

From Acerenza (Cathedral) to Palazzo San Gervasio (Church of Saint Roch) via the “Madonna su strada” shrine

A journey that brings together spirituality, art and nature, crossing hilly landscapes that tell centuries of faith and civilisation. Covering 25.4 kilometres, with an elevation gain of 470 metres uphill and 830 metres downhill, and an average duration of around 7 hours and 20 minutes, this challenging itinerary links the majestic Cathedral of Acerenza to the Church of Saint Roch in Palazzo San Gervasio, along ancient routes once travelled by pilgrims and wayfarers. The itinerary alternates paved, compacted and dirt sections, offering an extraordinary variety of scenery, from the heights of inland Lucania to the broad agricultural valleys of the Vulture area.

The walk starts in Acerenza, one of the most charming villages in Basilicata, listed among Italy's Most Beautiful Villages. Dominated by the Cathedral of Saints Mary of the Assumption and Bishop Canio, the ancient Acherontia reveals a medieval heart of rare charm, with stone alleyways and breathtaking views over the valleys of the Upper Bradano. The cathedral, built in the 11th century on the site of a pre-existing pagan temple dedicated to Hercules Acheruntinus, is a masterpiece of Romanesque-Norman architecture, enriched with Gothic influences. Its interior—solemn and filled with light—houses the 16th-century frescoed crypt and the sarcophagus of Saint Canio, the city's patron saint. Considered one of the most important Romanesque monuments in the Mediterranean, the Cathedral of Acerenza is a place where art, faith and myth merge into a single, powerful spiritual experience.



Figure 1. Cathedral of Saints Mary of the Assumption and Bishop Canio (Acerenza)

Leaving the village behind, the path opens out across golden hills, olive groves and oak woods, following ancient routes that for centuries connected the religious centres of the Upper Bradano area.

Halfway along the route lies the “Madonna su strada” shrine, a place of Marian devotion set within the rural landscape. The building, dating back to the seventeenth century, stands along an ancient transit route once used by pilgrims and travellers heading towards the shrines of southern Italy. Its isolated position, among fields and rolling hills, enhances its contemplative charm. Inside, a fresco depicting the Virgin and Child bears witness to a continuity of popular faith, handed down from generation to generation. The shrine is an ideal stopping point for prayer or for a quiet pause in the heart of nature.

Continuing towards Palazzo San Gervasio, the landscape opens into wide agricultural valleys, dotted with farmsteads, vineyards and wheat fields, until reaching the Church of Saint Roch, one of the most cherished places in the village. Built in 1753 at the behest of the Lacci family and later restored by the D'Errico family, the church is a refined example of Lucanian Baroque. Its elliptical plan and curved façade give the building a distinctive harmony, while inside the

polychrome marble altar stands out, crowned by the statue of Saint Roch, the work of the Potenza-born sculptor Michele Busciolano. After the earthquake of 1854, Camillo D'Errico promoted its restoration, transforming it into a family pantheon, now protected by the Camillo D'Errico Moral Institution. During the patronal feast, the statue of the saint is still carried in procession, renewing a centuries-old tradition that binds faith and community.



Figure 2. The “Madonna su strada” shrine

The route from Acerenza to Palazzo San Gervasio is an itinerary that brings together the profound spirituality of inland Lucania with the understated beauty of its rural landscapes. Every step tells of an age-old dialogue between humanity, nature and the divine, between the silence of the valleys and the stone of the churches that mark the way. It is an ideal journey for those seeking a slow, authentic and contemplative walking experience, in search of the faith, art and identity that make the Upper Bradano area unique. An itinerary where the land itself becomes prayer, and the landscape a place of the soul.



Figure 3. Church of Saint Roch (Palazzo San Gervasio)