

DAY 1 - Your journey begins

Board your overnight flight to Europe (not included).

DAY 2 - Welcome to Rome!

Transfers to your exquisite hotel in the heart of the 'Eternal City' depart from Rome's Fiumicino Leonardo da Vinci Airport at 09:30, 12:30 & 15:30. Relax and settle in before this evening's Welcome Reception. Meet your Tour Director and fellow guests over a pleasant evening of dinner and wine.(Welcome Reception and Dinner)

DAY 3 - The Vatican, cooking in Orvieto and on to Perugia

Explore the Vatican Museums this morning, where the hidden gems of the vast Papal art collection are unveiled by a local historian. Your special VIP visit includes fast-track entry and the Bramante Staircase, (a part of the Vatican closed to the general public). Now head north to the Umbrian hilltop town of Orvieto; its Cathedral is one of Italy's most celebrated buildings. You're welcomed into the kitchens of zesty 'Etruscan chef' Lorenzo Polegri, who shares with you his virtuoso cooking skills and love of Italian food. Delicious pasta fresca, combined with the local staples of olive oil, cheese, prosciutto and focaccia, make for a memorable lunch, all washed down with a chilled glass of Orvieto Classico wine. Continue to Perugia, one of the most beautiful centres of art in the whole of Italy. Join a local expert to navigate the underground labyrinth of little streets, alleys and arches. Promenade the wide Corso Vannucci, resplendent in pale-pink stone, past the princely Priors' Palace, Cathedral and finely sculptured Great Fountain in the main square. This evening is at leisure to dine or explore as you please.(Buffet Breakfast / Highlight Lunch)

DAY 4 - To Assisi, in Search of St. Francis

Maybe stretch your legs before breakfast and take in views across the cypress-jewelled valley. Cascading down the far hillside is the medieval walled town of Assisi - the focus of today's included experience. Crowned by a ruined citadel, its winding cobbled streets bustle with pilgrims and brown-robed friars. With a local expert, visit the imposing Basilica of St. Francis - its early frescoes served as inspiration for generations of Renaissance artists. Move on through the twisted groves that carpet the side of Mt Subasio. At a family-run mill, meet a third generation specialist to follow the evolution of the olive from tree to table, and relish the intense flavours drizzled over crusty bread with a splash of salt – *delizioso*! Continue to the charming hill-town of Todi where you are at leisure to bask in the medieval air of the main square, or succumb to the sugary promise of a local *pasticceria*. For dinner this evening, choose your ideal ambience and palate-pleasing menu from a hand-picked selection of Perugian restaurants. Buon appetito!(Buffet Breakfast / Dine-Around)

DAY 5 - Free Time in Perugia

Perugia presents a rich palette of possibilities today. Why not witness the impressive art of the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, or the fine Perugino frescoes in the Collegio del Cambio? Shop for brightly-coloured, handcrafted maiolica ceramics or the famous Baci bonbons. This evening, perhaps savour local Umbrian specialities in a nearby medieval village?(Buffet Breakfast)

DAY 6 - Through Tuscany to Cortona, Siena and San Gimignano

Follow the shores of Lake Trasimeno today, site of Hannibal's famous victory over the Romans in 217 BC and continue to Cortona, one of the oldest hill towns in Tuscany and setting for Francis Mayes "Under the Tuscan Sun". After time to explore, move on to the narrow cobbled streets of Siena. Standing in the shell-shaped Campo Square, imagine the frenzied atmosphere of the biannual Palio horse race and see the superb 14th century Town Hall. Then, with your local expert there is time to climb up to the black and white striped marble cathedral - a veritable treasury of the Renaissance, representing the work of over 40 artists. Your home for the next three nights is a delightful villa near the medieval town of San Gimignano. Before reaching your hotel, visit a wine cellar to taste the local wine - one of the most charismatic and distinctive Italian whites and a favourite of the Popes through the ages.(Buffet Breakfast / Dinner)

DAY 7 - Florence and Chianti Countryside Experience

This morning is devoted to the Renaissance city of Florence. From the heights of Piazza Michelangelo, enjoy the superb views over the city and the River Arno, spanned by the 15th century Ponte Vecchio. Then a fascinating walking tour with a local expert takes you to the marble-clad cathedral crowned by Brunelleschi's dome. See the Baptistry with its beautiful 'Gates of Paradise' and Giotto's splendid Bell-tower. Walk on to Signoria Square with its open-air gallery of Renaissance sculpture followed by free time to shop for top-quality Florentine leather or seek bargains in the gold-workshops. Then a delightful drive through the cypress and olive groves of Tuscany brings you to Greve in Chianti, where you can taste the local produce and explore the artisan shops beneath the arched loggias of the triangular Piazza Matteotti. Another stop along the winding Via Chinatigiana is Panzano in Chianti - originally a medieval castle, with its beautiful stone houses and Church of Santa Maria Assunta built into the remains of the fortifications.(Buffet Breakfast)

DAY 8 - Free time in San Gimignano

In the 12th century, hilltop San Gimignano was an independent merchant town, its families divided in virtual civil war between Guelphs and Ghibellines: each family built its own fortress tower and many still remain today. In addition to its medieval skyscrapers, San Gimignano also boasts the World Champion gelato Maestro Sergio Dondoli. At his artisan ice-cream parlour on the cobbled Piazza della Cisterna, the jaunty gelataio doles out his silky frozen treats in a range of mind-boggling flavours. Luckily, San Gimignano's serpentine streets and hidden squares provide the perfect opportunity to walk off any sinful excess. Afterwards you are at leisure to perhaps explore the nearby vineyards and olive groves by bicycle, or take an optional trip to Pisa and Lucca? By night, don't miss the opportunity to tuck into genuine Tuscan fare - not full of fancy flourishes but honest, fresh, ingredients that draw in a loyal crowd of locals.(Buffet Breakfast)

DAY 9 - To Venice and the Magic of 'La Serenissima'

Descend from the Apennines before crossing the fertile valley of the River Po and continue to magical Venice, where the city seems to float on the lagoon. Wonder at the marbled expanse of St Marks Square – the Byzantine Basilica, Doges' Palace and lofty belltower. Later, embark on a romantic gondola ride through the charismatic canals while musicians serenade you with some of Italy's best loved songs. This evening, enjoy a farewell Celebration dinner 'alla Veneziana' with good food, wine and company in the most magical of settings.(Buffet Breakfast / Celebration Dinner)

DAY 10 - Arrivederci Venezia

Delight in your final views of this sea lapped city this morning. Transfers arrive at Venice Airport at

08:00 & 09:30. This trip fits perfectly with the Country Roads of Puglia & the Neopolitan Riviera (see page xx). Why not combine these tours for a full Italian Experience.(Buffet Breakfast)