

THE ITALIAN 'GRANDE'

18 STUNNING DAYS – MILAN TO ROME

IMAGINE... A leisurely paced tour commencing with four nights touring the magnificent Italian Lakes District, five more nights in the heart of Tuscany taking in Siena, Florence, Lucca and Pisa and three nights on the Amalfi Coast for the Isle of Capri and the glorious Positano. Now add two more nights staying in a dreamy Italian castle, two more in the hills of Umbria and one night in the Eternal City of Rome. Among the many included highlights will be the remarkable canals and humped back bridges of Venice, a boat cruise along the famous Cinque Terre, Villa Carlotta and gardens, ancient Pompeii, Assisi, Bellagio and a day trip deep into the dramatic Swiss Alps visiting Zermatt and the mighty Matterhorn. An Italian tour with a more leisurely pace, plus that essential Albatross Travel difference!



DAY 1 STRESA ON LAKE MAGGIORE

Commencing in central Milan at midday we will transfer you to Stresa on wonderful Lake Maggiore, where you will stay the next four nights. Join us tonight for a welcome drink in the hotel bar before dinner. This is an ideal chance to meet your Tour Manager and fellow travellers. (D)

Your feature Hotel in the Italian Lakes – Grand Hotel Bristol. Set in beautiful gardens on the lakeside promenade facing the Borromean Islands, this superb first class hotel boasts crisp white tablecloths, marble columns, antique furnishings and Tiffany glass cupolas. There is an indoor and outdoor pool, leisure centre and all bedrooms have balconies. The Grand will delight you. See www.zaccherahotels.com

DAY 2 STRESA ON LAKE MAGGIORE

Today we explore the famous Italian Lakes District. After a leisurely start we drive to the town of Como and follow the shore of the lake to Cadenabbia, where we visit the world famous Villa Carlotta. Set in 70,000 square metres of romantic Italianate Gardens and facing across Lake Como to the Bellagio peninsula, this wonderful Villa contains a superb art collection. The classic gardens boast fountains and pergolas and in spring time is famous for its Rhododendrons and Azaleas. Later we board the ferry which takes us across the centre of the lake to delightful Bellagio. This beautiful town is situated

at the tip of the peninsula separating the lake's two southern arms, with the Alps visible across the lake to the north. It's time to relax in this delightful town which boasts peaceful villas and gardens nestled by the lakeside, elegant shops and walkways plus stylish al fresco dining at its very best. Why not try "risotto con pesce persico" made from the lake's fish. Later we return to Stresa where dinner is included in your hotel. (B, D)

DAY 3 STRESA ON LAKE MAGGIORE

Today we visit the famous islands of Lake Maggiore. First stop will be Isola Pescatori (the Fisherman's island), a small picturesque village with old houses, wooden balconies, tiny boats and fishing nets. Later we visit beautiful Isola Bella where we have included entrance and a guided tour of the palatial Borromeo villa and gardens which dominate the island. The villa boasts Murano glass chandeliers, gobelin-covered chairs, intricate tapestries and paintings. The spectacular formal gardens rise behind the ornate villa, with patterned flower beds falling in terraces, with statues and ornamental stonework completing the Italianate style. The afternoon and evening are at leisure in delightful, lakeside Stresa. (B)

DAY 4 STRESA ON LAKE MAGGIORE

Mountain peaks soar either side as we drive north over the spectacular Simplon Pass into the mighty Swiss Alps and down into the 'Swiss Valais'. Arriving at Taesch mid morning, we board the Alpine cog railway up to the picture postcard village of Zermatt. Set at an altitude of 5,315 feet, the village is surrounded by a dozen huge peaks and dominating all is the Mighty Matterhorn. Relax and enjoy the atmosphere in this alpine village or perhaps take the Gornergrat funicular train (not included) to the highest open air railway station in Europe, where at 10,170 feet the views across the Alps are beyond belief. Later we return to Stresa in Italy. Dinner is included in your hotel. (B, D)

