



# Tourissimo

ACTIVE TRAVEL IN ITALY

Updated and Expanded with  
New Tips and Insights

# The Ultimate Active Travel Guidebook:

37 Tips To Prepare You For Your Dream  
Vacation Even With Zero Knowledge

by Beppe Salerno

## The Ultimate Active Travel Guidebook

So, you know of a friend of a friend who has taken an active travel vacation and is now hooked. Perhaps, she's even organizing a group for her next trip.

While the idea of your own active vacation is slowly sinking in, you start to wonder how to plan and to get organized for it. What are the pitfalls to avoid and how do you choose the right type of trip and tour operator?



# Contents

The Ultimate Active Travel Guidebook	2
What is an active travel tour?	4
Choose a Tour	5
Now That You've Booked a Tour	10
Get Ready	13
Packing	15
Just Before You Go	18
Climate	20
How to Beat Jet-Lag	21
The Actual Tour	22
Coming Home	26
Off You Go!	27
Buy Experiences, Not Things	28
Italy is Waiting for You	29

## What is an active travel tour?

Active travel is a physical as well as cultural exploration of a region or remote destination.

You'll probably travel by foot (walking or hiking), bicycle, kayak or canoe, or a combination of these. Exceptional physical fitness usually isn't necessary; you can enjoy some active trips at a fitness level only a notch or two above that of a couch potato. But you'll almost certainly get sweaty, and tired at times. That's not a negative thing especially in today's car & computer society: it's refreshing for you body and soul. One of the nice features of going on a tour is that it is fully supported and help is usually at hand in the form of a sag vehicle stocked with water, supplies, and a cheerful tour leader.

In this guide we will give you tips for organized and escorted active vacations guided by professional tour leaders. Some of the tips will also apply to self-guided tours. In that instance, you buy a package that includes an itinerary, hotel reservations, and other services such as luggage transfer and on call assistance, but no guide accompanies you. The suggestions in this guide are intended mostly for people traveling to Europe, but some tips can apply to other destinations as well.

## Choose a Tour

Buy your friend of a friend dinner and get firsthand information about her experience: what she liked and disliked about her trips.

Prepare some questions and expect an overwhelming, contagious and enthusiastic dinner presentation. Active travel is known (and has been proven) to spark a lifelong passion in people, and they are eager to share their stories!

### **Choose the type of activity and how much of a physical challenge you want.**

If you like to ride you will love a bike tour. Walking and hiking appeal to a broader audience, and kayaking is another possibility. Any activity can be very rewarding in the right destination and in the hands of the right company. There's an active trip for virtually every level of physical fitness. Companies usually rate their trips as easy, moderate, or challenging. Study the trip ratings carefully and be realistic; different companies use different rating criteria, based on physical activity, altitude, and terrain.

### **Choose your destination.**

It can be a bit confusing and even intimidating to choose from the vast number of active vacations available. To narrow down the choices to a

manageable number, decide early what part of the world you want to visit. If you're new at this and not quite sure where you want to go, pick a trip that has a track record of broad appeal over the years.

Many European countries fit that description and have great destinations for all levels and budgets. Of course, you want to make sure they offer those tours on the dates you can travel.

Here's a pro-tip: find out sooner rather than later if the dates you are looking at are confirmed. Often, tour operators confirm departures once enough people sign up. That might lead to unexpected cancellations if the trip doesn't fill and you want to have a backup plan if that happens in order not to miss your vacation timeframe.

### **How much you can expect to pay.**

For a European destination you'll probably spend at least \$2,000, plus airfare, for a weeklong tour program. Longer trips to destinations like Asia or Africa cost \$3,000-\$6,000. Truly exotic adventures, climbing a mountain in Central Asia, for example, can cost up to \$20,000 or more. And there are "trophy" tours like riding Antarctica on fat bikes that can cost over \$50,000.

