



# **ITALY: LAKES & MOUNTAINS**

## with Victor Romagnoli

17 days

#### Day 1 Arrival in Venice

Today we arrive in Venice.

Today we arrive in Venice, "La Serenissima" -- the "Most Serene", as the city was called when it was a powerful maritime republic, queen of the eastern Mediterranean and Europe's gateway and entrepot for the wealth of trade coming from the Orient.

Overnight in Venice. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

## Day 2 Venice: St Mark's Square & Grand Canal

On our guided tour this morning we concentrate on St Mark's Square, surrounded with elegant, historic buildings. Napoleon called Piazza San Marco, "the drawing room of Europe". We start with a tour of the Doge's Palace. This former seat of Venetian power has the second largest wooden room in Europe. Of interest as we walk through the council rooms, is Tintoretto's Paradise over the Grand Council Chamber--alleged to be the largest oil painting in the world. The palace is connected to the old prison by the Bridge of Sighs. In the late 16th century the decision was made to build new airier prison cells to replace the original dark dungeons. It was from this "new" prison that Casanova made his daring escape across the rooftops in 1755.

We next visit St Mark's Basilica which is a Byzantine masterpiece. This cathedral was begun in 830 to house the tomb of St Mark whose relics were stolen from Alexandria in Egypt. The inside walls are encrusted with precious art, rare marbles and magnificent mosaics. Behind the altar is the famous gold altarpiece, "Palla d'Oro," which is one of the finest examples of gold craftsmanship. There will be time to stop for a coffee at the famous Cafe Florian situated on the piazza.

Later we take the vaporetto, or public water bus, along the Grand Canal and then walk along the maze of canals, sidewalks and bridges that are uniquely Venice. At the Rialto Bridge we visit the market area. The name Rialto derives from "high bank" because this area was one of the highest points on the approximately 120 small islands that make up the core of Venice. This meant that the area around the Rialto was a safe gathering point in times of flood. You will have time to visit the Accademia Art Museum or the Peggy Guggenheim Museum of Modern Art own your own, both of which are located on the Grand Canal, an aqueous main street unique in the world.

You will have free time this afternoon for independent exploration. Those who wish will have the opportunity to climb St Mark's bell tower for the best views of Venice. You could also visit the Accademia Art Museum or the Peggy Guggenheim Museum of Modern Art, located on the Grand Canal.

Overnight in Venice. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

## Day 3 Venice - Murano - Burano - Torcello - Venice

USA/ Canada 1-800-665-3998 United Kingdom 0114-247-3400 Today we travel by vaporetto (water bus) from Venice proper, past the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, to Murano island which is known internationally for its glass blowing industry. Originally, Venice's glass blowers had their studios in the heart of Venice, but frequent fires eventually caused them to be moved permanently to the island of Murano, at a safe distance.

Our second stop is at the picturesque island of Burano, famous not only for its lace but also for its fishermen's houses painted in bright colours. Then, after a short journey of about ten minutes we reach Torcello, the earliest centre of civilization in the estuary. Only the cathedral with its magnificent mosaics and the church of Santa Fosca remain as testimony of its former glory.

We return to Venice with the balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Venice. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

#### Day 4 Venice - Brenta Canal - Padua

Today, we have a guided boat trip along the Brenta Canal from Venice to Padua, visiting some of the Venetian villas, summer residences homes of the 16th century along the "Riviera del Brenta" with stops at the more grandiose palazzos with its legendary frescoes.

Once upon a time along this course sailed the "burchielli", boats that carried the Venetian nobles and the Patricians. Today all the boats that cruise along the Brenta Canal are called burchielli. This is a charming cruise that crosses 9 swing bridges and 5 locks, real "waterlifts" that raise or lower the water level the 10 metres between Venice and Padua.

Overnight in Padua. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

# Day 5 Padua - Vicenza

We begin our walking tour of Padua this morning with a visit to the towering Basilica of Saint Anthony, patron saint of lost things. With its minaret-like towers and byzantine cupolas, the structure is a blend of eastern and western elements and a focal point for a constant flow of pilgrims. When we step inside its precincts, we leave Italy and enter the Vatican State. This is the only Vatican property (apart from the Vatican City) in Italy that is extra-territorial. We continue on to the small Scrovegni Chapel, situated near the town centre. Here we view exquisite frescoes by Giotto, who led the way to the Renaissance by piercing the wall of two dimension and introducing perspective and humanism into painting in the fourteenth century.

