

Passport

A valid passport is needed to enter Europe, and it should be valid 6 months beyond your intended departure date, meaning the end of your visit. We suggest you take a photo of your passport and email it to yourself in case it is ever lost or stolen. If it is lost or stolen, and you don't have a copy, try to find the nearest embassy for your country to get a temporary passport before you head to the airport.

Currency

- The unit of currency is the Euro, valid in all member countries belonging to the European Union.
- We recommend using credit and debit cards during your trip. When taking money out from an ATM, the exchange rate comes directly from your bank. Make sure to check with your bank as to what that fee will be and to notify them that you will be using your debit and credit cards while in Europe. A 2 or 3-dollar fee won't matter if you get 200-400 euros out at one time. Bring some cash with you in case you cannot find an ATM right away.
- ATMs: European keypads have only numbers, so you'll need to know your personal identification number (PIN) by number rather than by letter. Plan on being able to withdraw money only from your checking account. You are unlikely to be able to access your savings account from a European ATM.
- Avoid non-bank ATMs. "Independent" ATMs charge outrageous fees.
- Don't use your credit card to withdraw cash unless it's an emergency; you'll be charged a high cash-advance interest rate.
- Make sure to bring a debit card, and carry some cash with you. Many small restaurants and some grocery stores don't take credit cards, especially for small purchases. Many places in Europe do not take American Express.

Voltage

The electrical current in Europe is 220 V, 50 cycles alternating current (AC). The wall outlets take the "Europlug," which is two round prongs. You can find adapters for this type of plug at many travel stores or electronic stores. Please note that you should not bring a US or Canadian hairdryer without also bringing a Europlug voltage converter. The 220 volts of European outlets will short-circuit your blow dryer without a voltage converter! Cell phones, iPads, and laptops all have a little box on the charger that automatically change the voltage, so for most electronics a voltage converter isn't necessary, only a Europlug adapter. If you are unsure if your device has a built-in voltage converter, please ask your local electronics store.

Cell Phones

It is recommended that you contact your phone provider to inquire about a temporary international plan. Most times this is the most convenient and affordable. If you don't feel you will need phone coverage all the time, and you have a "smart" phone, then you could simply download a program like "Skype" to make free calls, but only when you are connected to WIFI. Another option would be to purchase a prepaid SIM card once you arrive, however you

would want to first make sure with your phone carrier that your phone would support this. It is possible to purchase a prepaid cell phone in Europe, but it can be a hassle to find a store, and with the SIM card, it may cost you 50-100 euros. Check out Rick Steve's page for some more advice: <https://www.ricksteves.com/travel-tips/phones-tech>

Calling to/from/within Europe

****Sample**** phone numbers: +31 (0) 655 444 333 and 1-800-765-4321

From USA or Canada: If you need to call Europe while you are still in North America, or if your family need to reach your hotel or barge while you are in Europe, they would dial "011" then the phone number with no zeros. So in this case it would be "01131655444333"

To USA or Canada: To call the US or Canada from a local European phone (not your cell phone), you would dial "00" then the number with the country code and area code. So in this case it would be "0018007654321"

Using your cell phone while in Europe: If someone is trying to reach you from the US or Canada, as long as you have cell service, you can be reached at your usual phone number. They will not have to do anything different. In order for you to call out to local European or to USA/Canada, you just need to make sure to add a "+" in front of the number. Your cell phone will do the rest of the work. So for the two example numbers, dialed within Europe from you own cell phone, it would be: "+31655444333" or "+18007654321". You take out any extra zeros at the beginning of a European number.

Dialing to Europe from Europe: If you are able to use a local phone, and need to call within the same country, you don't need to dial the country code (the first two numbers). Instead, you dial "0" then the number. In this case, it would be "0655444333." If you need to dial a different country, you dial "00" then the country code, then the number. So for example, "0031655444333"

Service Charges and Tips

When paying the bill, value added tax (VAT) is shown. In France and Italy, service is included on the bill, so there is no need to tip unless you feel you had outstanding service. In The Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and Germany, a tip of 5-10% is customary. Tip in cash, handing the tip directly to the server, or tell the server how much the bill should be (including tip) before he or she makes change. Occasionally the credit card machines will allow you to add tip. The tariff on the taximeter includes service charge although it is customary to give a small tip. A lavatory attendant is usually given 50 eurocents.

Opening Hours - Banks, Museums and Shops

Banks are generally open from 8 or 8:30 AM to 1:30 PM and 2:30 or 3 PM to 4 PM from Monday to Friday. Foreign exchange bureaus are available at airports, railway stations, major hotels and popular tourist resorts. It is also possible to get cash advances on your bankcard (see above). **Museums** are usually open from 9 AM to 2 PM on weekdays and from 9 AM to 1 PM on Sundays and national holidays. Museums are usually closed on Mondays! **Shops:** Opening hours of shops vary from region to region. In general, shops are open from 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM and from 3:30 or 4 PM to 7 or 7:30 PM from Monday to Saturday. They are usually closed on Monday morning.

