

OSCAR WILDE TOURS

*Gay Italy, from Caesar to Michelangelo and Beyond,
September 20-29, 2017*

Wednesday, September 20

Day 1 After time to rest following our international flights, Professor Lear starts our tour with a brief talk about Italy's gay history, with all its different eras, before leading us on a walk through the center of this fascinating, breathtaking city, including monuments such as the Pantheon, the Piazza Navona, and the church where the opening scene of *Tosca* takes place—all within a short stroll from our hotel. With thousands of years of history around every corner, we encounter some of the key themes of our tour: the ancient world, the Renaissance, the Baroque, the history of opera—and, of course, the world's greatest gelati! We'll combine a relaxed, pleasant stroll with a little bit of learning—from Hadrian, the “gayest” emperor, to Caravaggio, the artistic rebel and genius. Then it's on to our welcome dinner, where we start to get to know this great culinary city's cuisine.

Thursday, September 21

Day 2 In the morning, we meet our local guides and delve into the core of the ancient city—the Forum, the Palatine Hill that housed the imperial residences, and the Colosseum, famous for its ghastly gladiatorial combats. While exploring the archaeological sites, we learn about Romans' sexual mores—including their important same-sex side—and examine the lurid tales of the emperors' sex lives. After a lunch at one of Rome's most traditional restaurants, we cross the river and visit the Vatican: a mixture of museum, church, and palace that contains one of the world's truly great art collections. Here we will reveal (and revel in!) the irony of a superb collection of homoerotic art being housed by an institution that has a long history of homophobia. Your evening is free to meander through the city and continue exploring its beauty and wonderful cuisine.

Friday, September 22

Day 3 Our day begins with a drive into the countryside to Tivoli, where we visit two great villas: Emperor Hadrian's country retreat (where, among other things, he built a temple to his lover Antinous, who was worshiped as a god after his death in the Nile), and the Villa d'Este, with its splendid Renaissance gardens and fountains. After a lunch in a country restaurant famous for its local produce and wine, we return to Rome to visit Palazzo Massimo, the center of the city's antiquity collections. Here we will explore the classical world in greater depth, seeing such masterpieces of Greco-Roman art as the Discobolus (a model of masculine form for the Greeks) and the sleeping hermaphrodite—a statue that has much to tell about the Romans' sexual attractions.

Saturday, September 23

Day 4 On our last morning in Rome, we visit the Capitoline museum, with its magnificent collection—ranging from the famous she-wolf of Rome to Caravaggio's strangely erotic St. John the Baptist; and then explore a recently discovered ancient senatorial palace, where a sound-and-light show explains the fascinating and complex history of the site. After that, you have a free afternoon and evening, for shopping, wandering, or more museums and churches and to try another of Rome's magnificent restaurants (remember to ask us for advice!)

OSCAR WILDE TOURS

Gay Italy, from Caesar to Michelangelo and Beyond

Sunday, September 24

Day 5 We take the express train to Naples and spend the afternoon in this most complex and lively of the Italian cities. We start with lunch: Naples is the city that invented pizza, and we will have a pizza Margherita in one of the best of its traditional pizzerias. Our main stop this afternoon is the Naples Archaeological Museum, where we see the amazing collection of frescoes and statues that were excavated in Pompeii and other nearby sites. The Museum also has some fabulous homoerotic pieces, including the joint statues of Harmodios and Aristogeiton, the male-male couple who were revered as the founders of the Athenian democracy; also, there is the fascinating Gabinetto Segreto, the collection of erotic art that until the 1960s was only open to “people of mature age and respectable morals.” We then proceed to Sorrento, where our hotel overlooks the palm-lined coast.

Monday, September 25

Day 6 We spend the morning in Pompeii, the place where archaeology was invented and still the world’s greatest archaeological site—a place unlike any other, where you can see right into the private lives of ancient people. We will immerse ourselves in the minutest details of their daily life and appreciate the beauty of their surroundings as well. Sexuality will, of course, be our special theme: Pompeii is rich in the history of the erotic, and full of many surprises, especially in the main bordello and the locker-room of the Suburban Baths! Lunch today is at one of the area’s great restaurants—one that has been feeding visitors to Pompeii since 1825—and features Southern specialties and wines. We are in the heart of the world’s mozzarella production and will get to enjoy it! In the afternoon, we drive south to Paestum and switch cultures, from ancient Roman to ancient Greek. Paestum, although in modern Italy, was an ancient Greek city and today is home to some of the best-preserved Greek temples in the world. We visit the temples and the museum, which contains one of the greatest homoerotic images in ancient art: a wall-painting of a symposium, where, among other party games, a man courts a youth in the ancient Greek style. We return to Sorrento for a free evening.

Tuesday, September 26

Day 7 This morning we take the hydrofoil out to Capri, the pearl of the Mediterranean. We spend the day exploring the island, famous for its beauty and for the rich and famous who have played there—and in particular for their same-sex relationships. After a boat ride around the island, we go up to the village of Capri, where we learn about the Emperor Tiberius and the orgies he supposedly held on the island as well as Capri’s gay culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the island was the site of a gay scandal that rocked the German empire. Passing the hotel where Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred “Bosie” Douglas stayed when visiting, we visit the public gardens donated to the village by the man at the center of the German scandal; those who are up for a walk can also visit the Villa Lysis, the most spectacular remaining villa of the period and, frankly, one of the world’s gayest spots. For lunch today we eat some of Capri’s wonderful seafood right at the water’s edge.

On return to Sorrento, an optional cooking lesson is available (must be booked in advance).

OSCAR WILDE TOURS

Gay Italy, from Caesar to Michelangelo and Beyond

Wednesday, September 27

Day 8 We begin today with the express train from Naples to Florence. On arrival we have a splendid lunch—with Tuscany’s famous steak and red wines, a great contrast with yesterday’s southern-style lunch on Capri! In the afternoon, we take a walking tour of the center of Florence, learning about the city’s key role in the Renaissance and the role of homosexual love in the Renaissance. Our afternoon ends with a visit to the Galleria dell’Accademia, where we see Michelangelo’s ‘slaves’ and the international symbol of male beauty, his David.

Thursday, September 28

Day 9 Today, we visit two of Florence’s splendid museums, where we will discover the whole history of Florentine Renaissance art, from Donatello to Cellini—as well as the dense gay history of Renaissance Florence that their work embodies. We start the morning at the Bargello, where we see several key male nude sculptures from the Renaissance, including Donatello’s David—the first freestanding male nude after ancient times; we then plunge into the Uffizi, the greatest of all collections of Renaissance painting. Bursting with masterpieces, the Uffizi is also a storehouse of homoerotic art by masters as varied as Botticelli, Caravaggio, and Bazzi (known to contemporaries as ‘Il Sodoma’—the sodomite!). The afternoon is yours to explore this charming city, its museums, and/or its wonderful fashion boutiques and artisan shops. This evening, we gather for a final, spectacular dinner.

Friday, September 29

Day 10 Our tour ends this morning in Florence, but we are happy to arrange your return trip to Rome (please let us know about your return to the US, especially if you are leaving today) or your transfer to the HE Travel Puglia Villa Culinary Experience.

HOTELS

Our hotels are 4★ and 5★ boutique hotels, chosen for their special charm and their central locations. Please contact us for details.