

The Italian Dolomites in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

NHS of Northumbria

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Verona, transfer to the Fassa Valley
Day 2	Pordoi Pass
Day 3	Passo Sella
Day 4	Passo San Pellegrino
Day 5	Tamion
Day 6	Panneviggio
Day 7	Passo Valles
Day 8	Fly Newcastle



Clusius' Gentian



Autumnal colours



Red Deer

Departs

Wednesday 25th September – Wednesday 2nd October

Focus

Scenery, birds, flowers, mammals

Grading

Day walks only. Grade B. Between 1,250 & 2,550 metres

Dates and Prices

Tour price £1995 Single Supp £0 or £210

Highlights

- Enjoy walking in some of Europe's finest mountains
- Experience clarity of autumn air and colours
- Birds include Snowfinch, Alpine Accentor and possibly Wallcreeper
- Search for the last flowers of summer, including Fringed Gentian and Autumn Crocus
- Listen for Red Deer rutting
- Enjoy a special family-run mountain hotel, and its delicious cuisine



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N.B. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

Throughout this holiday, we will be based at the Hotel Gran Mugon situated in the village of Tamion in the Fassa Valley, which has been inhabited since the Iron Age. This comfortable, friendly hotel is run by a family



of keen skiers who know every inch of the area. Here, as throughout Europe, farming practices have had an enriching influence on the vegetation and on the diversity of the plant communities and other wildlife.

The dramatic peaks of the Italian Dolomites are renowned for their magnificent walks, and late September is one of the best times to experience them. The weather is usually settled with a clarity to the air which makes the colours seem even brighter. Summer migrants will be moving south over the high passes, maybe in large numbers, while sought-after

species such as Snowfinch, Alpine Accentor, Wallcreeper and Grey-headed Woodpecker can be easier to see. Most of the summer flowers will be over, but some treasures may remain, such as Fringed Gentian, Autumn Crocus and Pink Cinquefoil, while Larch trees and low shrubs such as Bilberry will be taking on their autumn colours.

Our week will involve more walking than on the summer trips, but we will take it gently. There will be some steeper slopes, but it does not involve any strenuous mountaineering! There will be ample opportunity to slowly explore the mountain trails with their outstanding scenery while searching for iconic Alpine wildlife. We also have a moth-trap at the hotel, which we may run of a couple of nights during the week.

Day 1

Fly Verona, transfer to Fassa Valley

We will depart early this morning at 06:45 from Newcastle on a direct Jet2 flight to Verona, landing at 10:00. On arrival we will transfer to our privately hired minibuses for the drive north, into the Province of Trentino and the Dolomite Mountains. During the initial part of the journey, the vegetation will reflect aspects of the Mediterranean climate and then, as we get further north-east into the Cordevole Valley, low altitude mountain vegetation will start to appear.

On our arrival in the Fassa Valley we will settle into our hotel. This afternoon we will explore our immediate surroundings. The woods and meadows all about, offer the most delightful walks, or we may be able to enjoy the 'Wellness Centre' of the hotel, with its sauna and outside hot tub. We will then be time for dinner and an opportunity to sample the delicious cuisine of the hotel which we will enjoy for the following week.

Day 2

Pordoi Pass

We drive north up the Fassa Valley to Canazei, taking the many hairpin bends up to the Pordoi Pass (2,239metres) with its magnificent views. We will spend the day walking the Viel del Pan, the ancient flour-traders' route along the side of the mountains. (The path is also known as the Bindelweg, after a German doctor who had a part in its restoration in the early 1900s). From the car park we climb about 150 metres to a shoulder.

Snowfinches are resident here, and there are usually many Alpine Marmots around the boulders below. In summer, the area is full of botanical riches, and we will look for late or second flowering of Edelweiss



Pink Cinquefoil

(*Leontopodium nivale*), Alpine Poppy (*Papaver alpina*), Yellow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga aizoides*) and Pink Cinquefoil (*Potentilla nitida*), among others. These high mountain passes can be funnels for migrating passerines, so we will be alert for any unusual bird activity.

At the top of the path we get a stunning view of the mountain Marmolada, which has the only permanent glacier in the Dolomites. We follow the path along the side of the mountains above the Val di Ciampie, with views across to the glacier and later, the Lago di Fedaiia. Chamois and Mouflon may be seen on the outcrops and pastures below us, while Alpine Choughs circle overhead. We may opt to return via the ridge path (which is a bit steeper and narrower) with its all-round views, or retrace our outgoing route back to the Passo Pordoi (about 9 kilometres in total).

Day 3

Passo Sella

We drive north again today, but take the alternative route above Canazei, to the Sella Pass at 2,218 metres.

Parking below the Pass, we will explore the Valley of the Rocks under the dramatic peaks of Sassolungo and Sasso Piatto. We will then join the Sentiero Frederico Augusto, named after Frederick Augustus III of Saxony, who loved these mountains, reaching the Rifugio of the same name (which may be open!). As well as great views of the Sella massif, there are lovely views south down the Fassa Valley. Black Redstarts, Snowfinches and Alpine Accentor may be seen, as well as the ever-present Alpine Marmots, while the areas of Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Cowberry (*V. vitis-idaea*), Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) and Trailing Azalea (*Kalmia procumbens*) will be turning red. Maybe choosing to walk beyond the rifugio, we then return to the car park (about 9 kilometres).



Snowfinch

Day 4

Passo San Pellegrino

Today we will explore the area above the San Pellegrino Pass, stopping at the highest point to explore its northern side. From the top of the pass, we take the small road to Rifugio Miralago, with its small lake, Lech de le Poze (its Ladin name), where we will take a look for amphibians. We then take the track through open woodland and pastures to the Rifugio Fuciade. We may walk beyond to explore the area further, and will either retrace our steps or loop round to complete a circuit. Nutcrackers, Redpolls and Crossbills frequent the woods here, as well. We will probably be walking about 8 kilometres today.

This afternoon, there will be an opportunity to visit the Ladin Museum in Vigo di Fassa, which gives a fascinating insight into the traditions and culture of the Ladin people, including the Weiss family who run the hotel.

Day 5

Tamion

Today we'll spend the day walking from our hotel, exploring the meadows and woods around us. We start by walking through hay meadows, where there may be some late Autumn Crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*),



Crested Tit

Grass-of-Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*) and Willow Gentian (*Gentiana asclepiadea*). We then walk through spruce and pine woods, with Alpine Clematis (*Clematis alpina*) climbing through them and Shrubby Milkwort (*Polygala chamaebuxus*) on the forest floor. We will watch and listen for woodland birds such as Crested Tit and Marsh Tit, as well as Grey-headed and Black Woodpeckers. Red Squirrels jump through the trees and shy Roe and Fallow Deer may be glimpsed. Our path weaves along the hillside before dropping in to the valley below. Looping round the edge of Soraga, we then climb back up to the hotel.

The rest of the afternoon will be at leisure. If you would like a day off from walking, it is quite easy to take a bus from the end of the road to Bolzano, where you may like to visit the Museum of Archaeology, which houses the remains of Ötzi, the Iceman (timed web-tickets are on sale in advance, up to the evening before).

Day 6

Panevèggio

We will spend today in the Natural Park of Panevèggio, about an hour's drive from our hotel. We drive south down the Fassa Valley, before turning east at Predazzo. We drive up to the Passo Rolle and then up the gravel track to the Rifugio Baita Segantini at 2,170 metres, just under the dramatic peak of Cimon della Pala. From here we take a stony track which winds down into the Val Venegia, turning off onto a smaller path which leads across grassy, rocky pasture with scattered trees to the scree slopes of Cima di Val Grande. This area can be very good for Grey-headed Woodpecker. Continuing to follow the path across some scree, climbing steadily, we are faced with a large rockface, where we will search for Wallcreeper. We

then descend to a beautiful upland pasture dotted with large, well-vegetated boulders which hold many alpine gems. After a good exploration of this area, where Ring Ouzels breed in summer, we walk down through the Val Venegia, with the opportunity to stop for refreshments at the Malga Vengiota.

