

# Italy 2007

Gill Charlton offers a comprehensive guide to finding and booking a holiday in Italy this summer.

## Expect to pay...

The following are rough guides to prices for a week's holiday in June, per person, sharing a room and including flights unless stated otherwise.

- Three-bedroom villas with pool in Tuscany:** £1,200 (weekly rental for whole property).
- Two-bedroom apartment in Umbria:** £400 (week's rental for whole property).
- Four-star country hotel:** £140.
- Expert-led cultural tour:** £1,200 plus.
- Group walking holiday:** £800.
- Camping holiday** (two weeks in August including ferry crossing): £1,100.
- Highlights coach tour:** £750.
- Group B car hire:** £170 (with no insurance excess)



## Getting there

### BY AIR

There are now direct flights to 27 airports in Italy; most leave from London airports but there are interesting options from the Midlands, Liverpool and Glasgow. Prices vary hugely with off-peak fares for mid-week travel on Ryanair starting from as little as £40 return, including taxes, to Bologna to £275 to Pisa on a peak May weekend.

Use the internet to compare prices and book. Flight comparison websites [www.skyscanner.net](http://www.skyscanner.net) and [www.travelsupermarket.com](http://www.travelsupermarket.com) are useful tools but they do not always list every scheduled or charter flight.

For longer holidays in high summer it can be cheaper to take a charter flight. The seat-broker **Avro** (0870 458 2847, [www.avro.co.uk](http://www.avro.co.uk)) offers charter seats to Naples, Venice and Catania from Birmingham, Manchester and Gatwick.

**Holiday Options** (0870 420 8372, [www.holidayoptions.co.uk](http://www.holidayoptions.co.uk)) sells charter seats to Sardinia from nine UK airports. If you have a few thousand to spare, **Jeffersons** (0870 850 8181, [www.jeffersons.com](http://www.jeffersons.com)) will fly you to Italy by private Learjet.

### WHO FLIES WHERE

All destinations listed are served by direct, non-stop flights. We list all UK and Italian destinations but UK regional airports may not offer all routes.

**Air One** (00 39 06 4888 0069, [www.flyairone.it](http://www.flyairone.it)): London City to Milan, Rome, Genoa and Turin.

**Alitalia** (0870 544 8259, [www.alitalia.co.uk](http://www.alitalia.co.uk)): Heathrow to Milan (both airports) and Rome.

**BMI** (0870 6070 555, [www.flybmi.com](http://www.flybmi.com)): Heathrow to Naples and Venice.

**Bmibaby** (0871 224 0224, [www.bmibaby.com](http://www.bmibaby.com)): Birmingham to Rome from May 24.

## ITALY: destinations served from UK airports



**British Airways** (0870 850 9850, [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)): Heathrow or Gatwick to Bari, Bologna, Cagliari, Catania, Milan, Naples, Pisa, Rome, Turin, Venice and Verona.

**EasyJet** (0905 821 0905 - premium rate, [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)): Gatwick, Stansted, Luton, East Midlands, Bristol, Newcastle and Belfast to, variously, Venice, Milan, Rome, Olbia, Naples, Turin, Rimini and Pisa.

**Flyglobespan** (0870 556 1522, [www.flyglobespan.com](http://www.flyglobespan.com)): Edinburgh to Rome.

**Jet2** (0871 226 1737, [www.jet2.com](http://www.jet2.com)): Edinburgh, Belfast, Manchester, Leeds-Bradford (from April) and Newcastle to, variously, Venice, Bergamo (for Milan), Pisa and Rome.

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**Meridiana** (0845 355 5588, [www.meridiana.it](http://www.meridiana.it)): Gatwick to Florence.

**Ryanair** (0906 270 5656 - premium rate, [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)): Luton, Stansted, Bournemouth, East Midlands, Nottingham, Doncaster, Liverpool, Newcastle and Glasgow to, variously, Alghero, Ancona, Bari, Bergamo (for Milan), Brescia (for Verona), Brindisi, Forli (for Bologna), Genoa, Lamezia, Palermo, Parma, Perugia, Pescara, Pisa, Rimini, Rome, Treviso (for Venice), Trieste and Turin. Also a new Pisa-Cagliari (Sardinia) route.

**Thomsonfly** (0870 1900 737, [www.thomsonfly.com](http://www.thomsonfly.com)) offers summer services (most start in May) from Manchester, Gatwick, Luton, Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Doncaster, Birmingham, Newcastle and Glasgow to, variously, Lamezia, Catania, Naples, Verona, Venice, Pisa, Alghero, Cagliari and Olbia.

### BY RAIL

**Venice Simplon-Orient Express** (0845 077 2222, [www.orient-express.com](http://www.orient-express.com)): two-day journey from London to Venice £1,430 full board (single supplement £220); some departures continue to Rome (four days £1,710).

