

A Custom Designed Itinerary to
The Italian Lakes, Tuscany & Umbria:
By

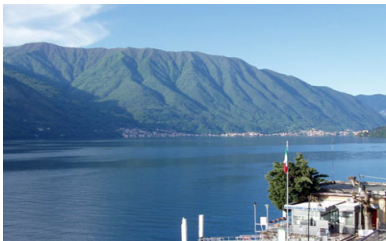
IN QUEST OF THE CLASSICS

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DAY 1: MILAN/COMO. Upon arrival at Milan's Malpensa Airport, we will be met by our private coach, driver and English-speaking escort and taken to Lake Como (about an hour away) where we will check in for three nights at the Hotel Due Corti. This ancient post house has been completely rebuilt to feature all the modern conveniences. Each of the 58 rooms is elegantly furnished with antiques. There is a restaurant, piano bar, and fully equipped health and fitness center. The hotel is located in the historic center of Como. Relax for the remainder of the day until we gather for a welcome dinner at our hotel. (D)



DAY 2 & 3: LAKE DISTRICT. Two full days to enjoy the scenic beauty of the Italian Lake District. We can visit Lake Garda. The most spectacular road is along the corniche, on the west side of the lake from Salò to Riva and it is prettiest in the late afternoon, when the sun strikes the east shore. There is a magnificent panorama from the Madonna di Monte Castello church. The town of Sirmione is on a narrow peninsula at the southern end of the lake. Desenzano del Garda, a lovely resort dominated by its castle is also noted for the ruins of a Roman villa with remarkable mosaics. There is a boat trip out of Stresa on Lake Maggiore to the three Borromean Islands. Isola Bella is the most famous and popular with its palace where Mussolini, MacDonal 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 splendid gardens. And, of course, there are beautiful views everywhere around Lake Como itself. There's the popular resort town of Cernobbio and nearby, the legendary, 16th century Villa d'Este. Between Tremezzo and Cadenabbia, is the Villa Carlotta with its beautiful terraced gardens of tropical vegetation. We can 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 we can see more splendid gardens at the Villa Melzi. We will not have time in two days to see all of the Lake District, but we'll do our best! (B)



DAY 4: TUSCANY. We will travel south today through the province of Emilia Romagna and into Tuscany. Our drive is approximately four hours. Along the way we can stop in one of the following places:

Bergamo. This charming hilltop town is divided into the Bergo Alta, the medieval district at the top of the hill with winding streets, old squares, monuments and medieval architecture and Bergo Bassa, the more modern district at the bottom of the hill. The architecture of the Piazza Vecchia in Bergo Alta is very appealing. This square has seen a series of conquerors from Attila to Hitler. Vaulted arcades connect Piazza Vecchia to the lovely Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore. The highlight of Bergo Bassa is the Galleria dell'Accademia where there is a fine collection of work by the Venetian masters.

Bologna. Bologna is famous for its university, one of the oldest in Europe. Tour the city and see numerous churches, medieval towers and palaces. Highlights include the Basilica of San Petronius, with its 15th century organ, one of the oldest in Italy and the leaning towers, symbols of the conflict in the Middle Ages between the two powerful Guelph and Ghibelline families. The National Picture Gallery has a fine selection of art of the Bolognese school from the 14th to the 17th centuries. Bologna is considered to be a gastronomic center in a country full of gastronomic centers.

Parma. This important market town is 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 Baptistry. Many buildings are decorated with Correggio frescoes. Here we can stop for a visit to a Parma cheese factory to see how this delicious cheese is made and enjoy a tasting. Modena. This city has its own spectacular Romanesque Cathedral and the Museum's Palace,



containing the two most important art collections of the Este family. On the gastronomic side, Modena is famous for producing Balsamic vinegar. Here we can visit an aceteria to see how the vinegar is processed. We will check in for three nights at the **Relais della Rovere** located in the heart of the Chianti area, near Colle Val d'Elsa. Originally an old abbey from the 11th century and later the home of Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, the "Relais" has a total of 30 rooms all with the modern conveniences suited to a 4 star hotel. (B)

DAY 5 & 6: TUSCANY. Two full days to enjoy this beautiful area of Italy. One day we will visit Siena for a guided tour. 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. We will 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. Next we visit charming San Gimignano and have free time to explore the town and do some shopping. San Gimignano is a wonderful 14th century medieval hill town with narrow, cobblestone streets, which seem to belong to another century. It is encircled by ramparts topped by fourteen towers of nobility. 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 the locals gather to gossip and the occasional market sets up. On the other day we have our choice of several other areas of Tuscany to visit. Maybe a drive along the Chianti Route through the heart of Chianti country? The Via Chiantigiana, between Radda and Greve, is one of the most scenic routes through miles and miles of vineyards. There are many interesting towns along the way where we may stop at an enoteca, or wine bar, and learn about the various kinds of Chianti. We may arrange a visit to a wine estate for tasting and a tour. Or head south to Montepulciano – another wine region of Tuscany. Vino Nobile is produced in this area. One of Tuscany's highest hill towns, the long and narrow walled city is about 11 miles from beginning to end. There is an ancient wine cellar here, parts of which were built by the Etruscans, where we might enjoy wine tasting. Other interesting towns and sights in the area are: Pienza, a delightful little town redesigned by Pope Pius II in the 15th century; the tiny little town of Monteriggioni, perhaps the smallest little walled city in the area; and Castiglionne dell'Orcia, the most photographed spot in all of Tuscany where the line of tall straight cypress trees are perched on the gentle hillside. 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 wood choir stalls. (B)



DAY 7: UMBRIA. A short drive today to the neighboring province of Umbria. On the way we will stop for a tour of Orvieto. Orvieto sits on a pedestal of volcanic rock looking down over lovely vineyards in a green valley below. This former Etruscan City, just 75 miles from Rome, has, perhaps, the most magnificent setting of all the hill towns in Umbria. Orvieto is home to one of the most magnificent cathedrals in Italy, noted for its mosaic facade with bas-reliefs by Maitani. The interior is adorned with notable frescoes begun by Fra Angelico. From the ramparts there is an excellent view of the valley below. We shouldn't leave without enjoying a glass of the white wine Orvieto is known for.

We continue on to Montefalco. On the way we may have time for a stop in one of the other nearby towns such as: the charming old town of Todi with its three sets of walls: Etruscan, Roman and medieval; Spoleto, the Umbrian town made chic and fashionable by virtue of its world renowned music festival held ever June and July; or, Spello, site of the Roman ruins from the Age of Augustus. Once we arrive in Montefalco we check in for three nights at **Villa Pambufetti**. Located close to the medieval town, it offers stylish, high quality rooms and a great restaurant serving authentic Umbrian cuisine. (B)



DAY 8 & 9: MONTEFALCO AND SURROUNDS. A treat today as we visit the Brizi Olive Oil Mill for a tour and lunch. This is sure to be one of the highlights of our trip! We will learn how Umbrian olive oil is still made using the traditional, cold pressing methods. The mill has been in the Brizi family for four generations and is currently operated by two dynamic and charismatic women, Emanuela and Maria Rita Brizi. After a tour of the mill, we will enjoy lunch in the old Brizi family home. Fresh vegetables are oven roasted over an open fire and served brucetta style. In Montefalco we'll find some lovely handwoven linen, and some of the finest red wines in Umbria. After lunch we visit Deruta, famous the world over for its maiolica pottery. On Day 9 we visit Assisi, site of many pilgrimages to St Francis. A special farewell dinner at the villa this evening. (B,L,D)



DAY 10: DEPART. After an early breakfast it's a 2-hour drive to Rome's main airport, where we'll connect with our flight back to the USA, or continue into Rome for an optional stay in the "Eternal City." (B)

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