

Classical Italy Welcome Letter – Nov 2026
Oct 30, 2026 · @Mildred Francis Steele-Hollenbeck
Benvenuti in Italia!
Welcome to Classical Italy – Rome, Florence & Venice
Premier World Discovery · November 3–12, 2026 · 10-Day Tour

⭐ **Please Read: A Little Homework Before You Fly** ⭐
My name is Mili Steele-Hollenbeck, and I'll be your Tour Director for this journey from Rome through Tuscany to Venice. Our group includes friends from Travel Masters NWA, First State Bank Prestige Club, Anoka-Hennepin Community Education, the Fresno Chamber of Commerce and Acworth Parks & Recreation, all traveling with Premier World Discovery, and I can't wait to meet every one of you. Over the next ten days we'll stand inside the Pantheon and the Colosseum, visit St. Peter's Basilica, walk the hill town of Assisi, make fresh pasta at a Tuscan farmhouse, see the Leaning Tower of Pisa and Michelangelo's David, explore Siena and San Gimignano, find Juliet's balcony in Verona, and ride a gondola in Venice. Art, history and wonderful food: this is going to be a good one!
Please read the first few pages carefully before you fly, then save this letter on your phone as your reference for the whole tour. If you prefer paper, please print it at home. Day numbers and dates match your Premier World Discovery itinerary.
I've also created a website just for our tour! You'll find the link at the bottom of this letter. On it you'll find this welcome letter, plus a guest itinerary with the actual times of what we're doing each day,

maps, and lists of nearby services like pharmacies, ATMs and restaurants. It's the easiest place to check what's next.

✈️ Before You Fly – Quick Checklist

- ☐ **Install WhatsApp and join our group chat at home, before you leave.** WhatsApp texts a code to your phone to verify it's you, and that text may not arrive once you're in Italy. WhatsApp is our main line of communication on tour.
  - 💬 Join our WhatsApp group: tap here
- ☐ Call your cell phone carrier and add an international plan (or set up an eSIM) for calls, texts and data. It's really about peace of mind: if we ever get separated, we'll be able to reach each other.
- ☐ Save my number: **+1 434-808-5233**. To type the + on your phone, press and hold the 0 key.
- ☐ Don't overpack. You'll handle your own luggage at the airport, including a walk of about 10–15 minutes from the terminal to our coach on arrival day.
- ☐ Pack: a Type C plug adapter, broken-in waterproof walking shoes, warm layers, a rain jacket or folding umbrella, a scarf or cover-up for churches, and a small zipped cross-body bag for touring days.
- ☐ Florence's Accademia Gallery (Day 6) has no cloakroom and doesn't allow large backpacks. Bring a small daypack or cross-body bag.
- ☐ Prone to motion sickness? Pack your remedy of choice. We have some long coach days, curvy roads up to Assisi, and boats in Venice on Day 9.
- ☐ Passport: carry a paper photocopy of your photo page every day and keep a photo of it on your phone. On Day 3 (Thu Nov 5) bring your original passport for the Colosseum: tickets are issued in your name and checked against a photo ID. On Day 4 (Fri Nov 6) keep it handy too: our Montecatini hotel scans passports at check-in.
- ☐ Medications in your carry-on, with enough for the whole trip plus extra. Know their generic names.
- ☐ Travel insurance is strongly recommended. If you need a doctor, you usually pay first and claim it back, so keep every receipt.
- ☐ Download your airline's app and add your flight details.

🇮🇹 A Bit About Mili

I'm a born-and-raised Charlottesville, Virginia native, and I lead tours across Italy and the US, as well as private tours back home in Charlottesville. I studied Art History and earned my MFA in Classical Art and Archaeology at the University of Virginia, so Rome, Florence and Venice are basically my happy place: expect a few fun facts along the way! I speak conversational Italian, and my style is warm, organized and full of good stories (and the occasional terrible pun).

Much of a Tour Director's work happens before you arrive: confirming hotels, guides, coaches and restaurants, learning every stop, and planning the details that keep our days running smoothly. I'll already be in Rome when you land, so I'm ready to welcome you.

