

Bella Italia

2006 Heart of Europe Bicycle Tour to Italy

Saturday May 27, 2006

Depart for Europe via scheduled international carrier to Milan, Italy.

Sunday May 28, 2006 Milan/Lugano

Early morning arrival at Milan's Malpensa airport where we will be greeted by the Heart of Europe tour leaders and our fully equipped luxury motorcoach that will take us to Lugano, Southern Switzerland's "Garden City." After assembling the bicycles, we will enjoy a warm-up ride along the shores of the charming Ceresio Peninsula to the artist colony of Morcote. We then return to our Lugano lakeside hotel.



Monday May 29, 2006 Lugano (25-50 miles of cycling)

Today's lovely route through this vacation paradise takes us to Lake Maggiore, the most famous of the Italian Lakes. We will be biking along the shoreline past country villas, gardens and vineyards to the colorful town of Ascona. Along the way we will have the opportunity to take a boat ride to the romantic islands of Isole Bella and Isole Superiore off the coast of Stresa, famous for their palaces. We then return to Lugano via coach. After dinner we have the option of taking a funicular to the top of Monte Bré for a breathtaking view of Lugano and surroundings.

Tuesday May 30, 2006 Lugano/Sirmione (20-30+ miles cycling)

In the morning we bike from our hotel along the fjord-like north shore of Lake Lugano to Menaggio for a great downhill to Cadenabbia. From here we take the ferry across Lake Como to charming Bellagio. Following lunch at this magnificent setting we continue along the lake's tree-lined western coast to Lecco. One of a biker's highlights should be the optional six mile climb to the village of Ghisallo. The twisting road with postcard views of the lake takes you to Italy's cyclist's church, Madonna del Ghisallo. The 14th century chapel has become famous as a museum for racing memorabilia including photos, jerseys and bikes of international racing immortals.



We then travel to Sirmione, the well known resort/spa which lies on a picturesque peninsula that extends two miles into Lake Garda, for our overnight accommodation. Enjoy fine dining at our lakeside restaurant.

Wednesday May 31, 2006 Sirmione (28-45+ miles cycling)

Today's ride is one of the highlights of the Northern Lakes region. We will drive the western shore of Lake Garda to Riva del Garda and then begin our biking at Nago situated high above the beautiful waters of the lake. Enjoy the view while biking down to Torbole, a colorful village that has become well known for its yachting and wind surfing. Bike through the captivating villages of Malcesine, Torri del Benaco and Peschiera del Garda on the way back to Sirmione. The splendid thirteen century Veronese island fortress, Rocca Scaligera, stands guard as you enter through the town gate. Dinner tonight will be in the romantic restaurant district.



Thursday June 1, 2006 Sirmione/Verona (Optional 35+ miles cycling)

Free time available to relax, take a dip in the clear waters outside the hotel or bike along the southwest coast of Lake Garda to Porto Portese and then inland through vineyards and olive groves. This afternoon we will drive to Verona, the enchanting city of Romeo and Juliet fame. After seeing the sights, dine at a ristorante or trattoria of your choice in the fashionable Piazza Bra which surrounds the magnificent Roman Amphitheater.



Friday June 2, 2006 Verona/Venice (23-40+ miles cycling)

Today we enter the heartland of the Veneto Region. Our motorcoach brings us to the outskirts of Vicenza located at the foot of the Berici mountains. Bright red poppy fields enhance our journey through the Po River Valley past the Euganean Hills to Este, the walled Medieval city of Monselice and Abano Terme. Late afternoon finds us in Padua, home of some of the most famous frescoes by the Medieval painter, Giotto. For the night we will stay in the Amadeus Hotel on the Grand Canal of Venice.



Saturday June 3, 2006 Venice

The "Queen City of the Adriatic" awaits to be explored for a full day. A morning guided tour will feature the Doges Palace, the Bridge of Sighs and other timeless landmarks. Later we will visit Lido Beach and also the island of Murano to watch a glassblower perform his ancient craft. Explore the shops in and around the Piazza San Marco. Enjoy an espresso and have a dinner of risotto, pasta or seafood. To top the evening, take a gondola ride through to the romantic canals of this unforgettable city.



