

Classical Difference:

Member Resource: Senior Trip - Planning Tips. How to Prepare.

First Steps: When & Where to Go

- Summer allows a space of time free of the natural impediments of the school year: lesson plans, exams, school events, and athletic calendars. However, it may also prove a challenge to find a time for all students to attend that does not come into conflict with familial summer engagements. Some have raised a concern about greater difficulty with student accountability, particularly with seniors who have graduated and are now technically alumni. As the busy season, the summer can be much more crowded and expensive (esp. airfare)
- Spring Break provides another cessation from school activities that may be conducive to travel. If this time is selected it is advised to plan the trip the week prior to Spring Break such that students will return home during the early part of the break week. This allows time for them to either recover from jet lag and finish the break period with some days for family. By scheduling the trip within the school year it may be easier to hold students accountable for poor decisions made on the trip with consequences upon return.
- Popular destinations for a European adventure tend to be England and Italy. Both provide students the opportunity to connect with sites related to the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern pieces of Theology, Humanities, and the Sciences which they have most certainly studied in their years formed by a Christian and classical education. The former has the advantage of our native tongue (with a mostly charming accent) and offers more sites connected to the Protestant Reformation and Modern History. The latter is steeped more greatly in the sights of Antiquity, the early days of Church History, and as the cradle of the Renaissance offers the homes and works of the greatest of artists and scientists. While the language may be more of a challenge it is also a delight to those who are well grounded in their Latin studies. Here they can witness the modern transformation of Latin and with a little preparation use their Latin skills to navigate the cities. This article will proceed to focus on the adventures that lie in store in Italia.
- The most notable cities for visitation in Italy are:
 - Rome: The Eternal City
 - Ancient Sites: Colosseum, Roman Forum, Imperial Forum, Palatine Hill, Circus Maximus, Forum Boarium, Ara Pacis, Pantheon
 - Religious Sites: St. Peter in Vincoli, Caravaggio?, Vatican City (St. Peter's Basilica, Sistine Chapel)
 - Medieval Sites: Trevi Fountain, Spanish Steps, Borghese Villa, Medici Villa
 - Modern Sites: Porta San Paolo, Mussolini's Balcony, Vittorio Emmanuel Monument, Keats-Byron-Shelley Museum
 - Art: National Gallery of Rome, Vatican Museum, Borghese Gallery
 - Recreation: extensive park grounds of Villa Borghese, regular concerts are held at Medieval churches around the city that showcase the acoustic designs of the architecture, in warmer seasons watch for opera and ballet performances in the Baths of Caracalla
 - Naples

- Ancient Sites: Pompeii, Herculaneum, Cumae, Lake Avernus, Vergil's Tomb, Puteoli
 - Art: National Archaeological Museum of Naples
- Florence
 - Medieval Sites: Palazzo Vecchio, Medici Palace, Pitti Palace, Profumatorio di Santa Maria Novella
 - Religious Sites: Duomo Complex (Cathedral, Bell Tower, and Baptistry), Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella
 - Art: Uffizi Gallery, The Academy
 - Notable Artists and Inventors: Michelangelo's House, Dante's House, Galileo Museum, DaVinci Museum
 - Recreation: landscape of Florence, Medici Gardens, Marketplace of San Lorenzo
- Additional options:
 - Venice
 - Cinque Terre
 - Milan
 - Pisa

Planning Calendar – The following planner offers a 10 month guide to plan and execute a trip to Italy. This allows for optimal time to book flights, hotels, guides, and events at the best possible prices. This can certainly be condensed into a shorter time frame if needed.

Transportation:

- Airline Flights – These may be booked up to 11 months in advance. Booking early often saves money. If you have a group of 10 or more travelers, consider looking into booking through a travel agency. An agency can often obtain discounts for larger groups as well as hold tickets with a down payment for several months. This allows the school to defer payment in full or even drop a traveler from the travel roster without losing the full price of the ticket. Travel agents can also be of help in making group hotel reservations.
- Trains – Traveling through Italy by train is an experience not to be missed! While your travel agent may be able to assist you with this, it may be easier to book these yourself. Trenitalia's Freccia Rosa high speed trains are best for travel between cities. Economy seats are perfectly fine and offer the best cost, however, you cannot cancel or change the ticket once made. You can purchase these at the following websites: www.trenitalia.com or www.italiarail.com
- Rome Metro – Rome's metro trains are an effective way to get around the large city. For small town kids, it is also an introduction to the concept of a subway. Tickets can be bought at the Termini train station, most of the metro stops, or at a Tabacchieri (look for the big T sign). You can buy multi-day passes. You should also consider the purchase of a Roma Pass which will give access to all metro and bus services in Rome + two museums within a 3 day period. www.romapass.it
- Circumvesuviana – This train runs between the smaller towns in the Naples region. You can buy tickets at Napoli Centrali, the central train station in Naples. When taking the Circumvesuviana to Herculaneum/Pompeii, make sure to take the train that goes to Sorrento. Get off the Circumvesuviana at the Ercolano Scavi stop to go to Herculaneum. When leaving for Pompeii, make sure to check that the digital display on the front of the

train says “Sorrento” and not “Sarno.” The train to Sarno goes by the modern city of Pompeii, but the train to Sorrento goes by the ruins. Florence and Venice – Smaller town such as these are fantastic for walking. Everything you will want to see is probably a 10 – 15 minute walk through an exquisite city that very much resembles its days from the Renaissance. Go for a walk. Anywhere.

