

A Custom Designed Itinerary to ITALY

by

IN QUEST OF THE CLASSICS

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DAY 1: MILAN/ COMO. Upon arrival at Milan's Malpensa Airport, collect your rental car, unlimited mileage, includes CDW, fire, theft and tax included. (Road tax of approximately \$3.00 per day must be paid locally.) An international driver's license is required. Drive the short distance (approximately one hour) to Lake Como, where you will check in to a king bedded room with lake view (balcony on request) for four nights at the Villa Flori. http://www.hotelvillaflori.com/inglese/como_lake.html. The Villa Flori stands in a beautiful private park full of age-old trees overlooking Lake Como. Marquis Flori, original owner of the villa, used to boast that he could grow orange and lemon trees without the need of glasshouses. Each room is furnished with style and enjoys a unique panorama: the calm waters of Lake Como and the beautiful surrounding park.

DAYS 2 - 4: ITALIAN LAKES. Three days on your own to explore the lovely Lake District of Italy. There are spectacular views everywhere around **Lake Como** where you are staying.



There's the popular resort town of Cernobbio, and nearby, the legendary, 16th century Villa d'Este. Between Tremezzo and Cadenabbia, you'll find the Villa Carlotta with its beautiful terraced gardens of tropical vegetation. Take a ferry from Cadenabbia to Bellagio, the "Pearl of the Lake," which sits on a promontory dividing Lake Lecco from the south branch of Lake Como. Near San Giovanni you'll see more splendid gardens at the Villa Melzi as well as a magnificent view of Tremezzo. One day you might like to drive to **Lake Maggiore** for a boat trip out of Stresa to the three **Borromean Islands**. Isola Bella is the most famous and popular, with its palace where Mussolini, MacDonald and Laval met in 1935. The Isola dei Pescatori (Fisherman's Island) is the best preserved, with the narrow alleys of the fishing village. The Isola Madre (Mother Island) has an 18th century palace and more splendid gardens. **Lake Orta** lies to the west of Lake Maggiore. Although it is one of the minor sub-alpine lakes, all the fascination and history of the larger lakes seem to be concentrated here: the quiet beauty of the landscape; fascinating history; and a wealth of artistic treasures of Romanesque and Baroque architecture.

DAY 5: LUCCA. Today you will have about a four hour drive (not counting stops) to Lucca. You will come first to Parma, an important market town known all over the world for its delicious ham, Prosciutto di Parma and Parmesan cheese. The historic city center, like almost every city in Italy, has a Romanesque Cathedral and Baptistery. Many buildings are decorated with Correggio frescoes. Then you will travel along the coast through the Riviera towns of Forte di Marmi and Viareggio. Next is Pisa, where you should definitely stop for a look at the famous Leaning Tower. The four top attractions, all Pisan-Romanesque buildings, are at the Piazza del Duomo, the famous square also known as Campo dei Miracoli: The Duomo, the Baptistery, the Cemetery and the Leaning Tower. The tower, which floats on a sandy base of clay, is no longer in serious danger of collapse. Great engineering efforts have been made to save this treasure. The tower is open to tourists wanting to make a climb to the top.

Your final destination is Lucca, where you will check in for two nights into a queen bedded room at the **Hotel Ilaria**. www.hotelilaria.com. Hotel Ilaria was created out of the old stables of the Villa Bottini and has parking and a private garage. The hotel's delightful annex, the Residenza dell'Alba, is situated in a 14th-century church, which you enter from a little square through its elegant portico. The bedrooms are elegantly furnished in shades of cherry red, gold and blue, welcoming and intimate.

DAY 6: LUCCA. Situated in the center of a fertile plain, Lucca has preserved within its ramparts, a rich heritage of churches, palaces, and tiny piazzas. The charming narrow streets wind through the many medieval buildings in the Old Town. The Cathedral of San Martino dates back to the 11th century. Other important churches include the Chiesa San Frediano and the San Michele in Foro. Stroll along the 16th and 17th century ramparts, the magnificent city walls, for lovely views of the city from the tree lined promenade.

