

TOUR CODE

OARF



NORTHERN ITALY

Rome, Siena, San Gimignano, the Cinque Terre & Florence

11 days

Updated 9/1/2011

Day 1 *Arrive in Rome*

Today we arrive in Rome and transfer to our hotel.

Few cities in the world are as beautiful as Rome, and few are as glamorous. The Eternal City's ancient monuments and spectacular galleries are looking more magnificent than ever after an extensive restoration program.

Overnight in Rome. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Rome: City Tour*

We begin our guided tour* of Rome at the 2,000 year old colosseum. Built to seat 55,000 spectators, this arena staged Rome's most brutal gladiatorial combats. Next we walk through the Roman Forum where we will see the Curia, the Rostra, the Temple of Vesta, the Basilica of Constantine, and the Arch of Titus. Continuing onwards and upwards we reach the Campidoglio (Capitoline Hill), seat of the Roman Senate since the 12th century and the original citadel of the city. This beautiful square was redesigned by Michelangelo in the 16th century.

We arrive at Piazza Navona where we can break for lunch at one of the many restaurants and cafes on or near the square. In the square itself we can admire the impressive Fountain of the Four Rivers, with detailed figures representing the Nile, Ganges, Danube and Palata rivers.

We continue to the famous Trevi Fountain, designed by Nicholas Salvi in 1732. It's water was supplied by one of Rome's earliest aqueducts. Throwing a coin into the fountain is said to ensure your safe return to Rome. We also visit the temple-turned church called the Pantheon, and have the opportunity to admire its perfect proportions on our way to the Spanish steps, where we finish our day's tour. Balance of the day at leisure.

* NOTE: Due to traffic problems and the fact that today's sites are reasonably close to each other, much of today's tour will occur on foot and with Rome's efficient public transit system (cost of tickets included).

Overnight in Rome. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Rome: Vatican City*

Today we begin our visit to Vatican City with a guided tour through the immense Vatican Museums.* This amazing collection houses some of the most important Greek and Roman sculptures, Renaissance paintings, Flemish tapestries and mosaics in the world. Understandably this collection is visited by more than 3 million people a year. We also visit Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel to take in the breathtaking frescoes. Heading into the cavernous interior of St. Peter's Basilica we can appreciate it's many treasures including Michelangelo's Pieta. At the end of the tour we visit the elegantly

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symmetrical Piazza St. Pietro. The Vatican is a sovereign state with its own post office, broadcasting service and newspaper.

*NOTE: The timing of today's sightseeing can vary depending on seasonality. Early spring and late fall tours can often begin in the morning due to lighter crowds at these times of year. Busier times often dictate an afternoon visit in order to avoid morning crowds. Weather may also be a consideration. Your Tour Leader will advise further upon your arrival in Rome.

The afternoon is yours to explore this wonderful city on your own.

Overnight in Rome. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 4 *Rome - Siena: Walking Tour*

Today we travel by train to Siena, queen of Tuscany's hill towns (we may have to change trains at one point).

On arrival we check in to our hotel, break for lunch, and then enjoy Siena on a walking tour. Indeed, the Siena city council was Europe's first to ban motor traffic from the city centre. Siena today seems frozen in time; the town has traditionally been Florence's rival as the centre of art and architecture in Tuscany. While Florence is known for its Renaissance art and buildings, Siena takes us straight back to the Middle Ages. Perhaps by preserving its original character more than any other city in Italy, Siena is a showcase of the Italian Gothic style. The walled city of Siena occupies three hill tops and contains a rich artistic heritage.

Included on our guided walking tour of Siena's charming medieval streets and squares is a visit to the Duomo. This huge cathedral, built in bands of black and white marble, dates from the 12th century. Built in the Romanesque and Italian Gothic styles, it has a dramatically painted façade -- partly designed by Giovanni Pisano -- and a soaring black and white bell tower. The inlaid marble floor depicts different Biblical scenes and the cathedral contains a glass-enclosed box with an arm. Tradition maintains that the arm is that of John the Baptist and was used to baptize Christ.

Overnight in Siena. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Siena - San Gimignano - Siena*

This morning we drive to San Gimignano, often called the 'Manhattan of Tuscany.' The medieval town preserves 13 of its noble brick towers, which give it a skyscraper skyline. Today its fortresslike severity is softened by the subtlety of its quiet, harmonious squares, and many of its places and churches are enhanced by Renaissance frescoes. Our drive back to Siena takes us through the grape growing countryside for which the region is famous.

The afternoon is free to explore Siena on your own.

Overnight in Siena. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Siena - Volterra - Pisa - Lericci*

This morning we drive through beautiful and quintessential Tuscan rolling countryside to Volterra.

