

# ***N & S Wildlife & Walking Holidays***

## ***Wildflowers & Walking in the Italian Dolomites with Richard Hobbs & Sally Ward 3 - 10 June 2014***

We return to what has to be one of our favourite destinations. We are based in South Tyrol (also known as Alto Adige) which is the northernmost province of Italy lying to the south of the Brenner Pass and bordered to the south east by the Dolomites with their dome-shaped limestone mountains rising to over 10,000 feet. Formed over a period of some 30 million years they were originally known as "the pale mountains" because of the pale-coloured dolomitic limestone. At their feet are rich alpine pastures, vineyards and tiny lakes. There are small villages with chalet style wooden farmhouses and Tyrolean style churches with onion shaped belfries. The area is known as the "Land of Castles" although many are now ruined. This part of Italy belonged to Austria before World War I and the official languages are both German and Italian. There is also an ancient language in existence called Ladin, which has its roots in Provençal French.

The Schlern, a magnificent limestone pinnacle typical of this region, always dominates the views in this area. It measures over 70 square kilometres and is Europe's largest expanse of high alpine meadowland and a veritable paradise for walkers. Our nearest main town of Bolzano, with its elegant shopping streets and stylish old arcades, has an Italian feel to it and there are many Gothic style buildings, an interesting market and an excellent museum. The museum is home to the internationally famous 'ice man' and the artifacts he had with him when he met his death a long while ago. A fascinating story and tastefully done.



Our delightful hotel is tucked away and set in its own alpine meadow next to a rushing stream and surrounded by woodland. If you have travelled here with us before, you will find that our walks have gradually evolved and that the local bus now comes to the hotel entrance to take us to the nearby cable car.

**The Plants** - The flora is extremely varied and we should find great colourful patches of gentians, yellow pulsatillas and globe-flowers growing in some of the high alpine meadows as well as orchids, alpine butterworts and saxifrages. The attractive woodland contains plants such as alpine clematis, a purple aquilegia, wintergreens and the strange bird's nest and coral root orchids. We should see interesting ferns such as forked spleenwort, shrubby honeysuckles and, hopefully, the lady's slipper orchid. Other interesting plants include primulas, louseworts, Solomon's seals, dwarf pine and Pyrenean lily.

**The Birds** – The woodland near the hotel is home to black, green, grey headed and great spotted woodpecker together with the unusual and fascinating nutcracker with its distinctive call. On the alpine pastures are ring ouzel and the yellow-billed alpine chough. Crossbill, black redstart and goldcrest are commonly seen.



**The Food** - The excellent food is based on South Tyrol's fine traditional cuisine and only pure, natural ingredients are used. There is always a wonderful range of fresh food available plus some fine wines to try. The breakfast table is remarkable with its range of fresh fruits, dried fruits, local breads, cheeses and ham as well as yoghurts and preserves. Cakes are

Waltraud Scherlin's specialty and you can even order a *Sachertorte* to take home. On one or two evenings we are allowed into the kitchens so that we can choose which type of home made pasta to have with our meals. Puddings are fabulous too. The family does not want you to go hungry!

## ITINERARY

**Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June** - We fly from Stansted airport to Milan/Bergamo airport where we are met and transferred to our hotel. The journey will take us through some spectacular scenery as we follow the River Adige as it winds its way through orchards and vineyards and then gradually up to the mountains. We will stop for a coffee en route.

**Wednesday** - Our first full day is a leisurely one as we walk straight from the hotel for a short walk on easy paths through woodland. We come to a clearing and this is a good spot to look for nutcrackers flitting among the pine trees. We should also find many interesting plants including hepatica, wintergreen and, the lovely pale blue alpine clematis twining over shrubs. We return to the hotel for a light lunch and on our way back look for the lady's slipper orchid, which grows just outside the grounds. After lunch we go out again for another walk taking a different path.

**Thursday** - Today we catch the local bus, which comes right up to the hotel door and takes us to the nearby cable car. We spend the day walking through hay meadows, woodland edge and alpine pastures which are around 1000ft above the hotel. Cars are no longer allowed up here so it is very quiet and peaceful. We have seen ring ouzel in this area. The hotel owners are quite happy for us to take some food from the breakfast table so we take a picnic with us today but there is plenty of opportunity to stop for a coffee. The alpine plants rely totally on grazing by the lovely, gentle looking cows which will be on some of the pastures. The landscape is so important that the government heavily subsidizes this system. Fantastic views all around.

**Friday** - We walk from the hotel through the woods crossing bridges over rushing streams and down to the village of Seis (or Suisi) with its wooden chalet houses and pretty onion-domed church. The village is one of South Tyrol's most historical resorts with tourism going back over 450 years. It was celebrated in medieval verse and was very popular during the late 19th century. On the way we pass a hotel that has a fairy tale look with turrets and the romantic ruined Castle Haustenstein. We then catch the local bus to **Vols** – a pretty village surrounded by orchards. There will be time to explore and have a cup of tea before catching the bus back.

**Saturday** – We are taken by minibus bus to **Bolzano**, an old trading town with elegant shopping streets, gourmet shops and stylish old arcades. There is a traditional food market on Saturday morning with local cheeses, fresh fruit and vegetables for sale. The town has many Gothic style buildings but has a smart Italian atmosphere. After lunch in the main square, we will visit the museum, which is now the home of the internationally famous 'ice-man' who has proved to be some 5,000 years old. For those who do not want to visit the museum there is a nice walk heading out of the town.

**Sunday** – We take another wonderful walk straight from the hotel. After crossing the Frommbach stream with a view of the surrounding villages we walk through the woods and then return home for lunch at the hotel. We have a free afternoon, which gives us time for a swim or sauna perhaps and then afternoon tea and cakes (!) before meeting up again in the evening.

