

Northern Italy: The Alps, Dolomites & Lombardy

PRELIMINARY TRIP INFORMATION

Editor's Note: A full trip information kit, including photos, larger maps and additional details will be available in the next week or so. Thank you for your patience as we compile the final color version for your enjoyment.

Tour: Northern Italy: The Alps, Dolomites & Lombardy

Dates: April 2020

Main Trip: **\$4,895** per person

Airfare from Detroit (DTW): **\$1,200** per person

Travel Protection: **\$699** per person

TRIP OVERVIEW:

Witness the awe-inspiring landscapes and cultural treasures of Northern Italy on a journey from the fashion capital of Milan and romance of the Lombardy Lakes to the snow-covered Alps and towering pinnacles of the Dolomites. Discover the enchanting juxtaposition of Italian and Austrian culture in this scenic region of woodlands, vineyards, and valleys dotted with medieval villages.

Thanks to our small group size, you'll get to meet and mingle with the people who live and work amidst the verdant valleys and Alpine splendor of Italy's northernmost lands. You'll rub elbows with Italian miners, visit with fishermen and local families, get to know winemakers, and meet with Latin-speaking locals to learn about the unique language and culture they are trying to preserve in valleys hidden deep in the Dolomites. And you'll ride through the majestic Alps into Switzerland aboard the legendary Bernina Red Train. Best of all, you'll travel in style with your friends from Southern Exposure!

Space is on a first-come, first-serve basis and is truly limited. To reserve your spot, call Southern Exposure at (269) 962-1255.



TEXT-ONLY ITINERARY:

DAY 1

Depart U.S.

Fly overnight from the U.S. to Milan, Italy.

DAY 2

Arrive Milan, Italy

Upon arrival in Milan, an O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and escort you to your hotel. After some time to relax from your flight, we'll get to know the members of your group, including travelers who took the Genoa & Cinque Terre pre-trip extension. Dinner is on your own.

DAY 3

Explore Milan

After some free time to relax from your journey this morning, we'll enjoy our welcome briefing and an orientation walk, followed by lunch on your own. Later this afternoon, we'll gather together for a walking tour of Milan. The capital of Lombardy and Italy's second largest city, Milan was an important trading center for more than two millennia, and once served as the capital of the western half of the Roman Empire. Today, it's a vibrant, fashion-conscious metropolis with a population of 1.3 million. Our discoveries include a stroll along the cobbled streets of the Quadrilatero della Moda, Milan's world-renowned fashion district; and Duomo di Milano, Milan's magnificent Gothic cathedral. One of the world's largest churches (it can seat 10,000), the white-marble Duomo covers an entire city block and has some 3,200 statues and 135 spires adorning its extravagant façade—more than any other building in the world. We'll also stop for an outside view of Castello Sforzesco, a centuries-old fortress now home to notable galleries and museums, as well as Michelangelo's final unfinished statue, Rondanini Pietà.

Later, we'll gather at a local restaurant for a Welcome Dinner.

DAY 4

Explore Orrido di Bellano • Tirano

After breakfast, we'll depart Milan and journey to Orrido di Bellano, a waterfall and natural gorge where caves have been carved out by the water over the centuries. This area on the eastern shore of Lake Como was named Orrido (which means "horrific") for the howling echo noises the water makes flowing through the series of natural caves. We'll admire the beauty of this natural wonder from footbridges attached to the rocks, and we'll visit the Devil's House, a four-story tower of mysterious origins that appears to guard the waters of the ravine.

Then, we'll stop in Varenna, a picturesque fishing village nestled along Lake Como. We'll stroll along the waterfront area, where our Trip Leader will lead a discussion on how to spot good gelato. Then, you can enjoy lunch on your own—and you may seek out gelato now that you know what to look for—while enjoying panoramic views of the rugged mountains and pristine waters of Italy's third largest lake, before continuing on to Tirano. After some time to relax at our hotel, we'll dine at a local restaurant built into an ancient wine cellar for our first taste of the local Valtellina delicacies.

DAY 5

Traditional Life in the Valtellina Valley • Home-Hosted Dinner

After breakfast, we'll experience the region's scenic splendor and glimpse everyday Italian life in the Valtellina Valley. Set in the Alps near the Swiss border, the lush valley is renowned for its natural beauty, wine, and regional cuisine. Blanketed in orchards and terraced vineyards, Valtellina winemaking traditions pre-date even the ancient Romans. First, we'll learn about the valley's ancient population at the Parco delle Incisioni Rupestri (Rock Engraving Park) in Grosio. The site of human settlement since prehistoric times, Grosio is home to numerous relics dating back to Neolithic times, including the massive "Rupe Magna," where there are some 5,000 engravings of warriors, animals, and geometric shapes etched into its surface. We'll also explore the remains of an early medieval castle located on a nearby hilltop before enjoying an included lunch at a local agriturismo. Then, we'll return to Tirano for some leisure time. Or, you may wish to join your Trip Leader for an elective hike through the surrounding countryside where you can learn about the famous red wines of the region, and discover how stone walls are used to create the precipitous terraced vineyards of the valley.

Later this evening, we'll learn more about life in the Valtellina Valley when we join a local family for a Home-Hosted Dinner.

DAY 6

Bernina Red Train to Switzerland

After breakfast, we'll board the local Bernina Red Train at the Tirano station for a full-day excursion across the Alps and into Switzerland. One of the few rail journeys designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Bernina Red Train is not just the world's highest Alpine crossing (reaching an altitude of 7,400 feet), but also the steepest, with gradients up to 7%. Panoramic views from the train allow us to sit back, relax, and enjoy the unfolding Alpine scenery as we travel over bridges and viaducts, through tunnels, and past glaciers, picturesque villages, alpine meadows, and vineyards.

After crossing the border into Switzerland, we'll depart the train at the Diavolezza station to board a cable car that will transport us farther up the Alps to an altitude of almost 10,000 feet so we can enjoy the stunning panoramic views of the surrounding snow-cloaked mountains and glaciers. Then, we'll return to Diavolezza for a picnic lunch. Our train returns to Tirano late this afternoon.

Dinner is on your own this evening.

DAY 7

Franciacorta vineyard and winery tour • Franciacorta

After breakfast, we depart Tirano and head to Lago d'Iseo, the least known of the Lombard lakes, and the Franciacorta wine region. Along the way, we'll stop in Edolo to witness sweeping views of Val Camonica, an ancient valley in the central Alps carved by glaciers—and named for the Camuni people who inhabited the region in the Iron Age. Upon arrival in Franciacorta, we'll discover how Franciacorta produces some of the best sparkling wines in the world. Unlike other popular Italian sparkling wines like Prosecco, Franciacorta wines are hand-harvested, fermented in wooden casks, and aged by law for 18 months. After a walk through one of the vineyards that dot the lush hills of this bucolic region, we'll visit the Berlucchi winery, whose centuries-old cellars produced the first of the famous Franciacorta wines. Here, we'll learn about the methode champenoise method used to produce the wine's "sparkle." Then, we'll enjoy a wine tasting accompanied by a light lunch.

Dinner this evening is at our hotel.

DAY 8

Rovato • Italian cooking lesson

Meet the people who call Northern Italy home through conversations with a food vendor, a sculptor who works in bronze, and a woman in Verona who answers letters addressed to Shakespeare's Juliet.

After breakfast, we'll enjoy most of the day to relax at our lodgings or do some local exploring with lunch on your own. Later this afternoon, we'll regroup to take a bus ride to Rovato, where a local resident will meet us and show us the charms of this historic town in the Franciacorta hills. Afterwards, because of our small group size, we'll be able to enjoy a hands-on Italian cooking lesson this evening at a trattoria in Rovato—and reap the rewards of our efforts at dinner.

DAY 9

Transfer to Verona

After breakfast, we'll transfer to Verona, the city made famous by Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet—and second only to Rome in the number of ancient Roman ruins. Our morning walking tour features a visit to the Arena di Verona, the grand Roman amphitheater built in the first century A.D. With seating for 30,000, the Arena is still in use today and renowned for its presentations of open-air opera performances. After strolling through the market at Piazza delle Erbe (the old Roman forum), we'll have lunch at a local restaurant. Then, the rest of the day is at leisure to explore the elegant squares of Verona at your own pace.

