

Wild and Holy: A 14-Day Pilgrimage Through Grief and Grace

This itinerary reflects the journey described in Wild and Holy—a grief pilgrimage across Italy. It offers a potential structure if you'd like to create a similar experience for yourself. Use it as a guide without pressure or expectation. May it serve as a useful companion as you create your own path through loss and grief..

Day 1 – Arrive in Rome

Sleep: Rome (Night 1)

- Land and settle in
- Visit Ancient Roman sites: Forum, Colosseum, Pantheon
- Evening *passeggiata* to ground yourself

Day 2 – Vatican City / St. Peter's Basilica

Sleep: Rome (Night 2)

- Optional visit to Vatican Museums and the Pietà
- Consider visit to Borghese Gallery, Trevi Fountain,

Novena Theme (1): *The Divine Feminine holds our grief; we are not alone*

Day 3 – Trastevere + Jewish Ghetto

Sleep: Rome (Night 3)

- Visit Santa Maria in Trastevere
- Walk through the Jewish Ghetto

Novena Theme (2): *We are part of the vast circle of grief: communal mourning unites us*

Day 4 – Travel to Florence

Sleep: Florence (Night 4)

- Walking tour of Florence
- Evening visit to Duomo

Novena Theme (3): *Grief echoes through history along with love, rebirth, Renaissance*

Day 5 – Florence Museums and Churches

Sleep: Florence (Night 5)

- Uffizi Gallery, Accademia (David),
- Piazzale Michelangelo, Santa Croce Church

Novena Theme (4): *Gratitude is a bridge that unites grief and joy; find gratitude for loss and longing*

Day 6 – Travel to Cinque Terre (Monterosso)

Sleep: Cinque Terre (Night 6)

- Arrive by train
- Take a walking tour of the village

Day 7 – Nature Walk + Contemplation

Sleep: Cinque Terre (Night 7)

- Hike between villages or a beach day
- Slow down and enjoy the beauty

Novena Theme (5): *Connect to nature as balm for grief; contemplate holding both joy and sorrow*

Day 8 – Travel to Siena

Sleep: Siena (Night 8)

- Take a walking tour of the city
- Explore historic center; view the unfinished wall of the Cathedral
- Relax in the Piazza del Campo

Day 9 – Basilica of San Domenico + St. Catherine

Sleep: Siena (Night 9)

- Follow the footsteps of St. Catherine
- Light a candle for buried guilt or grief

Novena Theme (6): *Explore the depths of grief (and guilt) and bring them to the light of awareness*

Day 10 – Travel to Cortona

Sleep: Cortona (Night 10)

- Visit Andrea Roggi's olive tree sculptures.
- Walk the path to the Church of St. Margaret

Novena Theme (7): *Reflect on grace and allow it to soothe guilt and self-blame*

Day 11 – Day trip to Assisi

Sleep: Cortona (Night 11)

- Explore Basilicas of St. Francis and St. Clare
- Visit the Porziuncola in Santa Maria degli Angeli

Novena Theme (8): *Find forgiveness for all imperfections; allow grief and sorrow to be bathed in the light of love*

Day 12 – Travel to Sorrento

Sleep: Sorrento (Night 12)

- Tour Sorrento
- Enjoy the Old Town, shop for lemons
- Rest in the coastal breeze

Day 13 – Visit Pompeii

Sleep: Sorrento (Night 13)

- Take the Circumvesuviana Train to Pompeii
- Following a walking tour through the ruins to learn the history and see the most important sites (e.g. Rick Steves' Audio Guide)

Novena Theme (9): *Return to Divine love holding all grief and carrying it with us; find grace and gifts even in tragedy*

Day 14 – Return to Rome or Naples + Departure

Sleep: Optional – Rome or Naples (Night 14)

- Enjoy a Neapolitan pizza
 - Fly home from either city
 - Carry the journey within you
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Notes:

- You may reverse the order, shorten or expand the time in each place.
 - Create your own Novena prayers using the guide below, which is excerpted from the Appendix in *Wild and Holy*
 - Choose your own location for each Novena prayer—whatever calls to you
 - This is not a tourism checklist but a grief pilgrimage. Take your time.
 - I used Rick Steves Italy Guide Book and Audio Tours to plan my trip and found them very helpful
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A Personal Novena for Healing and Release

The following nine-day ritual is offered as a guide for those carrying unspoken grief or hidden guilt. You might choose to practice it over nine days, or take each day as it comes, in your own time. You'll find reflections, simple practices, and short prayers designed to help you on this journey into the darkness to retrieve the light.