Sunday June 4, 2006 Florence

Today we board our motorcoach for the drive into the province of Tuscany and on to Florence, "The Cradle of the Renaissance" – a city filled with unsurpassed art treasures. We arrive in the afternoon and after a brief stop at our hotel we absorb the aura of this magnificent city and dine on Florentine specialties at the restaurant of your choice – either in the city or in Fiesole, a small town overlooking Florence.



Monday June 5, 2006 Florence (15-28+ miles cycling)

Free day of sightseeing in this city that is a museum in itself: the splendid Duomo crowned with the magnificent dome by Brunelleschi, the Baptistry with exquisite bronze doors by Ghiberti, Giotto's Bell Tower, the Piazza Della Signoria with its celebrated Uffizi gallery, Michelangelo's spellbinding David in the Accademia, the Pointe Vecchio with all its shops and the panoramic view from Piazzale Michelangelo.



Tuesday June 6, 2006 Florence/Siena (40 miles cycling)

This morning we start biking through Tuscany and the vineyards of the famous Chianti wine region experiencing firsthand this paradise of olive groves, hilltop villages and beautiful vistas. We will stop in Greve for lunch and we will also stop in Castellina for a taste of Chianti. Enjoy the wonderful ride into Siena, the famous Renaissance city and best known Italian hill town.



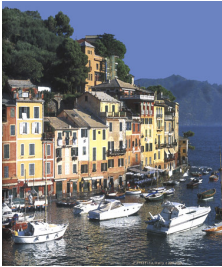
Wednesday June 7, 2006 Siena (15-28+ miles cycling)

This morning we bike on lightly traveled roads through the Tuscan hills to the photogenic deserted abbey of San Galgano. Afternoon free to stroll through Siena's narrow Gothic streets that are lined with Patrician Palaces which converge at the famous Piazza del Campo, site of the popular festival Palio delle Contrade. Relax and enjoy cappuccino and sample panforte - a traditional Sienese specialty.

Thursday June 8, 2006 Siena/Volterra (23-42 miles cycling)



The highlight of our ride today will take us through the idyllic rolling Tuscan countryside where vineyards and olive groves flourish to the beautiful walled town of San Gimignano renowned for its 15th century towers. It is also known as “The Manhattan of Tuscany.” After lunch we will continue biking to the scenic town of Volterra famous for its alabaster workshops. Our hotel, formerly a medieval convent, is located in the city center within walking distance of the Etruscan Museum and the ruins of the first century B.C. Teatro Romano.



Friday June 9, 2006 Volterra/Portofino (24-63 miles cycling)

Today’s bike ride takes us from the hills of Tuscany to the beaches of the Mediterranean. A thrilling downhill and easy ride along the valley to Cecina is followed by a comfortable trip along the sea to Livorno. Plenty of opportunities to cool off are only challenged by our desire to get to Pisa where we will be dazzled by the marvels of one of the world’s most stunning squares: Piazza dei Miracoli with the Leaning Tower. We will continue on to Portofino, the picturesque ancient fishing village – a national monument for the last 60 years – for overnight accommodation.

Saturday June 10, 2006 Portofino

A wonderful day of sightseeing, biking, swimming, hiking to the lighthouse and unwinding awaits us as we travel the Italian Riviera. We will ride along the Camogliis Harbor to the town of Sestri Levante for picturesque views. This evening we disassemble our bikes and have a farewell dinner at our seaside hotel restaurant overlooking the harbor.



Sunday June 11, 2006 Portofino/Milan/USA

Morning transfer to Milan’s International Airport for our return flight to the USA. You may extend your stay with an excursion to Rome, only 5 hours away by train, or some other destination of your choice. We will help you make travel arrangements for your post-tour plans.