

Italy With Friends Tours

Italian Treasures Tour: Celebrate Easter in Italy March 21 – April 1, 2027

Here is a daily itinerary of your tour adventures.

Remember, you will arrive in Europe the day after you depart the USA. You will need to book your air travel to depart on March 20th so that you arrive in Venice's Hotel Ala by 3pm on the 21st.

DAY 1 – ARRIVAL DAY – “BENVENUTO IN ITALIA” – SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 2027

Welcome 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. We will enjoy a walking tour through the back streets of Venice leading to the Grand Canal near the Rialto Bridge, continuing 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 here. We will enjoy a “Welcome Dinner” at a restaurant located along a quiet canal. We will toast to the start of our adventures through Italy with a Bellini, a drink that was invented at Harry's Bar in Venice.

(D) Light

DAY 2 – THE PLEASURE OF GETTING LOST IN VENICE – MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2027

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 and its museum. We will then cross the Rialto Bridge, which has been a major landmark in Venice since 1588. Across the Rialto Bridge is the commercial district of Venice. You will find the local vegetable and fish markets here in the same place they have been for centuries.

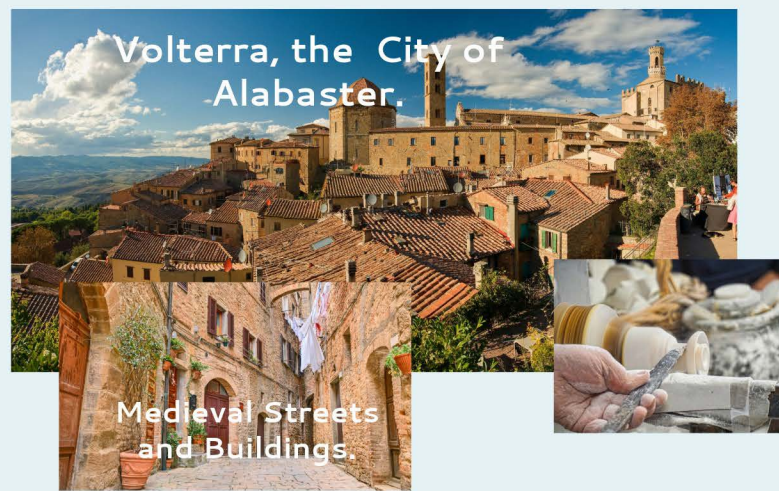
The rest of the day is free for you to visit Venice's other famous sights or get delightfully lost on this magical island. You must take a gondola ride sometime during your visit. Also, do not forget that Venice has some of the best and most unusual shopping in Italy. You may also wish to take a boat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



DAY 3 – PISA AND LUCCA, TUSCAN TREASURES – TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2027

Today we will move south to the beautiful region of Tuscany. Our first stop will be to visit one of Italy's most famous sights, the Leaning Tower of Pisa. PISA sits near the Mediterranean coast on the Arno River. The Field of Miracles complex includes the famous leaning bell tower, a stunning cathedral, and a very interesting cemetery. You will have time to enjoy everything.

Then we head to nearby LUCCA, Italy's most impressive fortress city, encircled by well-preserved Renaissance walls. Lucca boasts a beautiful historic center of cobblestoned streets lined with ornate churches, cute cafes, and pretty shops. There are many towers and one even with a tree on top. You can climb up to this one if you like. We will wander these streets for a bit on our way to enjoy our first Tuscan meal together accompanied by some famous Tuscan vino. Salute! (B) (D) Moderate



DAY 4 – SMILE! YOU ARE IN TUSCANY! – WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2027

Lucca seems to be the new “must visit” town in Tuscany and you will have plenty of time to find out why. You will have the opportunity to learn all about Lucca on the “Delectable” tour. While walking through the historic center of Lucca to admire its artistic and historic monuments, you will also visit small, traditional shops that feature local food products. To tempt the eye and palate, there will be the aroma of freshly baked focaccia topped with the famous olive oil of Lucca, a piece of “Cecina”, a thin type of pizza made from locally grown chick-peas, along with other delicacies such as Buccellato (sweet raisin bread), cheeses and cold cuts from the Garfagnana area, all washed down by a glass of good Tuscan wine from the area. This will be a fun way to learn all about this delightful city.

