

St. Francis of Assisi

9 days / 7 nights

Go, Francis, and repair my house are the words St. Francis of Assisi heard as a young man when he prayed before an ancient crucifix in the forsaken chapel of St. Damiano in Assisi. This beloved saint initially interpreted the words literally so went about trying to restore nearby churches stone by stone with his own hands. More powerful perhaps than the work of his hands is the example of his life which personified the divine message he delivered to the entire world: to give to the poor and follow God. As we follow in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi through the spiritually rich and beautiful countryside of central Italy (then travel back to Rome), we will experience far more than a new land and new sights; Our Pilgrimage will give us opportunity to reflect, to become closer to God, and to gratefully consider the sacrifices and dedication of those who have gone before. As we behold several sacred markers in the life of St. Francis of Assisi, magnificent basilicas and churches, and many timeless works of art regarded as the most awe-inspiring and important of the world – we will renew our commitment to the roots of our Catholic faith. The masses and meditations we celebrate along the way will draw us together as a community. They will remind us of our blessings and the call to stewardship as followers of Jesus Christ.

Day 1: Departure from the USA

For it is in giving that we receive (Portion of prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi).

Our pilgrimage begins with an overnight flight to Rome, Italy.

Day 2: Rome – Assisi

Until now I have called you my father on earth, henceforth I desire to say only, 'Our Father who art in Heaven' (What St. Francis of Assisi said to his father when he stripped himself of his worldly attire upon hearing God's call).

Assisi, located in the Umbria region of Italy, is the site of many a pilgrimage and a rare and special spot on earth linked in legend with its native son, St. Francis, a gentle saint who founded the Franciscan order and is remembered as a great lover of nature (his sermon to an audience of birds is one of the best-loved sermons of his life). After checking into our hotel, we will stroll to the huge 13th-century Basilica of St. Francis which contains many of the possessions of St. Francis and a series of frescoes depicting his life. En route to Assisi's main square, we will see the presumed birth place of St. Francis, the Chiesa Nuova, a church built in 1615 when the Spanish Vicar General of the Franciscans was saddened to see the original home of St. Francis becoming dilapidated. The Roman forum and Temple of Minerva will also capture our attention as we make our way to the Basilica of Santa Chiara (St. Clare), where St. Clare who founded the Order of Poor Clares, followed in the humble ways of St. Francis. We will enjoy dinner and an overnight stay in Assisi.

Day 3: Assisi

Love is he, radiant with great splendor [who] speaks to us of Thee, O Most High (St. Francis of Assisi's "The Song of Brother Sun and of All His Creatures").

After a good breakfast, the morning will find us walking to a medieval fortress with a commanding presence above Assisi, called the Rocca. When we return to the town center, we'll visit the Duomo where both St. Francis and St. Clare were baptized as children of God, and see the original San Damiano crucifix, where God first told St. Francis to rebuild His church. We'll then travel by minibus up a winding road to a secluded and beautifully forested site some two and half miles outside of Assisi where St. Francis often retired to meditate and pray. It is here, at the Eremo delle Carceri (Hermitage), amid lush green and singing birds, where we might get a true sense of the spirit of St. Francis and his followers. Later en route to St. Maria degli Angeli, we'll stop briefly at a spot where Francis met a leper and was so overcome by feelings of tender mercy that he later went to the leper



colony to give money to its members. We'll also have an opportunity after lunch, to be inspired by Porziuncola, a small church in the Basilica of St. Maria degli Angeli (16th century) which became the home of St. Francis and his first disciples. St. Francis pointed out that the Portiuncola was a primary source of inspiration in his life and a fitting model for his followers. Toward the end of St. Francis's life, he asked to be brought back to the Porziuncola where he died not fifteen yards from the church, at sunset on October 3, 1226. As we return to Assisi for dinner and another night's stay, the well-known words of this blessed saint, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace" might linger in our hearts.

Day 4: Assisi – Perugia – Cortona – Arezzo

Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance (The Counts of the Holy Father Saint Francis Admonition).

Today we depart for Perugia, the capital city of the region of Umbria and a notable artistic center in Italy. It was in here that St. Francis began considering spiritual things, when, as a young soldier, he was captured and imprisoned for over a year during the war between Perugia and Assisi. As we enjoy a stroll in the area of the prison, we will visit the Fontana Maggiore, a medieval fountain sculpted by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano. We will also take in the Palazzo dei Priori which houses the beautiful National Gallery of Umbrian Art in Middle Ages and Renaissance. This collection, presented in twenty-three galleries in the Palazzo, represents the greatest representation of the Umbrian School of painting and includes works by Duccio, Piero della Francesca, Beato Angelico and Perugino. Our destination after lunch is Cortona, a Tuscan town situated on a hillside, with steep narrow streets and a church dedicated to St. Francis by his disciple Friar Elia. The church contains Elia's tomb. Outside Cortona, we will visit the Hermitage of the Celle, founded by St. Francis in 1211, then drive to Arezzo for dinner and overnight.



Day 5: La Verna

[I]t is in pardoning that we are pardoned (Portion of prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi).