If something urgent comes up at night, ask the hotel front desk to call my room. The unfamiliar ring of a hotel phone wakes me much faster than my cell!

⏰ A Note on Timing

- Please aim to be at the coach 5–10 minutes early, so we can all be seated and ready at departure time.
- Our coach, boats, gondolas and guides run on set schedules, and museum entries are timed, so being on time means more time for everyone to enjoy each stop.
- If you're running late or get separated, just call or text me and we'll sort it out.
- Expect the unexpected: traffic, weather and lines happen. Patience and a sense of humor help everyone.

📣 How I Will Communicate With You

1. **In person first.** I announce times and plans on the coach and at each stop, and I'll give you the next day's schedule every evening: breakfast, bags and bus times.
2. **WhatsApp second.** I post the same information in our WhatsApp group so you have it in writing. To help important details stay easy to find, let's keep the group for announcements and questions, and save photos for Photo Circle.
3. **Photo Circle for photos!** Share your pictures with the whole group in our shared album.

📸 Join our Photo Circle album: tap here

🧭 My Role

Tour Director, not a local guide: a Tour Director knows a little about a lot; a licensed local guide knows a lot about a little, one city. In Italy, only licensed local guides may explain sights off the coach, so I share my stories and commentary on the coach, and our wonderful local guides take over on our guided visits. Off the coach, I lead the way and take care of the details. Think of me as a duck: calm on the surface, paddling hard underneath.

How it works: Premier World Discovery and our local partners arrange the itinerary, hotels, meals and sightseeing, and I deliver that plan. Hotels and restaurants are independent businesses: if something in your room needs attention, the front desk is the fastest fix. If it isn't resolved, let me know and I'll follow up.
Flights: I don't book or manage flights. If a flight is delayed or canceled, go straight to the airline staff to be rebooked, then call Premier World Discovery (numbers at the end of this letter).
If something isn't right, please tell me right away. Most things can be fixed if I know early, and I'll always do what I can.

🚶 Walking, Stairs & Coach Days

This tour has a lot of walking, much of it on cobblestones, steps, slopes and uneven ancient stone. Large coaches are tightly regulated in Italy and can't enter historic centers, so we often park a walk away from the sights. Venice has no cars at all: we arrive by boat and walk everywhere, over bridges with steps. If long walks or stairs are tricky for you, just let me know privately before the trip, and we'll plan together.

Long walking days

- **Day 3, Thu Nov 5, Rome:** most of the day on foot (Colosseum, Palatine Hill, Roman Forum, St. Peter's), with long standing time in the St. Peter's security line.
- **Day 4, Fri Nov 6, Assisi:** a hill town with steep lanes and steps.
- **Day 6, Sun Nov 8, Florence:** a walking tour plus the Accademia, then free time on foot.
- **Day 7, Mon Nov 9, Siena & San Gimignano:** two hill towns with sloping streets.
- **Day 9, Wed Nov 11, Venice:** a full day on foot, with many bridges and steps.

Long coach days & early mornings

- **Day 4, Fri Nov 6:** Rome to Assisi to Montecatini Terme, about 5 hours of driving with rest stops. 8:00 AM coach.
- **Day 8, Tue Nov 10:** Montecatini to Verona to our Venice hotel, about 4 hours of driving with rest stops. 8:00 AM coach.
- **Day 10, Thu Nov 12:** a 3:30 AM transfer for guests on early flights, 9:00 AM for everyone else.

A gentle note from Premier World Discovery: guests need to be able to get on and off the coach on their own, and travelers who need individual assistance are asked to travel with a companion who can help. If you'd ever like to skip a walk and take a taxi instead, I'm happy to point you in the right direction.

📅 Day 2 – Wed Nov 4: Arrival in Rome

Everyone on our main transfer meets me outside the Customs area. United 970 lands about 7:45 AM, Delta 214 about 8:15 AM and American 718 about 9:00 AM. Once everyone is through customs and baggage, I'll walk you to our coach, about 10–15 minutes with your bags.

