

ITALIAN JOURNEYS

4400 Cold Springs Road, Winston-Salem, NC 27106

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Venice and the Veneto

Day 1

Arrive in Venice at the Marco Polo Airport. Pick up your rental car. Drive to Mira, a small town on the Brenta Canal. You are staying at the Villa Margherita. Map and instructions enclosed. This is a villa hotel off the via Nazionale just east of Mira and across the road from the Brenta Canal. Plenty of parking. You have a superior double room for two nights.

Shower, grab something to eat, and be ready to meet your guide Wilma at the hotel at 2:30. (Ask the hotel to recommend a place for a quick lunch. Their restaurant is closed on Wednesday. They may offer to make you sandwiches.)

With Wilma you will drive to Vicenza to visit Palladio's masterpiece, the Villa Rotonda (which is only open on Wednesdays, inside and outside) and Ai Nani, a sweet little villa with exquisite frescoes throughout by eighteenth century artists Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo and his son Giambattista Tiepolo. The villas are within walking distance of each other.

For dinner, I recommend that you try the Vecchia Brenta, just down the road from your hotel. Ask the hotel for details. They do exquisite fish! And exquisite risotto. Remember, you are in the land of fish and rice. (I loved their pumpkin risotto—*zucca*.) Don't expect the pastas to be as good as they were in Rome. And do try a Sgroppino somewhere along the line—a lemon sorbet laced with grappa. Very Veneto. But maybe not wise your first night out.

Day 2

Meet Wilma at 9:30 at the hotel for a full day of villas, starting with the Malcontenta, by Palladio, and including his Villa Cornaro. You are in the land of villas, and Wilma is the person to show them to you.

For dinner, I recommend the hotel's restaurant just across the way. Lovely food—mostly fish, and a beautiful setting.

Day 3

Check out of the hotel.

You are going to meet Wilma in Vicenza for a morning tour of the city. She will tell you where and when to meet her and how to get there. Vicenza is, as you know, wall-to-wall 16th century palaces. Quite extraordinary. She is picking up another group in the afternoon, so you will be on your own for lunch, etc.

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In the afternoon, you will want to drive on to Verona. If time permits, you can stop at the castle of Soave for a glass of wine. Ask Wilma for details. I haven't actually done this myself.

In Verona, you are staying at the delightful and whimsical Gabbia D'Oro. Driving instructions enclosed. The hotel has valet parking—euro 47 for two nights.

Verona has some super restaurants. I have booked the **Osteria la Fontanina** for 8:00. It is a bit of a walk, across the river. Or you can take a cab. Magical setting. Wonderful food. And the nicest young couple runs the place. We thought we'd died and gone to heaven the first time we ate there. Ask the hotel to book this for you.

I also like the Bottega del Vino with a wine list like a telephone book. It's bustling, with long wooden tables, very good food, great wine, and quite chic in a rustic way. I've heard them accused of having an attitude. You might ask your guide, Lisa, on Saturday, for her recs.

Day 4

Meet Lisa at your hotel at 9:30 for a full day tour of Verona. Lisa is an American married to a Veronese and an excellent guide.

Day 5

Check out of your hotel. You will meet Lisa for a day in the country. Together you can discuss the details, but I have told her that you definitely want to visit the Brion Tomb (Carlo Scarpa.) Other possibilities include Possagno which has a Canova (18th century neo-Classical sculptor) museum that was designed by Scarpa. Bassano is a charming town at the foothills of the mountains and is famous for its wooden bridge designed by Palladio—whose bridges, in some company, are even more important than his villas. And you will definitely want to visit the Villa Barbero, a quasi-Palladian villa with wonderful frescoes by Veronese. The frescoes are actually the star of the show.

Finish the day at the Villa Cipriani in Asolo. This is one of those places that is going to be very difficult to leave.

I love the hotel but not the restaurant. Try Ai Due Archi a short walk from the hotel for dinner. If you don't mind driving, there is an excellent restaurant in Monfumo. (Monfumo is closed on Monday. Both are open on Sunday.) Ask at the desk for details, reservations, and for other recommendations.

Day 6

A day on your own to explore Asolo and to visit the lovely Villa Emo. Another Palladian villa and certainly the one I would most like to live in. Ask the hotel for driving instructions and hours. (It should be open on Monday!) A bit of gossip: the English

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woman you may see in the gift shop owns the place. (She rarely speaks and thus it's hard to know if she's English.) She married an Italian playboy who decided he liked his sports cars better than his wife and villa so he packed up and left. The villa is now on the market. So sad. Do you think we could pool resources and work out a timeshare?

In Asolo, you must visit the scarf shop. Just up the road from your hotel, under the arcade on the left side of the street. Ask to see the scarves designed by Scarpa. There is a nice glass shop next door but make sure you get them to swear up and down that the glasses, should you buy any, are insured against breakage.

