

CRUCIAL
CONSIDERATIONS

ITALY

PLANNING GUIDE



Maximizing your travel investment.



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FIRST!



If you're contemplating a trip abroad within the next 6 months and haven't arranged for your passport or passport renewal, do that **now**. (*Your passport should not expire within 6 months of your return date.*)

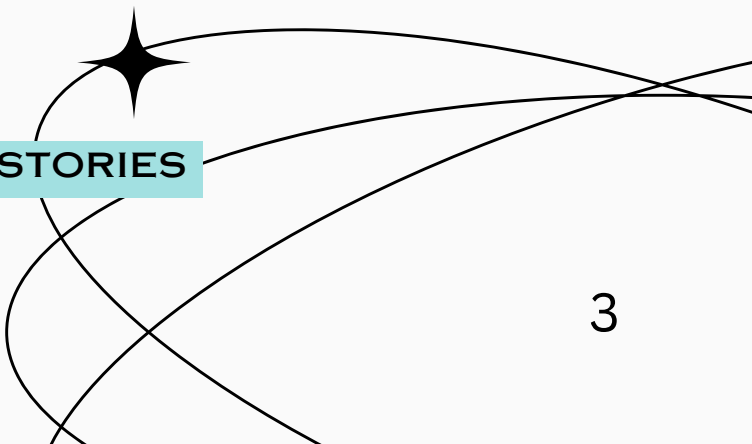
Also visit the ETIAS website. Eventually, we'll need this additional travel document to visit EU countries. It probably won't be a difficult or expensive process.

<https://travel-europe.europa.eu/en/etias>



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BEAUTIFUL HISTORIES

BEFORE YOU START PLANNING:



This guide addresses the #1 thing that can complicate or derail vacation plans: Lack of forethought.

By giving careful thought to the 4 considerations in this guide, in the order they're presented, your planning process will go more smoothly and your vacation will be more rewarding, trust me! After all, forethought almost always pays off, whereas lack of forethought rarely does.

This guide is your "plan for planning."

Even if you're someone who loves spontaneity, a bit of thoughtful preparation beforehand will make a world of difference. In fact, careful planning can equip you to be 'wisely spontaneous' once you reach your destination.

This guide will take you through each important consideration step-by-step. By the end, you'll be well on your way to transforming a "trip" into a memorable and rewarding experience.

So pour yourself a cup of coffee, and let's get started.



1. WHEN & WHERE

First things first: For the best travel experience, make sure your **WHEN** and **WHERE** are in alignment. Let me explain:

1. **WHEN**: Are you limited to a certain time of year you can travel? For example, can you only get away during summer months, or can you travel any season?

2. **WHERE**: Are you limited to or pre-committed to **WHERE** (country, city, region) you will travel? For instance, maybe you've already decided where you want to go, or you're traveling to visit friends in a specific city.

If you have flexibility in *either* #1 (**WHEN**) or #2 (**WHERE**), you can bring these into alignment. See the examples on the next page.

(If you *don't* have flexibility in either your **WHEN** or **WHERE**, don't fret. We'll also address ways to compensate if your **WHEN** and **WHERE** aren't ideally aligned.)

WHEN & WHERE

ALIGNMENT EXAMPLES:

In alignment

WHEN

Summer
(peak
season)



Spring or Fall
(shoulder
season)



Winter (off
season)



WHERE

Sicily
The Dolomites

Venice
Florence
Lake Como

Amalfi Coast
Rome
Sicily

WHEN & WHERE

ALIGNMENT EXAMPLES:

Out of alignment

WHEN

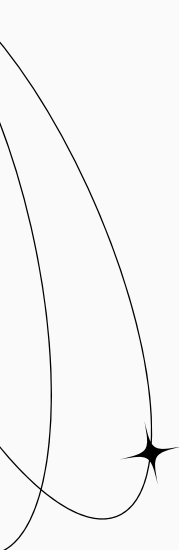
Summer
(peak
season)



WHERE

Venice
Rome
Amalfi Coast
Cinque Terre

Note: These examples are for illustrative purposes. They don't take into account your unique tolerances for heat/cold/damp/crowds. That being said, Venice, the Amalfi Coast, and the Cinque Terre are best avoided in July and August.

