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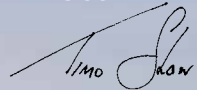
An Active Traveler's Guide to Italy



Why Travel to Italy

From the crunch of an almond-flavored cantucci cookie washed down with sweet Vin Santo wine in Tuscany to the dramatic snowcapped peaks of the Dolomites and breathtaking coastal views of Amalfi's "Path of the Gods"—Italy's distinct regions create a rich blend of cuisine, natural wonders, art, architecture, history, warm local life, and so much more. In these pages we only scratch the surface, giving you an overview of this vibrant country and a taste of some of its notable areas. We hope this inspires you to explore the "Land of Love."

Ciao!



Timo Shaw
President

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Italy in a Nutshell

One of the most romantic destinations in the world, Italy is synonymous with hearty, farm-grown cuisine, delicious wine and a remarkably rich history that changed the course of the world. It is also home to some of the most stunning landscapes on earth, making for one of the most fulfilling travel experiences in Europe.

At once pristine, rugged and civilized, Italy's landscapes evoke the heady days of Renaissance splendor, Roman genius and early Etruscan settlement. At its center, fabled Tuscany is a fertile patchwork of greens and browns, blanketed with renowned vineyards and dotted with the country's famed hill towns. With a variety of civilizations flourishing in Italy since ancient times, the country's 50 UNESCO World Heritage Sites—from Renaissance-era cities and medieval hill towns, to pre-modern architectural wonders and relics from ancient Rome—are the most of any country in the world.



The Top 5 Must-See Highlights of Italy

- Explore the elegant Baroque cities and charming fishing villages of Sicily.
- Follow scenic pathways through the forests and vineyards of Italy's Lakes Region
- Explore Tuscany's medieval hill towns, and sample their full-bodied wines
- Take in sweeping views of the legendary Amalfi Coast from terraced hillsides
- Sample the coveted truffles and Barbaresco wine of Piedmont

The Italian Cities

La moda italiana, with its dark-suited elegance, high-fashion wit, and laid-back cool, has been central to the mystique of urban Italy for generations. Experience it for yourself—and maybe pick up some chic sunglasses as well—in one of the country's vibrant cities.

Wander Florence's Oltrarno neighborhood with a knowledgeable guide, meeting artisan jewelers and leatherworkers along the way. Sip *macchiato* by the Trevi fountain in Rome, watching locals zip by on their *motos*. Or enjoy great wine with a local in one of Venice's out-of-the-way *osterias*.



Weather and Elements

Italy has a range of climates that vary by region. In general, spring and fall are often the best time to visit Italy on an active vacation, with daytime temperatures in the 60s to low 70s, evenings in the 50s, and occasional short rain showers.

In the northern Alpine areas, summer through early fall is an optimal time to travel. Springtime brings wildflowers, long days, and, on the table, early tender vegetables such as asparagus and artichokes. By late summer and fall, the warm days continue with highs in the low 80s, landscapes take on a golden hue as the grape harvest gets underway, and autumn specialties appear, such as mushrooms and truffles.

The Best Times To Visit Italy to...



Experience Olive Oil Pressing

The olive tree is native to the Mediterranean basin and thrives during warm, dry falls. In regions like Tuscany, Puglia, Campania, and Umbria with mild autumns, the olives are harvested and pressed during a six-week period that begins in late October and lasts through much of November.



Celebrate the Grape harvest

Harvest season in Italy is a perfect time to visit because these lively few weeks are full of celebrations, festivals, and feasts. Depending on the summer weather, the grapes in Italy are typically harvested between late-September and mid-October.



Avoid the Crowds

While the summer months provide assurance of warm weather, it's also the most popular time to visit. Travelers who want to avoid lines for museums and historical sites and experience an Italy just like the locals do should plan on traveling in the spring or fall—especially those interested in southern regions like Amalfi, Puglia & Sicily where the Mediterranean climate provides temperate weather as early as March and well into November.

For up-to-date forecasts, see qwikcast.com.
For historical average temperatures and rainfall, see weatherbase.com.

Don't Leave Home Without Knowing These 9 Italian Phrases

While knowledge of the local language is not necessary, you may want to learn some useful phrases to use during your visit. Italians are famously warm and friendly, but as in any culture, they appreciate visitors who make an initial effort to speak their language. By doing so with a smile, your interactions are likely to grow into rewarding exchanges.

Good Morning = Buongiorno (pronounced: bwon jorno)

Good Evening = Buenasera (pronounced: bwona say-rah)

Do you speak English? = Parla inglese? (pronounced: par-luh eengglayzeh)

I do not speak Italian = Non parlo italiano (pronounced: non par-loh eetaleeaaano)

Thank you = Grazie (pronounced: grahts-yeh NOT grat-zee)

Please = Per favore (pronounced: pear fa-VOR-ray)

Where is = Dov'è? (pronounced: do-veh) e.g. Dov'è la toeletta? = Where is the bathroom?

