

The Best of Italy

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The last two weeks of September were an exciting time for me and 26 members of the [Osher Lifelong Learning Institute](#) from Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois as we all enjoyed the Road Scholar program, [The Best of Italy: Rome, Florence and Venice](#). The early fall weather was perfect for sightseeing in Italy. We enjoyed sunny, warm days and refreshingly cool evenings that were perfect for exploring three of Italy's greatest cities. Road Scholar scheduled an orientation walk and a short lecture to introduce us to each city, and after that, we were ready for the expert-led field trips.

Our first field trip was to the Colosseum. Inside the Colosseum, we all stood in awe as we imagined 50,000 spectators in the seats around us. Then we took a group picture to post on the OLLI web site back home. After the Colosseum, our instructor took us to the Roman Forum and past the Arch of Constantine.

There is so much to see and do in Rome. We explored the Vatican Museums, saw Michelangelo's outstanding work in the Sistine Chapel, and marveled at the beautiful interior of St. Peter's Basilica, including the bronze Baldacchino by Bernini. We also enjoyed a trip to the Galleria Borghese, which houses world-class Baroque sculpture on the first floor and paintings by Caravaggio, Raphael, Titian, and Rubens on the second floor.

From our hotel, we could walk to the Trevi Fountain, Spanish Steps, Pantheon, and Piazza Navona. During our free time, we would walk to discover the many sights that were not on the main tour. For example, we rode the glass elevator to the top of the Victor Emmanuel Monument to see a 360 degree view of the whole city. We also went walking at night to see the many fountains, statues, and buildings lit up so we could see details that weren't noticed in bright sunlight.

After our orientation walk and lecture about the history of Florence and the Medici family, we toured the Bargello National Museum to enjoy a collection of Florentine sculpture. We also toured the Uffizi Gallery to enjoy paintings from the 13th through the 17th centuries. At the Galleria dell'Accademia we saw the 17-foot-tall sculpture of Michelangelo's **David**. Of course a trip to Florence would not be complete without a visit to Santa Maria del Fiore – the Duomo, the Baptistery, and the Duomo Museum. In our free time, I climbed the 414 steps to the top of the Campanile (bell tower), and I was rewarded with a fantastic view of the Duomo, with Brunelleschi's magnificent dome, and the whole city of Florence below.

Venice was the last city on our itinerary. Of special interest was the Basilica San Marco, with its gold mosaics, and the Doge's Palace. After a day of walking, everyone had a fun and relaxing gondola ride on the Grand Canal near the Rialto Bridge. The next day we took a vaporetto (water taxi) to Murano to see a glass- blowing demonstration.

Each city was special for its history, art, and architecture, and the food was always wonderful. From the antipasto to the tiramisu, every course was delicious. In Rome, we could snack on pizza and gelato on our free-time walks. There were so many flavors to enjoy! Everyone used the free time for shopping for everything from postcards to Murano glass, jewelry, and Italian leather.

This trip was an educational adventure that we will long remember. We experienced the thrill of learning by being there in person, and I think we are all inspired to keep on learning.