

ITALY WITH FRIENDS "BELLA ITALIA" TOUR
May 28 – June 10, 2017
(Itinerary is subject to change and variations with and/or without notice.)

DAY 0 – Saturday, May 27, 2017 - DEPART USA

Remember you will arrive in Europe the day after you depart the USA. You will need to book your air travel so that you arrive in Rome early enough to check into your hotel and be ready to meet with the group for orientation at 3:00 PM, on Sunday, May 28, 2017.

Day 1 – Sunday, May 28, 2017 - Benvenuto to Italy!

Welcome to Italia! Arrive into **Rome** and meet at 3:00 PM in the hotel for orientation and introductions. We will then begin our sightseeing with a walking tour of Rome's historical district. We will visit the **Pantheon**, the church of **Santa Maria Sopra Minerva**, **Piazza Navona**, and the **Trevi Fountain** along the way. We will then enjoy a welcome dinner in a typical Roman trattoria. We will toast the start of our Italian adventure with a sparkling Prosecco. Salute! We will then end our evening with a visit to one of Rome's most famous landmarks, the **Spanish Steps**. (D) Moderate

Day 2 – Monday, May 29, 2017 – The Wonders of Ancient Rome.

Today will be a full day of sightseeing starting with a walking tour of Ancient "Rome's most important sights. The **Colosseum** is one of the most impressive sights in the entire city of Rome. We will visit inside and learn about "Bread and Circuses" and the Gladiatorial games. We will enjoy lunch together in a restaurant overlooking the Colosseum. We will then walk among the ruins of the **Roman Forum**, the political and religious center of ancient Rome. There will be time to learn of the origins of Rome as we visit the **Campidoglio** which sits on the Capitoline Hill. We will also visit inside the **Capitaline Museum**, one of the oldest museums in the world.

Afterwards, you will have some free time to continue your ancient history lesson with a visit to Palatine Hill or other spots in Rome. You will have the evening free to enjoy as you like. (B) (L) Very Strenuous

Day 3 –Tuesday, May 30, 2017– Rome and Vatican City.

We will continue sightseeing in this amazing city. We begin this morning with a visit to Campo dei Fiori, a typical Roman market. From here we cross the Tiber River on the beautiful Pont Sant' Angelo lined with those Bernini Angels. This leads to the 2nd Century Tomb of the Emperor Hadrian, Castello Sant' Angelo. Then we will focus on **VATICAN CITY**, a tiny independent country located inside the city of Rome. We will visit the **Vatican Museum** with its famous **Sistine Chapel** followed by a visit inside **St. Peter's Basilica**, the largest and grandest church in Christendom. We will stop for lunch together before you begin the 4 mile trek through the Vatican Museum.

You will then have some time for your own pursuits. You can spend more time in the Vatican or take the metro to other parts of Rome. (B) (L) Very Strenuous

Day 4 –Wednesday, May 31, 2017 – The Divine Amalfi Coast Escape.

This morning we will head south for our Amalfi Coast escape. First we will stop for a visit to the one time lively port city of Pompeii. After Mount Vesuvius erupted in AD 79, it was covered by ash and preserved for us to wander its ruins today. It is truly one of the most amazing ancient sights in Italy. We will enjoy a guided tour of the ruins.

We will then head to Sorrento, a lovely coastal town where the smell of lemons and oranges permeate the air. We will get acquainted with Sorrento and its narrow Roman-grid streets. We will enjoy a delicious dinner and will toast our adventures ahead with the local Lemoncello. Salute! (D) Very Strenuous

DAY 5 – Thursday, June 1, 2017 – La Dolce Far Niente.

You will have time today to enjoy more of this heavenly location just as you like. You can spend more time in Sorrento. You could take the train to other areas along the coast. You could hop a ferry to the magical Isle of Capri. Hire a private boat for fun in the Mediterranean. It is your day to enjoy as you like, even enjoying the sweetness of doing nothing. (B)

DAY 6 – Friday, June 2, 2017– The Crazy Amalfi Coast Drive and Picturesque Villages.

Today will be a full day of discovery on a drive along the famous Amalfi Coast, the most amazing of all the Mediterranean shores. You will visit lovely towns like Positano, Amalfi and Ravello. There will be time for lunch as a group along the way. You will return to our Sorrento hotel and we will enjoy dinner together. (B) (L) (D) Light

DAY 7 – Saturday, June 3, 2017 – Umbria, the Green Heart of Italy.

