

BELLA ITALIA

A JOURNEY TO ROME, ASSISI, FLORENCE and TUSCANY

DESIGNED AND OPERATED BY CLUB EUROPA FOR

PARKLAND COLLEGE

Champaign, Illinois



View from the top of *St Peter's Basilica*

Day 1
Sep 14
Sun

Transatlantic flight from the United States to Rome, Italy
05:05 pm: Flight AA110 departs Chicago O'Hare (ORD) (inflight meals)

Day 2
Sep 15
Mon

ARRIVAL / ROME

09:15 am: arrival at Rome Fiumicino Airport (FCO)

Time will be allowed for money exchange at the airport – Italy is part of EURO-Land!

Meet and greet by Club Europa escort

Service of private motorcoach for transfer to the city

En route into the city: visit of the nearby town of TIVOLI (entrance fee to *Villa d'Este* and *Villa Adriana* plus guided tour included)

Free time for lunch (on your own)

Check-in at the hotel and free time to unpack and get adjusted

Welcome dinner at local restaurant is included

Overnight at Hotel Milton/ROME



The *Villa d'Este* in Tivoli, with its palace, gardens and hundreds of fountains and waterfalls, is one of the most remarkable and comprehensive illustrations of Renaissance culture at its most refined. Its innovative design along with the architectural components in the garden (fountains, ornamental basins, etc.) make this a unique example of an Italian 16th-century garden. The Villa d'Este, one of the first *giardini delle meraviglie*, was an early model for the development of European gardens.

The nearby *Villa Adriana* is an exceptional complex of classical buildings created in the 2nd century A.D. by the Roman emperor Hadrian. It combines the best elements of the architectural heritage of Egypt, Greece, and Rome in the form of an 'ideal city'. The remains of some 30 buildings extend over 120 hectares of the Tiburtine Hills, in Tivoli in the Lazio Region.

Day 3 **ROME**

Sep 16 Breakfast at hotel

Tue **09:00 am:** walk with an escort from the hotel to the *Colosseum* (20 minutes)

09.20 am: meet with a local guide at the Colosseum

09.45 am: guided visit of the *Colosseum (inside), Forum Romanum , Trajan's Forum, Trevi Fountain, Montecitorio, Pantheon, Piazza Navona.....*

NOTE: admission to the *Colosseum* can only be booked 30 days before the scheduled visit!
(This is partially a WALKING TOUR! Please wear comfortable shoes!)

02.00 pm: end of the visit and time for lunch (on your own)

The afternoon is free for individual or group activities, such as further sightseeing, shopping etc... perhaps a visit of the *Villa Borghese*, the area around the *Spanish Steps*, the beautiful *Trastevere* neighborhood, or one of the major Basilicas (such as *Santa Maria Maggiore*)

Dinner is on one's own

Overnight at Hotel Milton / ROME



The *Forum* in Rome was the religious, political, and commercial center of the city.

Day 4
Sep 17
Wed

ROME

Early breakfast or box breakfast at hotel

FOR PARTICIPANTS WANTING TO TAKE PART THE PUBLIC AUDIENCE WITH THE POPE:

06:30 am: early transfer to the Vatican is on own or by minibus, depending on the number of participants

07:30 am: gate opening

09:00 am: Papal Audience with the Holy Father - tickets will be provided by Club Europa

Note: although this event is scheduled for every Wednesday, there are circumstances (for example if the Holy Father is absent) which may keep it from taking place.

Admission to this Papal Audience is **free of charge**, but tickets need to be obtained/presented.

10:30 am: end of Papal Audience

Free time and time for lunch (on your own)

01:00 pm: Meeting with the other participants at the entrance to the Vatican Museums

FOR PARTICIPANTS **NOT** WANTING TO TAKE PART THE PUBLIC AUDIENCE WITH THE POPE:

Breakfast at hotel and free morning

12:15 pm: transfer from the hotel to the Vatican (Museum entrance) by private coach

01:00 pm: visit of the *Vatican Museums* with licensed guide, including the *Sistine Chapel* (entrance fee, earphones and guide included)

03:15 pm: end of Museum visit

NOTE: admission to the *Vatican Museums* can only be booked 60 days before the visit!

