

**ITALY WITH FRIENDS "ITALIAN DISCOVERY" TOUR  
ROME TO VENICE**

**March 16-27, 2024**

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

**DAY 0 – Friday, March 15, 2024 - DEPART USA**

You will arrive in Europe the day after you depart from the USA. You will need to book your air travel so that you arrive in Rome (FCO) early enough to check into your hotel and be ready to meet with the group for orientation at 3:00 PM, on Saturday, March 16, 2024.

**Day 1 – Saturday, March 16, 2024 - Benvenuto to Italy!**

Welcome to **ITALIA!** Arrive in **ROME** and meet at 3:00 PM in the hotel for orientation and introductions. We will then begin our discovery of Italy 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 Discovery with a sparkling Prosecco. Salute! We will then end our evening with a visit to one of Rome's most famous landmarks, the **Spanish Steps**. (D) Moderate

**DAY 2 – Sunday, March 17, 2024– The Wonders of Ancient Rome.**

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 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 Capitoline Hill. We will also enjoy lunch together.

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 – Monday, March 18, 2024 - The Treasures of Vatican City**

This morning we will head to another country, but on the way, we will make a few stops. First, it's off to **Campo de Fiore** with its lively market. We will continue our walk crossing the Tiber River on the **Ponte Sant'Angelo** lined with the beautiful Bernini Angels. 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 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. We will take some time for lunch together to prepare you for your hike through the Vatican Museum.

You will then have some time for your own pursuits. You can spend more time in the Vatican or explore other parts of Rome. (B) (L) Very Strenuous

**DAY 4 – Tuesday, March 19, 2024 – Orvieto, Grand Hill Town of Umbria and La Toscana!**

This morning we say "arrivederci" to Roma and head into the Italian countryside and the nearby region of **UMBRIA**. **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, and a delicious white wine, Orvieto Classico.

We will take plenty of time to enjoy this grand hill town. We will visit the Duomo, 300 years in construction, with its San Brizio Chapel covered in frescos by Luca Signorelli. You might like to tour the fascinating **Orvieto Underground** to see thousands of years of archaeological history. We will enjoy lunch together at a wonderful restaurant that specializes in Etruscan dishes and has its own hidden secret below.

We will then continue our discovery of the Italian countryside as we head to the region of **TUSCANY** and our overnight destination of **SIENA**. This popular Tuscan town 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 and ancient horse race takes place twice a year right here. After some time to settle into our little Tuscan hide away, we will visit Il Campo and enjoy an aperitivo together. (B) (L) Moderate

#### **DAY 5 – Wednesday, March 20, 2024 – Siena, A Tuscan Treasure**

Take a few moments this morning to relax and enjoy your lovely setting in **Siena**. Yes, you are really in Tuscany! We will meet for a walking tour of Siena which will include stops at several shops selling some of the local food products such as panforte and pecorino cheese.

We will also visit the massive **Siena 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 sculptures by Michelangelo, Pisano, and Bernini. The **Piccolomini Library** has some stunning 500+ year old frescos that depict the life of Pope Pius II. Afterwards, you will have time to enjoy more of Siena on your own.

Later we will make a short drive into the beautiful **Chianti** region filled with forests and perfectly manicured vineyards and olive groves on our way to **Castellina in Chianti**. Castellina was an important settlement of the Etruscans, an ancient people for which Tuscany is named. It is a lovely little village with many shops and even a small castle. We will enjoy a pizza dinner here at the local pizzeria set right on the main drag. After a lovely evening enjoying "la dolce vita", we will return to our hotel in Siena for the night. (B) (D) Moderate

#### **DAY 6 – Thursday, March 21, 2024 - Castello da Verrazzano and the City of Towers.**

No trip to Tuscany would be complete without a visit to a local winery. We will visit one of the oldest in the region, the 11<sup>th</sup> Century **Castello Verrazzano**. The hilltop location of this estate and winery is just spectacular. The Chianti countryside surrounding Verrazzano is dotted with castles, vineyards and olive groves and is truly magnificent. 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 making and wine tasting in this relaxed and amusing setting.

We will then head to **SAN GIMIGNANO**, one of the most beautiful villages in Tuscany. San Gimignano is known as the "city of towers". This is one of the most popular hill towns in Tuscany, and one of my favorites as well. You will truly enjoy exploring this quintessential medieval town. I always encourage everyone to rise early to see the village before it comes alive with locals and tourists. It is like a fairytale setting. After a short orientation walking tour of the village, you will have time for your own pursuits. (B) (L) Moderate

#### **DAY 7 – Friday, March 22, 2024 – Magical San Gimignano.**

You have been going strong for several days, so today you will have time to relax and "*breathe in the warmth of Tuscany*". You will have the day to discover San Gimignano as you like. This is always a favorite stop in Tuscany, and you will find lots to enjoy. You may wish to visit inside their Duomo. There are beautiful frescos throughout the church that were used to teach the peasants who could not read the stories of the Bible. There is also a small chapel dedicated to Santa Fina, the patron Saint of San Gimignano, frescoed in 1475 by Ghirlandaio, one of Michelangelo's teachers. You might also wish to climb the Torre Grande for the best views around. How about a visit to the Museum of Torture?

