

From Cancellara (Mother Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel) to Acerenza (Church of Saint Anthony of Padua and Convent of Saint Mary Magdalene) passing by the Acerenza Dam

A moderately difficult itinerary covering 18.7 kilometres, with an elevation gain of 560 metres uphill and 480 metres downhill, and an average walking time of around five and a half hours. The route crosses a hilly landscape of rare harmony, linking three emblematic places of Lucanian faith, art and ingenuity: the Mother Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Cancellara, the Acerenza Dam with its artificial lake, and the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua with the Convent of Saint Mary Magdalene in Acerenza.

The walk begins in Cancellara, an ancient village dominated by its medieval castle, where the Mother Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, built in the sixteenth century, stands close to the fortress. The church is distinguished by its sober façade, slender bell tower and an elegant, light-filled interior. Among its most significant works is the precious sixteenth-century painting of the *Our Lady of Grace*, an image of great devotional intensity and a symbol of the religious identity of the community. Around the church, stone alleyways and the remains of the fortified settlement preserve the atmosphere of the medieval town, accompanying the traveller through the first steps of the journey.



Figure 1. Mother Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Cancellara)

The path then winds through gentle hills and quiet valleys, following ancient grassy routes once used for transhumance, which historically linked inland Lucania with Apulia. Along the way, wheat fields, olive groves and small watercourses alternate, turning the landscape into a natural mosaic of colours and scents. At several points, the path opens onto evocative panoramic views over the Bradano valleys, where the slow rhythm of walking blends harmoniously with the tranquillity of the Lucanian countryside.

About halfway along the route, one reaches the Acerenza Dam, one of the most significant hydraulic works of modern Basilicata. Built in 1984 on the course of the River Bradano, the dam stands 55 metres high and is 760 metres long, creating the Acerenza reservoir, an artificial lake of great environmental and scenic interest. Its clear, calm waters stretch between woods, fields and clay hills, reflecting the changing colours of sky and land. Numerous animal species inhabit the surrounding area—wolves, otters, herons, red kites and honey buzzards—making it a true oasis of biodiversity. From the locality of *Il Maglio* there is a breathtaking panoramic view over the entire reservoir, an ideal spot for a contemplative pause or wildlife observation.

The walk then continues towards Acerenza, one of the most striking towns in Basilicata, dominated by its imposing Romanesque–Gothic cathedral. Just outside the town centre stands the Convent of Saint Mary Magdalene with the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua, founded in 1578 on a pre-existing medieval structure. Marked by great architectural sobriety, the complex

consists of a single-nave church with a barrel vault and a quadrangular cloister with a portico supported by pillars, which forms the spiritual heart of the convent. Inside are preserved important works of art, including a marble high altar dating from 1871, an eighteenth-century wooden Crucifix of Neapolitan school, and the evocative Museum of Carved Woods of the Di Trani family, housing over two thousand examples of rural and religious craftsmanship—precious testimony to Lucanian material culture.



Figure 2. Acerenza Dam

The itinerary from Cancellara to Acerenza thus unfolds as a journey through the culture of water and spirituality, where human ingenuity, devotion and nature coexist in harmonious balance. It is a walk among churches, lakes and silent hills, inviting reflection on the deep relationship between humanity and landscape, and between the memory of the past and the contemplative tranquillity of contemporary Basilicata.



Figure 3. Church of Saint Anthony of Padua and Convent of Saint Mary Magdalene (Acerenza)