Pantheon & Trevi Fountain: hotel rooms usually aren't ready this early, so on the way in we stop to see the heart of Classical Rome. The Pantheon is an active church, so have a scarf or layer handy to cover shoulders and knees.

Please listen on the coach! Italian law allows only licensed local guides to explain the sights once we're off the coach. So I'll tell you all about the Pantheon and the Trevi Fountain on the ride in from the airport. Once we arrive, you just follow me and enjoy. Save your questions for back on the coach, and I'll happily answer them there.

Hotel check-in is from 2:00 PM. Dinner tonight is on your own. Stay awake until evening if you can: it's the best cure for jet lag!

🎟️ Optional: Book Ahead

- **Leaning Tower of Pisa climb** (free time in Pisa, Day 5): not included. Timed tickets sell out, so book ahead on the official site, opapisa.it.
- **Uffizi Gallery** (free afternoon in Florence, Day 6): not included. Book timed tickets ahead on the official site, uffizi.it.

🎧 Headsets, Badges & Dress Code

- **Headsets:** you'll receive a personal headset to hear our local guides; in Venice they're required by law for groups. Please take good care of it and bring it every day. Lost or damaged units may be charged by the supplier. I'll collect them at our Venice hotel before we leave.

- **Name badges:** please wear your Premier World Discovery name badge on every touring day.
- **Church dress code:** the Pantheon (Day 2), St. Peter's (Day 3), the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi (Day 4) and any church we enter: shoulders and knees covered, men remove hats. Strictly enforced. A scarf or light cover-up in your bag solves everything.
- **Reservations & extras:** for restaurants, spa treatments and other extras, the hotel front desk is the best place to book. I'll also share a list of restaurants and services on tour.

🔒 Protect Yourself from Pickpockets

Violent crime is rare in Italy, but pickpocketing is common, especially at the Trevi Fountain, St. Peter's, the Leaning Tower, around Florence's Duomo, St. Mark's Square and the Rialto Bridge, and on crowded buses, trains and boats. Pickpockets often work in groups and use distractions.

- Keep valuables in zipped pockets or a zipped cross-body bag worn in front. Nothing in back pockets.
- Leave your passport (except on Days 3 and 4), spare cards and extra cash in the hotel safe.
- In restaurants and cafés, keep your bag on your lap or strapped to your chair, never on the floor or a chair back.
- Be wary of distractions: petitions, "free" bracelets or roses, people asking directions, and pushy crowds. "No grazie" and keep walking.
- Keep your phone zipped away when not in use, and don't leave it on café tables.

🩺 Health, Safety & Emergencies

- **Feeling unwell?** Let me know privately, and please wear a mask on the coach if you have cold or flu symptoms.
- **Injury or serious illness:** I'll help you get medical care and contact Premier World Discovery's emergency team. I need to stay with the group, but I'll check in with you.
- **Pharmacies:** look for the green cross. Pharmacists can advise on minor ailments.
- **Emergency number in Italy:** 112 (police, ambulance, fire).

🏨 Our Hotels

- **Hotel Milton Roma** · Via Emanuele Filiberto 155, Rome · +39 06 7720 7325 · Nov 4–6 (2 nights).
- **Hotel Adua & Regina di Saba** · Viale Manzoni 46, Montecatini Terme · +39 0572 78134 · Nov 6–10 (4 nights). Our Tuscan base, in a classic spa town. The coach stops about 50 m from the hotel.
- **Crowne Plaza Venice East** · Via della Resistenza 18/20, Quarto d'Altino · +39 0422 703811 · Nov 10–12 (2 nights). On the mainland outside Venice, close to the airport.

🛏️ Hotel Notes – What to Expect

- **Small rooms:** Italian hotel rooms and bathrooms are often smaller than at home, and shapes and sizes vary. A "double" is often two twin beds pushed together.
- **Key card slot:** insert your key card in the slot by the door for the lights to work.
- **Safe tip:** put one shoe in the safe with your valuables, so you can't leave without remembering what's inside!

