

ITALY FAMILY TOUR

Culture, Food & Fun!

13 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Rome

Today we arrive in Rome and transfer to our hotel.

Few cities in the world are as beautiful as Rome, and few are as glamorous. The Eternal City's ancient monuments and spectacular galleries are looking more magnificent than ever after an extensive restoration program.

Overnight in Rome.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Rome: Colosseum & Spanish Steps

This morning we visit the famous Colosseum, the biggest and best attraction in Rome, and its gory history is part of its charm. Kids will love the idea of gladiators slugging it out, spectacles of hungry lions ready to pounce, mock sea battles. If your kids have gotten into ancient Italian architecture, the Colosseum has it all--Doric, Ionian and Corinthian columns and plenty of room to run around.

In the afternoon we continue to the famous Spanish Steps and the Trevi Fountain, designed by Nicola Salvi in 1732. Its water was supplied by one of Rome's earliest aqueducts. Throwing a coin into the fountain is supposed to ensure your safe return to Rome!

We walk from the Spanish Steps to the Borghese Gardens. We start at the Piazza di Spagna, and head up the steps to the square in front of the Trinita dei Monti church. We'll be in good company with lots of Roman families. You can rent roller blades and bikes, or ride the bumper cars. The Cinema dei Piccoli is a charming little theater in the gardens that shows children's movies in the afternoon.

NOTE: As much of our Rome sightseeing can be accomplished on foot, and because we want to reduce our carbon output, we will not have a private bus today. Where necessary, we will make use of Rome's excellent and efficient metro system. When in Rome...

Overnight in Rome. Breakfast and

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Rome: St Peter's Basilica

This morning we visit St Peter's Basilica.

St Peter's Basilica--it's BIG! The size of this cathedral is impressive, and to get a good idea of just how big it is, we walk down the Piazza San Pietro to get the full effect of a grand entrance. Inside the basilica, we can climb up the dome (or take the elevator). Looking down on the city of Rome is just breathtaking. Michelangelo took over the St Peter's project in 1547 and was responsible for the design of the dome. The cavernous interior, which can hold up to 60,000 people, contains many treasures including Michelangelo's Pieta.

Those with the energy can climb waaaay up to the top for a stupendous view of Rome.

Overnight in Rome.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Rome - Siena: Walking Tour

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Today we travel by train to Siena, queen of Tuscany's hill towns (we may have to change trains at one point).

On arrival we check in to our hotel, break for lunch, and then enjoy Siena on a walking tour. Indeed, the Siena city council was Europe's first to ban motor traffic from the city centre. Siena today seems frozen in time; the town has traditionally been Florence's rival as the centre of art and architecture in Tuscany. While Florence is known for its Renaissance art and buildings, Siena takes us straight back to the Middle Ages. Perhaps by preserving its original character more than any other city in Italy, Siena is a showcase of the Italian Gothic style. The walled city of Siena occupies three hill tops and contains a rich artistic heritage.

Included on our guided walking tour of Siena's charming medieval streets and squares is a visit to the Duomo. This huge cathedral, built in bands of black and white marble, dates from the 12th century. Built in the Romanesque and Italian Gothic styles, it has a dramatically painted façade -- partly designed by Giovanni Pisano -- and a soaring black and white bell tower. The inlaid marble floor depicts different Biblical scenes and the cathedral contains a glass-enclosed box with an arm. Tradition maintains that the arm is that of John the Baptist and was used to baptize Christ.

Overnight in Siena.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Siena & San Gimignano

This morning we drive to San Gimignano, called the Manhattan of Tuscany. The medieval town preserves 13 of its noble brick towers, which give it a skyscraper skyline. Today its fortresslike severity is softened by the subtlety of its quiet, harmonious squares, and many of its places and churches are enhanced by Renaissance frescoes. San Gimignano is also famous for the "world's best gelatto."

Our drive this afternoon back to Siena takes us through the wine producing region of Chianti.

This afternoon is yours to explore on your own.

Overnight in Siena.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Siena - Volterra - Pisa - Monterosso

Today we depart Siena by private bus and drive through beautiful and quintessential Tuscan rolling countryside to Volterra. Situated like many Etruscan cities on a high plateau, Volterra offers uninterrupted views over the surrounding hills. In many places the town's ancient Etruscan walls still stand. The exact origins of the Etruscans and when they arrived in Italy, are unknown. Volterra has more recently become famous for its role in the Twilight series of books and films.

We stop in Pisa where we will spend most of our time concentrating on the town's principal monuments -- the Duomo and the Baptistery, and, of course, the most famous structure in Pisa, the gravity-defying "Leaning Tower" where Galileo carried out his experiments into the speeds of falling objects. We will take ample time to view and photograph the tower; advance reservations allow us to avoid long lines for entry into the tower itself.

