

The Art of TRAVELING ITALY

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO TRAVELING
FEARLESSLY AND WISELY

by Sandy Serio Gregory



The Art of TRAVELING ITALY

A GUIDE TO TRAVELING FEARLESSLY AND WISELY

Why I wrote this book. *The Art of Traveling Italy* is written for Americans traveling to Italy. Traveling well is an art form in itself: in the harmonious cadence of a trip; in the delight of the senses through art, music and food; in the connection with people and cultures. Many, however, become so overwhelmed by the process and planning of travel that they set their dreams of exploration and experience aside in frustration or fear.

This book will open your heart and mind to all that Italy has to offer. It is full of tips, tricks and insights gained from my lifetime of travel and my long career as a tour director and tour operator. Use it as a framework from which to plan and prepare for your own trip and to empower you to travel fearlessly and wisely.

Each chapter begins with a musing about my own travel life, which has inspired me, challenged me and healed me.

You will also find:

- ♦ Important websites, in-country emergency contacts and phone numbers
- ♦ To-do lists, packing checklists, language cheat sheets and my favorite travel products
- ♦ Photos and recipes to inspire and excite
- ♦ Pages where you can jot down notes and memories from your own trip

As a bonus for purchasing this printed book, I would like to include an electronic version to put on your phone or tablet to reference while you travel. Email me at sandy@chebellatours.com, attach your proof of purchase and I will send you the log-in information.

Throughout the book, you will be introduced to my tour company, Che Bella Tours. We warmly invite you to travel with us to share our experience, knowledge and resources as we move through bella Italia.

I hope you enjoy my book. And, as I always say on tour, *Andiamo! Let's go!*

Sandy Gregory

Founder, Che Bella Tours

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TRAVELING IN ITALY

DANCING IN THE MOMENT

Over the years, my guests have touched me in many ways. My world has become an odd, magical adventure. I am doing what I was built to do ... take people on vacation.

March 15, 2010: I didn't cry at all this week.

Morning light never streamed into my brother's basement, where I had been sleeping since my 2009 divorce. But today, a spring ray peaked through the tiny corner window and the warmth on my face woke me up. The Ariel comforter on my niece's Little Mermaid big girl bed twisted around my feet. I stared up at the low ceiling as I did every morning, rearranging my covers and checking in with my surroundings: gym equipment and ski boots in the corner, tangled Wii cords and VCR tapes on the brown couch, a beanbag chair slumped on the carpet that smelled of old dog.

Back in my own basement, amidst the discarded décor, I prepared for my new life. My commentary and trip notes were lined up and neatly organized. My passport sat atop a pile of crisp Euros. My suitcase sat upright, carefully packed and at the ready. This "travel still life" made me smile, representing a year of preparation, certification and validation.

I emerged from the basement into the sunlight, stunned and blinking, armed with everything I thought I needed from those kitchen table meetings. I was ready to travel as a Certified International Tour Director. Or was I?

I headed to Italy to start a new chapter in my life ... and become part of a much bigger story.



I was ready to travel as a Certified International Tour Director. Or was I?

Sandy Gregory

Above Where will I be going next time?

Photo by Susan LaBrie

My first tour was a whirlwind of dealing with everything from Caravaggio to coffee, confirmations to counseling, navigating motor coaches, lugging suitcases, doing stand-up comedy and a lot of, "I'll be happy to take care of that for you." The tour finished on the Amalfi Coast. Looking over the Bay of Naples, I raised a glass of prosecco to myself. Exhausted but happy, I looked forward to hopping a train to meet my second group in Milan. But my plans soon erupted.

An ash cloud shut down Europe.

In late March, a volcano in Iceland began to quietly sputter. On April 14, it blew. More than 300 airports and their corresponding airspace were cleared. Over 100,000 flights were cancelled, affecting seven million travelers in what was, at that time, the largest air-traffic shutdown since WWII. Thousands were stranded all over Europe. I was in the thick of it.