Day 7

Drive to Padua. There is parking near the train station, which is also near the Scrovegni Chapel. You will meet your guide, Deborah, at 10:30 at the entrance to the Eremitani Museum, which is a where you purchase tickets for the Scrovegni Chapel. She has booked you two entrances, which means you will have a full half hour in the chapel rather than the usual fifteen minutes.

You will have the remainder of the morning to see Padua with Deborah. It is an enchanting medieval city with wonderful piazzas, markets, the second oldest university in Europe and Il Santo, the sprawling cathedral dedicated to Sant'Antonio. It's a pilgrim destination and interesting as such. Lots of stuff inside. But you must take some time to appreciate the bronze equestrian statue of Gattamelata (The "Honey Cat") who stands guard outside. It's one of the most important bronze statues in existence.

From Padua, you will continue on to Venice where you turn in the car. There should be a rental car office in **Piazzale Roma**, which is the furthest point that you can go by car. From Piazzale Roma, you should take a water taxi to your hotel, the Palazzo Sant'Angelo, which is right on the Grand Canal.

Restaurants: I have booked you dinner at Da Fiore for Thursday night. It is fabulous. Make sure you cancel if your plans change. Other restaurants I like:

Ai Gondolieri is across the Accademia bridge, not far from Casa Artom. Wonderful MEAT! You may be eager for some! And an all around excellent restaurant.

Trattoria alla Madonna, on the other side of the Rialto, is a huge and bustling fish restaurant. They do not take reservations. It is an institution in Venice.

The Cantinone Storico is just over the Accademia and is a lovely little spot run by very nice people.

Fiaschetteria Toscana, is beyond the Rialto, in the Cannaregio. Maybe ten or fifteen minutes walk from the hotel. Excellent Venetian food. Try their liver if you like liver even a little bit.

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A note about concerts: There are Baroque music concerts all over town, many of them performed by students, which is fantastic for them. Concerts at the Scuola San Rocco are particularly nice since you'll be surrounded by Tintoretts.

Day 8

Meet Agnese at your hotel at 9:00 for a full day of touring. You can discuss with her the various sites that you want to see. Here is my list of favorite (and quirky) sites—to see with or without a guide, in no particular order:

Scuola di San Giorgio for the Carpaccio paintings

Scuola di San Rocco for the Tintoretts

Church of the Frari for the Titians

Querini Stampalia (exhibit space) for the Scarpa design

Santa Maria dei Miracoli, which is the most beautiful little church on earth

A note on the *vaporetti*—water buses. You have a station right outside your hotel. You may find it convenient to purchase a three-day pass. For this, you must go to the Rialto *vaporetto* station, since the Sant'Angelo station is tiny. The *vaporetti* run on the honor system. They assume that everyone has paid their fare. And just to be sure, they frequently run checks and fine anyone without a ticket.

Day 9

Afternoon with Agnese. You should ask her to help you coordinate water taxis for tomorrow. It's always best to establish a price ahead of time. She knows some good people.

Dinner at Da Fiore tonight at 8:00. I have booked this. This is a knock your socks off tiny fish restaurant. The best fish I have ever eaten. Expensive but well worth it. Note: it is hard to find. Make sure the hotel shows you where it is. You can get there by water taxi—at considerable expense, or you can take the *vaporetto* (water bus) to the other side of the Grand Canal and work your way into the restaurant.

Day 10

Island day.

Massimiliano, at the Venini glassworks, will be expecting you at 9:30, to see the showroom and to visit the glassworks. This is very exciting. They don't normally let tourists visit here. The glass is fabulous and their designs are in museums throughout the world.

You will need a water taxi for this day, and I suggest you ask Agnese or the hotel to organize this for you. Here is what I suggest: leave the hotel in time to arrive at Venini at 9:30. Visit Venini, take some time to stroll along the quay, and then meet your taxi,

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perhaps near the landing point near the cathedral, at, say, noon. Then go to Torcello to visit the church and for lunch at the Locanda Cipriani. Ask the hotel to book your lunch and to check the opening hours for the little church on Torcello. Make sure you visit it either before or after lunch. Torcello is a sweet little backwater island and the Locanda is very pleasant. This is where Hemingway liked to stay. The church has a fabulous mosaic of the Last Judgment. Then ask the water taxi to pick you up at, say, 3:30 and return you to Venice. If it rains, don't bother with Torcello.

Let's discuss this day with a good map in hand. You will want to make sure you know exactly where your boatman is meeting you, etc. And you should get his cell phone number in case your plans change.

Day 11

Free day in Venice.

Day 12

Depart. You will want to the hotel to get you a water taxi to take you to the airport. Once at the airport, you have to take this annoying shuttle bus—unless they have resolved constructions issues.

For further details:
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