**Rail Europe** (0870 584 8848, [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk)), **Railchoice** (020 8659 7300, [www.railchoice.com](http://www.railchoice.com)) and **Freedom Rail** (0870 757 9898, [www.freedomrail.com](http://www.freedomrail.com)) sell international rail tickets and railpasses. A return fare from London to Venice using Eurostar and an overnight sleeper costs from £218 (children £125); bookable 60 days ahead.

### BY MOTORAIL

The motorail specialist **Railsavers** (0870 750 7070, [www.railsavers.com](http://www.railsavers.com)) can arrange Channel and North Sea crossings and Deutschebahn motorail services from Hamburg to Livorno (Tuscany) and Verona. A new Friday service from s'Hertogenbosch (on the Dutch/Belgian border) to Bologna costs £1,258 return in late July for a family of four with car including couchette berths and meals.

## Getting around

### CAR HIRE

Italian car-hire franchises (notably at Pisa and Venice airports) are notorious for trying to sell extra insurances at the time of pick-up, such as Personal Accident Insurance, which should be covered under your travel insurance.

Another trick is to charge up to £40 for a petrol refill even though the car was returned full. Do top up the tank close to the airport and keep the official receipt in case of a dispute later.

Instead of buying expensive excess cover for collision damage waiver from the rental agent, take out annual excess reduction cover for £49 through **Insurance4carhire** (020 7012 6300, [www.insurance4carhire.com](http://www.insurance4carhire.com)).

For rentals of luxury cars, such as a Mercedes, many Italian agencies now require two credit cards as security.

When comparing quotes check that all extras are included such as airport fees, out-of-hours fees and theft cover, which is essential.

### Car-rental companies include:

**Avis** (0844 581 8181, [www.avis.co.uk](http://www.avis.co.uk));  
**Budget** (0870 153 9170, [www.budget.co.uk](http://www.budget.co.uk));  
**Europcar** (0870 607 5000, [www.europcar.co.uk](http://www.europcar.co.uk));

**Hertz** (0870 844 8844, [www.hertz.co.uk](http://www.hertz.co.uk)).

### Brokers include:

**Holiday Autos** (0870 400 0011, [www.holidayautos.co.uk](http://www.holidayautos.co.uk)), **Holiday Cars Direct** (0870 112 8101, [www.holidaycarsdirect.com](http://www.holidaycarsdirect.com));  
**Suncars** (0870 500 5566, [www.suncars.com](http://www.suncars.com)).

### BY RAIL

There are rail passes, but unless you are going to spend a holiday on the trains, it is cheaper to buy individual single tickets. For fares and timetable information, see the website of **Italian State Railways** - [www.trenitalia.it](http://www.trenitalia.it) - which also offers an online booking service. English-language version available.

### BY FERRY

A list of inter-island ferry operators can be found on the **Italian Tourist Board's** useful website: [www.italiantouristboard.co.uk](http://www.italiantouristboard.co.uk).

### OUR SELECTION

In some sections, we have picked out for special mention tour operators offering programmes that we consider particularly interesting or good value.

## Villas

There are dozens of websites offering villas and apartments where customers book direct with the owners. This can be a good way to save money on agency fees but these properties are not inspected by any independent body and there is no financial security for payments by bank transfer in advance.

For these reasons, there will always be a role for agents based in Britain who hand-pick properties, and for larger operators who take on the responsibility of ensuring that everything goes smoothly.

This year there is a much bigger choice of good-quality private houses and agritourism apartments with shared facilities in the Marche, southern Italy and Sicily. The ever-increasing choice of low-cost flights to smaller Italian airports has also led to property owners being more flexible and offering short breaks outside of July and August and flexible start days.

### VILLAS: LUXURY SPECIALISTS

At the top-end of the market you can expect a historic country house or architect-designed modern villa offering privacy, a large pool and mature landscaped gardens. Maid service is standard; cooks, concierge services and childminding can usually be arranged.

### OUR SELECTION

**A&K Villas** (0845 070 0618, [www.abercrombiekent.co.uk](http://www.abercrombiekent.co.uk)) has more than 60 country villas and farmhouses in Tuscany, Umbria and Sardinia. A good choice of larger properties sleeping 12 or more.

**CV Travel** (020 7384 5897, [www.cvtravel.co.uk](http://www.cvtravel.co.uk)) has some of the loveliest mid-size houses, most in Tuscany and Umbria, and a luxurious new trulli conversion in Puglia. Offers both characterful, rustic homes and stylish modern conversions with privacy, good staff and mature gardens. Its "cook service" (customers choose number of nights and menu plans) is very popular. Also well-chosen small hotels.

VIEW OUR PICTURE GALLERY OF ITALIAN HOTELS AND VILLAS



Find the latest reports on Italy

**OTHER OPTIONS**

**Costa Smeralda Holidays** (020 7493 8303, [www.costasmeralda-holidays.com](http://www.costasmeralda-holidays.com)). Beachside villas and hotels in north-east Sardinia.