How much is that? = Quanto costa? (pronounced: kwanto kosta)

I'd like = Vorrei (pronounced: vorr-ray) note: used when ordering in a restaurant e.g. "vorrei un caffè per favore", is "I would like a coffee please"

A Brief History of Italy

• Etruscans—8th century to 3rd Century BC

Born out of indigenous peoples in present-day Tuscany, the Etruscans were a society ruled by aristocratic families who flourished on mining metals and raw materials. Their architecture greatly influenced the Romans.

• Ancient Rome—8th century BC to 5th Century AD

The story goes that Rome was founded by legendary brothers Romulus and Remus. Centered around its eponymous city, Rome expanded into a large empire beyond the borders of present-day Italy until its defeat by Napoleon in 1806.

• The Holy Roman Empire—8th to 19th Centuries AD

The Holy Roman Empire began when Pope Leo III named Charlemagne, King of the Franks, the first Holy Roman Emperor. The Empire expanded throughout Europe for hundreds of years.

• The Renaissance/The Medicis 14th – 16th centuries AD

The Italian Renaissance was a cultural movement backed by large, wealthy families like the Medicis that focused on a revival of Italian culture through architecture and art during a period when the Papacy was relocated to Avignon, France.

• 17th Century Independence

After a period of foreign rule by Spanish, French and Austrian powers; Italy gained independence after a series of wars and was finally unified under its national hero, Victor Emanuel, who's army marched on Rome and other southern states like Sicily and Naples. After the annexation, a parliamentary election was held and the Kingdom of Italy was announced in 1861.

• 20th Century Fascism

In the 1920s Italy's fascist party gained control of the country and under the reign of Dictator Benito Mussolini, Italians saw their civil rights heavily restricted under the fear of an uprising. Twenty years later Mussolini met his demise after siding with the Germans in WWII and was ultimately removed from power by the Allied forces.

• Present Day

Socialist rule followed the fall of Mussolini and the subsequent 40 years saw much political unrest in Italy leading to many strikes, protests and even terrorist acts by both left and right-wing extremists. Today, Italy operates as a Republic and although it's political parties have grown less divisive, there is still much grappling for power and corruption in Italy's political and economic systems.



Italy's 6 Styles of Not-To-Miss Accommodations

Masserie—Centuries-old fortified farms (primarily on the Apulian peninsula) that have been remodeled with a five-star touch.

Agriturismi—A new trend in agritourism has been to convert rustic farm-houses in magnificent settings into elegant inns. Their onsite gardens, vineyards, olive trees and farm animals contribute to delectable, locally-sourced meals during your stay.

Refugios—Alpen-style chalets where you can enjoy a beer and plate of ravioli beneath the rough-hewn beams of a lodge-like dining room while you silently watch the snowcapped peaks outside.

Health and wellness resorts—Located in regions like the hilltowns of Tuscany and the Alps, these amenity-filled resorts often feature natural hot springs, thermal pools and rejuvenating spas to replenish any active traveler after a day on the road.

Boutique city hotels—Small hotels with unique décor often found in historic neighborhoods in Italian cities like Rome, Venice and Florence allow guests to explore the vibrant heart of urban culture.

Villas—Often found on the Mediterranean coast or in the Italian Lakes region. These opulent summer estates have been renovated into elegant lodgings with historic adornments and amazing views.



“At the Agriturismo Casa Scaparone in Alba, we explored a self-sufficient farm full of fruit orchards, vineyards, and vegetable gardens. While there, we enjoyed a family-style vegetarian feast in their rustic dining room. Beneath rows of exposed beams, we sampled their produce in a range of salads, soups, and frittatas. Everything was fresh, organic, and delicious.”

—Rich B.
VBT Guest

Italian Cuisine

Italian cuisine is one of the world's finest; many consider it reason enough to travel here. Because it's based on fresh local ingredients, generations-old recipes tend to vary by region. Wherever you visit, your active exploration of Italy will be rewarded with incredible meals.

Regional Specialties:

Northern Italy is the home of risotto, polenta, and slow-cooked meat dishes such as osso bucco. The cuisine of Tuscany and Umbria in central Italy also features meat and game dishes, such as bistecca alla fiorentina (Florentine steak), sausages, and roast pork, as well as vegetable- and bread-based dishes such as savory bruschetta, ribollita (vegetable soup), and panzanella (bread salad).

Southern Italy and **Sicily** are justly known for fresh seafood—spaghetti with tiny clams, or a main course of swordfish braised in a light tomato sauce. Fresh vegetables are also prominent in dishes like spaghetti with zucchini or the well-known insalata caprese, which is comprised of tomatoes, basil, and fresh mozzarella cheese.



Meal Times

Breakfast is served at hotels from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 or 10:30 a.m. Italians generally break for lunch from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. Restaurants typically open their doors for dinner from 7:30 to 11:00 p.m. (Restaurant meal times may vary by region, trending from earlier to later as you travel from north to south.)



Tipping

Tipping in restaurants is not compulsory in Italy. The menu or bill indicates *servizio incluso*, meaning “service is included.” However, locals tend to leave a small amount in coins after a meal or a coffee—roughly one to two percent of the total, or one to two euros for a meal of up to 50 euros. For a coffee or a drink in a bar or café, 20 to 50 euro cents is appropriate. In addition, most restaurants have a “cover charge” or *il coperto*, a per-person fee of one to three euros that is added to your final bill. It is a legitimate practice and it is considered the “fee” for the place setting, the bread, tap water (which is fine to drink), and breadsticks.

Italian Cuisine

Eating & Drinking at Italian Restaurants:

Meals in Italy typically have several courses, starting with an *antipasto* (an appetizer); then a *primo* (first course), which is usually pasta or risotto; a *secondo* (main course), which is a meat or fish dish; and *dolce* (dessert).

Coffee is served throughout the day in many different ways. Italians tend to drink *caffè latte* or *cappuccino* in the morning while saving *un caffè* (espresso) for later in the day. If you like your coffee with a little milk try ordering a *macchiato*. You'll need to specify if you want it *con latte caldo* (with hot milk), *con latte freddo* (with cold milk), or *con schiuma* (with foam). There's no charge to stand at the bar with your coffee, but a small fee is added to the bill when you sit at a *café table*.

Wine has been produced in Italy for millennia, and it's the perfect complement to any active vacation. The country's climate, soil and varied geography of coastline, foothills, and mountains create ideal conditions for viticulture in 20 regions, from the Alps in the north to southernmost Sicily. Restaurants typically feature their regions' local wine. For more on Italian wine, see the next page.



Have you ever eaten tagliatelle while viewing Roman ruins?

Talk about a dinner with a view: at the Locanda del Cardinale in Assisi, they've glassed in the weathered walls of an ancient patrician home and the intricately tiled street surrounding it and built a restaurant on top. The result? The singular experience of drinking in a bit of history while eating the best of Umbrian cuisine. And though it's hard to compete with the intimate perspective of Roman life beneath your feet, Locanda del Cardinale's menu gives it a run for its money. Savor fresh salami and tender flakes of local pecorino cheese before indulging in a perfectly creamy plate of mushroom risotto. Don't forget to take advantage of their extensive wine cellar, too!



Wine

Wine is virtually synonymous with Italy. And with good reason—it recently surpassed France as the world's largest producer with more than 2,000 labels and 48,000 hectoliters. Italians have been bottling wine for more than 3,000 years and many oenophiles are fond of saying that the whole of Italy is one big vineyard.

- Tuscany is the most celebrated Italian wine region thanks to Chianti and Super Tuscan wines. The former, according to the DOC (Italy's wine control organization) must be made with at least 80% Sangiovese grapes, one of Tuscany's finest having been cultivated since 1141 AD by dozens of generations! Because the latter are unregulated by the DOC, these Super Tuscans have added a new creativity and excitement to Tuscany's wine cellars.
- The provinces of Piedmont and Veneto—in the country's northwest and northeast corners, respectively—each produce 17% of Italy's wine, versus Tuscany's 11%. Piedmont's hillsides are blanketed with sun-splashed vineyards that produce fine reds such as the light, elegant Barbaresco. But the star of the region is the complex, bold Barolo, known even by Tuscan standards as the "King of Wines." Meanwhile, Veneto produces some of Italy's most consistent and easy-to-drink table wines, such as the sweet Amarone.
- Beyond its best-known regions, most every province in Italy is producing ever-improving wines, from Campania's Rovello bianco to Sicily's fortified Marsala.





The Dolomites

The spellbinding province of South Tyrol in the heart of the dramatic Dolomite range is part Italian, part Austrian, and wholly magnificent. Exploring the scenic valleys provides amazing views of soaring massifs, ancient villages, and meadows cloaked in alpenrose. Some cultural highlights of the Dolomites include relaxing in the treatment baths and wellness facilities of Terme Merano, museums dedicated to the indigenous and secluded Ladin people, and the Duomo della Collegiata—the oldest monastery in the Dolomites.

Alpine enthusiasts will love discovering the natural splendor of the mighty Dolomites grassy slopes packed with wildflowers, rugged pine forests, and rustic Dolomites' mountain *refugios* where you can enjoy a beer and a plate of ravioli beneath the rough-hewn beams of a lodge-like dining room while you silently watch the snowcapped peaks outside.

