Tour Code
IT7

ADVENTURESABROAD

NORTHERN ITALY

From Empire to Renaissance

10 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Rome

Welcome to Rome, the Eternal City,.

Rome announces itself before you've quite arrived — the dome of St. Peter's above the roofline, the density of history pressing in from every direction. After transferring to your hotel, we gather this evening for our first dinner together: the beginning of a journey through the arc of what Italy gave the world, from the empire that built the roads to the city that reinvented beauty.

Overnight in Rome.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Rome: City Tour

We begin at the Colosseum, where 55,000 spectators once roared as gladiators fought for survival above a labyrinthine underground of trapdoors and animal pens. Still dominating the cityscape nearly 2,000 years on, it unsettles as much as it impresses — because it was designed to. We then walk through the Roman Forum, heart of ancient civic life, where the Curia housed the Senate and the Arch of Titus commemorated the sacking of Jerusalem in AD 70. Among weathered columns and temple foundations, we stand at the physical centre of an empire that shaped Western civilisation.

Ascending to Capitoline Hill, we reach the Campidoglio — Rome's original citadel, redesigned by Michelangelo in the 16th century with the kind of harmonious geometry that would have pleased the ancients he admired. It is a fitting place to consider what separates Rome from other great cities: here, the ancient and the Renaissance don't merely coexist — each made the other possible.

We continue to Piazza Navona for lunch, surrounded by Baroque splendour. Bernini's Fountain of the Four Rivers — the Nile, Ganges, Danube, and Plate — asserted papal authority across continents as much as it delighted the eye. From here we walk to the Trevi Fountain, fed by an aqueduct built in 19 BC and still flowing, then proceed to the Pantheon. Its unreinforced concrete dome — wider than St. Peter's — was the largest in the world for thirteen centuries and remains a quiet provocation to everything built since.

NOTE: Due to traffic constraints and the proximity of today's sites, we travel primarily on foot and by Rome's efficient public transit system (tickets included). Any sightseeing not completed today continues tomorrow afternoon.

Overnight in Rome.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Rome: the Vatican Museums & St. Peter's

We travel by metro across the Tiber River to Vatican City, the world's smallest sovereign state. Our guided tour begins in the vast Vatican Museums, where corridors seem to stretch infinitely, lined with humanity's greatest artistic achievements. Here we discover Greek and Roman sculptures that influenced Renaissance masters, Flemish tapestries depicting biblical narratives, and glittering mosaics assembled tile by precious tile. More than three million visitors journey here annually to witness this extraordinary collection.

The museums' crowning glory awaits in the Sistine Chapel, where Michelangelo's frescoes transform ceiling and walls into a theological masterpiece. Created between 1508 and 1512, these paintings revolutionised art history—their anatomical precision and emotional depth remain unsurpassed. We then enter St. Peter's Basilica, Christendom's largest church, its cavernous interior housing treasures including Michelangelo's tender Pietà, carved when he was just 24 years old. Outside, the elegantly symmetrical Piazza San Pietro embraces visitors in Bernini's colonnade arms.

After a break for lunch, we continue with any sightseeing carried over from yesterday.

NOTE: The timing and order of today's sightseeing may vary depending on seasonality. During lighter periods, we often begin in the morning; busier times may require an afternoon or evening visit to avoid crowds. We may include lunch instead of dinner today to optimise our schedule. Your Tour Leader will advise upon arrival.

Overnight in Rome.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Rome - Assisi - Siena

We depart Rome for Tuscany, stopping first in Assisi — a hilltop town of pink limestone and cypress shadows that receives millions of pilgrims annually yet somehow retains the stillness its most famous son prescribed. Born here in 1182 to a prosperous cloth merchant, Francis renounced his inheritance as a young man and embraced radical poverty, founding the Order of Friars Minor in a gesture that reverberated through medieval Europe. What made his message so durable wasn't only its simplicity — it was that he lived it without compromise.

The Basilica of St. Francis is Umbria's supreme artistic monument, but it is also the beginning of a thread that will run through our entire journey. Giotto di Bondone decorated the Upper Basilica's nave with a celebrated cycle of frescoes depicting the life of Francis — and in doing so, changed Western painting. Where medieval artists rendered sacred figures as flat, symbolic, and remote, Giotto's figures have weight, gesture, and something recognisable as grief or joy.

The drive south to Siena passes the shores of Lake Trasimeno — serene today, but the site of one of Rome's most catastrophic defeats, where Hannibal's Carthaginian army ambushed and destroyed a Roman force of 30,000 in 217 BC. This medieval gem awaits our exploration tomorrow.