My job was clear — get from Sorrento to Milan with the hope that by the time I got there, the ash cloud would clear, flights would resume and I would be there to meet my guests to start our tour. I would need experience I did not yet have and training which I did not yet get, to follow procedures that were not yet created to pick up people I did not yet know. It was only my second tour. I was now on the Volcano Express.

I had a lot of lessons to learn.

I boarded the train to Milan. Before I could find my seat, the train was cancelled. Struggling with my suitcase, I disembarked and was caught up in a sea of people, moving like a school of fish toward the growing lines at the ticket counters. Everyone was trying to rebook, but nobody knew where to go. The departure board showed that while all of the express trains were shut down, the regional trains were still running. I knew I needed to keep moving north.

It was time to *faccia una mafia*. The term "mafia" means "acting as a protector against the arrogance of the powerful" and is equated, of course, with organized crime. In everyday Italian-American families like mine, however, *faccia una mafia* means "to do the workaround." "You do for me. I do for you. No one else needs to know. *Basta.*"

I called our company driver, Luigi, who was more than happy to take me through the back door of his cousin's travel agency. I bought a stack of regional and intercity general seating tickets to get me on any train I needed.

Traveler Lesson #1: Learn to think on your feet ... and *faccia una mafia*.

Like a freight-hopping hobo, I didn't stop moving for two days. At the small stations that became part of my ever-changing route, I made split-second decisions to board the few trains that were still running. Naples to Formia. Formia to Rome. Rome to Arezzo. Arezzo to Florence. Rolling hills of spring vines flashed and faded past my window as we creaked and crawled northward, but there was no sign of the ash we were supposed to be running away from.

While part of my job was to romanticize train travel on our tours, right now it was just a blur. People were wedged in, filling every available seat, standing in the aisle and sitting on their suitcases. Some could nap, their heads bobbing. Others clung wide-eyed to anything that would stabilize them from the shifting and rocking. Florence to Reggio Emilia. Reggio Emilia to Parma, where my journey stalled. The Italian train system was completely shut down.

Traveler Lesson #2: Travel with a smaller suitcase.

People had set up camp all over the Parma train station. Panicked tourists were negotiating with taxi drivers who were proposing pricing somewhere between "more than the trip is worth" and "a lot more than the trip was worth." Locals became instant entrepreneurs, offering their personal cars, scooters, motorcycles, bicycles, boats, barns, rooms and homes to the highest bidder. The finger purse, the prayer clasp, the chin flick, the forearm curl — the Italian body language was flying — and I wanted no part of it.

My flip phone was blowing up with text updates from my boss. Two of my guests out of the original 16 scheduled would actually make it. I had only a few hours before they would land. I quickly hit the ATM. Cash in hand, I ducked into a side street and hunted for a driver to take me to Milan. You guessed it, within a few hundred steps, "Ciao bella, do you need a ride? Come with me, cara, and I can take you wherever you want to go." I hustled quickly away from Romeo and followed my gut right back to the station.

Traveler Lesson #3: Make good choices.

Back amidst the crowd, I began to eavesdrop on conversations. It didn't take long to find what I was looking for ... a couple trying to figure out how to get to Milan. With any luck, they would be safe traveling companions and split the hefty fare. I approached them with my plan and the three of us walked right past Romeo to find an older gentleman named Lucca, a few blocks up, eager to take us for a mere 750 euro. Italians have a generosity and sweetness about them, but also are very complex and direct. Lucca wanted that money. In turn, he provided delightful conversation and bottles of water. When we arrived at my hotel, my new friend, Lucca, not only lugged my heavy suitcase into the lobby, but also took me to

Malpensa airport at no extra charge. I was ready to meet my guests who were — hopefully — showing up.

Traveler Lesson #4: Appreciate acts of kindness and generosity, but mind your dollars and sense.