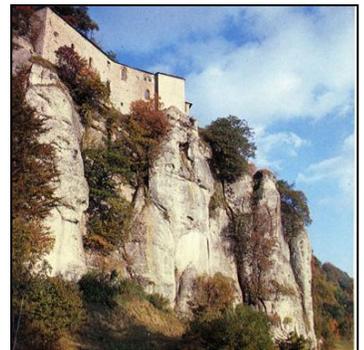
La Verna, located on Mount Penna in the Tuscan Apennines, is truly sacred ground for this is where St. Francis is said to have withdrawn for a forty-day fast and while praying on the mountain-side, received (on or about September 14th) the stigmata. Our excursion will take us to the Shrine or Chapel of the Stigmata near the spot where this miracle took place, and to the Monastery of Monte Casale, where disciples of St. Francis persuaded local bandits to give up their ways and convert to monastic life. For dinner and an overnight stay, we will return to Arezzo.



Day 6: Arezzo & Rieti

Praise to thee, my Lord, for all thy creatures, above all Brother Sun who brings us the day and lends us his light (The Song of Brother Sun and of All His Creatures [1225]).

In Arezzo, another city set on a steep hill, we will have the marvelous opportunity to appreciate a great masterpiece of Renaissance painting by Piero della Francesca. His cycle of frescos depicting *The Legend of the True Cross* derive from legendary sources as well as the 13th century stories of Jacopo da Varagine, and tell how timber relics of the True Cross came to be found. We will also see a stained glass window that shows St. Francis offering roses to Pope Honorius III. Later, as we head toward the Rieti area of northern Lazio, we will visit a medieval church, Santa Maria Maggiore (known from 1159), in Spello, an ancient town that commands a good view of the Umbrian plain toward Perugia. The most striking features of Santa Maria Maggiore are the 13th century bell tower and the fine chapel frescoed by Pinturicchio whose cycle includes the *Annunciation* and the *Nativity*. We will also stop briefly at a site between the towns of Cannara and Bevagna, where St. Francis is purported to have preached to the birds. After lunch, we will enjoy a walking



tour of the town of Montefalco which includes the Church of St. Francesco, now the town's museum and one of the most important in all of Umbria with its wonderful collection of art and artifacts including Gozzoli's fresco cycle of the life of St. Francis. After what will be a full and memorable day, we will continue to Greccio or Rieti for dinner and overnight.

Day 7: Rieti

Where there is hatred let me sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; and Where there is sadness, joy (Portion of prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi).

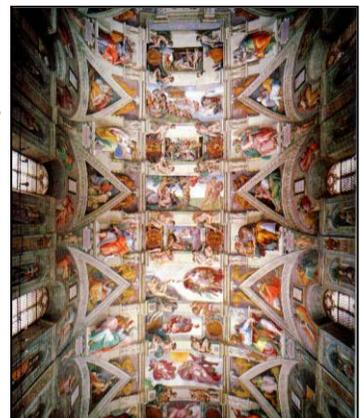
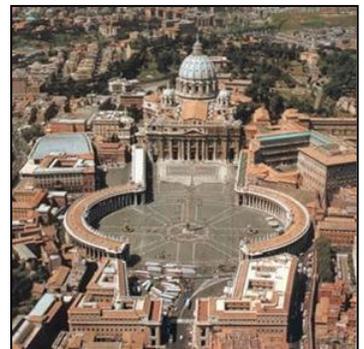
St. Francis spent much time in and around the city of Rieti, which, interestingly, served as a strategic point in the ancient network known as the "salt" track that linked Rome to the Adriatic Sea. Today we will visit sites important in the life of St. Francis and in the Franciscan Order, like the hermitage where the idea of the Franciscan mission first took form, where St. Francis drew up the monastic rule (a revised version was officially approved by the Pope in 1223), and where he performed the miracle of turning water into wine. We will conclude another inspiring day with the hermitage at Greccio, where at Christmastime in 1223, St. Francis established the custom of reproducing, with real people and animals, the manger scene. This scene is still reenacted every year and can be included in tours during the Christmas season. Our hearts are full and we have much to ponder as we enjoy dinner and an overnight stay in Greccio or Rieti.



Day 8: Rieti & Rome

Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee (Peter in Acts 3: 6).

We will travel today to a city nicknamed *Caput Mundi* (Capital of the World) and *The Eternal City*, not only because Rome has always been the hub of art, education, high culture and politics in the western world, but because it is also a spiritual capital and a powerful center of pilgrimage. Rome will offer us a richness of spirit and art as we tour the Vatican Museums which house what can be described as the most important collections of art in the world. The history and awe surrounding the galleries and all the treasures they contain will truly transfix us. Highlights include The Tapestry Gallery, The Raphael Rooms, and The Sistine Chapel where we will gaze on Michelangelo's incredible masterpiece. We will also enter St. Peter's Basilica which has the largest interior of any Christian church in the world and which has been described as the reason Rome is still the center of the civilized world. Tradition and historical evidence hold that St. Peter's tomb is directly below the altar of this basilica, which American Ralph Waldo Emerson described as *an ornament of the earth... the sublime of the beautiful*. Next we will have the chance to marvel at Bernini's beautiful bronze canopy and Michelangelo's Blessed Mother holding her crucified son, known as the *Pieta*. We will have ample time to savor and explore "The Eternal City" and to perhaps think on the experiences we have shared as our last day in Italy draws to a close and we gather for a farewell dinner.



Day 9: Rome & Return to the USA

We will let the power of the holy places and priceless relics settle over us, along with the profound example and life-changing words of St. Francis of Assisi; then like other pilgrims of other times, go back to our lives with renewed faith and readiness.

Transfer to Rome airport.

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