VENICE, FLORENCE & ROME

Introduction to Italy
DAILY ITINERARY
VENICE, FLORENCE & ROME | INTRODUCTION TO ITALY | FAMILY

**DAY 1**

VENICE

- See the best sites on a personally guided walk
- Visit Piazza San Marco, the Rialto Bridge and more
- Climb aboard a gondola for a ride on the canals

No matter how old you are you've probably seen plenty of pictures of Venice. Now you're really here, and today you'll see it in style. The city is small, so you don't have to cover much ground to take in the sights. Our guided afternoon walk starts in Piazza San Marco. The Cathedral is encrusted with gold and mosaics, the campanile (bell tower) is where medieval priests were suspended in cages to repent their sins, and the flocks of pigeons are legendary. Right next door is the Palazzo Ducale, the palace of the Doge, which was once the title given to Venice’s ruler. We'll also get a look at the Bridge of Sighs. The high-up enclosed bridge was where convicts used to sigh as they caught their last glimpse of Venice before going to prison. It’s just one of the tons of stories you’ll hear from your local guide on our walk.

The Grand Canal is the major waterway in Venice. Only four bridges cross it, and the most famous is the Rialto. So you know where we’re headed next! The people-watching is great, and you’ll be surprised at how many boats – and how many different kinds of boats – use the Grand Canal as a street. Until now, we’ve been on dry land. But no Venice visit is complete without a gondola ride. We’ll board the famous boats, skinny enough to make their way through the narrowest canals, to get a look at the city from sea level. Another surprise? How water laps on the steps of the houses…and sometimes inside them.

For dinner, we’ll head back to one of the restaurants that ring the perimeter of Piazza San Marco. As we enjoy our welcome dinner, part of the fun is hearing how the various orchestras in the square have a sort of “battle of the bands”, filling the air with lots of music.

OVERNIGHT: VENICE

MEALS: D

**DAY 2**

FLORENCE/CHIANTI

- Zip to Florence on a high-speed train
- Enjoy an insider’s view of Florence on a guided walking tour
- Check into your Tuscan villa hotel

After breakfast, we take care of hailing a water taxi that takes us to the Venice train station. There we board the high-speed train to Florence. If there’s a city with more famous art and buildings per square inch, we’ve never seen it. Like Venice, it’s an easy city to explore on foot without wearing out. Our local guide brings it all to life with personal stories and the colorful history of the Medici family. We’ll see the Ponte Vecchio – the most famous bridge across the Arno River, the Duomo and bustling Piazza Signoria.

Later in the afternoon, we head south across the Arno River into Chianti and our home for the next three nights. Our villa hotel is constructed as a palatial family home in the 16th century. You’ll have time to stroll the manicured estate with our hosts—the count and countess—before dinner on the terrace.

OVERNIGHT: CHIANTI

MEALS: B, D

**DAY 3**

SAN GIMIGNANO

- Bike ride towards Monteriggioni
- Pizza making with our friend Massimo
- Explore the towers of San Gimignano

Fuel up on breakfast because we’re off on a morning bike ride into the Tuscan countryside. A dirt road path takes us to the medieval village of Strove, and then to Badia a Isola, where there is an old church and abbey where pilgrims on their way to Rome used to stay overnight. We might even feel the atmosphere of those old medieval travelers. Along the way, according to what grows in the season, we can discover fields of wheat, poppies, sunflowers or fava beans. We continue on the country road to Monteriggioni...and if we feel up to it, we can pay a short visit to this medieval fortified village. Afterward, we go by vehicle along a road that leads through the legendary landscape to the grounds of a 15th century castle. Our friend, Massimo, who resides there, greets us for a pizza making session. Over lunch, the adults are invited to taste the estate's wine from our host’s cellar. We promise you: a young Chianti Classico will never taste better than it does when you drink it amid the hills where it was born.

Mid-afternoon, we return to our hotel to relax before we explore San Gimignano, while its 14 medieval towers shimmer in the afternoon sun. Parents and children enjoy guided explorations of the walled hill town. A mere 650 years ago, when the town competed with Florence and Siena for supremacy, San Gimignano boasted over 70 towers. A local expert and friend describes for us how the towers were used both for defensive purposes, as well as for ego building. (Kids love when our guides talk about how the towers were really good lookouts and great for pouring boiling oil over enemies!) This evening, we dine together at one of our favorite restaurants.

Please note: the biking activity is recommended for children age 12 years and older. The bike route is roughly 20% uphill, 30% downhill and 50% flat. The terrain is partly white road, dirt road and paved country road. Option for E-bikes is possible.