With minutes to spare, I gathered myself and waited at baggage claim with a smile and a sign for my two guests, Tena and Richard. "Where is the group?" they asked. I answered, "Well, you're it."

The next afternoon, our reluctant pre-booked, pre-paid driver transferred us from Milan to our Varenna hotel, nestled high above the shores of Lake Como. The driver's speed gave us all a strong sense he would have much preferred to be on the entrepreneurial highway, hoping to pick up a stranded tourist and making some big money before his day was over. The road narrowed and wound tightly through the mountains. We peered into the void of the cliff face, glancing wide-eyed at each other and relieved when we arrived at the hotel.

The crisp, blue view of the lake was breathtaking as we entered through the expansive veranda. Guests were gathered around tables, the hum of their conversation interrupted often by bursts of laughter. The smell of cigarettes, garlic and sizzling lake trout wasn't offensive, but rather warm and welcoming. We joined the crowd of diners. Over a long, luxurious meal, Richard and Tena shared their story of how they came to be at this table. It was a story of two 69-year-olds celebrating health and life.

In 2009, Tena was diagnosed with a condition called FMD, a narrowing of the arteries that led to a stroke. At the same time, Richard was diagnosed with prostate cancer. For a year, the two of them took the 30-minute drive daily from their home in Baytown, Texas, to a radiation treatment center

in Houston. They were tense and frightened, but instead of focusing solely on weighty medical procedures, they turned those days into an adventure. Their appointments were scheduled early, freeing them up to explore other activities. One day was yoga class, another was for shopping and a movie while the rest of the week was for ballroom dancing classes.



The hum stopped, and the diners turned to watch, enchanted by this couple floating across the dance floor as one, with a passion and physicality that were beyond anything I could have imagined for two people who spent the last year battling illness.

"Dancing is in the moment," Tena explained. "You get swept away by the music and have to concentrate on the choreography. Our emotions were all over the place, and the different dance styles we learned allowed us to put those emotions into movement. It gave us something to look forward to and we did it together." Within a year, their medical treatments were a speck in their rear view mirror.

Richard and Tena continued to take that 30-minute ride to Houston; however, this time it was to join their team in gowns and tuxes as competitive ballroom dancers. In April of 2010, healthy and ready to travel, they were ready to celebrate life. With that came my group tour to Milan, Lake Como, the Cinque Terre, and the South of France.

After dinner, we walked to the end of the veranda to watch the sunset and compare our odysseys to Milan. Richard rerouted his flights, considering options through South America, Morocco, Turkey and Portugal. There were stops and starts, quick connections and uncertainty, but sure enough, two days later, they made it, assured by my boss that his "experienced Tour Captain" would be ready to go and waiting at the airport. With that fortitude, it was no surprise these two got to Italy in spite of an ash cloud.

Traveler Lesson #5: Go with the flow and be ready to pivot.

After dinner, Richard said to me, "Get your computer and Google 'Shall We Dance' on YouTube." Shall We Dance is a romantic comedy about a bored, overworked lawyer who, upon first sight of a beautiful instructor, signs up for ballroom dancing lessons. That night Jennifer Lopez, Richard Gere and Richard Hallum taught me the tango. We cleared a small area in the corner of the veranda. Richard cupped my hand,

and as the beautiful dance instructor in the movie challenged her student, we also began. "Don't say anything. Don't think. Don't move unless you feel it." Left foot forward, right sweeps to the side, two quick steps back, leaving left crossing right, right foot back, left sweeps across and both feet together. Repeat.

Our dance ended, and Richard held out his hand to his bride, pulled her close and wrapped his arm around her waist. The hum stopped and the diners turned to watch, enchanted by this couple floating across the dance floor as one, with a passion and physicality that were beyond anything I could have imagined for two people who spent the last year battling illness.

