

NORTHERN ITALY
2007 Day-by-Day Itinerary

5/9 **DAY 1: Depart the U.S. for Milan**

Depart the U.S. late today on your flight bound for Milan.

5/10 **DAY 2: Arrive Milan/Transfer to Stresa**

You'll arrive in Milan late this morning and transfer by motorcoach to the international resort of Stresa on beautiful Lake Maggiore. More than 40 miles long at its longest and 6 miles wide at its widest, the lake sits on the Italian-Swiss border and is a touch of paradise surrounded by green hills and gracious villas. There's time to relax and settle in before joining your Odysseys Unlimited tour director and fellow travelers at tonight's welcome dinner at our hotel.

Accommodations: Hotel La Palma
Meals: Dinner

5/11 **DAY 3: Stresa/Ascona**

This morning we visit nearby Ascona, Switzerland (remember to bring your passport!) an artists' colony whose mazelike streets are crammed with shops and galleries. After lunch and time to explore on our own, we return to our lakeside hotel for a brief respite before our late afternoon cruise to Isola Bella, the prettiest of the tiny Borromean Islands in the center of Lake Maggiore. Here we take a guided tour of the 17th-century Palazzo Borromeo, a palace known for its spectacular views, grotto rooms, and unusual tapestries – and where we dine tonight.

Accommodations: Hotel La Palma
Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

5/12 **DAY 4: Stresa/Milan**

We visit the Italian capital today, a fascinating blend of contemporary and classic, as we see for ourselves. Highlights of our touring here include 14th-century Castello Sforzesco, a fortified castle that once hosted such luminaries as da Vinci and Bramante. Today the castle houses several museums, including the Museum of Antique Art, Museum of Musical Instruments, and the Picture Gallery with works of Renaissance and 17th-century Italian, Dutch, and French artists. The castle also is home to the unfinished last work of Michelangelo: the heart-breaking "Rondanini Pietà," on which he worked until six days before his death.

We also take a guided walk past the celebrated La Scala opera house, and the awe-inspiring Duomo, the world's largest Gothic cathedral, dating to 1386 and boasting some 135 spires. Then we're free for lunch and to explore on our own before returning to Stresa late this afternoon. Dinner tonight is on our own.

Accommodations: Hotel La Palma

Meals: Breakfast

5/13th **DAY 5: Stresa/Santa Margherita**

This morning we leave Stresa and travel south to the narrow crescent-shaped coastal plain of Italy's Liguria region. Stretching from San Remo in the west to Cinque Terre at its eastern reaches, Liguria is wedged between steep mountains and the Tyrrhenian Sea, with the Gulf of Genoa at its center and the city of Genoa as its capital. Our destination is the resort of Santa Margherita on the 110-mile Riviera Levante, the eastern coast from Genoa to La Spezia. Passing beautiful scenery along the way, we reach this pleasant, relaxed town this afternoon and dine at our hotel tonight. Later, you may wish to take a stroll along the popular seaside promenade.

Accommodations: Hotel Metropole

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

5/14 **DAY 6: Santa Margherita/Portovenere/Cinque Terre**

We depart this morning by for nearby Portovenere, a port town harkening to medieval times, with its cluster of colorful column-shaped houses face the Ligurian Sea, their backs to the surrounding mountains. We enjoy a brief walking tour of the Old Town, including a visit to the Church of St. Lorenzo. Then we board a boat for a cruise along the rugged coastline from Portovenere to the Cinque Terre (Five Lands), the five cliff-clinging villages seemingly carved from the Apuane Alps, whose high ridges jut over the sea. Originally medieval fishing villages, the Cinque Terre were inaccessible by land for centuries; even today, no road connects all five. We stop first in the scenic village of Vernazza, noted for its harborfront *piazza* (plaza), Renaissance *campanile* (bell tower), and labyrinthine steps that wind through the town, then continue on to Monterosso, where we have time for lunch and to explore on our own. We return to our hotel late this afternoon and dine together tonight.

Accommodations: Hotel Metropole

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

5/15 **DAY 7: Santa Margherita/Portofino**

Today's highlight is our excursion by ferry to nearby Portofino, the renowned port where the rich and sometimes famous enjoy *la dolce vita* by land, by sea, and aboard yacht after ever-larger yacht. Your time here is free to explore and eat lunch on your own; perhaps to shop in the chic boutiques or simply people-watch from a seat at a comfortable outdoor café. This multi-colored village boasts a jet-set reputation that far exceeds its size; still, with its seaside setting, olive groves, and palm and cypress trees it's one of Italy's prettiest spots. We return to Santa Margherita early afternoon and the remainder of the day is at leisure. For dinner on your own tonight, you may want to sample some of the local seafood specialties for which the region is renowned.

Accommodations: Hotel Metropole

Meals: Breakfast

5/16th DAY 8: Santa Margherita/Pisa/Tuscany

We leave Liguria this morning, traveling south to Pisa and one of the most recognized buildings in the Western world. However, the recently shored-up Leaning Tower is not the only treasure in this architecturally rich city. This morning's guided walking tour includes the unusual 11th-century Duomo, distinguished by its four layers of open-air arches, three bronze doors, and the polygonal pulpit supported by pillars and columnar statues symbolizing the Virtues. Of course, no trip to Pisa would be complete without visiting the Leaning Tower, a campanile built in fits and starts between 1173 and 1350. Designed to be vertical, the tower started to lean during its initial construction, but never fell. In 1934 cement was injected into the base, but in time the problem only worsened: the tower was supposedly floating on a base of waterlogged clay, leaning more than 14 feet from the perpendicular. In 1990 the Italian government suspended visits inside, and after heated debate about corrective techniques, proceeded with soil extraction – which by all accounts did the trick. The Leaning Tower still leans, but safely so, and it reopened to the public in 2001. After negotiating the 293 steps to and from the bell tower (if you wish), you're free to relax over lunch on your own here before we continue our journey. Late afternoon we reach our villa, where we are the only guests, just outside the village of Castellina-in-Chianti. Dinner tonight is at our villa.

Accommodations: Villa Godenano

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

5/17 DAY 9: Tuscany/Florence

Today we discover Florence, city of Renaissance artists and thinkers, filled with unimaginable art treasures and splendid churches. Since buses are not allowed in the historic center, we will be dropped off a short distance from where we begin our morning walking tour, which includes the Galleria dell'Accademia, home of Michelangelo's masterpiece "The David;" the soaring Duomo, whose dome was the masterwork of Brunelleschi; the Church of Santa Croce, with frescoes by Giotto and the tombs of Michelangelo, Galileo, and Machiavelli, among other dignitaries of the Renaissance; and Piazza della Signoria, one of Italy's most beautiful squares, surrounding the Fountain of Neptune. This afternoon is free for lunch and to discover more Florentine delights on your own: Giotto's Bell Tower, considered the most beautiful campanile in Europe; the Baptistery, the oldest structure in Florence; the Medici Chapels, housing the Michelangelo-designed New Sacristy; the Ponte Vecchio, the 14th-century bridge lined with jewelry shops; or any number of shops selling leather goods, Florentine paper goods, clothing, and so much more. Late this afternoon we return to our villa hotel, where we dine tonight.

Accommodations: Villa Godenano

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

5/18 DAY 10: Tuscany/Siena/Castellina-in-Chianti

Today we visit the walled city of Siena, whose ochre-colored buildings and ancient ramparts vividly evoke the city's medieval past. Fan-shaped Piazza del Campo is one of Europe's greatest public squares; its Duomo, with pillars of black and white marble, is one of Italy's finest, with masterpieces by Donatello and Michelangelo. Following a guided walking tour, we have free time for lunch and to explore on our own – the town is packed with museums, churches, and monuments. Then we head back to our hotel via the village of Castellina-in-Chianti, where we visit a local winery for a tour and tasting; only in this region is authentic *Chianti Classico* produced. Dinner tonight is at our villa. **(Please note that in Siena we must leave the bus outside the historic city center and walk into town then back to the bus.)**

Accommodations: Villa Godenano

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

5/19th **DAY 11: Tuscany/Volterra/San Gimignano**

We encounter classic Tuscany today as we visit first nearby Volterra, one of the region's lesser-known hill towns set in a dramatic landscape high on a bluff some 1,800 feet above the valley below and surrounded by soft rolling hills and lush woodlands. A fortress-like town, Volterra was a center of Etruscan art and commerce from the 9th century BC through the 4th century. On our walking tour here we explore the maze of medieval alleys and see some of the white alabaster carvings for which the city is renowned. After free time for lunch on our own, we continue on to the classic hill town of San Gimignano, "of the beautiful towers" – a reference to the 14 remaining bell towers dating to the 11th century; originally 72 towers stood guard here. Still, the skyline and historic center of this UNESCO World Heritage Site look much as they did in medieval times. We enjoy a brief walking tour of this town known for its churches and museums that house masterpieces of 14th and 15th century art; and for its smart shops and art galleries. We return to our villa late afternoon and enjoy our last dinner there tonight. **(Please note that as in Siena, in San Gimignano we must leave the bus outside the historic city center and walk up considerable hills into the town then walk to meet the bus again later.)**

Accommodations: Villa Godenano

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

5/20 **DAY 12: Tuscany/Venice**

We bid farewell to Tuscany this morning as we set off for Venice, city of drama and *doges*, canals and gondolas. We arrive in Venice early this afternoon, with the remainder of the day and evening free to begin discovering this wondrous, timeless city on our own.

Accommodations: Dei Dogi Hotel

Meals: Breakfast

5/21st **DAY 13: Venice**

This morning's informal walk reveals a host of Venetian delights: Piazza San Marco (St. Mark's Square), with its fantastic Basilica; the romantic Bridge of Sighs; the Rialto district with its bustling market. Your afternoon is at leisure to enjoy this timeless city as you wish. This evening we gather at our hotel for a farewell dinner to bid "*arrivederci*" to Italy and to our fellow travelers.

Accommodations: Dei Dogi Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

5/22 **DAY 14: Depart Venice for U.S.**

We depart early this morning for the airport and our connecting flights to the United States.

Meals: Breakfast