

# ITALY WITH FRIENDS "BELLA ITALIA" TOUR

**September 7 – 20, 2020**

(Itinerary is subject to change and variations with and/or without notice.)

## **Day 0 - Depart USA – Sunday, September 6, 2020**

Remember you will arrive in Europe the day after you depart the USA. You will need to book your air travel so that you arrive at the Rome hotel on Monday, September 7th to meet with your group by 3PM.

## **Day 1 - Arrival Day - Benvenuto to Italia! – Monday, September 7, 2020**

Welcome to Italy! Arrive in Rome and meet at 3:00PM for orientation in the hotel lobby before we begin our sightseeing with a walking tour of Rome's historical district. We will visit the Pantheon, the church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Piazza Navona, and the Trevi Fountain along the way. We will then enjoy a welcome dinner in a typical Roman trattoria. We will toast the start of our Italian adventure with a sparkling Prosecco. Salute! (D) Moderate

## **Day 2 - The Wonders of Ancient Rome – Tuesday, September 8, 2020**

Today will be a full day of sightseeing starting with a walking tour of Ancient Rome's most important sights. The Colosseum is one of the most impressive sights in the entire city of Rome. We will visit inside and learn about 'Bread and Circuses' and the Gladiatorial games. We will enjoy lunch together in a restaurant overlooking the Colosseum. We will then walk among the ruins of the Roman Forum, the political and religious center of ancient Rome. There will be time to learn of the origins of Rome as we visit the Campidoglio which sits on the Capitoline Hill.

Afterwards you will have some free time to continue your ancient history lesson with a visit to Palatine Hill or other spots in Rome. You will have the evening free to enjoy as you like. (B) (L) Very Strenuous

## **Day 3 - Rome and Vatican City – Wednesday, September 9, 2020**

We will continue our exploration of this magnificent city. Our first stop this morning will be at Campo de Fiore with its lively market. We then continue our walk crossing the Tiber river on the Ponte Sant' Angelo with its beautiful statues of angels by Bernini. This bridge leads to the Castel Sant'Angelo, built as a tomb for the Emperor Hadrian.

From here we will cross into Vatican City, a tiny independent country. We will take some time for lunch together at a little outdoor cafe. We will then spend a big part of our day visiting the Vatican Museum with its famous Sistine Chapel followed by a visit inside St. Peter's Basilica, the largest and grandest church in Christendom. You will have the evening free to enjoy your last night in the magnificent city. (B) (L) Very Strenuous

## **Day 4 - The Divine Amalfi Coast Escape – Thursday, September 10, 2020**

Today we head South for a visit to one of the most beautiful areas in Italy. The Divine Coast south of Naples is truly memorable. Here mountains erupt from the Mediterranean and pastel-hued villages cling to their sides. This area is filled with dazzling antiquities like Pompeii and breathtaking natural wonders. We will spend 3 days in this picturesque region.

When Mount Vesuvius erupted in AD 79, the lively port city of Pompeii was perfectly preserved by the volcano's ashes. Pompeii has amazed visitors since its discovery in the 18th century. Exquisite mosaics and wall paintings among the ruins of theaters, shops, homes and temples offer total immersion into the ancient Roman world. We will visit the site with a local guide and enjoy a tour throughout the excavations.

We will then head to Sorrento, known as the city of orange and lemon groves, which you will see everywhere. The perfume of the citrus trees is a reminder to sample the local liqueur, Limoncello. You will find panoramic sea views from many points in town, including from your balcony at Hotel Il Nido. We will explore Sorrento and its narrow Roman-grid streets, then sit down and enjoy a delicious dinner. Yes, we will toast our adventures ahead with some chilled Limoncello. Salute! (D) Strenuous

### **Day 5 - Picturesque Villages and Amazing Mediterranean Views – Friday, September 11, 2020**

Today will be a full day of discovery on a drive along the famous Amalfi Coast, the most amazing of all the Mediterranean shores. It has also been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. You will visit the vertical town of Positano, where colorful houses cling to a hillside overlooking the sea. Continue to Amalfi, once a mighty maritime republic. Enjoy a walk through the town and a visit to the Duomo di Sant' Andrea which glitters when the sun strikes the gold mosaics on its pediment. We will dine together once again for dinner at the hotel's fine restaurant with those amazing views. (B) (D) Light

### **Day 6 - La Dolce Far Niente (The Sweetness of Doing Nothing) – Saturday, September 12, 2020**

You will have time today to enjoy more of this heavenly location just as you like. You can spend more time in Sorrento. You could take a train or bus to other areas along the coast. You could hop a ferry to the magical Isle of Capri. Hire a private boat for fun in the Mediterranean. It is your day to spend as you like, even enjoying the "sweetness of doing nothing." (B)

### **Day 7 - Umbria, the Green Heart of Italy – Sunday, September 13, 2020**

This morning we say "arrivederci" to the coast and head north into the Italian countryside. Umbria is known as the Green Heart of Italy. It is filled with forests and beautiful hill towns. Orvieto sits majestically atop an outcrop of volcanic tufa stone with thousands of caves underneath the city, dug out during Etruscan, Medieval and Renaissance times. Orvieto was once an important Etruscan city. Today it is famous for one of Italy's most beautiful Gothic cathedrals with a miracle behind its construction, and a delicious white wine, Orvieto Classico.

We will take time to enjoy this grand hill town. We will visit inside the Duomo, 300 years in construction, with its San Brizio Chapel covered in frescos by Luca Signorelli. Then we will tour the fascinating Orvieto underground to see thousands of years of archaeological history. You will have some time to shop or relax at our hotel before we meet for our dinner at the Trattoria Tipica Etrusca which specializes in Etruscan dishes and hides a secret underground chamber. (B) (D) Strenuous

### **Day 8 - Chianti's Castello Verrazzano and Magical Florence– Monday, September 14, 2020**

This morning we leave the region of Umbria and drive into Tuscany, one of Italy's most beautiful regions.

No trip to Tuscany would be complete without a visit to a local winery. We will visit one of the oldest in the Chianti region, the 11th century Castello Verrazzano. You will enjoy a guided tour of the castle grounds and ancient ageing cellars followed by a feast of homemade Tuscan favorites accompanied by a range of delicious wines made by the Verrazzano winery. You will have the opportunity to learn the art of wine tasting in this relaxed and amusing setting.

Before heading into Florence, we will make a stop at the American Military Cemetery located just outside of Florence. The compelling sight of endless rows of white marble crosses recalls the heroism of the young Americans who fought so valiantly to free Italy from the grips of fascism during World War II. The 1940's may seem very long ago, but during WWII this area was terribly ravaged by the fighting. I feel it is an honor and our duty to take time to pay our respects to these brave soldiers.

We will then drive into the frenzy of Firenze, Florence in Italian. We will jump right into the Renaissance with a walking tour of the main sights of Florence. Florence is known as an outdoor

museum and you will have time to enjoy all the sculpture, art, and architecture that surrounds you. You will then have the evening free to enjoy the good life Florentine style. (B) (L) Moderate

### **Day 11 - Florence, birthplace of the Renaissance - Tuesday, September 15, 2020**

We will visit the Central Market where you will find some of the freshest fruits and vegetables in Italy. Next door you find the San Lorenzo market and it is a great place to find bargains and souvenirs. You will then have some free time. Shopping abounds in this town of designers and it is a great place to find those special souvenirs. There are several leather markets and the Ponte Vecchio is known for its many gold and silver shops.

We will also visit the Accademia Museum to enjoy seeing Michelangelo's masterpiece, *David*, along with a few other treasures. Seeing the "real" David is always a memorable experience.

Tuscany's cuisine is world famous. Today you will have the opportunity to learn how to prepare a Tuscan meal yourself, in the kitchen of Chefactory. Here, with the guidance of your professional chef, Francesco, you will prepare several courses from starters like bruschetta, homemade pasta and sauce, a main course and finally dessert. You will then sit down to enjoy the fruits of your labor with a little vino. This experience is always a highlight for many of my travelers. (B) (D) Light

### **Day 10 - Tuscan Treasures – Wednesday, September 16, 2020**

We will start our sightseeing today in Siena. This popular Tuscan city has a medieval character that has survived to an amazing extent. Siena's heart is the shell shaped Piazza del Campo or Il Campo. This is one of Italy's most famous and most beautiful squares. The Palio, a renowned horse race takes place twice a year right here. It is hard to imagine horses racing bareback frantically around for about 90 seconds in this area. This a great place to just relax and enjoy the beauty of the Fountain of Joy and admire the City Tower standing proudly over all of Siena.

There will be time to enjoy a tour of Siena's most important sights. First stop will be the massive Duomo, one of the most ornate in Italy. The inside of the Duomo is as ornate as the outside with its famous marble floors and sculpture by Michelangelo, Pisano and Bernini. The Piccolomini Library has some stunning frescos that depict the life of Pope Pius II. The frescos are just as vibrant as the day they were finished over 550 years ago.

After Siena, we will make a quick stop at Fattoria San Donato, a working farm that produces olive oil and a delicious white wine called Vernaccia. This is one of the few white wines produced in Tuscany. The Vernaccia grape is only grown in a 50 kilometer circle around San Gimignano. It is a fruity white that was said to be a favorite of Michelangelo.

We will then head to San Gimignano, one of Tuscany's most popular towns. You will quickly see why it is referred to as the "Medieval Manhattan". The 14 towers that dominate the San Gimignano skyline are just magnificent. We will stay right in the middle of everything and you will have time to truly enjoy this magical setting. We will meet for a short walking tour of the town, before dinner at the wonderful restaurant, La Terrazza. (B) (D) Very Strenuous

### **Day 9 - Magical San Gimignano – Thursday, September 17, 2020**

San Gimignano seems to be a favorite stop on the tour. You will have the whole day to enjoy as you wish. Thursday is market day in San Gimignano and you will enjoy being a part of the weekly experience. In fact, many of the booths will be right outside your door in the Piazza Cisterna. Do try to get out early and enjoy this important taste of the Italian culture.

You will find many things to do in San Gimignano. You may want to climb the Torre Grande, the highest tower in San Gimignano that affords expansive views over the surrounding countryside. There are several Torture Museums in town, yes, I did say torture museums, and they are supposedly very good. There are several trails for walking around the old town walls.

Beware, there are some of the best artisan shops right down the street. This has always been an important trading center. It was on the famous Via Francigena: the most traveled of the medieval roads that pilgrims traveled to Rome. From the 8th Century, it was the route through France that linked Canterbury Cathedral in England and Rome, the heart of Christianity. Today you will find locally owned shops selling ceramics, soaps, alabaster, olive wood items, leather goods, etc. You will find a great selection of paintings and prints of the Tuscan area. .

Also, do not miss the award winning gelato shop located right across from our hotel for a little taste of gelato heaven. Throngs of tourists come in and out of San Gimignano each day and it is especially nice to be able to enjoy it after the crowds have gone. (B) Light to Moderate

### **Day 12 - Venice, La Serenissima – Friday, September 18, 2020**

This morning we head north through the mountains to our final destination of Venice. Along the way we will pass through the area of the Po River valley, known as the "breadbasket of Italy". We will make a stop for lunch together along the way.

Then it is on to Venice, known as "La Serenissima", the most serene. Many first-time visitors are often stirred deeply by this almost fantasy world unlike anything they have ever seen before. Our private water taxi ride to the hotel will provide a wonderful view of Piazza San Marco and the Doge's Palace. We will be able to glide right up to our hotel's own landing on its little canal.