**Ilios Travel** (0870 060 0607, [www.iliotravel.com](http://www.iliotravel.com)). Attractive portfolio of 50 country homes and farmhouses, mostly in Tuscany and Umbria.

**ITC Classics** (01244 355527, [www.itcclassics.co.uk](http://www.itcclassics.co.uk)) A clutch of privately-owned villas in Tuscany and Umbria.

**Private Properties Abroad** (01423 330533, [www.ppaproperties.com](http://www.ppaproperties.com)). Particularly lavish staffed houses in Tuscany, plus one property in Umbria and another Calabria. Short breaks available low- and mid-season.

**Tuscany Now** (020 7684 8884, [www.tuscanynow.com](http://www.tuscanynow.com)). More than 200 properties countrywide, from farmhouses and historic villas to small castles and restored hamlets.

**Wimco** (0870 850 1144, [www.wimco.co.uk](http://www.wimco.co.uk)) Impressive villas in Tuscany and Umbria with pools.

**VILLAS: ALL CATEGORIES**

**OUR SELECTION**

**Cottages to Castles** (01622 775236, [www.cottagestocastles.com](http://www.cottagestocastles.com)). Its website is annoying (request a brochure), but this long-established Italy specialist has a good portfolio of characterful properties countrywide plus complementary hotels. New this year: three-day minimum stays and new houses in Puglia and Sardinia. Some properties offer cookery classes, wine-tasting courses and meals service.

**Simpson Travel** (0845 811 6504, [www.simpsontravel.com](http://www.simpsontravel.com)). Hand-picked apartments, some villas and small hotels in Tuscany, Umbria and Sicily.

**OTHER OPTIONS**

**Bridgewater** (0161 787 8587, [www.bridgewater-travel.co.uk](http://www.bridgewater-travel.co.uk)). Villas and apartments countrywide but particularly Tuscany, especially coastal areas.

**Carefree Italy** (01293 552277, [www.carefree-italy.com](http://www.carefree-italy.com)).

Carefully chosen villas, farmhouses and apartments countrywide.

**Discovery Travel** (01889 882170, [www.discovery-travel.co.uk](http://www.discovery-travel.co.uk)) specialises in southern Italy and smaller properties in Tuscany. Also hand-picked rural hotels and b&bs.

**Dolce Vita Villas** (020 7436 0426, [www.dolcevitavillas.com](http://www.dolcevitavillas.com)). More than 100 properties in main regions, plus apartments in Florence and Rome.

**Individual Italy** (0870 078 0193, [www.individualitaly.com](http://www.individualitaly.com)). More than 300 appealing villas, mostly in rural or coastal locations.

**Inntravel** (01653 617906, [www.inntravel.co.uk](http://www.inntravel.co.uk)). Quality conversions, most sleeping two to six, in large farmhouses and hamlets in seven regions, plus a few villas.

**Interhome** (020 8891 1294, [www.interhome.co.uk](http://www.interhome.co.uk)). Accommodation-only agent with 2,500 villas and apartments countrywide. Its sister company Solemar (020 8891 1294, [www.solemar.it](http://www.solemar.it)) offers a choice of 1,500 more upmarket properties.

**Landmark Trust** (01628 825925, [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)). Four historic homes: apartments in Florence and Rome, monastery of Sant Antonio in Tivoli and Villa Saraceno in Vicenza.

**The Owners' Syndicate** (020 7381 7490, [www.ownerssyndicate.com](http://www.ownerssyndicate.com)). More than 300 luxury and mid-range houses, stone cottages and apartments in northern Italy, Amalfi and Sicily.

**Quality Villas** (01442 870055, [www.qualityvillasitaly.co.uk](http://www.qualityvillasitaly.co.uk)). Villas and cottages in central Italy and Lake Garda.

**Real Holidays** (020 7359 3938, [www.realholidays.co.uk](http://www.realholidays.co.uk)). Villas and apartments on farming and wine estates in Umbria, Sicily, Calabria and Puglia.

**Simply Travel** (0870 166 4988, [www.simplytravel.co.uk](http://www.simplytravel.co.uk)). Carefully chosen houses and apartments in Tuscany, Umbria and the South, Sardinia and Sicily.

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**VILLAS: REGIONAL SPECIALISTS****OUR SELECTION**

**Invitation to Tuscany** (020 8600 2522, [www.invitationtotuscany.com](http://www.invitationtotuscany.com)) has a very good choice of private villas with pools (both historic and modern), village houses and apartments in agritourism enterprises. Knowledgeable booking agents.

**Long Travel** (01694 722367, [www.long-travel.co.uk](http://www.long-travel.co.uk)). Southern Italy and islands specialist focusing on coastal villas, smaller hotels and quality agritourism cottages and apartments; many are vineyards with an on-site bar and a good restaurant using farm produce.

**Summer's Leases** (0845 230 2223, [www.sumlea.com](http://www.sumlea.com)). Established web-based agency run by a British couple based in Italy offering 60 properties in Tuscany and Umbria ("places we'd like to stay in ourselves"). Good-value cottages for couples and classic villas including a new 15th-century Medici palazzo.