Prices can vary a lot depending on the type of accommodation, number and type of meals included and transfers before and after the trip. Some companies charge for wine separately, while others rent bikes or other

equipment at an additional fee. For a comfortable, safe, tested, active trip, it boils down to a range from US\$300 to US\$700 per day.

### **Decide how much variety you want.**

An active vacation usually includes a sampling of a wide variety of places and activities. Many tour operators offer programs with one or two night stays and at each hotel before moving on to the next location or village. Some people prefer to stay in one area so they can get to know it intimately and they don't have to pack and unpack.

There are a limited number of programs out there with one base only (sometimes referred to as villa-based programs).

### **Shop around.**

Call or email several active travel companies and request detailed daily itineraries for trips that interest you. For similar trips by different companies, compare trip routing and accommodations. Be sure to ask about potential extra costs like internal airfare, fees for visits and museums, or meals not included. Is there a surcharge for small groups? How much is a private room if you don't share? Is discounted airfare available?

This information will give you a feel for the level of service each company provides.

### **Compare cancellation policies.**

Because of the more complicated logistics of planning this kind of trip, deposit/cancellation policies are sometimes stringent. Is the initial deposit refundable? Are interim payments required? When is full payment required? What refunds, if any, apply if you cancel after that? Is the deposit transferable to another trip or to another year?

### **Talk to people who have already taken the trip (remember your friend of a friend?)**

Chances are that in your circle of friends someone has taken that trip or a similar one from a competitor. Ask them questions! Also, ask each company if they can put you in touch with previous customers on the trip you're looking at. This unbiased, word-of-mouth information is invaluable.

### **How much support will you receive.**

There are various tours with differing levels of support and one of the things you should know is just exactly what is the level of support for the tour you are considering. According to ATTA (Active Travel Trade Association) the average guide to guests ratio is 6.8. That is low compared to sight seeing tours because an active vacation is different. A group can spread out and the guides have to be able to reach someone in a reasonable amount of time. More guests per guide means less support and less attention.

Other things that you want to find out in your search for the perfect tour are: how much independent travel is possibly? Does everyone stick together all day? What about free days when nothing is scheduled? Each travel company might have a different style and tour programs might allow more or less free time. Decide upfront what suits you the best.

### **Find out about the tour leaders.**

The most important factor contributing to the enjoyment of your trip tour is the tour leader, who simultaneously fills the role of guide, interpreter, teacher, mother hen, drill sergeant, and group psychologist. A great leader can be an American expatriate or a local professional guide, but he or she should be a year-round resident of the country or region where he or she is guiding, and speak both English as well as the local language fluently.

## Now That You've Booked a Tour

### **Prepare your information.**

#### **Check your passport.**

International convention says that passports must be valid for at least six months after the date of entry into a country and should contain a full blank page for the visa of each country to be visited. Don't put your passport in your checked baggage for flights. Electronic passports (with a microchip built in) are now mandatory to clear customs in many countries.

#### **Check visas requirements.**

Unlike many European nations that are complying with international visa waiver agreements, other countries visited by adventure travelers often require visitors to obtain a visa before arrival. Your travel company will often provide you with visa application forms, which you then send to the appropriate embassy or consulate (a fee usually applies unless it's included in the cost of the trip).

The need for a visa also depends on your country of citizenship; if you don't have a US or Canadian passport, check with your embassy (or go online).

Upon arrival in your destination country, you will be asked the reason for your trip (tourism) and your passport will get stamped. The vacation is about to start!

**Make copies of important documents.**

Passport, visas, tickets, credit cards, drug prescriptions, and other critical documents should be photocopied, and the copies carried separately. Do not rely solely on documents saved on your smartphone.

**Read your pre-departure information carefully.**

Sometime before your trip date, you should receive a pre-departure info pack that is prepared by the travel company based on their experience and knowledge of the destination, and that answers the majority of questions you might have.

This package usually includes advice on visas, inoculations, packing, medical tips, local customs, currency, weather, and the like. Read it carefully, and feel free to call the travel company if you have additional questions. Also, research and read a book or two about your destination. We don't mean travel guides, but rather historical romances, biographies and travel essays.

