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Home » articles » 2017 » 09 » THE ALLURE OF ITALY | New York Lifestyles Magazine

**THE ALLURE OF ITALY***Sorrento***By Jeff & Stephanie Sylva**

Italy—endearing, enchanting, captivating and so inspiring. But it really sounds best in its own language “Bellissimo Italia!” For a glorious two weeks, we explored the Amalfi Coast and all its wonders: romantic towns and villages and marveled at spectacular vistas and rugged coastlines. We feasted on delectable cuisine, from fresh seafood and gourmet pizzas to homemade pasta and risottos paired with outstanding local wines. The customized itinerary was expertly planned by Perillo’s Italy Vacations. Here, some of the highlights of what to see and do!

**DAY 1—ROME**

Our itinerary began in Rome with a stress-free day of perusing the Eternal City. The hop-on/hop off bus made it convenient to explore and stroll the charming streets and piazzas and historical centers. With an overnight stay at centrally located Rose Garden Palace, an elegant hotel with a perfect location just off Via Veneto, guests can rest and enjoy the peaceful rose garden, a perfect respite after a day of sightseeing. Be sure to make reservations for a superb dining experience in the hotel's Il Roseto. The glass-enclosed restaurant is famous for their homemade pasta.

*Rome***DAY 2 TO 6—SORRENTO, POMPEII & AMALFI COAST**

The next morning it's off to Sorrento, a town popular with both foreign and local tourists for its inviting Mediterranean climate. Visitors are attracted to its stunning views from its many luxury hotels perched on the sea cliffs; its proximity to the Amalfi Coast, Naples, and Pompeii; and its prized limoncello—Southern Italy's after-dinner digestive made from the zest of lemons.

Go ahead and explore Sorrento's main attractions like Centro (the town's historic section), the Piazza Tasso (the main square), and its quaint waterfront. You just may forget the hours slipping away as you wander around narrow streets and alleyways. Pick up a few souvenirs in one the many colorful shops, and enjoy a meal at that quaint trattoria, and sampling—what else?—limoncello. You'll soon notice the streets are lined with lemon trees sprouting lemons the size of grapefruits.

For those who enjoy historical aspects try to visit the archaeological site of Pompeii. Knowledgeable guides recount how this thriving Roman city was buried under 20 feet of volcanic ash after Vesuvius erupted in 79AD. The excitement has only begun after a drive up to the volcano. Then, after a brief hike to the crater's edge, you have the thrill to walk nearly three-quarters of the way around the rim.

The best is yet to come! The highlight of any trip to the Amalfi Coast is Positano—the vertical town—best known for its menagerie of colorful pastel-painted houses, hotels, and villas that cling to the vertical terrain. Enjoy exploring the many shops with handmade leather sandals, hand-crafted ceramic goods, and Positano's famed lightweight linen fashions.

Amalfi, the largest town on this coast, has a quaint seafront promenade and numerous medieval buildings of historical interest. And, of course, Ravello, perched 1,000 feet above the coast, is a charming village with many beautiful garden villas ready to be discovered. It's also famed for its classical music concerts. However, the main attraction of our Amalfi tour was the drive itself. The Amalfi Drive offers some of the most dramatic coastal scenery in the world.

**DAY 7 TO 8—CAPRI**

Our next destination was the beautiful Isle of Capri, just a short ferry ride from Sorrento. Because of its stunning scenery and location, it was a favorite hideaway of the Roman emperors centuries ago. The best way to experience this idyllic island is by boat which will take you into many beautiful grottos along the soaring cliffs. You'll get to see the iconic Faraglioni Rocks and, of course, the entrance of the famous Grotta Azzurra (Blue Grotto). For those who want to soar to new heights, take the chairlift to the top of Monte Solaro. Located in Anacapri (it's less touristy) you'll find new vistas everywhere you turn. Hiking fans should take advantage of tours to Arco Naturale (Natural Arch) and be sure to visit Jardins d'August, the botanical gardens with beautiful sea views just outside of town.

**DAY 9 TO 11—FLORENCE**

Next on the itinerary is Florence our home base for three days with the charming picturesque hill towns of Tuscany and Umbria. First is the tiny hill towns Siena and San Gimignano. Siena has long been famous for its art, museums, and Palio, a traditional medieval horse race run around the Piazza del Campo. San Gimignano—The Town of Fine Towers—is known for its feudal architecture, particularly the preservation of fourteen tower houses. San Gimignano is as charming as it is historical. Be sure to try the local white wine, Vernaccia. To cap off the day, we indulged in an excellent dinner and wine tasting at a classic Tuscan winery and sampled their specialties including Super Tuscany, Chianti Classico, and Nobile de Montepulciano.