City Spotlight

Verona

From a Roman fortified city to a medieval center of trade and commerce, Verona shows the traces of a glorious past on every street. Indeed, its ancient amphitheater, bridges and city walls convey only a small part of the city's charm. During the summer, history is brought to life when Verona's most famous monument—the Roman amphitheater, known simply as "Arena"—comes alive with memorable opera and theater performances.

"I was able to practice my Italian with the locals, ride through numerous towns and watch their daily routines unfold. It was so much more experiential to travel this way. I felt more connected to the memories I made."

—Jennifer S., Italy: Cycling the Dolomite Valleys



The Unique Regions of Italy

The Dolomites:

Amazing views of soaring massifs, ancient villages, and meadows cloaked in alpenrose.

The Lakes:

Scenic walking paths, lavish lakeside villas, and charming medieval villages.

Piedmont:

Home of the Slow Food movement, this region is a feast of Italian culture and cuisine.

Tuscany:

Hilltop vineyards, cypress lined country lanes, fortified Etruscan ruins and just about all the mouthwatering cuisine you can eat.

Maremma:

This unspoiled region is a hidden gem in the western reaches of Tuscany.

Puglia:

The geographic 'heel' of the Italian boot that just might be Italy's heart.

The Amalfi Coast:

See awe-inspiring stretches of the Mediterranean Sea that wind with the coast on iconic routes like the Path of the Gods.

Sicily:

Discover the diverse cultural influences on the Mediterranean's largest island. Think azure waters, ancient villages, and Sicilian delicacies.



City Spotlight

Como

Its proximity to Lake Como and the Alps has made Como a popular tourist destination. The city is also the birthplace of many notable historical figures, including ancient Roman author and philosopher Pliny the Elder, his nephew and Roman statesman Pliny the Younger and scientist Alessandro Volta, inventor of the electric battery (“volt” derives from his name).

FUN FACT:

The Rockefeller Fountain that today stands in the Bronx Zoo in New York City was once the focal point of Como’s main square, Piazza Cavour. William Rockefeller bought the fountain in 1902 for 3,500 lira—about \$637 USD!



The Italian Lakes

Scenic walking paths, lavish lakeside villas, and charming medieval villages make any active vacation to the Italian Lake District memorable.

Extravagant villas dot the shores of the region’s most iconic body of water: Lake Como. Some are the homes of stars like George Clooney, Madonna and Versace; while some are well-preserved historic houses that are now open to the public. One of the best examples of the latter is a 17th-century villa named after Charlotte—the daughter of Princess Marianna of Prussia—who was given the property in the mid-1800s as a wedding gift. Charlotte’s botanist husband expanded the existing landscape, including an exotic corner laid out according to the dictates of English gardens. In spring, the villa’s grounds are bursting with more than 150 varieties of azaleas and rhododendrons.

What to Eat

The traditional fare of the Italian lakes tends to be a hearty mix of meat, pasta, fish and bountiful produce in the summer months. You’ll have plenty of chances to sample it all during meals at local restaurants or when visiting a bustling summer market. Our favorite experience perhaps is eating fresh fish on the aptly named Isola dei Pescatori—translated as ‘Fisherman’s Island’—which is just a short boat ride from the town of Stresa. Picture yourself taking in the sunset over a glass of local wine and a dish of freshly caught fish at a lakeside trattoria.



Piedmont

Along the gentle hillsides of the Langhe, where a patchwork of sheep paddocks and Dolcetto grape arbors give way to chestnut forests full of wild truffles, you’ll discover what makes Piedmont Italy’s ultimate destination for food and wine. In the birthplace of the Slow Food movement, you’ll savor every step of your journey: rubbing shoulders with artisans, sampling world-class wines in 200-year-old cellars, and exploring fertile river valleys full of orchards.



City Spotlight

Turin

Extend your time in Italy with an additional two nights in Turin, known as the “Capital of the Alps,” which is a distinguished city full of baroque buildings and beautiful riverside parks. While there, you’ll want to tour regal House of Savoy palaces, people watch in the Piazza Castello, and visit the Chapel of the Holy Shroud. With its tree-lined boulevards and stately gardens, Turin often reminds travelers of Paris, and you’ll delight in exploring the Versailles-inspired gardens of the Palazzo Reale. Of course, the city is all Italy where it counts: a stroll through the Quadrilatero Romano will yield numerous excellent restaurants serving Piedmontese fare in this, the capital of the Slow-Food movement.

Say Formaggio!

It takes cheesemaker Silvio Pistone 12 hours to make a batch of his signature sheep cheese. That’s about 11 hours and 15 minutes longer than factory-made versions, but just a taste of the Borgomale native’s goods will convince you that it’s worth it.