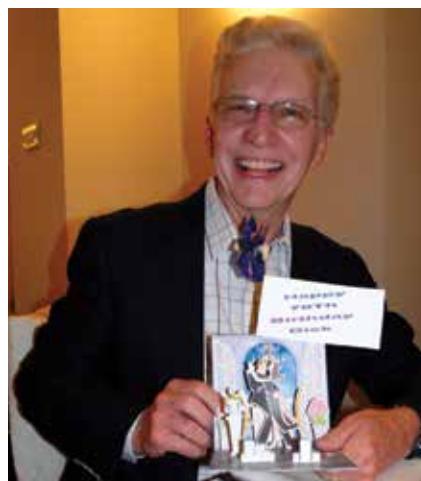
We arrived back at the hotel from dinner the next night, surprised to find the entire veranda cleared of furniture. An effervescent woman named Susanna blew in and pulled me over to the stereo, where some of the hotel guests gathered with smiles of anticipation. "I guess you better go get your computer," Richard shrugged. Of course, the country was still shut down! No one was going anywhere. So that night, and the next and the next, people from all over the world, with no place to go, shared the international language of dance.

Richard and Tena demonstrated the basic steps as we formed a line behind them, mimicking their movements and sweeping counter clockwise across the veranda. "First, the embrace. Follow your partner like a mirror," he explained. Some couples struggled over who was going to lead, doing their own thing, stepping on each other's feet, bumping shoulders and eventually settling into the familiar noodle arm "clutch and sway." Others were totally in the zone.

Richard continued, "Let go and let the man lead. The tango is not a dance — it's a feeling. Embrace the music and the melodrama." Smouldering looks of passion and desire gave way to uncontrollable giggles in a multitude of languages. Each couple was in their own intimate moment, while at the same

time connected to a group of strangers moving to the music. Stranded. Vulnerable. Embracing this beautiful and unexpected experience together. "That," Richard said, "is tango."

Traveler Lesson #6: Sometimes you've got to make space for the dance, so clear the furniture.



This wonderful man was like a gladiator conquering prostate cancer, at the same time his courageous wife recovered from a stroke. They learned how to ballroom dance, got to Italy during a continent-wide shutdown and taught an entire hotel full of stranded internationals to tango.

As we moved on to the Cinque Terre and France, more of my guests were able to fly in, join the tour and swing into our dance. We embraced the challenging hike over the seaside mountains of the Cinque Terre. In Nice, I did another *faccia una mafia* and had my guests' rooms changed

so they had balconies overlooking the park and the Mediterranean. We passed through Monaco and on to a lovely little town called Vence, where we stopped at an inn Richard and Tena had enjoyed 14 years earlier. They had such fond memories of the chef's roast chicken and lavender crème brûlée, and I surprised them by returning there for dinner that evening. The tour went great, I found my footing and knew I really was doing what I was built to do.

Traveler lesson #7: Life is full of situations outside of our control. Follow the itinerary, but leave room for happy surprises.

Richard's 70th birthday was to fall on the night of our tour's Farewell Dinner. I wanted to make it special. This wonderful man was like a gladiator conquering prostate cancer, at the same time his courageous wife recovered from a stroke. They learned how to ballroom dance, got to Italy during a continent-wide shutdown and taught an entire hotel full of stranded internationals to tango.

The perfect birthday gift waited for me at the market. In Italy, you can find pasta in just about any shape you can imagine. You also find the male organ just about everywhere: carvings in the front of homes, graffiti, mosaics, frescoes and statues. A few of my guests raised their eyebrows when Richard opened his present — a big bag of penis pasta. He took a double take, roared with laughter and read my card out loud, "You've certainly got balls, Dick. It's been a joy to travel with you. Learn from you. And dance with you. Think of me when you serve these up. But remember what I taught you: cook pasta to *al dente* only. You don't want these to be limp!"

Traveler Lesson #8: One of the important lessons in dancing is learning the art of leading and following. Lead your group, learn from them, and most of all, keep dancing.



Previous page The Tuscan countryside is a magical place where time seems to stand still. Dark green rows of cypress line the fields of olive groves and grapevines. Patches of sunflowers stand at attention as they march tidily down the side of a slope.

