

## SAGU Italy Experience Itinerary

(Friday) - 8 March, 2019: Depart DFW for Rome

(Saturday) - 9 March, 2019: Arrive Rome

Today, we land in Rome, meet our Italian Tour Escort and bus driver and proceed to our Rome hotel for check-in and dinner (depending on arrival time, we may include a couple of tour sites before proceeding to hotel).

(Sunday) - 10 March, 2019: Ancient Rome + Squares & Fountains

This morning, we begin at the center of the Roman Empire. From the Trajan's Column, jewel of architecture and sculpture made by Apollodorus of Damascus, our guide will show us along the Via dei Fori Imperiali (street of the Imperial Fora), the ruins of the fora that the great emperors built as lasting memory of their power. We see the Forum of Trajan, the biggest and most splendid of all, whose markets, true forerunners of the modern commercial centers, offered to the Roman citizen any goods to be found at that time. On foot, we will reach the Capitoline Hill, the former political and religious center of the town, which today is the seat of the Municipality. The stairway will lead us to the Piazza del Campidoglio, the magnificent result of a single project by Michelangelo, with a copy of the most famous equestrian statue in the world, the statue of Marcus Aurelius, in the middle. Behind Piazza del Campidoglio, we will find a natural terrace providing the best panoramic point over the valley of the Roman Forum and the Palatine Hill!

At the foot of Capitoline Hill, we will visit **Mamertine Prison**, to see the site traditionally believed to be where Paul and Peter were imprisoned in Rome.

Walking through the valley of the **Roman Forum**, one can imagine the ancient buildings; the Curia, seat of the Roman Senate, the State Archive, the basilicas, palaces of justice, the temple of Vesta, columns, and arches of triumph.

From the Forum, the guide will show us to the place linked to the fabulous origins of Rome: the Palatine. Here, Romulus founded the town in the year 753 B.C. and starting with Augustus the great emperors settled here. From the valley of the Roman Forum, we will admire the Domus Tiberiana, only partially explored, and the ruins of the Imperial Palaces. Leaving the Roman Forum, we will find the Arch of Constantine, erected to commemorate the victory of the emperor over Maxentius in the 4th century A.D. (tradition says that before the battle the Emperor saw a brilliant cross in the sky and said the famous words "in hoc signo vinces"). The walking tour ends at the **Colosseum**, the everlasting symbol of the greatness of Rome and the stage for the historical fights of the gladiators!

After a break for lunch, we will enjoy a walking tour of Baroque Rome, visiting the most cherished fountains and squares of the Eternal City! We begin at **Piazza Navona** where we will admire the ornate Fountain of the Four Rivers (Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi) by Bernini and the Sant'Agnese in Agone church by Borromini. Next, we continue to the **Pantheon**, known for its gigantic dome and 'oculum'. Once a temple dedicated to 'all the gods' and converted later to a Catholic church, this remarkably preserved site is an important example of ancient architecture. We then proceed to the famous **Trevi Fountain**, which appeared in the iconic Oscar-winning movie by Fellini, *La Dolce Vita*. Here, we will throw a coin into the fountain to ensure our return to Rome! Our tour ends at **Piazza di Spagna**, where we will wonder at the famed **Spanish Steps** and the Barcaccia fountain, designed by Pietro Bernini and his more famous son, Gian Lorenzo Bernini.

Afterwards, we regain our bus and return to our hotel. *Dinner and overnight in Rome hotel.*

### (Monday) - 11 March, 2019: Rome - Pompeii - Rome

Today, we will enjoy an excursion south to **Pompeii**. Here, we will meet our local guide to have an archeological journey through the ancient city. Buried under a layer of ashes and lapilli by a sudden eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.D., continuing excavations have uncovered a town whose daily life of the Imperial Age has been petrified, as under a spell, in its gestures, secrets, in the panic felt by its inhabitants during the last moments. Visiting the "frozen city" we will see houses, shops, temples, squares, streets and also the famous "Lupanare" before returning to Rome. *Dinner and overnight in Rome hotel.*

### (Tuesday) - 12 March, 2019: Basilicas + Vatican Museums

After breakfast, we venture beyond the walls of ancient Rome and descend into the **Catacombs of Santa Domitilla**, a vast network of subterranean tunnels where early Christians were buried. Led by our site guide, we will enter the labyrinth through a sunken 4<sup>th</sup> century church and make our way through corridors lined with (now empty) burial niches.

Afterwards, we regain our bus and visit **St. Paul Outside the Walls**, the Benedictine Abbey which shares its name, origins and centuries of history, both joyful and sorrowful, with the adjoining basilica. Next, we stop at the nearby **Abbey of the Three Fountains**, the place of Paul's martyrdom, where tradition has it, that three different springs gushed out at each spot touched when Paul's head fell down. Regaining our bus, we continue to the **Basilica of St. John Lateran** (San Giovanni in Laterano), to see one of the most important Christians Churches of Rome, discovering the importance that Constantine placed on his adopted new faith. Here, we also visit the **Lateran Baptistery**, the oldest and continuously used monumental Baptistery since it was built by Emperor Constantine as a place where the Christian community celebrated the sacraments of initiation.

