

go!

ITALY  
by bike

AND 4 OTHER SPECIALTY TOURS  
D4

AMERICA GOES 'KAMPING' In defense of KOA [newsday.com/travel](http://newsday.com/travel)



GO!

## ITALY NICHE TOURS

eat, drink,  
pedal,  
learnBY MARIE ELENA MARTINEZ  
Special to Newsday

**T**here is not just one Italy, but many Italys. (The country wasn't politically unified until the 19th century, after all). For the modern traveler, that means a wealth of different cultural, culinary and historical experiences for all tastes. The best way to navigate the abundance is with the help of an expert guide. Here are five specialty tours of Italy geared to a variety of interests and needs.

## THE ART HISTORY LESSON

A guided tour depends on expert knowledge — just what most of us need in approaching the vast artistic heritage of the country that gave us the Renaissance. Bravo Italian Tours focuses on the art cen-

ters of Florence and Rome, working directly with clients to customize a trip. Under Bravo's tutelage, you can spend your days in Rome in careful study of the Trevi Fountain, the Michelangelo-designed Piazza del Campidoglio or the impressive Piazza Navona; or craning your neck in

contemplation of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican; or marveling at the Titians, Caravaggios, Raphaels and Berninis that made the Borghese family the premier collectors of their time. In Florence, a thorough browsing of the permanent collection at the Uffizi Gallery could follow a visit to the Michelangelo's larger-than-life David at the Accademia. Cross the Arno River for an artisan's tour of the Oltrarno that highlights Florentine leatherworkers, silversmiths, shoe manufacturers and hatmakers. Rounded itineraries include food and wine experiences, along with other activities and confirmed lodging. Rates (not including airfare) vary depending on timing and level of travel. (312-238-9040; bravoitaliantours.com)



Some Italian tours offer visitors the chance to hone their cooking skills, such as this family-run cooking class in



Art aficionados can tour Italy's treasures guided by local experts. Above, visitors admire a painting in the Uffizi Gallery.

## THE FERRARI ROAD TRIP

The Italian roads drive a little more smoothly behind the wheel of a Ferrari, the country's famed luxury sports car, manufactured in Maranello since 1947. For its Ferrari Tour of Italy, Red Travel will set you up with a current model — options include a Ferrari 458 Italia/Spider, a Ferrari 612 Scaglietti F1 and others — and craft a one- to eight-day vacation through various combinations of regions, including Tuscany, Umbria, Lazio and the Northern Lakes (Maggiore, Como, Garda), and cities such as Milan, Rome, Florence, Venice and Naples. A personal tour director, also an expert

**ON THE COVER** A cyclist negotiates the road in Tuscany.



Ferraris near Florence: You could be in the

driver, will explain the finer points of the Ferrari driving experience, clarifying how the controls work and differentiating between models. Don't worry about getting lost; a tour director follows in a separate car to make all arrangements and care for the

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CAIO ANDIAMO PHOTO

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## THE FOOD AND WINE TOUR

Every trip to Italy is a food and wine trip — you can't help but feast your way across this country of enduring culinary traditions and hearty eaters. Ciao Andiamo's excursions build on that basic experience by tapping a network of small, family-run businesses. For example, in Tuscany, you can learn how to make pasta in a 17th century villa, visit a sheep farm to see how pecorino cheese is made and taste Chianti Classico and Vino Nobile wines. In Emilia-Romagna, makers of prosciutto di Parma, Parmigiana reggiano and balsamic vinegar will guide guests through production, while in Piedmont you can join a hunt for seasonal truffles, and then

See ITALY on D6

## reader tip

My husband and I went to Sicily with Club ABC Tours (clubabc.com) with the theme of learning to cook with a Sicilian chef. We stayed in Palermo and spent three days with the chef at Ristorante Cin Cin, Vincenzo Clemente, and his mother. Vincenzo did not give us recipes but rather explained what to do, let us loose and encouraged us to take notes and trade our recipes with the other participants. Then we got to sit down at a long table with much wine and eat our gastronomic delights. What fun! — Rande Spengler, Bohemia



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driver's seat.

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# Eat, drink, pedal, learn in Italy

ITALY from D5

nibble the finest cheeses in Bra, which hosts a major cheese festival every other September. In southern Campania, you can learn to make limoncello, the popular Italian liqueur; drop by a buffalo farm to learn about mozzarel-

la di bufala; talk with producers of fabled San Marzano tomatoes; and dine at the pizzeria that claims to have invented Neapolitan pizza 150 years ago. Rates begin as low as \$2,500 a person, depending on activities, level of service and length of trip. (917-652-6094; ciaoandiamo.com)



**Mangia, mangia!** Some Italy tours are formally centered around dining, drinking or learning how to cook as Italians do.

## THE GIRLFRIEND GETAWAY

Milestone birthday? Bachelorette party? Mommy's week off? Italy Vacations, a boutique division of Perillo Tours, recently launched a Girlfriend Getaway that takes in the sights, sounds, smells — and shops — of the country. Though the trips can be altered to specification, a sample seven-night excursion starts in Florence before heading to Cinque Terre, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of five villages built on terraced cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean. After a stop in Tuscany's Chianti region for some wine and food indulgence, the itiner-

ary continues down the Amalfi Coast, with stops in Sorrento and Positano. A full day of shopping follows on the island of Capri. Also on the agenda: beach time, cooking classes, and spa treatments at Amalfi's Hotel Santa Caterina or other wellness centers. Add a stop in Milan, settle at the Armani Hotel or Bvlgari Hotel, and seek some more Italian retail therapy. Set itineraries with airfare, lodging and most meals can start as low as \$3,499 a person (based on a group of 10 or more), but pricing varies depending on hotels, dates, itineraries and number of participants. (800-482-5925; italyvacations.com)

"Girlfriend Getaways" include cooking, beach time and a stop in Tuscany's Chianti region for wine tasting.



One way to work off that fine Italian food and wine is to tour by bike, as these cyclists do in the hills above Florence. There are tours for cyclists with different levels of ability.

## THE BIKE TOUR

For the athletic traveler, Bike Tours Italy offers itineraries for all rider levels. Over the course of six days, groups of eight to 14 cycle Italy's roads, taking in local culture, history, cuisine and, of course, landscape. Rides cover 13 to 50 miles a day, with longer routes available for those who want to test their endurance. Beginning riders should consider Puglia, bordered by the Adriatic Sea to the east and the Ionian to

the west, while riders at the intermediate level can head to landlocked Umbria, dotted with medieval hill towns. Intermediate riders looking for a challenge will find it in Piedmont, surrounded by the towering Alps and Apennines and home to wine towns such as Barbaresco and Barolo. In Tuscany, bikers can glide through Etruscan villages from Montepulciano to Chianti, taking in Renaissance masterpieces and feasting on Tuscan specialties such as freshly rolled *pici* pasta along

the way. The most demanding route is found in Sicily, which passes through the peaks and valleys of the island, ending at Siracusa's scenic volcanic harbor. Prices, which begin at \$4,095 a person, include the use of new aluminum bikes, helmets, hotels, most meals, local guides and access to sites. Planners can help you with pre- and post-trip planning, as well as booking flights. Dates are available through October. (888-396-5383; tuscanybiking.com)



When in Milan, do as the Milanese do, and pick up some cutting-edge fashions. Perillo Tours' "Girlfriend Getaway" offers premium retail therapy.