Silvio uses the finest raw milk for his creations, from his own herd of 30 Langhe sheep—he used to have 50, but his “maestro” convinced him to cull his herd and focus more on the well-being of each animal. His dedication exemplifies why Piedmont is home of the Slow Food Movement. The work harkens back to old Italian traditions, a bygone age when farmers would walk the mule tracks down to the coast to trade wheels of cheese for salted fish or crystals of salt. “I don’t want to lose that part of my history or my roots,” Silvio tells us. “This is land my grandparents farmed and it’s important to maintain it.”

City Spotlight

Florence

Lying gracefully on the banks of the River Arno, Florence is best known as the creative center of the flurry of productivity and inspiration that defined the Renaissance. Florence first came to prominence during the Middle Ages, when it was a center for European trade and finance. With this rich history, it grew to become one of the wealthiest cities of the time—and even served as capital of the Kingdom of Italy for a short time, between 1865 and 1870.

“Riding along the Tuscan coast has long been a “Bucket List” item for me. It wouldn’t have been possible without VBT, which set up one of the most well-run tours I’ve ever done. I appreciate the attention to quality, the various outside activities offered and I can’t say enough about our tour guides. I left Italy smiling from the experience and sad that I was saying good-bye to new friends. I will return to VBT without a doubt!”

–Jose M.,
Tuscany by the Sea

Tuscany

This is the Italy that you’ve read about, that you’ve seen in magazines, that you’ve longed to visit since you began traveling. With vineyards perched atop billowing hills, cypress lined country lanes, fortified Etruscan ruins and just about all the mouthwatering cuisine you can eat, Tuscany rewards its visitors well. Tuscany is also our most popular destination, and with 5 distinct itineraries in the region, we know you’ll be able to find your dream Tuscan Vacation with us.

Along the Mediterranean, the Costa degli Etruschi—the Etruscan Coast—holds endless secrets that are yours to unlock on a journey through spectacular landscapes of sea and sun-soaked hills. The ancient fortified hill towns and Roman ruins remind us that we aren’t the first to fall in love with the sublime beauty here.

Tuscany, specifically Florence and Siena, was the birthplace of the Renaissance and many of its villages stand just as they did when the likes of Michelangelo and da Vinci led that surge in creativity that introduced unprecedented innovations in the arts, humanities and sciences.



Cantuccini di Prato Recipe

Learning about the local culinary traditions of a destination is a must on any vacation. Our style of travel includes most meals as well as cooking classes, demonstrations or tastings designed to give you a window into authentic Italian cuisine.

One of our favorite treats is a type of Tuscan biscuit known as Cantuccini di Prato. Here’s the recipe, courtesy of a local Trip Leader.

Ingredients: (For 2 people)

- 1 cup of Italian “00” super fine farina (flour)
- 1 egg
- ¾ cup of sugar
- 1 cup of almonds
- 1 tsp of baking powder

Directions:

1. Put all the ingredients into the flour, mix well and knead energetically to obtain a soft sticky dough.
2. Roll the dough into cords and place them on a baking sheet covered with wax paper.
3. Bake at 350°F for 15 minutes until biscuits become gold colored with a darker brown edge.
4. Serve on its own or pair with fruit and chocolate.



City Spotlight

Rome

Rome is one of the world's most photogenic cities. One could stay for months and still not take in all of its wonders. During your stay, you'll witness a heady mix of modern and old, past and present—side by side on virtually every street. They say you should do what Romans do when you're here...we think it's better to follow your own whims and desires in the world's biggest open-air museum.



Maremma

They say that drama defines all things Tuscan and nowhere is this truer than in its westernmost reaches—a hidden gem known as the unspoiled Maremma region. Ancient traditions thrive here along the rugged coastal farmlands. Admire precise rows of prickly pear cactus, laid long ago to delineate farmers' lands. And a visit here isn't fully realized without feeling white sand between your toes and wading into the sea, the green island of Giglio shimmering in the distance.

Hill towns don't merely perch atop earthen mounds here; they seem sprouted from the soft limestone tufa that hoists them above pristine fields. And ancient subterranean caves, believed to have been carved centuries ago by Etruscans—the area's original settlers—are now used as labyrinthine wine and olive oil cellars.

Once the territory of the *Butteri*—horse riding cattle herders—the area is becoming a must-see travel destination that is perfect for active travel enthusiasts and foodies alike. Imagine spending your days cycling or walking through rolling foothills and vineyard-laden landscapes and your nights relaxing at farm hotels. Known as *agriturismi*, these hotels are known for their farm-to-table ethos and serve meals so fresh that the vegetables are picked onsite mere minutes before preparing.



Puglia

Set on the sturdy heel of the Italian boot, coastal Puglia shares the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, with a long history and colorful culture and cuisine that evoke its past Spanish, Turkish, and Norman settlers. The quiet pace of life and Puglians' devotion to their farms, groves, and vineyards create an ambiance that is unique in all of Europe. Don't miss stays at genuine *masserie*—centuries-old fortified villages made into country hotels. You'll love staying in *masserie*, visiting the white-washed trulli houses of Alberobello—a UNESCO World Heritage site—and taking in scenic views of glittering coastlines punctuated by inviting azure waters.