Hotels: Once you have decided where to go, the next big question is where to stay. Consider looking for a location closer to the main area of transportation for the city. Are you arriving by train? Sometimes locations near the station are easier to get to and less expensive than the main sites, while keeping city transit highly accessible.

- Local Bed & Breakfast – These are wonderful as they really give you a sense of being a part of the culture of the city that you are visiting. Often they are run by locals who are very helpful in providing directions, recommendations for eating, and helping with entrance information for well-known sites. On occasion they help us book tickets to local venues.
- VRBO or Air B&B – These sites provide residences for rent. These may be more affordable. They do provide a nice gathering space for your group in the evenings. Having your own kitchen may save money or may prove to be more of a hassle than you wish to take on.
- Cultivating an Experience - If you find an accommodation that you really like, it is worth keeping the contact information and returning year after year. Building a relationship with hotel and restaurant owners who know your school, your leader and are glad to receive your group each year is a great blessing and can provide unexpected benefits.

Food: Just as it is nice to cultivate a relationship with a hotel business as your home away from home, it is nice to find some go-to restaurants of various types that you know you can depend on for good food and good service. After all, the culinary experience of Italy is almost as important as the history and art. The following are some recommendations by city.

- Rome
 - La Famiglia https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g187791-d1034619-Reviews-Ristorante_Pizzeria_La_Famiglia-Rome_Lazio.html
 - La Capitale, https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g187791-d795376-Reviews-Ristorante_La_Capitale-Rome_Lazio.html
 - Osteria Stazione, near Termini Train Station <http://www.osteriadellastazione.com/home.asp>
 - Ristorante 34, near the Spanish Steps <http://www.ristoranteal34.it/>
 - Giolitti, Famous Gelateria near Pantheon <http://www.giolitti.it/>
 - Pizza al Massimo, Nice sandwich and pizza shop next to the Circus Maximus https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g187791-d8842627-Reviews-Pizza_Al_Massimo-Rome_Lazio.html
 - San Marco Pizzeria, near Vatican City <https://www.pizzeriasanmarcoroma.com/>
 - Isola della Pizza, near Vatican City <http://www.isoladellapizza.com/>
- Florence
 - Osteria dei Centopoveri, <http://www.centopoveri.it/it/>

- Osteria de Peccatori, near Uffizi Gallery
https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g187895-d1483376-Reviews-Osteria_De_Peccatori-Florence_Tuscany.html
- Brandolino, <https://www.ristorantebrandolino.com/>
- A Tip on “tipping.” Giving tips for meals (or other services) is not based on a percentage as it is here in the U.S.A. Instead 1 -2 euro per person is sufficient at meals. Waiters are generally paid a much better base salary than here in the states, such that tips are truly extra.

Financing: Financing such a trip is a significant question that must be considered carefully not only for the short term, but as part of the long-range vision of the educational travel program.

- Tuition Provision – Some schools roll in the cost of such trips into yearly tuition costs. If these start at Kindergarten, they can be rather small. Some prefer to start such tuition additions as part of the price increase in the upper school as students are growing closer to reaping the fruit of this investment.
- Fundraising – We must be mindful that for many families the financial costs involved with attending a private school (tuition, uniform, extra-curricular fees, miscellaneous costs) are a significant investment made at great cost. We would do well to be intentional about raising funds through student activities and/or donors to aide in the cost of this trip.
- Depending upon the size of your group, it may be wise to engage the services of a travel agency. STA Travel has worked well for Grace Academy of Georgetown and Covenant Classical in Fort Worth. Groups of 10+ are able to place a reserve on airline flights with only a small down payment and wait on the full airline fee for several months. Larger groups can sometimes obtain a cost benefit for airline and hotel when booking with an agency.

How can teachers/tour leaders prepare themselves?

- Those who have never led such a trip would do well to first accompany such a tour themselves.
- EF Tours – This organization specializes in conducting student tours both within the U.S. and abroad. Please be advised that depending upon the number of students in your travel group, your school may need to combine with another tour group. This may work very well if you are able to partner with another like-minded school or group, but may also introduce some unknown variables when traveling with groups with which you might not be familiar.
- Vergilian Society – This organization specializes in study tours for teachers, but also welcomes college students and life-long learners. Their tours vary from year to year, but they always offer tours to places around the Mediterranean that focus on various aspects of the classics.
- Rick Steve’s has become a traveling staple and for very good reason. His books often provide solid advice on attractions and travel tips.
- Maps – Do not underestimate the importance of a good map. Maps to cities both ancient and modern can be found online and become an important planning tool. Google Maps street view is an excellent resource in helping leaders (and even students) to orient

themselves to the feel of a city or important directions such as “how do we find our hotel from the train station.” The teacher and students can virtually walk the route via Google Map street view. After a long day of travel this takes a bit of stress out of that first step and also adds a touch of excitement.