The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Recommended is a visit of *St Peter's Basilica* – but be prepared for long lines of visitors!

Return to the hotel is on your own

Dinner is on one's own

Overnight at Hotel Milton/ROME



Built between 1475 and 1483, in the time of Pope Sixtus IV della Rovere, the *Sistine Chapel* originally served as Palatine Chapel. The chapel is rectangular in shape and measures 40.93 meters long by 13.41 meters wide, i.e. the exact dimensions of the Temple of Solomon, as given in the Old Testament. It is 20.7 meters high and is roofed by a flattened barrel vault, with little side vaults over the centered windows. The architectural plans were made by Baccio Pontelli and the construction work was supervised by Giovannino de' Dolci. The first Mass in the Sistine Chapel was celebrated on August 9, 1483. Michelangelo Buonarroti was commissioned by Pope Julius II della Rovere in 1508 to repaint the ceiling; the work was completed between 1508 and 1512. He painted the Last Judgement over the altar, between 1535 and 1541, being commissioned by Pope Paul III Farnese.

Day 5
Sep 18
Thu

ROME > ASSISI

Breakfast at hotel and early departure

Private long-distance coach for transfer from Rome to Assisi (110 miles, ~2.5 hrs.)

Local guide expects the group at the *Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli* to visit the huge *Mary of the Angels Basilica*, just a few miles from Assisi and site of the 'Porziuncola':

The *Porziuncola*, a tiny ancient chapel, was originally property of the Benedictines of Subasio. It was located on a piece of land known as the "Porziuncula"; the name became attached to the chapel. It is closely associated with Francis of Assisi and the Order of Friars Minor, who used the chapel as their headquarters. Following Francis's death in 1226, it became an important pilgrimage site. In the 16th century, a vast basilica, the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels, was built around the Porziuncula.

Free time for lunch (on your own)

Continuation up the hill to the town of Assisi, check-in at hotel

Dinner at the hotel is included

Overnight at the Assisi Grand Hotel / ASSISI



Assisi, with the huge *St Francis Basilica* on the left

St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) was the founder of the Franciscan Order and Patron of Italy. Child of the rich merchant of fabrics, Pietro Bernardone, his name was really Giovanni, but he was mostly called Francis because of his frequent business trips to France. After having participated in the war between Pisa and Perugia and after an illness he was converted. Francis undressed of any kind of ownership in order to consecrate his life completely to the poor: for the resounding gesture of renouncement of each worldly possession and for the way in which he conducted his life; he is nicknamed the "poverello of Assisi."

In 1209 he founded the order of the Friars Minor, a pauperistic movement. His love for all demonstrations of nature was great, as appears in his 'Cantico di frate Sole', and for this reason he is the patron of the animals, particularly of birds, animalists, and ecologists. Moreover, he is the patron of the blind.

Day 6 **ASSISI**

Sep 19

Fri

Breakfast at hotel

After breakfast: sightseeing with local guide: walking tour includes the huge

Basilica of San Francesco (built over the crypt of St Francis), containing many of his humble possessions and a series of frescoes depicting his life.

Also included: a visit of the *Basilica di Santa Chiara*: Santa Chiara, born in Assisi (1194) and received into the Franciscan order, founded the *Poor Clares*, an order devoted to the Franciscan ideal of poverty; she died in 1253.

Free time for lunch (on your own)

Free afternoon in Assisi

Dinner is on own

Overnight at the Assisi Grand Hotel / ASSISI

Day 7 **ASSISI > Cortona > SAN GIMIGNANO AREA**

Sep 20

Sat

Breakfast at hotel

After breakfast: departure by private motor coach

(This coach will remain with the group until arrival in Florence on Sept 23)

First stop (after approx. 50 miles) is the town of *Cortona*

Cortona is a small, charming town in the Valdichiana, or Chiana Valley, in the province of Arezzo, southern Tuscany. The city, enclosed by stone walls dating back to Etruscan and Roman times, sits on the top of a hill about 600 meters (about 1970 feet) above sea level. This dominant position offers a spectacular view from all over the town of the surrounding valley and even Lake Trasimeno.

