

THE GRAND TOUR OF ITALY

07 - 23 May 2012
27 Aug – 12 Sept 2012
(17 days/16 nights) AUD \$6980



Vita Italian Tours are designed
for the traveller who wants
more than just a holiday

As the snow of the winter months has long melted, the beautiful verdant countryside of Central Italy is in full bloom with spring colours. This is a wonderful time of the year to visit Italy. Your experience begins in Rome with a comprehensive guided visit to this remarkable capital city of the world. Then, we travel south to Sorrento with its beautiful views of the Bay of Naples. There will be a half day guided visit to Pompeii. Our stay in Sorrento is not complete without exploring the spectacular Amalfi Coast with stops in Positano and Amalfi.

The tour then heads north east to the city of Pesaro in Le Marche Region. During our stay in Pesaro, we will visit beautiful Renaissance hilltowns like Urbino, Urbania, San Leo, Gradara and the tiny Republic of San Marino. Here amongst castles and bell towers, historical town squares you will discover many ancient crafts, stopping to browse and watch local artisans at work. You will be able to make purchases at the craft shops, visit museums and wander around the local markets speaking to the local artisans. Most importantly, the tour allows you to experience the excellent hospitality and taste delicious typical dishes and genuine local products.

Then it is off to Venice to experience the sights of this truly unique city. Our last stop will be Florence, which includes tours to Siena and San Gimignano. One of the highlights will be a day in the Chianti area with wine tasting, tour and a special lunch at the historical Castello di Verrazzano winery. Two full days will be spent in Florence where you will marvel at the works of Giotto, Michelangelo and Botticelli. You will also have plenty of time to wander through the famous markets of Florence.

A Vita Italian Tour is a personally guided tour, which allows you to relax and enjoy your holiday in Italy. Mario and Viny, your expert tour leaders, will escort you throughout your stay and they will ensure that you have a wonderful experience.

Detailed Itinerary

Day 1 Rome (D) Your tour leaders Mario and Viny will meet you at the hotel in the centre of Rome at 4.00 PM, when there will be introductions and a small talk on the tour. The tour leaders will then guide you on a leisurely afternoon stroll through some of the famous *piazze* of Rome. The guided walking tour will include Piazza della Repubblica, Piazza Barberini, Piazza di Spagna, Fontana di Trevi, Piazza della Rotonda, Piazza Navona and finally Campo de' Fiori. The walk will end with an early dinner in a traditional family restaurant in Campo de' Fiori.

Day 2 Rome (BD) After breakfast your tour leaders will guide you on a walking tour through some of the fascinating sites of Rome. We start with the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele followed by the Campidoglio and the Mayoral Offices. We then take the group through Ancient Rome, visiting the Roman Forum, followed by a special visit to the Colosseum. The afternoon is free to pursue your own interests. Dinner will be in a traditional Roman restaurant in Trastevere.

Day 3 Rome (BLD) Today we spend the whole day at the Vatican. A tour of St Peter's Basilica is followed by a special conducted tour of the Vatican Museums including the Sistine Chapel. There will be time allowed for those who wish to further explore the magnificence of the Basilica and its treasures. At night we say good-bye to Rome with a dinner in a traditional Roman restaurant.

Day 4 Rome/Pompeii/Sorrento (BD) After breakfast we leave Rome and drive south along the Autostrada del Sol making our way to Pompeii which was destroyed and preserved by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79AD. A local guide will lead the group through the ruins of this truly magnificent city. We then proceed to your hotel in Sorrento which will provide you with some of the most memorable sights of the Bay of Naples and the imposing Mt Vesuvius. Dinner in a traditional restaurant in the heart of Sorrento.

Day 5 Sorrento/Positano/Amalfi Coast (BLD) Today will be spent taking in the sights of the Amalfi Coast which has breathtaking views. We travel by local bus to beautiful Positano and then proceed to Amalfi. The afternoon is free to wander through Amalfi. The return trip will be by ferry to enjoy this spectacular coastline by sea. Dinner in Sorrento.

