

Optional extension: Rome, Ninfa and Castel Gandolfo

17 – 20 September 2024

From £1,405 per person (based on min 15 paying guests)

Itinerary

Day 1 – Tuesday 17 September 2024

We enjoy breakfast at the hotel this morning before transferring to Palermo airport for our morning flight to Rome. On arrival we will continue by comfortable coach to our first visit - **Villa d'Este** in Tivoli, the 16th century gardens which are renowned for their use of water. The garden is romantically overgrown with tall pines, evergreen oaks and cedars. From the upper terrace the valley seems to be full of sparkling spray and the senses are confused by the continual sound of cascading water. You can amble along the Path of One Hundred Fountains, aptly named, to the remains of the miniature Rometta, constructed in 1568, to represent Rome and its seven hills washed at the foot by the River Tiber.

Following our visit, we travel to **Rome** where we have a short city tour. Rome has a justified claim as one of the world's greatest cities combining the magnificence of the Renaissance with the vibrancy and excitement of a thriving city. The sights are many and varied including the Coliseum, St Peter's Square and Basilica, the Spanish steps, and the Trevi fountain.

Later we will continue to our comfortable accommodation at the **4-star Rome Times Hotel**. A welcome drink will be served on arrival.

Day 2 – Wednesday 18 September 2024

Following breakfast we depart for **Viterbo**, capital of northern Lazio and the region's most historic centre, a medieval town that during the nineteenth century was something of a rival to Rome. As we shall see on our guided tour, a number of grand palaces and a host of old churches are enclosed by an intact set of medieval walls.

A short distance away in Bagnaia we find the splendid gardens of **Villa Lante**, described by European garden expert Charles Quest-Ritson as "one of Italy's greatest Renaissance gardens". This study in geometry and symmetry dates to 1568 when it was designed for Cardinal Gianfrancesco Gambara by the architect Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola. The dominant theme is water, and in front of the palazzine is a central water parterre which is a classic example of late-Renaissance or mannerist style. A later addition is the ornate French-style parterre de broderie, with intricate shapes in clipped box set against a ground cover of reddish gravel. Behind the palazzine and shaded by mature trees, the garden ascends in a series of four terraces. From the top terrace the Fountain of Dolphins sends water down to the water feature that dominates the second terrace; falling onto the third terrace the water enters the Fountain of the River Gods and finally the circular Candle Fountain that dominates the lower terrace.

We return to our hotel in the early evening. Evening at leisure.

Day 3 – Thursday 19 September 2024

Following breakfast this morning it is hoped that we will visit the gardens of **Castel Gandolfo**, the traditional papal residence just outside Rome. The property has been in papal hands since 1596, though it wasn't until the 17th century, when Pope Urban VIII commissioned architect Carlo Maderno to design a villa fit for a pontiff, that popes began spending their summers in the healthy air of the Alban Hills. The tour begins with a shady walk to the Giardino della Madonnina, where holm oaks twist out of ancient masonry, and leads on to the Giardino del Belvedere, formed by a series of rigidly geometric parterres, edged by towering cypresses, cloud-shaped crowns of umbrella pines and gnarled cedars.

In the afternoon we visit **Ninfa**. The gardens here are laid out in the ruins of the village of Ninfa, named after a mythical nymph whose tears shed for a lost lover are said to have become the cool stream, which runs through the centre of the garden. The garden is deemed by many to be the most beautiful garden in Europe - if not the world. All this belies its turbulent history; burnt in 1382 and beset by malaria, the village of Ninfa was abandoned and lay deserted for hundreds of years. After the mosquito hazard was removed in 1922 by draining the surrounding marshes, the Duchess of Sermoneta and her son Prince Caetani began to lay out a romantic garden among the village ruins. At least 10,000 plants were collected and planting has continued ever since giving Ninfa an entrancing beauty where flowers from all over the world thrive in glorious companionship.

NB: Due to the fragile nature of the gardens our visit will be by way of a conducted private tour - duration 1 hour 30 minutes.

This evening is free to explore at leisure.

Day 4 – Friday 20 September 2024

Breakfast will be served at the hotel this morning. At an agreed time we will transfer to the airport where our group will disperse and make their own onward connections.

Included in the price:

- Three nights' bed and breakfast at a four-star Rome Times Hotel, Rome
- Welcome drink on the first evening
- One way flight between Palermo and Rome
- Comfortable coaching in Rome
- Visits to the gardens of Ninfa, Castel Gandolfo, Villa d'Este and Villa Lante; guided tour of Viterbo
- Services of Trevor Edwards as Brightwater Holidays Tour Manager

Not included (per person)

- All lunches and dinners
- Gratuities for hotel and restaurant service
- Personal expenses
- Single room supplement £420.00