Free time in Cortona and time for lunch (on your own)

Continuation from Cortona to the San Gimignano area; included will be a visit and winetasting at one of the reputable Tuscan wineries, perhaps the *Fattoria San Donato*, located just a few miles southwest of San Gimignano

Dinner at the hotel is included

Overnight at the Cappuccina Resort Hotel/SAN GIMIGNANO



The drive to **Cortona** is what you would expect from any Tuscan town: beanstalk-like cypress trees, serpentine roads and farm crops that change with the seasons; but what sets this historical hamlet apart from the others is the expanse of sunflower fields that line its foothills (the best time to see them in full bloom is from July to September). A place of outstanding beauty whose soaring position offers 360-degree views across the Valdichiana Aretina, catching a glimpse of Lake Trasimeno on the horizon; it comes as no surprise that Audrey Wells selected this prime location for the movie *Under the Tuscan Sun*. In Cortona there are many cultural sites that allow you to delve into its Etruscan heritage as well as art-filled spaces, activities in nature and enogastronomic experiences to appreciate the charm of this picturesque hilltop borgo.

PLEASE NOTE:

Although this pilgrimage takes place in September, when temperatures even in Italy are moderate, please bear in mind that churches generally have a dress code that requires visitors to cover shoulders and knees. Do NOT wear: tank tops, or anything that exposes your shoulders, mini shorts, miniskirts, mini dresses, hats, sunglasses, or a shirt or attire that exposes your belly area.

Day 8 **SAN GIMIGNANO AREA and Siena**

Sep 21

Sun

Breakfast at hotel

After breakfast: departure for SIENA (about an hour's drive)

Siena is likely Italy's loveliest medieval city, and a trip worth making even if you are in Tuscany for just a few days. Siena's heart is its central piazza known as **Il Campo**, known worldwide for the famous *Palio* run here, a horse race run around the piazza two times every summer.

The Cathedral, *Duomo di Santa Maria Assunta*, is one of the most important and magnificent Romanesque-Gothic churches in Italy.

A sightseeing / walking tour in Siena with local guide is included

Free time in Siena and time for lunch (on your own)

Late afternoon: return drive to San Gimignano,

Free time in the small hilltop town for dinner (on your own)

Overnight at the Cappuccina Resort Hotel / SAN GIMIGNANO



The town hall in Siena's main square '*Piazza del Campo*'

Once a capital to rival Florence, **Siena** is still unspoiled and endowed with the grandeur of the days when it was at its peak, circa 1250 - 1350. Siena's Duomo goes back to the mid-14th century, and is one of Italy's most important cathedrals, a unique mixture of paintings, sculpture, and Pisan-influenced Romanesque architecture. The preserved head of the city's patroness, St Catherine of Siena (1347-80), can be seen in a gilded tabernacle on the altar of a chapel dedicated to her in the huge Gothic church of *San Domenico* (begun in 1226). The chapel itself was built in 1460 for this purpose and is dominated by Sodoma's frescoes of 1526, to the right and left of the altar, showing Catherine in states of religious fervor. The church has the only portrait of St Catherine considered authentic, painted by her friend Andrea Vanni.

Day 9
Sep 22
Mon

SAN GIMIGNANO AREA > Pisa > LUCCA

Breakfast at hotel

After breakfast: departure by private motorcoach

Drive from the hotel to PISA (60 miles),

xx:xx am: guided walk in Pisa; visit of the *Duomo*, the *Baptistry* and the *Leaning Tower* (admission to the *Camposanto and the Duomo* is included)

(NOTE: entrance to the Leaning Tower in Pisa can only be arranged on the spot, pre-booking is not possible)

Free time in Pisa and time for lunch (on your own)

Drive from Pisa to LUCCA, where our local guide expects group in *Piazzale Verdi* for a walking tour, focusing on the city's most famous son, the composer *Giuseppe Puccini* (1858 – 1924), creator of operas such as *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madame Butterfly*.

Also born in Lucca was the composer *Luigi Boccherini* (1743 - 1805) a composer who was known as "Haydn's wife" for his similarities to the Austrian master. He was a cellist, composer, and teacher at the courts of Madrid and Prussia. He is buried in the Church of San Francesco in Lucca, and there is a statue of him in Piazza del Suffragio.