The aforementioned *masserie* (or singularly, *masseria*) were fortified around the 16th century to ward off attacks by pirates and brigands. Defining characteristics are their high boundary walls, angular towers, drawbridges and watchtowers. Inside the walls, families worked and lived alongside their own church, oil mill and oven to bake bread. These farms would also house cisterns for water, storage rooms for tools and hay, stables, and everything else needed for day-to-day life.



City Spotlight

Matera

The unique landscape of Matera is a breathtaking experience for the visitors who arrive here for the first time. The Sassi (ancient cave dwellings) are like sculptures that have been dug out of the rock along the edge of the ravine. Bordering Basilicata and Puglia—and in a strategic position between the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea—Matera is one of the oldest towns in the world. The area around Matera has been inhabited since prehistoric times with settlements dating back to the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods.

“While I have lived in Italy and traveled quite extensively, Puglia was unknown to me. It is a gem, and all the more wonderful to discover it at a slow pace.”

– Mary D., Puglia: Italy's Undiscovered Coast



City Spotlight

Naples

Naples, once one of the most powerful and influential city-states in southern Italy, will surprise and fascinate you with its history, atmosphere, culture and food. Founded by the Greeks, it was then influenced by the Romans, Arabs, Germans, French and Spanish, all of whom have left a lasting impression on the city's architecture and culture.

Be sure to try the pizza (invented here!), espresso and the endless variety of pastries. Not to mention the museums, whose exhibits feature artifacts excavated from Pompeii, and paintings by artists ranging from Caravaggio to Warhol.

“This trip walking along the Amalfi Coast makes you feel sorry for travelers going by on big tour buses and thinking they have seen the Amalfi Coast. We saw the coastal villages by boat, as well as from above as we hiked the Path of the Gods, and enjoyed the villages free from the worry of navigating the narrow roads. Stopping at specially picked restaurants with fantastic views for lunch and taking time to see gardens in Ravello made the trip oh-so special.”

—Caryl F.,
The Amalfi Coast & Capri

The Amalfi Coast

The Amalfi Coast, Campania's coastal gem, is located on the southern edge of the Sorrentine Peninsula and features astonishing landscapes where dramatic cliffs of the Lattari mountains crash into the Gulf of Salerno below. Dotted with charming villages, majestic views and world-class walking trails, the Amalfi Coast—named a UNESCO World Heritage site as a cultural landscape in 1997—is a must-see destination for any world traveler. Active travelers will delight in the experience of walking along its most revered walking path, *Sentiero degli Dei* or “The Path of the Gods.”

Any visitor to the less-traveled south of Italy will want to take some time to try authentic Neapolitan pizza, sample exotic seafood and unwind over a robust glass of Primitivo. The region's charm is thoroughly evident in its delectable cuisine and its rich vintner's tradition.

The spectacular Isle of Capri, just a 20-minute hydrofoil ride from the mainland, is every hiker's dream. Here, walking trails offers breathtaking views of the Tyrrhenian Sea and dramatic coastal rock formations.



Sicily

The Mediterranean's largest island has a very rich history that is distinct from mainland Italy as it has been courted by the Greeks, refined by the Romans and influenced by the Moors over the past 2,000 years. Active travelers will also love the extended season Sicily's mild climate provides, making the weather quite comfortable for biking from March through November.

The Food

The region has a long history of producing a variety of noted cuisines and wines due to the diversity in cultural history and perfect climate—we've even heard some refer to the region as “God's Kitchen”. Native borage, wild fennel, cherry tomatoes, lemons and oranges often accent sublime dishes that primarily revolve around the abundance of fresh seafood. Those with a sweet tooth will have to visit Modica's Antica Dolceria Bonajuto chocolate factory, which has processed cocoa seeds according to old Aztec techniques since the late 1800's.

Historical Sites

Thanks to a large earthquake that demolished much of the island in 1693, many towns were rebuilt in a 17th century baroque style that is unique to the island. Visit Noto, Ragusa Ibla, Modica and Scicli to see some of the island's most beautiful Baroque palaces and churches, often made with local red sandstone.

Outside of the city of Syracuse, you'll find one of the most fascinating ruins on the island of Sicily. Protected as part of a nature reserve carved by the Anapo and Calcinara Rivers, the Necropolis of Pantalica is where locals entombed thousands of bodies within graves carved into the cliffs.



City Spotlight

Syracuse

Located in the southeastern corner of Sicily, on the Ionian coast overlooking a picturesque bay, Syracuse has forever depended upon the sea, rallying herself around the island of Ortigia. Perhaps more than any other modern city in Sicily, Syracuse maintains a visible continuity from its ancient past to the present, by preserving a large number of vestiges for visitors to see and enjoy. This rich past, along with the art museums and local traditions, make Syracuse an interesting place to explore for visitors from all over the world.



