

Italy With Friends Tours

THE MAGIC OF ITALY'S CHRISTMAS MARKETS

November 30 - December 8, 2026

Embrace the holiday spirit with this special Christmas Markets tour, where you'll explore the timeless beauty of Italy decked out in festive splendor. Wander through traditional Christmas markets set against backdrops of historic monuments and medieval buildings. Savor seasonal treats and discover unique gifts. Christmas markets happen all over Italy, transforming piazzas, scenic towns, and enchanting cities into festive wonderlands brimming with twinkling lights, artisanal crafts, local delicacies, and joyous celebrations. The most beautiful Christmas markets, or Mercatini di Natale, offer Italians and visitors a chance to savor the best festivities. Join Italy With Friends Tours for this unforgettable Christmas markets journey and immerse yourself in the Magic of Italy during the most wonderful time of the year!

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 Milan Malpensa Airport (MXP) on Monday, November 30, 2026.

DAY 1 - MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2026 - BENVENUTO TO ITALY! & BUON NATALE!

Welcome to Italy! Arrive at Milan Malpensa Airport for pickup and transfer by 1PM to the city of VERONA. This UNESCO World Heritage site is filled with wonderful treasures. Some of the best ancient Roman sights north of Rome can be found here, including the "pink" marble Colosseum. Verona was the setting for the most famous love story in the English language, Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. One of Italy's best Christmas Markets takes place right here. The Christmas spirit takes hold as wooden stalls lined with Christmas lights and a massive Christmas tree in Piazza Bra contribute to a festive atmosphere.

You will have time to settle in your hotel located in the heart of Verona before we gather for a "Welcome" drink. This area is famous for several delicious wines after all. There will be time for a short orientation tour to get acquainted with Verona and show you a few of the many piazzas where the Christmas markets are located. Verona is a wonderful place to visit at any time of the year with its pink marble streets and ancient history, but there is nothing like seeing it at Christmas for the magic which infuses every part of the city. Afterward, we will enjoy our first dinner together in this magical setting. (D) Light

Fair Verona's Holiday Grandeur

Christmas Market

Piazza Erbe



DAY 2 – TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2026 – BOLZANO, THE ITALIAN TYROL!

We will start early today with an excursion to BOLZANO. Italy's biggest and possibly most characteristic Christmas market is way up north in the South Tyrol area. This region is along the border with Austria and Switzerland, and you will instantly feel the collision of cultures. The town itself is heavily populated with German speakers, so expect the street signs to be in both Italian and German. It even has a German name, Bozen.

Surrounded by the Dolomites' snow-capped peaks, this market is steeped in Alpine charm and a unique blend of Italian and Austrian influences. The town, known as the "Gateway to the Dolomites," is gorgeous and resembles something from a Hans Christian Anderson storybook.

The Mercatino di Natale di Bolzano, held yearly in Piazza Walther, is famous for its wooden stalls filled with local crafts, from hand-carved ornaments to woolen scarves. Don't miss the chance to sample South Tyrolean specialties like Christmas sweets, mulled wine (glühwein), and hearty dumplings. We will take plenty of time to explore Bolzano. We will enjoy lunch together where we will forego our normal Italian for Tirolean fare. Bolzano is also famous for its Museum of Archaeology where you can see "Otzi the Ice Man". We will return to Verona, and you will have the evening free. (B) (L) Moderate

DAY 3 – WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2026 – MERCATINO DI NATALE DI VERONA

Today we will focus on the "fair city of Verona", the city of Romeo and Juliet and just knowing that adds a romantic flair to its Christmas market. We will start the day with the unique opportunity to experience the true heart of Verona with a local guide learning about its history and its "foodie" heritage. You will get to taste several of these delicacies along the way. You must try the pandoro, a Christmas cake loosely resembling a snow-covered Christmas tree. Afterwards, you will have the rest of the day to visit Verona's Christmas markets and let yourself be swept up in the Christmas atmosphere of this historical and visually beautiful city.