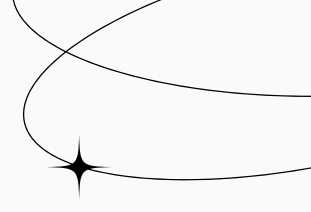
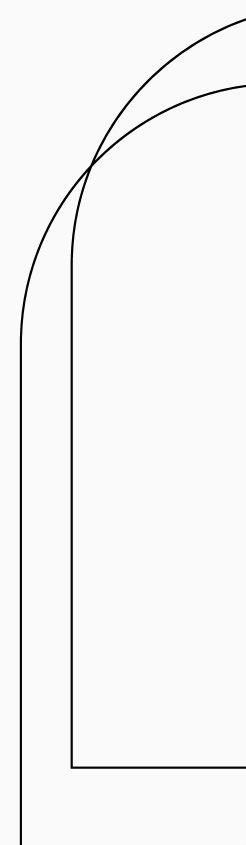


WHEN & WHERE

COMPENSATING IF YOUR “WHEN” IS LIMITED TO PEAK SEASON

If you must travel during peak season (late May through early September), plan to make certain allowances, because popular Italian destinations will be at their most congested. “Peak season” can also apply during popular festivals, such as Venice’s Carnival.

In heavily touristed locations, this can mean longer lines, with hotel rooms, flights, venues and tours booking up farther in advance and, in some cases, charging slightly higher rates.

- Consider options in northern Italy, like smaller cities in the vicinity of the Dolomites. Trento, for instance, is charming, walkable, has good things to see and do, and is also convenient for other nearby sites and towns.
 - Sicily is typically less-crowded and has great beaches with ocean breezes that keep it slightly cooler.
- 
- 

WHEN & WHERE

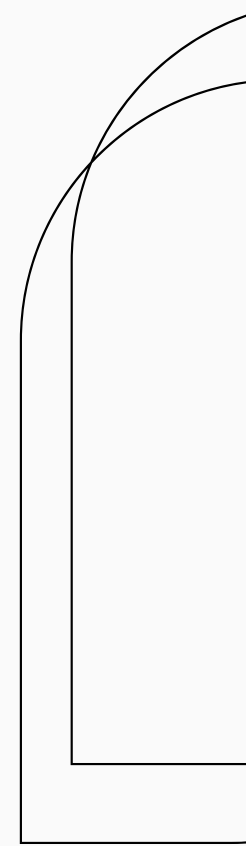


More ways to compensate if you're limited to peak season/summer travel:

Sometimes our WHEN and WHERE just aren't in alignment.

- If you must visit a tourist hotspot like Venice, Florence, or Rome during peak (summer) season, compensate by booking hotels, flights, and tours early (as much as a year in advance in some cases).
- If you must go during the summer, be strategic about how you plan your days, with indoor activities planned for the hottest part of the days and outdoor activities early in the morning and in the evening. Italy gets HOT, and you'll likely be outdoors much of the time.
- Additionally, in the heat of the day, you can plan to get off the tourist track and visit other, less-crowded parts of the historic city center or even a nearby small town. These lesser-known places often hold worthwhile surprises.

Sadly, some popular Italian destinations like the Cinque Terre, Amalfi Coast, and Venice have become hopelessly and unpleasantly overcrowded in the peak summer months. If you really want to experience these lovely but over-touristed places, I strongly suggest going in the very early spring, the very late autumn, or even in winter.



WHEN & WHERE

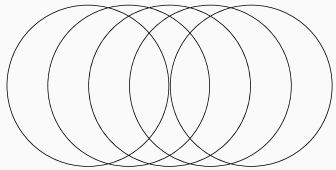
COMPENSATING IF YOUR “WHEN” IS LIMITED TO WINTER SEASON

If you can only travel during the winter, take heart! Flights and hotels are cheaper and easier to find, and you'll get to experience more of what “real” Italy is like when it's not overrun with tourists.

- Winter is a good time to head south. Consider Rome, Sicily, or the Apulia (Puglia) region, with charming towns like Lecce (“the Florence of the South”) and Bari, on the Adriatic coast.
- Or, if you enjoy a winter climate for outdoor activities, consider towns in or near the Dolomites, like Bolzano or Trento.
- Good news: The lines will be shorter at the popular venues. Places will be less crowded.
- Bad news: Some venues will have limited hours, or might even be closed. Just check ahead of time to make sure, so you can compensate by planning around limited hours or closures.
- Italy tends to be rainier in the winter, so compensate by packing accordingly and have some indoor options in mind just in case.



