

ITALY

Gigi Griffis

100 LOCALS

TELL YOU
WHERE TO GO,
WHAT TO EAT, &
HOW TO FIT IN



Unconventional Travel Guides

ITALY

100 Locals Tell You Where to Go, What to Eat, & How to Fit In

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is for people who want to see another side of Italy.

To stroll past the main attractions, but also find the hidden-away gelato shop with the best cinnamon gelato in all of Rome. Or to discover that the best part of Genoa's Red Museum is actually its rooftop, where the panorama of the town will take your breath away. Or to know ahead of time that you shouldn't order a cappuccino after 11 a.m. or with a pizza (as one Italian says, "or we'll secretly think you should be put in jail").

In other words, this book is for people who want to get under the skin of another culture. Who want to rent apartments and live in local neighborhoods. Who want to eat in tiny restaurants without English menus. Who want to make friends with locals. Who want to deepen their experience of Italy.

Think of this as a supplement to your traditional guidebooks.

Use those for their handy place histories, lists of local hotels (if that's your style), restaurant pricing charts, and basic language lessons. And then use this to go deeper—to figure out the most colorful neighborhood in Naples, the most delicious *osteria* in Verona, the must-eat dishes of Bologna, and how to get to that hidden-away hiking path in the hills outside Positano.

Getting excited? Me too (just wait till you read some of these interviews!).

Now, a little orientation:

This book is split into two large sections: **Plan By Interest** and **Plan By Place**.

In the **Plan By Interest** section, you'll find interviews with some of Italy's top chefs, wine experts, extreme athletes, historians, and more. These interviews are designed to help you plan a trip to Italy that reflects your passion. Love food? Dig into the chef interviews to find out what dishes are a must-try and what regions they come from. Passionate about the outdoors?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Check out our interviews with athletes to find the best hiking trails, cycling trips, or paragliding destinations.

In the **Plan By Place** section, you'll find interviews with people who live all over Italy. Many of them have lived in their cities for decades. Some are local Italians. Others are expats who have fallen in love with their new country. And all of them love showing travelers the best their cities have to offer. Use this section to plan your trip if you already know where your heart is set on taking you.

In every section, below each person's name, you'll see a short bio designed to help you understand his or her background. If you are traveling to Rome and interested in food, look for someone whose short bio includes "Foodie" or "Chef." If you're traveling to Sicily and want to get out in nature, look for hikers, walkers, bikers, etc.

Many of the interviewees are also tour guides, artists, Airbnb hosts, business owners, or bloggers. Watch for web addresses under their interviews if you'd like to learn more about their art, business, rental properties, or tours.

Now, then, into the book...

ON TRAVELING LIKE A LOCAL

The first time I went to Rome, I hated it.

The sun beat down mercilessly as I weaved past each cultural landmark on one of those bus tours. The earphones were broken, so I could barely make out what the guide was saying about each ruin. I was sweating so badly that I was sticking to the seat. I rushed around to some of the main monuments, but none of them spoke to me and I left each one quickly, feeling overcrowded, overly hot, and simply out of sorts.

I was supposed to stay in Rome for a week, but I left the next day.

But the second time I went to Rome—more than five years later, with a lot more travel experience under my belt, and with a brand new travel philosophy—I fell in love.

Instead of a bus tour with a big, well-advertised company, I went on a food tour with a smaller, passionate-about-what-they-do tour company (whose founder gave a Rome interview in the Rome & Lazio section of this guide!). I tasted sweet liquors in the marketplace. I had conversations with people who lived there. And I bought the best balsamic vinegar I've ever tried in my life.

I was only supposed to stay one day, but I thought, "Hmm, I could see myself spending a month here."

There were probably a number of reasons for this massively different experience. One is that it was winter (off-season) the second time I went. The streets were bustling, but not overcrowded. I was wearing a winter coat instead of sweating through my dress.

But more importantly, I think, is that fact that I was experiencing a different side of Rome.

Instead of rushing along from monument to monument with the other tourists, frantic to see everything, I was dedicating a day to the simple pleasure of discovering Italy's food—and not

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even through restaurants, but through small, local butchers, cheese shops, and marketplaces.