A good map (1:200000) can be a really helpful tool even though you will certainly get route sheets as well as other forms of direction from the tour company and guides.

In Italy, ERs are as loud as a housewife kitchen with multiple kids, but the health system is government subsidized. Should you need treatment you will get by with a "grazie mille" and a charming smile.

Studying the map in advance will give you some confidence by reducing the amount of “unknown”. Michelin provides some excellent maps that are available online, not to mention Google Earth, of course.

And, of course, try and get some feeling for the current events happening at your destination...politics, culture, art...When labor unrest is likely and you will be relying on public transport for part of your trip, for example, you should have some sort of plan B.

**Consider buying travel insurance (aka buy travel insurance).**

Check to see if your regular health insurance policy covers illness or injury overseas. If not, a short-term policy for the duration of the trip will provide peace of mind. Sometimes a tour operator will refer you to their insurance broker for group rates. Verify what the insurance actually covers. The most comprehensive policies include medical evacuation insurance for the injured and his/her partner, as well as trip cancellation.

Also, make sure that the policy covers “sport” activities so that if, by chance, or bad luck, you have to rent equipment, for example, it will be covered.

Many people end up filing a claim not due to an injury during the trip, but because of an emergency before the trip that forces them to cancel (weather, illness or injury).



## Get Ready

### **Get in shape.**

Get fitter while dreaming of and preparing for the trip! Physical requirements vary greatly according to the trip, and you should follow the guidelines provided by the tour company. But at a minimum, you should exercise three times a week for two months before departure. Your exercise routine should simulate a day on tour: if the tour program shows 2 to 3 hr hikes, you should do that several times a week.

### **Be smile ready. Get a dental checkup before you leave.**

A toothache caused by a cavity or a lost filling can turn into a painful ordeal when you're an ocean apart from your dentist.

### **Thoroughly break in your hiking shoes as well as your cycling gear.**

Many first-time active travelers buy new hiking boots for the trip and even worse, riders invest in cycling shoes paired with clip-in pedals without allowing time to get used to them. You must walk a minimum of 20 miles in your hiking and walking shoes, and go on 5 to 10 rides with your cycling shoes, before departure.

We recommend trusting your local outdoor store and trying shoes from several makers and sizes. If you are a rider, rely on your local bike shop

for gear as long as you don't let them talk you into road cycling shoes (the kind without rubber soles). They are nearly impossible to walk on. Buy mountain bike shoes and pedals instead. That way you will be comfortable on and off the bike for the occasional stops and visits along the ride. Riders can simply opt for sneakers and the standard pedals attached to the bike.

Let's be practical. No one will be offended if you bring your own shoes and pedals to go with them...and they will think you wise, if you bring your own saddle as well, if it is already "broken in" and you find it very comfortable.

**If you wear contact lenses, consider disposables.**

Removing and replacing contact lenses every day on a outdoor trip can be a very annoying chore. Disposables are better for adventure travelers because you need not carry along cleaning or storage paraphernalia. Disposables have the additional advantage of being very cheap; it's no big deal if you lose one. We have experienced lost contacts while descending on a bike (air can find its way between the cornea and the lens and blow it away).

## Packing

A suitcase and a backpack or small duffel bag will do.

Remember that for part of your journey you will have to transport your luggage on trains, and perhaps city center cobblestones and up some stairs.

Once you are in the hands of the guides, they will take care of your luggage transporting it from one hotel to the other and even delivering it to your room ready for your arrival. Bags should be tagged (do it at the outbound airport if they are not).

Pro-tip: because when you fly luggage can get misplaced (it doesn't really get lost), you'll want your outdoor gear or cycling gear, medications, and some clean underwear in your carry on. Your checked bags may rejoin the trip one or two days after you started.

Sort smaller bags roughly according to function: one for everyday stuff, one for cold-weather and rain gear, for isolating wet and/or dirty clothes, and for organizing luggage.