After some time to settle into the hotel, we will enjoy a walking tour through the back streets of Venice leading to St. Mark's Square. Napoleon referred to this square as "the most beautiful drawing room in Europe". St. Mark's Basilica and the Doge's Palace are both located on this beautiful square. Tonight why not enjoy dinner at a restaurant along a quiet canal after that once in a lifetime Gondola ride. (B) (L) Light

### **Day 13 - The Pleasure of Getting Lost in Venice – Saturday, September 19, 2020**

We will dive right into the historic center of what was for centuries Europe's top superpower, with a visit inside St. Mark's Basilica with its museum located on St. Mark's Square. We will then walk over the Rialto Bridge to visit the Pescheria or fish market. The open-air stalls have the catch of the day and you will see fish like you have never seen before. Find eels, scallops, and crustaceans with five-inch antennae. This is the Venice that has existed for centuries.

The rest of the day is free for you to visit Venice's other famous sights or to get delightfully lost in the back lanes of this magical island. I am sure you will want to take that gondola ride sometime during your visit. Also, do not forget that Venice has some of the best and most unusual shopping in Italy. You may also wish to take a boat ride to one of the islands like Murano to see the glass blowing exhibits.

Tonight will be your last night in Venice and Italy. We will meet on the rooftop terrace of the hotel for a final look across Venice before dining together at our farewell dinner along a lovely canal. We will toast the success of our adventures through Italy with a Bellini (prosecco and peach juice) that was invented at Harry's Bar in Venice. (B) (D) Light

### **Day 14 - Arrivederci Italia! – Sunday, September 20, 2020**

Sadly, it is time to say "arrivederci". Parting will be such sweet sorrow, but I know you will take along wonderful memories of time spent experiencing the wonders from coast to coast in Bella Italia with new friends. (B)

(Included meals are designated each day with (B) for breakfast, (L) for lunch, and (D) for dinner.)

### **THE FOLLOWING IS INCLUDED IN YOUR ITALY WITH FRIENDS TOUR:**

- 13 nights' accommodation in 3-4 star, centrally located hotels with private bath or shower.
- 24 meals included: 13 breakfasts (B), 4 lunches (L), 7 dinners (D). (Water, tea and coffee provided at all included meals, wine (2 glasses per person LOL) provided with dinner only, unless specified otherwise on the itinerary.)
- All ground transportation in Italy during tour. (Does not include airfare. Does not include transportation to and from the airport or train station)
- Guided sightseeing and entrance fees to select sights, wineries and museums as described in itinerary.
- Local VAT taxes and government fees, gas, highway tolls and parking fees.
- Pre-tour visit with helpful travel information.
- Plenty of memories to last a lifetime.
- Surprises along the way.

### **NOT INCLUDED IN TOUR:**

- Does not include airfare.
- Does not include transportation to and/or from the airport in Rome or Venice.
- Does not include remaining meals, alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks at included meals.
- Does not include personal expenses such as internet use, laundry, mini-bar, or extra transportation in tour towns.
- Does not include travel insurance.
- Does not include local city tax to be paid to hotel directly. Ranges from 1-6 Euro.

### **2020 LAND ONLY TOUR PRICES:**

**Tour begins in Rome and ends in Venice; tour is for 14 days and 13 nights.**

The total cost per person is **\$3999** with double occupancy. (Includes taxes, fees, and Euro exchange rate adjustment.) Single occupancy supplement is **\$815**.

A **\$500** deposit will hold your place on the tour. Tours are limited in size. (This tour is limited to 8 guests.) Payment is accepted by check or credit card through PayPal. (5% fee if using PayPal) Your deposit is credited against the total tour cost. Final payment is required no later than **60** days prior to departure.

### **PHYSICAL DEMANDS:**

Prepare for a physically demanding tour. Age is not a concern so long as you are physically fit, a very good walker at an energetic pace, and able to stand for extended periods of time and climb lots of hills and stairs. All of the above could be done in all sorts of weather and temperatures. You are required to load and unload your bags into the van, and to carry your bag to your room. This sometimes could be a short distance from the hotel. Most days our sightseeing will cover anywhere from 2-8 miles of walking, sometimes over uneven surfaces. Plan to get in shape before you head to Italy.