Day 6 Sorrento (BD) Today is a free day to relax and enjoy the facilities of the hotel and its beautiful pool or to wander into the historical part of Sorrento. Sorrento has great shops with gifts, souvenirs, ceramics and fine liqueurs. You could also visit Capri and the Blue Grotto, a short trip by ferry. Dinner in a local *pizzeria*.

Day 7 Sorrento/Pesaro (BD) After breakfast we travel east crossing the Central Apennines to the City of Pesaro in Le Marche Region. We will travel in air conditioned comfort through some of the most beautiful countryside of Central Italy. Part of the trip is travelling along the A14 Autostrada which has spectacular views of the Adriatic and surrounding countryside. We should reach Pesaro by late afternoon. The City of Pesaro is situated on the Adriatic Coast. A charming town nestled against a backdrop of hills surrounded by ancient hilltowns and castles. After check in, there is an optional walk through the Centro Storico of Pesaro. Dinner at the hotel.

Day 8 Pesaro/San Marino/San Leo (BLD) Today after breakfast at the hotel, we travel just over the Le Marche border for a morning visit to the tiny Republic of San Marino. It is a day for shopping as San Marino is jammed with heavily discounted shops. Apart from souvenirs, you will be able to pick up perfumes, watches and leather bags at very reasonable prices. San Marino is also worth a visit for its history and pageantry and its magnificent hilltop setting, which offers excellent views of the countryside. We then travel to San Leo with its ancient castle perched above sheer cliffs. Lunch is organised at a local *trattoria* famous for its *formaggio di fossa*, a cheese walled up in rock caves to mature for months. Dinner at the hotel.

Day 9 Pesaro/Gradara (BLD) Tuesday is market day in Pesaro. A huge travelling market visits the City every Tuesday. You will be guided through the markets whose stalls are full of leather goods and the latest fashions. There will also be a guided visit of the City of Pesaro visiting the Rossini House and Theatre, the Civic Museums and Piazza del Popolo with its historical Ducal Palace. Lunch will be at one of the oldest restaurants in Pesaro. Afternoon is

free. Towards the evening there is a visit to Gradara: a medieval village dominated by its magnificent castle overlooking the Adriatic Sea. We will tour the impressive castle and the well preserved old town. Gradara was made famous by the legendary love affair between Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini as immortalised in the 5th Canto of Dante's *Inferno*. Dinner at Gradara for *piadina* and local wine.

Day 10 Pesaro/Urbino/Urbania (BLD) Today after breakfast we explore the land once ruled by the medieval lords of Montefeltro. We visit Urbino one of Italy's fascinating towns of the Renaissance. It is also the birthplace of Raphael. A conducted tour of the magnificent Ducal Palace which houses the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche with its precious paintings by Piero della Francesca, Tiziano, Paolo Uccello and Raphael. In the afternoon, we visit the nearby City of Urbania, famous for its traditional Majolica ceramics. Lunch will be at an award winning *osteria* specialising in local produce. We also visit several ceramic workshops and observe skilled artisans working at their craft. Dinner at the hotel.

Day 11 Pesaro/Venice/Dolo (BD) After breakfast, we say good bye to Pesaro and Le Marche and travel to Dolo (Venice). After check in at our beautiful villa on one the canals that leads to the lagoon of Venice, we travel to Venice for our first visit. We take a *vaporetto* ride along the Grand Canal to Piazza San Marco. We will explore and enjoy some of the best sights of the City including the Basilica, the Bridge of Sighs, Ducal Palace and the Rialto Bridge. We then walk back to our bus through the small streets of Venice. Dinner at the hotel.