**OTHER OPTIONS**

**Elysian Holidays** (01580 766599, [www.elysianholidays.co.uk](http://www.elysianholidays.co.uk)). Four hideaways in Tuscany.

**Freelance Holidays** (01789 297705, [www.freelance-holidays.co.uk](http://www.freelance-holidays.co.uk)). Villas and apartments on Sardinia.

**Hello Italy** (01483 419964, [www.helloit.co.uk](http://www.helloit.co.uk)). Apartments and villas in Tuscany and Umbria.

**James Villa Holidays** (08700 505058, [www.jamesvillas.co.uk](http://www.jamesvillas.co.uk)). Tuscan specialist.

**Meon Villas** (0870 909 7550, [www.meonvillas.co.uk](http://www.meonvillas.co.uk)). Nine larger properties in Tuscany.

**Sovereign Villas** (08709 003 290, [www.sovereignvillas.co.uk](http://www.sovereignvillas.co.uk)). Villas with pools in Tuscany.

**Think Sicily** (020 7377 8518, [www.thinksicily.com](http://www.thinksicily.com)) has more than 70 appealing properties, most with pools.

**To Tuscany** (020 7193 7782, [www.to-tuscany.com](http://www.to-tuscany.com)). Two hundred properties, from country villas with private pools to apartments in converted hamlets.

**Traditional Tuscany** (01553 810003, [www.traditionaltuscany.co.uk](http://www.traditionaltuscany.co.uk)). Good-value, characterful rural houses and apartments (also in Le Marche and Umbria).

**Travel à la Carte** (01635 33800, [www.anotheritaly.co.uk](http://www.anotheritaly.co.uk)). Some lovely, well-priced properties in Le Marche and the Val d'Orcia in Tuscany.

**Venetian Apartments** (020 8878 1130, [www.venice-rentals.com](http://www.venice-rentals.com)) has the best selection in the city.

**Veronica Tomasso Cotgrove** (020 7267 2423, [www.vtcitaly.com](http://www.vtcitaly.com)). Carefully selected villas and farmhouses in Tuscany and Umbria plus apartments in Florence, Siena and Rome.

**Villa Centre** (01223 513593, [www.villacentre.com](http://www.villacentre.com)). Mid-range villas in Tuscany, Umbria and Lazio.

**The Villa Collection** (01753 853737, [www.thevilla-collection.co.uk](http://www.thevilla-collection.co.uk)). Small collection of Tuscan villas.

**Vintage Travel** (01954 261431, [www.vintagetravel.co.uk](http://www.vintagetravel.co.uk)). Rural homes with pools in Tuscany, Umbria and Le Marche.

**Voyages Ilena** (020 7924 4440, [www.voyagesilena.co.uk](http://www.voyagesilena.co.uk)). Good choice of villas and hotels on Sardinia; new programme to Sicily.

**Hotel holidays**

The traditional fortnight's package holiday to Italy is in terminal decline. Even the main tour operators are now offering start-any-day accommodation-only deals with add-on flights and car hire. Italy hotel specialists are focusing on tailor-made touring holidays based on stays in several hotels.

It is worth comparing prices for particular hotels: some wily operators quote attractive package prices but then charge hefty supplements for a sea view, balcony, and flights that are scheduled or from regional airports.

While it is possible to book direct with hotels, many of the companies listed below have long working relationships with the properties they feature. If overbooking occurs, or there is a choice about who is put in the worst rooms, the chances are that the hotel will favour the customers of companies with whom it does the best business.

**OUR SELECTION**

**Italian Expressions** (020 7433 2675, [www.expressionsholidays.co.uk](http://www.expressionsholidays.co.uk)) has the best geographical coverage and its sumptuous brochure contains carefully selected three- to five-star hotels that can be the basis of a tailor-made touring holiday. A new Islands of the South trip links Sicily, the Aeolians and Capri. A separate Families programme includes hotels in Sardinia and Sicily offering childcare.

**Kuoni** (01306 747746, [www.kuoni.co.uk](http://www.kuoni.co.uk)) offers an impressive collection of mostly four-star hotels as the basis for its tailor-made touring holidays and short breaks. The programme, launched last year, is run by former Magic of Italy staff who have added 60 new properties, ranging from spa hotels and luxury guesthouses in historic buildings to villas and townhouses. Most areas of the country are covered, including the island of Elba and lakes Iseo and Orta.

**OTHER OPTIONS**

**Citalia** (0870 909 7554, [www.citalia.com](http://www.citalia.com)) books three- to five-star hotels countrywide and arranges tailor-made holidays.

**Classic Collection** (0870 787 3377, [www.classic-collection.co.uk](http://www.classic-collection.co.uk)). Tailor-made holidays to the Amalfi coast and Sicily.

**Cricketer Holidays** (01892 664242, [www.cricketerholidays.co.uk](http://www.cricketerholidays.co.uk)). Two resort hotels in Calabria and Sardinia.

**Holiday Options** (0870 420 8372, [www.holidayoptions.co.uk](http://www.holidayoptions.co.uk)). Choice of 30 Sardinia hotels; smaller programme to Sicily. Good choice of regional departures.

**The Italian Connection** (01424 728900, [www.italian-connection.co.uk](http://www.italian-connection.co.uk)). Big range countrywide from b&b's to five-star hideaways.

**Just Sardinia** (01202 484858, [www.justsardinia.co.uk](http://www.justsardinia.co.uk)). Small collection of three- to five-star hotels.

**Kirker Holidays** (0870 112 3333, [www.kirkerholidays.com](http://www.kirkerholidays.com)). Well-chosen hotels in cities and resorts.

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**TRAVEL MESSAGE BOARDS** 

[Post questions and share tips on travel in Italy](#)

**Momentum Italy** (020 7371 9111, [www.momentumitaly.com](http://www.momentumitaly.com)). Hotels countrywide, opera breaks and villas.

**Real Holidays** (020 7359 3938, [www.realholidays.co.uk](http://www.realholidays.co.uk)). Some stylish family-run hotels, many on wine and olive estates.

**Sardatur** (020 8940 8399, [www.sardinia-holidays.co.uk](http://www.sardinia-holidays.co.uk)). Island specialist with 27 hotels.

**Scott Dunn** (020 8682 5080, [www.scottdunn.com](http://www.scottdunn.com)). Family-focused resort hotels; one with a club run by UK nannies.

**Sunvil** (020 8758 4722, [www.sunvil.co.uk](http://www.sunvil.co.uk)). Fly-drives and train-and-transfer holidays in the more off-beat areas of mainland and Sicily.

### HOTELS: LUXURY SPECIALISTS

For a special occasion or to discuss particular rooms at Italy's top hotels, these top-end specialists aim to please:

**Elegant Resorts** (01244 897777, [www.elegantresorts.co.uk](http://www.elegantresorts.co.uk)); **Seasons in Style** (01244 202 000, [www.seasonsinstyle.co.uk](http://www.seasonsinstyle.co.uk)), **Mediterranean Experience** (0870 499 0511, [www.medexperience.co.uk](http://www.medexperience.co.uk)).

### HOTELS: THE BIG OPERATORS

Mainstays of most programmes are larger resort hotels in the northern Italian Lakes, Rimini, the Neapolitan, Tuscan and Venetian rivieras sold either with or without flights. Many companies have new properties in Puglia, Calabria and Sardinia and a good choice of regional charter flights.

For lakes-and-mountains holidays in northern Italy try **Crystal** (0870 403 0543, [www.crystallakes.co.uk](http://www.crystallakes.co.uk)), **Inghams** (020 8780 4433, [www.inghams.co.uk](http://www.inghams.co.uk)), which also features Lake Trasimeno in Umbria, **Portland Direct** (0870 241 3172, [www.portlandholidays.co.uk](http://www.portlandholidays.co.uk)) for Lake Garda, and **Lakes & Mountains Holidays** (01243 792442, [www.lakes-mountains.co.uk](http://www.lakes-mountains.co.uk)).

**Cosmos Holidays** (0870 443 1823, [www.cosmosholidays.co.uk](http://www.cosmosholidays.co.uk)) has a new twin-centre Ischia/Lake Garda package and an accommodation-only website, [www.somewhere2stay.com](http://www.somewhere2stay.com).

**Cresta Holidays** (0870 238 7711, [www.crestaholidays.co.uk](http://www.crestaholidays.co.uk)). Good choice of two- to four-star hotels countrywide plus flights.

**My Travel** (0870 238 7711, [www.mytravel.com](http://www.mytravel.com)) has a good website where you can view hotels without having to put in a departure date; new places in Puglia.

**Sovereign** (08703 661626, [www.sovereign.com](http://www.sovereign.com)) features four- and five-star hotels in Sorrento and Amalfi.

**Thomas Cook** (08701 111 111, [www.thomascook.com](http://www.thomascook.com)) has a dedicated Italy brochure strong on Lake Garda, Sorrento, Sicily and Sardinia.

**Thomson** (0870 165 2602, [www.thomson.co.uk](http://www.thomson.co.uk)) offers both packages and accommodation-only options countrywide. Properties formerly featured by the upmarket Magic of Italy brand are tagged in this new all-in-one Italy brochure. Particularly strong on the Neapolitan Riviera, Sicily and Sardinia and new resort properties in Calabria and Puglia.

### Cultural breaks

There is a huge choice of expert-led tours with many companies now including itineraries that take in the lesser-known treasures of southern Italy and Sicily or focus particularly on local food and wine. Guest lecturers, often professional historians and archaeologists, can add enormously to your enjoyment of a place. Group sizes are also smaller on these tours (up to 20 people) but they do cost twice as much as a classic coach tour.

### OUR SELECTION

**Martin Randall Travel** (020 8742 3355, [www.martinrandall.com](http://www.martinrandall.com)) offers a choice of more than 50 well-researched and expert-led tours with the emphasis on music, the arts and gastronomy. Favourites include Gardens of the Lakes, Ruskin's Venice, the Mozart festival in Le Marche and gastronomic tours of Parma, Umbria and Puglia. Expect to pay around £1,800 all-in for a week in fairly high-brow company.

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**Andante Travels** (01722 713800, [www.andantetravels.co.uk](http://www.andantetravels.co.uk)) has an enticing selection of guided tours for archaeology and early history enthusiasts. There's a new Basilicata tour and more departures on its very popular "bare bones" Pompeii trip (£895 for a week b&b) with more free time built in but a similar high standard of guide lecturers and special access to sites.

**Liaisons Abroad** (0870 421 4020, [www.liaisonsabroad.com](http://www.liaisonsabroad.com)) is a good source of tickets for opera, theatre and music festivals (booking fee of £20- plus per ticket) as well as the Venice Carnival and Siena Palio, and football and rugby matches. It can also arrange hotel accommodation.

#### OTHER OPTIONS

The following companies offer small group tours with expert guides: **ACE Study Tours** (01223 835 055, [www.study-tours.org](http://www.study-tours.org)); **Cox & Kings** (020 7873 5000, [www.coxandkings.co.uk](http://www.coxandkings.co.uk)); **Fine Art Travel** (020 7437 8553, [www.finearttravel.co.uk](http://www.finearttravel.co.uk)), which has a March week in Rome with Boris Johnson; **Kirker Holidays** (0870 112 3333, [www.kirkerholidays.com](http://www.kirkerholidays.com)); **Inscape** (0870 850 9962, [www.inscapetours.co.uk](http://www.inscapetours.co.uk)); opera specialist **JMB Travel** (01905 422282, [www.jmb-travel.co.uk](http://www.jmb-travel.co.uk)); **Kudu Travel** (01722 716 167, [www.kudutavel.com](http://www.kudutavel.com)) for music, wine and gastronomy tours; **Prospect** (01227 773 545, [www.prospecttours.com](http://www.prospecttours.com)); **Specialtours** (020 7730 2297, [www.specialtours.co.uk](http://www.specialtours.co.uk)); **Travel for the Arts** (020 8799 8350, [www.travelforthearts.com](http://www.travelforthearts.com)); and **The Traveller** (020 7436 9343, [www.the-traveller.co.uk](http://www.the-traveller.co.uk)).

#### MAINSTREAM TOURS

**Citalia** (0870 901 4014, [www.citalia.com](http://www.citalia.com)) has introduced three new escorted "tour experiences" in Puglia, eastern Sicily and Tuscany. They are for groups of 8-12 and give a great insight into a region's culture, food and wine. Classic fly-coach tours too.

**Collette** (0900 884 8706, [www.colletteworldwide.com](http://www.colletteworldwide.com)) and **Titan Travel** (01293 440 033, [www.titantravel.co.uk](http://www.titantravel.co.uk)) offer a good choice of quality tours, based on four-star hotels, are also offered by.

**Great Rail Journeys** (01904 521980, [www.greatrail.co.uk](http://www.greatrail.co.uk)) has seven new rail tours from the UK taking in Cinque Terre, the Lakes, Tuscany and the Amalfi coast.

**Imaginative Traveller** (01473 667337, [www.imaginative-traveller.com](http://www.imaginative-traveller.com)) has tours of Tuscany and Sicily; good for under-40s.

Other touring companies offering either coach all the way from the UK or fly-coach trips include: **Archers Direct** (0870 460 3648, [www.archersdirect.co.uk](http://www.archersdirect.co.uk)) has Platinum departures with extra legroom and lounge area; **Consort Travel** (0845 345 0300, [www.consorttravel.com](http://www.consorttravel.com)); **Cosmos Tourama** (0845 402 3198, [www.cosmostourama.co.uk](http://www.cosmostourama.co.uk)); **Leger** (0845 402 3198, [www.leger.co.uk](http://www.leger.co.uk)); **Page & Moy** (08708 334 012, [www.pageandmoy.com](http://www.pageandmoy.com)); **Shearings Holidays** (01942 824824, [www.shearingsholidays.com](http://www.shearingsholidays.com)); **Voyages Jules Verne** (0845 166 7000, [www.vjv.com](http://www.vjv.com)), which has 24 tours (two by train) and some imaginative itineraries.

## Food and wine

### OUR SELECTION

For wine-tasting holidays, mixed with a little gastronomy, the leading operator is **Arblaster & Clarke** (01730 263 111, [www.winetours.co.uk](http://www.winetours.co.uk)), which organises expert-led tours all over Italy. Some are focused solely on wine; others

combine wine-tasting with opera visits and walking. New tours include Puglia, Ravenna and the Marche, Trentino and Adige and a Corsica-Sardinia two-centre break.

**Tasting Places** (020 8964 5333, [www.tastingplaces.com](http://www.tastingplaces.com)). Carla Tomasi teaches week-long courses near Arezzo in Tuscany; Maxine Clark hosts in Sicily.

#### OTHER OPTIONS

**Le Baccanti** (0039 055 806 5046, [www.lebaccanti.com](http://www.lebaccanti.com)). Florence-based operator offering gourmet tours and cookery classes in Tuscany and Umbria.

**Cooking in Umbria** (01580 240022, [www.cookinginumbria.com](http://www.cookinginumbria.com)). Weeks based in an historic villa north of Perugia.

**Flavours** (0131 625 7002, [www.flavoursholidays.com](http://www.flavoursholidays.com)). Cookery schools in Bologna, Lazio, Ravenna and Puglia.

**Gourmet on Tour** (020 7871 0848, [www.gourmetontour.com](http://www.gourmetontour.com)). Cookery courses based in smart hotels and trattoria.

**Holiday Options** (0870 4208372, [www.holidayoptions.co.uk](http://www.holidayoptions.co.uk)). New Sardinian cookery and wine appreciation weeks at a four-star hotel.

#### OTHER PURSUITS

##### DANCE

**Dance Holidays** (0870 286 6000, [www.danceholidays.com](http://www.danceholidays.com)). Learn Tango in Turin, modern and Latin in Sorrento.

#### LANGUAGE COURSES

**CESA Languages Abroad** (01209 211800, [www.cesalanguages.com](http://www.cesalanguages.com)) and **Euro-academy** (020 8297 0505, [www.euroacademy.co.uk](http://www.euroacademy.co.uk)) in Florence, Rome, Siena and Milan.

#### NATURAL WORLD

**Naturetrek** (01962 733 051, [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)) has eight itineraries focusing on birds, butterflies and wildflowers, including a new tour of the Sibillini Mountains in Marche.

**Collett's Mountain Holidays** (01763 289660, [www.colletts.co.uk](http://www.colletts.co.uk)) has five walks in the Dolomites led by Alpine wildflower specialists.

#### PAINTING

Tutored weeks with Painting in Umbria (0800 458 9044, [www.paintinginitaly.com](http://www.paintinginitaly.com)); **Andalucian Adventures** (01453 834137, [www.andalucian-adventures.co.uk](http://www.andalucian-adventures.co.uk)) in Tuscany (also photography in Rome); and **Bettina Schroeder** (020 7609 0843; [www.art-holidays.com](http://www.art-holidays.com)) in Tuscany and Sicily.

#### SPA HOLIDAYS

These are offered by most hotel specialists. Also **Spa Holidays** (020 7433 2615, [www.spaexpressions.co.uk](http://www.spaexpressions.co.uk)), **Erna Low Body & Soul Holidays** (020 7594 0290, [www.bodyandsoulholidays.com](http://www.bodyandsoulholidays.com)), **Essential Escapes** (020 7284 3344, [www.essentialescapes.com](http://www.essentialescapes.com)) and **La Joie de Vivre** (01483 272 379, [www.lajoiedevivre.co.uk](http://www.lajoiedevivre.co.uk)).

#### SCOOTER TRIPS

Guided and self-guided tours of Puglia and Tuscany on Vespas with **Scooter Bella** (01622 775236, [www.scooterbella.co.uk](http://www.scooterbella.co.uk)).

#### YACHT CHARTERS

**Top Yacht Charter** (01243 520950, [www.top-yacht.com](http://www.top-yacht.com)) and **Sail Italy** (01728 747340, [www.sail-italy.com](http://www.sail-italy.com)) offer bareboat and skippered charters from bases on Italy's west coast.

Continued >

## Special interest holidays

Walking in Italy is more popular than ever with dozens of itineraries to choose from: some holidays follow linear routes travelling from inn to inn with luggage transfer provided; others are day walks from a single base.

Most operators offer both guided and self-guided options, short breaks, and family departures in school holidays. A good choice of cycling trips too, both touring and off-road.

### OUR SELECTION

**Headwater** (08700 662650, [www.headwater.com](http://www.headwater.com)) has an enticing choice of 18 walks (both guided and self-guided) and six cycling tours with accommodation in good three- and four-star hotels with decent pools. New this year is a walk through Piedmont's Barolo vineyards and a cycle tour along Sicily's west coast.

**Inntravel** (01653 617906 [www.inntravel.co.uk](http://www.inntravel.co.uk)) has a well-researched Walking & More programme offering 19 different self-guided walks based on characterful smaller hotels and inns with good food and convivial owners. Also cycling in Tuscany and the Veneto.

