

# THE GREAT GARDENS OF ITALY TOUR

**26 APRIL - 10 MAY 2018**

AUD 8,390 PER PERSON (TWIN SHARE )

AUD 9,380 PER PERSON (SOLO TRAVELLER )





## OVERVIEW

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From classical marvels to Renaissance mastery to just sheer beauty, come along and let Italy work its magic. This spring tour is for both the avid horticulturists and for those who just want to add another dimension to their Italian experience, with guided garden visits with local experts and general sightseeing as well as excellent food and wine. We visit some wonderful villas and there is free time to see museums and other sights that aren't strictly gardens.

In this tour, we try to cover many of the key periods and themes in the development of Italian gardens, but not always in chronological order. We visit Villa Adriana outside of Rome to see the influence this ancient Roman villa had on the development of Renaissance gardens that were to follow. We visit some of the key Renaissance gardens and villas in and around Florence and Rome and the Baroque masterpieces on the Lakes. We also explore some of the 19th and 20th century gardens, that will completely erase any preconceptions you might have of Italian gardens being all green hedges and ordered paths with their explosions of colour and whimsical treasures.

We try and ground the exploration of these wonderful Italian gardens in a general appreciation of Italian culture and history. Some days we leave gardens aside and simply enjoy the sights of the city we are visiting, whether that be Florence, Verona or Rome. We're experts in Italy, Italian history and culture and enjoying all facets of this wonderful country and we engage local, expert guides to lead our excursions to many of the gardens.

We stay in just four bases on this tour with four nights in Rome, four nights in Florence, three nights in Verona and three nights in Bellagio, on Lake Como. We generally stay in four-star hotels, or very good, boutique three star hotels on occasion. Five lunches and five dinners are included in restaurants chosen for their authenticity and local cuisine. All entry fees to attractions in the itinerary are included as well as local, expert guides and all transfers in private air-conditioned buses.





## ITINERARY

### DAY 1 - THURSDAY 26 APRIL - ARRIVAL IN ROME

Arrive at your own convenience at the hotel, where we meet in the late afternoon to go for aperitivi and our welcome dinner in a typical Roman trattoria near Campo dei Fiori.

Overnight: Rome

### DAY 2 - FRIDAY 27 APRIL - IL GIARDINO DI NINFA & CASTEL GANDOLFO

Today we will drive just south of Rome to visit the Garden of Ninfa, perhaps the most romantic garden in the world. The prosperous town of Ninfa was abandoned in the 14th Century and left as a medieval Pompeii until Prince Gelasio Caetani and his English mother started to create a garden around, on and in the ruins of the old town in the 20th Century.

On our trip back towards Rome, we stop at Castel Gandolfo, the Papal summer palace and visit the gardens of the Villa Barberini with an official guide.

Overnight: Rome

### DAY 3 - SATURDAY 28 APRIL - THE VATICAN GARDENS AND FREE TIME TO VISIT ROME

We start this morning with a walking tour of the Vatican Gardens, the enormous, previously private gardens of the Pope. Our ticket to the Gardens includes entry to the Vatican Museum and the Sistine Chapel so, time permitting, you can spend an hour or so in the museums, before we head back to our hotel.

In the afternoon you have free to explore the Eternal City; catch-up on shopping and postcards or just put your feet up. Our hotel is next door to some of Rome's key attractions including the Pantheon, Spanish Steps, the Corso shopping district and the Trevi Fountain so it will be easy to do a combination of all activities.

Overnight: Rome



#### DAY 4 - SUNDAY 29 APRIL - TIVOLI - THE GARDENS OF AN EMPEROR & A CARDINAL

This morning we drive north to visit two of perhaps the most famous Italian gardens, conveniently located in proximity to each other at Tivoli. Our first stop is at Villa Adriana, the ruins of Emperor Hadrian's villa, built from 117AD. The ruins were rediscovered in the 15th Century and became a source of inspiration for the great Renaissance architects & designers. Cardinal Ippolito d'Este oversaw extensive excavations in the 16th Century while he was Governor of Tivoli. It is to his palace, the Villa d'Este, that we head off to in the afternoon. The Villa d'Este is one of the most impressive of the high Renaissance gardens and we will spend a delightful afternoon wondering through the hectares of gardens.

Overnight: Rome

#### DAY 5 - MONDAY 30 APRIL - CASTELLO RUSPOLI AND ON TO FLORENCE

Today we leave our base in Rome and transfer to Florence. On our way we stop at the Castello Ruspoli, a wonderful traditional Italian garden that boasts hedging dating back to the 1600s. We have lunch in the pretty hilltop town of Vignanello before driving on to Florence. We'll arrive in time for you to settle in and relax before the excitement of the next few days.

Overnight: Florence

#### DAY 6 - TUESDAY 01 MAY - FLORENCE

This morning is again a time-out from the gardens - we spend it on a walking tour of central Florence learning about the origins of the Renaissance and some of the history of the Medici family whose name will crop up again and again over the coming days. You will have the afternoon free to appreciate this memorable city. Florence lends itself to be explored on foot, its famous museums and churches rich in art are a tempting attraction, but its famous markets and beautiful piazze are just as inviting.

Overnight: Florence

#### DAY 7 -WEDNESDAY 02 MAY - WALLED GARDENS OF CENTRAL FLORENCE

Today we explore two of the important gardens within the city of Florence. Firstly, we visit the private Torrigiani gardens in the morning. Once inside these huge gardens you can so easily forget you are in the middle of a crowded city. After lunch we visit another garden in central Florence - the Bardini Gardens - with their wonderful views out over the city and its river Arno.