For several centuries Padua was under the rule of the independent Venetian Republic, where the Catholic Church was unable to impose its censure. Thus the University of Padua developed as a crucial centre for learning and scientific inquiry, gaining the status of Free University and attended by luminaries from all across Europe. Here we visit a unique structure, Europe's oldest permanent anatomy theatre built in 1594, with viewing balconies so narrow that when students fainted they would be prevented from falling. After a short walk from the university we come to the Piazza Bo, the scene of one of the liveliest daily markets in Italy.

This afternoon, we travel by road to nearby Vicenza.

Overnight in Vicenza. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

#### Day 6 Vicenza & Environs

Our day begins with a fascinating walking tour of the city of Vicenza, a city that Andrea Palladio transformed with his imposing civic buildings, basilica and aristocratic residences. As we stroll around the streets of Vicenza, we'll discuss the life and times of Palladio and the influences that helped to create his unique form of architecture.

Along with Palladio's Basilica, the highlight of our time in Vicenza will be a visit to the Teatro Olimpico, one of the purest creations of Renaissance architecture in Italy and a perfect miniature version of a Roman theatre.

From Vicenza, we travel by bus down scenic back roads through the beautiful countryside of rural Veneto to see some of Palladio's country villas. Hidden away down country roads, these villas will help give you a full impression of Palladio's work as a villa architect.

We hope to be able to visit Palladio's first villa project; the Villa Godi, as well as one of his most famous, the Villa Rotonda. (Entry to these properties depends on ever-changing opening hours.)

Overnight in Vicenza. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

## Day 7 Vincenza - Belluno - Cortina d'Ampezzo

Today we travel by road to Cortina d'Ampezzo via Belluno.

Belluno is surrounded by mountains and lies on the Piave River. It's a charming town -- a beautiful setting. The town's origins are pre-Roman. The Piazza del Duomo is a lovely square with the cathedral/duomo (16th century) and bell tower/campanile by Juvara offers great views. Inside the duomo are two fine altarpieces and paintings by Bassano/Jacopo da Ponto. Also in the square are the Renaissance Palazzo dei Rettori and the Palazzo dei Vescovi. We stop in at the cloister of the Chiesa di Santo Stefano, a Gothic church. The Piazza del Mercato is a wonderful square with a pretty fountain dating back to the 15th century.

We continue to Cortina, host to the 1956 Winter Olympics and one of Italy's most elegant Tyrolean villages, surrounded by the impressive Dolomite mountains.

Overnight in Cortina d'Ampezzo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

## Day 8 Cortina - Bolzano

This morning's drive takes us into the heart of the Dolomites for some extraordinary alpine scenery. We arrive, this afternoon, in Bolzano. Bolzano, or Bolzen, was actually a part of Austria for longer than it was a part of Italy. It was annexed by the counts of Tyrol in 1278, and the area became a favourite watering hole for the Hapsburgs. In 1948 it was handed over to Italy. Although Bolzano was inundated with Italian language and culture, its heart has remained Austrian.

Upon arrival in Bolzano we visit the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology with a fascinating exhibition of the mysteries of L'Uomo venuto dal ghiaccio, or Iceman. Over 5000 years ago, a man climbed up to the icy heights of the Schnalstal glacier and died. He was found by accident in 1991, with his clothes and equipment, mummified and frozen: an archaeological sensation and a unique snapshot of a Copper Age man. The Museum has models, reconstructions, stereoscopic pictures, videos and interactive multimedia stations allow the visitor to gain insight into the ancient past of the southern Alpine.

USA/ Canada 1-800-665-3998 United Kingdom 0114-247-3400 We finish with a walking tour of Bolzano, with plenty of Tyrolean architecture, winding streets, outdoor cafes and restaurants that create a charming, picturesque atmosphere. The town's small historic center is known as Piazza Walther, or Waltherplatz (like the streets, many of the restaurants go by two names, Italian and German).

Overnight in Bolzano. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

### Day 9 Bolzano - Merano - Bolzano

For more than 150 years, Merano has been a popular holiday and vacation destination in all four seasons of the year. It is a town full of magnificent buildings, relaxing spas, and shops displaying traditional South Tyrolean products.

We make a day trip to Merano from Bolzano. Merano was the birthplace of the Tyrol Counts. The Tyrol Count castle is a 30 minute walk from the little village of Tyrol (3.7 km from Merano), and is one of the most representative monuments in the whole region.

In Merano, we can do some easy walking along a lovely riverside trail before returning to Bolzano later in the afternoon.

Dinner is on your own this evening.

Overnight in Bolzano. Meal plan: Breakfast.

## Day 10 Bolzano - Verona

We depart for Verona, the setting for Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'. With its pink marble Roman structures and rose-painted buildings, Verona is one of Italy's most appealing towns. The town contains many Roman ruins, including the first century Arena now used as Verona's opera house, the third largest such structure in existence. The Teatro Romano is often used for the performance of plays, particularly those of William Shakespeare.