We really like the practical, no nonsense, see-through Ziplock bags that come in different sizes. Clothes can be wrapped in bags within the suitcase to stay protected and to prevent wrinkling. We like to keep street clothes and athletic gear separated, too.

**Remember: Pack Light.**

If the packing list your travel company provides seems impossibly skimpy, don't worry. Humans have a tendency to overpack. Fashion doesn't count much on an active vacation, and modern outdoor clothing is so versatile that one garment can perform a variety of functions. Our advice is to bring clothing that does not wrinkle and dries quickly, and a couple of nicer pieces for fancier restaurants.

**Bring along a medium-size day pack.**

The right size is a 35 liter capacity (2,000 cubic inches), and it should have several compartments. Use it on the airplane as a carry-on bag for all your indispensable items (documents, toiletries, camera, clothes to wear in case your checked luggage is lost or delayed- see above). It has the advantage of being easy to carry on long walks down airport corridors. Once you arrive and the trip begins, use it to carry all the things you'll need during the day: water bottle, snacks, camera, extra clothing, and sunblock. Your main piece of luggage will most likely be inaccessible.

Pro-tip: when visiting crowded places and especially at train and bus stations, do not carry valuables in your backpack. Keep those on you in a money belt or neck pouch under your clothes. Make sure you have a copy of your passport as well. Absolutely necessary should the original need to be replaced in a hurry.

### **Oversize luggage.**

Make sure you know if the airline will accept your luggage if, for example, a bicycle is included. There are strict size and weight limitations and, in some cases, it doesn't matter what you are willing to pay, they simply won't accept oversize overweight baggage. Leave plenty of time for checking in any "unusual" luggage such as a bike box. And, do not pack any Co2 cartridges (the ones to inflate tires) because they will have you take them out. Storing them in the seat-post will foul the scanning system, but we don't recommend doing that.

### **Take along your favorite energy food...or try the local specialties.**

Your favorite energy bar probably won't be available, so take it with you if you want a comfort from home.

Here's a recipe for an extraordinary tasty high-carbo concoction that provides instant energy and staying power along the trail. Simply mix dry-roasted peanuts and chocolate-covered raisins.

You can also take this opportunity to try local fruits and snacks. Some may be provided by the tour operator.



## Just Before You Go

### **Arrange your flight schedule to minimize jet lag.**

If you are traveling eastbound (from the US), schedule your arrival for morning at your destination. Westbound, shoot for a late afternoon arrival. This will help your body's internal clock get in sync more quickly.

### **Hold off on exchanging dollars until you arrive at your destination.**

The exchange rate is almost always better overseas than at U.S. banks, which take hefty commissions and don't like to trade in small amounts. Traveler's checks are safer than cash but are nearly obsolete.

We advise that you go to an ATM and get cash (enough for 2-3 days) in local currency upon landing. The international transaction fee will likely be less than the commission that an exchange bureau charges.

In Europe, credit cards can be used to pay in most places but do not take this for granted. Also, in Europe it's not proper to pay with credit cards for small amounts, such as coffee or cheap items.

One more thing. Most banks in Europe only take credit cards with electronic chips.

Pro-tip: call your bank and/or credit card company beforehand to let them know where you will be traveling so that they don't get suspicious with foreign purchases.

