



WALKING WITH ST. FRANCIS



October is the month of St. Francis of Assisi, with pilgrimages and processions to the shrines, monasteries and other sites connected with the *Poverello* (Little Poor Man) as he is called. The *Cammini di San Francesco* (St. Francis Ways), have become more and more popular in recent years with hikers and tourists, who follow the old pilgrim routes that wend through the unspoiled byways and highways of rural Umbria. The *St. Francis Ways* network is more flexible than the well-trod *Via Francigena*, that traces the medieval pilgrims' route to the Eternal City and beyond to Jerusalem, running down the entire Italian peninsula. Although the St. Francis Trail starts in Tuscany and ends in Rome, there are many variations to the routes through Umbria that walkers can follow, making their own itineraries and taking in the sights of their choice. Starting point is the stunning *Sanctuary of La Verna*, perched on a spur of rock rising between the valleys of the Tiber and the Arno rivers in the heart of the unspoiled *Casentinesi Forest*. The trail crosses over into *Umbria at Citerna*, after touching *Pieve Santo Stefano* (known as "the city of the diary" due to its fascinating archive) and *Sansepolcro*. From there you can head for *Assisi*, via *Gubbio*, credited as being Italy's best preserved medieval town and the place where the saint befriended a wolf and famously set up his Christmas crèche.

Tracks branch off from Assisi, leading either to *Perugia* and southwards through the upper valley of the Tiber along the ancient *Via Romeo* through "*Museum Valley*", so called because of the many monuments and historic sites scattered along the route, or else to *Foligno* and *Spoletto*, where a letter signed by St. Francis is preserved.

From *Terni*, home of *St. Valentine*, patron saint of lovers, take time out to see the spectacular *Marmore Falls*, one of the highest waterfalls in Europe, then head for the medieval towns of *Narni* and *Amelia*. The ancient *Via Amerino*, that linked Umbria to Rome, runs through spectacular scenery. The memory of the *Poverello* is palpable here, with a string of sacred sites and churches linked to his life and work. *Narni* has the 14th century *Church of St. Francis*, with the nearby *Sant'Urbano* cave where St. Francis stayed in 1213 while *Amelia's Church of St. Francis* is frescoed by the School of Giotto. *Lungano in Teverina* merits a visit to the beautiful Romanesque *Church of St. Mary of the Assumption* as well as the *Church and Monastery of St. Francis*, with a depiction of one of the saint's more eccentric miracles: he sends a duck to save a child carried off by a wolf. On the theme of animals (much loved by St. Francis) *Alviano* has the charming *Swallow Chapel*, decorated with the celebrated story of Francis preaching to the birds. In nearby *Guarda*, the venerated *Hermitage of Santa Illuminata* has the cave where Francis is said to have stayed, sleeping on a stone. The faithful collect drops of water that seep through the roof as they are believed to have healing qualities.

Full information about the routes and distances between the various stages can be found in the following websites:

Info: www.viadifrancesco.it

www.umbriafrancescoways.eu

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