DAY 5 CASTELBRANDO

Bidding farewell to Lake Maggiore we drive east and arrive at Lake Garda late morning. This is the largest of the Italian lakes and the meeting point of three Italian regions. With a circumference of about 100 kilometres, the lake is surrounded by lemon and citrus groves. There will be time at leisure for lunch in one of the colourful and diverse lakeside towns. Later we reach the foothills of the Dolomites and the superb CastelBrando, where we stay for the next two evocative nights. Located above the village of Cison di Valmarino, this 2,000 year old Roman fortress was turned into a sumptuous noble's palace in the 13th century. Access to the castle is by funicular. On arrival we have included a guided tour of the castle. (B, D)

Your feature Hotel in Italy – CastelBrando. Skilful restoration and sensitive modernisation have brought the original magnificence back to life. Guelph style





Italy – Lake Maggiore – Isola Bella

decorative battlements, stone cellars, tapestries, swords and suits of armour set the scene for the elegant halls, dining rooms, manicured gardens and terraces overlooking the valley. Glorious for those après dinner drinks on those long summer evenings! For more information look at www.castelbrando.it

DAY 6 CASTELBRANDO

After a leisurely start we descend to the Po Valley and visit nearby 'Venezia' (Venice) – arguably one of the most romantic cities in the world. At Tronchetto we board a boat to take us to St Marc's Square, where we join our expert local guide for a walking tour. The rest of the day is free to meander through the myriad of narrow, water lined streets and alleys spanned by humped back bridges. Dinner this evening is back in 'our' magnificent castle. (B, D)

DAY 7 MONTECATINI TERME IN TUSCANY

A leisurely start to the day as we bid farewell to our castle and travel south to Tuscany. We arrive in the charming spa town of Montecatini Terme mid afternoon. This was once a favourite 'cure resort' of the crowned heads of state from all over Europe. We stay here for the next five nights, in a traditional family run, four star hotel, close to the major sights. As a highlight this evening we have arranged a 'Chianti dinner' at Villa Pasquini. Set among the green hills of the Valdinievole, the Villa maintains all the original and warm atmosphere of the summer residence of the noble family of the Pasquinis. (B, D)

Your feature Tuscan Hotel – Ercolini & Savi Hotel. Dating from the second half of the 19th century, the splendid Liberty-style building which hosts Hotel Ercolini & Savi is one of the oldest in the town. The hotel is in an extremely central location in the elegant Via San Martino, close by Piazza del Popolo.

DAY 8 MONTECATINI TERME IN TUSCANY

Today is dedicated to nearby 'Firenze' (Florence). A local guide will bring to life this truly beautiful city which is otherwise known as the 'Cradle of the Renaissance'. We will visit the Duomo and take in the magnificent statues in the Piazza della Signoria. Your tour ends inside the famous Uffizi Gallery - one of the world's greatest collections of Italian, Florentine and Renaissance art. Your afternoon is entirely free to enjoy Florence at your own pace. Espresso Coffee on Piazza Santa Croce where Michelangelo is buried? A gelato whilst strolling across the Ponte Vecchio? Don't forget the excellent shopping. Dinner is included in your hotel. (B, D)

DAY 9 MONTECATINI TERME IN TUSCANY

The whole of today has been purposely left entirely at leisure. This is a perfect opportunity for you to do as little, or as much as you want! Maybe

take the local train back to the museums and shops of Florence. Alternatively explore Montecatini's old centre and parklands, or pamper yourself in one of the Spas. Perhaps just relax in your hotel or sip wine in a café and watch the world go by! (B)

DAY 10 MONTECATINI TERME IN TUSCANY

Our first stop today is in one of the most typically 'Tuscan' towns in the area, Lucca - a medieval walled city, filled with palaces, churches, ancient houses and the former home of Puccini, where he wrote Turandot. Walk on top of the city walls for the very best city views or visit Piazza San Michele and stroll along the shops of Borgo Giannotti. Later we visit Fattoria di Poggio, a farmhouse in the Tuscan Hills, and enjoy a tasting of a wide variety of local wines, olive oils, grappa, Vin Santo plus locally produced breads, salami and sun dried tomatoes. Your afternoon is at leisure in Pisa with its famous Leaning Tower, Cathedral and Baptistery in the magnificent Piazza dei Miracoli. (B)