Traveling To Italy With A Tour Operator? The Questions To Ask

How do your Trip Leaders know the region?

All of our Trip Leaders are residents of the region they lead in. They know the local customs and traditions, as well as the inside information on revealing and reliable places to shop, eat, explore, and relax. They are all fluent in English and are able to communicate to both you and locals alike.

Will we eat at locally-owned restaurants or at the hotels?

Both! Typically each breakfast is served at the hotel and the occasional dinner, depending on your tour. Those staying in farm hotels like *masserie* and *agriturismi* will eat more at the hotel while other tours may utilize locally-owned restaurants and even some home-hosted meals with area residents during group dinners.

What if someone in my group wants to bike or walk more than I do?

Not a problem. You can bike or walk as much or as little as you want. Our support van is available to give rides to any group members who would like a rest, skip a hill or even return to the hotel to relax or perhaps explore the town we're staying in on foot.

How many people will there be in my group?

Our average group size is 17 guests.

Can I bring my kids or grandkids?

You certainly can but please note that VBT requires that travelers are at least 16 years old for our international vacations.

What if I am a solo traveler?

Single travelers love VBT vacations. Our trips encourage a sociable pace allowing you to easily make friends and our hospitable Trip Leaders ensure everyone feels part of the group. There is a single supplement fee for single travelers. However, if you are on a tour where sharing a room is possible, we will do our best to match you with a roommate and refund your supplement fee.



A Day in the Life of an Active Vacation in Italy

8:00 a.m.

We begin each day with a hearty breakfast, with choices that reflect the bounty of regional cuisine, from fresh fruit to warm pastries, to sausages and eggs.

10:00 a.m.

All VBT routes are bicycle and pedestrian friendly, so you can pedal or walk at your own pace without distraction. Whether cycling through the epic valleys of the Dolomites or walking through ancient villages in the Tuscan Hilltowns, you decide the distance.

11:00 a.m.

Meet with your VBT support van at a pre-arranged time to replenish your water supply and have a healthy snack. Then continue biking or walking on your way to a picnic lunch prepared by your Trip Leaders.

12:30 p.m.

Other lunch options on your active vacation will highlight local tradition: perhaps a farm-to-table meal at an *agriturismo* or a delightful home-cooked meal with a local family at their farm estate.

2:00 p.m.

Back in the saddle, continue cycling through vineyards on the Strada del Vino or take a ferry to the Isola San Giulio in Lake Orta and stroll along La Via del Silenzi ("The Way of Silence"), a footpath that encircles the island before stopping to admire the island's beautifully frescoed basilica.

4:30 p.m.

Refreshment calls. Perhaps we'll pause for a wine tasting at a local vineyard, learn how to make an Italian dish with a local chef or simply enjoy a dip in the pool at our hotel.

7:00 p.m.

Dinner means gathering with your fellow travelers and Trip Leaders at our *masserie* or wonderful local restaurants. But we also make sure that a few meals are free, so you can make culinary discoveries on your own.

9:30 p.m.

Take a stroll in the center of town or enjoy a nightcap, if you like. Perhaps a lovely *vin santo* in Tuscany.

VBT's Value Is Unsurpassed in Active Travel

Simplify your life and your journey. When you travel with VBT, we take care of all your needs from the moment you step on the plane until you return home. Each tour includes:

- Roundtrip international airfare (with Air Package)
- All transfers to and from the airport (with Air Package)
- All accommodations
- Numerous meals and snack breaks
- Custom VBT bicycle and helmet, or walking poles included
- Services of two local expert VBT Trip Leaders
- Unique, immersive cultural activities facilitated by your Trip Leaders
- Vehicle support for water, snack breaks, and assistance as well as transportation between sites
- Daily route briefings, RidewithGPS navigation on your phone, and hard-copy route notes



Travel & Leisure World's Best Tour Operator Award

Our commitment to both quality and value was recognized once again when VBT was recently named among the “World’s Best Tour Operators” by the readers of *Travel + Leisure* Magazine. This is the eighth year we have received a top accolade from the magazine.

The Most Affordable, Comprehensive Trips in their Class

VBT's prices are lower than any other active travel company. We give you more for your money—while maintaining the highest quality. Unlike our competitors, we include nearly everything at one low price, with no last minute “extras” to boost your cost. How? We buy directly, carefully tend our long-standing vendor relationships, and pass the savings on to you.

Italy Vacations



Italy Bike & Boat: Venice to Mantua

Venice | Mantua | Verona

There is a side of Italy begging to be explored by bike and boat. Here, fishermen haul in their catch in the shadow of Venice ... the Po River Delta harbors an untouched wilderness ... Renaissance-era cities hide cultural jewels, from Grana Padano cheese and a carousel museum to grand ducal palaces.