This morning we say farewell to our lovely coastal hideaway and head north into the Italian countryside and the region of Umbria. **Orvieto** sits majestically atop an outcrop of volcanic tufa stone with thousands of caves underneath the city, dug out during Etruscan, Medieval and Renaissance times. Orvieto was once an important Etruscan city. Today it is famous for one of Italy's most beautiful Gothic cathedrals, and a delicious white wine, Orvieto Classico.

We will take plenty of time to enjoy this grand hill town. We will visit the Duomo, 300 years in construction, with its San Brizio Chapel covered in frescos by Luca Signorelli. Then we will tour the fascinating **Orvieto Underground** to see thousands of years of archaeological history. After time to settle in to the hotel, we will meet for dinner at a wonderful restaurant that specializes in Etruscan dishes. (B) (D) Strenuous

DAY 8 – Sunday, June 4, 2017 – Tuscan Treasures.

We say farewell to Umbria and drive into the beautiful region of Tuscany. We start our day with a visit to **SIENA**, a popular Tuscan city has a medieval character that has survived to an amazing extent. Siena's heart is the shell shaped **Piazza del Campo** or **Il Campo**. This is one of Italy's most famous and most beautiful squares. The Palio, a renowned and ancient horse race takes place twice a year right here. We will enjoy a walking tour of Siena. We will visit the massive **Duomo**, one of the most ornate in Italy. The inside of the Duomo is as ornate as the outside with its famous marble floors and sculpture by Michelangelo, Pisano and Bernini. The **Piccolomini Library** has some stunning frescos that depict the life of Pope Pius II.

After enjoying all that Siena has to offer, we will head out to discover more of Tuscany with a short stop in the tiny village of **Monteriggioni**. This walled village will take your breath away at first sight, nestled on the top of a small hill, with 14 towers still standing in a perfectly preserved circle. It is such a gem that it is hard to believe it is not a creation by Disney.

We will make one last stop at **Fattoria San Donato**, a small working farm that produces olive oil and a delicious white wine called Vernaccia. Umberto and Federica have worked very hard and are very proud of their organic wine production. This is one of the few white wines produced in Tuscany. It is a fruity white that was said to be a favorite of Michelangelo.

We will then head to **SAN GIMIGNANO**, one of the most beautiful villages in Tuscany. San Gimignano is known as the "city of towers". This is one of the most popular hill towns in Tuscany, and one of my favorites as well. You will truly enjoy exploring this quintessential medieval town. I always encourage everyone to rise early if possible to see the village before it comes alive with locals and tourists. It is like a fairytale setting. After settling into our hotel, we will meet for a short orientation walking tour of the village before. You will then have the evening free. We will meet for our dinner with a view at La Terrazza restaurant. (B) (D) Strenuous

DAY 9 –Monday, June 5, 2017 - Magical San Gimignano – La Dolce Far Niente!

You have been going strong for several days, so today you will have time to relax and “*breathe in the warmth of Tuscany*”. You will have the day to explore **San Gimignano** as you like. This is always a favorite stop on the tour and you will find lots to enjoy.

You may wish to visit inside the Duomo (or Collegiata). There are beautiful frescos throughout the church that were used to teach the peasants who could not read the stories of the Bible. There is also a small chapel dedicated to Santa Fina, the patron Saint of San Gimignano, frescoed in 1475 by Ghirlandaio, one of Michelangelo’s teachers. You might also wish to climb the Torre Grande for the best views around. How about a visit to the Museum of Torture?

You may just enjoy shopping along the main streets. Beware; there are some of the best artisan shops in Tuscany right here. This has always been an important trading center. It was on the famous Via Francigena: the most traveled of the medieval roads that pilgrims traveled to Rome. From the 8th century, it was the route through France that linked Canterbury Cathedral in England and Rome, the heart of Christianity. Today you will find locally owned shops selling ceramics, soaps, leather goods, etc. You will also find a great selection of paintings and prints of the Tuscan area. You will find all sorts of enticements in San Gimignano. Also, not to be missed is the award winning gelato at the gelateria right across from our hotel. (B) Light to Strenuous

Day 10 – Tuesday, June 6, 2017– Chianti, Castello Verrazzano and Firenze.

