

# THE BEST OF ITALY

## 14 DAYS



You begin your Italian journey when you arrive in the “Eternal City” of Rome; whether you are returning for another visit or exploring this city for the first time, it is a moving experience.

You travel northward through the villages of Tuscany; and take to the air as you float over the rolling countryside in a hot air balloon. In Florence, you spend one afternoon in local markets shopping for the various ingredients you will use in your cooking class.

You stay at the renowned Gritti Palace overlooking the Grand Canal in Venice and enjoy delicious Venetian seafood for dinner. Drive through the lake district of northern Italy and relax at the renowned Villa d’Este overlooking Lake Como. And there is time for shopping in the upscale boutiques of Milan before it is time to fly back home.

### BALLOONING IN TUSCANY

- Each departure limited to 16 guests
- Luxury hotels or best in each location
- 26 à la carte meals (table d’hôte, if unavailable) including beverages of your choice
- Professionally escorted
- All sightseeing, including entrance fees and special events as indicated in the itinerary
- Arrival and departure transfer by private car
- All gratuities included (also your tour manager’s)
- Portage of 2 suitcases per passenger
- Airport departure taxes

#### DAY 1 – (Tuesday)

##### USA – ROME

Depart USA for your overnight flight to Rome.

#### DAY 2 – (Wednesday)

##### ROME

Upon your arrival at Rome’s DaVinci Airport, you are met and go by private car to your hotel – the **Hotel Excelsior** on the Via Veneto. The most glamorous hotel in the Eternal City with its elegant high ceilings, rich paneling, and glistening

chandeliers is just minutes away from the Borghese Gardens. The afternoon is free for your leisure although your tour manager will be in the lobby to answer your questions and to offer suggestions. Join your tour manager and travel companions for a private cocktail party with à la carte dining later this evening at a restaurant in our hotel. (D)

#### DAY 3 – (Thursday)

##### ROME

This morning you begin your tour of the ancient city – you visit the Roman Forum (once the political and business center of the world), the Hippodrome, the imposing Colosseum, the Arch of Constantine, the 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Roman Baths, the Pantheon, and Trevi fountain, just to name a few. Relax with a coffee or a Campari at one of the street-side cafes this afternoon to plan your shopping itinerary or stroll through the huge expanse of



Spanish Steps, Rome



Swiss Guards, Vatican

gardens, groves, and walkways of the Borghese Gardens to see the superb art collection housed in the Borghese Gallery.

This evening, at **Sabatini** in the old district of Trastevere, you make your dinner selections from such traditional Roman favorites as fettuccine alla romana, tonnarelli with arugula and garlic oil, spaghetti alla carbonara, or saltimbocca. (B,D)

#### DAY 4 – (Friday)

##### ROME

You continue your exploration of Rome – richer in masterpieces than any city in the world – this morning. You visit St. Peter's (the largest church in the world, covering 3 ½ acres), the Vatican museums, the Sistine Chapel, and the Basilica of St. John Lateran. You journey along the most famous of all Roman roads – the Via Appia Antica, built in 312 BC – to the Catacombs. In the distance, you notice the ruins of one of the great aqueducts that brought water to the city for centuries.

There is time to go shopping along the Via Condotti (at the foot of the Spanish Steps) where you find Gucci, Ferragamo and Bulgari boutiques, or on the Via Borgognona, which has offerings from Fendi and Gianfranco Ferré. If you are looking for antiques, stop by the Via del Babuino, the Via Margutta, or the Via Julia. Tonight, you dine à la carte at a local restaurant. (B,D)

#### DAY 5 – (Saturday)

##### ROME - SIENA

The countryside beckons; and today you leave Rome to journey northward through Tuscany to the charming village of Todi, with its three preserved sets of walls – Etruscan, Roman, and Mediaeval. Continuing on to Orvieto, we see another town built by the Etruscans with narrow, winding streets leading up to a remarkable view overlooking little houses with balconies and hanging flowers. In the heart of the town, on the Piazza del Duomo, you visit the impressive cathedral – a

## ACCOMMODATIONS

### Rome – Hotel Excelsior (3 nights), *Condé Nast Traveler Gold List '02*

The magnificent stucco palace on the Via Veneto is one of the world's classic hotels in 'Belle Epoque' style, a few minutes away from the gardens of the Villa Borghese and the Piazza di Spagna.

### Siena – Park Hotel (2)

The Park Hotel is your 16<sup>th</sup>-century villa in the beautiful Tuscan countryside – you see antique terracotta flooring, period furnishings, and splendid stone detailing.

### Florence - Hotel Excelsior (2), *Condé Nast Traveler Gold List '02*

A masterpiece in the "Renaissance City", the Excelsior is located on the banks of the Arno, in the heart of Florence and only a few minutes from the city's most legendary art treasures.

### Venice - Gritti Palace (2), *Condé Nast Traveler Gold List '02*

Directly on the Grand Canal, with an incomparable view of Venice, the early 16th-century palace of the Doge Gritti is now one of the world's most celebrated hotels.