Below The hills of San Gimignano. Centuries of history weave into one of the world's most beautiful landscapes.

Right Stunning contemporary sculptures contrast with old-world charm at one of our favorite villas just outside of Florence.

Photos by Sandy Gregory





Suggested Italy Itineraries

My job is to move my guests from place to place; however, the more I move around, the more I have come to appreciate staying put. Traveling too quickly and trying to see too much in a short time wears you out both mentally and physically. That's why at Che Bella Tours we prioritize consistency and contentment over stop-offs and drive-bys. The gift of soaking it all in brings a healthy view of the world so you return home rested and refreshed, rather than travel-weary.

Traveling can be a costly investment. Minimize the risk when you call on us to create the perfect guided or independent travel itinerary. We work closely with groups who want a personalized, private experience. Che Bella Tours is creative travel and the partner you want when planning your trip of a lifetime.

chebellatours.com

Above Few places in this world are as photogenic as Venice. It is pure magic as the sun is setting in this colorful city, making it the perfect time to take a gondola ride.

Photo by Sandy Gregory



Italian Dreams

Travel to Italy's great cities for the perfect mixture of everything Italy has to offer. This itinerary is perfect for the first-time traveler to Italy.

VENICE

FLORENCE

A TUSCAN VILLA

SAN GIMIGNANO

SIENA

ORVIETO

ROME

NAPLES

THE AMALFI COAST



Previous page, top

Santa Maria del Fiore, the Duomo, lights up Florence at night.

Previous page, bottom

At the peak of power in the 13th century, San Gimignano had 72 towers. Today there are 15 still standing. Le Torre Grossa of San Gimignano is the tallest and offers breathtaking views of the Tuscan countryside.

Left Santa Maria della Salute in Venice rises from the water prominently at the entrance of the Grand Canal.

Photos by Sandy Gregory

The Italian Restaurant Experience

Next page Preparing truffle risotto in Lake Como.

Photo by Sandy Gregory

CONSIDER TAKING A FOOD TOUR

There is no better way to get the taste of a new place than walking through the markets, side-street restaurants and food shops with a local guide. The value is not just someone who shows you around their town, but also who gives you their insider's enthusiasm about how food is grown, bought and sold, and what — and where — to eat in their city. You will find that your best meals will not come from the Michelin, Yelp or Trip Advisor recommendations, but rather from off-the-beaten path places where the locals go.

TYPES OF RESTAURANTS

Bar Serves cocktails, coffee and soft drinks, plus a variety of pastries, snacks and sandwiches. Usually has only stand-up counter service.

Gastronomia Like a bar, but with more sandwich and snack options.

Café Like a bar, but with small indoor and outdoor tables. Know that you will pay more for your beverage if you sit at the table rather than stand at the bar.

Tavola Calda Casual a la carte buffet with lots of cold and hot plate choices. Great for the busy traveler.

Osteria A casual eatery serving simple, rustic, traditional food and good, local wines.

Trattoria A casual, family-owned place with a limited menu of fresh seasonal food. Varies in size and price range.

Ristorante A restaurant with a full menu and extensive wine list.



MEALTIMES

Breakfast: Colazione. A typical breakfast for an Italian is a frothy cappuccino with a cornetto, a croissant-style bread pastry, eaten while standing in a neighborhood bar. Italians save their appetite for a proper lunch. Most vacation hotels and villas, however, offer a full breakfast that includes eggs, meats, cheeses, yogurts, pastries and fruit to satisfy the American palate. Be warned, however, that scrambled eggs are often bland and runny, and the "bacon," soggy. Italians do not eat these heavy breakfast foods and are not very good at making them. Be assured, however, that whatever breakfast foods you choose, it will be accompanied by a wonderful cup of coffee.

