



Treasures of Northern Italy

Sunday, September 20th. Departure from Chicago O'Hare Airport. **Overnight: Plane**

Monday, September 21st. Your morning arrival in Milan will be met for the short drive to our hotel in Stresa on Lake Maggiore. After time to unpack and rest up from the overnight flight, there will be time to begin exploring the neighborhood. This evening a welcome dinner is served at the hotel. **(D) Overnight: Stresa**

Tuesday, September 22nd. The second-largest lake in Italy, Lake Maggiore reaches into the Alps and is home to beautiful villages and the famous gardens of the Borromean Islands. This morning we take a boat to Isola Bella's magnificent 17th-century Palazzo Borromeo and its unique sculpted gardens, before continuing on to Isola Madre's exquisite palace where azaleas, rhododendrons, and camellias flourish. After our mid-afternoon return to Stresa, the rest of the day is free. **(B) Overnight: Stresa**

Wednesday, September 23rd. Today we step back in time with a visit to Lake Orta, a small gem of a lake dotted with villages and tucked away behind Lake Maggiore. We'll visit Orta San Giulio, ideally situated on the tip of a peninsula, and brimming with old houses and leaning, wrought-iron balconies. We'll visit the Basilica, said to date from the 4th century. Returning to the mainland, we climb the Sacre Monte di Orta – the sacred mountain. Begun in 1590, this is a series of chapels leading up the hillside overlooking the lake, all of them filled with scenes depicting the life of St. Francis, in frescoes, paintings and life-sized terracotta statues. Erected over a period of 300 years the chapels also provide a fascinating look at the changes in architectural styles over the centuries. On our return we'll stop in Carciano di Stresa for the view from Il Mottarone, the mountain between Lakes Maggiore and Orta that offers one of the most beautiful natural balconies in the whole Piedmont, reached via a cable car that climbs to 5,000 feet. We return to Stresa, where we enjoy dinner in a local restaurant. **(B, D) Overnight: Stresa**

Thursday, September 24th. Leaving Stresa, we make our way north, around the tip of Lake Maggiore, crossing into Switzerland to the resort town of Lugano, where we'll stop for lunch and a brief walking tour. This afternoon we continue down the stunning western side of Lake Como and on to the autostrade, past Bergamo and Brescia, to our hotel in Sirmione on Lake Garda, where dinner awaits us. **(B, D) Overnight: Sirmione**

Friday, September 25th. This morning we'll explore Sirmione, an enchanting town on the lake's southern shore, and visit the Grotte di Catullo, the ruins of a large Roman villa, a reminder that Garda has been a holiday resort for the pleasure-seeking well-to-do since the height of the Roman era. This is the most important example of Roman imperial domestic architecture in northern Italy and is beautifully set amid olive groves at the end of a long promontory. We'll have time for lunch and then the afternoon and evening are free for individual interests. **(B) Overnight: Sirmione**

Saturday, September 26th. Our first stop today is Verona, one of the most attractive towns in northern Italy, with wide pavements of red Verona marble, impressive Roman remains, including its famous Arena, a rich artistic heritage and important historic churches. We'll stop for lunch and a chance to walk around this ancient city, founded by the Romans in 89 BC. We might buy lunch in the Piazza delle Erbe, a large fruit and vegetable market, before continuing through the Piazza dei Signori to the cathedral and campanile. There will be time for a quick sprint to the top of the Roman Amphitheatre, one of the largest of its kind, for splendid views across the city, and, of course, a stop at the Casa di Giulietta for a view of Juliet's balcony. We continue to Padua, the city of St. Anthony, where we'll visit the Scrovegni Chapel to view the fabulous Giotto frescoes. We'll arrive in Venice in time to relax before dinner. **(B, D) Overnight: Venice**

Sunday, September 27th. Venice stands apart from the rest of Italy, a fairy-tale city floating on the sea (and sometimes well beneath it!), fiercely independent and a constant thorn in the side of successive empires. The "Most Serene Republic" can be dazzling, seductive, irritating, dirty, expensive, but never, never disappointing or boring. A morning walking tour with a local guide places Venice in its historical context as we visit St Mark's Basilica to observe the Byzantine influence and then the Doge's Palace. The afternoon and evening are free and your tour guide will have suggestions and directions. **(B) Overnight: Venice**

Monday, September 28th. A leisurely start to the day before we pay a guided visit to Venice's cathedral of art, the Accademia. The afternoon is free to take an excursion to the island of Torcello and the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, built in the Ravenna style with the finest mosaics in Venice, or, if you've had your fill of churches, to visit the glassblowers on Murano. Whatever your plans, Venice is a wonder to explore and your tour guide will be on hand to help you decide. **(B) Overnight: Venice**

Tuesday, September 29th. Leaving Venice this morning, we'll drive across the fertile plain of the Po Valley to the regional capital of Bologna. A walking tour will introduce the city center with its wonderful arcades and monuments and we'll have time to sample some of the local delicacies for lunch. This afternoon our drive takes us across the Appenine Mountains, the "backbone" of Italy, to the Ligurian Coast. Dinner is included in La Spezia this evening. **(B, D) Overnight: La Spezia**

Wednesday, September 30th. The Cinque Terre (literally the Five Lands) is a stretch of coastland that is wild and isolated, but at the same time spectacularly beautiful and hospitable. Old traditions and customs live on here side by side with the modern tourism that the region's status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has attracted. The five towns that make up the region (Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, Vernazza and Monterosso) are connected by walking paths and by train or boat – but not by road. Today we take the train and boat to explore, returning to La Spezia for a free evening. **(B) Overnight: La Spezia**

Thursday, October 1st. A completely free day – go back on the train to see what you missed yesterday, take one of the hiking trails, or just sit in that café by the water and watch the world go by. Dinner is included this evening. **(B, D) Overnight: La Spezia**

Friday, October 2nd. Heading north, there will be time for a brief stop in Christopher Columbus' home town of Genoa, before continuing on to Milan to see Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper still in situ in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie. We'll have dinner and spend the night close to the airport, ready for our departure. **(B, D) Overnight: Milan**

Saturday, October 3rd. Morning departure from Milan Linate Airport for the returning flights to the U.S. **(B)**

Key to included meals: B - breakfast, L - lunch, D - dinner