After the tour you will have free time for your own exploration. You might like to ride a bicycle along the garden like walls surrounding the old town. You may want to relax with a before-or-after-dinner drink in Piazza Anfiteatro, a bustling square that was once a Roman amphitheater. (B) (L) Moderate

DAY 5 – VOLTERRA AND A VISIT TO THE FARM – THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2027

Today will be an enjoyable day of learning and discovery. We will start with a visit to the grand hill town of VOLTERRA, the most important Etruscan town in central Tuscany. You will have a guided tour with an overall historical introduction to Volterra. A must in Volterra is a stop in an alabaster workshop, since the carving of this stone is one of the most typical expressions of the local craftsmen. You will also stare at Roman ruins, huge fortification walls and cute little lanes that give the town its charm and fascination.

Next, we will visit a very panoramic organic Cheese Farm in the middle of the countryside. You will learn about the intricate process of crafting cheese in Tuscany and discover the origins of “pecorino,” a sheep’s milk cheese derived from the Italian word “pecora,” meaning sheep. You will get to visit the barn and meet the animals. You can tour the cheese factory, learn about each step of the process, and witness some of the aging phases. This will be followed by a nice lunch that will include the homemade cheese products and other local dishes prepared by family members.

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 settling into our hotel, we will meet for a short orientation walking tour of the village. (B) (L) Moderate

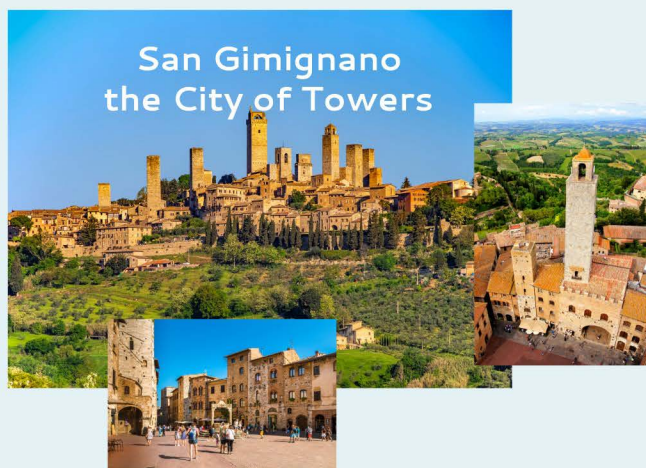


DAY 6 – MAGICAL SAN GIMIGNANO – FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 2027

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. 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, leather goods, etc. You will also find a great selection of paintings and prints of the Tuscan area. There are all sorts of enticements in San Gimignano.

Also, do not miss the award-winning gelato at Gelateria Dondoli 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 Strenuous?



DAY 7 – SIENA, A TUSCAN TREASURE – SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 2027

Today we start early with a visit to Siena. This beloved Tuscan hill town's medieval character has survived to an amazing extent. Siena's heart is the shell shaped Piazza del Campo, one of Italy's most famous and most beautiful squares. The Palio, a renowned horse race dating back to the 17th century, still takes place twice a year right here.

There will be time to enjoy a tour of some 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 sculptures 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 enjoying all that Siena has to offer, we will visit Tenuta Torciano for a guided tour of its beautiful winery and vineyards. This will be followed by a delicious meal that includes a Wine and Olive Oil Tasting. You will taste a variety of oils along with some Tenuta Torciano wine including the delicious local white wine called Vernaccia. This is one of the few white wines produced in Tuscany. It is a fruity white that was said to be a favorite of Michelangelo.

Finally, we are off to FLORENCE or Firenze, the capital of Tuscany. There will be time for an evening stroll through the medieval streets of Florence. We will end the evening with a cocktail at one of the cafes located on Piazza Repubblica, a great setting for people watching. (B) (L) Strenuous



DAY 8 – FLORENCE, BIRTHPLACE OF THE RENAISSANCE – EASTER SUNDAY, MARCH 28, 2027

Buona Pasqua! Easter Sunday in Tuscany, what more could you ask for! Take time this morning to enjoy spending this special day in one of the most amazing cities in the world. Pasqua is a special time in Italy, and you will enjoy seeing the beautiful Easter displays in windows throughout the city. Later, we will jump right into the 'frenzy' of Firenze with a walking tour of the main sights including the Duomo and the Baptistery, with its famous bronze doors, "the Gates of Paradise". Florence is known as an outdoor museum, and you will have time to enjoy all the sculpture, art, and architecture that surrounds you.

