

ITALIAN TREASURES (ZK) / 2011

11 days incl. travel, or 10 days from Rome to Rome

Vacation Overview

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2010 saw the lowest prices to Europe in recent history. Get this vacation on the books and save when you pay 2010 prices for your 2011 European vacation. Smart you for booking early - place a deposit on the vacation in order to receive 2010 pricing.

This vacation includes Rome, Florence, and Venice, as well as overnight stays in Lucca and St. Francis' Assisi. All major sights are included, such as St. Peter's, the Sistine Chapel, and the Colosseum in Rome, Michelangelo's David in Florence, St. Mark's, Doges' Palace, and the Bridge of Sighs in Venice (which you enter by private boat), and St. Francis' Basilica and St. Clare's Church in Assisi. Enjoy a welcome dinner in Rome, a stop at Pisa's Leaning Tower, walking tours of Lucca and Siena, and time in picturesque San Gimignano, at Verrazzano Castle to learn about the famous Chianti wine, and in Romeo & Juliet's Verona. Also travel along the stunning coastline to Ravenna, admire the mosaics in the 6th-century Basilica of St. Apollinaris in Classe, and stop in Orvieto for a funicular ride right through its ramparts!

Itinerary

DAY 1

Board your overnight transatlantic flight.

DAY 2 Arrive in Rome, Italy

Time to rest or start exploring the "Eternal City" on your own. At 6 pm, meet your Tour Director and traveling companions and leave the hotel for a special welcome dinner with wine at one of Rome's lively restaurants. (Dinner)

DAY 3 Rome

Sightseeing with your Local Guide starts with a visit to the VATICAN MUSEUMS and SISTINE CHAPEL, world famous for Michelangelo's ceiling paintings and The Last Judgement. Continue to monumental ST. PETER'S SQUARE and BASILICA. Cross the Tiber and visit the COLOSSEUM and the ROMAN FORUM, where Roman legions marched in triumph. Time for independent activities and exciting optional excursion possibilities. (Breakfast)

St. Peter's Square St. Peter The Sistine Chapel is world famous for Michelangelo's ceiling paintings

"Visitors can be a little confused by the Roman Forum; at first glance, it is a rather lifeless array of marble fragments. But we must remember that in ancient times, this space was far more than the temples and monuments whose ruins we can explore today. It was filled with bustling, noisy life as the popular crossroads of the city – the predecessor, in fact, of the modern Italian piazza. Every morning at dawn, average Romans would escape their cramped, dark apartment blocks (called insulae, or "islands") and spent their days outdoors. "

The statue of Laocoön and His Sons can be seen at the Vatican Museums

Vatican Museums

"In the early 1500s, Rome was full of neglected ruins from the days of the ancient Empire, which still contained artworks buried amongst the rubble. The Renaissance had seen a sudden growth of interest in all things classical, and the popes – cultivated men who were in touch with the intellectual currents of the day – were the richest art collectors in Italy. They began offering substantial cash rewards for any sculptures, until Rome was scoured by freelance treasure hunters on the hunt for pagan masterpieces. The most dramatic discovery occurred in 1506, when a Roman father-and-son team of excavators reported a promising find near the ruined Baths of Titus. The artist Michelangelo himself excitedly hurried over to help with the work, followed by the pope's official agent, Guiliano da Sangallo. When the excavators brushed away the dirt of 1,000 years, they found an enormous marble sculpture, perfectly intact, of a muscular Trojan hero being attacked by giant snakes. Guilano cried out in amazement, "This is the very Laocoön described by (the ancient Roman author) Pliny!" The sculpture was carted off to the Vatican Museum."

"Thanks to Hollywood recreations such as *Gladiator*, nothing symbolizes the cruelty of Imperial Rome as much as the Colosseum. In truth, the games held there were even more extreme and theatrical than modern film directors dare to suggest. A day at the Empire's most famous arena was a total entertainment package, mixing bouts of savage violence with solemn religious pageantry, sexual titillation, slapstick comedy and kitschy stage shows."

DAY 4 Rome–Pisa–Lucca

This morning, head north along the Tyrrhenian coastline through an area where many a town was founded at the very beginning of recorded history by the mysterious, highly civilized Etruscans. Stop in Pisa for lunch and to take pictures of its Leaning Tower, 180 feet high and no less than 12 feet out of the perpendicular. Then, continue to Lucca, and enjoy an orientation walk and time to explore this pretty town on your own. (Breakfast, Dinner)

Leaning Tower of Pisa

"It was the most perfect experiment in the history of science. Holding both a cannon ball and a small musket ball, the 30-something Pisa native Galileo Galilei scaled the steps of his city's famous Leaning Tower, and held them dramatically over the edge. Eight stories below, the town's most learned scholars and priests were gathered as observers. They watched as the two balls dropped to the ground at the same speed – disproving, with a single stroke, the ancient idea that objects fall at different rates depending on their weight and size. This archaic concept, which had been espoused by the ancient Greek author Aristotle, had been accepted without question for more than 2,000 years, Galileo's great innovation was to put it to a practical test of observation. Unfortunately, this famous story is probably not true. Galileo never wrote about it himself – it was recounted in a late biography penned by his secretary, Vincenzo Viviani. Most historians now believe that it was Galileo's imaginative disciples who invented the Leaning Tower tale in order to make the theory so clear that even a child could understand it. "

DAY 5 Lucca–San Gimignano–Siena–Florence

A scenic day in Tuscany. Morning visit to hilltop San Gimignano, the most picturesque of Italy's perfectly preserved medieval towns. On to Siena for a leisurely lunchtime break and a walk through ancient narrow lanes to beautiful PIAZZA DEL CAMPO, theater of the biannual Palio, Siena's spectacular medieval-style horse race. In the afternoon, drive along the Chianti Road leading from Siena due north to Florence. On the way, call at splendid VERRAZZANO CASTLE to hear about the fine art of blending four types of grapes to obtain the famous Chianti. Enjoy a WINE TASTING, accompanied by local specialties. (Breakfast, Dinner)

San Gimignano is a small walled hill town in the province of Siena See the vineyard covered hillsides of Tuscany Visit stunning Florence and the Ponte Vecchio

"Siena's Piazza del Campo is a town square shaped like an oval sloping gently down to the Palazzo Pubblico and the Torre del Mangia, it is divided into sections representing the city's nine rulers in the 1400s, known (bluntly enough) as the Council of Nine. But the Piazza's striking medieval ambiance is not only due to the surrounding architecture – but for a race. For most of June, July and August, the entire city is devoted to Il Palio, a series of horse races held in the Piazza whose ancient passions makes the Kentucky Derby seem like a fly-by-night event. The festival's contours have not changed since the 1100s, when members of the city's 17 contrade, or town districts, began to compete with one another in track events. The two central races are held every July 2 and August 16, but the pageantry and excitement dominate Siena for the entire summer. "

DAY 6 Florence

During your walking tour with a Local Guide, visit the ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS with Michelangelo's celebrated David and the magnificent CATHEDRAL. Admire Giotto's Bell Tower, the Baptistry's heavy bronze "Gate of Paradise," and sculpture-studded SIGNORIA SQUARE. Afternoon free for independent sightseeing and browsing through the shops. Leather goods and gold jewelry sold by the ounce are attractive buys. Why not try the culinary delights of a fine Florentine restaurant tonight? (Breakfast)

Florence Admire the detailed craftsmanship of Michelangelo Gate of Paradise in Florence

"What's the best vantage point to ponder the most illustrious town square in Florence, the Signoria? An outdoor table in the venerable Caffè Rivoire – preferably over a delicious, if not painfully expensive cioccolata con pane, a dark and mud-thick hot chocolate. Late at night, when the crowds have gone, you can search the long shadows and imagine that very little has changed here since the 1400s. The Signoria is the most elegant sculpture garden in Europe. Masterpieces include the splendid Neptune Fountain by Ammannati, Hercules and Cacus by Bandinelli and a precise copy of Michelangelo's David, all strategically poised in front of the Palazzo Vecchio. This grand public space has been the centerpiece of Florence since the 15th Century, the golden age when the city was established as the most beautiful in Europe. Eminent merchants in their ostentatious finery met here to discuss business in the midst of Florence's raucous daily life."

DAY 7 Florence–Verona–Venice

Stop in Verona, setting of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet to see Juliet's Balcony and the Arena, an incredibly well-preserved pink marble Roman amphitheater. Built in the 1st century AD, it is now the magical venue for world-famous opera performances. Tonight you are in Venice, a powerful magnet for romantics and art lovers from around the globe. (Breakfast)

Venice is considered one of the most beautiful cities in the world

DAY 8 Venice

Enter in style by PRIVATE BOAT and enjoy morning sightseeing with your Local Guide featuring ST. MARK'S SQUARE and the byzantine BASILICA, lavish DOGES' PALACE and the Bridge of Sighs. Also watch skilled GLASSBLOWERS fashion their delicate objects in an age-old traditional manner. Then, enjoy Venice at your own pace or join an optional gondola ride. Tonight is your chance to sample the city's fine restaurants. (Breakfast)

"It is no accident that one of history's greatest explorers, Marco Polo, came from Venice. His hometown had been Europe's gateway to the East long before he set sail in 1271; the influence of the Orient could be seen in its art, its fashion and its architecture, creating, in the words of one historian, "the most colorful, sumptuous, and sensually bewitching civilization that history has ever known." Thanks to Venetian conquests in the eastern Mediterranean, the 17-year-old Marco had the first leg of his travel route mapped out for him – he was able to island-hop through friendly territory as far as Constantinople, from there he was seduced by China for more than 20 years. When Polo returned to Venice in 1295 as a bearded and vaguely Eastern middle aged man, even his relatives did not believe he had been in China the entire time."

The Bridge of Sighs in Venice

"The world's most poetically-named bridge, Il Ponte dei Sospiri, the Bridge of Sighs, was built in 1614 so that prisoners of the Venetian state could be transferred in secret from the Doge's Palace to the so-called Nuovi Prigioni, or New Prisons. The wistful name was actually conceived by the English poet Lord Byron in the early 1800s that imagined the horror of prisoners taking their last glimpse of Venice before going underground to captivity. "

DAY 9 Venice–Ravenna–Assisi

Along the coastline of the Adriatic Sea to Ravenna. Here, see the famous mosaics in the 6th-century BASILICA of ST. APOLLINARIS IN CLASSE. In the afternoon, arrive in Assisi. During your walking tour with a Local Guide, visit ST. CLARE'S CHURCH and ST. FRANCIS' BASILICA, the hub of a religious order devoted to the ideals of humility, forgiveness, simplicity, and love for all God's creatures. Hear about monastic life and view the priceless frescoes adorning the walls of the church. (Breakfast, Dinner)

Assisi is a town in the province of Perugia, Italy

"Saint Francis may be Assisi's most internationally famous son, the charismatic preacher who has been the subject of numerous bio-pics. But his female counterpart, Saint Clare, evokes almost as much devotion amongst Italians. Her life story reads like a medieval inversion of The Sound of Music: A beautiful young woman born into a wealthy family, she was betrothed at an early age to a dashing local noble and seemed destined for a conventional life of luxury and pleasure. But her future was transformed in 1210, when she saw the handsome young Francis, espousing the sacred virtues of poverty in the streets of Assisi. Clare immediately cut off her long golden hair, took a vow of celibacy, gave away all her fine clothes and began to dress in a simple cassock. She soon founded her own religious order for women, the Poor Sisters of Saint Clare, which demonstrated a devotion to good works that matches the all-male Franciscan order of monks. In fact, she is often known to Catholics as alter Franciscus, another Francis."

DAY 10 Assisi–Orvieto–Rome

Following the Tiber Valley, reach Orvieto, perched high atop a volcanic rock. Access, denied to many a would-be conqueror through the ages, is easy for you. Ride a modern FUNICULAR right through the forbidding ramparts. Time for lunch, browsing through tempting shops in the lanes off Piazza del Duomo, and finding the right angle for a picture of the fabulous gothic CATHEDRAL. In the late afternoon, return to Rome. Why not join an optional festive dinner at one of Rome's fine restaurants to bid farewell to the companions of a memorable Italian vacation? (Breakfast)

DAY 11

Your homebound flight arrives the same day. (Breakfast)

Vacation Highlights

INCLUDED FEATURES

Headsets throughout the tour

Rome:

Welcome dinner at a local restaurant; guided sightseeing, visit the Vatican Museums and Sistine Chapel, St. Peter's Square and Basilica, the Colosseum and Roman Forum

Pisa:

Take pictures of the Leaning Tower

Lucca:

Walking tour

San Gimignano:

Orientation

Siena:

Walking tour including Piazza del Campo

Verrazzano Castle:

Wine tasting

Florence:

Guided walking tour, visit Michelangelo's David, the cathedral, and Signoria Square

Verona:

Walking tour including Juliet's Balcony and the Arena

Venice:

Private boat ride; guided walking tour, visit St. Mark's Square and Basilica, Doges' Palace and the Bridge of Sighs; glassblowers' demonstration

Ravenna:

Visit St. Apollinaris in Classe

Assisi:

Guided walking tour, visit St. Clare's Church and St. Francis' Basilica

Orvieto:

Ride a funicular through the ramparts to the cathedral

INSIDE VISITS

Inside visits and special features are shown in the description, including admission charges when applicable.

Accommodations

MEALS - (B) Breakfast (L) Lunch (D) Dinner

Full buffet breakfast (B); 4 three-course dinners (D), including a special welcome dinner with wine in Rome.

SUPERIOR HOTELS - (D) Deluxe (SF) Superior First-Class (F) First-Class

Rome Albani (F), Lucca Grand Hotel Guinigi (F), Florence Grand Hotel Mediterraneo (F), Venice Carlton & Grand Canal (F) or Principe (F), Assisi San Francesco, Rome

Dates and Prices

View the following dates and prices to find just the right date for your vacation. Below you'll find the date you'll depart, the date the vacation starts and date you'll return.

The price listed does not include your airfare.

Depart Date	Vacation Start Date	Return Date	Details & Information	Price Without Air
1/17/2011	1/18/2011	1/27/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
2/14/2011	2/15/2011	2/24/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
3/14/2011	3/15/2011	3/24/2011		\$1,849.00
3/21/2011	3/22/2011	3/31/2011		\$1,849.00
3/28/2011	3/29/2011	4/7/2011		\$2,129.00
4/4/2011	4/5/2011	4/14/2011		\$2,129.00
4/11/2011	4/12/2011	4/21/2011		\$2,129.00
4/14/2011	4/15/2011	4/24/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
4/18/2011	4/19/2011	4/28/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
4/25/2011	4/26/2011	5/5/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
4/28/2011	4/29/2011	5/8/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
5/2/2011	5/3/2011	5/12/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
5/9/2011	5/10/2011	5/19/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
5/12/2011	5/13/2011	5/22/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
5/16/2011	5/17/2011	5/26/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
5/23/2011	5/24/2011	6/2/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
5/26/2011	5/27/2011	6/5/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,129.00
5/30/2011	5/31/2011	6/9/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,139.00
6/6/2011	6/7/2011	6/16/2011	Early Booking*	\$2,139.00
6/9/2011	6/10/2011	6/19/2011		

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