You might like to visit some of the villas around Lucca. These villas were the summer residences of some of the most important noble families of the town. **Villa Bernardini** was built between 1600 and 1615. Its plain, cubical shape, with a three-arched porch on the front, gives on the whole a feeling of simplicity. The garden is enriched by rare plants and trees, and by a beautiful



lemon-house. The treasure of Villa Bernardini is the shrubbery amphitheater, dating back to the XVIII century. (Villa will be open from 3 to 7:30PM) The **Villa Torrigiani** sums up all the splendor and magnificence of the Lucchese tradition of the country mansion-house. The long and monumental avenue leading to the villa is lined with cypresses, and has a pompous gate. The "Garden of Flora" is the clearest example of the Lucchese taste, a bright and surprising ensemble of grottoes, nymph temples, flowers, masks and fountains that make you feel as

if you were in a fairy-tale. Villa Torrigiani offers guided tours for a small fee at 4:30, 5:30 and 6:30PM. **Villa Mansi** is the pride and the symbol of Lucchese architecture as far as villas go. It stands out from the other villas by its magnificence. The present look of Villa Mansi is due to the architect Maurizio Oddi, who worked on the rearrangement of the preexistent building during the years 1634-1635. Later on there were new interventions that further enriched the villa, most of all, the garden. In 1675 the property of the villa went to the Mansi family, who commissioned the architect Filippo Juvarra to renovate the garden. The whole park was transformed by his genius. **PLEASE VERIFY OPENING DAYS AND TIMES LOCALLY.**

DAY 7: SAN GIMIGNANO/ SIENA. Head southeast today to Siena. Along the way stop for a visit to charming little San Gimignano, a wonderful 14th century medieval hill town with narrow, cobblestone streets, which seem to belong to another century. Ramparts topped by fourteen towers of nobility encircle it.

Originally there were 72 towers, which the lords built as high as they could, and from various vantage points there are spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. The Piazza della Cisterna is the center of town, where there are restaurants to enjoy and maybe relax and people watch. Continue on to Siena, where you will check in to a queen bedded room for two nights at the **Hotel Garden**, a prestigious 19th century residence with original frescoed halls, surrounded by a secular live oaks park. <http://www.garden-hotels.it/uk/garden/garden.html>. The property is situated just 700 meters from the ancient walls of Siena and has been recently renovated. The bedrooms feature customized decoration and are equipped with all the modern comforts. There is a spacious swimming pool and a tennis court, as well as an elegant restaurant.



DAY 8: SIENA. A showplace of Italian Gothic, Siena has preserved much of its original character. Gothic palaces, aristocratic mansions, narrow streets and medieval gates, walls and towers are the heart of the city's character. Visit the Piazza del Campo, the central square where the famous horse race, the Palio, is held twice a year.



All the pomp and ritual of the Middle Ages live again during the big race. Nearby is the impressive cathedral made from green, black and white marble. Other highlights of Siena include the Palazzo Pubblico, the Libreria Piccolomini, the National Picture Gallery and the Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana. When you finish your tour, you may wish to visit the Enoteca just outside the entrance to the old fortress. This is a showcase for the finest wines of Italy and there are terraces where you can enjoy wine tasting.

Time permitting you might continue south a bit to **Pienza**, a delightful little town redesigned by Pope Pius II in the 15th century, where you can enjoy some of the locally made Pecorino cheese served with honey. The tiny little town of **Monteriggioni**, perhaps the smallest walled city in the area, is also worth a visit. Also in the area you will find **Abbazia di Sant'Antimo**, a 12th century jewel fashioned in large part of luminous alabaster. This is one of the most beautiful Romanesque monastic churches in existence. The abbey hosts several frescoes, including one in the crypt of Jesus exiting the sepulchre between two angels. **Monte Oliveto Maggiore**, once one of the most powerful monasteries of Tuscany, is now famous for its remarkable frescoes showing the life of St. Benedict and for the minutely detailed inlay of its wooden choir stalls.

