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The 30 greatest Italian holidays

By Kiki Deere



Ah, Italy. It is a perennial favourite, of course, with its cradles of culture – Venice, Rome and Florence – attracting the bulk of tourists. But there is so much more to be discovered away from the big-hitting highlights.

This year, there's an increased focus on outdoor activities, with hiking and cycling holidays popular choices. While Tuscany's rolling hills have long been the go-to rural escape for British travellers, they are only part of the story. Hit TV series such as *The White Lotus* have put Sicily firmly on the tourist map, and there is a wealth of experiences to be had, including sailing the volcanic Aeolian Islands on a classic wooden windjammer.

And while we have listed some firm favourites in our list, we hope to inspire you with getaways that are not your conventional Italy holiday, too, from learning about Ladin culture in the German-speaking Alta Badia region to horse-riding through the wilds of Molise in central Italy.

Prices and temperatures soar in July and August so, if you can, try and visit outside these months. If you can only travel then, but don't like the idea of overly hot weather, make for the mountains instead, where altitude will give you a welcome respite from the stifling heat further south.



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Abruzzo

Wild wanders

This east-coast region is home to some of Italy's wildest landscapes – the Gran Sasso and Majella are among the highest massifs in the country outside the Alps, with wild animals including wolves, endangered Marsican brown bears and chamois roaming the dense beech forests. This five-night tour combines e-biking and walking, taking visitors across the Majella and Gran Sasso National Parks along quiet paths that meander through forested valleys and high plateaus, stopping off to refuel with hearty mountain fare.

[The five-night trip with The Slow Cyclist](#) costs £3,250pp, and includes airport transfers, tour guides, accommodation, meals, all activities, e-bikes and helmet hire. Flights not included.

Umbria

Saints and sights

2023 marked the start of three years of celebrations to celebrate the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, who left an indelible mark on Umbria, with no shortage of monasteries, shrines and pilgrimage routes associated with his life. This trip includes Francis's birthplace of Assisi, taking in the spectacular frescoes of the Basilica di San Francesco along with the Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli, where Saint Francis announced he would cultivate poverty, founding the Franciscan movement. The holiday also includes a wine tasting tour and a leisurely boat ride across Lake Trasimeno, where Hannibal famously defeated the Roman army during the Second Punic War.

[Ramble Worldwide's Sights and Delights of Umbria](#) trip costs from £1,479 pp including seven nights' half-board with one lunch, wine with evening meals, flights, transfers, local transport, guided walks, wine tasting tour and lunch at a local vineyard.

Molise

Horseriding heaven

Sleepy, mountainous little Molise, snugly tucked away in central Italy, remains well off the tourist radar – and there's no better way to explore this rugged region than on horseback. A recently launched trail ride follows the region's tratturi, ancient sheep and cattle-driving routes used by shepherds and herders to move their flocks from high pastures to the lowlands in winter.

The [Tratturi Altomolise Trail with Far and Ride](#) costs from £950pp including six nights' accommodation in shared rooms, all meals, wine and beer with lunches and dinners, five days of riding and transfers to/from Isernia train station. Flights not included.

Positano

Boutique rooms

Franco Zeffirelli was one of Italy's greatest opera and film directors, whose adaptations of Shakespeare tragedies brought him international fame. His former home is now a boutique hotel, set in a dramatic location perched on a cliffside above Positano on the Amalfi Coast – all lush gardens, secluded terraces and hidden pools shaded by tropical plants. The villa houses Zeffirelli's memorabilia and family heirlooms, with original sketches for his sets also on display.

Treville Positano (00 39 089 812 2401) offers doubles from £675 on a B&B basis. [Plan the perfect holiday on the Amalfi Coast with our guide.](#)

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Pompeii

Astounding archeology

Earlier this year, artworks depicting scenes from Greek mythology were uncovered in Pompeii, while last year the site's Casa dei Vettii reopened after 20 years' restoration, revealing head-turning frescoes and offering an incredible insight into Roman domestic life. As well as Pompeii and nearby Herculaneum, this tour includes a visit to Paestum, an ancient Greek city on the Tyrrhenian Sea where you can admire beautifully preserved Doric temples.

[Travelsphere](#) runs eight-day trips from £1,424pp, including return flights, tour guides, accommodation and meals.