You may just enjoy shopping along the main streets. Beware; there are some of the best artisan shops in Tuscany right here. 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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, leather goods, etc. You will also find a great selection of paintings and prints of the Tuscan area. You will find all sorts of enticements in San Gimignano. Also, not to be missed is the award-winning gelato at Gelateria Dondoli, right across from our hotel.

We will meet later for a delicious Tuscan meal under the stars at the restaurant **La Terrazza**. We will toast our trip with a glass of delicious Vernaccia, the local white wine, at our "dinner on the Piazza."  
(B) (D) Light to Moderate, your choice

### **DAY 8 – Saturday, March 23, 2024 – A Famous Leaning Tower and Fabulous Firenze.**

We must say farewell to beautiful San Gimignano. We will begin our day with a stop to visit one of Italy's most famous sights, the Leaning Tower of **Pisa**. Pisa sits near the coast on the Arno River. The Field of Miracles complex includes the leaning bell tower, a beautiful cathedral, and a very interesting cemetery. You will have time to enjoy everything. We will take some time for lunch together in Pisa.

Before heading into Florence, we will stop at the **American Military Cemetery** located just outside of town. 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 believe it is our duty and our privilege to visit this site and honor all of those fallen heroes.

Next stop on our discovery of Italy will be **FLORENCE**, or Firenze in Italian. We will jump right into the Renaissance, with a walking tour of Florence's most important sights, including the **Duomo, Baptistery, Piazza Signoria**, and finally the **Ponte Vecchio**. You will then have the evening free to discover all that a Saturday night in Florence has to offer. (B) (L) Moderate

### **DAY 9 – Sunday, March 24, 2024 - Florence, Birthplace of the Italian Renaissance.**

**FLORENCE** cannot really be described in words; it must be experienced. Florence is an outdoor museum, and you will enjoy just strolling through its medieval streets and taking in all the sculpture, art and architecture that surrounds you. We will start our day with a visit to the **Accademia Museum** to enjoy seeing Michelangelo's masterpiece, **DAVID**, along with a few other treasures. Seeing the "real *David*" is truly an unforgettable experience.

Afterwards you will have time for your own pursuits. You might wish to visit one of the many wonderful museums. Shopping abounds in Florence, and it is a great place to find souvenirs and gifts. There are several leather markets. My favorite chocolate shop Rivoire is located right on the Piazza Signoria. You can find delicious treats and some unusual gifts. Their hot chocolate is thick and delicious. YUM!

Later we will enjoy a fun family style dinner together at lively **Il Latini**. (B) (D) Light

### **DAY 10 – Monday, March 25, 2024 – Venice, La Serenissima**

This morning we will head north through the Appenine mountains to discover **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.

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 11 – Tuesday, March 26, 2024 - The Pleasure of Getting Lost in Venice**

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 discover fish that 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 Italy. We will meet for our farewell dinner along a lovely canal. We will toast the success of our adventures through Italy with a Bellini, a drink that was invented at Harry's Bar in Venice. (B) (D) Light

### **Day 12 – Wednesday, March 27, 2024 - Arrivederci Italia!**

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 discovering the wonders of Italy 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:**

- 11 nights' accommodation in 3-4 star, centrally located hotels with private bath or shower.
- Many meals included: 11 breakfasts (B), 6 lunches (L), 5 dinners (D). Wine is included with dinner only unless specified with lunch in the itinerary.
- All ground transportation in Italy during the tour.
- 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 or train station in Rome or Venice.
- Does not include Hotel City Tax to be paid individually at each hotel. Taxes will differ at each hotel.
- 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.

### **MARCH 2024 LAND ONLY TOUR PRICES:**

**Tour begins in Rome and ends in Venice; tour is for 12 days and 11 nights.**

**Airport codes: Rome Fiumicino (a.k.a. Leonardo da Vinci (FCO) and Venice Marco Polo (VCE)**

The total cost per person is **\$4199** with double occupancy. (Includes taxes, fees, and Euro exchange rate adjustment.)

Single occupancy supplement is **\$650**.

A **\$500** nonrefundable deposit will hold your place on the tour. Tours are limited in size. (Usually only 8 people.) Payment is accepted by check, bank transfer or credit card through Zelle or other Cash Apps. Your deposit is credited against the total tour cost. Final payment is required no later than **60** days prior to departure. Please read the Italy With Friends Tours Terms and Conditions for more information.

### **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 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.