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# strada toscana

ITALY TRAVEL GUIDE

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## Discover Tuscany: Top 10 Tips

Learn the best ways to discover one of Italy's most beautiful, famous and historic regions.

## Explorers' Checklist

Love exploring places off the beaten path? Make sure you take these things along with you.

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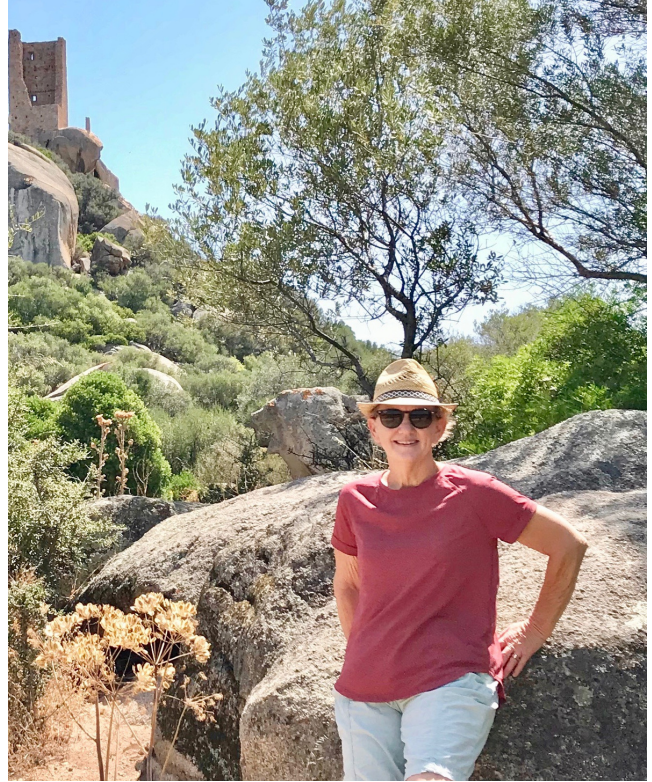
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Italian Caffè 101



# I'm so glad you've requested a copy of my Strada Toscana Italy Travel Guide!

After years of living in Italy, exploring hidden places and helping our guests to get to know Italy as an insider, I've learned that traveling to Italy and experiencing Italy are two very different things, and that in today's fast-paced, hurry up, check-that-off-my-bucket-list world it's more important than ever before to allow space for authentic experiences to emerge - to leave room in a trip itinerary for the in-depth, the unexpected and the spontaneous.



## "THE TRULY MAGICAL MOMENTS... ARE EXPERIENCED IN UNSPOILED, LESS-TRAVELED AREAS"

Although millions of tourists flock to Italy each year, the vast majority don't even come close to seeing authentic Italy. Of course there will always be "must-see" places in busy, tourist-filled areas that one really should see. But I've discovered that the most special moments - the truly magical moments, that one remembers for a lifetime, are experienced in unspoiled, less-traveled areas. That's why I created this guide: to help you get to know Italy as an insider.

So here's to discovery, authenticity and and experiencing that magical sense of wonder, off the beaten path.

Buon Viaggio

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela".

# Top 10 Tips for Discovering Tuscany

1. Visit larger cities, like Florence and Siena, and tourist-filled towns, like San Gimignano and Cortona, at the beginning of your trip when your energy level is at its peak.

2. Visit quieter towns and villages, off the beaten path, during the second part of your vacation, when you're craving a slower pace.

## 3. VISIT JUST ONE MEDIEVAL VILLAGE PER DAY, WITH A SECOND SCHEDULED ONLY AS A BACK-UP.

4. Rent a car, because it's the best way (and often the only way) to really get off the beaten path. Plus, the roads in Tuscany are generally well-marked and the drives are beautiful in-and-of-themselves.




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5. Opt for a navigational system in your rental car, or use your Smartphone. Although navigational systems are not foolproof (and can be incomplete in rural areas) they can definitely save you hours of aggravation.

6. Schedule down-time during afternoon rest, riposo, hours, since shops and restaurants in rural areas usually observe it. Hours can vary for each establishment but in general...

- Restaurants open for lunch at 12:30pm, and then close for riposo around 3:00pm. They usually open again for dinner at 7:30pm - 8:00pm.
- Bars in Italy can be open all day, sometimes with a break for riposo. They are the hub of any community, with coffee being the star beverage.
- Many shops in rural areas close from lunch through riposo hours (1:00pm until 4:00pm - 5:00pm)



7. Include plenty of time for the journey to get there (wherever “there” might be) as a part of your overall trip plan. The less-traveled strade throughout Tuscany can be as spectacular as the destination itself.

8. Schedule time for long lunches. In Italy, lunch is traditionally the most important meal of the day and is meant to be thoroughly enjoyed. This is an ideal time to relax, take your time and enjoy the present moment.