Instead of choosing a big bus tour company because it was convenient, I chose a small, passionate walking tour company that cared about connecting its tour groups with the local culture.

And this time I wasn't in a rush. I didn't have a checklist. I wasn't treating Rome like something on my bucket list.

I was, instead, trying to dig into authentic Italy, to experience what a local would experience, to meet people who really lived there, to eat what locals really ate, to shop where locals really shopped.

Which is the whole point of this book.

Yes, there are a lot of amazing monuments and tourist attractions to see all over Italy. There's a reason places like the Colosseum or the Vatican attract the masses. Many of these things are worth seeing and experiencing. (And many of my interviewees will tell you so.)

BUT.

They aren't the whole story of Italy.

And, personally, I want to know more of the story, to get into the culture, to feel, even if I am only there for a few days, like I am truly living in Italy, experiencing something authentic.

In over 15 years of short-term international trips and two years of traveling full-time, mostly in Europe, I've come up with a routine that makes me feel more like a local. Before you dive into this book, I thought I'd share.

1. Travel slowly. Spend some real time in a place. Rome wasn't built in a day and it shouldn't be seen in one either.

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2. Rent apartments, preferably in a neighborhood full of local people. (Not sure how to find the right neighborhood? I've asked locals to tell us in the interviews you'll find in this book. Not sure how to find apartments? My personal starting point is Airbnb.com.)

3. Shop at fresh markets, small butcher shops, and neighborhood bakeries. This is where you'll find the best food (as opposed to the grocery store, though that can also be a welcome adventure).

4. Make friends with people who live there. Ask people about their lives, their thoughts, and their cultures. Expats and locals are both incredibly fascinating and every conversation will teach you a lot.

5. Try to fit in. In Italy, this means dress nicely, don't wear flip-flops if you aren't at the beach, order cappuccino at the right time of day, and offer a hearty *buongiorno!* to the proprietor when you come into a restaurant or café.

It is these principles and this type of travel that I've molded the questions in this book around. So if you, too, want to slow down and experience Italy in a different way, these interviews should provide a very solid foundation indeed.

PLAN BY INTEREST

Plan your trip based on what you love to do.

ITALY FOR WINE LOVERS



Alfonso Cevola

The Italian Wine Guy.

First, tell us about you.

I was born in a vineyard. (*Literally*. The hospital I was born in was surrounded by vines.) My grandfather had vineyards in Cucamonga. When I went to Santa Clara University, the president was a Jesuit and a winemaker. And many of my college pals were from winemaking families in Napa, Sonoma, and Santa Clara Valley.

My heritage is Italian and I naturally gravitated to Italy. I was very fortunate to have that random luck.

What I love about wine is *the connection people have to their little corner of earth*. I love the stories, the passions, the arguments, and the dreams.

If someone is visiting Italy for the first time, what are the top 10 wines you recommend they try and why?

10 wines is a lot. And it all depends where you land. Let's say you land in Rome. Start with a carafe of the house red or white. (Really. Get an idea for the baseline. I still do it to this day.) Then, find a cool wine bar and settle in. If you're looking for a great place, consult The Rome Digest (.com), and Katie Parla's app.

So, my 10 wines for beginners? *Frascati, Pinot Grigio, Orvieto, Verdicchio, Chianti, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Nero d'Avola, Barbera d'Asti*, and *Prosecco*. These are gateway wines, easing you into the Italian landscape softly, gently.

For more experienced wine lovers, what are some of the hidden gems you'd recommend?

I'd say wines from the Langhe: *Nebbiolo, Barbaresco*, and *Barolo*. From Tuscany: *Brunello, Vino Nobile*, and *Chianti Classico Riserva* (or *Rufina*). *Etna Rosso* from Sicily, *Aglianico*

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from Basilicata, *Inferno* from Valtellina, and *Lambrusco di Sorbara*.

If someone is planning a wine tour around Italy, what regions and towns do you recommend they visit?

I am not a city person when it comes to Italy. If you think you need to see Rome, Florence, Milan, and Venice because they are on your bucket list, by all means, have at it. When you get them checked off, head out to the country. Tuscany, Piedmont, Abruzzo, Marche, Sicily, Trentino-Alto Adige, and Veneto...all these places are, at most, a few hours by car from those four cities.