**Budget for tips to your tour leader, guides, and porters.**

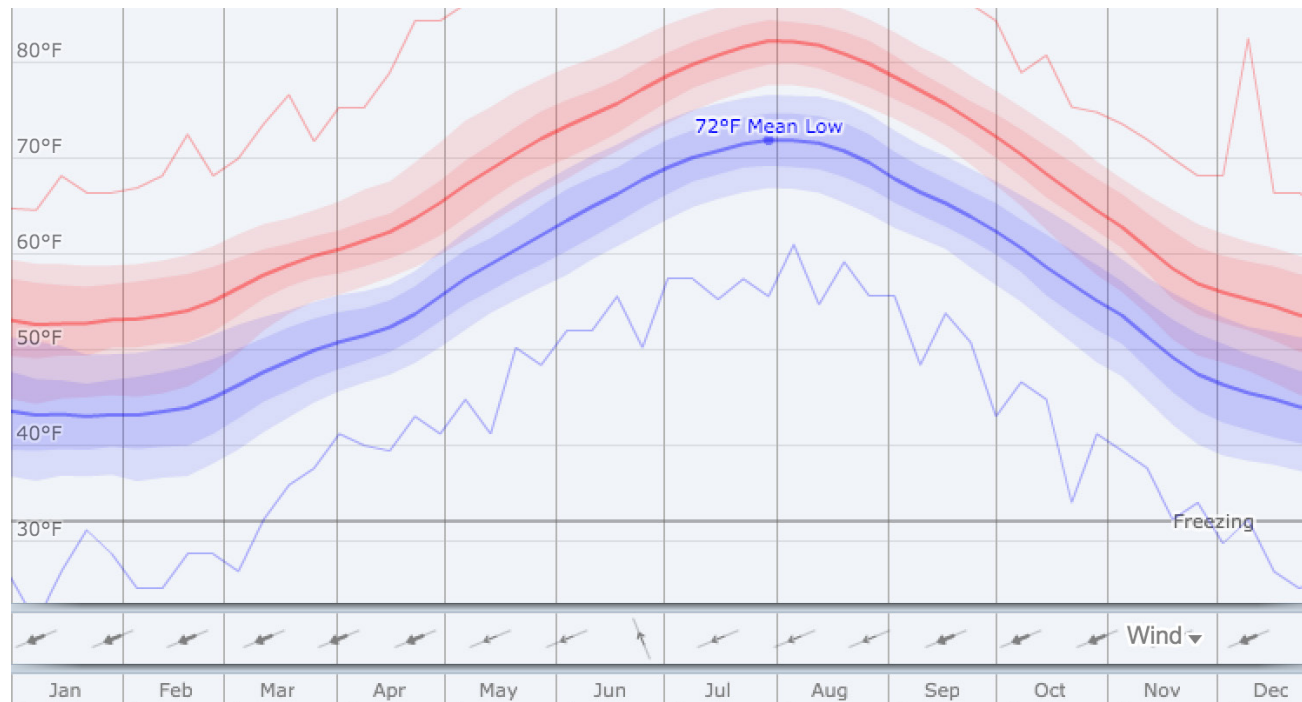
Like waiters and ski instructors, adventure travel company field staff traditionally rely on tips for a portion of their income. The amount is strictly up to you, but if you feel the staff did a good job, 5 percent of your land cost is a good ballpark figure.

Keep in mind that what appears to be a trivial amount of money to you can be a big help to a local staff member. Local guides (for city tours for instance) and drivers are paid by the travel company and they usually budget tipping for them. So, no need to tip them as you have already done so within the cost of your tour. If in doubt, ask your tour leader about tipping etiquette.



## Climate

Other than information from the travel company and perhaps friends who traveled to that region you want to check some weather websites for average temperatures.



We like weatherspark.com because it gives a 10 year average and precipitation chances.

## How to Beat Jet-Lag

**Set your watch to the destination time as soon as you get on the plane.**

This will get you thinking on destination time and serve as a reference for the following anti-jet-lag steps, which should be performed on a precise schedule.

**Schedule your in-flight naps for nighttime at your destination.**

Your body's daily circadian rhythm is controlled by the hormone melatonin, whose release is triggered by darkness perceived by the retina. The idea is to start the new dark-light cycle as soon as possible. When it's night at your destination, try to keep your eyes closed, or wear a sleep mask, to keep outside daylight from shining into the eyes.

At the very least, stay as quiet as possible during this period, and keep socializing to a minimum. Conversely, when it's daytime at your destination, try to stay awake.