Lunch: Pranzo. Lunch is enjoyed between 12:30 and 2:30 p.m. In small towns, expect many stores to shut down for a proper lunch. Enjoy this tradition while on your own trip and plan your day accordingly.

Dinner: Cena. It's important to know, when making plans for dinner, that restaurants generally do not start serving until 7:00 p.m., and 9:00 p.m. is prime dining time. If you're wondering how you got a 7:00 p.m. reservation at a hot spot, you might arrive and find the place empty. But come 10:00 p.m., the place will be jumping.

REGIONAL CUISINE

Italian restaurants around the world improvise and experiment, creating dazzling takes on Italian dishes. In Italy, however, classic recipes rarely change. Just like the differences in language, history, and sensibility, each region has its own culinary tradition. Ingredients are simple and the quality of the cuisine is based on the quality of these ingredients. There is no such thing as "Italian Seasoning" in Italy. No, you will not get a meatball on top of spaghetti. Ceasar Salad? Invented in Mexico. Veal or Chicken Parm? Nope. Deep dish pizza? Just a variation of *focaccia*. And no, you will not dig in to a sausage and pepper combo topped with *giardiniera*. But don't worry, you'll be far from disappointed. Because in Italy, discovering regional cuisine means discovering local spirit.

In this chapter, I focus on some of the most popular dishes you will see on Italian menus. Some of my favorite recipes are featured in our cookbook at the end of this book *Make It With Love: Recipes from My Travels for the American Kitchen*.



Pasta

I TELL MY GUESTS ON TOUR, "WHEN IN ROME, DO AS THE ROMANS DO." ONE OF THOSE ACTIVITIES IS HONORING THE TRADITION AND PASSION OF PASTA. WE ITALIANS TAKE PASTA VERY SERIOUSLY. PASTA IS THE FOOD THAT TRULY DEFINES US. HERE ARE A FEW TIPS AND TRICKS I HAVE LEARNED ABOUT EATING PASTA.

PASTA RULES

Pasta is to be eaten only with a fork.

Spoons are for amateurs. Put the fork into a few strands of spaghetti and let the tines of the fork rest against the curve of the bowl or the curved indentation of the plate. Twirl the fork around to create a small bundle. Too big? Too long? Drop it back into the dish and start again.

Never cut spaghetti ... ever. With the side of the fork, with a knife, never ever ever! The one thing that could bring my boisterous family to silence at the dinner table was a guest who cut their spaghetti. Awkward.

Bread is used to soak up the pasta sauce.

Fa la scarpetta means "do the little shoe." You form the bread like a little shoe to mop up the last of the sauce. No butter is served on an Italian table and no Italian would ever dip their bread into plates of olive oil covered with balsamic or parmesan cheese. That is an American creation.

Cheese on seafood pasta? No. Fish from the seas and rivers of Italy are mild and delicate. The milky saltiness of cheese overwhelms the flavor of the fish. Cheese is usually made in the land-locked areas of the country where fish is not widely served, so location as well as tradition, makes cheese on fish pasta a no-no.

All that being said, Italians are famous rule-breakers. To an Italian, any rule is merely a suggestion. So take the above information and use it as you will. Except for the part about cutting your spaghetti. Don't do that. Ever.

Previous page Spinach linguine with truffle cream sauce and shaved black truffle (*Linguine agli spinaci con crema di tartufo e scaglie di tartufo nero*).

Right Linguine with lobster (*linguine all'astice*). No cheese.

Photos by Sandy Gregory



THE HOURS

Especially in small towns, the Italian workday may seem quirky to Americans. Visitors are often surprised and disappointed when they arrive at a shop, only to find that it closed at 1 p.m. for lunch and won't be open again until 3 or 4 p.m. In this case, I recommend doing what the locals do — enjoy a wonderful Italian lunch and return to the shops when they open. Most everything in the larger tourist cities are always open, but if you're planning on dipping into a small town for a few hours of shopping, plan your travel itinerary accordingly. The good news is that these shops are often open in the evening, so you can shop and enjoy your *passeggiata* or evening walk.



