



“Travel Today”

Interview with Patrizia Cinquini Cerruti, the Italian Cultural Society’s “Ambassador to Italy”

Photo (Patrizia in Ravello overlooking the Amalfi Coast during the 2025 Sorrento and Sicily Tour). It’s been several years since we last interviewed Patrizia Cinquini Cerruti, the [Italian Cultural Society’s See Italy Director](#). Patrizia has organized tours to her native Italy since 1987. “Altre Voci” caught up with Patrizia to ask what travel to Italy is like today.

AV: *It’s been a few years since we caught up. Last time we talked about travel after COVID. What is travel to Italy like today?*

Patrizia: *Actually, it does seem like a long time ago. I have been doing tours to Italy for so many years that I have a long-term view of travel. Of course, COVID was different because for the first time we were all on “lock-down” and traveling was not a choice. This served to emphasize just how important it is to travel when it is possible. Unfortunately, some of the travelers who were scheduled to travel with me in 2020 were no longer able to go or had a difficult time due to health issues by the time we reopened travel in 2022. I lost my mother in just a few months to cancer in 2022 and that brought home how precious health is.*

AV: *How does your “long term view of travel” affect your tours?*

I think it allows me to have a broader perspective. Over the 35 plus years I have seen so much and met so many people. I have taken thousands of travelers to Italy, and I can tell you that not one person has ever regretted traveling, but so many have regretted not going when they had the chance. There are some sad stories about people who, due to unexpected health issues, were never able to travel again. I always tell people to do their travel when they can do it. Take the trips which require more physical activity now, you can always go sit on a cruise ship when you are unable to walk.

I brought the first group of post 9-11 Americans to Italy in November of 2001 just after the 9-11 attacks. In those days, I was taking larger groups, and we had sold out for the “Thanksgiving in Tuscany Tour”. I had 50 travelers reserved for the tour and after the attack eight people cancelled. What I find more telling is that the other 42 did not cancel. They trusted me and felt secure in traveling with me. It was a beautiful experience and thanked for the opportunity. While we were touring and Italians saw our group they came out on the streets and hugged us and showed their solidarity. A lovely couple from that group in 2001 joined me again for the Tuscan Treasures Tour in 2025 and we spoke about how special the tour had been. In 2008, I was still doing large groups, and I sold out three summer tours to Tuscany in June and July. The dollar was at an all-time low against the euro and still people loved the tour and remembered the wonderful time they had, not the exchange rate.

In a way, travel is like having a child, there are always reasons to put it off, but eventually it becomes too late, and you lose the option.

AV: That’s an interesting way to put it. Are there any other changes since COVID?

***Patrizia:** Covid took out some of the small, local family run businesses. Then there was the huge post pandemic demand for travel, and this year was the Jubilee. I have seen a big increase in prices. Of course, price increases seem to be worldwide. I certainly see them when I travel in the United States as well as in Europe and elsewhere. There are real reasons, like energy costs and supply chain issues for price increases. It makes my experience in selecting great local suppliers even more important to travelers*

AV: Have you changed the tours?

***Patrizia:** Every tour I offer is always a bit different than the last. I learn from each tour, discover new places and meet new people. If something is special, I always want to share it! As I said, I used to do big tours. In the early years some of my tours were often very big, today I limit my tour size to about twenty. I like to know the travelers by name, learn about them and really share the trip with them. Often these fellow travelers become friends.*

*I think I have also slowed the tours a bit. I **never** did rush in and out tours, but today I am giving travelers more time to experience and enjoy the places we visit. I don’t like changing hotels every night and I don’t like big commercial places which cater to groups. Whenever possible, I try and find special hotels which are well located. We stay a little longer and take our time to visit places.*

I taught Italian for Travelers classes for over 30 years and have written a few travel books. I say that going to Italy is like going to the best buffet in the world, but if you eat too much you will get indigestion. It’s tempting to overload your “travel plate,” but doing so guarantees you won’t be able to truly savor and appreciate anything. When I plan tours, I feel people trust my knowledge

of the treasures a region has to offer, and know that I have selected the best, most representative, and broad experience possible to share with them. For some travelers this will be the only time they visit Italy and I want to give them an authentic experience.