**Monday** - For our last full day we visit the spectacular **Alpe di Suisi** (or Seiser Alm). We catch the local bus to the start of the cable car. We have a swift ride up to the higher pastures and will stop for a coffee before setting off on our walk. This wonderful place is the highest and largest alp (upland pasture) in Europe. The gently rolling fields lie just below the craggy peaks and provide a glorious contrast to them. We stop at an alpine hut and you may wish to sample the famous Alpine bacon and eggs for lunch if you haven't brought a picnic with you. We continue walking in this area for the rest of the afternoon before returning on the cable car and then catch the bus back home.

**Tuesday** - Today we say goodbye to the hotel and are transferred back to the airport for our journey home back to the UK.

## Important Holiday Information

**LEADERS:** Richard Hobbs is a freelance environmental consultant who has led many holidays for N & S Wildlife & Walking Holidays over the last 28 years. Sally has a lifelong love of wildflowers and is a keen gardener. Richard and Sally are both directors of the company.

We reserve the right to substitute a leader should this be necessary due to unforeseen circumstances and to alter the itinerary if weather conditions dictate.

**ACCOMMODATION** - What can we say about the hotel at Bad Ratzes? ("Bad" means spa). This amazing 3\* hotel is owned by two sisters - Frau Eva and Frau Waltraud and their niece Petra, who make us very welcome indeed. It offers an incredibly relaxing and comfortable atmosphere in beautiful surroundings. There is an open fireplace and spacious lounges, a bar and outside terrace together with a library with information on the region. The excellent food is based on South Tyrol's fine traditional cuisine and there is a very varied menu. The indoor swimming pool has fabulous views of the surrounding mountains. There are bowls of flowers everywhere. Rooms are very comfortable and en suite with mini bar, TV and safe and all have lovely views.

**WEATHER** - It should be warm and pleasant for walking. Average temperatures for June are 16°. Showers are always a possibility in mountainous areas and if this happens it is no hardship to return to the hotel for a dip in the (indoor) swimming pool with its wonderful views or perhaps try the sauna. It is easy to be tempted by afternoon tea and cakes in the library!

**TRANSPORT** - Herr Goller runs the local coach company and he will take us to Bolzano as well as transferring us to and from the airport. It is about 2½ hours from the airport to the hotel but it is a beautiful and interesting journey and we will stop en route for a leg stretch and a drink.

**GROUP SIZE** - 15 to 18 including 2 leaders.

**TRAVELLING ALONE** - Single travellers are most welcome on these specialist trips and a number of regular passengers have made friends over the years. The leaders make every effort to ensure that everybody is part of the group.

**FITNESS AND PATTERN OF THE DAY** - We walk between 4-6 miles daily, on tracks and paths, sometimes uphill. We expect to be back to the hotel about 5pm most days. The party will eat together each evening and there will be time to catch up on the day's events over a drink. All excursions are optional. Although there is some uphill walking this is not a strenuous holiday as our hotel is already situated at 1200m and we travel by bus to the high alpine meadows.

Please remember that this is an activity holiday. It will not be strenuous but we will be walking on country paths and tracks. Every effort has been made to check the walks but we cannot be held responsible for any accidents that occur unless caused by our negligence. Normal standards of fitness for country walking in Britain will be sufficient. Walking boots or stout shoes with ankle support and non-slip soles are strongly recommended.

This is a group holiday and for it to work well individuals need to abide by the leaders' authority. It is quite acceptable for anyone to opt out of a particular excursion provided the leaders are informed beforehand.

'Leave only footprints, take only photographs'. The leaders may pick the occasional wildflower for identification purposes, but generally we ask you not to do so in the interests of conservation.

**WHAT IS INCLUDED** - Seven nights accommodation on full board basis, return flights from Stansted to Milan/Bergamo airport with Ryanair, (20kg hold luggage included plus 10kg hand baggage. Flight times to be advised but in 2013 the flight left the UK at 1400hr) transfers to and from the airport, excursions as shown on the above itinerary and services of the leaders. You will be able to learn

about the environment of the area as we go through the week and you will be sent a list of the birds, butterflies and flowers upon our return.

**WHAT IS EXCLUDED** – Although we are on full board we may eat out at lunchtime one day so allow around an extra £5/6 if you would like to do this. Rather surprisingly, the hotel owners are very happy for us to take food from the breakfast table for a picnic. Insurance, drinks, items of a personal nature and entrance to museums etc. are not included.

Insurance is not included but it is essential that you take out insurance before the trip or we can suggest Global Travel Insurance Services Ltd, The Turret, 25 Farncombe Road, Worthing, W. Sussex, BN11 2AY. Tel no. 01903 235042. Email: enquiries@globaltravelinsurance.co.uk.

**PRICE:**

£1,399 (based on sharing a twin room)

Single room supplement - £30

Deposit - £300

**TO BOOK** – Please fill in the booking form and send to Sally Ward, 16 Witton Lane, Little Plumstead, Norwich, NR13 5DL together with your deposit cheque made payable to '*Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays*'. N & S Wildlife & Walking Holidays have set up this holiday but your contract is with Honeyguide, 36 Thunder Lane, Thorpe St. Andrew, Norwich, NR7 0PX. ATOL 3253.

**AFTER BOOKING WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?** - You will receive confirmation of your booking and a reminder of when the balance is due. A letter with details of what to take and recommended books etc. will be sent out about one month before travel.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS HOLIDAY PLEASE RING  
SALLY WARD ON 01603 717006**