After a break for lunch on our own, we will explore the **Vatican Museums**. Passing through the Court of the Pigna, designed by Bramante in the 16th century, we will enter the Belvedere Palace to reach the heart of the museum, the Belvedere Courtyard. Proceeding with the visit, we will quickly pass the secondary galleries to reach the Greek Cross Room where the splendid Sarcophagi of St. Helene and St. Constance are housed. Walking through the Galleries of the Candelabra, of the Maps and of the Tapestries, we will reach the Apostolic Palace, the oldest section of the complex. Our guide will then show us the Apartments of Julius II, splendidly decorated by Raphael and his assistants, and then the **Sistine Chapel**, where we will admire one of the greatest masterpieces of art: the *Genesis and the Last Judgement* by Michelangelo, that have gained their original splendor after the latest restorations.

Leaving the Sistine Chapel and going down the Royal Stairway, projected by Bernini, the guide will conduct us to the **Basilica of St. Peter**, the most important temple of Christianity, which gathers inside 2000 years of history and famous works of art such as the *Pietà* by Michelangelo. The visit ends at **St. Peter's Square**, which is embraced by the colonnade, an architectural masterpiece by Bernini, under the symbolic protection of the "Cuppolone", as the Romans call Michelangelo's dome. *This evening, we will enjoy dinner in a typical Roman trattoria! Overnight in Rome hotel.*

### (Wednesday) - 13 March, 2019: Rome – Assisi

After breakfast, we travel north to **Assisi**. We will meet our local guide and start an unforgettable walk through the narrow streets of the ancient town which sweeps the flanks of Monte Subasio. Here, will visit the **Church of Santa Chiara**, the site where St. Francis was born and then on to see the house where he spent the first years of his life. We will then reach the very heart of the town, the **Piazza del Comune** with its Roman and medieval buildings. Then, near the ancient city walls, we will

visit the **Basilica of St Francis**, which houses the tomb of the Saint. The interiors are decorated with beautiful frescoes from the 12th and 13th centuries. Proceed to Assisi hotel for check-in. *Dinner and overnight in Assisi hotel.*

#### (Thursday) 14 March, 2019: Assisi – Florence

Today, we head to **Florence**. Upon arrival, we will meet our local guide and enjoy a half-day walking tour of this beautiful city to discover the cradle of the Renaissance, where one breathes art in the medieval streets, in the craftsmen's workshops, and in the Renaissance Palaces! Our touring today will include the **Accademia Gallery**, which hosts Michelangelo's famous David, the beautiful **Duomo**, the "**Gates of Paradise**" doors of the Baptistery of St. John (outside visit only), and beautiful **Piazza della Signoria**. Proceed to Florence hotel for check-in. *Dinner and overnight in Florence hotel.*

#### (Friday) 15 March, 2019: Florence – Pisa – Florence

This morning, we will enjoy a scenic drive through the rolling hills of the Tuscan countryside to reach Pisa. Upon arrival, we will meet our guide, head to **Piazza dei Miracoli** where we will visit the impressive **Duomo** and **Baptistery** and view the famous **Leaning Tower**. We will then regain our bus and return to Florence. The rest of the day is ours to enjoy at leisure to explore additional treasures of Florence or to shop on our own. The outdoor Market of San Lorenzo boasts leather products, and the Ponte Vecchio, covered since medieval times with goldsmiths' shops, is a must for Florence's other specialty, gold jewelry. Other suggestions include: Uffizi Gallery\*, Brunelleschi's Dome\*, Giotto's Bell Tower\*, Basilica of Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella Church, San Lorenzo Basilica, the Church of San Miniato al Monte, etc... (\*We recommend booking these sites in advance). *Tonight, we will enjoy dinner in a typical Florentine restaurant! Overnight in Florence hotel.*

#### (Saturday) 16 March, 2019: Florence – San Gimignano – Siena – Rome

After breakfast, we drive to **San Gimignano**, the medieval walled city known for its impressive towers, visible for miles over the cityscape. Perched on a hill overlooking the lush Val d'Elsa valley, we will admire panoramic views of the region and enjoy some leisure time before proceeding to **Siena** where we will meet our local guide and tour this enchanting medieval city! Famed for the rich red color of its cityscape, Siena is home of the Palio, a horse race dating from medieval times which takes place each July in Siena's central square! Here, we will visit the **Duomo**, a fabulous marble gothic cathedral, and the **Piazza del Campo**. We will then regain our bus and continue to Rome. *Final dinner and overnight in Rome hotel.*

#### (Sunday) 17 March, 2019: Depart Rome

Today, we bid farewell to Italy and transfer to the Rome airport for our departure flight.