**ATG-Oxford** (01865 315678, [www.atg-oxford.co.uk](http://www.atg-oxford.co.uk)) is for those who like their luxuries on a walk (two staff, a back-up minibus and the best available hotels and restaurants). Big choice of routes, self-guided options and less energetic "discovery" holidays. Three new classic journeys: hills of Lake Garda, the Amalfi coast and Basilicata.

### OTHER OPTIONS

**Activities Abroad** (01670 789991, [www.activitiesabroad.com](http://www.activitiesabroad.com)) has multi-activity weeks in the Veneto and Tuscany.

**The Adventure Company** (0845 450 5311, [www.adventurecompany.co.uk](http://www.adventurecompany.co.uk)) offers summer weeks on a working farm near Sorrento where children can learn pizza-making.

**Collett's Mountain Holidays** (01763 289660, [www.colletts.co.uk](http://www.colletts.co.uk)). Guided Dolomites walks including Via Ferrata scrambles using ladders and cables.

**Crystal Active** (0870 888 0266, [www.crystal-active.co.uk](http://www.crystal-active.co.uk)) uses Cavalese in the Dolomites for biking, rafting, paragliding and canyoning.

**Exodus** (0870 950 0039, [www.exodus.co.uk](http://www.exodus.co.uk)). A choice of 20 guided walks for all levels including easy walks combined with sightseeing and active family weeks. New venture include the Alps on horseback and off-road biking in Tuscany.

**Explore Worldwide** (0870 333 4001, [www.explore.co.uk](http://www.explore.co.uk)). Escorted trips that mix walking with sociable sightseeing plus cycling in Sardinia, the Veneto and Tuscany. Aimed at 25-55s.

**Freewheel Holidays** (01636 815636, [www.freewheelholidays.com](http://www.freewheelholidays.com)). Independent "downhill-only" Dolomites.

**HF Holidays** (020 8905 9558, [www.hfholidays.co.uk](http://www.hfholidays.co.uk)). Guided and self-guided hotel-to-hotel walks and cycle touring.



**KE Adventure** (01768 771700, [www.keadventure.com](http://www.keadventure.com)). High-level trekking and climbing in the Dolomites and Sicily.

**Mark Warner** (0870 770 4227, [www.markwarner.co.uk](http://www.markwarner.co.uk)). Smart all-inclusive resort with watersports and tennis tuition on Sardinia. Adults only outside of school holidays when there's childcare for kids aged six and over.

**Peregrine Adventures** (01635 872300, [www.peregrineadventures.co.uk](http://www.peregrineadventures.co.uk)). Walking and discovery holidays for small groups and families.

**Ramblers Holidays** (01707 331133, [www.ramblersholidays.co.uk](http://www.ramblersholidays.co.uk)). A choice of 26 good-value walks all over Italy including Basilicata and the Aeolian islands.

**Saddle Skedaddle** (0191 265 1110, [www.skedaddle.co.uk](http://www.skedaddle.co.uk)). Guided and self-guided rides in Tuscany and Sicily.

**Sherpa** (020 8577 2717, [www.sherpa-walking-holidays.co.uk](http://www.sherpa-walking-holidays.co.uk)). Self-guided inn-to-inn walking and cycling plus several guided treks.

**Upland Escapes** (01367 851 111, [www.uplandescapes.com](http://www.uplandescapes.com)). Well-researched day walks (guided on three days) from village base in the Majella national park, Abruzzo.

**Walks Worldwide** (01524 242000, [www.walksworldwide.com](http://www.walksworldwide.com)). Self-guided inn-to-inn walks in less-known areas including the high Apennines.

**The Wayfarers** (01242 620871, [www.thewayfarers.com](http://www.thewayfarers.com)). Upmarket, escorted walking holidays.

**Waymark Holidays** (01753 516477, [www.waymarkholidays.com](http://www.waymarkholidays.com)). Europe walking specialist offering guided walks in all grades for small groups.

## RIDING

**In the Saddle** (01299 272232, [www.inthesaddle.co.uk](http://www.inthesaddle.co.uk)) has two rides, in Chianti and north of Rome and **Ride Worldwide** (01837 82544, [www.rideworldwide.com](http://www.rideworldwide.com)) has a choice of rides in Tuscany.

## CAMPING

Most campsites are clustered around Lake Garda and along the coast near Venice and in southern Tuscany. **Vacansoleil** (0870 077 8779, [www.vacansoleil.co.uk](http://www.vacansoleil.co.uk)) offers 52 campsites countrywide. Tents and mobile homes can also be rented through **Canvas Holidays** (0870 192 1159, [www.canvasholidays.co.uk](http://www.canvasholidays.co.uk)), **Eurocamp** (0870 366 7552, [www.eurocamp.co.uk](http://www.eurocamp.co.uk)), **Siblu** (0870 998 2288, [www.siblu.com](http://www.siblu.com)), **Keycamp** (0870 7000 750, [www.keycamp.co.uk](http://www.keycamp.co.uk)) and **Venue Holidays** (01233 629950, [www.venueholidays.co.uk](http://www.venueholidays.co.uk)).

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