

From Melfi (Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption) to Lavello (Church of Saint Anthony of Padua) via Lake Rendina

An itinerary that brings together history, nature and spirituality, linking two emblematic towns of the Vulture–Melfese area—Melfi and Lavello—and crossing landscapes of rare beauty such as those surrounding Lake Rendina. Covering 17.6 kilometres, with an elevation gain of 310 metres uphill and 540 metres downhill, and an average walking time of around five hours, this challenging route offers a richly evocative and rewarding experience. The trail alternates paved, compacted and unpaved sections, guiding the traveller through natural environments that shift gradually with the rhythm of the walk: from the hilly uplands of the Vulture to the fertile plains that herald the Ofanto valley. The walk begins in Melfi, the ancient Norman capital of Basilicata. The starting point is the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption, built at the behest of Robert Guiscard in 1076 (though some sources attribute its construction to 1153, under William I of Sicily). Today it has a predominantly Baroque appearance due to successive restorations, yet it still preserves a strong connection to its medieval origins in the Romanesque–Norman bell tower dating from 1153. The interior, laid out on a Latin cross plan with three naves, a gilded ceiling and an eight-sided pyramidal dome, welcomes visitors as a symbolic and spiritual point of departure.



Figure 1. Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption (Melfi)

Crossing the historic centre of Melfi, the walk winds through stone alleyways, ancient churches and Baroque palaces, where the scent of bread and wine mingles with the sounds of small markets. Leaving the town behind, the route opens onto a bright agricultural landscape of vineyards, olive groves and wheat fields, with the unmistakable silhouette of Mount Vulture in the background. After the first gentle hills, the trail reaches one of the most captivating sites in the Vulture–Melfese area: Lake Rendina. This artificial basin, created in the 1950s by the construction of a dam on the stream bearing the same name, is today a natural reserve of great environmental and scenic value. Its calm waters reflect the sky and the surrounding fields, creating an atmosphere of peace and profound stillness. The lake's shores are home to a rich birdlife: grey herons, little egrets, mallards and coots, as well as numerous migratory species that stop here during seasonal passages. According to legend, the lake takes its name from Rendina, an ancient settlement destroyed and submerged by the waters—its memory surviving in the tales of local farmers and in the aura of mystery that surrounds this place. Lake Rendina offers a natural pause for meditation and rest, where nature seems to speak through wind and silence. Skirting the lake, the path continues south-westwards through broad agricultural expanses and farmsteads that define the rhythm of the Lucanian countryside. The hills gradually soften, and the view opens out over the Ofanto valley, revealing a mosaic of fields and *masserie* bathed in light. The route follows farm roads and ancient transhumance routes,

bearing witness to the passage of shepherds, pilgrims and merchants who have travelled these ways for centuries.



Figure 2. Lake Rendina

With each season the landscape changes: the bright green of spring, the intense yellow of summer wheat, the reddish-brown of ploughed earth in autumn, and the silvery grey of olive trees in winter. This stretch of the walk that invites slowness and contemplation, encouraging the rediscovery of a deep balance between humanity and nature. The journey concludes at the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua, in the heart of Lavello's historic centre. Built in the sixteenth century beside the former Franciscan convent and originally dedicated to Saint Mary of Loreto, the church is a fine example of late Baroque art. Its interior, with a single nave and two chapels on each side, preserves eighteenth-century wooden statues, a frescoed dome and a semicircular apse restored in 1987. The façade, built of local stone, features a marble portal and a central rose window, and is flanked by a seventeenth-century bell tower with three tiers and clocks on each side. The adjacent convent and cloister continue a long-standing tradition of prayer and hospitality. Around the church, the streets of the old town come alive with voices, scents and colours: Lavello is a vibrant community where the rhythm of everyday life intertwines naturally with that of ancient traditions.



Figure 3. Church of Saint Anthony of Padua (Lavello)

The route from Melfi to Lavello is a journey that interweaves memory and landscape, spirituality and nature. From the historic streets of Melfi to the tranquil waters of Lake Rendina, and on to the sunlit alleyways of Lavello, each step reveals a fragment of history and a reflection of beauty. It is an ideal itinerary for lovers of cultural and nature-based trekking, as well as for

those seeking a slow, meaningful connection with the land, where every glance encounters the life of the earth and the enduring voice of the past.