Photos by Sandy Gregory



TO BARGAIN OR NOT TO BARGAIN

The rule of thumb: If the store is mobile like a market tent, give bargaining a try. If it has fixed walls and a roof, there is usually no bargaining. A vendor's desire to bargain can depend on the time of day or time of year, how busy the market is, or what you are trying to buy. Their desire also can be influenced if they are bored, if you're cute, or if they need some fast cash.

I recommend you walk through the market and visit several shops to understand the going rate for an item. Then work your way back through to the vendor that gives you the lowest price. It might be appropriate to bargain if you are buying quantities of things, such as ten scarves. If you are making a big purchase, you can try to throw something else into the pot. Most vendors will meet you in the middle. If you still find the price too high, walk away. If the shopkeeper is able to lower it further, they'll find you.

My guests sometimes feel the need to drive a hard bargain. Remember, locals need to make a living. Think about paying a fair price — not the lowest price. Driving a hard bargain can cause real suffering to vendors already living hand-to-mouth. As with everything, you get what you pay for. There are endless rows of shops stocked with ubiquitous souvenirs and inexpensive imports, but try to dig a little deeper. Support local producers, makers and artisans. Think about buying souvenirs as a way to support and learn about local communities.

Have exact change when you shop at the markets. Cash in hand is a quick and attractive way to seal a deal.

Bring currency in a variety of denominations. This way, you won't bargain down something to 20 Euros and then ask the vendor to make change for a hundred.

Be polite and respectful.

Make it fun for everyone.

Know when to cut bait.

Enjoy the game.

My Favorite Things

WHAT TO BUY WHERE AND HOW

During the Middle Ages, artisans were organized into guilds or *arti*: painters, sculptors, glass blowers, leather makers, goldsmiths, mask makers, silk masters and more. Masters helped prepare young workers while benefitting through what we might think of as unpaid labor, while young trainees learned a skill to support themselves in the future, like today's internships. Guilds worked to promote their craft by creating and enforcing regulations for their trade, setting and policing wages, prices and quality.

Today, the streets of Italy are lined with glitz high-end boutiques and couture chain stores. But tucked away amidst the winding streets are the tiny shops — like mini-museums — where local artisans weave, paint, carve, pound and stitch.

Many of my guests count on me to take them shopping. When we find a treasure, they ask, "Should I buy this here?" My answer is usually, "Yes, if you find something you love and it is created and produced in the region where we are shopping. Don't second-guess yourself. Just buy it. I can't guarantee you'll find it somewhere else."

Remember, generally you have a luggage limit of 50 pounds when you fly internationally. Many of my guests pack a light duffel bag for the flight home. Your dirty laundry and unbreakables go into the duffel so you can wrap your treasures in your sturdy travel bag. Don't forget to bring some **Wineskin** brand sleeves for any wine or olive oil you want to bring home in your suitcase.

Now let's take a closer look at my favorite things to buy in Italy.

Artisan Shops

LEATHER

Florence

CERAMICS

Throughout Italy

OLIVE WOOD UTENSILS

Tuscany and to the South

SILK

Lake Como and Florence

CERAMICS AND HANDWOVEN LINENS

Puglia

BUSATTI LINEN

Tuscany

HAND MADE PAPER

Venice, Florence and Amalfi

JEWELRY

Throughout Italy

FORTUNY

Venice

CARNIVAL MASKS

Venice

MURANO GLASS

Venice

Local Markets

PORCINI MUSHROOMS

Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont, the Alto Adige, Tuscany, Umbria and the Veneto

SPICES

Throughout Italy

SAFFRON

San Gimignano, Abruzzo and L'Aquila

DARIO SALT

Tuscany

TRUFFLES

Piedmont, Tuscany, Umbria, Le Marche

LEMON EVERYTHING

The Amalfi Coast

The Grocery

BACI

POCKET COFFEE

CASTELVETRANO OLIVES

FORMAGGIO

MIELE

MAKE IT WITH LOVE

RECIPES FROM MY ITALIAN TRAVELS FOR THE AMERICAN KITCHEN

Exploring a country through its recipes is an adventure in itself. I have taken cooking lessons throughout Italy, relentlessly pestered the chefs at my favorite restaurants, and spent many lazy afternoons with my Italian friends in the kitchens of their countryside homes.