Free time in Lucca

Short drive to hotel

Dinner at the hotel is included

Overnight at the BW Grand Hotel / LUCCA AREA



The Puccini Statue in **Lucca**

The house in which Puccini was born in 1858 is now a small museum with portraits, scores, sketches, and the Steinway piano at which he composed *Turandot*.

Puccini saw his first operas in Lucca's *Teatro del Giglio*, where he later conducted. Nearby are his ancestral home in Celle and his villa and burial site in Torre del Lago.

The invention of OPERA happened essentially by mistake. The people in the early 17th century Florence, known as the *Camerata dell'Arte*, decided that they were intellectuals and would like to copy some authentic Greek plays. However, they were wrong in thinking that the Greeks put the emphasis on the music rather than the words. The ancient Greeks were more interested in words. In 1498, the first 'opera', as we now know it, was written by Jacopo Corsi, and he was a head at a leading Caramata. Another person called Peri had set the text, by Riniccini, to music, and it was called *La Dafne*. This was the first opera. By early the 1500s, performance of Latin plays always had musical interludes called Intermedii, or more commonly Intermezzi. These were little pieces between acts. There were always about five acts in this kind of primitive opera and it was later known as Opera Seria. Later on (in the 16th century), the Intermezzi became a staged drama, which had nothing to do with the main plot of the opera. 'Urbina', an intermedio, which was given with a linking theme. The story at this point tells the love of a couple. The intermedio and play are two different ones in the 'buy one get one free' style.

Day 10 **LUCCA > FLORENCE**

Sep 23 Breakfast at hotel

Tue After breakfast: short drive from Lucca to Florence (70 miles)

On the way into the city: stop at *Piazzale Michelangelo* for a spectacular view of the city

Lunch (en route) is on your own:

Check-in at hotel and free time for a first orientation walk

xx:xx pm: meeting with local guide for sightseeing (walking tour!) of Florence, focusing on the *Duomo*, (entrance fee included) *Piazza Signoria*, *Santa Croce Basilica*, *Giotto's Belltower* and the '*Ponte Vecchio*', the '*Old Bridge*' spanning the Arno River

Dinner at local restaurant is included

Overnight at Hotel Cellai/FLORENCE



Florence is the capital of Tuscany and the vast and beautiful monument to the Renaissance, the artistic and cultural reawakening of the 15th century. Writers such as Dante, Petrarch, and Macchiavelli contributed to its proud literary heritage, but it was the paintings and sculptures of artists such as Botticelli, Michelangelo and Donatello that turned the city into one of the world's artistic capitals.

The cultural and historical impact of Florence is overwhelming.

Close up, however, the city is one of Italy's most atmospheric and pleasant, retaining a strong resemblance to the small late- medieval center that contributed so much to the cultural and political development of Europe. Its striking buildings, formidable galleries and treasure-crammed churches attest to the Florentine love of display. Even long after it had set on the political and economic horizon, Florence upheld its elegant appearance: its skyline, all russet rooftops and lofty domes, is indeed picturesque. The glory of Florence is rooted in its past. The Medicis commanded the city's fortunes for centuries and, as patrons, they encouraged the Renaissance's influence on the city. They are attributed in today's Florence: their family crest still adorns many public buildings and their support of many artforms is evident in the city's streets.

Day 11
Sep 24
Wed

FLORENCE

Breakfast at hotel

After breakfast: short walk to the *Galleria dell' Accademia*

09:30 am: guided visit of the famed *Accademia*, housing Michelangelo's 'David',

Free time for lunch (on your own)

The afternoon is free for individual or group activities, such as sightseeing, shopping, or visit to the *Boboli Gardens* or the *Uffizi Galleries*

(SUGGESTION for the time after shopping for those leather and jewelry items: one of the best ice creams in the world is produced and served at a little ice cream parlor at 7, Via Isole delle Stinche, named *Vivoli's* – do not miss it!) <http://www.vivoli.it/>

Dinner is on your own

Overnight at Hotel Cellai/FLORENCE



The *Duomo* in Orvieto, founded in 1290 and consecrated in 1309.

