



# MILAN & THE ITALIAN LAKES

**11 - 25 MAY 2016**

\$7,790 PER PERSON





## OVERVIEW

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“We have visited Italy previously, once with a large group and twice independently, but Italian Tours was definitely the most enjoyable. The carefully chosen hotels, cultural visits and local food and wine experiences, combined with a small friendly group, were decidedly a bonus”

Paul (Milan and Lakes 2013)

Since 2007, we've been designing itineraries for people, who like us, are fascinated by Italy and believe that an experience, like a good story, is worth sharing in good company. Our small groups and carefully chosen itineraries ensure you will have a delightful and unique Italian journey.

We travel at a relaxed pace so that you can make the most of your time in Italy without racing from one city to another. There is plenty of free time so you can explore that museum that really interested you, indulge in some shopping or just put your feet up and enjoy your holiday.

The tour begins in the vibrant city of Milan, the capital of the Lombardy region and the style capital of the Italian fashion world. In Milan we see some of the major sites; the Duomo, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele and Leonardo's Last Supper. We also see some of the less famous sites like Sant'Ambrogio church and the Poldo Pezzoli museum.

We explore some magical lakes, including the famous Lakes Como and Maggiore and the lesser-known but equally beautiful Lake Iseo and Endine. The group visits charming medieval towns such as Bergamo, Bologna and Parma and several interesting castles along the way.

We'll be staying in just four hotels over the 15 days to ensure we minimise the time spent packing and moving. Our bases for the tour are Milan (3 nights), Parma (4 nights), Bergamo (3 nights) and Bellagio (4 nights).

There are 5 lunches and 5 dinners included in the tour in restaurants chosen for their high quality food and wine that is typical of the area we're visiting. And we are always on hand to enjoy a meal together on other occasions.





## ITINERARY

### DAY 1 - ARRIVE IN MILAN

The tour begins in Milan, where you can check into the hotel during the day to rest up for the excitement ahead or get a head start on the sightseeing and shopping. We meet in the early evening for aperitivi and the chance to watch the Milanese fashionistas doing la passeggiata (the Italian promenade) before we enjoy a welcome dinner at a local trattoria.

Overnight: Milan

### DAY 2 - CENTRAL MILAN

We begin our tour in the fashion capital of Italy, but before we start considering Italian designer 'investment' pieces, we'll spend some time acquainting ourselves with the centre of Milan and visiting some of the major attractions. Our morning walking tour will take us to visit the Duomo, the second largest gothic church in the world, with its famous facade covered in sculptures. We will walk through one of the most beautiful shopping arcades in the world, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, and see La Scala, the opera house that is home to some of the most famous operas that have shaped musical history. In the afternoon we visit the Museo Poldo Pezzoli, a fascinating house-museum showcasing one man's extensive collection of art and artefacts.

Overnight: Milan

### DAY 3 - MORE OF MILAN

After breakfast we will visit Sant' Ambrogio, one of the oldest churches in Milan, from whose fortress-like structure the bishops of the early Middle Ages wielded their unrivalled power over the city. Our walking tour also includes stops at San Maurizio, home to one of the most complete Renaissance fresco cycle in Milan and San Lorenzo with its impressive Roman colonnade.

The afternoon is yours to stock up your wardrobe or visit one or two of Milan's



art galleries or museums, whose collections are said to rival those of Florence and Rome.

Overnight: Milan

#### DAY 4 - TOWARDS PARMA

Today we leave Milan for Parma, but there is something important to see before we leave: Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper. We depart Milan after lunch and stop to marvel at the Certosa di Pavia, one of the most impressive monasteries in the whole of Italy. In the afternoon we head to our new base in Parma - the prosciutto capital of the world. You'll have plenty of time to try some with a slice of the local cheese known to the rest of the world as Parmigiano Reggiano.

Overnight: Parma.

#### DAY 5 - PARMA AND A BEAUTIFUL CASTLE

We spend this first morning in Parma getting to know the centre of our new home and it would be a crime not to spend some quiet time exploring one of the best preserved and most beautiful medieval centres in Italy. In the afternoon, we visit the castle of Torrechiara, deep in the prosciutto heartland. The views from this amazing castle across the valley are breathtaking.

Overnight: Parma

#### DAY 6 - BOLOGNA AND AN ACETAIA

We spend the morning exploring Bologna, the city claimed by many as the most beautiful in Italy. It's also known as the "red" city - not just for the colour of its brickwork, but also for the colour of its politics. Bologna is best enjoyed by getting out there and walking around. We'll stop for lunch in a typical bolognese trattoria (after all Bologna is known as the food capital of Italy). On the way back to Parma, we stop at a local producer of Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Modena, not to be confused with the stuff we buy in the supermarkets of Australia. The real balsamic vinegar is as expensive as French Champagne and has an equally complex and refined production process

Overnight: Parma

#### DAY 7 - THE ART OF PARMA

Today we stay close to home and spend the morning visiting the well organised Galleria Nazionale in the Palazzo Pilotta, home to an impressive collection of Parmigianino and Correggio as well as other interesting elements such as the Teatro Farnese, the Renaissance theatre completely of wood used to stage theatrical entertainment for the Dukes of Parma. The afternoon is free time to do some shopping or indulge in

some prosciutto and Parmigiano Reggiano.