We continue to Monterosso,* the first of the famous "Cinque Terre," five villages famous for the beautiful walks overlooking the deep blue sea. We have the balance of the day free to enjoy the village and spend time on the beautiful beach, located next to a huge statue carved into the cliffs.

* NOTE: On some departures, especially July (high season), we may spend these two nights in nearby Lerici instead of Monterosso. Hotels in the Cinque Terre are often booked far in advance in summer, or they require a minimum one-week stay. If we stay in Lerici, our access to the Cinque Terre (15 minutes away by train), is still very pleasant and convenient.

Overnight in Monterosso (or Lerici).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Cinque Terre Hike

Today we have an easy-paced walk between the rugged coastal villages of the Cinque Terre ('Five Lands'). It is a short jaunt to neighbouring Vernazza, where we can pause for some exploration before picking up the trail again for some fantastic views looking back at Vernazza. The next stretch to Corniglia is the longest (about 1.5 hours), with an undulating trail and lots of vistas. Corniglia is often our lunch spot and maybe the farthest we want to walk. Our pass includes a train ticket that can take us to Manarola, from where we can enjoy the short but famous Via D'Amore -- Lover's Walk -- to Riomaggiore.

Our day offers some flexibility whereby travellers not so keen on walking can opt out on certain sections, explore on their own, and meet up with the group later using their all-day train tickets.

Overnight in Monterosso (or Lerici).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Monterosso - Florence

This morning we depart by train for Florence. After checking in to our hotel, we head to the the biggest "must see": the Duomo. After touring the interior, we can climb up to the top of the dome of the Duomo for a panoramic view of this bella citta.* The cupola is an architectural tour de force. In the 15th century nobody had put such a big dome onto a cathedral, and skeptics thought it would fall down. Hundreds of years later, the dome of the Duomo is one of the cherished landmarks in Florence.

* Optional cost 8 Euros. We may set aside time elsewhere in our program if there is a long queue for entry today.

Overnight in Florence.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Florence: Santa Maria del Fiore

Today we tackle the inside of the cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore. Look for the fresco by Michelino, that has Dante in his stocking feet, showing off an open book, the Divine Comedy. Behind Dante on the left is a wedding cake topped by Adam and Eve and other poor people in purgatory, and on the right, a surrealistic scene of the Duomo itself.

If the kids still need to run off a little energy, climb up to the top of the Giotto Campanile (bell tower) next door. Bring your binoculars to look at the incredible mosaics in the ceiling of the Baptistry. The scenes of Hell show the devil with horns and snakes coming out of his ears, purple demons and green newts. We also visit the Accademia to see Michelangelo's statue, David.

During our time in Florence we will also visit the Leonardo da Vinci Museum which hosts reproductions of the largest and most intriguing machines taken from Leonardo da Vinci's designs. They were built through careful study of Leonardo's drawings and work to a perfection that has never before been achieved. This is a hands-on museum where visitors can actually play with the models and see up close how they work.

The famous food of Florence is gelato (ice cream). Florence lays claim to the invention of gelato by Bernardo Buontalenti, who made it for, who else, the Medicis. Stop at gelaterias often and sample the selection.

Overnight in Florence.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Florence - Venice

This morning we travel by train to Venice (2 hours).

From the 13th-15th centuries, Venice was one of the most luxurious cities in Europe, and a great trading empire with the Middle East -- Marco Polo was 17 years old when he left Venice to sail to Asia. Today Venice is still a city like no other.

Depending on train times, we will likely be able to accomplish an orientation stroll after settling in to our hotel.

Overnight in Venice.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Venice: St Mark's & Campo San Polo

This morning we embark on a walking programme. Before we enter St Mark's Basilica, you might want to climb up the Bell Tower (Campanile) in the Piazza. From the bell tower you'll get a bird's eye view of Venice, and the pigeons in the square down below.

Inside the murky shadows of the basilica, look for yards of exquisite mosaics adorned with gold and the Pala d'Oro altar panel, decorated with thousands of garnets, rubies, pearls and sapphires. We can climb up onto the porch of the church to see replicas of the four life-size bronze horses, brought from Constantinople in the 13th century. (The original horses are in the museum in the basilica). These horses really got around--in 1797 the French carried off the horses, but returned them to Venice a few years later.

Break time takes us to Campo San Polo--this is the biggest square in Venice where kids will be in good company with all the other Italian kids who come to play.

Overnight in Venice.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Venice: Murano

This morning we take a boat to see Venetian glass-blowers at work on the island of Murano. We tour glass blowing workshops and watch these master glassblowers take a glowing lump and turn it into glassware. We stop into the Museo Vetrario (Glass-making Museum) to see wild and colourful glass creations over the centuries (don't miss the marriage cup with portraits of the bride and groom in glass).

This afternoon is yours to enjoy Venice.

Overnight in Venice.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Departure

Departure from Venice.

BUON VIAGGIO!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast