



Keep on trekking.



All Paths Lead to Rome

What better way to see the Italian countryside than a walking safari that includes great food and quaint inns



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Travel in the time of the Delta variant is a tricky proposition, and leads us, once again, to the merits of the great outdoors. Trekking solo while hauling a heavy pack has its place, but those who value a great meal and a comfortable bed after a day spent hiking through the wilds of some of the most beautiful spots in Europe may be more drawn to the guided excursions organized by the Maremma Safari Club.



It's the brainchild of Rudston Steward, who has called Tuscany home ever since he moved to Siena in 2001 to work on a farm. He's been drawn to nature since childhood, a significant portion of which he spent in

South Africa.



The pause that refreshes.

“In that wild part of the world, humans are not the top of the food chain when you’re out and about on foot, so you necessarily develop an awareness and instinctive ability to navigate landscapes,” he says.

As a teenager, he spent weeks on a game reserve in southern Botswana. “I’d wake up each day, spin an empty bottle, walk all morning in the random direction the bottle pointed in, and then walk back to camp in the afternoon,” he says. “Later in life, when I was thinking about meaningful things I might do with my time, walking was thus an obvious candidate.”



Steward got his start working for other outfitters, bringing travelers to far-flung locales such as Bandhavgarh and Bhutan. After spending nine months traversing the regions of Italy, he discovered enough spectacular routes (and restaurants and inns alongside them) that he branched out on his own, and the Maremma Safari Club was born. (While the excursions happen all over Italy, the name itself is a nod to the Maremma region of Tuscany, which is home to stylish seaside resort towns such as Castiglione della Pescaia and Porto Ercole.)

He focused exclusively on Italy for environmental reasons, to cut down on long-haul flights for himself as well as for his clients, but also, he says, because, “simply put, I think that Italy is the greatest country on earth.”



At the end of every trail ... wine and cheese and more.

Steward specializes in continuous routes split into daily stages and anchored by solid meals and charming hotels. (Luggage is transported by van.) Boulder-hopping in Aspromonte, circumambulating the Aeolian Islands, climbing in the Dolomites, and traipsing through Elba are only a few of the itineraries on offer. (Group rates hover around \$2,000 per person for a five-day trip, assuming double occupancy.)



Charming, witty, and knowledgeable, Steward leads all of these adventures personally, and he's game to customize experiences for groups of all persuasions (and physical abilities).

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“All the trips have vastly different terrains and require different levels of fitness, so I talk at length to all travelers before they book to ensure they are matched to the right trip—if any—for their ability,” he says. “But these are not overly demanding or challenging itineraries. They are not endurance tests or races. Our walking trips are designed to be enjoyed. They are the ultimate kind of slow travel.”



From mountains to beaches.

The walking season in Italy is relatively short, so trips are concentrated between April and July and from September to mid-November. A five-day group stroll in late September through the volcanic island of Salina, for example, will include climbing the wooded northern face of Monte Fossa delle Felci (with a packed lunch at the summit) and a descent through an ancient caldera to the hamlet of Pollara.

It's an appealing and rather relaxing opportunity for travelers who are itching to get out and see the world—while we are still permitted to do so—without encountering the crowds. (Or the Delta variant.) And do make sure to pack a new pair of hiking boots. ©

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