Overnight in Siena.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Siena & San Gimignano

Siena chose a different path from Florence — while its great rival embraced Renaissance innovation, Siena clung to medieval traditions, and that stubbornness is the reason it survives today as the finest showcase of Italian Gothic architecture in existence.

Our guided walking tour begins at Il Campo, the extraordinary shell-shaped piazza that has served as the city's living room since the 13th century. This is where the Palio happens — the twice-yearly bareback horse race run in the name of the city's seventeen contrade, whose rivalries are so deeply felt that local guides describe them with an intensity that makes the last race feel like it finished yesterday. From the Campo we continue to San Domenico, where a reliquary holds what is venerated as the head of Saint Catherine of Siena — patron saint of Italy, Doctor of the Church, and one of the medieval period's most remarkable voices. We finish at the Duomo, whose black and white marble interior contains a Piccolomini Chapel with early Michelangelo sculptures that most visitors walk past without noticing. Free time follows — the Palazzo Pubblico's Simone Martini frescoes and the Torre del Mangia's 464-step climb are both worth the effort.

San Gimignano's tower skyline appears from the road about ten kilometres out — one of those views that stops conversation on a coach. Thirteen towers survive from the medieval period when 72 proclaimed family wealth and Guelf-Ghibelline rivalry; the political feuds that played out here were among Europe's earliest experiments in organised party politics. Piazza della Cisterna takes its name from the ingenious cistern below — a system of rooftop channels that collected rainwater across the entire town, allowing it to outlast sieges indefinitely. Gelateria Dondoli on the same square has been recognised among the world's finest; the hazelnut is non-negotiable. From the Rocca above the town, the full panorama of towers and Tuscan valley opens in every direction.

We return to Siena in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Siena.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Siena - Volterra - Pisa - Lerici

The drive to Volterra crosses a landscape that keeps surprising. The valley opens to reveal the cooling towers of a geothermal power plant — Tuscany drawing energy directly from the volcanic earth beneath it — and just before the town, a giant red circle on the hillside marks one of sculptor Mauro Staccioli's land art installations, placed across his native landscape and stopping travellers on this road for decades.

Volterra sits on a high plateau behind Etruscan walls that predate Rome. Our walking tour takes in the Etruscan Gate — its basalt heads of deities gazing across a valley Rome had not yet conquered — the Romanesque Duomo and Baptistery, and a Roman amphitheatre intact enough to require almost no imagination. Volterra has worked alabaster since the Etruscan period; workshops still carve the translucent stone by hand throughout the town. We finish at the Guarnacci Museum, where the Ombra della Sera — a haunting elongated bronze figure from the 3rd century BC — stands in quiet conversation with anything Giacometti ever made.

En route to Pisa the coach passes through La Sterza, Andrea Bocelli's birthplace, where the businesses have his name and the surrounding hills contain his outdoor Teatro del Silenzio. The Arno appears shortly after — the same river that runs through Florence — and the Leaning Tower announces itself above the rooftops before the coach has quite arrived.

At the Campo dei Miracoli we visit the Duomo, the Baptistery — where the guard demonstrates the acoustics on the hour — and the atmospheric Camposanto cemetery, its cloistered walls enclosing soil reputedly brought from Golgotha by Crusaders. The Tower provides the closing ritual.

The drive to Lerici passes the Carrara marble quarries — the source of the stone Michelangelo hauled down these same mountains for the David and the Pietà — and basil fields that make the coastal air smell like a kitchen. Lerici itself sits at the head of a Ligurian bay, dinner is timed for sunset over the water, and passengers routinely wish the itinerary allowed two nights.

Overnight in Lerici.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Lerici - Cinque Terre - Florence

The morning begins at the Lerici waterfront, where the boat to the Cinque Terre departs after breakfast. This matters: the Five Lands reveal themselves properly only from the sea. The villages — Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, Vernazza, Monterosso — are built into cliffs so steep that from the land you see only the town you're standing in. From the water, with all five visible in sequence against the Ligurian coast, the full improbability of what medieval people built here becomes clear.

We disembark at Vernazza, generally considered the most dramatically positioned of the five — a single street descending to a small harbour, pastel buildings stacked above it, fishing boats pulled up on the stones. From here the day opens up. The Cinque Terre operates like a five-stop commuter railway, and once your Tour Leader has oriented everyone to the system — trains running every twenty minutes or so between the villages, passes valid all day — the group spreads out according to appetite and fitness.

