

THINGS I NEED TO KNOW (FAQ)

A Guided Pilgrimage with Soul Care Seattle

Via di Francesco 2027

Florence to Assisi

Sept 12- Sept 27, 2027

A Soul Care Seattle Pilgrimage...

...is a journey for the curious, the searchers, the one needing to find their way back, the one needing to discover something new.

...is a journey for the questioning, the christian, the curious, the deconstructing, and the doubting. It is for all who can physically make the journey. It is for all who are willing and able to walk and give themselves to what The Journey will reveal.

...is a journey for the individual in the context of community. No two people have the same life or spiritual path to walk. Married, single, or partnered - each pilgrim has their own story, and will walk their own path in freedom of judgement. It is a journey into our authentic selves as the beloved.

... is a journey into the unknown, the uncomfortable, the uncontrolled. Surrounded by beauty and history we abandon convenience for inconvenience, control for the unknown, and immediate gratification for the simple pleasure of a bed at the end of the day. We journey into the interior spaces that only slowing of time and the release of control can afford.

...is a journey of heart and mind, of spirit in hopes of a deeper connection with God, others, and our authentic selves.

...is a journey full of beauty, memories, good food, and fun!

Q: Important Dates

- Pilgrimage Dates: September 12, Florence, Italy - September 27, 2027, Assisi, Italy
- REGISTRATION CLOSES: January 5, 2027
- Four Team Building Meetings (in-person or Zoom)
 - January 15, 2027
 - March 5, 2027
 - May 28, 2027
 - July 30, 2027
- Sept 4, 2027, optional BBQ at the Layne for ALL Pilgrims past and present!

Q: What does the trip cost?

- **Pilgrim Package:** \$3,825 [Visit this page](#) to see a list of inclusions and exclusions

Q: When should I plan to arrive in Europe?

A: It is optimal to allow at least one full day in Italy prior to our gathering day: Sept 12th. This allows ample time to make the ground journey to Florence, Italy, to adjust to your surroundings, and take care of last minute preparations.

At minimum, you need to plan to land in Europe no later than Sept 11th in order to arrive in Florence the 12th in time for our Orientation and Kick-Off-Dinner. Pilgrims arriving late will be responsible for related expenses and configuring their own transportation to the next stage accommodation.

Q: What exactly is a pilgrimage?

A: *"The pilgrim moves toward the source of order and blessing in her world...the tourist, by contrast, desires to escape her world... For this reason, pilgrims welcome other pilgrims, but tourists regard other tourists with disdain."* - William Cavanaugh, "Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk"

Certainly, I (Dan) have held tourists with disdain, although at times, I find myself being one. Similarly, I have welcomed both. But, I believe Cavanaugh's point rests in the notion of curiosity. The curiosity innate in a movement toward 'the source of order and blessing' opens us to others on a similar quest. Ultimately, a pilgrimage is an inner recognition of our uncomfortability with the unknown. Thus, there is mystery and always more to discover. Drawn to the 'source', we practice curiosity, openness, and comfortability with the unknown and with fellow pilgrims.

Q; Why should I consider making a pilgrimage? (See "What if I'm not sure what I believe?)

A: We journey together expecting that, as we open ourselves to the experience of watching, searching, smelling, feeling, listening for God, we will somehow participate in becoming new. We find ourselves invited to slowly let go of attachments. We have more space to receive from God. We increasingly discover our true selves to be God's delight, God's beloved.

Q: What is the trip itinerary?

A: The itinerary is as follows (please note, some minor changes may occur depending upon hotel availability):

Itinerary (Nights)

Sept 12 - Sunday - Florence - Orientation & Kickoff dinner
Sept 13 - Monday - Bus from Florence to LaVerna
Sept 14 - Tuesday - Laverna - day of reflection at [LaVerna Monastery](#)
Sept 15 - Wednesday - Stage 1: Pieve Santo Stefano
Sept 16 - Thursday - Stage 2: Rifugio Pian della Capanna / Montagna
Sept 17 - Friday - Stage 3: Sansepolcro
Sept 18 - Saturday - Stage 4: Citerno
Sept 19 - Sunday - Stage 5: Citta Di Castello

Sept 20 - Monday - Stage 6: Pietralunga
Sept 21 - Tuesday - Stage 7: Gubbio
Sept 22 - Wednesday - Gubbio
Sept 23 - Thursday - Stage 8: Biscina or (San Pietro in Vigneto?)
Sept 24 - Friday - Stage 9: Valfabbrica
Sept 25 - Saturday- Stage 10: Assisi
Sept 26 - Sunday - Assisi - Celebration Dinner
Sept 27 - Monday- Morning Goodbyes

Q: Will I need a guide book?

A: Yes, we definitely suggest purchasing a guide book. Your guidebook will be one of three tools for navigation, along with GPS and waymarkers, but, additionally, reading through your guidebook will help round out what you can expect along the way. Suggest: *The Way of St Francis: Via Di Francesco*, By: Sandy Brown

Q: How difficult is this pilgrimage route?

A: Difficulty is subjective, differing from one person to another. We have done our best to describe each stage (day's journey) [here](#). We encourage you to think about difficulty from two perspectives; internal and physical.

Interior Difficulties: Certainly, physical exhaustion, pain, and/or discomfort can lead to interior difficulties. International travel, language barriers, lack of familiarity, long days without a lot of creature comforts along the way will invite each of us to look within, or to God, or higher power in times we come up lacking. This can be painful, disorienting, and isolating.

Physical: You will need to train. Hiking in the mountains one day is vastly different than getting up and going on an extended walk the next day, and the day after that. To get the most out of your pilgrimage, you will need to develop memory in your body in order to minimize injury and to build a history so that your body knows it will handle each day without anxiety.

All of that said, we have this from our *Via di Francesco* coordinator in Assisi:

*As for the 'rugged' terrain, elevation changes and distance, I usually point out to walkers that the Way of St Francis is a wonderful route, which crosses part of Tuscany and half of Umbria, winding through the hills of the Apennines. This makes the route absolutely stunning but also a bit tiring; it's not one of those classic 'flat trails' like some sections of the Camino de Santiago or parts of the Via Francigena. To get from one town to another, you sometimes need to walk a bit further to avoid sleeping in the woods; for this reason, some stages are long because there are no alternatives other than going from one town to another. Of course, you can always shorten them by using private transfers. **Many people still choose Via di Francesco as their first hiking experience and manage to complete the whole route without any problems.***

Q: What if I want to go but I am not particularly interested in St Francis or St Clare?

A: True, a pilgrimage is often about the destination, but most pilgrims would say that many of the gifts they received were not in the “destination” - ie. what they thought they were looking for. Rather, some of the most impacting gifts lie in the little noticings along the way. They lie in unplugging, dealing with adversity, being outside of one’s comfort zone, being immersed in ancient beauty, or simply the restful pace of walking. In short, you do not need to have a devotion or curiosity toward the Saints. The practice of pilgrimage will shape you with or without the saints.

Q: Why did SCS choose this particular pilgrimage? Perhaps it’s as simple as St Francis is among the most widely recognizable saints. Statues of Francis, found the world over, remind us to care for nature with love, respect, humility. And not just nature, St Francis chose to model Christ by giving up everything, becoming for the poor, and lived life caring for the poor. We find ourselves drawn to the heart of St Francis because his abandon to God arouses in us a curiosity, a deeper desire to pursue this source of order and blessing. What he saw, we long to see.

We also can’t resist the great food, wine, culture, and stunning countryside.

Q: What if I prefer to walk alone or in silence?

A: By all means... YES! We want to give as much space as possible to honor each person’s way of being. Our suggestion: Mornings will be in structured silence to provide a contemplative space for all and to encourage the contemplative practices of Silence, Solitude, and inner Stillness. Afternoons allow for more of a social walk if both parties agree. The best of both worlds. (But people within the group can decide in advance, together, to not walk in silence. That is great!)

Q: Who will I share a room with?

A: Good question. The following explains accommodations, excerpted from correspondence with our pilgrimage coordinator...

Accommodation is limited due to the small size of the facilities, we will always have to share twin rooms and it will not be possible to have single rooms (at most one or two single rooms).

Furthermore, on 16 September at the mountain refuge, we will be staying in mixed-sex dormitories (there are no double or single rooms). Luggage transport will not reach the refuge, so you will need to carry a small rucksack with essentials for the night. Your luggage will be waiting for you in San Sepolcro.

In the spirit of pilgrimage, of letting go of comforts, we find ourselves in potentially awkward situations and in hopes for an inward orientation toward “watch and wonder”. We invite all pilgrims to be open to what new thing might gradually form in you through roommates. That said, it is perfectly acceptable to request single occupancy when available or to bring a companion with whom you would like to share twin rooms.

Q: Why four meetings before the pilgrimage?

A: There is a lot that goes into preparing to make the most of an adventure like this. One key ingredient is team building. Even if you have participated in other SCS pilgrimages, we ask that you bring your presence and experience in order to build familiarity, cohesion and build collective wisdom. More specifically, these meetings will focus on the three main themes of logistics, physical, and spiritual preparation, along with building an understanding of St Francis and St Clare. Maybe even a movie night!

Q: Spiritual Preparation?

A: Along with brief introductions of Franciscan spirituality, our group meetings, prior to the journey, will explore the wisdom and practical help of Ignatian Spirituality with particular attention to Image of God, Image of Self, “God in all things” and “All is Gift”.

Q: What if I am not even sure of what I believe anymore? What if I have lost all trust in the church or in God?

A: We want you to know that you are both definitely not alone and that you are fully welcome. We honor where you are without expectation or agenda. We invite you to use this pilgrimage as a time to explore the next steps of your unique path without others having an agenda for you.. Our hope is that you will find space for healing, a time for newness, and for coming further into your true self, free to explore *your* path; the way *you* are wired to be in this world. We anticipate that we will all be in different places along our unique paths. You can expect safety and honor in all that we experience together. Please let us know if you ever experience anything less.

Q: How should I prepare physically for the pilgrimage?

A: Walking the Via diFrancesco involves moving to different locations on foot each day. Over ten consecutive days with one rest day after Stage 7, we will walk roughly 120 miles through perpetual ups and downs through the Apennine Mountains (apəˌnɪnz). This is a significant distance and it includes varying, often uneven terrain (i.e. trails, cobble stones, gravel, elevation changes). Additionally, we are anticipating temperatures in the 60s and 70s. But... who knows?

It is strongly recommended that pilgrims train their bodies at least four months in advance for the journey. Additionally, pilgrims must train using the boots or shoes they will wear on the journey. Breaking in new footwear on the journey is not for the faint of heart.... As part of our group preparation, we will swap ideas and experiences on training and preparation.

Traditionally, training days form within the group, often to bakeries or pubs for more holistic training. :-)

Search the following sites for training suggestions that resonate with you.

- o Follow the Camino: <https://followthecamino.com/en/blog/your-camino-training-plan/>
- o Camino Ways: <https://caminoways.com/how-do-i-train-for-the-camino-de-santiago>
- o Stingy Nomad: <https://stingynomads.com/camino-de-santiago-training/>

Q: Can older children join us?

A: Pilgrimage is an amazing gift to older children, especially high school age, provided they are traveling with a parent or legal guardian.

Q: Where does the pilgrimage begin? How do I get there?

A: Regardless of when you arrive in Florence, our team will meet up after check in (exact time and location to be announced) at our group lodging, we will meet for a final team meeting at the Basilica of Sant Croce. We will provide the exact location and further details as we get closer to the start of the pilgrimage. Pilgrims will likely fly into Florence or nearby larger cities, such as Rome or Milan. If you are including other cities prior to meeting up in Florence, we suggest Rome2Rio to plan your itinerary to reach Florence well in advance of the afternoon of Sept 12th.

Q: What about after the pilgrimage?

A: Officially, the pilgrimage ends with our celebration dinner in Assisi, late Sunday evening, September 26th. On Monday, September 27th, for those who have not yet departed, we will host a casual sending as we transition into the ongoing pilgrimage of daily life. Each individual will find their way (bus, train, car, ...or foot) to their airport or next destination.

Q What is the Feast of St Francis?

A: Monday, October 4th, 2027 coincidentally is the Feast of St Francis, which as of 2027 is a national holiday in Italy! A Feast Day is a day set aside by the Catholic Church to remember particular saints and celebrate the gifts that saints brought to the church and our world. Historically, Assisi transforms into an international mecca, drawing church and elected officials from around the world. Music, street festivals, worship services. We encourage you to look it up! It may be worth a return visit before heading home.

Q: What about footwear?

A: Light hiking boots or trail running shoes are likely all you need. We are only carrying daypacks with probably only 5-10 pounds. However, the more prone you are to ankle injuries, the higher level of ankle support you may want. Cushion is not always the best option, as inconsistent and uneven surfaces, such as gravel bordering on small river rock, or cobblestone, can render cushy shoes unstable. Water resistance will be your friend. "Waterproof" may prove to be *too* warm. Lastly, many find that their feet tend to swell as the walking progresses. Opting for shoes with a larger/wider toe box can reduce hotspots. We highly recommend a good shoe store with knowledgeable people. For example, "Fleet Feet" offers foot imaging to help in this process.

Q: What about blisters?

We'll talk about this in our Team Building meetings!

A: This is where adequate training and breaking your shoes in early is imperative. It's much better to experiment with blisters at home where they can heal rather than on the route where you will have to put your shoes on again the next day.

Lubricants to pretreat your feet are ESSENTIAL: Tallow, Vaseline, Oils reduce the friction of skin on skin, or skin on socks/shoes.

We suggest Smartwool socks. Bombas also seems to be fairly good in this regard. You will need a minimum of three pairs (one to hike in, one to carry just in case, and one to wear the next day while the previous pair is drying). Additionally, jell-blister pads such as Compeed are essential. Moleskine is also a great item. You will devise what works for you! If you experience difficulty and pain, you are welcome to make your own ground transportation arrangements to the next lodging location.

Q: Do I have to carry all my things with me each day?

A: No. The cost of the pilgrimage includes a service that will transport our baggage from lodging site to lodging site each day. Therefore, you only need to carry in your pack anything you would like to have during the day's walk (water, snacks, journal, ID, cash, sunscreen, first aid supplies, rain jacket). Keep in mind, the baggage courier service only allows one bag per pilgrim. Therefore, pilgrims should plan to only have one piece of luggage and one backpack or day pack, to carry as they walk. Also note, the baggage courier service limits the weight of each suitcase/pack/duffel to 20 kgs (44 lbs).

You may be charged for overweight bags and/or additional bags.

Q: What about meals?

A: Breakfast at each stage is included in the cost of the pilgrimage.

NOTE: Breakfasts are often offered at a set time, most commonly 7:30. Depending on temperatures, distance, or your own walking style, you may find yourself leaving prior to breakfast. It would be wise to plan ahead on these days.

Given the remote nature of this route and the size of the villages, most meals are included. In larger cities dinners are not provided. This becomes an adventure to think through the 'when and where' to find your next meal. Let this experience take you deeper into your pilgrimage and enjoy the food culture of Umbria.

On the evenings when you are on your own for dinner, watch for the "Menu del Pellegrino", "Menu Turistico" or "Menu del giorno" de Perigrino) or "Menu del Dia" offering a 3-course meal that will likely include pasta or soup, a protein, drink and desert.

Q: How much money will I spend on food and drink?

A: With the exception of a handful of meals, breakfast, lunch and dinner are included. [See Inclusions here.](#)

You will want to bring extra spending money for coffee, alcoholic beverages, snacks, and desserts. You may also want to bring extra spending money for any gifts or souvenirs you wish to purchase.

Our friend Chat GPT offers the following information. It may be helpful, or not, for meals before and after, as well as an idea of what to expect at times when meals are not included.

- Restaurants:
 - 18€-€28 for a hearty 3-4 course dinner,
 - 12€ - 16€ for a hearty lunch
 - 9€-12€ Mezzo Menu - a half portion is often available (a main, side, and beverage)
- Cafe's:
 - 3€-5€ for coffee & pastry
 - 7€-12€ for a panini/sandwich, perhaps a small salad and drink at Lunch
- Fees:
 - "Coperto" is a table fee per person to cover linens, flatware, and dishes
 - Cafes:
 - No coperto if you stand and eat at the bar
 - Coperto is hidden in the menu pricing which is higher for table service inside whether or out.
 - Restaurants:
 - 1.5€-€3 per person
 - Menu del Giorno very often includes the "Coperto", saving another couple €
 - "Tipping"
 - Generally not expected
 - 1€-€2 cash on the table or simply rounding up a cash payment commends good service
 - Tip lines on CC transactions are unlikely. A tip is cash on the table.
 - Servizio Incluso on your bill indicates a service fee of 10-12% has been assessed. Definitely no need to tip in excess.