Rimini

On your bike

The 111th edition of the Tour de France is set to host its Grand Départ on Italian soil for the first time this year, with the opening stage from Florence to Rimini. To mark the occasion, a new self-guided cycling holiday in Emilia Romagna takes biking enthusiasts from Parma to Modena, with a leisurely itinerary (complete with luggage transferred ahead by road) designed to allow time to take in the sights and refuel with local specialities along the way.

[Inntravel's](#) six-night Flavours of Emilia Romagna is priced from £1,065pp based on two sharing, including B&B accommodation, bike hire, route notes and maps, GPS navigation, luggage transfers, and a guided visit to a balsamic vinegar producer with tasting. Electric bikes available for a supplement of £33pp. Flights not included.

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Verona

Operatic immersion

The Arena di Verona Opera Festival has an incredible programme of events taking place throughout the summer, from operas to other musical performances by world-renowned artists. Two dedicated arrangements offer a novel way of experiencing the event – one with backstage passes to soak up the vibes before performances begin, the other with a Michelin-starred meal on the Arena's Star Roof before taking front-row seats.

A [three-night trip with Citalia](#) costs from £699pp, including return flights, three nights on a B&B basis, a night at the Arena di Verona and private transfers. The additional Michelin-starred dining experience is priced at £995 pp and includes a gourmet dinner with wine and front-row seats; the Backstage VIP pass experience is priced at £475 pp and includes stall seats.



Sicily

Nature and culture

Italy's largest island has been in the spotlight recently, its arresting landscapes the setting for episodes of comedy-drama series *The White Lotus*. Its capital, Palermo, is abuzz this year as it celebrates the 400th anniversary of the Festino di Santa Rosalia, with scores of events held throughout the year. The central focus is the historical parade on July 14 and 15, when the saint's statue is carried from the city's Norman Palace to the seafront aboard a lavishly embellished handcrafted float. The parade culminates in a spectacular fireworks display over the city.

[Villa Igiea](#) offers rooms starting from £469 per night on a B&B basis. [Plan the perfect holiday in Sicily with our expert guide.](#)



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Le Marche

Open-aired arias

Named 2024 Capital of Culture, the Adriatic coastal town of Pesaro in the Marche region has a long (and strong) musical tradition, with over 80 musical festivals held annually. The most prestigious is the [Rossini Opera Festival](#) in August (the city is the birthplace of the composer), although it's not only Pesaro that excels in operatic tradition – the Marche's [Macerata Opera Festival](#) celebrates its 60th anniversary this summer with *Norma* by Vincenzo Bellini, one of the first operas staged in the town's open-air neoclassical arena.

Scott Williams' latest addition to its portfolio is [Casa Aria](#), set in the Marche countryside. Sleeping up to 10 in six bedrooms, it comes with a panoramic swimming pool, sauna and steam room, with prices starting from £8,685 per week.



Florence & Venice

Arts and crafts

A recently launched foundation helps visitors scratch beneath the surface of two of Italy's greatest art cities, introducing them to Florence and Venice's hidden artisans. [The Place of Wonders](#) seeks to safeguard and promote artistic craftsmanship, providing exclusive access to family-run workshops, from porcelain-making ateliers and historic workrooms producing luxury cashmere in Florence to lampwork and jewellery studios in Venice.

Experiences are based on voluntary donations that go towards funding full scholarships for Italian craft students. In Florence, visits can be organised through [The Place Firenze](#), where rooms are priced from £580; in Venice, through [Londra Palace Venezia](#), where rooms are priced from £555. [Plan the perfect trip to Florence with our expert guide.](#)

Puglia

Architecture in style

Occupying the heel of Italy, Puglia has increasingly been on visitors' radars in recent years, and little wonder – its whitewashed villages, Baroque architecture and powdery beaches with turquoise waters are a major draw, as is the region's cuisine, heavily influenced by the region's former Greek and Spanish rulers. The Apulian masserie (farmhouses) and famous trulli, distinctive conical buildings built as temporary storehouses or dwellings, have been converted into chic guesthouses and luxury hotels.

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In partnership with StayOne, [Mandarin Oriental Exclusive Homes](#) has launched a couple of new holiday homes in Puglia this season, including the ten-bedroom Masseria Pistola, which combines original architectural features, including conical trulli ceilings and gable-roofed arches. Prices start from £1,430 per night.

