

AUTHENTIC ITALY

GUIDED GRAND TOUR NORTH

The Northern Lakes, Florence, Tuscany, Umbria in 12 days

June 11th – 23rd, 2019

A tour for connoisseurs, from Milan to Rome via Florence, admiring the extraordinary beauty of Italy and its “borghi”. You will enjoy the diversity of habits and traditions across the country, as well as the diverse yet most savoury regional cuisines of Lombardy, Emilia, Tuscany, Umbria and Lazio!!

TOUR SUMMARY

- Group size: 4 to 10 Pax
- Tour Start Date: June 11th, 2019
- Tour End Date: June 23rd, 2019
- Type of tour: point to point
- Duration: 12 Days + 12 Nights
- Tour starts in Milan
- Tour end in Rome

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- **The Tour is led by an Italian Authorised Tour Leader**
- **Accommodations in Double Room with Continental Breakfast (*):**
 - Day 1: 3* Hotel La Perla - Via Romolo Quaglino 7, Tremezzo (CO)
 - Days 2 & 3: Antico Borgo di Tabiano Castello - Relais de Charme
 - Day 4: 4* Hotel Al Cappello Rosso - Via De' Fusari 9, Bologna
 - Days 5: Tenuta Monacelli Lecce - Via Giacomo Monticelli, Località Cerrate – Lecce
 - Day 6: Castello di Tornano - Loc. Tornano, Gaiole in Chianti (SI)
 - Days 9: Castello di Petrata - Via Petrata, Assisi (PG)
 - Day 10: Palazzo Dragoni - Via del Duomo 13, Spoleto (PG)
 - Day 11: Borgo Pallavicini Mori - Via Tiberina 571, Roma
 - Day 12: 4* Hotel Monti Palace - Via Cavour 185, Roma

(*) Accommodations are indicative. Before confirmation, we reserve the right to replace the ones indicated above with others with similar or higher characteristics.

- **All transfers by private minibus**
- **Private Guided Visits / Tours / Activities:**
 - Day 1: Meeting Point at NH Hotel Concordia in Milan – Visit of Villa Balbianello in Lenno – Round trip to Bellagio by public ferry – Free time in Bellagio
 - Day 2: Private Boat Tour of Borromean Islands Isola Bella and Isola Madre on Lake Maggiore
 - Day 3: Full day tour of Parma area with an Authorised Tourist Guide, including visits of a Parmesan Cheese factory, a Parma Ham factory and a Cooking class in a Villa near Parma
 - Day 4: Full day tour of Modena area, including a visit to a Balsamic Vinegar of Modena Estate and admission to Museo Ferrari in Maranello
 - Day 5: “Michelangelo’s Legacy” walking tour of Florence city centre with an Authorised Tourist Guide
 - Day 6: Visit of a wine cellar in Chianti with tasting
 - Day 7: 2-hour private walking tour of Siena city centre with an Authorised Tourist Guide
 - Day 8: Full-day tour of Val d’Orcia: Bagno Vignoni, Pienza, Montepulciano - Visit of a “Pecorino di Pienza” cheese factory - Gourmet walking tour of Montepulciano city centre with food tastings
 - Day 9: 2-hour walking tour of Assisi city centre with an Authorised Tourist Guide
 - Day 10: Visit of an organic farm near Todi with tasting of local olive oil
 - Day 11: Tour of Orvieto Underground
 - Day 12: Full day tour of Tivoli area with an authorized Tourist Guide, including admission to Villa d’Este and Hadrian’s Villa
- **Admission Tickets to:**
 - Villa Balbianello on Lake Como
 - Borromean Islands on Lake Maggiore
 - Museo Ferrari in Maranello
 - Orvieto Underground
 - Villa d’Este and Hadrian’s Villa in Tivoli
- **All dinners at selected home-style local restaurants (wine not included)**
- Full assistance 24 hours/day by our Back Office
- All taxes (tips not mandatory)

DAY 1 – LAKE COMO

Benvenuti in Italia, welcome to Italy! Your Tour Leader will meet you at NH Concordia Hotel in Milan, here you'll meet your travel mates too. Let's have a coffee together, just to know each other!

From Milan, we will head north for Lake Como, one of Italy's most popular lakes and also its deepest. Shaped like an inverted Y, giving it a long perimeter, it is surrounded by mountains and hills and dotted with beautiful and resort villages. The magnificent scenery of Lake Como (also known as "Lario") has enchanted artists and travellers for centuries: from French novelist Flaubert to musicians of the calibre of Gioacchino Rossini, Giuseppe Verdi, and Vincenzo Bellini; it was here that he composed his opera Norma. Today Lake Como continues to attract members of the international jet-set and celebrities that appreciate the evocative beauty of the Lake and its surroundings.