2. DURATION



Once you know your **WHEN & WHERE**, you should determine your duration.

Take as much time as you can comfortably manage! After all, international travel takes a lot of effort and planning, and you'll use 2 full days coming and going. You'll enjoy yourself more if you don't feel rushed.

HOW LONG?

Depending on how many destinations and activities you want to include, 7-12 days is a good range.

FLIT OR NEST?

In general, it's more enjoyable and less stressful to stay in just **ONE** location – settle in, unpack, get to know the neighborhood, and make it your base for day trips to other cities.

CONSIDERATIONS

While staying longer will increase your overall costs, some hotels and short-term rentals offer discounts for prolonged stays of more than just a few days.

3. BOOKING

Once you've determined your WHEN & WHERE and DURATION, you're *almost* ready to start booking your trip!

However, before you begin booking, make a rough draft of your day-to-day itinerary. Why, you ask?

You can tweak it as you progress, but a draft itinerary gives you a guide to work out timings and prevent you from accidentally double-booking activities or booking too much in a single day.

It will also help you avoid situations such as having two early-morning starts back-to-back, or a late-night activity followed by an early-morning start.

- On your draft itinerary, add every variable you can think of, such as approximate times for transportation and meals before and after itinerary items.
- Don't forget to build in free time, and aim to include at least one day that's totally unplanned.
- Be realistic about the mobility and endurance levels of *all* of your travel companions as you prepare your draft.
- For anything that's time-sensitive, over-estimate the time it will take to find the location, get there, etc.



BOOKING

Once your draft itinerary is ready, you should immediately start booking.

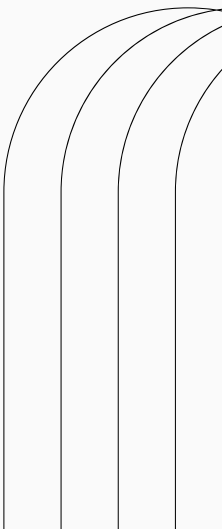
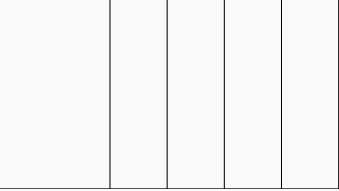
I recommend booking things *in this order*:

1. HOTEL
2. FLIGHTS
3. TOURS, TICKETS, & EVENTS
4. GROUND TRANSPORTATION

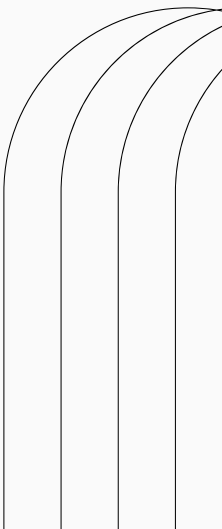
Let's go through the details for each, step-by-step . . .



BOOKING



HOTEL/LODGINGS



It's a good plan to select and book your lodgings first. Why? Because the hotel that's the best fit for you might only have availability for certain nights.

I've learned this the hard way: I've booked my flight and then discovered that my preferred hotel's availability doesn't align with my flight dates. Desirable hotels in Italy book up fast! So line up your hotel first, then book a flight that aligns with those dates. (Flights have more options.)

Where you stay makes a big difference on the overall quality of your trip, and you don't want to have to settle for whatever's available. In other words, don't wait too long to nail down your lodging.

Note: In most cases, for travel in Italy I recommend booking hotels rather than lodgings such as AirBNBs. One reason (among several) is the negative impact short-term rentals have on local residents, displacing them from affordable housing. Sometimes, though, for larger groups or families with children, a hotel just isn't the best option.

(See Tips for Selecting a Hotel at the end of this guide.)



BOOKING



FLIGHT

Next, book your flight. To get good seats, routes, and departure/arrival times, book as far in advance as possible. On international flights *all* of these – seats, routes, and times – matter. (You may want to request my free guide, “10 Tips for Avoiding Stressful Flights.”)

Here, “routes” refers to your departing, arriving, and connecting airports. When selecting flights, it’s a good idea to spend a minute looking at all the airports for that flight. You can look up airports’ on-time and safety stats as well as reviews pertaining to cleanliness, convenience, walking distances, etc.

REMINDER: On most international flights from the U.S. to Italy, **your arrival day will be one day later than your departure day**. For example, if you fly out on the 10th, your first night at the hotel would be the 11th.



BOOKING

TOURS, TICKETS & EVENTS

In Italy, the most popular venues and tours book up fast. Sensing a common theme? Yes, Italy is a popular destination. These days, planning ahead is more important than ever.

- Some tour and ticket providers are more reliable than others. Read reviews, use personal word-of-mouth recommendations, and read the “fine print.”
- *In general*, Get Your Guide and Viator are good options for American users, both for tours and admission tickets. Other options for tours are Walks of Italy and The Tour Guy. Regardless, always read tour and provider reviews from more than one source, paying most attention to recent reviews.
- Consider duration: For example, a tour that combines Rome’s Colosseum AND the Forum is too much standing, walking, and information for some people. The same is true for a combined tour of St. Mark’s Basilica and the Doge’s Palace in Venice – doing both in the same tour can be a lot.
- Finally, look for tours that limit the group size.

Tip: Generally, the cheaper the tour, the less-reliable the info. Tour guides who work mainly for tips have a bigger incentive to embellish and stretch the truth.



BOOKING

GROUND TRANSPORTATION

Ground transportation includes things like train tickets, drivers for excursions, rental cars, and, for large groups, private transport to and from the airport.

- Look into your options ahead of time. In some cases, it's necessary to arrange for special transportation (such as drivers, rental cars) in advance. Even if you plan to use public transportation, it's smart to get an idea of cost, where/how to buy tickets, meeting points, and other helpful information ahead of time.
- Have a back-up plan in case of transportation strikes on your important travel days.
- Doing a bit of research will make planning your itinerary easier and decrease the chance of unpleasant surprises. Nothing's worse than guestimating that it will take 45 minutes to get to the airport by taxi, only to discover at the last minute that it actually takes an hour and a half!
- Speaking of taxis – check on the taxi situation before you go or at least soon after you arrive at your destination. In some cities, such as Venice and Florence, there are certain times you'll need to line up your taxi a day or more in advance.



BOOKING

GROUND TRANSPORTATION



Booking train tickets in Italy:

- Train travel in Italy isn't expensive, and it's often worthwhile to book a higher "class" ticket than 2nd class. For one thing, you can pre-select your seat and carriage. And for another, occasionally, 2nd class carriages can get a bit rowdy.
- Good sites for booking train tickets: I like the Trainline app. It's user-friendly, gives track and delay updates, and it makes it easy to choose options like assigned seating. RailEurope is another option.
- It's also possible to purchase tickets at the train station. But, language differences, hard-to-understand kiosks, and unfamiliarity with the system can make it challenging. A day-of-travel ticket purchase also makes it less likely your group will be able to get assigned seats or sit together.



4. PRE-TRAVEL IMMERSION

Okay, now it's time to elevate your Italy experience. Here's the game-changer that will make your vacation unforgettable:

Pre-travel immersion is the thing that will add the most value to your vacation and transform a "trip" into a memorable and enriching experience!



Don't just see. Comprehend.

Have you ever been to a great destination, but you didn't really understand the beautiful things you saw? Or felt like you were drowning in a fire hydrant of new information when you just wanted to enjoy your surroundings? Or returned home with a blur of memories and photos without meaning or context? A better option: Know before you go.

PRE-TRAVEL IMMERSION

As soon as you know your destination and have the first things nailed down, immerse yourself in your destination – its history, traditions, literature art, food, etc. This type of pre-travel preparation makes a world of difference!

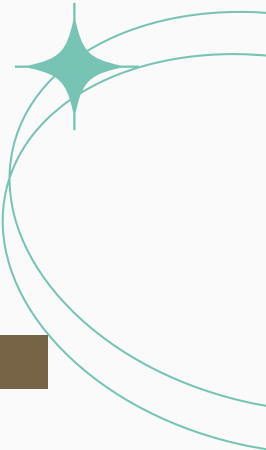
Anything you can do to familiarize yourself with your destination's history, culture, layout, and key sites will decrease the chances of your trip being just an expensive blur of beautiful things for which you have no context.