OVERNIGHT: CHIANTI

MEALS: B, L, D

**DAY 4**

SIENA

- Explore Siena on a guided walk
- Taste the gelato and do a little shopping
- Meet shepherds and see how they make cheese

Our morning visit today is great for everyone—it’s the cinnamon-colored town of Siena, the true heart of the Tuscan hill towns and a work of art in itself. Still encircled by brick walls, Siena has been an elegant cultural landmark for centuries. Here we’ll join our friend Elena for a scenic and historic walk around the town—into the sloping, scallop-shaped Piazza del Campo, through the maze of streets lined with gothic and medieval houses, towers and palazzos, to the zebra-striped cathedral. Along the way, our guide tells us how fiercely teams from the local districts have competed in the Palio horse race run in Piazza del Campo every year for centuries.
If you like, your guide will challenge you to a fun scavenger hunt—a great way to discover the city together. The reward is gelato, everybody’s favorite treat in these parts. You’ll also have some time for a little shopping. Your kids will also love the collectible flags and scarves that represent the local districts and feature animals from owls and caterpillars to snails, unicorns and dragons. This afternoon, we stop at the family farm of our friends Franco and Sara who tend a flock of 800 sheep in the Tuscan hills. If it happens to be milking day, we may get to see how they milk the ewes. And we’ll definitely have a cheese feast as we taste the various fresh and aged varieties that they make right there on their farm.

OVERNIGHT: CHIANTI
MEALS: B, D

DAY 5
ROME/COLOSSEUM
• Jump to the head of the line to see Michelangelo’s David
• Relax on the train to Rome
• See the ruins of the Colosseum and Forum

This morning is a special treat, we’ll head back into Florence as we’ve made arrangements at the Galleria dell’Accademia. We’ll skip the long lines so you can see Michelangelo’s statue of David. Be prepared: He’s 14 feet tall!

This afternoon’s high-speed train trip is a great chance to rest up and compare notes about your favorite moments of the trip so far. Our late afternoon arrival to Rome leaves us with plenty of time to explore the Colosseum. It’s huge, and with our guide’s help it’s easy to imagine the stadium full of spectators for gladiator flights, lion hunts and even mock naval battles. We’ll also walk through the ruins of the Roman Forum with its ancient columns, the Arch of Constantine and the stone streets that Emperors used to travel.

The balance of the evening is all yours. Make time for some shopping, wander the scenic streets at your own pace, or settle in at a piazza for a glass of something cold. For dinner, choose a nearby ristorante, make it a pizza evening, or ask for a recommendation for fine dining. It’s almost impossible to have anything but a wonderful meal in Rome, no matter what your family’s tastes may be.

OVERNIGHT: ROME
MEALS: B

DAY 6
ROME/VATICAN
• Make a wish at the Trevi Fountain
• Enjoy a guided visit to the Vatican and Sistine Chapel
• Thrill to the excitement of a lively gladiator training session

Italian breakfasts are amazing – hot chocolate, fruits, fresh rolls, cheese, yogurt, and a whole range of delicious things that aren’t usual back home. Everybody will want to fuel up because it’s an exciting day. First, our local Roman guide plots out a route that includes the Trevi Fountain and the Spanish Steps. Today’s highlight: St. Peter’s Basilica and the Sistine Chapel. If you think Michelangelo’s dome is mind-boggling, wait until you stand under it. This is truly one of the world’s most awesome structures for its size, the incredible variety of art and colored stone, and its history—all of which you’ll learn about from your guide. It’s difficult to get tickets to the Sistine Chapel, but don’t worry. We’ve arranged them so you can all marvel at the artistic treasures without the hassle of planning your own visit.

Afterward, we’ll grab lunch at one of the lively trattorias. Yesterday at the Colosseum, you all saw where the gladiators fought. Today, you get a firsthand look at how the fighters trained for the arena. At a two-hour lesson, we’ll dress in traditional tunics. Under the guidance of experts, you learn to wield a training sword and imagine fighting off wild animals and spear-wielding warriors. It’s a fun and fascinating experience whether you’re in the fray…or on the sidelines cheering on your favorite competitor.

Later, we’ll celebrate the end to an amazing week with a festive farewell dinner together.

OVERNIGHT: ROME
MEALS: B, D

DAY 7
ROME/DEPART
• Part company at your Rome hotel
• Return home with great memories of your family’s dolce vita

After breakfast, you’ll transfer independently to the Rome airport for onward travel with fun memories and shared experiences of our time in Italy.

MEALS: B