

# The Borgias' Italy

EXPLORE ITALY'S RENAISSANCE TREASURES  
& ICONIC SIGHTS



CONTENT PROVIDED BY 

## Italy

Boasting cultural and historic treasures that most countries can only dream of, stunning natural beauty, and food that is envied the world over, Italy is one of Europe's most stylish and intoxicating countries. Ever since young European aristocrats started visiting in the 18th century, travelers have been falling under its spell and still today the *bel paese* (beautiful country) stirs strong emotions. The thrill of seeing the Colosseum for the first time or of standing before a Michelangelo masterpiece are emotions you'll never forget.

Although a young country (in 2011 it celebrated its 150th anniversary), Italy's history dates back to the age of classical mythology and the feats of the ancient Roman emperors. Later, the Renaissance (1400-1600) signaled a golden period, revolutionizing European art and revitalizing Italy's great cityscapes. Pulling the strings were Italy's dynastic families and the era's ambitious popes, people like Rodrigo Borgia (Pope Alexander VI), the cruel, manipulative head of the notorious Borgia family. In subsequent centuries, baroque art blossomed, giving rise to magnificent churches, piazzas and palazzi across the country.

But travel in Italy is not all about culture. Nature has done her bit too, blessing the country with beautiful Alpine peaks, idyllic coastlines, rolling hills and stark unspoiled valleys.



Academy Award® winner Jeremy Irons stars in the epic new Showtime Original Series **THE BORGIAS**, the explosive story of history's original crime family.

Conspiring with his ruthless sons Cesare and Juan, and poisonously seductive daughter Lucrezia, Rodrigo Borgia will stop at nothing to have everything. Through bribery, intimidation and murder, Rodrigo gains control of the Vatican and begins his scandalous reign as Pope Alexander VI by securing powerful positions for his children.

Relentless in their pursuit of both power and pleasure, the Borgias live a decadent lifestyle full of wild parties, lavish banquets and other sinful pleasures. Rodrigo uses

his Papal reign to amass great wealth and builds an empire that will make the Borgias one of the most notorious families in history – inspiring Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*.

**Don't miss the epic story of THE BORGIAS, the new series from Academy Award® winner Neil Jordan – only on SHOWTIME®.**

**The Borgias  
Special Premiere Event  
Sunday April 3 9pm et/pt  
New Episodes Sundays 10pm et/pt**





## Highlights

◊ **Colosseum One** of Italy's iconic sights, Rome's great gladiatorial arena is a thrilling monument to ancient power.

◊ **Sistine Chapel** The star of the Vatican Museums boasts Michelangelo's two greatest frescoes, Genesis and The Last Judgment.

◊ **St Peter's Basilica** The Vatican's awe-inspiring showpiece church is the holy of holies for the world's one billion Catholics.

◊ **Leaning Tower of Pisa** This startling 13th-century bell tower teeters over one of Italy's most beautiful squares.

◊ **Florence's Duomo** A masterpiece of Renaissance architecture, Brunelleschi's giant red dome caps this landmark cathedral.

◊ **Galleria degli Uffizi** Florence's premier gallery houses the world's greatest collection of Italian Renaissance art.

◊ **Piazza San Marco** Overlooked by the Basilica di San Marco, Venice's central square is a memorable sight with its refined porticos and elegant cafes.

◊ **Milan's Duomo** The world's largest Gothic cathedral is a fairy tale ensemble of flying buttresses, spires and statues.

◊ **Pompeii** Italy's most perfectly preserved ancient town is one of Europe's top archaeological sites.

◊ **Valley of the Temples, Agrigento** The spectacular Greek temples here are among the finest you'll see outside of Greece.

## Art & architecture

Italy has long been a fertile ground for artistic creativity. All the great movements in Western European art have swept across Italy and it was in late 14th-century Florence that the most revolutionary of them all broke out. Emerging as an artistic counterpart to humanism - a philosophy that emphasizes the central role of humanity - the Renaissance (Rinascimento in Italian) gave rise to an unprecedented bout of creativity. First in Florence, where Brunelleschi added a dome to the city's Gothic Duomo and Michelangelo set his stall out as a sculptor, and then in Venice and Rome. In Rome, Pope Alexander VI (aka Rodrigo Borgia; pope 1492-1503) and his 16th century successors were eager patrons of the arts, commissioning the likes of Bramante, Michelangelo and Raphael to restyle the city. The results still impress today - Bramante's Tempietto, the Michelangelo-frescoed Sistine Chapel, St Peter's Basilica.

