

30 of the greatest Italian holidays

From exploring wild Abruzzo to a night at the opera in Verona, Italy is calling for 2023

[By Kiki Deere](#), Destination expert 29 April 2023



Tuscany's rolling hills have long been the go-to rural escape for British travellers Credit: getty

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.

Italy's 20 regions were only unified in 1861 and, to this day, each remains culturally unique. The topography varies greatly too, so there's plenty to suit all tastes, from trekking across glaciers in Valle d'Aosta – Italy's smallest region, tucked into the Alps – to tree camping in the underexplored landscapes of Le Marche.

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.

Glorious golfing - Tuscany



Argentario Golf & Wellness Resort. with Orbetello Lagoon in the distance Credit: Yasser Lashin

The 2023 Ryder Cup will be held in Italy for the first time this autumn (September 25 - October 1), played at the Marco Simone Golf & Country Club outside Rome. Golf and wellness aficionados can combine a trip with a stay at Tuscany's [Argentario Golf & Wellness Resort](#) (00 39 0564 810292), home to one of Italy's most scenic 18-hole par 71 courses that meanders through lush Mediterranean vegetation and olive groves, offering stunning vistas of the Orbetello Lagoon.

The resort has launched a special Ryder Cup stay-and-play package, with a reduced green fee at Marco Simone. Prices start from £961pp for a five-night stay, and include three rounds of golf at Argentario, a welcome dinner and daily access to the Espace Wellness Centre.

Wild wanders - Abruzzo

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. A new 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](#) (0207 060 4487) costs £3,495pp, and includes airport transfers, tour guides, accommodation, meals, all activities, e-bikes and helmet hire. Flights not included.

Saints and sights - Umbria

This year marks 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.

Adagio's (01707 537 214) [Sights and Delights of Umbria trip](#) costs from £1,520 pp including seven nights' half-board with one lunch, flights, transfers, local transport, guided walks, wine tasting tour and lunch at a local vineyard.

Horseriding heaven - Molise

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 newly 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](#) (01462 701 110) costs from £965 pp 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.

Franco Zeffirelli's - Positano



Positano's Villa Treville is the former home of Franco Zeffirelli

This year marks the centenary of the birth of Franco Zeffirelli, one of Italy's greatest opera and film directors whose adaptations of Shakespeare tragedies brought him international fame. In a dramatic location perched on a cliffside above Positano, on the Amalfi Coast, Zeffirelli's former home, Villa Treville, is now a boutique hotel – all lush gardens, secluded terraces and hidden pools shaded by tropical plants. Throughout the season, Villa Treville is hosting several events to pay homage to Zeffirelli, with memorabilia and original sketches for his sets on display, and themed dishes and cocktails at the restaurant.

[*Villa Treville*](#) (00 39 089 812 2401) offers doubles from £695, B&B.

Astounding archeology - Pompeii

Earlier this year, Pompeii's Casa dei Vettii reopened after 20 years' restoration, revealing head-turning frescoes while offering an incredible insight into Roman domestic life. As well as Pompeii, this tour run by archeology experts includes a visit to nearby Herculaneum and the recently opened exhibition *The Wood that Didn't Burn* at the Reggia di Portici (running until December 31), displaying rare wooden items recovered from the site.

[*Andante Travels*](#) (01722 671 084) runs eight-day trips from £2,805pp, including return flights, an expert guide-lecturer and tour manager, as well as accommodation, local travel, all visits as per the itinerary and all meals.

Federico Fellini's - Rimini

This year marks 30 years since the death of celebrated Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini, with scores of events taking place at venues throughout Emilia Romagna. Rimini's [Fellini Museum](#) is a good place to start, while Parma's [Magnani Rocca](#) is hosting a special exhibition dedicated to his life and works (runs until July 2). Two new Fellini-themed trips

take in the Fellini Museum, along with some of the director's favourite childhood haunts and iconic settings that served as inspiration for his films.

The two-day trips organised by [Visit Rimini](#) (00 39 0541 51441) are priced from £87, and include accommodation in a three-star hotel, afternoon tea at the Grand Hotel di Rimini, entrance to the Fellini Museum and one aperitivo. Flights not included.

Operatic immersion - Verona



Backstage at the Verona Opera

The Verona Opera Festival celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, with an incredible programme of events taking place throughout the summer, from operas to other musical performances by world-renowned artists including tenor Plácido Domingo. Two dedicated arrangements offer guests backstage passes to soak up the vibes before performances begin, along with the chance to enjoy a Michelin-starred meal on the Arena's Star Roof before taking front-row seats.

A [three-night trip with Citalia](#) (01293 324465) costs from £749pp, 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.