## The Actual Tour

### **Be extravagantly friendly with your guides.**

Don't let a language barrier stop you. Ask them to teach you a few words. Learn their names. Gesticulate wildly. Make visual jokes. Buy them drinks. The idea is to break down the cultural and hierarchical barriers and really get to know these people. If you succeed, you may find to your surprise that the highlight of your trip was not a mountain or a fancy hotel, but a person.

### **Keep a journal.**

Snapshots are fine, but you'll find that a written record of your thoughts and feelings will bring a knowing smile to your face years from now. Adventure travel, because it removes you so completely from normal everyday life, invariably stimulates contemplation and triggers unaccustomed musings. Should I quit my boring job? Does it really matter who wins the Super Bowl? Am I really ready to settle down and get married? Write these thoughts down. Years from now, you'll be amazed at what went on in your head.

### **Wifi and cell phones.**

Smart phones are great travel companions. Apps like Facebook, Instagram, and others are for many people where travel memories are stored and shared. Some might argue that unplugging is part of the vacation, but

honestly it's hardly the case nowadays. Therefore, you need data connection and that can be achieved through wifi and phone companies letting you use their antennas (not for free of course).

Wifi is available in nearly every hotel (most of them don't charge anymore) but the quality of the signal is often inadequate and spotty. We found ourselves not being able to navigate at all during peak navigation times. Patience is key; but finding a corner where the signal is stronger and avoiding peak hours can smooth frustration.

One alternative (or additional option) is to buy international data packages from your mobile phone company, or to buy a new sim (the little microchip that allows your phone to communicate using the local antennas) altogether in the region you visit. You want to research beforehand which companies offer pre-paid data packages and compare. Or, ask your guides when you meet them and they will tell you the best options.

Also, consider one of those outdoor smart phone cases. It's money well invested that buys you peace of mind.

### **Maintain your normal hygiene routines.**

If the tour involves a remote exploration, resist the temptation to play Neanderthal man (or woman) in the wilderness; your travel mates will appreciate it, and you'll feel a lot better. Maybe you can't take a shower on

a two-week trek or plug in your hair dryer or Water Pick. But you can brush and floss your teeth daily, take sponge baths, and wash your hair regularly. (Just ask the camp staff to heat you up a potful of hot water.) If there's a river nearby, so much the better. And don't forget to use biodegradable soap.

**Drink, drink, drink.**

Dehydration, which can make you more susceptible to fatigue and illness, is a common problem among adventure travelers. It starts with the extremely dry cabin air of your long airplane trip. Summer heat, exertion, and adjusting to the new diet (wine included!) only make matters worse.

Drinking enough water is especially important at altitudes above 10,000 feet, where dehydration can greatly exacerbate the symptoms of altitude sickness. Keep a bottle of drinking water with you at all times, and try to drink even when you're not thirsty. By the time you feel thirsty you're already well on the way to dehydration. Check the color of your urine; it should be almost clear. If it's a dark yellow, you need to drink more.

Clear, copious and continuous is what you want. On the days you fly, you may want to hydrate while waiting and empty the bladder just before boarding.

**Food, fueling up with local specialties.**

You are going to love the feeling of fueling up everyday with delicious food

and exercising.

In many countries, food is part of the culture and it is served with pride and with great emphasis by hosts to show their hospitality.

If you have food allergies or particular dietary needs, let the company know at the time of booking. They will relay the information to the tour leaders that will arrange to have alternative dishes for you.

Pro-tip: do you love cooking? Why not ask for the recipes of the dishes that impressed you the most? You could then have an after vacation party with your friends to show pictures and to show off your newly-imported dishes.

**If you feel ill, inform your trip leader immediately.**

If you think the problem is food-related, he or she will need to know right away. Don't try to tough it out; it's important your leader be aware of any physical problems as soon as possible.