This morning our first stop will be at the **American Military Cemetery** located just outside of Florence. The compelling sight of endless rows of white marble crosses recalls the heroism of the young Americans who fought so valiantly to free Italy from the grips of fascism during World War II. The 1940's may seem very long ago, but during WWII this area was terribly ravaged by the fighting. I believe it is our duty and our privilege to visit this site and honor all of those fallen heroes.

No trip to Chianti would be complete without a visit to a local winery. We will visit one of the oldest in the region, the 11th Century **Castello Verrazzano**. The hilltop location of this estate and winery is just spectacular. The countryside surrounding Verrazzano is dotted with castles, vineyards and olive groves and is truly magnificent. You will enjoy a guided tour of the castle grounds and ancient ageing cellars, followed by a feast of homemade Tuscan favorites accompanied by a range of delicious wines made by the Verrazzano winery. You will have the opportunity to learn the art of wine making and wine tasting in this relaxed and amusing setting. You will also have the opportunity to purchase any of the products like wine, olive oil or the OMG basalmico that you enjoyed with your lunch.

We will then drive into the frenzy of Firenze, Florence in Italian. We will jump right into the Renaissance, with a walking tour of Florence’s most important sights. We will then visit the **Piazza Duomo**, the heart of religious Florence. Here you will find the octagonal **Baptistery** with its bronze doors, dubbed the “gates of paradise” by Michelangelo. Across from the Baptistery sets **Santa Maria del Fiore**, better known as just the “**Duomo**”.

You will see the beautiful Piazza Republica, the ancient Roman Forum. Then we will pass through one of the main shopping streets in Florence on our way to **Piazza Signoria**, the civic center of Florence. The **Palazzo Vecchio** (old city hall) towers over the sculpture laden piazza. The **Uffizi Gallery**, one of the oldest museums in Europe is also located here. Passing through the outside courtyard you will see statues of some of the most famous artists, scientists and explorers in Italy. This courtyard leads to the Arno River where you will have your first view of the **Ponte Vecchio**, the oldest bridge in Florence. This ancient bridge is lined with shops selling gold and silver jewelry and is truly one of the most beautiful spots in all of Italy. **FLORENCE** cannot really be described in words, it must be experienced. Florence is an outdoor museum and you will enjoy just strolling through its medieval streets and taking in all the sculpture, art and architecture that surrounds you. You will have the evening free to enjoy it all. (B) (L) Moderate

DAY 11 – Wednesday, June 7, 2017 - Florence, Birthplace of the Italian Renaissance.

We will start our day with a visit to the **Central Market**, which is filled with all types of food items

produced throughout Italy. You will also find the **San Lorenzo market** here. This is a great place to find bargains and souvenirs. We will then finish our sightseeing and afterwards you will have some time for your own pursuits. Do not forget that Florence has many of the original designer shops, so you can go completely crazy and shop till you drop. Again you might wish to visit one of the many museums in Florence during this time. There are also several other wonderful churches with fabulous art that you could see. My favorite chocolate shop Rivoire is located right on the Piazza Signoria. You can find delicious treats and some unusual gifts.

We will also visit the **Museo Accademia**. Here you will have the unforgettable experience of viewing Michelangelo's "*David*". This massive sculpture is truly one of the most famous works of art in the world.

The Tuscan cuisine is famous all over the world. We will cross the Arno River and walk to the **Il Tavola Cooking School** where you will learn how to cook Italian. You will prepare several courses and enjoy the fruits of your labor with a little vino along the way. (B) (D) Moderate

DAY 12– Thursday, June 8, 2017 - Venice, "La Serenissima"

On our way out of Florence we will make a stop at **Piazzale Michelangelo**. This large square overlooking the city from across the river provides marvelous views of Florence and the stunning dome of the Duomo. There is also a huge fake David located here. It is the perfect place to say farewell to the region of Tuscany.

We will then hit the Autostrada once again and head to **VENICE**. We will pass near **Bologna**, the heart of the Emilia Romagna region. You will notice how flat it will become once we pass Bologna. This is one of the most bountiful farming districts in Italy. The **Po River** valley is filled with farm land for miles. It is no wonder why this area is referred to as "the Breadbasket of Italy". We will make a stop along the way for a quick lunch together.

Finally, we will cross a long causeway leaving the mainland and arrive in magical Venice. We will drop off the van and then board a private water taxi for our ride into Venice. From now on this will be how you travel, by boat, water taxi or gondola. It will take you a few moments to really realize where you are. It is just such an unusual city.