DAY 11 MONTECATINI TERME IN TUSCANY

A delightful day is planned as we explore the famous Cinque Terre. The name means 'five lands' and comes from the five unspoilt fishing villages that cling to the cliffs, overlooking the sea. We have arranged a coastal boat ride for you to admire the spectacular scenery and almost inaccessible fishing villages, and to visit Porto Venere, Vernazza and Monterosso. Our return journey is by train through the tunnels and cliffs above. Dinner is included in your hotel. (B, D)

DAY 12 SPOLETO IN UMBRIA

We make the short drive across Tuscany to the fairytale 'town of towers' San Gimignano, famous for its 13th and 14th century Tuscan towers. Exploring the pedestrian walkways of this hilltop town is an absolute delight. Lunchtime will be spent in the beautifully preserved streets of medieval Siena amongst the great sights such as the gothic town hall and the Piazza del Campo, scene of the famous Palio horse race. Next we wind up to the hills of Umbria and the wonderful walled town of Spoleto where we stay the next two nights. Medieval Spoleto is easily explored on foot. There are numerous romanesque churches and cobblestone alleyways with character shops, bars and trattorias. (B, D)

Your Umbrian feature Hotel – Hotel Dei Duchi. This unpretentious, family run hotel is located literally just outside the old city walls and is known locally for its cuisine. The dining area has wide panoramic views of the stunning Umbrian countryside. The hotel has the dual benefit of being a 'town' hotel but at the same



Basilica de Santa Maria del Fiore Florence

time giving the feeling as if you are in the middle of the countryside - so you have the best of both worlds. Perfect for those after dinner strolls into the medieval centre to enjoy a gelato or nightcap in a local café!

DAY 13 SPOLETO IN UMBRIA

We spend this morning in the nearby beautiful Umbrian city of Assisi. Badly damaged by earthquakes in 1997 the city, dominated by two medieval castles, undertook a remarkable programme of restoration which soon brought it back to all its glory. On arrival in Assisi we are joined by a lay Franciscan Monk for a guided tour of the Basilica of St Francis with its magnificent frescoes. Afterwards there is time for you to explore Assisi at your own pace. Returning to Spoleto, the rest of the afternoon is at leisure. Perhaps take a walk on the lovely pathway around the town looping across an old viaduct in the countryside. This is the real Italy! (B, D)

DAY 14 MAIORI ON THE AMALFI COAST

Driving south past Vesuvius we visit the ancient ruins of Pompeii, where a local guide takes us through the city that was buried under volcanic ash in AD 79. Paintings, furniture, mosaics, sculptures, graffiti and even loaves in ovens are wonderfully preserved. From here it's only a short drive to the Amalfi coast and the port town of Maiori, where we stay in the Reginna Palace Hotel for the next three nights. We have selected this hotel for its position and style, local ambience and the warm, welcoming service you will receive during your stay. A perfect base for visiting all the local sights and soaking up the unique atmosphere of the Amalfi Coast! (B, D)

Your Maiori Hotel – Reginna Palace Hotel

DAY 15 MAIORI ON THE AMALFI COAST

Enjoy your day as we take you on the ferry across to Marina Grande, on the island of Capri, which the Roman emperor Tiberius made his capital. On arrival we board a local coach for a short orientation tour of this dramatic island. The rest of the day is free to explore the towns of Capri, Anacapri or maybe Marina Piccola, a tiny hamlet, where you can dine on seafood in a seaside bistro. (B, D)

DAY 16 MAIORI ON THE AMALFI COAST

The Amalfi Coast is famous for its twisting, winding scenic drive with picturesque villages and towns hugging the cliffs and craggy coves. This morning we catch a ferry from Maiori along the dramatic coastline to our

morning stop in Amalfi. Later we continue by ferry to perhaps the most scenic of towns, Positano. The town clings, in tiers to the rock face down the steep, rugged hillside to the old port, which is only directly accessible by boat. Mid afternoon we return by ferry to Maiori, where the remainder of the afternoon is at leisure to relax and enjoy your surroundings. (B, D)

DAY 17 ROME

On arrival in Rome we enjoy a guided panoramic tour around the famous landmarks of this grand city, from the magnificent fountains by Bernini, the palaces and open squares to Piazza Venezia and the massive Colosseum (entrance not included). After checking into our central Rome hotel, our finale will be a farewell dinner in a local restaurant. (B, D)

Your Rome Hotel – Hotel Massimo D'Azeglio

DAY 18 ROME

Sadly your tour ends after breakfast in your hotel. (B)

The Albatross Travel Difference

Italy is big. Very big! Did you know, with motorway service station stops for morning tea and lunch, taking into consideration tolls, traffic and entering and exiting major cities it takes over eight and a half hours to travel on a coach from Florence to Sorrento or Venice to Rome! Yet so many tours have these drives as a standard part of their itinerary.