Day 12 Venice/Murano (BLD) A ride along the Grand Canal to the island of Murano where Venice's world famous glass is made. We visit a master glassblower at work and see amazing works displayed in a world renowned glass factory. Then we return to San Marco Square and the afternoon is free for shopping for masks or a piece of Venetian glassware. Dinner in a typical Venetian restaurant

Day 13 Venice/Florence (BD) After breakfast we make our way to Florence, the Renaissance jewel and city of the Medici. We should reach Florence by late afternoon and after check in we will take a leisurely walk, featuring Piazza del Duomo and its Cathedral with the Giotto Campanile and the magnificent East Door of the Baptistery known as the 'Gate to Paradise'. Dinner in Florence in a restaurant famous for its local cuisine.

Day 14 Florence (BD) Our second day in Florence starts with a visit to the Accademia Gallery and admire the original David by Michelangelo and other masterpieces by this great artist. The tour continues to the Piazza della Signoria and the Ducal Palace and we visit the famous Uffizi Gallery. In the afternoon you are free to wander through the famous markets shopping for leather and gold goods or leisurely explore this beautiful city. There will also be free time to explore other historical sights such as Ponte Vecchio and the church of Santa Croce renowned for its frescoes and the tombs of some of Italy's famous artists. Dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 15 Siena/San Gimignano (BLD) Today after breakfast we travel to San Gimignano: a tiny historical city perched on a hill, famous for its numerous towers and art treasures. There will be wine tasting and the chance to buy a bottle or two of *Vernaccia*, the area's famous white wine. In the afternoon we visit Siena to admire the Cathedral and the Piazza del Campo: one of the most beautiful squares in Europe and learn about the famous race, The *Palio*. Dinner in Florence in a local restaurant.

Day 16 Florence/Chianti Region/Greve (BLD) Today we take a picturesque drive through the Chianti region. You will experience the atmosphere of this part of Tuscany which is full of small villages and hundreds of vineyards dotting the countryside. We will stop for morning

tea in Greve in the beautiful town square followed by a special lunch at one of the oldest wineries in the area. Dinner in Florence at a local *pizzeria*.

Day 17 Florence (B) The tour officially ends after breakfast at the hotel.

Items included in the Tour

- All land travel in an air conditioned bus
- Accommodation for 16 nights in 3/4 star hotels/villa in Rome/Sorrento/Pesaro/Venice/Florence
- **16** breakfasts
- **16** dinners
- **8** lunches (the meals includes special lunches and dinners in traditional local restaurants as detailed in the itinerary)
- Admission to all galleries, museums, wineries and historical sites included in the itinerary
- Personally guided tours to all towns mentioned in the tour
- Services of the tour leaders throughout the tour

Items not included

- Airfares
- Travel insurance (we strongly recommend you take travel insurance during your travels) Vita Italian Tours can arrange travel insurance for you.
- Admission fees to places other than those specifically itemised in the itinerary
- Meals on tour except when specifically mentioned in the itinerary
- Drinks outside normal meal times or additional wine in restaurants
- Personal transport costs, phone calls and other personal needs

Cost

The cost of the tour, land content only, is **AUD \$6980** per person in twin share accommodation.

A deposit of **AUD \$400** is required to reserve a place on the tour which is not refundable unless the tour is cancelled.

Single supplements are available at an additional cost of **AUD \$790**. The full balance is due 60 days before departure.

The tour is costed on a minimum of 6 people travelling on the tour with a maximum number of 14 people.

We recommend that you read carefully the conditions applying to Vita Italian Tours

Additional information

The weather: it is the end of spring. It can get warm during the day however the evenings are cool. For the August departure the weather is similar: generally warm days with mild nights. We recommend light, comfortable clothing, a light jacket with your favourite walking shoes. The countryside is undulating and hilly. Many of the hill towns have their historical centres closed to traffic and therefore lots of walking is required. You should expect to stroll leisurely for up to an hour with many breaks for sightseeing, coffee and a taste of the local produce. **The program** appears to be full; however it is mixed with long restful lunches and leisure time for your enjoyment and comfort.

If you need to, you can always take time off from the organised program.

For further information

Visit the web site **www.vitaitaliantours.com** for the full list of tours.

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