9. If possible, plan your visit to Tuscany between late September and early June. Avoid July and August as they are typically the hottest months of the year, and shops and restaurants invariably close during August (sometimes for the entire month) when Italians take vacations on and around the popular holiday, Ferragosto.

10. Learn a few basic words and phrases in Italian and practice using them again and again. Saying simple words or phrases, such as, buongiorno, grazie, per favore or piacere is appreciated by local Italians more than you can image.

## A Couple More Suggestions...

- Make a point to suspend cultural beliefs to better immerse yourself in the cultural of rural Italy. You'll enjoy local experiences even more when you stop comparing them to your own cultural standards.
- Be open and flexible. Of course there are things that you have on your list - things that you're eager to see and do - but as you roam the back roads and tiny villages of rural Italy and an opportunity presents itself to do something different (which it most certainly will) be willing to take it.





## Explorer's Checklist

Few things are as fun as exploring off the beaten path in Italy! But it's a good idea to have some things on hand when you do. Here are some of my favorites.

- Paper map (even if you're using Googlemaps)
- Extra pair of comfortable walking shoes (just in case)
- Shawl or sweater (for covering bare shoulders when visiting churches)
- Umbrella (so it won't rain 😊)
- Rain jacket
- Small flashlight or light on your phone (for tombs, caves, catacombs, etc.)
- Small pair of binoculars
- Refillable water bottle (stay hydrated!)
- Healthy energy snacks
- Tissues (restrooms in rural areas might not be stocked with paper products)
- Backpack or small duffle bag (handy for carrying snacks and water)
- Hand wipes
- Cell phone
- Camera
- English/Italian dictionary or translator App



# Italy's New Artisans

## BRINGING BACK THE TRADITION OF SAFFRON

It's no secret that in today's modern world Italy's ancient artisan crafts are in danger of fading away into obscurity. But thanks to some passionate Italians, with a vision for carrying the torch into the future, many of these fascinating traditions will thrive on into the next generation.

### **Saffron is one of these traditions.**

Situated along the border between Tuscany and Umbria, lies the village of Città della Pieve, where

saffron's use in textiles and painting has been a recorded tradition since the middle ages. In fact, Renaissance painter, Perugino, is known to have used saffron to create a vibrant gold-yellow paint in some of his masterpieces.

Documents discovered in the town's archives show that taxes were paid - and disputes were held - over the town's precious saffron. Hundreds of years ago Città della Pieve was a wealthy village, thanks to saffron.

But a change in the production of dyes, and certainly changes in politics, brought about a halt to the town's saffron production in the 1800s, and the local tradition was all but forgotten. Until, recently, that is.

In the last 20 years, saffron production has re-emerged in Città della Pieve thanks to the vision and determination of several of the town's citizens, including our friends, Alessandro and Gianni, who have enthusiastically embraced saffron, along with its countless purposes and benefits.

Both natives of the area, Alessandro and Gianni began planting crocus bulbs (the type that produce saffron) as an experiment, in fields near their homes. Little by little, the crocus fields expanded, and a business was born.

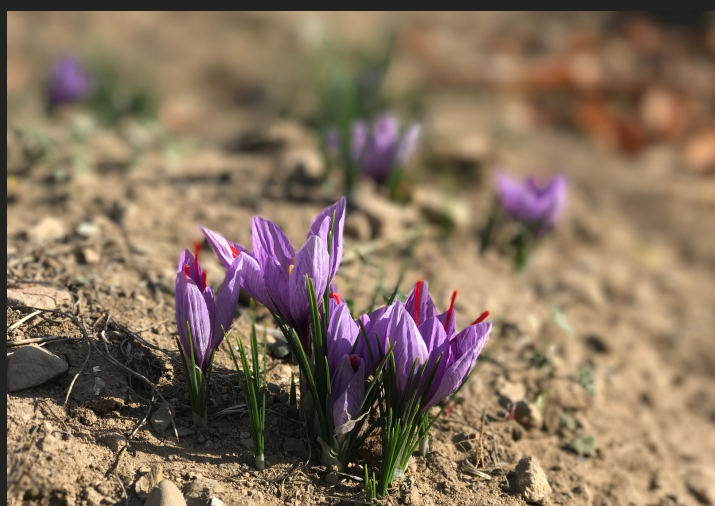
Each October, late in the month, they prepare for the laborious harvest of saffron stamens from the intensely purple crocus that bloom over the period of about one week.

It's tedious work, and the entire family - along with some dedicated friends - work quickly each morning, before the sun opens the blooms, to harvest and dry the delicate stamens. Every step of the process is done by hand, and the result is some of the world's highest quality saffron.

This top-level saffron is then used in everything from regional dishes and infused honeys to beverages (like beer and grappa), beauty products and painting medium.