- **Floors:** the ground floor is "0", "T" or "PT"; "1" is one floor up. Elevators are often small, so take turns with luggage.
- **Bathrooms:** the low fixture beside the toilet is a bidet. Washcloths are often missing. Don't pull the cord in the bathroom: it's an emergency alarm, not a flush.
- **Heating & air conditioning** are often switched on by season. Just ask reception to turn on the A/C or heat, or to bring you a fan or an extra blanket. Duvets replace top sheets.
- **Incidentals:** settle room charges the evening before or before breakfast on departure mornings.
- **Departure mornings:** sweep your room (safe, outlets, hooks) and return your key.

🍽 Meals – What to Expect

Breakfast is included daily. Italian hotel breakfasts are usually continental; eggs aren't always available. Early-flight guests get a breakfast box on departure morning.

Included meals:

- Day 3, Thu Nov 5: Welcome Dinner at Ristorante Tanagra, Rome
- Day 4, Fri Nov 6: dinner at our Montecatini hotel
- Day 5, Sat Nov 7: farmhouse cooking class & lunch
- Day 7, Mon Nov 9: Tuscan farmhouse dinner with wine tasting
- Day 8, Tue Nov 10: dinner at our Venice hotel
- Day 9, Wed Nov 11: Farewell Dinner at our Venice hotel

On your own: all other lunches and dinners, including arrival day. Long days can mean late lunches, so carry a snack.

Set menus & dietary needs: group meals are pre-set. I pass your dietary restrictions to every hotel and restaurant, but how they accommodate them is up to each kitchen. If your diet is very restricted, bring snacks and plan ahead.

Coffee, bread & water: ask for a "caffè Americano" for a larger coffee; no free refills, and each cup is charged separately. Soft drinks are usually extra. Bread comes plain, salads with oil and vinegar. Tap water is safe to drink. You'll be asked "naturale" (still) or "frizzante" (sparkling).

Dining is unhurried: the bill won't come until you ask for it ("il conto, per favore"). Many restaurants open for dinner at 7:00–7:30 PM. Ice is used sparingly: ask for "ghiaccio."

🚌 On the Coach

- **Seat rotation:** we rotate seats every day so everyone gets a turn up front and by the windows. Everyone takes part, and I'll explain how it works once we're all together.
- **Seatbelts:** stay seated while moving and wear your seatbelt.
- **Motion sickness:** let me know! Rows 3 and 4 sit right over the front wheels, where there's the least motion.
- **Layers:** the coach can feel cool, like an airplane.
- **Food & drink:** up to our driver; some allow water only. Please no smelly or messy food.
- **Scents:** please no strong perfume, cologne or essential oils on coach days.
- **No smoking** on the coach (PWD policy).

🧳 Luggage

- **PWD policy:** one checked bag per person, with your Premier World Discovery tag on the top handle, plus one small carry-on.
- **Hotel porters** carry tagged bags to and from your room. A bag without its tag is much more likely to be missed.
- **Moving days:** I'll tell you the evening before what time bags go out. On arrival, bags can take up to an hour to reach your room, so keep medications and your passport in your hand luggage.
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🗣️ Handy Italian Phrases

English	Italian	Say it
Hello / Good morning	Buongiorno	bwohn-JOR-noh
Good evening	Buonasera	bwoh-nah-SEH-rah
Please	Per favore	pehr fah-VOH-reh
Thank you	Grazie	GRAHT-see-eh
You're welcome	Prego	PREH-goh
Excuse me / Sorry	Scusi	SKOO-zee
Where is the restroom?	Dov'è il bagno?	doh-VEH eel BAHN-yoh
How much is it?	Quanto costa?	KWAHN-toh KOH-stah
The bill, please	Il conto, per favore	eel KOHN-toh, pehr fah-VOH-reh
Still / sparkling water	Acqua naturale / frizzante	AH-kwah nah-too-RAH-leh / free-TSAHN-teh
Ice	Ghiaccio	GYAH-cho
Delicious!	Buonissimo!	bwoh-NEES-see-moh
I don't understand	Non capisco	nohn kah-PEES-koh
Do you speak English?	Parla inglese?	PAR-lah een-GLEH-zeh
Help!	Aiuto!	ah-YOO-toh
I'm allergic to…	Sono allergico/a a…	SOH-noh ah-LEHR-jee-koh/kah ah
Cheers!	Salute! / Cin cin!	sah-LOO-teh / cheen cheen