### Lake Como - Villa d'Este (2), *Condé Nast Traveler Gold List '02, Leading Hotels of the World '01*

Set on the shores of Lake Como and surrounded by a 10-acre private park, this marvelous princely estate of the 16<sup>th</sup> century offers you an enchanting retreat from the busy world.

### Milan – Hotel Principe di Savoia (1), *Leading Hotels of the World '02*

The hotel dominates the Piazza Repubblica in Milan, offering legendary accommodations and a long tradition of elegance. Each guest room is reminiscent of Milanese-style spaces at the turn of the century, decorated with wood paneling and fabric wall coverings.

wonderful example of Italian Gothic, which required the combined talents of 33 architects, 152 sculptors, 68 painters, and 90 mosaicists. Construction of this building was started in 1290; it was modified and completed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

You stop in Todi for lunch and a coffee or some of the cool, fragrant wine for which this valley is famous. Upon your arrival in Siena later in the afternoon, you check into the **Park Hotel**, which is an adapted 15<sup>th</sup>-century villa set amidst the Marciano Hills. Your à la carte dinner is served on the veranda overlooking the gardens. (B,L,D)

#### DAY 6 - (Sunday)

##### SIENA

Sienna is believed to have been founded by sons of Remus; the town's coat

of arms includes a she-wolf and twins, which represents the legend of Romulus and his brother, Remus, nursed by a wolf when they were babies. This morning, you go to the unique shell-shaped Piazza del Campo; eleven streets lead into it. You stop at the massive 13<sup>th</sup>-century Palazzo Pubblico and its 286-foot-high Torre del Mangia for an incredible view from the top. You also visit the magnificent Cathedral with its multicolored striped marble façade, which dates from 1056. There is peace and elegance at every turn. This afternoon you glide across Tuscany by hot air balloon from which you view the hills and vineyards of the Tuscan countryside. Join your companions for an à la carte dinner at a local restaurant this evening. (B,L)



San Gimignano, Tuscany



Michelangelo's David, Florence

### DAY 7 – (Monday)

#### SIENA – FLORENCE

This morning you visit the charming 14<sup>th</sup> century village of San Gimignano - “of the fine towers” – 15 of its original 72 towers still guard the town. In the Middle Ages, noble families designed their own towers to be used as keeps during the battles. Each lord tried to outdo the other by building his tower as high as he possibly could. The narrow streets are lined with palaces and old houses encircled by ramparts.

After lunch, later in the day, you visit the impressive buildings of Pisa – once a republic in its own right. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, it was a very busy commercial port and competed with Genoa and Venice. Soldiers from Pisa joined the First Crusade in 1099. The city reached its height of power and influence in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, during which time the university was founded. Always known for its Leaning Tower, the city also has a very impressive cathedral and baptistry.

This evening you arrive in Florence, where you stay at the renowned **Hotel Excelsior**. Tonight, you dine in the **Il Cestello** restaurant with its stunning stained-glass windows and most tempting à la carte menu. (B,L,D)

### DAY 8 – (Tuesday)

#### FLORENCE

Today you tour the city of Florence, with its Renaissance churches, palaces, and plazas; it is a living museum – the essence of Italy. Growing from the banks of the Arno River around 200 BC, it was a prominent power in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>

centuries. Trades were organized in powerful guilds, a currency (the “Florin”) was established, and Florentine cloth was widely traded. It is here, in Florence, that the purest Italian is spoken today. You visit the Uffizi Museum and Gallery to see an extensive collection of paintings from the 13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. You go to the Duomo Cathedral and the Medici Palace.

This afternoon you participate in a cooking class! You have the opportunity to shop for ingredients in local markets like native Florentines, prepare the meal with the guidance of a master chef and then – the best part – sit down to enjoy the results of your attention to culinary detail. (B,D)

### DAY 9 – (Wednesday)

#### FLORENCE – VENICE

Your morning is at leisure; and early in the afternoon, you journey northward from Florence, pausing for a stop in Padua – home of one of the world’s great universities (founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century). Galileo was once a professor here. The school’s anatomy theater, dating from 1594, is perfectly preserved. Within the Scrovegni Chapel, we see a series of 38 frescoes painted by Giotto between 1304 and 1306 depicting the lives of the Virgin and Christ. You also visit the Saint’s Basilica, dedicated to St. Anthony.