Begin wherever you are, with whatever you have, and consider using a journal to reflect each day. May love carry you the rest of the way.

Day 1 – Create a Sanctuary for Your Grief

Establish a sacred space for your ritual. This might be a small table, corner of a room, or outdoor setting. Include objects that feel grounding or meaningful: photos, a candle, a smooth stone, a journal, dried flowers—whatever gets you in touch with your grief.

Ritual: Build an altar or “grief corner” and return to it each day, even briefly. Light a candle if it feels right.

Prayer:

Guide me through this journey. Let me feel held as I remember what has been lost. Let this space be a container for sorrow and love.

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Day 2 – Mourn What Has Been Lost

Acknowledge the people, places, relationships, or dreams that have ended—those named and unnamed. Include collective losses as well: climate grief, injustice, mass death, ancestral suffering.

Ritual: Bring a flower to a memorial site, or release petals into flowing water. Name the losses aloud or in writing.

Prayer:

Bring peace to all who carry grief alongside me. Let my mourning join the great river of remembrance that flows through time.

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Day 3 – Look to the Sky: Grief Is a Cosmic Law

Lift your gaze. Let the sky, stars, or vastness above remind you that grief is not solitary or out of place—it is part of the cosmology of love.

Ritual: Watch the stars. Light a lantern. Recite the names of your ancestors. Lay under the sky and weep.

Prayer:

Heal me, and heal those who came before me. Let this grief be a ripple of love stretching across generations.

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Day 4 – Practice the Five Gratuities

Gratitude and grief are twins. They arrive together, aching and holy. Reflect on five things you're grateful for—especially those that feel tangled with loss.

Ritual: Journal your responses to these:

- 1 Life
- 2 Love
- 3 Laughter
- 4 Loss
- 5 Longing

Prayer:

Let gratitude arise even in darkness. Help me embody thankfulness as a companion to my sorrow, and share it gently with others.

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Day 5 – Connect with the Healing Power of Nature

Let the natural world support your nervous system. Let trees, stones, water, and sky absorb what you can't carry alone.

Ritual: Walk barefoot. Hug a tree. Watch the sun set. Sit with your back to a stone wall. Rest under the sky and let the wind speak.

Prayer:

Infuse every cell and atom of my being with your calm, life-giving presence. Let me call upon you when the world feels too heavy.

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Day 6 – Gaze into the Shadow

Turn toward what you’ve hidden—the shame, the pain, the broken places that have not yet been seen or named. Meet them in the soft light of love, not judgment.

Ritual: Sit in silence with a journal. Write what you’re afraid to speak. Light a candle in the dark.

Prayer:

Illuminate the places I’ve buried. Let your light reach into my shadow and show me what still longs to be held.

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Day 7 – Face the Voice of Guilt with Compassion

If guilt arises—whether rational or not—let it surface. Hold it with kindness. You are not here to punish yourself. You are here to heal.

Ritual: Write your guilt on a piece of paper, then tear or burn it. Or release a leaf or flower into flowing water with the words: I release you.

Prayer:

Grant me the courage to release self-blame. Let guilt be alchemized into love, and love into action.

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Day 8 – Practice Radical Forgiveness

Let go of how your mind says it should have been. Forgive what cannot be changed. Offer the same mercy to yourself that you would to someone you love.

Ritual: Practice Ho'oponopono for yourself:

I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I love you. Thank you.

Prayer:

Let forgiveness rise like water over stone. Let me receive my own tenderness with open hands.

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Day 9 – Return with Love

You are not the same person who began this ritual. Let your grief become a blessing for the world. Let your transformation ripple outward.

Ritual: Write a blessing from your new self to the self who began this journey. Keep it on your altar. Read it aloud.

Prayer:

Let me carry this love-soaked grief into the world as a quiet offering. May it bless those I meet. May it continue the healing.