Here are some tips for how to do this:



PRE-TRAVEL IMMERSION

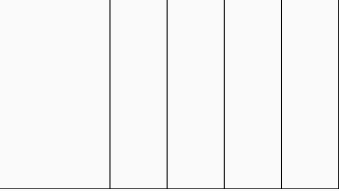


- Seek out good sources. By no means should you get your only information from social influencers.
- “Broad” learning is best: Read novels set in your destination. Listen to podcasts and audio books about its history and culture. Watch movies and documentaries associated with your destination. Listen to the music of its composers. Read about local and regional food and wines. Learn some key phrases in Italian.
- Spend some time with a map, getting a feel for the “lay of the land.” Having just a general sense beforehand of where key sites are in relation to each other will be surprisingly helpful.
 - By the way, the best time to spend time with a map is *before* you go. For one thing, it builds anticipation. But more importantly – when you arrive, you’ll have better things to do than wasting time getting your bearings.

A brilliant option: Make this immersion process fun, easy, and feeling less like homework, by hiring me at Beautiful Histories to provide you with in-depth, painless travel prep!

You’ll be AMAZED at the impact pre-travel immersion will have on your experience.





Bonus:

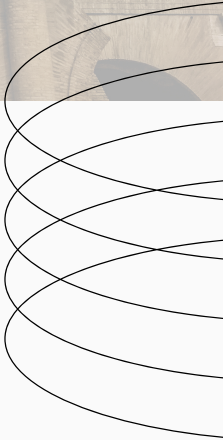
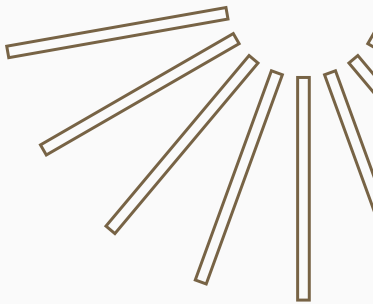
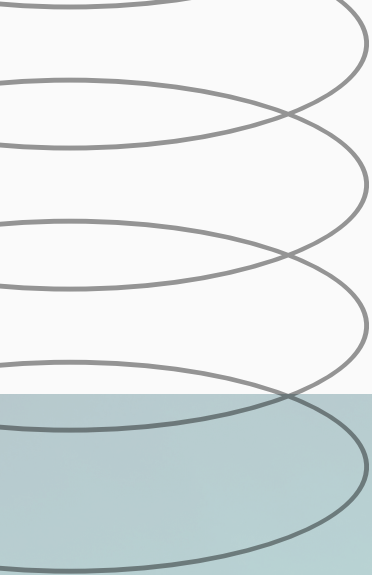
TIPS FOR SELECTING A HOTEL IN ITALY



Location is probably the most important consideration in regard to your lodging. (By the way, while there are some things in your travel budget where you can economize, your hotel shouldn't be one of them.)

Quantify – in cost, time, and exertion – going to and from your hotel and the city center. Also, how much is it worth to be able to quickly pop back to the hotel if you forget something or need to rest a bit? Other things to consider:

- The neighborhood. Plug in the hotel's address on Google and look at the 360° street view. Does it look safe? Clean? Pleasant?
- What transportation options are nearby? For example, in Venice, staying in a hotel near a vaporetto stop and/or with its own water taxi landing can save lots of time and effort.
- A hotel with free breakfast can be a money-saver. I typically eat a big breakfast so I can have a late lunch and a light dinner. (Making lunch your biggest and best meal of the day can save money because lunch menus are generally cheaper.)
- Read the reviews on *multiple* sites, like Google, Booking.com, and TripAdvisor. While you're doing that, look at **guest** photos. Look especially carefully at bathroom photos.
- Something we take for granted in the U.S. but bears consideration in Europe is the question of air conditioning. Just because a hotel says it has A/C doesn't mean they can or will run it when you want it. If you can't find the answer in reviews or on the hotel website, it doesn't hurt to email and ask.
- Don't assume the hotel has an elevator. If it's important, find out before you book.
- Finally, is the front desk staffed 24/7?



Happy planning!

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