Your drive continues to the incredibly fascinating city of Venice – archipelago of more than 100 islands connected by a seemingly endless number of footbridges. With the city’s original layout still intact, you imagine you might come face to face at almost any corner with a medieval gentleman clad in cape and tri-cornered hat. In the afternoon, you check into the



View from the Hotel Excelsior, Florence

distinguished **Hotel Gritti Palace** on the Grand Canal; and this evening you select from the à la carte menu at the restaurant there. (B,D)

### DAY 10 – (Thursday)

#### VENICE

Venice invites strolling down walkways and relaxing in cafes, made all the more enjoyable by the absence of motor vehicles. “*Horas non numero nisi serenas*” – “I count only the happy hours” – is inscribed on sundials here. You go to the Piazza San Marco to see St. Mark’s Cathedral, the Doges’ Palace, and the Bell Tower. You will visit the picturesque island of Murano to shop for original blown glass objects and the island of Burano for hand-made lace items to take home. Join your travel companions tonight at a local restaurant featuring such typical and delicious Venetian dishes as soft-shelled crabs, scallops, lobster, or

#### COOKING CLASS IN FLORENCE



Duomo, Florence

shrimp prepared with lemon and olive oil, seasoned with pepper and parsley, and risottos prepared in the Venetian style with seafood or local vegetables. (B,D)

**DAY 11 – (Friday)**

**VENICE – LAKE COMO**

After breakfast this morning, you bid your farewell to Venice and drive to Vicenza, with its wonderful architectural examples of the work of Andrea di Pietro (“Palladio”), the most eminent architect of Italian High Renaissance. His work is obvious in many of the houses – be sure to note #163 Corso Palladio, the city’s main street, which is a wonderful example of Palladio’s classic lines. You see the Basilica in the Piazza dei Signori, the more ornate Loggia Del Capitaniato, the Teatro Olimpico (thought to have been the first covered theater in Europe and still in use today), and La Rotonda, Palladio’s most famous villa. You have lunch in this fascinating city.

You then journey on to the historic city of Verona, (home of those two young people immortalized by Shakespeare). Its red, pink, and ochre-colored buildings, such a striking contrast to the surrounding cypress forests, made the city a favorite of the Roman emperors; and today, this city continues to be prosperous and elegant. You visit the market place in the Piazza delle Erbe (Square of Herbs), which is the former Roman forum where chariot races were run. Today it is a lively center with stalls of flowers, fruit, and vegetables.



St. Mark's Square, Venice

You travel through the province of Lombardy, catching glimpses of shiny lakes and lush green hills with mountains in the background. Upon your arrival in Cernobbio at Lake Como, you check into your lakeside hotel – the *Villa d’Este* – known worldwide for its elegance, exclusive accommodations, and vast gardens adorned with fountains, statuary, and grottos. Your à la carte dinner at the hotel this evening is served while you enjoy this splendid panorama. (B,L,D)

**DAY 12 – (Saturday)**

**LAKE COMO**

Today you have the entire day at leisure at this delightful resort along Lake Como, which is shaped like an upside-down Y. Its depth of 1,345 feet distinguishes it as the deepest lake in Europe. Of all the Italian lakes, Como has the most variety. There are olive, walnut, chestnut, fig, and mulberry trees along the shore; appealing villages, private villas, well-

tended gardens, and austere castles overlook it all. Sheer cliffs appear at some points along the shore, and the Alps afford a striking accent to the north. You visit an 18<sup>th</sup> century villa, “Villa Valbianello”, accessible only by boat. Como has been known for centuries as one of the most significant silk-producing and selling centers in the world. (B)

**DAY 13 – (Sunday)**

**LAKE COMO - MILAN**

After a short drive this morning, you are in the bustling city of Milan. Thought to be of Celtic origin, the Romans conquered the city in 222 BC. You visit the enormous white marble Duomo Cathedral, with its statues, intricate pinnacles, and belfries, which took more than 400 years to complete; Mark Twain described it as a “poem in marble”. Here, you also go to the world-famous opera house (*La Scala*) and to the Cenacolo Vinciano to see Leonardo da Vinci’s “Last Supper”. Visitors to Milan come for shopping and dining as well as to see the sights. Browsing in the “Golden Quarter” (Via Monte Napoleone, Via Spiga, and Via S.Andrea) is always enjoyable. Your hotel in Milan is the *Principe di Savoia* – the epitome of old-world opulence. This evening, join your companions for cocktails and a farewell dinner at a local restaurant where you can select from such local specialties as savory, thick soups, game dishes, delicate vegetables, and sweet wild strawberries for dessert. (B,D)

**DAY 14 – (Monday)**

**MILAN**

This morning, your journey comes to an end; and your tour manager escorts you to the airport for your flight home. (B)



Hotel Principe di Savoia, Milan

**DATES**

<b>Depart-TUE</b> (from USA)	<b>Return-MON</b>
Jun 15, 2004	Jun 28

**COST PER PERSON**

Land Portion (Double occupancy)	\$ 6,995
Single supplement	\$ 1,890
International Airfare (New York)	\$ 1,050

*All airfares are subject to availability and to change by the airlines. Cancellation penalties and surcharges may apply. Fares from other U.S. cities, as well as First and Business Class rates, are also available.*

**FOR RESERVATIONS, PLEASE TELEPHONE TOLL FREE: 1-888-377-8023**