Hint: don't try to do Italy in one fell swoop. Go to one place for a week or 10 days and get to know the locals. I once took a friend who had never been to Italy to an island off the coast of Sicily. Now, *that* was true immersion.

Italy is very easy and very forgiving once you get out of the larger urban areas. Save those places for when you start to get a feel for the real Italy. Then a place like Rome will make more sense.

Where, in your opinion, are the best vineyard tours?

Well, it seems Tuscany is the best-organized place. But you can also find tours in Puglia, Sicily, Piedmont, Liguria...almost anywhere there is a vineyard, there is a tour. Italy, after all, is one giant vineyard. *25% of the wine produced in the world comes from Italy.*

For a general experience, though, I'd start with Tuscany.

Can you tell us a little about the regional differences in Italian wines?

One should drink the wines from the region they are in unless they are in a large urban area (such as Rome) and they are at a restaurant that specializes in the food of, say, Abruzzo. (In which case, order a *Montepulciano d'Abruzzo*.) Or if you are in Milan and in a restaurant where everyone is from Sicily, then by

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all means order a Sicilian wine. "If it grows with it, it goes with it," as Danny Meyer likes to say.

Generally, the wines of Italy are very diverse, but they have evolved with the food from the regions from which they come. Crisp whites from the Adriatic Coast, Marche, or Abruzzo (like *Verdicchio* or *Trebbiano*) go very well with the fresh seafood from the Adriatic, for instance.

If you are in Piedmont during truffle season, then a *Barolo* or *Barbaresco* is a terrific match.

If you are in Tuscany and they are firing up thick, hearty steaks, nothing is better than a *Chianti Classico*, *Vino Nobile*, *Brunello*, or *SuperTuscan*. They complement each other. And with wine it's all about the harmony.

How can a traveler experience Italy's wine like a local?

Try and speak a few words in the language. Smile. Envision humility; many people in Italy never really travel any further than their regional capital. Be patient. And kind. Go to local little places and order the house wine. Don't order a *Barolo* in Tuscany or a *Brunello* in Piedmont (for now). Slow down. Breathe. Keep your heart open. I know this sounds a little corny, but it will work.

What's your best piece of advice for travelers who want to have an amazing Italian wine experience?

If you can stand it, I'd say to go to one place, a vineyard, maybe one that has a nice B&B or an apartment for rent. Stay there and explore the region from that home base. Get to know the locals, the baker, the cheese-maker, and the local tavern folk. I cannot tell you how rewarding something as simple as that can be.

Anything else we should know about wine in Italy?

Don't try and understand all of Italy or all of Italian wine in one trip. Enjoy the moment and the experience. When in Rome, enjoy life as the Romans do: leisurely, unrushed, and with a sense of joy and celebration of life and being alive.

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Find Alfonso at: www.acevola.blogspot.ch.



Cindy-Marie Harvey

Wine Expert. Senior Programme Manager with Arblaster & Clark Wine Tours.

If someone is visiting Italy for the first time, what are the top 10 wines you recommend they try and why?

Sparkling wine from Franciacorta: to showcase how world-class Italian sparkling wines can be.

Greco di Tufo from Campania: to demonstrate native white variety from the south.

Frappato from Sicily: to show that the region can do elegant reds, as well as blockbusters.

Chianti Classico: the perfect introduction to Sangiovese.

Salice Salentino: a big, gutsy red from Puglia.

Lambrusco Cru de Sorbara: to discover what this much maligned wine tastes like when properly made (paired with local salami!).

Barolo: king of all red wines in Italy. Need I say more?

Aglianico: to prove the power and complexity of reds from the south, especially Basilicata.

Passito de Pantelleria: sheer nectar in a glass from the volcanic island close to the African coast.

Moscato D'Asti: at 5.5% ABV, it's the perfect end to a meal or even as a mid-morning welcome drink.

For more experienced wine lovers, what are some of the hidden gems you'd recommend?

Craving more?

Buy the book and get all 100 interviews
at gigigriffis.com.

PLUS, enter to win fabulous Italian prizes.