Seeing Michelangelo's sculpture of his 17 Ft. marble "David" is truly a highlight of any visit to Florence. We will visit the Accademia Gallery to gaze upon one of the most famous sculptures in the world. We will enjoy an Easter dinner together at Il Latini where you can taste the famous Bistecca alla Fiorentina. (B) (D) Moderate



DAY 9 – THE ETERNAL CITY OF ROME – EASTER MONDAY, MARCH 29, 2027

We will say our farewell to Florence from the spectacular viewing area located on Piazzale Michelangelo. We will then 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 like a very long time 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.

Then we are off to ROME, the capital of Italy. There will be time for a walking tour of Rome's historical district. We will visit Largo Argentina, Piazza Venezia and the Trevi Fountain along the way. The Pantheon is the only building in Rome to have been continually in use since its construction in 120AD. We will visit inside and marvel at this amazing structure. We will enjoy dinner together at Tre Scalini located in Piazza Navona. If you love chocolate, then you must try their famous "Tartufo" dessert. Rome is known for so many delicious pasta dishes including Cacio e pepe, Bucatini all' amatriciana and Spaghetti alla carbonara. Molto delizioso!! (B) (D) Strenuous



DAY 10- THE TREASURES OF VATICAN CITY- TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 2027

Today we will visit Campo de Fiore with its lively market. Then we will cross 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 in 139AD.

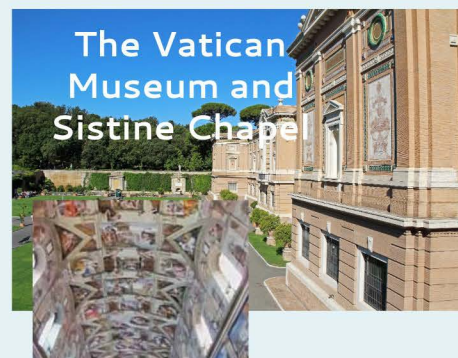
From here we will enter Vatican City, a tiny independent country. We will take some time for lunch together at a little outdoor cafe. You will then spend a big part of the day visiting the Vatican Museum with its famous Sistine Chapel followed by a visit inside St. Peter's Basilica, the largest and grandest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



Campo de Fiore



St. Peter's Basilica



The Vatican Museum and Sistine Chapel

DAY 11 - THE WONDERS OF ANCIENT ROME – WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 2027

Today will be a full day of sightseeing starting with a walking tour of Ancient Rome's most important sights. There will be time to learn of the origins of Rome as we visit the Campidoglio which sits on the Capitoline Hill.

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. Afterwards, you will have some free time to continue your ancient history lesson with a visit to Palatine Hill or other spots in Rome. We will meet later for our "farewell dinner". (B) (D) Very Strenuous

DAY 12 - ARRIVEDERCI ITALIA! – THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 2027

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 "Italian Treasures" with new friends. (B)

"Itinerary is subject to change and variations with and/or without notice"

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



The Trevi Fountain



The Roman Colosseum



The Pantheon

Arrivederci!

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), 4 lunches (L), 5 dinners (D).
- 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 per night City Tax required to be paid in cash by each guest at each hotel. It can vary from 2-10 Euro depending on city and hotel.

2027 LAND ONLY TOUR PRICES:

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

The total cost per person is \$3999 with double occupancy. (Includes taxes, fees, and Euro exchange rate adjustment. Does not include local city hotel tax.)

Traveling solo? Sadly, most hotels only have a few single rooms, so often they provide what they term "double for single use". They do, however, charge a premium for the luxury of staying alone. I am faced with this all the time. The single supplement for this tour is \$800.00 extra per person.

A \$500 (non-refundable) deposit will hold your place on the tour. Tours are limited in size. Payment is accepted by a personal check or credit card through PayPal or other Cash apps like Zelle or Venmo. (5% fee if using PayPal) Your deposit is credited against the total tour cost. Final payment is required no later than 90 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 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.