Overnight: Florence

#### DAY 8 - THURSDAY 03 MAY - GREATER FLORENCE AND ITS RENAISSANCE SPLENDOURS

On our last day in Florence we spend the morning visiting one of the Medici gardens at Villa Castello. The villa was constructed by Cosimo I de Medici in the 1500s when he was elected as the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Many experts claim that it is perhaps the nearest thing to a true Renaissance garden that exists today. In the afternoon we visit the Villa Gamberaia set in the hills above Florence. This garden was loved by a long-list of English and American ex-pats and in fact, Cecil Pinset spent time here studying its layout.

Overnight: Florence

#### DAY 9 - FRIDAY 04 MAY - TRADITIONAL BALSAMIC VINEGAR AND PASSEGGIATA

We're on the road again today, heading north to the enchanting small city of Verona. Our route takes us through Modena, famous as the centre of Italy's balsamic vinegar industry. We'll stop along the way to visit an acetaia, a traditional balsamic vinegar producer, where we'll learn why this tightly controlled product is as expensive per litre as the best champagnes!

We arrive in Verona in time for the afternoon passeggiata, the leisurely stroll through the streets and piazze of this most romantic city with the rest of its gentlefolk.

Overnight: Verona

#### DAY 10 - SATURDAY 05 MAY - GIARDINO GIUSTI AND VERONA

This garden is one of the relatively undiscovered treasures of Verona. It dates back to 1404, on land originally purchased to build a dyeing factory but transformed over the centuries into one of Italy's most spectacular gardens. The present layout, which features Roman ruins, fountains, mythological statues and an enormous cypress beloved of the poet Goethe, was designed in 1570 by Agostino Giusti, a knight of the Venetian Republic. We'll enjoy the spectacular views of Verona from the belvedere as well as exploring its lovely palazzo.

We leave the afternoon free to wander through the charming pedestrian streets of the city.

Overnight: Verona

#### DAY 11 - SUNDAY 06 MAY - VILLA PISANI

Today we'll introduce you to the joys of the Ville Venete: the summer retreats built for aristocratic Venetians along the rivers and canals that lead to Venice. We drive through the beautiful Veneto countryside to reach Villa Pisani and its gardens. The villa itself was built in the eighteenth





century by architects influenced by Palladio; the surrounding gardens are elegant in the extreme, boasting beautiful symmetrical pools, statuary and a wonderfully enigmatic labyrinth.

Overnight: Verona

#### DAY 12 - MONDAY 07 MAY -TO LAKE COMO VIA THE FRANCIACORTA

The Franciacorta area has some of the best champagne-style wines in the world. We're lucky to have a great relationship with one of the smaller quality producers in the area, who are also sensational chefs. So our road north to Bellagio today will be punctuated by a enjoyable break at this wonderful small winery, a tour of the their production facilities and a memorable lunch.

We arrive at Bellagio mid-afternoon in time to settle down for aperitivi on the hotel's terrace overlooking the exquisite Lake Como.

Overnight: Bellagio

#### DAY 13 - TUESDAY 08 MAY - LAKE MAGGIORE AND ISOLA BELLA

Today we drive across to the neighbouring Lake Maggiore where we visit the most spectacular of the Borromean Islands, Isola Bella. In the sixteenth century Carlo III Borromeo acquired this island as the site for his Baroque

palace and surrounding gardens. Its unique geography has resulted in a multi-level tiered garden with spectacular and surprising views from different angles. Watch out for the noisy white peacocks who just love to put on a gaudy display.

Overnight: Bellagio

#### DAY 14 - WEDNESDAY 09 MAY - GARDEN WARFARE AT VILLA CARLOTTA AND MELZI

We spend our last day criss-crossing the waters of Lake Como to see some beautiful villa gardens. We visit two of the most famous, Villa Melzi and Villa Carlotta. These two gardens are in part the product of the rivalry between Francesco Melzi d'Eril and his neighbour across the water Giovanni Battista Sommariva as they tried to outdo one another in an open display of horticultural one-upmanship.

Overnight: Bellagio

#### DAY 15 - THURSDAY 10 MAY - DEPARTURE

Today we depart our base and transfer back to Milan's Malpensa airport, arriving by 12pm and on to Milano Centrale station, where we arrive by 1pm. We are happy to organise for you to extend your stay in the Lakes area or to offer advice for extending your holiday in Italy.





Luca and Philippa



# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ◆ Tour leader on hand for duration of tour from the start of the tour in Rome to departure from Milan
- ◆ Accommodation (on a twin-share or double basis) in 3 or 4 star hotels
- ◆ All breakfasts and 5 lunches and 5 dinners (wine, or something softer if you would prefer, included with all lunches and dinners)
- ◆ All land travel in Italy in private, air-conditioned mini-coach (we also utilise the ferry service on Lakes Como and Maggiore)
- ◆ Entry fees to all attractions listed in the itinerary
- ◆ Expert, local guides at many attractions
- ◆ All gratuities and local taxes (no surprise taxes at hotels as you check-out)

## WEATHER

Whilst spring is the best time to visit the gardens, the weather can be a little changeable, so you should be prepared for some cooler weather and the possibility of some rain. We usually expect average temperatures from 17 - 25° during the day.

## PHYSICAL FITNESS

We don't place any age limitations on the tour and welcome anyone with a moderate level of physical fitness. Specifically, you should be comfortable on your feet for up to 3 hours with short breaks and confident on the cobblestones and uneven surfaces. We will always do our best to accommodate everyone, including offering alternative arrangements where possible for people who for some reason cannot take part in an activity.

## SINGLE SUPPLEMENT

We try to keep our single supplement as low as possible. For this tour the supplement is AUD 990.

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is compulsory when travelling on one of our tours. Please contact us if you need help arranging travel insurance.

## BOOKING

If you would like to book a place on this or any other tour, or if you have some questions about the itinerary, please don't hesitate to contact Luca or Philippa at Italian Tours.

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