Held in Piazza dei Signori, Verona's market is modeled after the famous Christkindlmarkt of Nuremberg, complete with wooden stalls offering German-inspired treats like gingerbread, bratwurst, and the standard but oh-so-delicious, spiced hot wine. This market is dreamy, surrounded by Verona's medieval towers and Romanesque architecture. They also offer an indoor ornament hut, a welcome reprieve from the cold and a great place to browse hundreds of ornaments to take home the perfect souvenir.

Verona is also famous for its nativity scenes, and during the Christmas season, you can visit the International Nativity Scene Exhibition, featuring over 400 nativity scenes from around the world. The Arena di Verona, the city's ancient Roman amphitheater, also hosts a spectacular Christmas light display. You will have the evening free. (B) (L) Moderate





Sirmione on Lake Garda



Scaligero Castle



Quaint Streets
and Cafes

DAY 4 – THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2026 – “WEIHNACHTSMARKT” SANTA CROCE

This morning we will say farewell to fair Verona and drive to nearby Lake Garda, Italy's largest lake. The lovely town of SIRMIONE has a beautiful 13th century castle that is built out into the lake. There will be time to wander the tiny medieval lanes filled with a festive atmosphere and enjoy lunch along the blue waters of Lago Garda.

Then we will make our way south to FLORENCE. Florence, the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance, brings an artistic touch to its Christmas market. The famous "Weihnachtsmarkten" is Florence's iconic Christmas market. We will check into Hotel Pendini located on Piazza Repubblica, which is always lively with its many cafes and pretty carousel, but during the holidays, will be even more majestic. It is the perfect place to grab a cioccolata calda and stroll through the bright piazza covered in elegant Christmas lights.

There will be time to get acquainted with Florence on a short walking tour followed by a delicious Tuscan dinner together in one of its liveliest trattorias. (B) (D) Moderate



Florence's Duomo

Christmas Market at
Piazza Santa Croce

Piazza Repubblica

Via
Tornabuoni

Michelangelo's
David

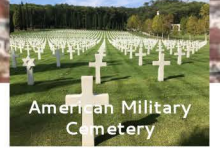
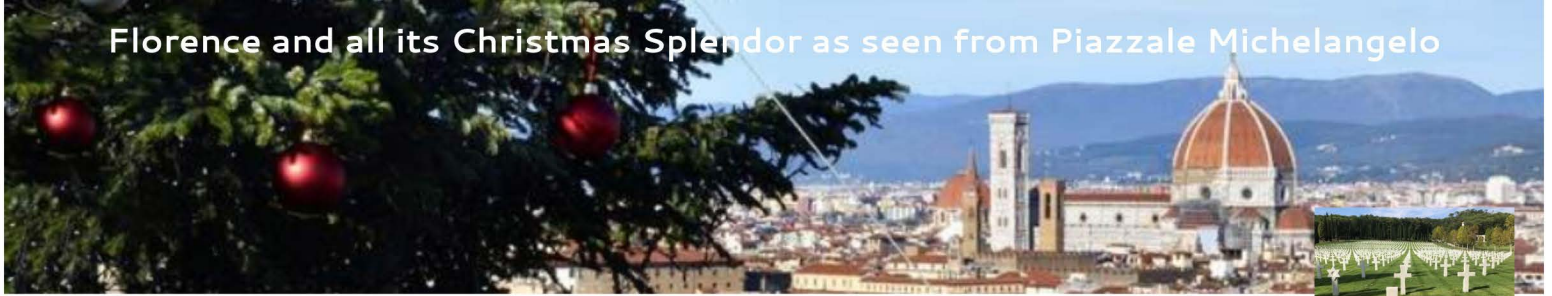
DAY 5 – FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2026 – TREASURES OF FIRENZE!

You will have plenty of time today to search for your own Christmas treasures in this beautiful city. The largest Christmas market in Florence is in Piazza di Santa Croce. Held in this location for over 500 years, it has a decidedly German Austrian appeal. Wooden stalls with handmade toys, candles, and Christmas decorations line the square, and the stunning Basilica di Santa Croce serves as an unbeatable backdrop. Take a break from browsing to enjoy Bavarian sausages, Tuscan wines, or a slice of panforte, a dense Christmas cake filled with dried fruits and nuts from nearby Siena.