On day two it's off to Cortona and Assisi, two picturesque villages located in Italy's central region. Cortona's main attractions include a variety of churches, classic medieval architecture, remains of the Etruscan wall, and the villa Bramasole, which was used as the location for the 2003 film *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Assisi is revered as the birthplace of St. Francis and a visit to the massive two-level Basilica of St. Francis is a must; it houses the saint's stone sarcophagus.

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### DAY 12 TO 15—CINQUE TERRE

The final leg of the trip brought us to probably the most engaging place on earth! Cinque Terre (Five Lands) is a series of five little towns amazingly constructed into the steep, terraced hillsides of this seductive 10-kilometer stretch of the Italian Riviera. All five towns, the coastlines, and surrounding terraced hillsides are part of Cinque Terre National Park. Each of the villages is a picture-perfect collection of pastel-colored homes and shops flowing down to a picturesque sea, except for Corniglia, which is perched on a bluff above the sparkling blue waters of the Mediterranean.

Because of their natural isolation, cars are thankfully scarce, and in some areas of the villages, non-existent. All of the villages are connected by train service, making travel between them easy. But most people come to Cinque Terre to walk the trails. Although two of the connecting trails have been closed for some time because of landslides, we found more than enough challenge. The trails have what sometimes seem like endless steps, but the magnificent views make an effort worth it.

We learned much about the region by taking Enjoy Cinque Terre Boat Tours. Owner and captain Daniele Faggioni enthusiastically shared his love of his hometown, Manarola, while serving up the history, culture, and stories of Cinque Terre as we cruised the coastline soaking in fantastic views of the sea.

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### THE PERSONAL TOUCH

A leader in travel to Italy since 1945, Perillo Tours launched its customized tour division, ItalyVacations, in 2009. The largest and most experienced tour company for Italy, it will arrange everything for a customized itinerary—hotels, days tours, all transportation within Italy (including trains, ferries, and private car service).

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## DINING AL FRESCO



Dining in Italy is filled with many delights. Centuries-old regional dishes are being rediscovered and presented in modernized versions. As expected, there are more pasta dishes in Italy than there are forks, so don't limit yourself to spaghetti. With 5,000 miles of coastline, fish abounds as well, and meat dishes are imaginative and varied. Wind up the meal with a fine distilled grappa, available in most bars and restaurants.

Almost every evening in Italy, the cena (dinner) is the principal entertainment. Fine restaurants can be found in every city and town (and in many an out-of-the-way corner), and family trattoria know how to make the most of their bounties; they offer a mix of comfort, sophistication and market-fresh foods.

-The Editors

## PIZZA...PIZZA!



No doubt, pizza is one of the world's preferred meals, but above all, it is one of Italy's favorites. Indeed, approximately one million pizzas are consumed in Italy every day. Tasting this delicious foodstuff while admiring a gorgeous panorama—whether on Capri's Piazzetta, in the shadow of Vesuvius, or perhaps in the side streets of Rome—is priceless. The sensation of crispy, wood-baked dough mixed with hot tomato and gooey cheese melting away with each bite, is simply ecstasy of the senses.

### A BIT OF HISTORY

Pizza is an original dish of Italian cuisine, even though its history is still pretty contested, with debates over its geographical birthplace. Nevertheless, even ancient peoples, such as the Egyptians, Romans, and Greeks ate focaccia bread very similar to pizza; and writings from the year 1000, have been discovered in Italian towns.

Despite the likelihood of its ancient birth date, it is certain that a flatbread was coined as pizza in Naples around 1500 (the word pizza probably deriving from pitta, which will remind Anglo-Saxons of the Greek Pita bread).

### ON THE MENU

Besides its variety of shapes and sizes, pizza also comes with a variety of toppings and even methods to customize it to taste and digestion.

Of course, the most famous of pizzas is the Margherita, created by a Neapolitan pizza maker in honor of Queen Margherita in 1889; it consists of mozzarella, tomato, olive oil, garlic, oregano, and basil. Aesthetically, it is also the most "patriotic" of pizzas, with its red tomatoes, white mozzarella and green basil representing the tricolor of the Italian flag. Then, there's the very basic Marinara made only with tomato, garlic, oregano and olive oil. For cheese lovers, the Quattro Formaggi comprises mozzarella, fontina, gorgonzola, and provolone. Just as tasty is the Boscaiola with mushrooms and sausage.

Hundreds of pizza combinations exist, but don't tell the purists in Italy that your pizza comes with pineapple! They just wouldn't understand.

-The Editors

For more information on **Perillo Italy Vacations**, visit [italyvacations.com](http://italyvacations.com).

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*Jeff and Stephanie Sylva are retired English and Social Studies high school teachers who have been freelance travel writers for over 28 years. They've been publishing in many national publications and who love to write about the great outdoors and, of course, travel.*

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