

Adoring Italy

"You may have the universe if I may have Italy." --**Giuseppe Verdi**

"What is the fatal charm of Italy? What do we find there that can be found nowhere else? I believe it is a certain permission to be human, which other places, other countries, lost long ago." --**Erica Jong**



It's no wonder that Italy is always at the top of travel destination lists. *La Dolce Vita* is not just a good movie; it is a way of life — a life of constant celebration. Family gatherings here are not reserved for just special occasions, they *are* the occasion. Many of the products produced here from food and wine to fashion and design, exude quality of life. Whether you choose to explore this good life by motor coach, train, or car, depends upon how much freedom you prefer, what you hope to see and do, and how adventurous your spirit!

To Tour or Not to Tour — Touring Italy with a large group on a 45-seat motor coach, and staying in international hotels may offer conveniences and be cost-effective, but you will lose some of the romance and cultural interaction. The allure of exploring out-of-the-way spots is a strong draw for many travelers, however, fear of the unfamiliar, wondering what "rustic and charming" accommodations really means, or the thought of navigating winding back roads on your own in a Fiat, unfortunately deters many from trying this. Nowadays, organized tours are evolving into smaller, more personalized experiences that blend the security of a managed itinerary with exposure to the countryside, providing an ideal base for first time visitors and returning visitors alike. Today's tours have more leisure time, more independence, more sight-doing as opposed to sight-seeing. They offer life-enriching experiences such as cooking, art, photography, and wellness programs. These tours are designed specifically with the more sophisticated traveler in mind.





Transportation — If you choose to travel on your own, train travel is a great way to get from city to city. Italian trains are comfortable, affordable, and most stations are in the center of town, making it quite convenient. Public transportation such as metros and buses vary from city to city. It takes a certain finesse and a bit of studying to master the art of this type of travel and it is generally

recommended for longer stays that allow extra time in the event of an incorrect bus or train selection.

If you plan to stay only in the larger cities, please, do not get a car. But if you plan to tour the countryside on your own, then you will need one unless you opt for a smaller tour specializing in countryside traveling as mentioned earlier. For the ultimate mode of transportation, you can hire a private driver, having complete independence and enjoy the view and the wine without worry!

Whichever route you take, there is plenty of information available to you to help you make the right decision. Visit websites such as Slow Travel www.slowtrav.com and Trip Advisor www.tripadvisor.com for a wealth of information. Seek the assistance of your local travel professional to help sort out the sometimes-overwhelming amount of information you find online.



Lodging — Many travelers belong to loyalty programs with larger hotel chains, earning valuable stays across the globe. This is indeed a wonderful benefit. However, if you want to really get a feel for the local flavor, consider smaller, family-owned B&B's, or charming hotels. Staying at local farms known as "agriturismos" are becoming a popular option these days, especially for families, and travelers on a tight budget who wish to get a

cow's eye view of the local culture. Keep in mind the tractors still start up bright and early!

Restaurants — Truly, it is almost impossible to eat poorly in Italy. But there are still some things to keep in mind. If you want to eat like the locals, and this is a good thing, avoid the places that have tourist menus posted out front or plastic plates of food on display in the windows. Ask your hotel or travel consultant for recommendations. It is generally wise to make reservations for dinner. Many good restaurants have



limited tables. Dine outside in the piazzas or in the streets whenever and wherever possible. Ask about the house specialties at your osteria (tavern), trattoria (family restaurant), or ristorante (fine restaurant). Bring a good phrase book that decodes menu items for you. Try everything. Especially the gelato — in all flavors! Learn a few phrases before arriving to accommodate special diets or preferences, such as "niente con gli occhi, per favore," "*Nothing with eyes, please.*" Some of the best places to eat have no menus at all — just bring your appetite, take a seat, and leave the rest to them! Italians are very good at feeding people well! *Mangia bene!*



However you decide to see Italy, travel with a curious spirit and an open heart, learn a few words of Italian, embrace differences, and above all, enjoy *La Dolce Vita*.

Buon Viaggio!

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