DAY 9: FLORENCE. Drive north today to Florence, perhaps taking the Chianti Wine route along the Via Chiantigiana. It is a most scenic route, taking you past miles and miles of vineyards. There are many interesting towns along the way where you may stop at an enoteca, or wine bar, and learn about the various kinds of Chianti. One of the very best is in the town of **Greve**. Or, you could stop in **Impruneta**, a Tuscan hill town surrounded by pine forests and olive groves that has developed world wide fame for the natural red finished terra cotta. Impruneta began exporting of tiles, pottery and brick in 1098, this encouraged development and population growth between the 12th and 13th centuries. If you have time, visit the manufacturing outlets to view or purchase a wealth of different pottery from life-size statues to hand made pots, garden vases and oil jars with a large range of floor and ruff tiles. When you reach Florence, drop off your rental car and take a taxi to **Hotel Cellai** to check in for three nights. www.hotelcellai.it.

This family owned and run hotel is built in a beautifully restored 18th century building offering the magical atmosphere and charm of living in a Florentine home. The flowered roof garden is a sunny, peaceful, place offering a beautiful view of Florence's monuments and surrounding hills. The hotel is approximately a seven-minute walk from the Duomo.

DAY 10: FLORENCE. This morning enjoy a group three hour walking tour of the city. The tour includes the exteriors of Palazzo Strozzi, Palazzo Vecchio, Ponte Vecchio, Piazza Signoria, Brunelleschi's Dome, Ghiberti's Gates of Paradise, and last but not least, the original marble statue of David housed in the Accademia museum of Florence.



As you walk through the streets and piazzas of Florence you will learn about the ideas of the Renaissance, the lives of many famous artists, the Medici family who showered Florence with countless masterpieces, and how life changed forever during this epic period of the history of Florence. In-between the famous landmarks, you'll walk along enchanting back-streets and alleys paved with the original stones from ancient times and discover lesser known

attractions that will help you understand the complex and rich history of the city and enjoy a more intimate experience of Florence. You will admire the Ponte Vecchio and enter the piazza Signoria, and Dante's old neighborhood. After a walk through the historical center of Florence you arrive at the Accademia Gallery, home to Florence's most treasured work of art – Michelangelo's “David”. Time to admire Michelangelo's “Slaves” as well, a series of breath taking sculptures of original captives of the stone who writhe, struggle and turn, forever attempting to free themselves from their rigid marble blocks. Tour finishes inside the Accademia Gallery. *(NOTE: Tickets for admittance to the Gallery are payable direct the day of the tour).*

Remainder of your stay at leisure to explore the Renaissance City.

DAY 11: FLORENCE. Two full days to enjoy sightseeing in the city. Museum visits are a must in Florence. The Uffizi has an immense collection of Renaissance art. Cross the Arno to visit the Pitti Palace to see even more Renaissance art and artifacts in a lovely setting. Continue on to the Boboli Gardens, full of statuary, and fountains.



We suggest a visit to the interactive, newly-opened Leonardo da Vinci museum. It hosts the largest and most beautiful machines taken from Leonardo da Vinci's codes. *Many museums will be closed on Monday in the city.*

Another city site worth a visit is Santa Croce. Legend says that Santa Croce was founded by St Francis himself. The vast structure is the largest Franciscan church in the world. Its most notable features are its sixteen chapels, many of them decorated with frescoes by Giotto.

Florence is such a wonderful city for strolling. Along the Ponte Vecchio you'll find all the jewelry shops, but very few bargains. Rest your feet and get in some people watching from one of the many sidewalk cafes.

DAY 12: DEPARTURE. Make your way to the airport in time for your flight home.

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