Situated like many Etruscan cities on a high plateau, Volterra offers uninterrupted views over the surrounding hills. In many places the town's ancient Etruscan walls still stand. The exact origins of the Etruscans and when they arrived in

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Italy, are unknown. Their civilisation was centred in the area between present-day Rome and Florence, and had its Golden Age from the eighth until the sixth century BC. After this period the Etruscan empire was gradually superseded by the rising power of Rome, although in the process, the Romans incorporated many aspects of Etruscan culture into their own society and beliefs. Although the Etruscans had their own language and alphabet, nothing of their literature has survived. What we know of their civilisation comes mainly from their highly decorated tombs which were stocked with everything the deceased would need in the afterlife -- food, drink, clothes, weapons and furniture.

We visit Volterra's famous Museo Guarnacci, which contains one of Italy's best collections of Etruscan artifacts. Pride of place in the museum goes to the collection of 600 Etruscan funerary urns, depicting many aspects of Etruscan customs and beliefs.

We also visit the city walls and the Etruscan Gate with its basalt heads of Etruscan gods dating back to the sixth century BC. Before leaving Volterra we view the Roman amphitheatre, dating to the first century BC. This is one of the best preserved Roman theatres in Italy and enough of the original structure has survived to allow an almost complete reconstruction.

Our next stop is Pisa, where we will spend most of our time concentrating on the town's principal monuments -- the Duomo, the Baptistery, and the most famous structure in Pisa, the gravity-defying "Leaning Tower." We will take ample time to view and photograph the tower from the outside (to climb the tower requires advance reservations and a considerable amount of time to queue for entry; time constraints make this impractical for our tour).

We continue to Lerici, set dramatically on a beautiful bay on the Ligurian coast.

Overnight in Lerici. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *The Cinque Terre*

Today we travel by boat (+/- 90 min) along the Ligurian coast to village of Vernazza in the Cinque Terre (if weather does not permit, your Tour Leader will re-adjust our program to access the area by bus and / or rail). This spectacular section of the Italian Riviera is considered to rival the Amalfi Coast near Naples for its stunning views and gorgeous sunsets. Here we begin our easy-paced walk between the coastal villages.

Depending on variables such as group interest, weather, and trail conditions, we may walk as far as Corniglia, or continue to Manarola on foot or by train (included in our National Park entrance tickets). From Manarola we will walk the short and scenic (and easy) Via D'Amore -- Lover's Walk -- to Riomaggiore. Our day offers some flexibility whereby travellers not so keen on walking can opt out on certain sections, explore on their own, and meet up with the group later using their all-day train tickets.

From Riomaggiore we take the train 10 minutes to La Spezia where we meet up with our transport to take us back to neighbouring Lerici.

Overnight in Lerici. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Lerici - Florence: The Accademia*

Today we transfer back to La Spezia (or possibly Pisa) from which we travel by train to Florence.

This afternoon we have a guided tour of the Accademia, Europe's first academy of drawing, today housing a superb art collection including Michelangelo's David, the archetype of male beauty set in marble.

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Overnight in Florence. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Florence: Duomo & Ponte Vecchio*

This morning we visit the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore (Duomo), complete with its magnificent red dome. Upon its completion in 1436, the dome was hailed as the greatest architectural achievement of its day, equaling, perhaps even surpassing, the monuments of antiquity. The cupola's diameter is greater than that of St Peter's in Rome and the nave is the third largest in Christendom. The Romanesque Baptistery, famous for its decorated bronze doors (named the "Gateway to Paradise" by Michelangelo), and the 81 m (266 feet) Giotto's Bell Tower.

We continue along the pedestrian mall to the Ponte Vecchio, the oldest bridge in Florence and the only one in the city to survive World War II. The Ponte Vecchio was built in 1345 and used to be lined with butchers' shops which have now been replaced by rows of gold and silver shops on both sides. At the Piazza Santa Croce, we stop to admire the facade of the Franciscan church of the same name. Inside we see the burial places of some of the most illustrious Italians, such as Michelangelo, Galileo, Machiavelli, Foscolo, Gentile and Rossini.

Overnight in Florence. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 10 *Florence: At Leisure*

Today is free. We suggest a visit to the Uffizi Gallery,* Giorgio Vasari's extraordinary administrative buildings which he designed for Cosimo I Medici in the mid-sixteenth century. The galleries here contain the greatest collection of Italian artworks, including hundreds of paintings by such great artists as Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian and Caravaggio. The galleries also contain one of the most famous paintings in the world, Botticelli's Birth of Venus.

Florence is also famous for its shopping, especially for leather articles, fashion in general, and its large street market.

A fun activity for the afternoon / evening is to participate in an optional Tuscan cooking class. Details can be provided by your Tour Leader upon arrival in Rome, but generally courses are about 4-5 hours in duration and culminate in dining upon the fruits of your labour. Your Tour Leader can book in advance and payment can be made locally.

* Pre-book tickets and time slot at www.uffizi.com

Overnight in Florence. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 11 *Departure*

Departure from Florence.

BUON VIAGGIO! Meal plan: Breakfast.

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