After some time to settle in, we will meet for a walking tour through the back streets of Venice leading to the **Grand Canal** and the **Rialto Bridge**. We will then make our way to **St. Mark's Square**. Napoleon referred to this square as "the most beautiful drawing room in Europe". If the weather is nice, sitting at one of the outdoor bars on the Piazza, listening to live music is a memorable experience.

You will then have the evening free to enjoy as you like. Most shops stay open late, so you can really enjoy wandering through all of the places selling lovely Murano glass. Venice is known for their glass blowing and you will find everything from light fixtures to jewelry made from it all over town. You may also want to take your gondola ride if that is on your list of must-do adventures in Venice. It is an experience that you will surely remember all of your life. (B) (L) Light

DAY 13 – Friday, June 9, 2017 – The Wonder of Wandering in Venice

We start early this morning and will dive right into the historic center of what was for centuries Europe's top superpower, with a visit to **St. Mark's Basilica**, located on St. Mark's Square. We will also climb to its museum with fantastic views over St. Mark's Square and the interior of the church. We will then walk to the **Rialto Bridge** which has been a major landmark in Venice since 1588. It is lined with shops selling all the local wares. Across the Rialto Bridge is the commercial district of Venice. You will find the local market here and it is worth a visit. You will see more types of fish here than you could have imagined and they are all fresh.

You will then have the rest of the day for your own pursuits. You may want to continue shopping for those last minute purchases. You might want to visit inside the Doge's Palace for a look into the life of the rich and famous during the Republic of Venice. You might wish to visit the Campanile (bell

tower) for a 360 degree view of Venice and the lagoon.

You also might wish to visit some of the islands in the lagoon. Murano is the island where you will find the glass blowing factories. Burano is a tiny fishing village where you will find beautiful lace. You might just want to wander around more of Venice. That is one of the pleasures in Venice, to get pleasantly lost in the tiny back streets and canals.

We will meet later in the evening for our "farewell dinner" at a lovely restaurant along a beautiful canal. (B) (D) Light

DAY 14 – Saturday, June 10, 2017 - Arrivederci Italia!

It will be hard to say arrivederci, but I know you will take home wonderful memories of your time spent with friends on your trip of a lifetime experiencing our **ITALIAN ESCAPE!!!** Graci e Ciao! (B)

THE FOLLOWING IS INCLUDED IN YOUR ITALY WITH FRIENDS TOUR:

- 13 nights accommodation in 3-4 star, centrally located hotels with private bath or shower.
- Many meals included: 13 breakfasts (B), 5 lunches (L), 7 dinners (D).
- All ground transportation in Italy during tour. (Does not include airfare. Does not include transportation to and from the airport or train station)
- Guided sightseeing and entrance fees to select sights, wineries and museums as described in itinerary.
- Local VAT taxes and government fees, gas, highway tolls and parking fees.
- Pre-tour visit with helpful travel information.
- Plenty of memories to last a lifetime.
- Surprises along the way.

NOT INCLUDED IN TOUR:

- Does not include airfare.
- Does not include transportation to and/or from the airport in Rome or Venice.
- Does not include remaining meals, alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks at included meals.
- Does not include personal expenses such as internet use, laundry, mini-bar, or extra transportation in tour towns.
- Does not include travel insurance.

2017 LAND ONLY TOUR PRICES:

Tour begins in Rome and ends in Venice; tour is for 14 days and 13 nights.

The total cost per person is **\$3799** with double occupancy. (Includes taxes, fees, and Euro exchange rate adjustment.) Single occupancy supplement is **\$900**.

A **\$500** deposit will hold your place on the tour. Tours are limited in size. (This tour is limited to 8 guests.) Payment is accepted by check or credit card through PayPal. (5% fee if using PayPal) Your deposit is credited against the total tour cost. Final payment is required no later than **60** days prior to departure.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:

Prepare for a physically demanding tour. Age is not a concern so long as you are physically fit, a very good walker at an energetic pace, and able to stand for extended periods of time and climb lots of hills and stairs. All of the above could be done in all sorts of weather and temperatures. You are required to load and unload your bags into the van, and to carry your bag to your room. This sometimes could be a short distance from the hotel. Most days our sightseeing will cover anywhere from 2-8 miles of walking, sometimes over uneven surfaces. Plan to get in shape before you head to Italy.