

MEREDITH COLLEGE

Dear Meredith Travel Alumnae and Friends,

As cold weather settles in here in Raleigh, we are personally dreaming of Italy during the golden days of autumn when olives are harvested and pressed and the new grapes are sent to the winery. It's the time of year to enjoy leisurely conversations at sundown as platters of cheese and charcuterie are shared in a setting that begs to be photographed.

If that dream sounds appealing to you, too, then please join us from September 22nd- October 5, 2022, as Meredith Travel samples the tastes, sights, history, and culture of Northern Italy—from Sea to Shining Sea. While that may seem an impossibility if we think about the United States and the 42 hours it would take to drive from Wilmington, North Carolina, to Los Angeles, California – Italy is CONCENTRATED. To drive from Ravenna, on the Adriatic to Carrara, near the Ligurian Sea, takes less than three hours! However, there is so much to experience in between that we will take 13 days to navigate that distance. The tour focus will be local at every stop along the way: food specialties, history across so many centuries, and an ever-changing landscape that ranges from sea level to the towering Alps.

For ease of booking, we will arrive and depart from Milan Malpensa airport, but instead of checking into a hotel next to a runway, our first night will be spent in Como. The next morning we depart for Bologna, our base for the next four days, with stops along the way in Cremona, where Stradivarius made some rather fine fiddles, and in Parma for lunch. (Spoiler alert: Yes, it's time for Parma ham, and Parmesan cheese!). In Bologna the twin medieval towers await us—the shorter one leaning at a greater angle than the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Did you know that the largest food park in the world is in Bologna? It's on our itinerary.

Our first day trip from Bologna takes us to the nearby historic city of Modena. We will taste our way through an *acetaia*, a family-run business that has been producing balsamic vinegar for over a hundred years. Modena's picturesque city center is old, the Ferrari Museum is new; we'll learn more about each.

Day trip two will take us to Ravenna where the UNESCO World Heritage mosaics and architecture give stunning visual documentation to the end of the Roman Empire and the beginning of Byzantine influence. Before returning to Bologna it is essential to drive to the coast to dip a toe in the Adriatic Sea and maybe collect a shell or two.

Departing Bologna on Day 7, we will make two unique stops along the way before we reach our evening's destination. The first is in Lucca, where the entire defensive city wall still stands. However, instead of protecting the city from invaders, it now welcomes guests as an elevated park for a stroll around the perimeter of the medieval city center. After this delightful interlude, it's time for action: a Jeep caravan through a marble quarry! Carrara has been mined for over 2000 years. The gigantic block that Michelangelo magically transformed into his *David* came from here, in fact. La Spezia, on the Ligurian Sea, with its beautiful public garden beside the port promenade, is our stop for the night.

The next morning we will take a boat to the Cinque Terre, the five rainbow-hued villages some perched high above the sea, and another UNESCO site. Then we board a train to the seaside resort of Rapallo for the night. The coastal views along the way should be spectacular. Dinner tonight will come with a view.

Our base for the next two nights is Genoa, still a major Italian port and medieval rival to the Republic of Venice. The long, rich maritime history of the city is apparent in the Renaissance and Baroque mansions that line the Strada Nova, another UNESCO site. Genoa is home to the largest aquarium in Europe and a splendid maritime museum; they are not to be missed. And finally, we can't move on from Genoa without mentioning that this is where Christopher Columbus was born and where pesto sauce, that addictive, green elixir for pasta, originated.

Having gone from sea to shining sea, as promised, we now head north to Turin on our way to the Alps. While you may associate the name Turin, or Torino, with the Shroud of Turin—and yes, it is here— so is the oldest Egyptian museum in the world. Driving north from Turin takes us through the lovely alpine Aosta Valley, ending the day in the city of Aosta, near the Italian/French border, where we will spend the next two nights.

In Aosta it is possible to go back in time and rise to great heights. Roman ruins and medieval walls are evidence of the city's importance as a trading and military outpost. After a lunch whose heritage may be more French than Italian, we will be swept high up the mountain in a cable car. While we will insist that we're looking at Monte Bianco, the French would tell us, "Non! Mont Blanc." After this exciting ride, a stop for a wine tasting is a necessity.

Leaving Aosta the next morning, we will view two sites of conflict dating nearly a century apart before moving on to Bergamo, for our last night's stay. The Forte di Bard, an early 19th century mountain fortress, is so massive that its buildings look monumental even among the Alps. After touring the stronghold, we continue east to the Commune di Perloz, a tiny village whose citizens were responsible for heroic resistance during World War II. Finally, we arrive in Bergamo where a funicular will whisk us up to Bergamo Alto, the Old Town on the hill, for our farewell dinner. It will be an easy drive from Bergamo to Milan Malpensa the next morning for departure for home.

We hope you've enjoyed this virtual journey through Northern Italy with us and will join us next fall for all the wonderful tastes, amazing sights/sites, and real adventures when we travel there.

Becky Bailey, Betty Webb and Taylor Twine

Your Meredith Friends and Alumnae Travel Team

PS And just in case you have been wondering what the price of this tour is, we wish we could say, especially to those of you who had signed on in 2019/20, that the price has not changed. We can't because it has. The travel industry is struggling to recuperate and those of us who support it are the logical folk to help it do so. I hope you, like us, have accumulated a balance in your travel budget over these last two years, having been able to go nowhere! The 2022 cost is \$4392 per person (double room) plus an additional \$834 if you prefer a single room. This includes a custom designed itinerary, a specialist guide, a luxury coach, 12 nights' quality accommodation, 12 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 5 dinners. A \$1000 non-refundable deposit is due February 28, 2022. The final payment due by May 30, 2022.