Airports

Mantova/Venice: There are many small airports that you can fly to in this region. The most popular in Venice is Venezia Marco Polo airport. The most popular close to Mantua is Verona Villafranca Catullo.

Umbria: Most people fly into Rome or Florence Peretola airport. From either city there is a train directly to Terontola.

Puglia: Two small airports are in Puglia; Bari airport or Brindisi airport

Tuscany: Florence Peretola and Pisa International Airport are the closest to Tuscany.

Rome: Most international and all domestic flights arrive at “**Leonardo da Vinci**” Airport also known as Fiumicino, 30 km outside the city. From the airport there is direct train service, the non-stop Airport-Termini express (marked FS and run by the state railway) to Track 22 at Termini station, Rome's main train station. The ride to Termini takes 30 minutes; departures are hourly beginning at 7:38 AM from the airport. Tickets cost about 10 euros. Website for more information: <http://www.initaly.com/romeair.htm>

Climate

In summer stick with clothing that is as light as possible, although a sweater may be necessary in the cool of the evening. Brief summer afternoon thunderstorms are common in inland cities, so bring your rain gear and an umbrella! In the spring and fall, the weather can be a bit cooler, so make sure to bring layers.

Getting to and from your Tour in Italy

This information is to help you plan your travel time. Please check your final documents before you leave and contact us if there is any discrepancy.

Train Schedule in Italy

The train in Italy is good way to get around without a car, although train stations can be confusing, there are often strikes, and sometimes the trains can arrive late. It is possible to check the train schedule in Italy on the Internet at www.trenitalia.com or www.raileurope.com. You cannot check schedules more than 2 months in advance, but you can get a general idea of distances, time, transfers necessary and prices.

HOW TO REACH VENICE AND MANTUA

By Plane

Both Venice and Mantua are well served by many airports of Northern Italy: Venice (VCE), Treviso (TSF), Verona (VRN), Bergamo (BGY), Milano Malpensa (MXP), Milano Linate (LIN)

By Car

Mantua is situated on the A22 Highway Brennero–Modena, only 50 km south of Verona. Venice is situated on the A4 highway.

By Train

It is possible to check the train schedule in Italy at www.trenitalia.com or www.raileurope.com.

You cannot book travel more than 2 months in advance, but you can plug in a Friday or Saturday date and get a general idea of distances, travel time, transfers, and prices.

Tour ending in Venice

The Mantua to Venice tour ends in the island of Giudecca.

You will take a "vaporetto" (public boat) or a water taxi to reach the main train station of Venice (which is located in the main island). The train station in Venice is Venezia Santa Lucia. The high-speed train will get you there in a little over 3 hours.

Tour ending in Mantua

From the boat you will take a regular taxi about 10 min. to the train station. Please request from the tour leader to book a taxi for you from the harbor of Mantua to the train station.

If at the end of the tour you return to Venice or Mantua we recommend you take the train. The cities are well connected by train. The transfer is quick, and not expensive. From Venice or from Mantua there are about 20 trains a day between 6:00 am and 8:00 pm. The transfer takes about 160 minutes and costs from 10 to 25 euros per person depending on type of train. Between Venice and Mantua or the other way around there are no direct connections. You always have to change in Verona Porta Nuova or Monselice.

In Venice **ACTV (water bus) tickets**

The public transport in Mestre, Venice, and Chioggia is managed by ACTV company. In addition to the common buses on the dry land, you will find the "vaporetti", the boats that guarantee the passengers' transport in the lagoon of Venice. At your arrival in Venice or Chioggia we recommend the purchase of a tourist travel card that is valid 48 hours (price approx.. 30 €). It is the cheapest solution to get around with public transport ACTV. This tourist travel card allows an unlimited number of transfers and can be used in all kind of transport on water (except the private line "Alilaguna" that connects the airport Marco Polo with Venice) and on dry land (buses for and from the airport Marco Polo, urban net of Mestre, Lido and Chioggia). The bicycles transportation is permitted only on board the ferry-boats and not on regular vaporettos (water busses). The price of bike transportation is Euro 1.00 per bike per stretch and must be paid directly on board.

OUR OTHER ITALY TOURS- GUIDED AND SELF GUIDED

****Please let us know the arrival time of your train at least one week before your tour!**
For train schedules visit the website of the Italian Railways, www.trenitalia.com or www.raileurope.com

Umbria, Guided Cycling Tours and Umbria Walking Tours: You will be met by one of our representatives at the Terontola train station in Cortona. There is a direct train from Rome or Florence.