DAY 10

Verona • Optional Mantua tour with boat ride

After breakfast, the day is yours to explore Verona independently, with lunch on your own. Or, you may join a full-day optional tour to explore nearby Mantua, an ancient city known as *la bella addormentata*—the sleeping beauty—by the locals. This optional excursion features a guided walking tour, a visit to Palazzo Ducale, lunch at a local restaurant, and leisure time in Mantua before returning to Verona in the late afternoon.

Our small group will all enjoy dinner this evening at a local restaurant in Verona.

Mantua tour - \$100/person

This optional tour journeys by train to Mantua, backdrop to Verdi's opera *Rigoletto*. Mantua sits beside three serene lakes, and your tour begins with a guided walking tour of the city including a visit to Palazzo Ducale, a palatial complex built between the 14th and 17th centuries. An included lunch at a local restaurant is followed by free time to explore Mantua's atmospheric streets and cobbled squares on your own before taking the train back to Verona by late afternoon.

DAY 11

Trento and the Dolomites • Bressanone (Brixen)

After breakfast, we journey north to the valleys, meadows, and towering peaks of the Italian Dolomites. Our first stop is Trento, noted in history as the locale of the Council of Trent, which began the Counter Reformation and brought half of Europe back to Roman Catholicism in the mid-16th century. We'll enjoy a walking tour of Trento, followed by some free time to explore on our own. Or, you may wish to join our

Trip Leader to visit Castello del Buonconsiglio, a mighty fortress in the heart of the city that was home to Trento's bishop-princes from the 13th century until 1801.

After lunch at a local restaurant in Trento, our northern journey continues to Bressanone (also known as Brixen), the oldest city in the Alto Adige. Upon arrival, we'll enjoy a discussion about the South Tyrol region from a local expert followed by an orientation walk along the medieval streets of this Austrian-influenced city founded in 901. Dinner is on your own this evening.

DAY 12

Ladin villages of Val Gardena • Bressanone

After breakfast, we'll depart by bus to Val Gardena, a magical valley nestled in the heart of the Dolomites where a trio of languages is spoken: German, Italian, and Ladin. Several of these small Alpine villages in the Val Gardena are centers of Ladin culture. An ethnic minority of about 35,000 people living in five valleys in a corner of the Dolomites, Ladins developed their own language—unrelated to German or Italian, it's the oldest language of Italy's Alpine region. Because of our small group size, we'll meet up with a Ladin-speaking resident of the region who will accompany us while we hike amidst the scenic beauty of the Dolomites. At Sella Pass, one of the most scenic mountain passes in the Dolomites, we'll breathe in the crisp mountain air during a brief hike toward Saslong, a legendary mountain slope where world cup skiers compete. Then, after lunch at a local chalet, we'll journey back to Bressanone, arriving late this afternoon. Dinner is on your own this evening.

DAY 13

Villages of South Tyrol • Bolzano

South Tyrol is an idyllic enclave of picturesque villages, medieval castles, and rolling hills. An Austrian territory for centuries, some 70% of South Tyroleans speak German as their first language. After breakfast, we'll depart by train to Bolzano, the picturesque provincial capital of South Tyrol, where we'll enjoy a walking tour to view its medieval splendor and pastel-painted homes. Afterward, travelers may wish to visit Bolzano's Museum of Archaeology, which features Otzi the Iceman, the incredibly well-preserved 5,300-year-old mummy discovered in the region in 1991.

After lunch on your own in Bolzano, we'll return to Bressanone with the remainder of the day at leisure. Dinner is at a local restaurant in Bressanone this evening.

DAY 14

Valsugana • Apple orchard experience • Venetian countryside

We depart Bressanone after breakfast, leaving the towering peaks of the Alps for the enchanting hills of the Veneto region. Our journey will take us to Valsugana, a fertile plateau dotted with vineyards and pristine lakes and streams. Apples and other fruits have been cultivated in this scenic region for centuries, and we'll spend some time at an apple orchard farm. Here, we'll meet with the farmer and learn about local apple cultivation and the production of apple-derived products such as juice, cider, and vinegar—and how apples are incorporated into the local cuisine, especially in desserts and cakes. After lunch at the farm along with a sampling of the delicious apple varieties grown here, we'll continue our journey into the Veneto region. This evening, we'll enjoy a Farewell Dinner at our lodgings, an ancient villa set in the Venetian countryside.

DAY 15

Return to U.S.