Puglia: Italy's Undiscovered Coast

Alberobello | Salento | Lecce

Cycle along stunning coastal roads overlooking the Adriatic Sea and discover a different side of Italy, where local life moves at a gentle pace. Along the way we'll learn about local culture through home-hosted meals, olive-oil tastings and a visit to the iconic *trulli* houses of Alberobello, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Italy: Cycling the Dolomite Valleys

Venice | Cortina d'Ampezzo | Verona

Easy cycling and dramatic alpine scenery are combined on this one-of-a-kind journey through the valleys of the Dolomite mountains of northern Italy.



Tuscany by the Sea

Orvieto | Giglio Island | Rome

Discover by bike where Tuscany pours into the Tyrrhenian Sea, tranquility washes over Italy's unspoiled Maremma region and Italian hospitality overflows in ancient towns and at locally-owned *agriturismi*.

Italy Vacations



The Tuscan Coast

Florence | Castiglione | Rome

The exquisite beauty of Tuscany's coastline and the Tyrrhenian Sea unfold before you as we cycle along breathtakingly scenic routes including the Strada del Vino, one of the most beautiful wine roads in Italy.



Sicily: Biking the Southern Coastal Villages

Ragusa | Modica | Noto

Pedal back in time on the Mediterranean island of Sicily courted by Greeks, refined by Romans and influenced by Moors to develop its own distinct, Italian flavor. Join us and discover Sicily at a slower pace, from the footstep of Mt Etna to the shores of the Ionian Sea.



Walking The Amalfi Coast & Capri

Pompeii | Capri | Positano

Few places can rival the dramatic beauty of the Amalfi Coast and Capri, an enchanting region where walking trails like the iconic Path of the Gods give way to panoramic views of rugged mountains plunging into the Mediterranean Sea. Off the trail we'll visit the ruins of Pompeii and visit scenic seaside towns like Positano and Ravello.



Walking the Italian Lakes

Bellagio | Stresa | Orta San Giulio

Stroll the scenic shores of Italy's Lake District including Como, Maggiore and Orta and explore their opulent Renaissance villas. Along the way we'll pause to savor the acclaimed wines and cuisine of Piedmont and Lombardy.

Limoncello Recipe

On the Sentieri degli Dei—"Path of the Gods"—along Italy's Amalfi Coast, you catch the scent of fresh lemon in waves. The tart and floral aroma rides the sea breeze up from terraced groves along the coast, filling your nose with the sweet and bitter perfume of citrus...and the promise of one of Italy's most delicious creations, limoncello. This vibrant yellow liqueur is a hallmark of Amalfi's seaside culture. You'll find it for sale in virtually every store—most families have their own recipe—and at the end of most meals, as a delicious, chilled digestivo.

Interested in making your own limoncello? You're in luck! One of our Trip Leaders recently shared her family's recipe with us. Brew up your own batch for a tiny taste of the Amalfi Coast today!

Ingredients:

- 1 liter grain alcohol (or vodka)
- 1 liter water
- 8 medium organic lemons
- 1 3/4 to 2 cups sugar

Directions:

1. According to our recipe, for the best limoncello the lemons should not even be washed (though we'd recommend a light rinse for sanitation's sake!). Peel the lemons into long strips of zest with a paring knife or vegetable peeler, being careful to collect only the zest, not the white. Save the zest and set aside the lemons for another use.
2. Place the peels in the alcohol, seal the bottle, and set-aside in a dark, cool cupboard for five days or more.
3. When the alcohol is ready, bring 1 liter of water to a boil in a medium saucepan and add the sugar. Stir until it's dissolved and then let the solution cool.
4. Strain the alcohol to remove the lemon rinds and then combine with the sugar solution. Pour into bottles and enjoy. You may drink limoncello hot or cold.



Top 10 Reasons To Travel To Italy With VBT

1. We offer a variety of Italian destinations from the Dolomites, to Puglia, to the Amalfi Coast and Tuscany.
2. Immerse yourself in Italian culture—olive oil and wine tastings, stays at *agriturismi*, and home-hosted visits.
3. Our amazing local Trip Leaders provide insight into the destinations' local customs, flora, and fauna.
4. VBT includes international airfare in our prices.
5. Named among the World's Best Tour Operators by *Travel + Leisure* magazine eight years.
6. We engage all your senses for an unparalleled experience.
7. VBT offers a choice of daily routes and vehicle support.
8. Each trip includes immersive cultural experiences, authentic accommodations, and numerous meals.
9. Small group size—each Italian tour has a maximum of 20 guests.
10. We embrace solo travelers and have affordable single supplements.

Talk To A VBT Tour Consultant

(800) 245-3868

Mon-Fri 8:30 a.m. - 6:30 p.m. ET
Saturday 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. ET