Umbria Delight Walking Tour: Individual arrival at the Perugia train station. Here you'll find a metro ride (the Minimetro) directly to the center of town and your comfortable hotel. Travel

time by train from Rome is a good two and a half hours. We will ask you for your flight and train schedule before your arrival in Italy.

Tuscany Walking Tour: You will be met at the Chiusi train station by one of our representatives.

Tempting Tuscany and Tuscany Self Guided Cycling Tour: You will be met at the Poggibonsi train station by one of our representatives.

The Best of Umbria and Tuscany: You will be met by your tour guide at the train station in Assisi. There is a direct train from Rome or Florence to the Terontola Train Station near Cortona. There you transfer by train to Assisi.

Puglia and Basilicata Cycling Tours and Walking Tours: You will be met at the Bari Airport. If you arrive in Bari earlier, it is possible to arrange pick up at your hotel.

Other Transportation Around Europe

Visiting other places in Italy?

Here is a link to the trains and times.

<http://www.eurail.com/europe-by-train/italy>

Train: Train travel is the most convenient and speedy way of travel in Europe. High-speed trains generally require reservations, as they assign seats, but local trains do not and tickets can be purchased at the train station upon arrival.

Bus: Traveling from one country to another? Busses are usually cheaper than trains, and may require fewer transfers.

Car rental: Driving yourself can be a great way to see the countryside, especially if you want to visit smaller villages and towns where train connections are limited. Usually, one-way car rental within the same country charges no extra fee, but if you would like to pick up the car in one country and drop it off in another, there is usually a hefty fee.

A fantastic resource for travel logistics is www.rome2rio.com. You plug in your departure and arrival information, and they will tell you which planes trains busses or ferries you need to take to get from one place to another, even with small towns! They also have links to the exact website where you need to make the online bookings for tickets. Note that their suggestions aren't always 100% perfect, but it is a great place to start.

Tips on Getting in Shape

ELIGIBILITY: *Clients are responsible for choosing a tour appropriate to their own fitness level. Minors (under age 18) must be accompanied by an adult.*

You'll enjoy your European bicycle vacation a whole lot more if you take the time to get reasonably fit before your plane lands on the eastern side of the Atlantic. You will also greatly decrease the likelihood of an injury while on tour. "I'll just get in shape during the first days of the tour!" is not a great idea! Please consult your physician if you are overweight or have any other health factors that might make strenuous exercise a risk to your well being.

Gradual training takes less out of you, both physically and psychologically, and allows you to strengthen your body incrementally so you won't become injured from the stress of cycling.

So take some fun rides near your home in the two months prior to the tour. If time permits, build your distance gradually. Start with 3 or 4 one-hour rides per week. Remember to stretch and loosen up your quads, calf and hamstring muscles ten minutes before and after each ride. Eventually increase the length of at least one, preferably two, of the weekly rides to 3 or 4 hours, so that you'll be ready for the 3 to 4 hours per day you'll be doing on an average day of touring. This regimen will also train your body to burn fat more efficiently so you'll be more comfortable biking that many hours daily for a week. In addition to getting your legs, lungs and fat burning system in shape, you'll also be training your sit bones, which can become very sore.

Go at an easy pace. 9-12 miles per hour is an excellent sightseeing speed. On your 3 and 4-hour rides, stop at 45-minute intervals that will simulate the relaxed pace you'll be using during the tour. You'll be stopping at least that often to photograph a windmill, visit a castle or simply behold a beautiful field of sunflowers. You'll also be stopping for lunch, snacks or a museum break!

Don't over train! Take rest days to allow yourself to recover. Your body is damaged by exercise and it's during the rest that follows the exercise that you get stronger.

Try to structure your bicycling workouts so they're enjoyable. Ride to a destination with friends if that is motivating. Have fun while you train so you're in shape and ready when your tour begins.

Packing Tips

Following are some tips and a suggested packing list for a one-week bike tour. Realize however that this is a general suggested list designed for all weather situations. Check the weather forecast! Keep in mind, even if your luggage is transported from place to place or stays on the barge, you must still carry it to your first meeting place, lug it around airports, and train stations! **It pays to pack lightly!**