🔌 Practical Tips

- **Electricity:** Italy uses 230V, about twice the voltage at home. Only plug in devices labeled 100–240V (most phone, tablet and laptop chargers). An adapter changes only the plug shape, not the voltage. Hair dryers are usually provided. Bring a Type C adapter.
- **Wi-Fi:** available in hotels and many cafés, but you usually need to join the network and accept a log-in page. The coach may not have Wi-Fi.
- **Weather:** November is cool and often rainy. Expect daytime highs around the low 60s°F in Rome and Tuscany and the mid-50s in Venice, with chilly mornings and evenings. Pack warm layers, a rain jacket or umbrella, and waterproof shoes. Quick conversion: Celsius × 2 + 30 ≈ Fahrenheit.

- **Time:** Italy is 6 hours ahead of US Eastern time and 7 hours ahead of Central. Your phone will update on its own! Italy uses the 24-hour clock (1:00 PM = 13:00).
- **Taxis:** use an official taxi stand or ask the hotel to call one. Uber is very limited in Italy.
- **Restrooms:** marked "W.C." Public toilets often cost €0.50–€2, and not all have paper, so carry tissues.

💶 Money

- **Euro notes:** smaller shops and cafés often won't break €50 notes or larger, so carry €5–€20 notes and keep coins for restrooms and coffee.
- **ATMs:** use bank ATMs (Bancomat) and avoid Euronet. Always choose to be charged in euros, never your home currency.
- **Cash for small things:** coffee, postcards and gelato often need cash, even where cards are accepted.
- **Coperto:** a cover charge of €1–€3 per person for bread and table service is normal on restaurant bills. Ask about cards and separate checks before ordering.
- **Café bars:** standing at the bar is cheaper than sitting at a table. In many bars you pay at the register first, then show your receipt at the counter.
- **Counterfeits:** skip the fake designer goods from street sellers; in Italy, even buyers can be fined.
- **Tax-free shopping:** as non-EU residents you can claim back part of Italy's sales tax on goods you take home (generally over about €70 in one store, same day). Ask the shop for a tax-free form, then have it validated at the airport before check-in. Allow extra time on departure morning.

💵 Gratuities

Gratuities are always personal and at your discretion. A few local customs to know:

- **Already included:** gratuities for hotel and restaurant staff on included meals, and porterage for one bag per person.
- **Housekeeping:** not included; about €1–€2 per person, per night if you wish.
- **Meals on your own:** a coperto often covers part of the service, so rounding up or €1–€2 per person is customary. Tips are left in cash.

📱 Contact Info

- **Mili:** +1 434-808-5233 (call, text or WhatsApp; hold 0 to type the +) · milihollenbeck@gmail.com
- **Premier World Discovery, from Italy:** +1 310 372 3668 (Mon–Fri 8:30 AM–5:30 PM Pacific) or +1 310 854 4200 after hours. Toll-free 1-877-953-8687 works only from the US and Canada.
- **Emergency in Italy:** 112, Europe's version of 911 (police, ambulance, fire).

🏛️ Final Thoughts from Mili

Most of all, I hope this journey invites you to relax, stay curious, and enjoy Italy as it unfolds. Travel doesn't have to be perfect to be memorable, and sometimes the unexpected moments become the ones we remember most. I'll do my very best to keep things running smoothly, and I can't wait to share the art, history and flavors of Rome, Tuscany and Venice with you.

What are you most looking forward to?
Send me a message, I'd love to know! Andiamo! (ahn-DYAH-moh, "let's go!")
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+1 434-808-5233 · milihollenbeck@gmail.com
🌐 **Our Tour Website**
Welcome letter · Guest itinerary with daily times · Maps · Local services
Open our tour website