At this stage of my life, I do these tours because I love it, and because I have spent most of my life learning and understanding Italy's incredible patrimony, its history, culture, art, food, and breathtaking places. I want to share my passion and love for my beautiful native country.

AV: I know we have asked you before, but can you tell us about the people who travel with you?

Patrizia: *Well, there really isn't a single type of person. Over the thirty-five plus years I have enjoyed the company of all sorts of travelers. We have mature people in their 50s, 60s and 70s, but plenty of young people join our tours as well. One thing that is probably different for my tours is that the travelers who travel with me are often Italian Americans. They are visiting their ancestral land, and I have had the privilege of helping them "return to their roots".*

It's always a nice mix. Sometimes we have entire families, some singles, and couples. Generally, the kind of travelers who want to travel with a cultural organization are by definition "special".

AV: So even after over 100 plus trips you don't get bored?

Patrizia: *Oh, heck no! Italy is so incredibly rich in experiences, natural and manmade places that I don't think a single lifetime is enough to explore them all. I live in Italy, in my hometown of Lucca, for part of each year, but still have so many places to explore. Italy's treasures are so numerous and varied that I still have many new experiences awaiting. I participate in a few hiking clubs, a Fiat, Alfa Romeo and Ferrari car club and other cultural groups which take many trips in the area, and I am discovering new places, festivals, restaurants, farms, gardens, and museums all the time.*

AV: Any words of advice for traveling to Italy today?

Patrizia: *I just returned from Washington DC yesterday, and while there I remember turning to my husband and saying, "Wow how wonderful it would be if we had someone here to do what I do for people on my tours!" It sounds like marketing, but it was real. We got lost on the subway twice, we walked for miles in the wrong neighborhoods, and even with Google Maps, Reviews and all the internet searches we had some lousy expensive experiences and meals. I think we missed a lot of places which we could have enjoyed. Our hotel was just OK, and we spent a lot of money on Uber, taxis and meals which I think were a miss. We did have one nice meal, but it was all too hit and miss.*

Planning your own tour takes time, research, and lots of dedication and planning. Plus, unless you are an expert, you don't know what each region has to offer. If one is going to go independently, I encourage people to start right away by keeping a travel journal before you depart. Write the places you most want to visit and why. Then research the places and talk to people who have been there if possible. I give places stars. The must-see places get three stars and the sort of interested get only one or no stars. Then lay the cities out on a map and see if they make sense to see all in one trip. If most of your cities are in one or two regions, then limit the tour to those regions. Of course, be open to changes if something amazing comes up take the opportunity. You must consider the number of days or weeks you have and then choose wisely.

Be careful of a lot of nonsense on the web. The internet is useful, but it can't take the place of years of experience and knowledge. I read articles by people who have visited Italy once or a few times giving travel advice which very often misses the mark. In the early days of travel, we used to call certain restaurants, hotels, and shops "tourist traps". They still exist, but unfortunately today the "tourist traps" are more profuse since they are on the web! Many gimmicks have people sign up for "fake perks" like "skip the line" or expensive tastings and special visits that are a waste of time. I am not saying people must spend hours in line. But you don't need a gimmick, almost every venue offers an entrance appointment. When I visit the Uffizi, the Accademia, the Vatican Museums, I always purchase a guaranteed entrance time. If you do travel without a tour don't skip getting city guides. A good city guide can be worth their weight in gold! Tour managers, like me, will fight to get a certain guide because we know what a difference it makes to visit a city with the best, passionate, fun guide who brings a site to life versus a tiresome, dull guide who recites tedious dates and details one could get on Wikipedia!

The absolute best travel tip I, or anyone, can give, is to expect the unexpected - if possible, embrace it and enjoy it. Even the most thoroughly planned trip might have some glitches- a strike, a plane delay, lost luggage, bad weather or any other variety of "bumps in the road." Don't let these things ruin your trip. When possible, purchase insurance to protect yourself against these things, and when it's not "insurable" try not to let small things ruin your trip. Italy is profoundly rich in art, many of her greatest treasures are not in churches or in museums. The people and the experiences are a big part of the magic. I always try and create an opportunity for my travelers to meet locals. We have lunch at the homes of my friends in both Tuscany and Sicily and my travelers love the experience. Let yourself delight in the show Italy will make for all your senses. Live Italy and let yourself fall madly in love!