Travel

The Via Francigena is a lesser-known cousin of Spain’s Camino, writes Yvonne Gordon. It’s arguably more beautiful, too...

The Via Francigena route dates back to the 6th century and there is little change on the trail. The Via Francigena museum in Lucca has welcomed over a million pilgrims on its journey through France, Switzerland and Italy, ending in Lucca. If you’re bored of the Camino de Santiago in Spain, think again. It’s arguably more beautiful, too...

The Via Francigena’s rich history and long pilgrim tradition. In Lucca’s walled city of San Frediano, a beautiful 13th-century basilica sits on a small ‘island’ surrounded by marsh. The town is along the Via Francigena, the path that led through the green hills, olive and cypress groves, and a clock tower. As we walk through the Etsul Valley, the trail becomes more forested with more trees lining our path. We pass more farms and fields of green. The Via Francigena is a gold mine for birdwatchers and butterfly fans. As we walk, we chat, getting to know each other and learning each other’s stories. Some of the group have walked part of the Camino de Santiago, others walk or hike at weekends. We’re all ages and everyone has a different reason for coming: there are people travelling alone, a couple who came to walk the first two years earlier but couldn’t do the last four due to an injury, and four pairs that met on the Spanish Camino and decided to do another trail. The woman who got our immediate attention spotted a bird, who has walked the entire Camino. As we walk through the Etsul Valley, the trail becomes more forested with more trees lining our path. We pass more farms and fields of green. The Via Francigena is a gold mine for birdwatchers and butterfly fans. As we walk, we chat, getting to know each other and learning each other’s stories. Some of the group have walked part of the Camino de Santiago, others walk or hike at weekends. We’re all ages and everyone has a different reason for coming: there are people travelling alone, a couple who came to walk the first two years earlier but couldn’t do the last four due to an injury, and four pairs that met on the Spanish Camino and decided to do another trail. The woman who got our immediate attention spotted a bird, who has walked the entire Camino.

The scenery on the Via Francigena is fascinating, and remains unchanged throughout the centuries. Although there may be a few modern touches here and there, it still has a medieval feel to it. The town of San Gimignano, famous for its ancient towers, still has a unique charm about it. The next day is an easier walk to San Gimignano, a beautiful 13km trek. We stop for a rest at the monastery at San Miniato, where we can see across the wheat fields to distant valleys, with olive groves and tiny villages dotted in the distance. A golden-yellow farmhouse with a red tiled roof. The road and turns into a white gravel track leading to a typical Tuscan scene. There are low, rolling hills all around, lined with olive groves and patches of cypress trees. In the distance, a gravel path curves up around a green hill to a wooden gate. We are in a, starting from the trail across the main road and onto a white gravel track leading to a typical Tuscan scene. There are low, rolling hills all around, lined with olive groves and patches of cypress trees. In the distance, a gravel path curves up around a green hill to a wooden gate.

For more information on the Via Francigena see viafrancigenaentrypoint.eu/. Don’t miss the superb video on the Via Francigena in Italy.

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