

From Palazzo San Gervasio (Domus Federiciana) to Venosa (Unfinished Church) via the Notarchirico Archaeological Site

A walk through history, linking two emblematic sites of the Vulture Alto Bradano area: the restored Domus Federiciana of Palazzo San Gervasio, a splendid Swabian imperial residence, and the majestic town of Venosa, an ancient Roman city and birthplace of the poet Horace. The route, 20.4 kilometres long, with an elevation gain of 300 metres uphill and a descent of 340 metres and an average walking time of around five and a half hours, is classified as demanding. It follows paved roads, compacted tracks and unpaved paths, crossing cultivated fields, gentle hills and wide horizons that lead the traveller into the rural and historical heart of Basilicata.

The walk begins in Palazzo San Gervasio, home to the imposing Domus Federiciana, also known as the *Palatium Regium*. Following a careful restoration and enhancement programme as part of the *Fantastico Medioevo* project, the Domus is today one of the most fascinating examples of Frederick II's architectural legacy. Restored interior spaces, walkways and reconstructed rooms allow visitors to relive the atmosphere of the Swabian court in the thirteenth century.

Built at the behest of Frederick II of Swabia as a hunting lodge and representative residence, the Domus bears witness to the ingenuity and elegance of an era in which Basilicata stood at a crossroads of power and culture. Today, visitors can wander through the restored halls and discover a site that brings together history and architecture, reflecting the emperor's far-reaching vision.

Leaving the Domus behind, the route continues along rural roads and wheat fields, where the landscape opens out into a sea of rolling hills and, in the distance, the unmistakable silhouette of Mount Vulture.



Figure 1. Domus Federiciana (Palazzo San Gervasio)

Halfway along the route lies the archaeological site of Notarchirico, one of the most important prehistoric areas in Europe. Set within a landscape of rare beauty, the site has yielded fossil remains of elephants, hippopotamuses and rhinoceroses, together with stone tools fashioned by *Homo erectus*, dating back more than 600,000 years. Equipped with walkways and explanatory panels, the site allows visitors to understand the earliest origins of human presence in the Lucanian territory and offers a true journey through time, from the dawn of civilisation to the medieval age.

The walk then continues through broad agricultural expanses and gentle rises and dips, where the colours of the countryside change with the seasons: the fresh green of spring shoots, the yellow of ripened fields, and the ochre tones of ploughed earth in autumn. The silence of these landscapes, dotted with *masserie* and farmhouses, conveys the deep meaning of slow, contemplative walking, where every step becomes an encounter with nature and with the memory of the land.



Figure 2. Archaeological Site of Notarchirico

The route ends in splendid Venosa, one of the most historically and culturally rich towns in Basilicata. The route ends in front of the evocative Church of the Most Holy Trinity, built between the eleventh and twelfth centuries on the remains of an ancient Roman temple. Beside it stands the “new” church—left unfinished, one of the most extraordinary examples of incomplete medieval architecture in Italy: arches, columns and apses rise against the sky, creating a poetic dialogue between presence and absence, stone and light.

In the silence of the site, among Roman ruins and monastic remains, one senses the breath of Venosa’s millennia-old history, embracing different eras—from the Roman world of Horace to medieval spirituality—within a continuous weave of beauty and memory.

The route from Palazzo San Gervasio to Venosa is an extraordinary journey across millennia of history: from the origins of humankind to the imperial vision of Frederick II, and on to the classical legacy of Horace. It is an ideal itinerary for those seeking the cultural depth of Basilicata and the understated beauty of its landscapes.

Walking this route means treading the same ground where early humans fashioned tools, an emperor dreamed of knowledge, and a poet sang of the measure of life. It is an experience that brings together history, nature and spirituality, in a timeless dialogue between past and present.



Figure 3. Unfinished Church (Venosa)