Driving along the lake road we will enjoy multiple, fascinating views: suggestive borgoes, splendid villas and lush gardens await visitors in search of a little charm and relaxation, or a little culture and contact with nature.

Breathtaking villas, one after the other, encircle the lake, a resort destination of the nobles of Lombardy since the 16th Century. In Lenno, we will admire **Villa Balbianello**, used as a location in films such as "Star Wars: Episode II" and James Bond's "Casino Royale". Then Tremezzo and **Villa Carlotta**, with terrace gardens and a museum boasting works by Canova, Thorvaldsen and Hayez. The Villa was built in the 17th century for a powerful Milanese family, and in the 2nd half of the 19th century Princess Marianne of Nassau bought it and gave it to her daughter Carlotta as a wedding present, hence the name. Her husband was a keen botanist and over the years turned it into the lush garden that we see here today.

Later on, we will reach **Bellagio**, where we will relax and enjoy the lakeside ambience.

DAY 2 – LAKE MAGGIORE

In the early morning we will head for our next destination, Lake Maggiore.

It has the magnificent vintage air of old-fashioned vacations, but it never goes out of style. Lake Maggiore is the second largest in Italy in size (the biggest is Lake Garda) but the largest—and that's why it's called Maggiore—of the lakes closest to the Alps. Geographically, it straddles two Italian regions, Lombardy and Piedmont, and a small part juts into Switzerland's Canton Ticino. But the main thing is that since the 19th century it has been one of the top vacation and weekend destinations for wealthy families from big cities, who built some of Northern Italy's most stunning villas on its shores. The secret to Lake Maggiore's success is its position just under Mount Rosa, a varied landscape, easy accessibility from both Milan and Piedmont, and a climate that allows very distinctive vegetation to thrive. In spring, the blossoming of azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias, lemons and magnolias rightfully attract plant lovers.

The jewels of the lake are the **Borromean Islands**: anyone who has seen a postcard of Lake Maggiore is bound to be familiar with their outline. The archipelago is one of the biggest attractions for travellers and Isola Bella, Isola Madre and Isola dei Pescatori have plenty of charm. The archipelago is named after the Borromeo family, which acquired the islands in the 14th century and still owns two of them. The noble palaces on the islands, with their rooms filled with antique furniture, paintings and priceless porcelain, and the enchanting gardens are open to visitors and are a must on your list of things to see. From Laveno we will explore them on the boat, before getting to elegant Stresa.

We will then drive south to our next destination, a particularly savoury one: Parma.

DAY 3 – PARMA

Parma is known for its delicious food products. First, we will visit a **Parmigiano Reggiano** factory, where we will see cheese masters at work: a very special way to get into the production culture of the area and to discover how a true gastronomic gem is made! (see our **BLOG** at <https://www.vitoritalytours.com/blog/item/5-my-private-italy-parmigiano-reggiano-please-don%E2%80%99t-call-me-parmesan.html>).

Later on, time for a visit to a **Parma ham** factory, where you will learn the secrets of the most delicious ham, Prosciutto di Parma. And finally, we will savour authentic Italian cuisine on a fun-filled cooking class led by a local “rezdora” (a female cook in Parmesan language). We will immerse ourselves into the tradition of fresh Italian pasta and study the secrets of preparing pasta dough from scratch, using just flour and eggs. We will make your own “Tortelli d'erbetta” (Parma most traditional pasta with a filling of ricotta cheese and chards) and delicious tagliatelle with tomato sauce – all local ingredients! Once our amazing meal is ready, we will enjoy what we prepared matched with a glass of local Lambrusco wine. A very tasty experience at the end of an unforgettable day!

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DAY 4 – MODENA AND THE MOTOR VALLEY

Modena is a very beautiful city, and derives its name for the famous people - Enzo Ferrari and Luciano Pavarotti - who were born and lived here, as well as for some of its gastronomical products. Modena lies in the so-called "Motor Valley": actually the factories of the famous Italian sports car makers Ferrari, De Tomaso, Lamborghini and Maserati are located here.

In Maranello, we will visit **Museo Ferrari**, not just a collection of the past, but an extraordinary experience of the world of Ferrari and sports car racing! How exciting to see live the most beautiful cars of the world, exceptional artworks made by modern mechanic artisan masters.