So where might you learn about, and more importantly sample, some of Città della Pieve's precious saffron? Stop by and visit Alessandro and Gianni's shop, Casa dello Zafferano, on Via Pietro Vannucci in Città della Pieve, or better yet attend the town's saffron festival that's held each October.

Then get ready to be surprised and delighted by saffron!





# 43 Fun Things to Do Off the Beaten Path

1. Drink Italian coffee in Italian coffee bars
2. Eat gelato in a gelateria
3. Choose a fresh-baked pastry in a local pasticceria
4. Take a long lunch in a small trattoria
5. Eat regional pasta dishes (the varieties are endless!)
6. Opt for seasonal dishes (and avoid the tourist menu)
7. Eat thin-crust, Tuscan-style, wood-fired pizza in a traditional pizzeria

## 8. ENJOY A LONG, LATE DINNER

9. Take time to get to know the owners of a family-run restaurant
10. Buy freshly baked bread from a local forno
11. Take a cooking lesson from a local
12. Soak in thermal waters at a thermal spa (a favorite of our favorites)
13. Stop to watch grazing sheep
14. Eat pecorino (sheep's milk cheese) from the sheep you watched grazing
15. Participate in a local festa
16. Buy from local artisans who make things based on ancient traditions - ceramics, lace, iron, mosaics, terra cotta, etc.
17. Browse through roadside antique stands

## 18. SHOP AT AN OUTDOOR MARKET



19. Tour small production wineries
20. Tour local museums
21. Visit historic villas
23. Climb medieval towers
24. Wander aimlessly through tiny, medieval villages
25. Drink local wines in local restaurants (Hint: Order vino della casa.)
26. Visit, and buy olive oil from, a local frantoio (olive press)
27. Take photos of old windows and old doors



28. Sit in an ancient piazza and watch the world go by
29. Chat with locals - or simply smile at them
30. Tour local museums
31. Tour local museums
32. Explore Etruscan and Roman archeological sites
33. Hike nature trails
34. View Renaissance masterpieces in tiny, local churches
35. Learn about famous local artists
36. Attend a concert or opera
37. Tip-toe through monasteries, abbeys and convents
38. Visit medieval castles (and imagine living in them)
39. Watch the sun rise over the mountains
40. Watch the sun set over the Mediterranean
41. Drive slowly along less traveled roads
42. Breathe deeply ... after viewing breath-taking panoramas

### 43. ENJOY A PASSEGGIATA

It's traditional for Italians to enjoy an early evening stroll to socialize with family, friends and neighbors. Everyone - old and young alike - take part in the ages-old custom of passeggiata, and you can too.



# APERITIVO

with  
*Friends*

Paola Donzelli & Pamela Haack

## Ideas from Italy for Casual Get-togethers

Aperitivo is quintessentially Italian – a time for gathering together with friends to sip and nibble something light before a meal.

But in reality, aperitivo is much more. It's a rich part of the Italian experience, and an ages-old tradition that is woven into Italy's tight social culture.

Lucky for us, native Roman, Paola Donzelli (Strada Toscana's hospitality director), has shared her

very best ideas for easy, delicious aperitivo menus in our book, [Aperitivo with Friends](#).

You can get your own copy by [clicking here](#), and in the meantime enjoy this simple recipe (straight from the book) for Campari Spritz – the perfect accompaniment to a pizza aperitivo.

### **CAMPARI SPRITZ**

- 3 parts Prosecco
- 1 part of soda
- 2 parts Campari
- Ice to your taste

# ITALIAN CAFFÈ GUIDELINES

Italians have a love affair with coffee, and ordering caffè in a caffè bar when visiting Italy is in-and-of-itself a fabulous cultural experience.

However, if you are a coffee drinker and are accustomed to North American style coffee (ie: drip grind coffee served in a mug) Italian coffee might at first seem confusing – and even strange. The best advice is to suspend all cultural norms and fully embrace the Italian way! (When in Rome, right?)

Here are some guidelines for ordering caffè (pronounced kah FAY).

- If you order a caffè you will get a shot of espresso in a tiny cup. Italians rarely use the word espresso. Caffè is caffè, and that's that.

- If you order a cappuccino you will get 1/3 espresso, 1/3 milk, 1/3 foam in a bit larger cup, served in a porcelain cup. Cappuccino (which in no way resembles Starbucks' bad imitation) is drunk only in the morning, while caffè is taken throughout the day.
- If you order a latte you will get a glass of milk, as the word latte means milk in Italian.
- Ordering a caffè latte will get you a shot of espresso alongside a glass of milk.

## Variations on caffè:

- Caffè doppio (double) is a double shot of espresso
- Caffè macchiato (marked) has a tiny amount of foamed milk on top
- Caffè ristretto (restricted) has even less water and is more potent than a regular caffè
- Caffè lungo (long) is diluted espresso served in a tall cup
- Caffè corretto (correct) is served with a bit of liquor, such as grappa or amaretto





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