**Duomo, Florence** (Piazza del Duomo; [www.duomofirenze.it](http://www.duomofirenze.it)) **Tempietto di Bramante, Rome** ([@](https://www.instagram.com/tempietto_bramante/)06 581 39 40; [www.sanpietroinmontorio.it](http://www.sanpietroinmontorio.it); Piazza San Pietro in Montorio 2) **Sistine Chapel, Rome** (Vatican Museums; [@](https://www.instagram.com/sistine_chapel/) 06 698 84 676; [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va); Viale Vaticano) **St Peter's Basilica, Rome** ([@](https://www.instagram.com/stpetersbasilica/) 06 698 83 731; St Peter's Square)

### THE DARK SIDE OF THE RENAISSANCE

During the Renaissance, artistic creativity went hand in hand with corruption, debauchery and crime on a scale not seen since the dark days of the Roman Empire. Italy's ruling dynasties were passionate art lovers but they were also ruthless political operators. Nepotism was rife and the popes of the 15th and 16th centuries unashamedly appointed family members to key positions. But being born into privilege wasn't always a passport to the high life. One of the period's most notorious crimes involved Beatrice Cenci, a Roman aristocrat who was driven by years of abuse to murder her tyrannical father. After a long and brutal investigation she was beheaded on 11 September 1599 in front of a huge crowd on Ponte Sant'Angelo in Rome. A touching portrait of Beatrice by Guido Reni now hangs in Rome's Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica.

Artistic and intellectual development also led to crime in the form of body snatching. Bodies were stolen for dissection by medical students at the University of Bologna, Rodrigo Borgia's alma mater, and to enable artists like Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci to study human anatomy. Michelangelo's world-famous sculpture, David, in Florence's Galleria dell'Accademia, magnificently reveals his intimate grasp of the subject.

**Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome** ([@](https://www.instagram.com/galleriaborghese/) 06 328 10; [www.galleriaborghese.it](http://www.galleriaborghese.it); Via Quattro Fontane 13) **Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence** ([@](https://www.instagram.com/galleriaccademia/) 055 238 86 12; [www.uffizi.firenze.it/musei/accademia](http://www.uffizi.firenze.it/musei/accademia); Via Ricasoli 60)

## Italy's cities

### { Rome }

An epic, monumental metropolis, Rome has been in the spotlight for close to 3000 years. As the seat of the Roman Empire, it was the all-powerful Caput Mundi (Capital of the World), home to legendary buildings such as the Colosseum, the Roman Forum, and the Pantheon. Later, as the Renaissance center of the Catholic world its name sent shivers of holy terror through believers and infidels alike.

The Renaissance was a period of great upheaval for Rome. Against a background of rising population and political uncertainty, its papal rulers set about remodeling and fortifying the city. The Borgia Pope Alexander VI strengthened Castel Sant'Angelo and the Leonine walls, whilst Pope Julius II set about transforming the Vatican into a showcase for Catholic glory. But while Rome was being revamped, trouble was brewing, and in 1527 the city was sacked by Spanish forces. Once again Rome needed rebuilding and it was to the 17th-century baroque masters Bernini and Borromini that the city turned. With their exuberant churches, fountains and palazzi, these two bitter rivals changed the face of the city.

**Colosseum** ([ @ ]06 399 67 700; Piazza del Colosseo) **Roman Forum** ([ @ ]06 399 67 700; Largo della Salara Vecchia) **Pantheon** (Piazza della Rotonda) **Castel Sant'Angelo** ([ @ ]06 681 91 11; Lungotevere Castello 50)

### { Vatican City }

The Vatican, the world's smallest sovereign state (a mere 0.44 sq km), sits atop the low-lying Vatican hill in the center of Rome. Focused on the domed bulk of St Peter's Basilica and St Peter's Square, it is the capital of the Catholic world, a spiritual superpower of immense wealth and influence.

Established under the terms of the 1929 Lateran Treaty, the Vatican is the modern vestige of the Papal States, the papal fiefdom that encompassed Rome and much of central Italy until Italian unification in 1861. As part of the treaty, signed by Mussolini and Pope Pius XI, the Holy See was also given extraterritorial authority over a further 28 sites in and around Rome.

Visiting the Vatican Museums you can see where Alexander VI lived during his tenure as pope (1492-1503) - the Borgia Apartments, underneath the celebrated Raphael Rooms, are richly decorated with frescoes by Pinturicchio.

**St Peter's Basilica** ([ @ ]06 698 83 731; St Peter's Square) **Vatican Museums** ([ @ ]06 698 84 676; www.vatican.va; Viale Vaticano)



## Italy's other power families

### { Florence and the Medici }

Perhaps the greatest of Italy's Renaissance dynasties was the Florentine Medici. A successful and wildly rich banking family, they came to the fore in 1434 when Cosimo The Elder (1389-1464) became Florence's de facto ruler. A passionate patron of the arts, Cosimo encouraged the Renaissance in visual arts, paving the way for his grandson, Lorenzo The Magnificent (1449-1492), to usher in the city's finest hour. Under Lorenzo, artists such as Michelangelo, Luca della Robbia and Botticelli flourished and the city enjoyed a much-needed respite from feuding with its neighboring city-states. Alas it was not to last and Lorenzo's death in 1492 marked the beginning of a new era of political and economic uncertainty. However, there were flourishes still to come, such as Cosimo I's construction of the Palazzo degli Uffizi, home of the eponymous gallery, and the embellishment of Palazzo Pitti, one of Florence's grandest palazzi. Check out the Medici family tombs in the spectacular Cappelle Medicee.