Q: What is a "standard" accommodation?

A: Lodging at a "standard" accommodation is usually a smaller hotel or guest house, sometimes a family run that offers a homey, simple feel, and usually a hearty breakfast.

Q: What's the daily schedule like?

A: We will follow a general daily rhythm (see below). Exact timing will vary somewhat day-to-day and depend on factors that are hard to predict or plan on in advance, so plan on flexibility.

Also, please note that this is *your* pilgrimage. We will offer an optional brief morning gathering for a blessing and reflection. When practical, we may offer an optional formal time of debrief.

Breakfast, optional blessing for the day. The exact timing of breakfast and our morning departure will vary because different lodging locations begin breakfast at different times. Pilgrims will likely begin their days at times that make sense to them.

Baggage Transfer will ask us to place our luggage at a designated place each day for courier pickup. We will be informed what time each morning they would like it to be there.

NOTE: Weather, terrain, or distance depending, we will announce a time for the morning blessing that will allow us to begin walking without breakfast. As always, the morning blessing and departure time is completely optional.

Q: What do I need to bring?

A: The most important item you will bring is your boots or shoes. You must, must, must break these in well before the pilgrimage. Additionally, you may want to bring a pair of sandals or flip-flops to put on in the evening. They will feel good on your feet after the day's walk. Also, bring clothes that are comfortable to walk in. Lastly, keep in mind that you may want to stop and pray for a minute in a church, cathedral, or basilica. For these sites, due to the number of pilgrims and tourists, dress codes have been relaxed. Also, bring:

- o Hat
- o Rain poncho (good to be prepared)
- o Sunglasses
- o Backpack / good footwear, blister kit: bandages, lubricants, etc
- o Water bottle
- o Sunscreen & bug spray
- o Journal and writing utensil
- o Snacks (suggest bars/trail mix as they travel well. Packaged meat sticks and fruit may not be allowed into the EU. These items can be purchased there.)
- o ID (passport) and copies of important documents kept separately from your ID.
- o Cash & Credit Card (some restaurants and vendors will be cash only)
- o First Aid – consider bringing your own small anti-blister kit (we'll go over what items to include in your kit in group meetings)
- o Toiletries
- o Phone / Camera
- o Hiking poles (optional: some people find these help alleviate joint pain on downhill hiking)
- o Outlet adapters for Italy (Appliances rated between 220V and 240V are safe to plug into Spanish sockets.)
- o Phone charger
- o Earplugs
- o Durable luggage tags with: name, leader's name, and booking code
- o Insider tip: We are particularly fond of pads for sitting. These small, thermal pads provide a relatively inexpensive perk when you need to stop in a wet, muddy, dusty, or rocky space to nurse blisters or simply take in a snack and a view.

Q: How much cash should I bring?

A: We are fans of limiting the amount of cash that you carry. Credit cards are welcome in many, if not most establishments, **but you will need Euros at times.** We prefer to carry 100

Euros and replenish using cash machines *at banks*, as needed. Remember to check your bank for fees.

- HEADS UP: smaller villages in Italy can be more cash-oriented or entirely cash. Carry Euro denominations of 5€, 10€, or 20€ notes (Start by bringing 50€ - 100€ and you can always stop at an ATM if needed later).
- YOU WILL WANT a stash of smaller denominations for drinks and incidentals in the event merchants will not take cc's for small purchases.
- YOU WILL NEED small denominations (2€ - 4€) for local tourist taxes payable at hotels. Larger cities, such as Florence, may range as high as 8€. It is best to set aside 45€-75€ for this specific use along the way.
- YOU WILL WANT small denominations, anywhere from 1€-10€ for restaurant service. There is not a tipping culture. That said, you may want to show gratitude by rounding up the change or leaving a euro or two. For servers, it is not about the amount but about the recognition. 5€ or 10€ is reserved for rare service that is well above/exceptional/memorable service.

Q: Do I need Travel Insurance?

A: Travel insurance is not included, but is a valuable option in case of unforeseen events, damage, illness, injury, and so on. There are many travel insurance providers. A reliable and easy resource is worldnomads.com