Afterwards, we will move to the estate of a **Balsamic Vinegar of Modena Producer**, to delight in the unique, enticing taste of traditional balsamic vinegar. Balsamic Vinegar of Modena is obtained from partially fermented, cooked and concentrated grape must. The grapes come exclusively from the vines of the area, and the most important processing phase is refinement, inside containers of fine wood, such as oak, chestnut, oak, mulberry and juniper. The minimum period of ageing is 60 days; at the end of refinement, the product obtained is subjected to an analytical and organoleptic examination, entrusted to a group of expert technicians and tasters: this is the step to be taken to ensure that the product can be certified as Balsamic Vinegar of Modena.

DAY 5 – FLORENCE

Here we are in Florence, the land of Dante and Michelangelo!

Despite its international fame and greatness, Florence is also a small city, whose history is interwoven with that of its passionate citizens for more than 1,000 years.

In Piazza Duomo you will be astonished by the **Duomo**, with the incredible Brunelleschi's cupola, a masterpiece of art and architecture whose building techniques building are still covered by a veil of mystery. Beside it, Giotto's Campanile (Belltower) and the Baptistery, one of the oldest buildings in the city, with its famous bronze doors made by no and Ghiberti in the 14th and 15th centuries. In Piazza della Signoria we will walk in the middle of bronze and marble masterpieces by Giambologna and Cellini inside the marvellous **Loggia dei Lanzi**, and will admire the imposing **Palazzo Vecchio**, one of the symbols of Florence and still the seat of government of the city. We may also spare some time to relax, visiting a typical market for shopping, strolling through the pedestrian streets of the city and crossing the oldest bridge in Florence, "**Ponte Vecchio**" (Old Bridge), rich of jewellery shops.

For a full understanding of the Renaissance period and the incredible competition which took place among the best artists in the period, we will engage in the "Michelangelo's Experience": our partner Giovanni, an Authorised Tourist Guide and Art Historian specialized in Michelangelo, will help you enter Michelangelo's' world thanks to a deeper exploration of his works and the places

where he lived. We will meet Michelangelo in person in front of his tomb in the Basilica di Santa Croce, an unforgettable moment!

Florence is also the main Italian centre for the production of **high-quality leather goods**. The Florentine artisans are so famous that many fashion brands have opened their factories in the city or close to it, due to the high skill of the artisans involved and to the continuous inspiration that designers take from the town's masterpieces. The area around Piazza Santa Croce is full of leather shops and workshops.

Thanks to the tradition of Tuscan tanneries, there is no better place to find **shoes for all tastes** than Florence: from the creations, designed and produced by hand by skilled craftsmen, to the large collections available in stores, renewed every season. Above all, for refinement and elegance, Ferragamo (also worth seeing the museum), Gucci and Prada. If you prefer a simpler style, across the river Arno there are many shops specialized in handmade shoes and sandals.

At dinner we will taste the typical Tuscan cuisine at a home-style local restaurant in Florence, enjoying simple yet unforgettable recipes of the Tuscan tradition (see our **BLOG** at <https://www.vitoritalytours.com/blog/item/8-in-tuscany,-eat-like-a-tuscan.html>).

DAY 6 – CHIANTI AND SAN GIMIGNANO

Today we will explore the hilly area of Chianti, home of the world-famous wine!

Only a few regions can offer such a beautiful and rich panorama as Chianti: green hills sketched by miles and miles of vineyards and olive groves, ancient walled villages, panoramic curvy roads. Chianti Classico spreads from Florence to Siena and includes the municipalities of Greve, Panzano, Radda, Gaiole and Castellina. Most of the route consists of the grid of roads connecting the larger towns to villages and castles, like the one leading to **Radda**, former headquarters of the Chianti Military League, and then to **Castello di Brolio** where Bettino Ricasoli devised the "recipe" for Chianti wine.

In the afternoon, we will stroll with our head upwards along the streets of one of the most beautiful cities in Tuscany, **San Gimignano**, also known as the "Medieval Manhattan", thanks to its very old and impressive 14 towers that dominate the town skyline. Originally the towers were 72, built by patrician families probably to demonstrate their wealth and power. Seven of San Gimignano's towers are around Piazza del Duomo, the tallest one is **Torre Grossa**, 54 meters high, dating back to 1298.

DAY 7 – SIENA

Leaving San Gimignano, today we will first head for **Monteriggioni**, the famous Senese fortress which guarded the boundary between the Senese Republic and the Florentine “Signoria”. A step back in the medieval times that will impress you. All around are Chianti vineyards and pasturelands, it’s amazing! The village can only evoke the Middle Ages with its 13th-century walls and 14 quadrilateral towers. Towers that Dante compared to the Giants of hell, in the time when this fortified site was an outpost of the Senese against the Florentines, passing several times from one to the other.