- Tour Guides – An excellent tour guide can be a highly valuable asset. It is wise to make such arrangements in advance as opposed to hiring one off the street. The latter may not be as helpful and could likely be a scam. You can usually find recommendations in Rick Steve’s guides to Italy, or on Tripadvisor. Developing a long-term relationship with a trusted guide can also be a wonderful resource for finding hotels, booking sites (esp. the notoriously difficult Colosseum), and troubleshooting in challenging situations. Be sure to treat & tip them well!

Please be aware that Italy maintains strict laws regarding tour guides. While allowances can be made for a teacher taking a school group through a site like the Forum, do make sure to distinguish yourself as a “teacher” and not a “guide.”

How do we prepare students for such a trip?

- It is no small undertaking to organize a group of students to travel abroad, especially those who have not yet traveled outside the U.S.A. It is helpful to plan time, space, and material to help them prepare.
- Plan an initial parent-student meeting in the Spring semester of the Junior year in order to review plans for the senior trip, discuss items for preparation, fundraiser ideas, etc. Airplane tickets can be purchased as early as 11 months before a trip. Set a deadline for parents to confirm their student’s participation.
- Encourage students to obtain passports the summer before their senior year begins. Make copies of their passports for the trip leader to keep throughout the duration of the trip as a back up in case of emergency.
- Students may need some guidance, or at least reminders, on obtaining passports, setting up phone plans while abroad, and planning ahead regarding payment methods while in Europe.
- Organize a “field trip” folder that contains not only the copies of passports, but additional medical information that might be needed.
- Consider a series of senior seminars on Italy that will prepare students not only in the above items, but also for the wonder of the culture they are about to experience. Topics could include:
 - Basic Italian phrases. How to use their Latin knowledge to decipher Italian. How to order food, ask directions, or bargain shop in Italy.
 - Duolingo is a great tool for introductory Italian. It is a FREE app that can be downloaded onto a phone, laptop, ipad, etc. www.duolingo.com
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 - There is also a school feature that allows a teacher to form an online classroom, invite students, assign goals, and track progress. This could be used independently for fun, or made an ancillary part of a senior language class. www.schools.duolingo.com
 - Money. Discuss the exchange rate from dollar to euro. How to read price tags, watch for a good sell, tip for service, and bargain in the marketplace. Credit cards give the best exchange rate, most US banks have relationships with particular

Italian banks such that fees can be avoided so as to provide a much cheaper and safer way of procuring cash overseas.

- Italian culture and customs. What to expect, how to act, what to wear, and what to avoid.
- Art and Architecture. Look ahead at the specific buildings you will visit and some of the art you will see.
- Geography. Give them city maps and practice finding routes from the train to the hotel and from the hotel to important sites around town. Google street view can also very helpful as an engaging class activity.

Documenting Memories -The senior trip is not only the reflection upon a lifetime of memories (all we have studied together K-12), but also the enjoyment of one incredible experience, one that will be remembered and treasured forever. Upon return from our senior trip, the students, as a class project, create some special memorabilia.

- Senior Trip Photo Album – Set up a school/teacher account on Shutterfly or a similar photo album website. Establish a password shared by teacher/supervisor and student contributors. Assign students the task of creating a photo album to document the trip. Shutterfly often has a sale where these can be purchased for up to 50% off. These make a great end of year gift for seniors. Some parameters to consider:
 - First page lists the itinerary and page numbers
 - Give a two-page layout to each day.
 - Make sure to include small pieces of information about what each day entailed. Not enough words may lead to lack of clarity (especially in 20 years). Too many words detract from the visual presentation.
 - Include memorable quotes. Quotes from students and quotes from books read in previous years that connect to the places visited.
 - Include a balance of both staged photos and candid shots.
 - Make sure to have a variety of faces on each layout and distributed evenly throughout the album.
 - SPELL CHECK! Supervisor should take responsibility for a final spell check. The program does not provide one.
- Video – Our students have also enjoyed creating a video montage set to music. Parameters to consider:
 - Shoot video shorts throughout the trip.
 - Assign a team of “videographers” (nice phone cameras are sufficient) who will share the responsibility of collecting video shorts each day or at each location.
 - It would be wise for them to coordinate what kind of camera they are using to make sure all will be compatible when it comes to post-trip editing.
 - Video shorts need not be long. 10 – 30 seconds each is usually plenty.
 - Voices are optional. Ours have not contained voices, but instead one song that plays over the entire video.
 - 4-5 minutes is a great length. This memory is less informative, more visual and nostalgic.

