinale or similar

Day 15

Locations: Rome

Overview:

Today is a free day to spend at leisure. Spend this time to relax in your hotel room, or to explore Rome on your own.

Accommodation:

Hotel Quirinale or similar

Day 16

Locations: Rome

Overview:

Today we will spend a full day exploring the Eternal City with our local guide.

We will visit:

- **Vatican museums** including the **Sistine Chapel**
- **St Peter's Basilica**
- **Trevi Fountain**
- **Spanish Steps**
- **Colosseum** *(no internal visit)*

In the evening, we will have a farewell dinner as a group.

(B, D)

Accommodation:

Hotel Quirinale or similar

Day 17

Locations: Rome

Overview:

The end of breakfast marks the end of the tour and our services.

(B)

Inclusions / Exclusions

Included

- 17 nights of accomodation, typically 4 start and well provided 3 star regional accommodation.
- 17 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 10 evening meals.
- Services of a program leader for the duration and expert local guides.
- All transfers and entrances for activities.
- All tipping
- Transportation in a modern air conditioned coach.
- Detailed electronic tour booklet.

Excluded

- Flights and transfer.
- All items of a personal nature.
- Comprehensive travel insurance.
- Porterage unless specified.

Level 3 - Moderate to Challenging

Participants must be in excellent health, extremely mobile and live an active lifestyle. Program activities may include up to 6 hours of continuous strenuous, moderate to fast paced activity per day over varied terrain.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any requests for further information about this tour or any others offered by Odyssey Travel.