We will then move to Siena, the city of the Palio, where we will walk on the famous **Piazza del Campo**, the concave square where horses run twice a year in a dangerous race that symbolizes the city’s freedom (see article at <https://www.vitoritalytours.com/blog/item/4-my-private-italy-dreaming-twice-a-year-in-siena.html> in our **BLOG**).

Not far away, Piazza Sant'Oronzo narrates the city's entire history. The Roman period is visible in the ruins of the Amphitheatre. But, maybe, the thing that you are going to remember better is the colour of frontages and roofs, the renowned colour “**Sienna**”, a pigment first produced during the Renaissance, that makes the city lovely and warm. And don’t forget to taste the **Senese sweets**: “*cantucci*” (biscuits with toasted almonds), “*ricciarelli*” (soft biscuits with icing sugar), “*panforte*” (cake with fruit nuts and spices) and “*cavallucci*” (biscuits with honey, walnut, candied fruits and spices). Travellers who love dessert will be delighted!

DAY 8 – VAL D’ORCIA

On the way to Val d’Orcia, we will take a diversion to one of the most fascinating spots of Tuscany. Here we are in **Chiusdino**, to see the famous Abbey of San Galgano. What a stunning place!

The Abbey of San Galgano dates back to 1218 and was considerably wealthy until the 14th century, so much as to be disputed between the Papacy and the Republic of Siena. Unfortunately, a great decline followed so much splendour: local people used it as a warehouse of building materials, even selling the roof of lead to make ammunition and transforming it into what we see today. It is really impressive for those who see it for the first time, for the isolation in which it is located as well as for the absence of the roof. In fact, finding yourself inside a church and having the sky as a cover is not common and when the evening comes, the stars offer a wonderful show. But why did the Cistercians Monks decided to build such an imposing complex in that secluded valley crossed by

the river Merse? The answer is simple. Very close to it a church, the hermitage of Montesiepi, whose first nucleus is due to the same saint (and his direct followers), already existed. In its Chapel, also called "Rotonda" because of the circular shape of the central structure, an old iron sword is encased in stone, a clear reference to the legend of Excalibur, the mythic sword of King Arthur!

From Chiusdino we will then drive to Val d'Orcia, one of the most fascinating places in Italy, included by UNESCO in the list of World Heritage Sites. The landscape of Val d'Orcia is part of the agricultural hinterland of Siena, redrawn and developed when it was integrated into the territory of the city-state in the 14th and 15th centuries to reflect an idealized model of good governance and to create an aesthetically pleasing picture. The landscape's distinctive aesthetics, flat chalk plains out of which rise almost conical hills with fortified settlements on top, inspired many artists. Their images have come to exemplify the beauty of well-managed Renaissance agricultural landscapes.

Our first stop will be **Pienza**, "Pio's town": here the Pope Pius II decided to build the perfect palazzo for his papal court according to the project of an "Ideal City" drawn up by artists such as Piero della Francesca. From the loggia of the Palace you will enjoy a breath-taking panorama of the landscape all around! Pienza is also the area of the typical "Pecorino di fossa" cheese, a real delight to the palate; here you will visit a cheese factory, where the cheese masters will uncover the secrets of this ancient cheese!

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Then, we will get to **Montepulciano**, for a history and gourmet food tour of the city with our Guide Francesca, at the discovery of this land's delicacies: Nobile di Montepulciano wine and local olive oil.

We will finally stop in **Bagno Vignoni**, a tiny and charming village where the main square is a pool 49 meters long and 29 wide, from the bottom of which bubble up a number of hot springs whose therapeutic quality has been renowned since antiquity! All this creates such a pleasant sensation, it will be hard to leave!

DAY 9 – ASSISI

Our first step today will be **Tuoro** on Lake Trasimeno; this small town is built on the site which in 217 B.C. witnessed one of the most disastrous battles of Roman times when more than 16,000 Roman soldiers were killed by Hannibal's army! Here you will understand how the Roman Armies fought and conquered most of the ancient Western World.

We will then proceed to **Assisi**, the birthplace of St. Francis, the nobleman who renounced all his possessions in order to devote his life to helping the needy.

