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## Venice and Vineyards ..... 3rd - 23rd April 2008

This 20 Night Guided Holiday to Italy, is the perfect combination of the yearned-for destinations of Venice and Tuscany.

Staying in 3\* Hotels and B&Bs in the historical centre of each town, you'll have time to unpack, settle in and get to know your way around Venice, Lucca, San Gimignano & Siena. Breakfast and guided half day / full day programmes are carefully designed to introduce you to the highlights and everyday sights, of this ancient and beautiful country. Most afternoons and evenings are free for indulging your special interests and taking it easy!

### ITINERARY

#### DAY 1 THURSDAY 3rd. VENICE

Maggie will meet you at Marco Polo Airport and guide you to the delightful Hotel Canaletto, not far from the famous Rialto Bridge. Unpack and settle in and step outside for a delicious taste of this unique city, on a short orientation walk with Maggie. Continue exploring or if you've succumbed to jet-lag, back to the Hotel for an afternoon nap! We'll meet up in the evening for our "welcome dinner" at a local Trattoria.

#### DAY 2 FRIDAY 4th. VENICE

Venice is one of the few cities in the world that can truly be described as unique. The secret to seeing and discovering the real romance and beauty of VENEZIA is to walk. You can become lost for hours in the narrow winding streets, crossing dozens of bridges, with an irresistible photo opportunity at every turn. Spend the morning wandering with Maggie. This is her favourite city in the world, and there's nothing she loves more, than sharing her passion with new comers. See the Rialto Bridge and markets. Buy a leather handbag, or a piece of jewellery made of glass. Head to the 'less touristy' area of Dorsoduro, and sit in Campo San Barnaba, eat pizza, and watch the Venetians living in their city. You may like to visit Peggy Guggenheim's great modern art collection, or the Accademia, home to the world's greatest collection of Venetian paintings. The choices are endless!



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## DAY 3 SATURDAY 5th. VENICE

Saturday is market day in Campo Santa Margherita. Experience a typical local weekly food market – then sit with a coffee at an outdoor café and people watch. Visit the splendid Doges Palace, a triumph of Gothic architecture. This will take time.... In the afternoon, explore the Basilica di San Marco. See the flooring of intricate designs in marble, and it's walls of dazzling gilded mosaics, the oldest dating from around 1063. Climb the stairs to the Galleria and be rewarded with wonderful views of the interior, while the terrace offers equally captivating vistas of the Piazza below. [The basilica closes to tourists at 4.30pm

## DAY 4 SUNDAY 6th. VENICE

Today is a free day, for you to wander, eat, shop and rest as you please. Treat yourself to coffee at the famous Florian's café, a 'bellini' at Harry's Bar, a gentle ride on a Gondola.

## DAY 5 MONDAY 7th. VENICE

After breakfast, we'll walk to the vaporetto stop, hop on a No 42, and head across the Lagoon to the Islands of Murano [glass making] and Burano [lace making], where we can enjoy lunch surrounded by the colourful cottages of the island. Return to Venice in your own time, but make sure you get to the Grand Canal before sunset. Enjoy cruising along, as the lights come on, and the sun goes down over the water.

## DAY 6 TUESDAY 8th. VENICE

Today we'll venture to the mainland with a Local Expert Guide. Travelling by minibus, we'll spend the full day visiting the beautiful hill country of the Veneto, north of Venice. Framed by the Dolomites, the area is rich in natural beauty, enchanting villages, delightful gardens and elegant renaissance palaces. Another highlight of the day, will be a guided visit to a Palladian Villa. We'll end our day on the spectacular Prosecco wine road, visiting a celebrated vineyard with stunning views of the terraced slopes and sipping a glass or two of Italy's delightful bubbly – Prosecco.

## DAY 7 WEDNESDAY 9th. VENICE – LUCCA

Today we bid arrivederci to Venice, and board the fast train heading south to Lucca, our destination for the next four nights. Nestled between Florence and the Mediterranean Sea, Lucca is one of the few cities in Italy to have its original medieval city walls in tact. More than 200 years ago, these walls were turned into avenues and parklands and have been a major attraction of the city ever since. In an hour or so, you can stroll around the entire wall. Taking in the day to day life of this fascinating town, stopping for photos, peaking into walled gardens of renaissance villas, imagining the soldiers at their guard posts, it's a lovely way to spend an afternoon or two. After checking into our hotel, Palazzo Alexander, Maggie will lead you on an orientation walk around the town and onto the ramparts.



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#### DAY 8 THURSDAY 10th. LUCCA.

Today we are going to visit Cinque Terra. [Five Lands or villages] This part of the Mediterranean coastline, north west of Lucca, is known for its spectacular scenery. Travelling by train from Lucca, we'll head to the most southerly of the five villages, Riomaggiore. From here we'll walk along the renowned Via dell'Amore [lovers pathway] cut out of costal rock, and winding along the hillside, then board the train again to reach the final village of Monterosso. Stopping in villages along the way, for coffees and lunch, this will be a whole day event and an entirely different taste of Tuscany.

#### DAY 9 FRIDAY 11th. LUCCA

After breakfast, our mini-bus will be waiting to escort us to the hills behind Lucca, where some of the most beautiful villas of the 16th century, are to be found - famous not only for their elegant architecture but also for the gardens and grounds that surround them. We'll have leasurely lunch and wine tasting at a vineyard trattoria, enjoying a seasonal menu and plenty of wine. After lunch, there'll be time for one more magnificent villa, before we head for home.

#### DAY 10 SATURDAY 12th. LUCCA

This morning will be free time for shopping or further exploring of Lucca. At 3pm, we'll join a walking tour lead by a local guide. There is much to see, including the small circular piazza with entrances at the four points of the compass which stands on the site of the town's Roman amphitheatre. The beautiful church of San Frediano, founded by an Irish saint, the statue of Lucca's favourite son, Puccini, relaxing with a cigarette, the fine Duomo in the Pisan style, alongside its own museum. Located over the old Roman forum, and named for it, is another grand church: San Michele in Foro. There will be time after for art-lovers who want to explore the Pinacoteca Nazionale, the town's art gallery and the Museo Guinigi, which contains sculpture as well as paintings. The Palazzo Pfanner built in 1667 with its beautiful formal garden is a perfect way to finish the days' walking – follow it with a cool glass of wine in the piazza.

#### DAY 11 SUNDAY 13th LUCCA – SAN GIMIGNANO

Another full day ahead. We'll transfer from Lucca to San Gimignano, on the way we'll stop in Pisa to visit the breathtaking "Piazza dei Miracoli" and its stunning monuments, including the famous leaning tower then a visit to the "magic and mysterious" city of Volterra with its three thousand years of history. Arriving in the medieval hill town of San Gimignano [pronounced gim-en-yarno], we'll check into our charming B&B. The rooms of this 200 year old townhouse, have recently been restored and updated, offering modern



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comfort but retaining the feel of the old architecture. Rich in history art and culture, and surrounded by the beautiful patchwork Tuscan countryside of vineyards and olive groves there is plenty to do inside and outside the walls of this ancient town. Acoustics in the churches and the small, sumptuously decorated theatre are wonderful, so look out for posters advertising the concerts for this week. On our days exploring the beautiful countryside, and fascinating villages and towns of central Tuscany, we'll travel in comfort, in an 8 seater mini-bus, with an experienced, English speaking driver. We can sit back and enjoy the sights.....

#### DAY 12 MONDAY 14th. SAN GIMIGNANO

This morning is free for you to wander at leisure. Shopping in San Gimignano is very good, and there are a number of museums and galleries which might take your fancy. At 3pm we will join a walking tour led by an expert guide, who will bring to life the history of this historically important and fascinating town.

#### DAY 13 TUESDAY 15th. SAN GIMIGNANO

Today our mini-bus will pick us up at 9.30, and we'll set off on our travels. After stopping in the hill top village of Certaldo, and the tiny village of Monteriggioni encircled by its perfectly preserved 13th century walls, we'll head to Colle Val d'Elsa, where we'll have lunch, then spend some time exploring this delightful village. We'll return to San Gimignano on the local bus, later in the afternoon.

#### DAY 14 WEDNESDAY 16th. SAN GIMIGNANO

Today is completely free. After a leisurely breakfast you might like to retire to the beautiful garden of the B&B, for some well earned rest or reading time. For the shoppers amongst you, go to it! For those with energy to burn, or the desire for more fantastic panoramic photos, climbing the Torre Grossa, the tallest tower in the city, and the one belonging to the town hall will be a rewarding mornings' work. Lunch can be had at one of the many outdoor cafes or overlooking the breathtaking beauty of the countryside. Perhaps the afternoon could include a visit to the Museum of Wine, where tasting is an important part of learning!

#### DAY 15 THURSDAY 17TH SAN GIMIGNANO

Thursday is market day in San Gimignano. It's great fun to shop this way. You'll find fresh fruit and vegetables, pasta, meat, fish, cheese, salami, breads and pastries, in fact it's how the locals do their weekly shopping. As well as the food vendors, there are vans and tables full of clothing, from cotton undies to silk scarves, pot plants, flowers, shoes, household linen, cleaning products and cosmetics. You'll find it hard to tear yourself away, but eventually hunger will overcome. Find a table at café on the piazza, rest your feet, and enjoy watching village life. Spend the afternoon further exploring the shops, churches, museums, ramparts or art galleries.



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DAY 16 FRIDAY 18th. SAN GIMIGNANO – SIENA

Moving day today. Pack up, breakfast, and say ciao to San Gimignano, Marco will be waiting for us. We'll load the minibus with ourselves and our luggage [slightly heavier after the shopping done here], and head for the hills. The Chianti Hills that is - arguably some of the most stunning landscape in Italy. We'll stop in Radda and Greve, lunch and try some wine at a winery and eventually arrive at our final destination – our hotel in the medieval heart of Siena.

DAY 17 SATURDAY 19th. SIENA

This morning is yours, to have a wander and begin to get a feel for Siena. Just a few of the highlights - Piazza del Campo, one of Italy's loveliest squares –its distinctive red brick paving was completed in 1349. Palazzo Pubblico, while continuing its ancient role as Siena's town hall, its medieval rooms and the Museo Civico are open to the public, and are well worth a visit. We'll meet our local guide in the afternoon, for a two hour walk, taking in the wonderful sights and the historical significance of this charming city.

DAY 18 SUNDAY 20th. SIENA

This morning we'll head to the Duomo, its spectacular Romanesque-Gothic architecture, will amaze you, from the intricate inlaid marble floor, to its vaulted ceiling, painted blue with bold stars to resemble the night sky, and the stunning frescos in the Piccolomini Library. Then Sunday Lunch, in a nearby Trattoria – the pizza is excellent!

DAY 19 MONDAY 21th. SIENA

Have a hearty breakfast today, as we've got a big day ahead. Marco and our mini-bus will pick us up, and while enjoying the views of the countryside, we'll be on our way south, stopping in the villages of Pienza and Montepulciano, each with its own character and charm. Then onto the Abby of St Antimo which dates from 781, and the monks still sing Gregorian chant. We will lunch at a nearby Trattoria enjoying good simple local food and wine. This area of Tuscany is where the world famous Brunello di Montalcino wine is produced. We'll have a tour of a winery which uses state of the art methods along side the time honored traditions to produce award winning red wines. Followed by a visit to the tasting room, where you can decide for yourself if it's good enough to bring home a bottle or two. Our last stop for the day is the town of Montalcino. With its enormous 14th-century fortress and timeless streets, with an array of interesting shops, it's a pleasure to wander. We'll then head back to Siena, with the sun setting behind the hills.



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DAY 20 TUESDAY 22nd. SIENA

Our last day in Siena is actually going to be spent in the capital of Tuscany – Florence. We'll make use of the local public transport, and catch the bus, arriving in Florence in time to meet our expert guide. An in-depth walking seminar lead by an English speaking scholar, will introduce us to the streets and piazzas of Florence, discussing the ideas of the Renaissance, the lives of many famous artists, the Medici family who showered Florence with countless masterpieces, and how life changed forever during this epic period of the history of Florence. In-between the famous landmarks, we'll take enchanting backstreets and alleys paved with the original stones from ancient times. Here, we'll discover lesser known attractions that will help weave together the complex and rich history of the city and gain a more intimate experience of Florence. On completion of the walk, the remainder of the day is free for you to continue exploring, perhaps fitting in a visit to the famous Uffizi Gallery, or some bartering at the leather markets then cross the Ponte Vecchio [Old Bridge] and spend the early evening in the beautiful Boboli Gardens at the the Pitti Palace. We'll meet back in Siena for our 'farewell' dinner.

DAY 21 WEDNESDAY 23rd. DEPARTURE

After a leisurely breakfast, we'll say our arrivedici and set off to connect with our return flights on our journey home. ARRIVING IN AUSTRALIA FRIDAY 25TH APRIL 2008. [Change of return date, to accommodate further travel, is possible at the time of booking.]

Price per person, [double/twin share basis] AUD\$5850.00.

Single supplement AUD\$650.00 per person

This includes transfers, 20 nights accommodation with continental / buffet breakfast, all costs involved in half and full day guided tours as well as 'welcome' and 'farewell' dinners. [Other meals are not included in the price].

Max 6 / 7 people. Bookings close 31st December, 2007.