- 1) Ziploc bags or packing cubes are fantastic! Use them to separate clothing items, toiletries etc. This makes it easy to stay organized.
- 2) Don't count on using laundromats or laundry services at hotels or on the barge. There are hardly any laundromats in small villages in Europe and hotel services often take too long and are expensive. It is possible to wash out t-shirts or bike pants in your hotel or barge bathroom. After you ring them out, roll them in a dry towel and press the water out of them. Hang to dry! Therefore 1-2 pairs of bike pants and 4 or 5 T-shirts or bike shirts should be enough for a week of cycling during summer months.
- 3) Do **not** bring a rain poncho! These become "sails" in the wind. However, a rain proof, wind proof type of jacket is a must! Full rain pants are nice but optional. We suggest rain "chaps". The ones that we use are called "Rain Legs" and can be found online or occasionally in your local bike store.
- 4) **Spring cycling** can be unpredictable. In case of cold weather, it is not a bad idea bring warm gloves, hat, and socks. If you have an under helmet liner you may want to bring it to keep your ears warm. Better to have and not use than to miss these things and wish that you had brought them!
- 5) Layer! Even during the summer months or in a warm climate you may have some cool or wet days. We suggest a lightweight base layer that will wick moisture away from the skin. A cycling jersey is ideal and T-shirts are fine in the summer. The next layer should provide insulation for cool weather conditions. Finally you need a windproof and waterproof shell to protect you from the elements.
- 6) Bring baby powder, moleskins, or your own preferred type of provision in case you experience irritation or chafing during biking.
- 7) Sunglasses. Test the fit of your sunglasses with a helmet on a bike ride before you go! A sun visor on your helmet is also a nice addition.
- 8) Padded biking gloves can add to the comfort of your biking vacation.
- 9) Bring a gel seat cover if you are worried about your saddle, but generally our seats are pretty wide and comfortable, and have gel built into them.
- 10) 1-3 pairs of padded bike shorts is a good idea to keep your sit bones happy.
- 11) Bring an under-clothing pouch to carry money, credit cards and passports.
- 12) **Photocopy or picture of your passport.** If it's lost or stolen, you'll save time replacing it.

Suggested Packing List

One-week cycling tours

BIKING GEAR

- 1-3 pairs of biking shorts
- 4-5 T-shirts or biking jerseys
- 1 pair of long comfortable pants
- 1-2 long-sleeved shirts or jerseys
- Sweatshirt or fleece pullover
- Waterproof jacket (a must!)
- Shoes to cycle in
- Sunglasses (a must!)
- Water bottle (at times provided)
- Rain legs (optional)*
- Helmet (**many times provided!**)*
- Cycling gloves (optional)*

CLOTHES

- Regular shoes or sandals
- Socks
- Underwear
- Casual outfits for the evening
- Bathing suit (optional)*

TOILETRY KIT

- Deodorant
- Toothpaste, toothbrush
- Comb, brush
- Shampoo/conditioner
- Shaver or razor

FIRST-AID KIT

- Sunscreen
- Band-Aids
- Aspirin or Ibuprofen
- Digestive aid
- Hand sanitizer
- Lip balm with sunscreen
- Butt butter (optional)*
- Moleskin (optional)*
- Insect repellent (optional)*

MISCELLANEOUS

- Passport (and copy)
- Earplugs
- Cell phone and charger
- Reading glasses
- Reading material
- Headphones
- Electrical adapter for europlug
- Safety pouch for money
- Camera, charger, memory card
- Zip-lock plastic bags
- Printed final documents**
(Will be emailed about 40 days before departure)

VGT General Information

PAYMENTS: Please carefully note that full payment by credit card, check, or bank draft is due 60 days before trip departure. VGT reserves the right to regard reservations for its tours canceled when payment of the balance is not received when due.

CANCELLATIONS and REFUNDS:

In the event of cancellation by the Client the following percentages shall be due:

After reservation and up to 90 days prior to departure: \$100 per person

From 89 to 60 days prior to departure: \$400 per person (loss of deposit)

From 59 to 30 days prior departure: 60% of total tour cost

From 29 days prior to departure date to arrival day: 100% of total tour cost

INSURANCE: On your booking confirmation, we have included information on CSA Travel Protection. **We strongly recommend trip cancellation insurance in case of personal or family emergency.**

ELIGIBILITY: Clients are responsible for choosing a tour appropriate to their own fitness level. Minors (under age 18) must be accompanied by an adult.

RELEASE OF LIABILITY & MEDICAL FORM: These forms have been sent to you and must be returned to VGT at the time of registration.

AIRLINE TICKETING: Since flight options vary locally, consult your local travel agent for advice or try vayama.com. We recommend booking early.

HELMETS: VGT strongly recommends that all bicyclists wear helmets. On many tours helmets are provided, or are available to rent. **Please see individual tour details (under "what's included") for more information about helmets.**

CHANGES to the ITINERARY: Due to unforeseen circumstances VGT on rare occasions must alter the accommodations or routes from those mentioned in the itinerary. All efforts are made to select an alternative hotel of the same high quality and to keep the route changes to a minimum.

VGT Cancellation of Tours: VGT also reserves the right to cancel a tour for any reason. In the unlikely event that this happens a refund of all money received will be made.