The splendid **Basilica**, one of the emblems of Christianity, located on Mount Subasio and overlooking the entire valley, is dedicated to him. Apart from being a strong appeal for millions of religious believers, the Basilica is a monument of great artistic value. The construction of the Basilica began two years after his death, in 1228, and between the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century the basilica's walls were frescoed by the best artists of that time: Giotto, Cimabue, Simone Martini and Pietro Lorenzetti. St. Francis's Basilica consists of two churches laid upon each other and a crypt containing the tomb of the Saint. The Lower Basilica, with a double front portal, presents a simple facade embellished with a rose window and a mosaic. The interior is decorated with frescoes by some of the most important painters from 1200 to 1300, from Cimabue to Giotto and from the Lorenzettis to Simone Martini.

In the **Upper Basilica**, it is possible to see the life cycle of St. Francis in frescoes painted by maestro Giotto, and the stories of the Old and New Testament covering the entire nave, and other wonderful frescoes by Cimabue and Torriti.

Another figure who has deeply influenced these places is Saint Clare, to whom the homonymous **Basilica** - presenting a facade made of white and pink stone and divided into three sections by horizontal cornices - is dedicated. The engaging interior frescoes and the remains of the Saint are visible through a window in the crypt.

Try to enjoy the mystical atmosphere of Assisi:

"Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,

Who feeds us and rules us,

And produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs."

Francis, Prayer of the Canticle of the Creatures)

DAY 10 – UMBRIA

Today we will explore the area between Assisi and Spoleto, the heart of Italy.

First, we will head for **Spello**, a charming medieval town on the top of a hill, far from tourists' destination.

We will end our daily tour in **Spoleto**, a medieval hill town in the Umbria region, famous for its summer music festival, "Festival dei Due Mondi". Thick walls and a magnificent gorge surround the city and fine medieval and Roman monuments sit along the streets. The **Duomo** is one of Spoleto's finest sights: begun in the 12th century, the cathedral is set against a backdrop of hills and valleys. High above the town stand the Rocca, a Papal fortress which was used as a prison until the 1980s. A massive bridge, Ponte delle Torri, built in the 14th century, functioned as both a bridge and aqueduct; we can walk on it for breath-taking views of the valley and gorge below.

Tonight for dinner we'll enjoy "salumi di cinghiale o cervo" (boar or deer sausage) and pecorino cheese, and taste the region's prized white truffle oil while sipping the red Rubesco Riserva or Sagrantino di Montefalco.

DAY 11 – ORVIETO

From Spoleto today we will reach Orvieto, one of the most beautiful hill towns in Italy, perched up on volcanic rock, its history dating back to the Etruscans.

Although just an hour from Rome, the architecture is different, with many of the buildings constructed out of tufo, a type of volcanic rock. Orvieto's main attraction is its **14th-century Cathedral** – a masterpiece of Gothic architecture with a glistening façade of stained glass, mosaics and sculptures. Another attraction is **St. Patrick's Well**, a 62-meter-deep (203 feet) feat of engineering characterized by two spiral staircases that wind around the well (yet never meet), with 248 steps down to the water. A pleasant guided tour along a very easy route makes it possible to get to know Orvieto's underground world, created by its ancient inhabitants over about 2,500 years of uninterrupted digging. A tour on a discovery of a millenary, surprising and unexpected "Underground City", which you will surely enjoy!

At lunch, we will taste "salumi di cinghiale o cervo" (boar or deer sausage) and pecorino cheese, together with the region's prized white truffle oil and the delicious white wine of the area, Orvieto Classico!

DAY 12 – TIVOLI

Today you will discover one of Italy's hidden gems! Here is Tivoli, a small town in Lazio, about 30 Km east of Rome. The first major sight is **Hadrian's Villa**: Emperor Hadrian built it to escape the



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crowd and turmoil of the capital. Much of the enormous, luxurious ancient villa remains intact today, and you will be surprised by the clever application of Renaissance plumbing in the fountains and waterworks, perfectly integrated with the landscape. There are about 500 fountains here!

The other masterpiece in the area is **Villa d'Este**, the great Villa commissioned by Cardinal Ippolito of the Este family around 1560. Among the masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance that most inspired landscape architects and painters, it is an ideal reinterpretation - in a sumptuous way - of the hanging Eden of Babylon. The prestigious residence is surrounded by terraces, stairways and avenues set on each other, decorated with water games so audacious as to reveal considerable engineering skills. The monument was elected the most beautiful park in Europe, as well as UNESCO Heritage with the motivation: "one of the first gardens of wonders, which from the beginning had a decisive influence on the development of European landscape painting ».

The tour is over, but the memories of a fantastic journey will accompany you for a lifetime!

Arrivederci for another tour with VITOR, Visit Italy on the Road.