

# Italians reveal their favorite places to go on vacation in Italy

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Italy is home to some of the world’s most famous cities, art, wine and beaches. Think Florence, Rome and Venice with their abundant Renaissance architecture and well-known galleries, Tuscany with its globally-renowned vineyards and the glamorous Amalfi coast with its see-and-be-seen vibe.

While these places are an obvious draw for travelers, Italians themselves prefer to go on vacation to lesser-known areas.

These are places where the menus aren’t translated into English, where foreigners are few and far between — but the pleasures are no less plentiful.

Puglia, in the “heel” of Italy, is a favorite destination for travel writer Marina Cacciapuoti, who runs the Italy Segreta website and travel consultancy. She loves to visit in the springtime, “when you can experience it with the locals,” she said.

“It’s a region of farmers, of traditions, of passion, of simplicity that has to be enjoyed slowly,” she told CNBC by email.

A recent find is private home Masseria Schiuma, a farmhouse close to the beach, restored by a Danish couple and available to rent only a handful of weeks per year.

The region is also beloved by Rome-based real estate agent Diletta Giorgolo, who heads there for its beaches and “remarkable” little towns.

She recommends visiting Puglia in May, June, September and October, when “the weather is warm and the beaches are empty,” she told CNBC by email.

Giorgolo likes to stay at the 1860s-built Palazzo Daniele, a former palace she described as “Mediterranean chic,” or Naturalis Bio Resort & Spa, a collection of 18th-century farm buildings restored by a husband-and-wife team.

To eat, she suggests Alex Ristorante in Lecce, famous for its raw fish dishes by chef Alessandra Civilla.

### **Mountain destinations**

For skiing and hiking, Giorgolo likes the Dolomites mountain range — and in particular, the skiing areas of Cortina d’Ampezzo and Corvara.

“I have been skiing in most countries around the Alps including Switzerland, France [and] Austria, but the Dolomites have a more dramatic natural scenery — and the food is definitively the best,” she said.

“The Sellaronda is one of my favorite ski domains, and Cortina is definitely the best place to start the most beautiful treks during the summer,” she added.

In Cortina, she recommends eating at family-run restaurant Beppe Sello, where the specialty is benfatti alla moda — a homemade ravioli with caciotta cheese.

Giorgolo, who works for Sotheby’s International Realty, stays at the Ambra Cortina, which styles itself as a “fashion boutique” hotel, where rooms are themed around movies, theater and nature.

### **Roman routes**

Even in well-trodden Rome, it’s possible to find hidden treasures. But Cacciapuoti — who spent part of her childhood there — simply enjoys wandering the city’s streets.

“There is really nothing like it — the sun shines differently there,” she said. “I always say there are beautiful cities, and cities with a soul — Rome is the latter.”

Cacciapuoti likes to stop at Angelo Feroci, a butcher’s shop in the Sant’Eustachio district that has been in the same location for around 100 years.

She recommended the Gian Fornaio cafe where pizza is sold “al taglio” — or “by the cut” — and baked in large rectangular trays. For an aperitivo, Cacciapuoti said she heads to the bar at the Hotel Locarno, a spot that was popular with Italian movie stars during the country’s 1950s golden age of film.

## Italian escapes

The Tuscan city of Florence is known for its red-domed Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore and world-renowned art collection at the Uffizi Gallery. But Tuscany also has plenty of beachside resorts as well as a seven-island archipelago.

Cacciapuoti recommended the under-the-radar island of Giglio, “a natural beauty ripe with hand-cultivated wines, crystal-clear waters [and] panoramic hikes,” as she states in a post on her website. There, she likes to hop between the L’Arenella, Le Cannelle and Le Caldane beaches, and stay harborside at La Guardia, a hotel decorated with wood, stone and concrete.

The Monte Argentario peninsula, linked to mainland Tuscany by quiet roads, is home to Il Pellicano, a former private home turned chi-chi hotel. It was purchased by Italian business magnate Roberto Scio in 1979 and photographed in the decade that followed by Slim Aarons, who was famous for capturing the socialite and celebrity scene.

Known for its star appeal, it’s now run by his daughter, Marie Louise Scio, who grew up at the hotel and restored it in the mid-2000s.

## Tips from the experts

A recent discovery for Marie Louise Scio is the northern Italian city of Vicenza, about an hour’s drive west of Venice.

“The city of Vicenza and the Palladian villas of the Veneto is a World Heritage Site in Italy, which protects buildings by the architect Andrea Palladio,” she told CNBC via email.

Giorgolo has several recommendations for visitors who want to get away from high season crowds.

“Visit Umbria with its wonderful hills and beautiful towns, go to Lucca in Tuscany, a jewel less known than Florence, and discover the city of Turin and the region of the Langhe,” she said.

August is when many travelers head to Italy. Cacciapuoti suggested that those vacationing during peak season go off the beaten track.

“Somewhere remote like Filicudi or the Isole Tremiti; places without too many accommodations ... or find a home away from home on mainland Umbria [a] quiet, green, safe haven,” she told CNBC.

“What I would tell everyone visiting Italy is to take it slow, to not be on a constant schedule, to appreciate life around you — to take a directionless stroll or a long coffee break, don’t always use Google maps, try to talk to a local to ask directions or don’t be so scared to get lost.”

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