Nature and culture - Sicily

Italy's largest island has been in the spotlight recently, its arresting landscapes the setting for episodes of comedy-drama series *The White Lotus*. Several scenes were set in Cefalù, a coastal city with a fine sandy stretch of beach that also features in the long-awaited fifth episode of *Indiana Jones*, due on the big screen in June. A new self-guided, hotel-to-hotel

walking holiday combines culture and nature with a couple of days in Cefalù and moderate walks through the Parco delle Madonie, a national park with thriving biodiversity.

Inntravel's (01653 617001) [The Mountains of Sicily with Cefalù trip](#) costs from £1,355 pp based on two sharing, including 10 nights accommodation, B&B, three picnics, eight dinners, maps, luggage transfers and GPS.

Arboreal adventures - Le Marche

Bordered by the Apennines to the west and the Adriatic to the east, Le Marche is one of Italy's most unspoilt and little-visited regions. This new cycling trip traverses the region, with visitors pedalling through medieval hill villages, woodlands and vineyard landscapes stopping off for the night in tents suspended between trees. The trip ends on the Conero Riviera, a stretch of rugged coastline with white cliffs, pebble beaches and secluded coves.

Much Better Adventures' (0203 966 7597) five-night [Gravel Riding and Tree Camping trip](#) costs from £1,285 and includes cycle guides, accommodation, all meals, transfers, portage and equipment. Flights not included.

Arts and crafts - Florence

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

Experiences are based on voluntary donations that go towards funding full scholarships for Italian craft students. Visits can be organised through [The Place Firenze](#) (00 39 055 2645181), where rooms are priced from £580.

Architecture in style - Puglia



Masseria Pistola, which combines original architectural features, including conical trulli ceilings and gable-roofed arches

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.

In partnership with StayOne, [Mandarin Oriental Exclusive Homes](#) (07815011678) 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.

[New routes for 2023](#)

Family adventures - Tuscany

In the heart of Tuscany lies the WWF-affiliated Oasi Dynamo nature reserve, harbouring rare species of plants and providing a rich habitat for wildlife including deer and wolves. Children can swoosh across a lake on a new zip line and get involved in hands-on sustainable activities from wildlife tours and paper workshops using plants, leaves and seeds, to sensory activities, including discovering the sounds of nature and learning how to obtain ink and colours from the natural environment.

Stays at [Oasyhotel](#) (00 39 0573 1716062) start from £472 per lodge per night including breakfast, minibar access, e-bike usage, access to private lake and water sports and valet parking

Three-wheeled foray - Northern Italy

First introduced to Italy's roads 75 years ago, the iconic, three-wheeled Ape Piaggio has become a symbol of Italian way of life, its whirring and rumbling sound as distinctive as its shape. This adventurous new tour is aimed at younger travellers, whether solo or in small groups, who want to explore the country behind the wheel of an Ape, combining adventure, fun and food in four of Italy's northern regions. A little competitive streak is an optional bonus – there are challenges along the way – and there is the chance for teams to meet up at pre-booked hotels to share travel tales.

The [eight-night group trip with Large Minority](#) (07739 826279) is priced from £1,500pp, based on three travelling together, including breakfast and two dinners. Flights not included.

Ham and history - Friuli-Venezia Giulia & Veneto

Tucked away in Italy's north-eastern corner, hugging Slovenia and a little stretch of Austria, Friuli Venezia Giulia is often overlooked in favour of neighbouring Veneto. Along with some of Veneto's highlights outside of Venice, this new trip takes in Friuli's Trieste, an elegant Adriatic city that was once the Habsburg Empire's only port. The trip also includes a visit to the town of San Daniele del Friuli, renowned for its soft, buttery prosciutto that some would say edges the better-known prosciutto di Parma for quality and taste.

Cox & Kings' (03301 731321) eight-day fly-drive [Beyond Venice: Veneto and Friuli trip](#) is priced from £1,795 and includes flights, accommodation, one dinner, local transfers and guides.

Making a splash - Sardinia

Porto Flavia in southern Sardinia is an extraordinary sight: a 1920s mine carved into the rockface along the Masua coastline. Now you can combine a visit with a tour that takes in both diving and climbing. You'll travel by boat from Masua beach to Pan di Zuccheru, a sea stack that soars 133m into the sky, where you'll take part in an exhilarating climb along an ancient path once used by miners. Next, explore the underwater white limestone reefs of Pan di Zuccheru, whose walls are coated in soft corals, sponges and sea daisies.

[Sardinian Places](#) (01489 866 959) offer holiday stays in Southern Sardinia, with seven-night B&B packages starting from £916 including flights and private transfers or car hire. The full day tour with [Ajoa Dive](#) (00 39 329 633 2294) costs £130 and includes boat transfers and all diving equipment.