Meanwhile, the leaders will be climbing back up the mountain to Baita Segantini, and bringing the vehicles



Alpine Marmot

round to meet the group at the bottom of Val Venegia. This beautiful valley has a rich tapestry of habitats and therefore of plants (it is reputed to have all the flowers of the Dolomites!) and other wildlife. The track descends steadily through rocky spruce woods, wet meadows and by the river. Nutcrackers, Alpine Chough and Alpine Marmots are among the species often encountered along the way.

Back down in the valley, we will stop in Paneveggio, where there is a population of Red Deer in a large but enclosed area. At this time the stags will be rutting, so we will hope to observe their behaviour.

Day 7

Passo Valles

We will spend today exploring the area of Passo Valles, a pass located between Passo San Pellegrino and Passo Rolle. This area, known as an outdoor geological museum, is an important north-south pass, favoured by migrating birds. Starting at the top of the pass (2,031 metres), we walk northwards, climbing gently but steadily. The area, which is of metamorphic rock rather than limestone, is home to late flowers such as Fringed Gentian (*Gentianopsis ciliata*), *Gentianella anisodonta*, Snow Gentian (*Gentiana nivalis*), Dwarf Soapwort (*Saponaria pumila*), Bearded Bellflower (*Campanula barbata*), Common Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and *Jacobaea carniolica* subsp. *incana*, as well as many lichens. Alpine Accentors, Black Redstarts, Water Pipits and Snowfinches are found here, and there is the remote possibility to see Ptarmigan. Bogs and ponds along the way are home to Alpine Newts and Common Frogs, and Viviparous Lizard may be found.

The path climbs more steeply, as we ascend the Col Margherita (2,550 metres), from where the views are breath-taking in all directions, down in to Passo San Pellegrino, and especially of Cimon della Pala in the afternoon light. You also get good views of the Triassic Werfen rock formations by Cima Palles. A ridge path takes us to an area where Dotterel may be found. We retrace our route back to the Pass. A less strenuous option could be to divert from the main path to the Lago di Cavia, instead of reaching the summit.



Cimon della Pala

Day 8

Fly Newcastle

Today we have an early start to travel back to Verona airport in time for the 10:45 departure, arriving into Newcastle at 12:15.

Tour grading

On this holiday, we will be based at one hotel throughout. We will explore the mountains of this spectacular region and will look for the wildlife that inhabits them. We will take daily walks of between 6 and 13 kilometres in length. Paths can be rough and some will be quite steep, so walking poles may be useful. However, the pace will be gentle, with plenty of time to scan the slopes and examine the scree and the rocky outcrops which we come across; when you are enjoying the natural environment the going is usually slow! We will have the support of two minibuses (depending on group size) to allow the maximum flexibility, and enable us to plan alternative options for each day's programme if necessary.

Weather

The months of September and October are usually fairly settled in the Dolomites, and we hope that by timing the holiday for the latter part of September, we will enjoy good sunny weather with clear skies. Past the equinox, the days are getting shorter and the evenings cooler. While precipitation in the higher mountains may fall as snow, it rarely lies for long. We should, however, be prepared for changeable weather and good waterproof clothing with some warm walking gear is advisable. When sunny, the days should be pleasantly warm (in the mid 60's°F) but the evenings and high altitudes may be chilly.

Food & accommodation

All the food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. Past clients have been delighted at the standard of our hotel's catering! Attached to the hotel is a Michelin-starred Restaurant, L Chimpi; it may be possible to book a meal there (at extra cost), if desired. We will ensure that the daily picnic lunches which we carry with us onto the mountains will be excellent and will reflect, as far as possible, the local produce. While there are a number of rifugios along our way, most serving refreshments will be closing for the end of the summer season.



Hotel Gran Mugon reception

Single supplement – there are 2 true singles available (small rooms of approx. 10m² with a single bed and window) for which there is no single supplement. These are on a first come first served basis. Thereafter rooms for single occupancy will be standard rooms (approx. 16m² with double bed and balcony) with a single supplement of £210.

Junior Suite – subject to availability, the hotel has a small number of junior suites (approx. 22m² with double bed and balcony, with the best views of the mountains). The additional cost for one of these for the week is £105 per person on a sharing basis.

How to book your place on this tour:

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card for a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example room or dietary requests, at the time of booking.

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