For other Florence shopping, there are tons of options. Check out the San Lorenzo Market and surrounding stores for budget-friendly leather goods. If designer brands and posh fashion are more your scene, you'll find high-end shopping on Via Tornabuoni. La Rinascente, Italy's premier department store is on Piazza della Repubblica and its Christmas displays will take your breath away.

You may want to visit one of the many famous museums located in Florence. This will be your day to enjoy however you wish. (B)

Florence and all its Christmas Splendor as seen from Piazzale Michelangelo



DAY 6 – SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2026 – CHRISTMAS IN TUSCANY.

You will be able to say farewell to Florence from Piazzale Michelangelo and observe the wonder of Christmas in Florence on top of it all, overlooking the entire city. Here, you get a panoramic view of the city's skyline with that amazing red dome, looking down upon all the holiday splendor.

Then 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 like a very long time 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.

At Christmas, TUSCANY is adorned for the holidays, with every stretch coming to life with markets replete with lights, flavors and traditions. Amidst little wooden houses, mulled wine and local crafts, the Christmas markets in Tuscany provide fairy-tale atmospheres and the perfect opportunity to visit the region at one of the most magical times of the year.



Lunch & Wine Tasting at
Tenuta Torciano Winery

Of course, Tuscany is known for its many delicious wines, and we could not pass up the chance to enjoy a wine tasting with lunch at Tenuta Torciano. They will be decked out for the holidays, and you will enjoy a delicious full-course meal featuring local products and a guided wine and olive oil tasting. Each dish is crafted to highlight the best of Tuscan cuisine, perfectly paired with Torciano award winning wines. The tasting will include 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.

Next, we journey to SIENA, a popular Tuscan city that has a medieval character that has survived to an amazing extent. Siena's heart is the Piazza del 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. The enchanting Mercato nel Campo turns Siena's iconic shell-shaped square into a cornucopia of typical local products, as well as wares from other Italian regions and Europe, with over 140 stalls set up, following the instructions issued in the 14th century by the municipal authorities.



Siena's Christmas Market
& Traditional Goodies

We will enjoy a walking tour of Siena. We will visit 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 over 550 years old that depict the life of Pope Pius II. You will have the evening free to enjoy Siena as you like. (B) (L) Moderate



DAY 7 – SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2026 – HOLIDAY TRADITIONS IN TUSCANY

You will have a big part of the day to explore Siena, a medieval jewel because of the fascinating and legendary atmosphere that pervades the entire city, starting right from its foundation. This is only enhanced during the holiday season. You can enjoy shopping at the Christmas market in Piazza del Campo and the many local shops.

As you explore Italy's festive spirit through its enchanting Christmas markets, you'll find that the holiday season isn't complete without indulging in the country's rich culinary traditions. From sipping mulled wine at a bustling market stall to enjoying artisanal holiday treats, the Christmas season in Italy is a feast for the senses.

We will dive into these rich culinary traditions with an unforgettable cooking class in the heart of Siena. The Fonte Giusta Academy experience is designed for food lovers eager to learn authentic recipes while enjoying a glass of wine in a charming, locally cherished restaurant.

You will have a hands-on culinary experience where you'll receive step-by-step guidance on creating three different types of pasta dough. Discover the nuances of pasta with eggs (traditional), without eggs for the local 'pici', and with potatoes (gnocchi). Once the pasta is prepared, it's time to switch gears and turn your attention to the true highlight of the class, mastering authentic Tiramisù from scratch, crafting Italy's most beloved dessert with expert guidance.

At the conclusion of your culinary journey, gather around the table with your fellow chefs for a delightful dinner, where you'll savor the fruits of your labor, complemented by a carefully selected glass of exquisite wine that enhances the flavors of your creations. (B) (D) Moderate



Fonte Giusta Cooking Academy



DAY 8 – MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2026 – MERCATINI DI NATALE DI ROMA

Today we leave lovely Tuscany and head to the Eternal City of ROME. With its ancient history and prestigious role as the seat of Catholicism, Rome offers a Christmas market that reflects the city's rich history and religious significance. The main attraction in the eternal city is Piazza Navona, a stunning baroque square. You'll find everything from handmade nativity sets to toys, ornaments, and local street food here. Ristorante Tre Scalini is located here, and you do not want to miss that famous Tartufo dessert!