Those who want to walk will find trails connecting the villages through terraced vineyards producing local Sciacchetrà wine, with varying degrees of difficulty and coastal views that reward every metre of elevation gained. Trail conditions vary seasonally and some sections have been subject to closure following flooding — your Tour Leader will have current information and won't send anyone somewhere that isn't open. Those who prefer to travel by train can cover all five villages at their own pace, lingering over lunch in whichever square suits them. Monterosso, the largest and most beach-fronted of the five, makes a natural gathering point by early afternoon.

The group reconvenes at La Spezia station before the drive to Florence — a journey that takes the better part of two hours and delivers you into the city in time for dinner. Somewhere between the Ligurian coast and the first Tuscan hills, the week's pace shifts perceptibly. Tomorrow the Renaissance begins.

Please note: The actual order of Florence sightseeing elements may vary from this description. Your Tour Leader will advise of any adjustments in advance.

Overnight in Florence.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Florence: Uffizi & City Walking Tour

Florence transformed the world during the Renaissance, and the evidence is everywhere on foot — which is how we spend today.

We begin at the Uffizi, Giorgio Vasari's 16th-century administrative building for the Medici that now houses Italy's greatest art collection. Our guided tour moves through corridors lined with Botticelli, Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, and Caravaggio — each room a landmark in the story of how European painting learned to see. The collection's centrepiece is Botticelli's Birth of Venus, painted around 1485: the goddess emerging from the sea on a shell, the nude female form celebrated as beauty itself rather than shame, classical antiquity reborn in Florentine paint. Before leaving, the gallery offers a window with a view directly over the Ponte Vecchio — a good moment for the guide to tell its story without losing anyone to the gift shop.

Outside, Piazza della Signoria functions as an open-air sculpture museum — Cellini's Perseus, a copy of Michelangelo's David, the Loggia dei Lanzi — the civic heart of Renaissance Florence, where political decisions were announced and occasionally enforced in public. En route to the Accademia we pass the Mercato del Porcellino, where a bronze boar's snout has been rubbed smooth by centuries of hands seeking good luck, and where a less celebrated spot beneath the market stalls once served a more humiliating civic purpose: the public paddling of Florentines who failed to repay their debts.

At the Accademia, Michelangelo's David needs no introduction and rewards no rushing. Seventeen feet of marble carved from a single block by a 29-year-old, it remains the Renaissance's fullest statement of human potential — and the room that contains it, with four of Michelangelo's unfinished Prisoners lining the approach, is one of the great theatrical spaces in art.

After lunch we pass the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore — Brunelleschi's dome examined from the outside, the full complex saved for tomorrow — before continuing to Santa Croce, the Franciscan church that serves as Florence's pantheon. Michelangelo is buried here, as are Galileo, Machiavelli, and Rossini. The Pazzi Chapel in the first cloister is Brunelleschi's most perfect small building.

A gelato stop near the square closes the afternoon before free time returns the city to you.

Overnight in Florence.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Florence: The Duomo Complex & Free Afternoon

This morning belongs to the building that defines the Florentine skyline — and to the objects inside it that most visitors never reach.

The Ghiberti Pass gives us access to the full Cathedral complex: the Cathedral itself, the Baptistery, the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, and the ancient basilica of Santa Reparata buried beneath the current nave — the city's original 4th-century church, excavated and now walkable underfoot. Our guide meets us at Caffè Scudieri on the square, and the three-hour tour moves through a sequence that rewards having saved this for a second day.

The Baptistery's bronze doors are the starting point for understanding everything that followed in Florentine art. Lorenzo Ghiberti spent 27 years casting the east doors — the ones Michelangelo called the Gates of Paradise — ten gilded panels depicting Old Testament scenes with a spatial depth and narrative complexity that had no precedent in medieval metalwork. The original panels are housed in the Museo dell'Opera across the square, where they can be seen at eye level: faces, drapery, and architectural recession worked into bronze with a precision that still stops conservators. What hangs on the Baptistery today are high-quality replicas; the originals are here.

Brunelleschi's dome — wider than St. Peter's in Rome, completed in 1436 without scaffolding using a double-shell technique he kept deliberately secret — is best understood from the museum's scale models before being experienced from the outside. Those wishing to climb the 463 steps to the lantern can arrange this independently during the free afternoon; the views across the Arno valley justify every one of them.

The afternoon is yours — Florence returned to you without agenda.

Overnight in Florence.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Departure from Florence

We say farewell to Florence this morning — a city that has a way of making departure feel like an interruption. The Renaissance isn't finished with you yet, but the airport waits.

Buon viaggio.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast