La Dolce Vita - Itinerary

Valid for departures before 31 December

# 15 Day tour of Italy

La Dolce Vita, the good life, is exactly what this trip is all about. Starting in the Eternal City and ending by the canals of Venice, uncover the best of northern Italy. Experience food, wine, style and character - all the things this wonderful country is famous for - and discover the natural beauty of this spectacular region.

This is how it all started; the trips that made us one of the world's leading operators of small group adventures. And they're still as popular as ever! Original trips are all about variety: the places, the people, the activities, and even the accommodation and transport we use. From home stays to market trips to visits to community projects, there's a new experience every day, with many activities included.

# Trip Map



# Itinerary

## Day 1 Rome

You can arrive at any time on day 1 as there are no activities planned until the important welcome meeting at 6:00pm. If your flight arrives too late, we recommend that you consider booking a night's accommodation prior to the trip so you can ensure you are able to attend this meeting. We will collect your insurance details and next of kin information at this meeting so please ensure you have all details on hand to provide to your leader.

Your group leader will leave a note at reception telling you where this important meeting will take place. Please ask a member of reception for this information. If you are going to be late, please inform the hotel reception.

Check-in time at our joining point hotel is after 2:00pm. Early check-in is not guaranteed, however if you arrive early, luggage storage is available. Speak to the hotel reception on arrival.

Joining Hotel: Hotel Castelfidardo, Rome.

## Days 2-3 Rome/Florence

There is arguably no other city in the world with so much history as Rome and the best way to experience that history is with a walking trip. On the morning of day 2 your Group Leader takes you on an optional orientation walk around Rome where you see some of the world-famous sights such as the Colosseum and Arch of Constantine, the Forum (centre of ancient Rome), the Victor Emmanuel Monument and Piazza Venezia, Piazza Navona, the Pantheon, the Trevi Fountain and the Spanish Steps.

On Day 2 you can make an optional visit to the Vatican Museums and Sistine chapel in the famous Vatican City. (Please note that the Vatican Museums are closed on certain days). You may also choose to visit St Peter's Basilica, either instead of or after the Vatican Museums. Entry to the Basilica is free, and there is a small charge to climb the dome for the ultimate breathtaking panorama over bella Roma.

### The Vatican Museum

The Vatican Museum is closed on some days including Sunday unless it is the last Sunday of the month. Check the Vatican website for these dates. www.vatican.va

Tickets for the Vatican Museum or alternatively the Galleria Borghese can be booked online at www.en.roma.waf.it

In the late afternoon on Day 2 we bid 'arrivederci' to Rome and board our train for Florence (approx. 2 hours).

We have ample opportunity to explore and enjoy all that Florence has to offer, with its excellent restaurants, pavement cafes, bars and other nightlife. Easily discovered on foot, you can see the principal sights of this beautiful 'outdoor museum' of a city - the Pitti Palace, the Ponte Vecchio, the Arno River front, the many statues and monuments of the Piazza della Signoria, the Palazzo Vecchio, the 13th Century Duomo, Baptistry and Belltower and the Santa Croce Church.

Day 3 is a free day in Florence so we have plenty of free time to take in the many fine museums and art treasures such as the Medici Chapels, as well as time to shop in the markets and in the chic boutiques. Other possibilities are a visit to the Uffizi gallery, one of the top three art museums of the world, or see Michelangelo's famous statue of David in the Galleria dell' Accademia.

### Florentine State Museums

(Uffizi, Accademia, Pitti Palace, Medici Chapels, Bargello, Archaeological Museum, Davanzati) can all be booked in advance for a fee. Reserve your tickets by phoning (+39) 055 294883 from Monday to Friday 8:30am-6:30pm or Saturday 8:30am-12:30. You can also book online on www.en.firenze.waf.it. We suggest that you book at least 2 months in advance especially for the Uffizi as this museum experiences enormous queues all year round (up to 5 hours).

The individual museums have slightly different opening times and closing days between them but the website www.firenzemusei.it has everything you need to know about all of them. Make your reservations for these museums for Day 3 or morning of Day 4 of this itinerary.

In the evening of Day 3 we can climb uphill to Piazzale Michelangelo for that most photographed of all sunset views across the rooftops of Florence.

Our accommodation in Florence:

For nights 2 and 3 we stay in the centrally located hotel – Albergo Firenze. All rooms have ensuite.

## Days 4-6 Florence/Lucca/Pisa

In the afternoon of Day 4 we take a train (approx. 2 hours) to Lucca, our base for the next three nights.

Lucca is one of Italy's real hidden gems. We stay in our own apartments located within the city ramparts, providing easy access to the city centre and its centuries-old buildings, beautiful churches, charming piazzas and narrow streets.

While in Lucca we will set off for a cycle ride winding along a scenic river through the Tuscan countryside and perhaps stop for a picnic (4 km round the walls and 14 km by the river - approx. 4 hours). With two full days, there is also time to explore Lucca itself plus plenty of opportunities to sample traditional Tuscan cuisine!

We take a half day trip from Lucca by train to the nearby city of Pisa. There's ample time for you view the world-famous Duomo, Baptistry and Leaning Tower.

Our accommodation in Lucca:

For nights 4, 5 and 6 we stay in some unique accommodation - our own private apartments. We have several separate apartments located near the city centre so you may be a short walk away from your other group members and your leader. It is an approximate 25 minute walk from the train station to our main apartment in Lucca. Should you wish to organise a taxi for yourself or your luggage to get to or from the station, your leader will be more than happy to assist in arranging this for you at your expense.

The apartments in Lucca are a real treat. Staying in the city centre allows easy access to all the sights and the restaurants and bars- it is all an easy stroll from your front door. This is your chance to look behind those facades. Each apartment has 2-3 rooms with a shared bathroom. The kitchen is fully equipped and you can choose to buy your own groceries and supplies for meals. Some of our groups make Italian feasts with local ingredients during their stay. Our apartments are not hotels, there is no reception, room service or cleaning service every day, no televisions or washing machines, but plenty of charm and you just cannot beat the location.

## Days 7-8 Cinque Terre

On the morning of Day 7 we board the train bound for the small but lovely coastal town of Levanto (approx. 3 hours), where we stay for the next two nights. In the afternoon we have time for a dip in the Mediterranean and the chance to explore Levanto with its streetside cafes, parks and seafront promenade.

On day 8 you can walk along this stunning stretch of coast and the path of the Cinque Terre. Olive groves and vineyards cover the mountains that plunge into the sea - the vistas here are breathtaking.

If you're feeling energetic, walking the entire path (12kms and approx. 5 hours walking time) will give you the best taste of the villages and countryside. However, you can jump on a train between any of the villages, or to get back to our base whenever you want. Please note that some sections of the Cinque Terre path can be quite difficult with challenging uphill stretches, narrow paths, steep cliffs and foot bridges.

* Riomaggiore to Manarola is easy and takes 25 minutes on a paved path.
* Manarola to Corniglia is easy and takes approximately 50 minutes on a partly paved and partly rocky path.
* Corniglia to Vernazza is medium level difficulty and takes approximately 1.5 hours on a rocky path.
* Vernazza to Monterosso is more challenging, taking approximately 2 hours on a rocky path.

Our accommodation in Levanto:

For nights 7 and 8 we stay at a centrally located 2 star Pensione – Hotel Europa. All rooms have en-suite.

## Days 9-10 Portofino, Liguria/Piedmonte

Early in the morning on day 9 we take a train (approx. 1 hour) to the Peninsula of Portofino where we store our luggage and have time for a 5-7km walk, finishing at the glamorous resort of Portofino. Walk up to the marvellous viewpoints surrounding the town, or join the rich and famous for coffee on the harbour side and enjoy the people-watching. Then we enjoy fabulous coastal scenery with a boat ride back from Portofino to Santa Margherita.

In the afternoon we travel on by train (approx. 2.5 hours) to the region of Piedmont, which is home to some of the finest and most sought after wines in Europe. It is also the best place to find 'tartufo' (truffles), a distinctive regional delicacy.

On Day 10 we visit a local winery and sample their vintages. The Ruche' grape variety, is unique to this region of Italy - it is grown in just seven small villages in the province of Asti and produces a ruby-red, intense and aromatic wine.

Our accommodation in Asti:

For nights 9 and 10 we stay at a centrally located small hotel. All rooms have en-suite.

## Days 11-12 Milan/Lake Como

On day 11 we depart on a train (approx. 2 hours) to Milan where we stop for a few hours. We store our luggage at the train station and after visiting the magnificent Duomo (cathedral) and its stunning Gothic roof, there is free time for stylish shopping and cafes - Milanese specialities! Check out the local cafes and indulge in some people watching along the streets and boulevards where the chic display their magnificent sense of style.

Only a short walk from the Duomo is a fabulous museum at the Castello Sforzesco. With an eclectic collection including one of only three unfinished Michelangelo Pieta and a Leonardo da Vinci ceiling the fortress also has pleasant grassy grounds that are free to enter.

The highlight of Milan is a visit to Leonardo Da Vinci's masterpiece, The Last Supper (not included). Please note that your Group Leader cannot assist with tickets to see the Last Supper in Milan. These tickets are limited and generally sell out extremely quickly and well in advance (up to 6 months). If you expressly want to see the Last Supper, and we suggest you do, you need to make arrangements in advance. Day 11 of this trip between 13:30 and 15:00 are suitable times. Note that the viewing is 15 minutes and in order not to lose the reservation, visitors must arrive 15 minutes before the time allocated for the visit. For information and reservations call + 39 02 89 42 11 46 or use this site: www.cenacolovinciano.org or www.en.milano.waf.it

For those interested there is time for the museum at the Castello Sforzesco. It's a short walk from the Duomo and has a fascinating eclectic collection including one of only three unfinished Michelangelo pieta' and a Leonardo da Vinci ceiling. Or see La Scala - the famous opera theatre with an interesting museum attached.

We move on to Lake Como by train and bus, late in the afternoon (approx. 3 hours). It's time to unwind here - relax on the lakeside or explore the shops.

On day 12 we board a ferry to travel across the blue waters to Menaggio and Bellagio. The rest of the day is free to use the ferry pass and explore Varenna, Cadenabbia or Villa Carlotta.

If you're feeling energetic and you would like to explore the mountains around Lake Como, there are plenty of walking tracks from Menaggio to keep you occupied.

Our accommodation in Cadenabbia:

For nights 11 and 12 we stay at the Hotel Riviera - a small hotel by the lakefront. All rooms have en-suite.

## Days 13-15 Venice

On day 13 a train journey (approx. 6 hours) brings us to one of the most unique cities of the world - Venice. We arrive at approximately 3:00pm and then we take you on a brief orientation walk of the city and pass some of the famous sights - the Grand Canal, the old-world shops of the Rialto Bridge, the Palace of the Doge (ruler of Venice), the Piazza and Basilica di San Marco and the Bridge of Sighs.

Day 14 is a free day so you have ample time to revisit the major sights and wander the narrow, cobblestone streets and spacious piazzas and cross the hundreds of tiny bridges. There are shops, markets, galleries, museums, churches and stunning buildings around every corner. You could also choose to see Venice from a different perspective by taking a gondola ride along the canals.

Day 15 is departure day. There are no activities planned for today and you are able to depart the hotel at any time. Check out time from the hotel is 10:00am. If you are departing later, you can arrange luggage storage at the hotel reception. There may be a small service fee.

Our accommodation in Venice:

For nights 13 and 14 we stay at Casa Villa Rosa - a small hotel near the Train Station (we do not need to do the suitcase shuffle across the city!)

# Included Activities

This is a list of included activities on this trip. All other activities are optional and at your own expense. For a list of optional activities and sightseeing available on this trip, see the optional activities section below. If you choose not to participate in the included activities on this itinerary, the cost will not be refunded.

* Piazzale Michelangelo in Florence
* Cycling in Lucca
* Pisa half-day trip
* Cinque Terre hike
* Walk to Portofino and return boat ride
* Winery visit in Piedmont
* Milan half-day trip
* Ferry pass on Lake Como
* Traghetto across Grand Canal in Venice



# Optional Activities

We list the following optional activities for your information. This is not an exhaustive list and should be used as a guide only.

They are not necessarily endorsed or recommended by Sojourn nor included in price of this trip. If you do any of them, you do so at your own risk and it must be clearly understood that your participation is your own decision and does not form part of your contract with Sojourn.

Rome:

* Colosseum, Roman Forum and Palatine Hill - €11
* Vatican Museums - €14
* St Peter's dome climb - €6
* St Peter's dome elevator - €7

Florence:

* Duomo & Campanile climb - €6
* Accademia - €6.5
* Uffizi Gallery - €12.50

Lucca:

* Puccini Concert - from €15
* Guinigi Tower climb - €4
* Day trip to Barga by bus €8

Cinque Terra, Piedmont & the Lakes:

* Pesto Class in Levanto - €10
* Sea Kayak Hire in Levanto - €5 per hour
* Archaeological Museum in Asti - €5
* Villa Carlotta in Tremezzo - €8
* Trip to Switzerland by Public Bus from Menaggio - €6

Venice:

* Venezia Concerto - €30
* Gondola ride - €80 for up to 5 people
* Accademia Gallery - €7
* St Mark's Campanile - €7
* Doges Palace and Bridge of Sighs - €13
* St. Mark's Basilica Treasury - €2
* Ca' d'Oro - €3
* Guggenheim Museum - €12

# Departure Dates

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Start | Finish | Price |
| 04 Apr | 18 Apr | AUD $3,780 |
| 11 Apr | 25 Apr | AUD $3,780 |
| 18 Apr | 02 May | AUD $3,780 |
| 25 Apr | 09 May | AUD $3,780 |
| 02 May | 16 May | AUD $3,780 |
| 09 May | 23 May | AUD $3,780 |
| 16 May | 30 May | AUD $3,780 |
| 23 May | 06 Jun | AUD $3,780 |
| 30 May | 13 Jun | AUD $3,780 |
| 06 Jun | 20 Jun | AUD $3,780 |
| 13 Jun | 27 Jun | AUD $3,780 |
| 20 Jun | 04 Jul | AUD $3,780 |
| 27 Jun | 11 Jul | AUD $3,780 |
| 04 Jul | 18 Jul | AUD $3,780 |
| 11 Jul | 25 Jul | AUD $3,780 |
| 18 Jul | 01 Aug | AUD $3,780 |
| 25 Jul | 08 Aug | AUD $3,780 |
| 01 Aug | 15 Aug | AUD $3,780 |
| 08 Aug | 22 Aug | AUD $3,780 |
| 15 Aug | 29 Aug | AUD $3,780 |
| 22 Aug | 05 Sep | AUD $3,780 |
| 29 Aug | 12 Sep | AUD $3,780 |
| 05 Sep | 19 Sep | AUD $3,780 |
| 12 Sep | 26 Sep | AUD $3,780 |
| 19 Sep | 03 Oct | AUD $3,780 |
| 26 Sep | 10 Oct | AUD $3,780 |
| 03 Oct | 17 Oct | AUD $3,780 |
| 10 Oct | 24 Oct | AUD $3,780 |
| 17 Oct | 31 Oct | AUD $3,780 |
| 24 Oct | 07 Nov | AUD $3,780 |

# Country Information

## Times to go

* The climate of Italy is a typical Mediterranean climate with mild winters and generally hot and dry summers.
* The most crowded periods are Easter, May and June, October and Christmas. July and August are less crowded because of the heat.
* Generally, the hottest months are July & August (where temperatures can reach 38°C in the south)  
  the coldest month is January  
  the wettest month is November, with an average rainfall of 129mm  
  the driest month is July, with an average rainfall of 15mm.
* Tourists flock to Italy at all times of the year for regional festivals, for fun in the sun and even skiing, so no matter what time you choose to go, Italy is a great place to travel all year round.
* It is always advisable to bring warm clothes, as cold spells are common, even in summer.

## Accommodation

* We use a huge variety of accommodation in Italy from small family run properties, charming old stone buildings to international standard multi-story hotels
* Rooms and beds tend to be smaller than you would expect from similar standard hotels worldwide- space can be a premium in the ancient towns and cities in Italy
* Bathrooms are not always private - some hotels have shared bathrooms accessed from the hallway
* Bathrooms in Italy have showers and usually bidets, but rarely bathtubs
* Some of our accommodation in is old historic buildings which means there is a lot of charm and character, but also antiquated plumbing and sometimes things do not work like they used to
* Our local friends in our accommodation sometimes do not speak English so this is your chance to practise your Italian
* Please take note of the luggage limit since some accommodation does not have lifts so you will be hauling your luggage up several flights of stairs
* Air conditioning is a luxury in Europe and the Europeans have a very environmentally friendly attitude to energy consumption therefore we do not often have AC at our accommodation. Where it is available, it usually costs more and you are required to make a per day payment to the reception
* Continental breakfast (simply a hot drink and a croissant) is sometimes included at our hotels
* We choose accommodation based on convenience of location, sometimes that means we stay very centrally - meaning all the bars and restaurants are at your doorstep and other times it means we stay near the train station so we can catch that early train
* Towels and linen are always provided unless otherwise stated - there is rarely a need for sleeping bags
* But bring your own toiletries and hair drier since these are rarely provided at our accommodation
* Some accommodation has TVs, but there are no English channels
* Although rooms are cleaned every day, towels and sheets are only changed when a passenger vacates the room. Hot running water is sometimes not guaranteed throughout the day.
* Most hotels have a check in time of 14:00 and a check out time of 11:00

## Transport

### Trains

* We use a variety of transport from trains, coaches, local buses, trams, metro, walking, bicycle, boats and vaporetto.
* We rarely use private charter transport because trains are comfortable with functional toilets and dining carts.
* Trains vary in standard from Intercity to regional trains.
* Sometimes the carriages are open with airplane style seating, other times they are closed cabins with 6-8 passengers.
* There are non-smoking sections in all trains.
* Trains do not usually have reclining seats.
* Sometimes we have assigned seating and other times you can sit anywhere.
* Trains sit quite high off the platform which means you should stick to our luggage limits as you will be required to lift your luggage onto trains and into overhead luggage storage.

### Buses

* On buses be wary of winding and narrow roads - there are many of these in Italy
* Some local buses we use are very crowded
* Luggage on buses is 'self-help' so drivers in Italy do not load your luggage for you- you are expected to lift your own luggage onto buses and ferries and trains
* Luggage sometimes goes on the bus with you and not in luggage lockers under the bus
* Toilets are not usually available on buses

### Public transport

* You always need to validate your ticket in a stamping machine when entering the public transport system.
* Keep the ticket on you until you exit the metro system.
* You will be fined up to €200 if caught without a ticket and tourists are often targeted.
* Never believe an inspector who says that the stamping machines are not working; this is a scam.

## Food & Drink

### Meals

* Eating out in Italy is an adventure and a delight but is very different to what you might be expecting. Italian cuisine has been adapted around the world so you cannot expect the same meals as you would at home. Parmesan cheese doesn't usually go with the meals you expect
* A cover charge is often added to bills and it is customary to tip approximately 10%
* Italy can be an expensive destination and so you should budget €35 per person per day for meals alone
* A typical meal with cover charge will cost between €15-€25. If you are on a budget there are many shops that sell local produce - great for picnics
* In Italy you pay for waiter service and views and you also may pay more for sitting on the sidewalk as opposed to inside. Generally if the view is nice- the prices will be inflated
* Often restaurants have a cover charge of about 10% or €2 per person on top of the bill.
* You should order your side dishes separately in Italy.
* Usually have to pay for water at restaurants and they will not provide tap water.
* Sometimes a light breakfast is included at our hotels (simply a hot drink and a croissant)

#### Special diets

Travellers with special dietary requirements will usually find Italy to be a very diverse country.

***Vegan and vegetarian*** – There are many pastas and pasta sauces available with only vegan and vegetarian ingredients.

***Nut allergies*** – Ask your waiter. A wide variety of fresh fruits, vegetables and meats are available to eat without any worry for nuts.

***Coeliacs, wheat allergies and gluten intolerance*** – as much as you might worry that the bread, pizza and pasta focused diet will contain lashings of wheat and other gluten carrying ingredients, you are correct. But Italy is also the centre where children are tested for coeliac disease, and gluten intolerance. Diagnosed coeliacs will also get a government stipend for the rest of their lives of €140 per month, to offset the cost of "senza glutina" food. Gluten free pastas are readily available (in most supermarkets the gluten free pasta section is the size of a normal pasta aisle in other western countries!). Check with the restaurant if they can substitute a gluten free pizza base or pasta into a meal. Again, a wide selection of meat, salads, fresh fruit and vegetables will also be available. You will certainly be spoiled for choices.

### Must try food in Italy

There are some fabulous food experiences to be had:

* The original pizza in Naples.
* Sitting in waterfront restaurants in Sorrento, sipping Limoncello.
* Eating Umbrian cuisine on a vine covered terrace of a medieval building in Gubbio
* Trying local produce and exclusive wines in an enoteca in Umbria
* Pesto making in Levanto on the Cinque Terre
* Having a local feast in an Agriturismo near Asti in Piedmont
* Joining in the aperitivi culture - where you buy a drink and can snack on finger food - this happens at local bars from about 6:30pm.
* Sampling local food and drink in the region of origin is a highlight such as Limoncello on the Amalfi Coast, Ribollita in Tuscany, pizza in Naples and Bolognese sauce in Bologna.
* Pasta plays a substantial part in Italian recipes, but nearly all regions have developed their own special dishes.
* Some of the best cheeses include mozzarella, caciotta romana (semi-hard, sweet sheep cheese), pecorino (hard, sharp sheep's milk cheese).
* Italy has over 20 major wine regions, from Valle d'Aosta on the French border, to Sicily and Sardinia in the south. Wines are named after grape varieties or after their village or area of origin. The most widespread is the Chianti group of vineyards, governed by the Chianti Classico quality controls (denoted by a black cockerel on the neck of each bottle).
* Risotto - Rice that has been sautéed and cooked in a shallow pan with stock. The result is a very creamy and hearty dish. Meat, poultry, seafood, vegetables, and cheeses are almost always added depending on the recipe and the locale. Many restaurants, families, towns, and regions will have a signature risotto or at least style of ristotto, in addition or in place of a signature pasta dish (risotto alla Milanese is famous Italian classic).
* Arancini - Balls of rice with tomato sauce, eggs, and cheese that are deep fried. They are a southern Italian specialty, though are now quite common all over.
* Polenta - Yellow corn meal (yellow grits) that has been cooked with stock. It is normally served either creamy or allowed to set up and then cut into shapes and fried or roasted.
* Gelato - This is the Italian version of ice cream. The non-fruit flavours are usually made only with milk. The fruit flavours are non-dairy. It's fresh as a sorbet, but tastier. There are many flavours: coffee, chocolate, fruit, tiramisù... To try absolutely.
* Tiramisù Italian cake made with coffee, mascarpone, cookies and cocoa powder on the top. The name means "pick-me-up."

### Food and culture

* It is fun to try and master the dos and don'ts of food customs such as when it is an appropriate time to have different types of coffee (for example cappuccino should be consumed before lunch only).
* Or parmesan is only provided with dishes that should be accompanied by it - for example not all pasta sauces should have parmesan.
* Garlic bread is not an Italian dish, nor is Fettuccine Alfredo.
* Fruiterers don't appreciate self-service in fruit shops and squeezing fruit, like you may do at home, to test its ripeness is not appropriate.

### Water

* Tap water in Europe is considered safe to drink but to be sure to avoid any stomach upsets due to different chemicals or bacteria, bottled water is best a solution.
* Bottled water is expensive in Europe and is available everywhere.
* Don’t bother to buy water in Rome. Refill your water bottle from any of the running water fontanelle around the city. These deliver fresh water from the surrounding hills via the ancient Roman aqueducts.

## What to buy

* Avoid purchasing fake designer labels - anything cheaper than at home and NOT sold in a shop IS fake.
* There is a huge crack down on fake brands in Italy and passengers should be aware that purchasing fake brands off street vendors can result in a €5,000 fine
* Care should be taken when buying antiques since Italy is renowned for skilled imitators.
* Prices are generally fixed and bargaining is not general practice, although a discount may be given on a large purchase.
* Florence, Milan and Rome are famous as important fashion centres, but smaller towns also offer good scope for shopping.
* Some places are known for particular products, e.g. Lake Como (Lombardy) for silk, Prato (Tuscany) for textiles, Empoli (Tuscany) for the production of bottles and glasses in green glass, Deruta (Umbria) and Faenza (Emilia-Romagna) for pottery, Florence (Tuscany) for leather, Venice (Veneto) for glass and lace.
* If you have room in your luggage, Venetian masks make for a different, but beautiful wall decoration once you return home.
* Check with your local customs officials to ensure that you are able to import some items back into your home country. Australia and New Zealand for example have strict quarantine laws. 