That is why Albatross Travel breaks these journeys with five nights in Tuscany and two nights in Spoleto, enroute to the Amalfi Coast. That is also why when we travel between destinations our days are not endurance tests. We allow leisurely stops enroute! For instance, between Tuscany and Umbria we enjoy visits to both Siena and delightful San Gimignano and between Stresa and CastelBrando we have lunchtime on Lake Garda.

Aren't these sorts of visits exactly why you want to travel to glorious Italy? By providing four nights in the glorious Lakes District, three on the Amalfi Coast and two in an ancient castle, we perfectly complete your Italian experience! It's all about a sensible touring style, a civilized pace, genuine inclusions and actually enjoying what you have come so far to see.

Albatross Travel delivers a fuller and more rewarding experience.

Please note: In this tour we visit a number of medieval hilltop towns which may have some steep, uneven cobbled stone streets. Additionally some larger cities only provide coach passenger drop off points 15 minutes or so walk from the old town centres. Please note: this need to walk from coach drop off points in some Italian towns and cities is common to ALL Tour Operators. People with walking difficulties or limitations should consider this before booking. Additionally, local traffic by-laws and regulations on coach travel in Italian cities require a higher than usual number of earlier starts.

Compare the Albatross Difference

 <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: white;">Less time on coaches, average 172 kms travelled each day</p>	 <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: white;">Maximum 30 passengers</p>	 <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: white;">Over \$1,800 value of extras included - no hidden costs</p>	 <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: white;">Guaranteed to depart with 7 or more passengers</p>	 <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: white;">Book by 22 December and save \$300 pp</p>
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Albatross gives you more...

Highlights

- Relax in Bellagio and visit Villa Carlotta by Lake Como
- Visit the Borromean Islands on Lake Maggiore
- Explore Zermatt and the mighty Matterhorn
- Stay in a centuries old Italian castle
- See Lake Garda and enjoy the canals of Venice
- Spend 5 nights in Tuscany in the Spa town of Montecatini Terme and visit Florence and the Uffizi Gallery, Pisa, the medieval cities of Lucca, Siena and the fairytale 'town of towers' San Gimignano, and taste wine and olive oil in a Tuscan farmhouse
- Take in the scenic villages of the famous Cinque Terre
- Savour a 'Chianti dinner' at Villa Pasquini
- Stay in Spoleto in the Umbrian Hills and visit Assisi
- Relax over 3 nights on the stunning Amalfi Coast and visit the island of Capri and Positano
- Marvel at the ancient ruins of Pompeii and eternal Rome

Inclusions

- All the sightseeing, scenic drives and excursions (as per the itinerary)
- Fully escorted by our experienced Tour Manager
- First class air-conditioned touring coach
- End of tour tips to Tour Manager, driver and local guides
- 17 nights selected accommodation as described
- Hotel portorage (1 bag per person)
- Buffet breakfasts daily
- 14 dinners including welcome and farewell dinners, Chianti dinner at Villa Pasquini in Tuscany
- Welcome drink in Stresa
- Local guides – Isola Bella, CastelBrando, Venice, Florence, Assisi, Rome, Pompeii and Capri
- Entrances: Borromea Villa and Gardens, Villa Carlotta, Uffizi Gallery, and Pompeii
- Cinque Terre excursion, Borromean Islands boat ride on Lake Maggiore, return ferry to Bellagio, water transfers in Venice, cog railway ride to Zermatt, return ferry to Capri, ferry to Positano and Amalfi, Fattoria di Poggio Farmhouse food, wine and olive oil tasting
- Quietvox personal audio system whilst on tour

Tour Price

18 days only **\$5,879** pp twin share
Single supplement \$879 (land only prices)

Special 2011 Departures

4 May; 11 May; 18 May; 25 May; 1 June; 13 July; 31 August;
7 September; 14 September; 21 September; 28 September

...come share our love of Europe

