

Walking Through Tuscan Hills, French Canals & Forests

by *Julianne Mooney*



I love to walk. I think I've always done.

Nothing clears my head than taking to the beach and walking alongside the waves, gulls soaring above and the wind on my face.

They say the best things in life are free and I think I agree. Except for chocolate, that's not free. Or wine. Or holidays.

I spent the other week walking through the Tuscan hills with my friend. We went to school together, lived in London together and experienced half our lives together. However, now that she's in London and I'm back in Dublin we only catch up for a few brief hours here and there. It's been a while since we took off together and this seemed the perfect opportunity. There would be no distractions, except for the map, which we probably should have paid more attention to but that's another story.

I've also spent much time in France, especially in and around Carcassonne. You probably hear me hark on a bit about it, but that's simply because it's beautiful there.

This morning at 9.10am I will be on Ireland AM chatting about these two wonderful places, where to walk and how to do it. Hopefully some of my tips will prevent you from getting lost!

Below is all the information from the slot.

Tuscany, Italy (A full post on this will be coming soon!)

The Via Francigena is the name given to the ancient route that pilgrims took travelling from France to Rome. In fact, it is said that the route was also used by those travelling from Canterbury to Rome and the first written reference to it was in the 9th century.

Today, you can follow the route, starting at many different points depending on how long you wish to walk for. One of the most spectacular routes, which I did, is through the rolling hills of tuscany, passing through vineyards, olive groves and some of the country's most beautiful towns and villages. Route 14 starts in San Miniato and finishes in Siena and is designed as a relatively gentle pace trail, covering approx 12-14kms per day. Much of the route is through remote countryside, forest, fields and through only a handful of villages so you need to be prepared.

Tips

- Travel with a company that transfers your luggage each day to avoid having to carry your baggage
- Wear very comfortable shoes and clothing
- Carry detailed maps of the area with listings of places to stop for food
- Carry granola bars, water and fruit for snacks as there are few places to stop along the way.
- Wear a hat and plenty of sunscreen
- Bring a compass
- Travel with someone and have your hotel reservations made in advance

Along this route there are a number of beautiful spots to overnight. San Gimignano is a beautiful fortified town, which can get very busy with tourists, however, off-peak months leaves the medieval streets empty and easy to explore. Monteriggioni is a stunning walled town, with incredible views across the countryside. Make sure to factor in a number of days in Siena – visit the cathedral, piazza's, gardens in the city.

Getting There Fly direct to Pisa From €25 each way with www.ryanair.com

Hotel Accommodation from €70 per room per night

Special Offers [Francigena Ways](#) –

From €599 includes accommodation on a half board basis, luggage transfer from hotel to hotel and holiday pack (with maps, walking notes, pilgrim passport).

South of France

The summer draws in the crowds to the south of France, holidaymakers who come in search of lively beachside towns. However, come September the crowds disperse and the inland areas become more appealing to those looking for a walking holiday. The area surrounding

Carcassonne is very popular with walkers and in fact an official European Long Distance walking trail runs through the Black Mountains, north of Carcassonne – known as E4. The routes are well signposted, however, many of them run through densely forested areas, small villages and towns and lush valleys. For those not wanting to move accommodation each evening, staying in the one town and then choosing the different paths you want to take can be a relaxing way of doing a walking holiday. There are also plenty of interesting villages, Cathar ruins and vineyards to visit if you fancy a day off walking.

Tips

- Take detailed maps of the area and let your host know where you are walking and when to expect you back
- Visit the 'Village of Books' – Montelieu, a wonderful town packed with bookshops, cafes and a paper factory.
- Feast on the world's best cassoulet in Castelnaudary, self-proclaimed World Capital of Cassoulet

Canal du Midi

The Canal du Midi runs north west of Carcassonne and the tow path makes for a beautiful walk, whether just for the day or for an extended period of time. Following the pathway you pass through scenic towns and walk alongside open fields and scenic countryside.

Getting There

Fly direct to Carcassonne From €30 each way with www.ryanair.com

Accommodation From €50 per room

Special Offers

Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.(Black Mountains)

3 bedroom house from €900 per week

1 room from €300 per week