Day 12
Sep 25
Thu

FLORENCE > Orvieto > ROME-OSTIA

Breakfast at hotel

Drive from Florence to OSTIA (200 miles, midday arrival)

Stop (after approx. 70 miles) in the hilltown of *Orvieto*

Perched on a plateau almost a thousand feet high, Orvieto looks down from its cliff-edged balcony over a vineyard-dotted plain. The 'Duomo' of Orvieto, with its stunning facade, is one of Italy's greatest cathedrals

Free time in Orvieto and time for lunch (on your own)

Continuation from Orvieto to OSTIA

It is situated near the ancient port of Rome within the municipality of Rome and is the city's seaside resort

xx:xx pm: guided walk through the archaeological site of Ostia, known as *Ostia Antica*.

Farewell dinner at local restaurant is included

Overnight at the SMY Aran Blu Hotel/ROME – OSTIA



The beautifully preserved ruins of **Ostia** lie twenty miles from Rome, in the meadows between the Tiber River and the Tyrrhenian Sea. It was founded, probably in the 4th century BC, as a military colony to guard the river mouth against seaborne invasions. Ostia's name is derived from the Latin word *ostium* which literally means 'mouth'. Situated at the mouth of the river Tiber, it was the military and commercial seaport of Rome.

In Ancient Times, the main streets of Ostia were lined with shops, warehouses and inns. Its bars, clubs and baths were crowded with sailors and merchants from all the corners of the empire. It was inhabited by upwards of 100,000 people, many of whose apartment buildings, taverns, and grocery shops are still intact.

Taking a stroll along the Decumanus Maximus, Ostia's main street, the visitor enjoys the nice sea breeze during his visit to the Baths of Neptune with its fabulous mosaics, the theatre, the mill and a bakery of Roman times.

At the Thermopolium you can still see an ancient counter where drinks were served and imagine sipping a cup of Roman wine while hearing the conversation of shipbuilders and traders.

Day 13

Sep 26

Fri

RETURN TO THE U.S.

Breakfast at the hotel

08:15 am: private coach for very short transfer to Fiumicino Airport
Services of Club Europa escort terminate after transfer and check-in

Return flight to the U.S.:

11:05 am: Flight AA111 departs Rome Fiumicino Airport (FCO) (inflight meals)

02:30 pm: arrival at Chicago O'Hare (ORD)



INCLUDED ARE:

- Eleven overnights at superior tourist/moderate first-class hotels, centrally/conveniently located, twin or double occupancy. Brochures and/or hotel websites will be presented before final reservations
- All breakfasts, buffet style
- Five dinners
- Experienced, multilingual Club Europa escort for the entire tour
- Services of local, licensed guides for sightseeing as noted
- Services of deluxe motorcoach (equipped with A/C) as noted (all highway tolls, parking fees, drivers' expenses and city permits included)
- Entrance fees as noted in the itinerary
- Both airport transfers (Rome)
- All applicable local taxes
- Gratuities to coach drivers and local guides
- Round trip air: Chicago > Rome > Chicago, coach (direct/non-stop) (taxes and fuel surcharges as of January 2025 also included)
- Andy Benz of Club Europa is available for preparatory meetings as needed



Pisa: the Baptistery (left), the Duomo and the Leaning Tower

NOT INCLUDED:

- Meals other than those mentioned
- Drinks with dinners (please note that table water is not always free in Europe)
- Luggage handling (not included for cost savings)
- Expenses of personal nature (such as passport, laundry, insurance, European Travel Authorization, souvenirs, etc.)
- Airport transfers in the United States
- Gratuities to escort: (Euro 5.00 per person, per day for the escort is standard)

IMPORTANT:

The rules of travel to Europe will change: starting in the first half of 2025, visitors from over 60 visa-exempt countries will be required to have a travel authorization to enter most European countries.

We are following this matter closely and will keep you informed.

https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en



As for all international travel, you need a valid PASSPORT!

Please make sure your passport is valid at least six months beyond the date of your return.

PLEASE NOTE:



THE USE OF MOTORCOACHES WITHIN ALL EUROPEAN CITIES IS DRAMATICALLY RESTRICTED IF NOT ALTOGETHER IMPOSSIBLE.

THIS GOES ESPECIALLY FOR ITALY.

THE DISTANCES TO BE COVERED ON FOOT AND WALKING THROUGH HISTORIC SITES ARE SOMETIMES CHALLENGING.

COMFORTABLE SHOES ARE HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!