After years of eating in restaurants all over the world, the COVID-19 pandemic forced me to rediscover my own kitchen. I gathered a few of the favorite recipes from my tours. With my brother, Chef Danny Serio, I spent the winter months of 2020 in "The Che Bella Tours Test Kitchen" adapting the measurements for the American kitchen. The olive oils, spices, vinegars and salts I brought home from my travels found their way from the darkness of my cabinets to the counter, bringing my collection of Italian recipes to life. Every sizzle of garlic, splash of balsamic and whiff of truffle flooded my senses with memories of my trips.

I hope this cookbook inspires you to open your palate to an authentic cuisine that will draw you under its spell and increase your hunger for more. Make a few of the recipes before your trip to anticipate your culinary adventure, or recreate the memories from your vacation when you return.

Buon appetito!

Sandy Gregory

Founder, Che Bella Tours

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Above Sandy Gregory and Chef Danny Serio in "The Che Bella Tours Test Kitchen."

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Let's cook!

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Pair these regional recipes with the following regional wines:

Nebbiolo

Pinot Noir

Barolo or Barbaresco from nearby Piedmont

Lombardy

LOMBARDY IS A RICH, WEALTHY REGION OF ITALY. MEAT, CHEESE AND BUTTER FEATURE PROMINENTLY IN THIS CUISINE, OFTEN TURNED INTO RICH, HEARTY STEWS. MUCH OF THE REGION ALONG THE PO VALLEY IS COVERED BY RICE PADDIES, SO THEY ARE MASTERS IN THE ART OF MAKING RISOTTO.



OSO BUCCO

RISOTTO MILANESE

COTOLETTA ALLA MILANESE

The Art of TRAVELING **ITALY**

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO TRAVELING
FEARLESSLY AND WISELY™

by Sandy Serio Gregory

Whether you are traveling for the first or the fifth time, being prepared can make all the difference. You want to enjoy everything wonderful that Italy has to offer and minimize any risks. The Art of Traveling Italy is written to make planning fun and set you on a course to make the most of your time in this amazing country. This ultimate handbook is chock full of essential information, tricks, tips and cultural insights prepared by seasoned tour director, tour operator and intrepid traveler, Sandy Serio Gregory, owner of Che Bella Tours. This guide takes the mystery out of travel thanks to the practical information gained from Sandy's lifetime of travel. She lived and studied in Florence and has taken literally hundreds of people to Italy over the years, many on repeat trips. Use this guide as a framework from which to plan and prepare for your trip. Refer to it while you travel so you know what to expect while in country.

Each chapter begins with a snapshot of Sandy's life on the road, written to inspire and capture the spirit of her time in Italy. She breaks down each chapter in a step-by-step manner, clearly outlining what to expect and how to travel with passion, wisdom and style. Beautifully designed with stunning photography, this book also includes:

- ♦ Suggested Italy itineraries
- ♦ Ways to travel mindfully and responsibly
- ♦ Safety, security and staying connected
- ♦ Sandy's favorite travel products
- ♦ Favorite books and films
- ♦ Eating in Italy
- ♦ Shopping in Italy
- ♦ How to view art and make it fun
- ♦ A cookbook filled with the classic dishes you will find on menus in Italy
- ♦ Important websites, in-country emergency contacts and phone numbers
- ♦ Informational lists and packing checklists
- ♦ Language cheat sheets
- ♦ As a bonus for purchasing this printed book, you will receive an electronic version to put on your phone or tablet to reference while traveling

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