**Ride or hike comfortably at your own pace.**

Don't worry if you can't keep up with the sprinters in the group or if you just prefer to sightsee or putter along the way. You will all end up in the same place; one tour leader usually brings up the rear to keep an eye out for stragglers. Pace yourself and conserve energy early. Eventually, you'll find who has your same pace and might go along in small groups.



## Coming Home

### **Send yourself a postcard home.**

Just before getting on the plane back home, send yourself a postcard from your last dreamy destination. Global mail service being what it is, the card usually takes a few weeks to get back home. By then, you're back in the normal routine of job and family, and the sudden arrival of a brightly colored postcard from a faraway country is always a delightful reminder of your trip.

### **Beware of duty-free shops.**

Most do not offer any real bargains. A few exceptions: cameras and jewelry at Schiphol Airport (Amsterdam), and jewelry in Tel Aviv. Duty-free shops in Paris, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Rio de Janeiro are good.

If you make important purchases, you might be able to deduct VATs by requesting and filling out the proper paperwork. You can read how it's done in our blog: [How to Get Money Back on Purchases in Italy](#).

### **Fill out your travel company's post-trip questionnaire.**

Be candid. Report the lows as well as the highs. Thoughtful comments from trip participants are the best form of quality control, and most companies pay very close attention to feedback from their travelers.

## Off You Go!

Virtually anyone can enjoy an active vacation.

Age hardly matters; 65 year olds climb Kilimanjaro, and 75 year olds have the time of their lives riding the whole length of Italy. Physical fitness and athletic prowess hardly matter; there are active trips for virtually every level.

But some things do matter, like your spirit of adventure, your flexible attitude and your sense of humor. Not everything goes exactly according to plan on an active vacation (think of a weather change). Are you the kind of person who cheerfully takes in stride, or even relishes, the occasional delays and frustrations of off-the-beaten-path travel? If so, you've probably got the spirit of adventure that makes this kind of travel so exhilarating.

One of the best things that will happen to you is that you will make great friends. Often, people who met for the first time on a tour remain in touch and plan the next one together.

## Buy Experiences, Not Things

We wrote this guidebook because we want your vacation to be extra special. We believe that your holiday should be memorable for you and your loved ones.

By following our tips, we hope that you are now prepared to take the next step and book your tour. We believe that being prepared opens up for unique experiences you'll treasure for the rest of your life.

### **Experiences are priceless. And those are all that matter.**

Delight in the experience of dining with warm, friendly locals. Treasure every bump and twist down strange roads and pathways. Revel in rich, colorful festivities to the envy of your friends back home.

An occasional downpour on your ride is a let down. A sudden delay in your itinerary is understandable. Getting lost in translation is downright hilarious. But who cares?

Those same experiences will be your hero's journey once back in the office.

And when it's time to pack your things and ride back to the airport, look back to these past few days. Think back to every moment you've spent on the road or on the trail. And the new-found friends you'll miss once you reach home. Unforgettable, right?

## Italy is Waiting for You

**We can help you experience Italy in more ways than you can think of:**

- The majestic Dolomites
- The Italian hospitality
- Rolling hills dotted with castles
- High-quality vintage wines and authentic regional food
- Scenic landscapes
- Rustic farmhouses
- And world-renowned festivals like Battle of the Oranges and Game of the Bridge (Il Gioco del Ponte)

**We invite you to come over and visit [Tourissimo.travel](https://Tourissimo.travel). Get information on how to book your Italian private tour.**

# Thanks!

Thank you for reading “The Ultimate Active Travel Guidebook.”  
Enjoy your tour!

## About Tourissimo

Tourissimo creates active vacations that are full of intense meaningful experiences. Our tours are designed (or modified) to suit the ability level of the group. Sometimes we offer two partially different rides or hikes in a day (for participants of different levels), and rest days mid way through the tour.

It takes passion, drive and attention to detail to deliver a superior experience for guests. We are experts in many Italian destinations and we have several decades of combined experience in all facets of the adventure travel industry.

You can learn more at our website:

[www.tourissimo.travel](http://www.tourissimo.travel)