Overnight in Verona. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

## Day 11 Verona: City Tour

Our walking tour of Verona starts at the Piazza Bra, the centre of Veronese life. We wander the rosy-hued streets admiring the palaces, townhouses and churches. We see the Gothic mausoleum of the Scaligeri rulers of 13th and 14th century Verona. We also visit the family's fortified residence on the River Adige and a bridge named after them. We also visit the marvelous Romanesque church of Saint Zeno, the city's patron saint.

Overnight in Verona. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

### Day 12 Verona - Bergamo - Lake Como Area

We travel by road to Lake Como via Bergamo Alto, a medieval gem only reachable by a steep "Funiculare". Lake Como (Lago di Como) is one of the famous Italian Lakes destinations, not far from Milan. The lake is long (50 km), slender and extremely deep. The southern end forks into two long 'legs', with the picturesque town of Bellagio situated on the promontory between them. Like the other Italian Lakes, Lake Como has been popular as a resort since the days of the Roman Empire.

USA/ Canada 1-800-665-3998 United Kingdom 0114-247-3400

Overnight in Como. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

### Day 13 Lake Como Area

Framed against a delightful backdrop of awesome mountains and tree covered hills, Lake Como is renowned for its peace and serenity. The towns and villages which surround the water's edge echo a bygone age and azure skies reflect in the gently rippling deep blue majesty of the lake. We have a scenic drive along the southern banks of the lake to the town of Como itself. Here we visit the elegant main square, Piazza Cavour, and the stunning 14th century cathedral, a mix of Gothic and Renaissance styles.

A ferry ride across Lake Como places us in exquisite Varenna. We'll walk its beautiful lakeside promenade before setting out on peaceful trails to quaint Bellano and the Bellano gorge, echoing with a thunderous cascade.

Overnight in Como. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

## Day 14 Lake Como - Lago Orta - Lago Maggiore

We depart Como for Stresa on Lago Maggiore, but first we'll stop at nearby Lago Orta for a walk along its pristine shores and a boat ride to the island of San Giulio. There we'll visit the medieval basilica dedicated to Saint Giulio, who is said to have liberated the island from dragons in the 5th Century!

Lake Maggiore (or Verbano) is a lake basin of northeastern Piedmont which borders with Lombardy and Switzerland, and the second largest among Italian lakes after Lake Garda.

Overnight in Lago Maggiore. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

## Day 15 Lago Maggiore Area

This morning we take a boat to the Isole Borromee, a group of small islands in the lake.

In 1670 Count Vitaliano Borromeo started construction of the monumental baroque palace, and began to landscape the majestic scenery of the gardens for which the island became so famous, and which today still bear witness of the splendours of that bygone age. The stately Borromeo residence contains priceless masterpieces: tapestries, furniture, and paintings by great masters. The gardens bloom with every variety of trees and rare flowers which, in their succession of ornate terraces, provide a classic, inimitable example of the celebrated "Italian garden" of that period.

Isola dei Pescatori, Fishermen's Island, owes its name to the activity of its inhabitants. The fascination of this island lies in the archaic simplicity and the rustic nature of its houses and narrow streets. Isola Madre is the largest of the Borromeo islands and the most characteristic one, with its atmosphere of the silence, meditation and enchantment: a garden of exotic plants and flowers where white peacocks, parrots and pheasants, lend the charm of a tropical island.

Overnight in Lago Maggiore. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

# Day 16 Lago Maggiore - Milan

USA/ Canada 1-800-665-3998 United Kingdom 0114-247-3400

Today we travel to the cosmopolitan city of Milan. Milan is believed to have been founded by Celtic tribes who settled along the Po River in the 7th century BC. In 222 BC, Roma marched into the territory, defeated the Gallic and occupied the town as it had a key position on the trade route between Roma and North Western Europe, ensuring its prosperity. Milan has a varied history, ranging from the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, to Napoleon who, in 1797, made Milan the capital of his Cisalpine Republic. It was occupied by Austrian troops who were eventually crushed by Victor Emmanuel II and Napoleon III's troops at the Battle of Magenta in 1859 and then incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy.

On arrival we will visit the Cathedral and Castello Sforzesco (possibly Il Cenacolo Vinciano - Da Vinci's "Last Supper", if time permits and space is available as reservation space is very limited). Tonight we have our last supper at a local osteria.

Overnight in Milan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

### Day 17 Departure

Departure from Milan.

BUON VIAGGIO! Meal plan: Breakfast.

USA/ Canada United Kingdom 1-800-665-3998 0114-247-3400