Overnight: Parma

#### DAY 8 - MANTUA AND ON TO BERGAMO

After breakfast our bus takes us on the half hour drive to Mantua. We spend the morning visiting the Palazzo Ducale, home of the Gonzaga family and a world famous collection of art including many works by their court artist Mantegna. We wander through the streets of Mantua, taking in the Piazza delle Erbe, Piazza Broletto and the 11th Century Rotonda di San Lorenzo before taking our bus to the Palazzo Te - the summer palace of the Gonzaga family.

In the afternoon, we drive onto our next base in Bergamo and settle into our new hotel.

Overnight: Bergamo

#### DAY 9 - BERGAMO

We'll spend our first morning discovering the marvels of this hilltop city. Its gargantuan walls have preserved some stunning medieval and renaissance buildings and art and at the same time spared it from being overwhelmed by tourism. After a guided walking tour in the morning, the afternoon is free for you to relax.

Overnight: Bergamo

#### DAY 10 - LAKE ISEO & WINE TASTING IN FRANCIACORTA

This morning we meander along the shores of two of Italy's lesser known yet equally beautiful lakes, Iseo and Endine. We'll follow the stunning lakeside back to Bergamo, stopping at various small towns for coffee breaks and lunch along the way. On the way home, we visit a winery and try some of the famous local Franciacorta.

Overnight: Bergamo

#### DAY 11 - LAKE COMO & BELLAGIO

After a late start, it's goodbye Bergamo as we transfer today to the lovely lakeside jewel of Bellagio. We'll stop for lunch on the lake shore, before arriving in Bellagio by mid afternoon, with plenty of time to unpack and have an aperitivo before the sun goes down.

Overnight: Bellagio

#### DAY 12 - THE BORROMEAN ISLANDS & LAKE MAGGIORE

Today is a whole day dedicated to the Borromeo Islands on Lake Maggiore. In the 1600s Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan set out to make two is-





lands on Lake Maggiore a floating cornucopia of style and beauty. They are still owned by the Borromeo family and successive members have all contributed to their development over the centuries right up to the 1950s. Our visit will start in the morning when we stop at Isola Madre to walk through its impressive botanical gardens and dodge strutting peacocks. In the afternoon, after lunch and a walk through the small town on Isola Bella, we visit the Palace, where even Napoleon was tempted to stay, and the ostentatiously baroque gardens.

Overnight: Bellagio

#### DAY 13 - COMO & FREE TIME IN BELLAGIO

After the last two days of traveling on the bus, we slow down today and swap to the ferry for getting around the lake. In the morning, we head down to Como, a small and aristocratic mediaeval city, from which the most famous and romantic of the Italian lakes – Lago di Como – takes its name. We'll be following in the footsteps of generations of European visitors as we visit Santa Maria Maggiore, the exceptionally beautiful duomo set in a magnificent mediaeval piazza. We'll explore the city's cobbled streets, stroll along the elegant lakeside promenade and wander through the gardens of the graceful 18 century villas that line the shores of the lake. In the afternoon, you are free to head back to Bellagio where you might climb the hill behind Bellagio to visit Villa Serbelloni or simply

relax and enjoy one of Italy's prettiest resort towns.

Overnight: Bellagio

#### DAY 14 - THE VILLAS CARLOTTA & BALBIANELLO

Today we ride the ferry again, heading across the lake to visit a couple of the most charming of the aristocratic ville that sprung up along Como's shores across the centuries. We visit Villa Carlotta, with its spectacular gardens and Villa Balbianello, recently immortalised as the location of Darth Vader's marriage in the more recent Star Wars trilogy, but with a longer and very illustrious heritage. From Menaggio we head back to Bellagio for a well-earned dinner in a local trattoria.

Overnight: Bellagio

#### DAY 15 - BELLAGIO AND FAREWELLS

Our tour ends after breakfast today. Stay for another relaxing morning in Bellagio, or take the bus back to the Milan's Malpensa airport. We are more than happy to help those who wish to stay on in Italy organise the rest of their trip or book a transfer to other destinations.





Luca and Philippa



# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ◆ Tour leader on hand for duration of tour from the start of the tour in Milan to the final day
- ◆ Transfer to Milan's Malpensa airport or Milano Centrale station at the completion of the tour
- ◆ 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, is 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 like many other tour companies)

## WEATHER

Spring is a beautiful time to visit Italy, but some years the weather can be a little changeable, so you should be prepared for some cooler weather and the possibility of some rain. We always recommend packing a light jacket or raincoat. 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 \$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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