**Galleria degli Uffizi** (Uffizi Gallery; [ @ ]055 238 86 12 ; www.uffizi.firenze.it/musei/uffizi; Piazza degli Uffizi 6) **Palazzo Pitti** (www.uffizi.firenze.it/musei/palazopitti; Piazza de' Pitti) **Cappelle Medicee** (Medici Chapels; Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini)

## { The Sforza in Milan }

Towering over the center of Milan, the immense red-brick Castello Sforzesco was the main residence of the Sforza clan, Milan's powerful 15th-century rulers. The family established their control in 1450, when Francesco Sforza (1401-1466) stepped into a power vacuum created by the death of the Visconti Duke of Milan. A skilled condottiero (mercenary), Francesco had made his name fighting for clients across the country, but as a ruler he proved a talented administrator and an adept diplomat, modernizing the city and keeping foreign enemies at bay. His court became a center of culture and it was in Milan that Bramante, one of the Renaissance's most important architects, completed his first projects, and Leonardo da Vinci painted *The Last Supper*. The Sforza era, while notable, was relatively short-lived, and with the death of Francesco II in 1535, the family passed into history.



**Castello Sforzesco** ([ @ ]02 884 637 00; [www.milanocastello.it](http://www.milanocastello.it); Piazza Castello 3)

**The Last Supper (at the Cenacolo Vinciano)**; [ @ ]02 928 00 360; [www.vivaticket.it](http://www.vivaticket.it); Piazza Santa Maria delle Grazie 2)

## { Ferrara and the Este }

The striking city of Ferrara owes much of its beauty to its heyday as the seat of the influential Este family. Of Lombard origin, the Este ruled Ferrara for some 300 years from the late 13th century. In the heart of the city, Castello Estense and Palazzo Schifanoia testify to the family's power, which, in Renaissance times, was considerable. Under Nicolò III (1393-1441) the city became a serious political player, and under Ercole I (1471-1505) it grew into one of Renaissance Italy's great showpiece cities, leading the way in urban design and musical composition. Ercole further consolidated his, and Ferrara's, position by marrying his children off to members of Italy's other ruling dynasties - his eldest son Alfonso, for example, married Lucrezia Borgia, thus cementing ties with Rome and the Papal States. Ferrara and the Este flourished throughout the 16th century until the death of the last of the Este dukes in 1598.

**Castello Estense** ([ @ ]0532 299 233; [www.castelloestense.it](http://www.castelloestense.it); Viale Cavour)

**Palazzo Schifanoia** ([ @ ]0532 244 949; Via Scandiana 23)

## Did You Know?

**Turin is supposed to have magical properties.** The city is said to be one of the three apexes of a white-magic triangle with Lyon and Prague and a black-magic triangle with London and San Francisco.

**The world's oldest army is the Pontifical Swiss Guard.** Formed in 1506, the army is responsible for the safety of the pope and defense of the Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, the pope's main residence. Recruits must be Catholic, Swiss and male.

**Italy has more Unesco World Heritage Sites (45) than any other country.** These range from archeological sites to historic city centers and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

**Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella* (Life is Beautiful) is the second highest-grossing foreign-language film of all time.** The film tells of a father's attempt to protect his son from the horrific realities of the Holocaust by pretending it's all a game.v

**Cesare Borgia is generally considered the model for Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (The Prince).** A studied analysis of power politics, Machiavelli's book was first published in 1532 and is now regarded as a classic of political philosophy.

**Orson Welles**, not Graham Greene, wrote the famous cuckoo-clock speech in *The Third Man*: '...in Italy, for 30 years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, they had 500 years of democracy and peace - and what did they produce? The cuckoo clock.'

**America owes its name to Amerigo Vespucci**, a Florentine navigator who, from 1497 to 1504, made several voyages to what would later be known as South America.

**Stromboli, one of the seven Aeolian Islands off Sicily's northern coast**, is one of the world's most active volcanoes, as well as the place where Roberto Rossellini had his affair with Ingrid Bergman.

**Naples is home of the pizza margherita.** Designed to reflect the colors of the Italian flag - red (tomato), white (mozzarella), and green (basil) - it was first served to Queen Margherita when she visited the city in 1889.

**The southern port of Bari is a long way from Lapland but it's here that Santa Claus is buried.** The bones of St Nicholas, the saint behind the santa myth, are kept in the Basilica di San Nicola.