It's important to note that Rome's Christmas appeal extends far beyond the markets. Visitors can explore St. Peter's Square, where a magnificent Christmas tree and a life-sized nativity scene are on display. For a more spiritual experience, walk through the many churches throughout the city to admire their Christmas decorations.

We will only have a short time to visit Rome, but you will still be able to soak up the atmosphere of festivity that permeates throughout the city. December 8th is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, one of the most important National holidays in Italy. It marks the official start of the Christmas holiday season and locals will be out in throngs taking in all the holiday decorations and festivities. That is one of the reasons the tour ends tonight, but you are welcome to extend your stay in Rome if you like. We will meet for our farewell dinner and toast our amazing adventures discovering the Christmas Markets in Italy. (B) (D) Moderate

DAY 9 – TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2026 – BUON NATALE!

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 exploring the Christmas Markets in Italy with new friends. (B)



Arrivederci & Buon Natale!

THE FOLLOWING IS INCLUDED IN YOUR ITALY WITH FRIENDS TOUR:

- 8 nights' accommodation in 3-4 star, centrally located hotels with private bath or shower.
- Many meals included: 8 breakfasts (B), 3 lunches (L), 4 dinners (D).
(Water, wine, and coffee/tea included with all meals.)
- All ground transportation in Italy during tour.
- Includes pickup at Milan Malpensa Airport no later than 1pm for transfer to Verona.
- 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.
- Plenty of memories to last a lifetime.
- Surprises along the way.

NOT INCLUDED IN TOUR:

- Does not include airfare.
- Does not include transportation to the airport in Rome on departure day.
- Does not include transportation to or from the airport in Milan if you decide to arrive early. Does not include transportation from the airport in Verona to the tour hotel if you decide to arrive at the Verona Villafranca Airport (VRN)
- Does not include remaining meals, other alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks at included meals.
- Does not include personal expenses such as internet use, laundry, mini-bar, or extra transportation.
- Does not include travel insurance.
- Does not include city tax required in each hotel. Can range from 1 – 6 Euro per person per night.

2026 LAND ONLY TOUR PRICES:

Tour begins in Milan/Verona and ends in Rome; tour is for 9 days and 8 nights.

The total cost per person is \$3399.00 with double occupancy.
(Includes Euro exchange rate adjustment, which is changing constantly.)

Traveling solo? The single supplement for this tour is \$650.00 extra per person.

Former IWF's tour members will be entitled to the \$100 BFF Discount.

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. See www.ItalyWithFriends.com for Terms & Conditions and Registration Forms.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:

Prepare for a physically demanding tour. This tour is more moderate than most but there will still be quite a bit of walking. There could be weather issues since it will be December. 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 France.

ACTIVITY & WALKING KEY:

LIGHT = 2-4 miles of mostly level walking (some cobblestones) throughout the day.

MODERATE = 2-6 miles walking throughout the day with some hills and stairs.

STRENUOUS = 2-8 miles walking throughout the day with a lot of hills, stairs, or uneven terrain.

VERY STRENUOUS = Everything above and beyond! Mamma mia!

****One of the biggest logistical hurdles for winter travel is the lack of daylight. In Central Europe including Italy in December, the sun often sets around 4:30 p.m. or 5:00 p.m. While this makes traditional outdoor sightseeing a challenge, it works entirely to your advantage during a holiday trip. The cities literally light up. Special displays, animated projections on cathedral facades, and millions of twinkling lights strung over alleyways transform the environment. The street that you walked down at 10:00 a.m. will have a completely different, magical feel once the sun goes down. We will structure our days to handle indoor activities, museums, and transit in the morning and early afternoon, reserving the evening hours entirely for soaking up the holiday atmosphere in the illuminated squares.**