La dolce vita - Rome

It's 70 years since Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck gracefully zipped around the cobbled streets of the Italian capital on a Vespa in romantic comedy 'A Roman Holiday'. The best way to explore is on foot or on two wheels, getting lost in the city's narrow cobbled streets while taking in the many iconic sights that feature in the film. Rome is abuzz this year, with the Ryder Cup taking place at the end of September northeast of the city.

[Onefinestay](#) (0800 808 5830) offers a range of carefully curated holiday rental apartments and homes in the capital, with prices starting from £328 per night. A 24/7 concierge service is available to all guests, with services including private chefs and babysitting services.

A foodie foray - Emilia Romagna

This region is Italy's foodie heartland, the home of Parmesan cheese, Parma ham, balsamic vinegar and lasagne. This new gastronomic tour in the company of chef, broadcaster and food writer Valentina Harris includes a pasta-making class, visits to local markets, artisans and food producers complete with behind-the-scenes tours, along with cultural trips to galleries and museums, refuelling here and there with hearty meals at traditional restaurants.

[Kirker](#) (0207 593 2288) offers the [Italy's Gastronomic Heart \(in association with Harden's\)](#) tour from £2,692pp for five nights, including return flights, accommodation on a B&B basis, two lunches and three dinners and all entrance fees.

Scenic drives - Calabria & Basilicata



Vecchio borgo di Craco, Basilicata

Occupying the toe of Italy, sun-kissed Calabria remains well off the beaten track. A new self-guided road trip introduces visitors to the region's rich heritage, driving along wild stretches of the rugged Ionic coastline, taking in historical sites, powdery white sand beaches and sweeping sea vistas before crossing into Basilicata, home to the otherworldly troglodyte settlement of Matera.

[Wexas](#) (0208 125 4214) offers [a 12-day self-drive trip](#) from £3,645pp, including return flights, accommodation on a B&B basis, 12 days' car hire, three half-day private guided tours and a private home hosted dinner in Bari.

Coastal trails - Puglia

Southern Puglia offers an ever-changing landscape, with undulating hills gently leading to dry open grasslands that suddenly give way to white cliffs and turquoise waters. A new self-guided coastal walk stretching from Otranto to Gagliano del Capo takes in fabulous scenery over the course of a week, journeying along a coastal path through sleepy fishing hamlets and whitewashed villages before ending in Lecce, known for its creamy-sandstone baroque buildings.

The [seven-night self-guided walk](#) with Ramblers Walking Holidays (01707 537 275) starts from £755pp, including seven nights' accommodation on a B&B basis, two dinners, luggage transfer Days 3-7 inclusive, route notes in English with maps, digital walk information with an app and 24-hour assistance in English. Flights not included.

Eye for design - Turin & Milan

Turin's Fiat Lingotto factory was inaugurated 100 years ago, its iconic rooftop track famously featuring in the harum-scarum police chase in 'The Italian Job'. This new trip traces the development of Italian design from the turn of the 20th century to the present day, with visits to iconic buildings and access to private collections. Tours are led by expert lecturer Dr Philippa Joseph, with a complementary series of online talks running prior to the trip.

Martin Randall Travel (0208 742 3355) offers the [Modernism in Turin and Milan tour](#) from £3,320pp and includes flights, accommodation, one lunch, four dinners, travel by private coach, all admissions and the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Cause for celebration - Lake Como



Iconic hotel Villa Serbelloni celebrates its 150th anniversary this year

Last year saw Lake Como's iconic Villa d'Este celebrate its 150th season, but this year, the spotlight is on Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni, which celebrates its 150th anniversary, albeit on the opposite shore of the lake. Festivities include an exclusive gala party and concert for a select few international guests, a new signature cocktail named after the hotel's inauguration year (1873), and a special seven-course menu available at the Hotel's Michelin-starred Mistral, with dishes inspired by key moments of Italian history.

Doubles at [Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni](#) (00 39 031 950 216) start at £507, B&B.

Vie ferrate - Trentino

Scenic high-altitude trails crisscross the Dolomites, many equipped with vie ferrate – mountain routes with rungs, ladders and steel cables that cling to steep rock faces, making for an exhilarating way to take in the mountain panoramas. A new intermediate level climbing route takes keen hikers along the southern flank of the Pale di San Martino massif along a scenic trail through the Parco Naturale Paneveggio, crossing three vie ferrate and overnighting in traditional mountain huts.

The [three-day experience with Palaronda Trek](#) (00 39 0439 768867) costs from £215pp on a half-board basis. Flights not included.

Art and jazz - Umbria

The Umbria Jazz Festival celebrates 50 years this year, with an exciting line-up of artists set to play in the regional capital, Perugia (July 7-16), including musical icon Bob Dylan. This year, the city also celebrates Italian Renaissance painter Pietro Perugino, with an exhibition at the [Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria](#) (until June 11) to mark 500 years since his death.

The 10th-century [Hotel Castello di Reschio](#) (00 39 075 844 362) northwest of Perugia will host its own musical performances throughout the summer, welcoming Grammy Award-winning jazz pianist Steven Feifke. Art-lovers can take part in off-the-beaten track tours with art historians, taking in some of Perugino's hidden works in nearby cities.
Rooms start at £770, B&B.

Making waves - Aeolian Islands



Exploring the Aeolians is best done aboard a classic wooden windjammer sailing boat

The ruggedly beautiful volcanic Aeolian Islands can get exceptionally busy in summer, with prices hitting a peak in July and August. Experience all the beauty of the archipelago away from the crowds aboard a classic wooden windjammer sailing boat, with daily trips ashore to explore the islands. There are plenty of opportunities to swim and snorkel in secluded coves, and there are SUPs and kayaks for guests, too.

The eight-day Aeolian Islands sailing trip aboard Florette is a new addition to [VentureSail's](#) portfolio (01872 487288). Prices start from £1,060 on a half-board basis, including six meals, full crew and tuition, all tender trips during the voyage to and from the boat, and equipment.

Gourmet delights - Piedmont

The vine-clad hills of Piedmont's Langhe-Roero and Monferrato are real foodie territory, with outstanding restaurants and some of the world's best wines produced in the area, including fine Barolos and Barbarescos. Complete with 1920s wooden carriages, the recently launched historical food and wine [TrEno](#) rolls through the landscape, with a new itinerary added this year to enhance the experience. As well as wine tasting on board, gourmands will enjoy a traditional lunch in Nizza Monferrato, renowned for its Nizza DOCG wines made with Barbera grapes grown on hilly, south facing slopes.

Stay at [La Villa Hotel](#) (00 39 0141 793890), a 15-minute drive east of Nizza Monferrato, which reopens this year with a new wellness centre. Rates start at £225. The TrEno experience costs £140.

Wondrous walks - Lombardy

The cities of Bergamo and Brescia have jointly been named 2023 Capitals of Culture. The new 130km [La Via delle Sorelle walking route](#) connects the two cities, crossing undulating terrain in regional parks and the vineyard landscapes of wine-producing Franciacorta. Cultural sights and works of art punctuate the route, which is divided into six stages.

Walkers can create their own itinerary, selecting their preferred accommodation options for each leg of the journey. By purchasing an online pass (minimum €10 donation), walkers have access to preferential rates at hotels, with many offering hiker-friendly services such as packed breakfasts and laundry facilities.

Ladin culture - South Tyrol



South Tyrol offers a chance to learn about age-old Ladin traditions and customs Credit: Alex Moling

Alta Badia and Val Gardena are home to the Ladin people, who settled here thousands of years ago and share age-old traditions, customs and a common language in Ladin, part of the Romance family. Visitors can learn about this unique culture with a couple of new experiences, including time spent with a local beekeeper or a morning on one of the region's oldest family farms, followed by a traditional Ladin lunch.

[Badia Hill](#) (00 39 0471 180 8060) opens for its first summer season this year, complete with rooftop swimming pool, sauna and steam room, with rates from £200, B&B. The [Alta Badia Nos Ladins experiences](#) (00 39 0471 836176) cost between £22-40pp.

New heights - Valle d'Aosta

It may be Italy's smallest region but the Valle d'Aosta has no shortage of awe-inspiring scenery (it's home to Mont Blanc, after all). This July sees the [Matterhorn Glacier Ride II](#) go into operation, connecting the ski resort of Cervinia with Switzerland's Zermatt, offering

views of the Matterhorn from the moment you step onto the cable car until you reach the summit. In summer, over 400 kilometres of hiking trails crisscross the mountain peaks, with marmots and chamois a common sight.

Macs Adventure (0141 530 5452) offers the self-guided, six-day [Tour of the Matterhorn South](#) for experienced hikers, with two glacier crossings with experienced guides. Ending in Zermatt, the tour is priced from £1,080 and includes B&B accommodation in traditional mountain huts and hotels, four dinners, a qualified guide, route notes and maps. Flights not included.

Mastering culinary skills - Mount Etna

The volcanic soils of Sicily's Mount Etna are known to produce excellent wines along with outstanding agricultural produce, including plump lemons, olives and pistachios. Now you can get a flavour for the region's rich cuisine at Palazzo Previtiera, a centre for contemporary art with rooms on the slopes of the peak, with new four-day experiences featuring immersive wild food classes led by chef Ben Tish. You'll pick edible wild herbs on a foraging experience and take part in an Etna DOC wine masterclass.

The [four-day experience at Palazzo Previtiera](#) (00 39 0956 47386) costs £2,950 pp and includes all meals, accommodation, two cooking classes led by Chef Ben, a masterclass on Etna DOC Wines, a foraging experience, and a traditional granita making and tasting session.