

Vacanza Bella | 2261 Market Street, PMB 281, San Francisco, CA 94114 | (415) 554-0234 | Email: info@vbella.com | www.vbella.com

Explore the wealth of information available in previous issues of Vacanza Bella News



[July 2007](#)



[March 2007](#)



[September 2006](#)

Published by Vacanza Bella.
All material in this newsletter
is protected by copyright.

What? No villas? Sometimes I'm so sick of renting villas I can't stand it one day longer. Anyhow, in this issue of Vacanza Bella News, you'll find not one reference to a villa, castle, apartment, or farmhouse for rent. You all know that it's what I do for a living and how to reach me whenever you want to rent a place anyway.

I thought you might enjoy it if I shared with you some of the scatterings of my increasingly feeble mind in the form of "Top 10s". I've spent about 25 years on the couch trying (among other things) to conquer, so far unsuccessfully, my tendency to consider life as a list. Or rather "life" as the last item on a list of duties, to be contemplated after washing the car, going to the bank, answering email, etc., etc., etc.

So here are five Italy-related lists I've thought up, and I invite you to propose others, to berate me for these, or to write your own. My chosen topics are: movies, museums, children, hilltowns, and churches. So there.

Alla prossima volta,

Daniel

TOP 10 ITALY Italy for Children

Let's say this: I am so child-ignorant it's not funny. My own childhood was spent among books, period. But over the years, I've at least imagined what a proper childhood might be like, and here are some things I think I would have enjoyed as a child. In addition, they're things I think wouldn't drive adults crazy, as I've enjoyed each and every one of them myself as an adult.

1. Bomarzo Monster Park. This fantastic Baroque sculpture garden in northernmost Lazio, within easy

reach of several of our properties, is a kind of 16th-century amusement park created to amuse and delight. And it still does.

2. Frassassi Caverns. Deep in the Marche region, but within reach of our Umbrian properties for a daytrip, these caves astound young and old alike. In the height of summer, there are lines at the ticket counter and a wait for the tour to begin, but it's well worth it.

3. Lido di Ostia. I'm going to tell you: If you want a REAL Italian [continued on page 2](#)

Top 10 Italy for Children (cont'd)

summertime experience in Rome, get on the little train leaving from Ostiense station to Rome's beach resort at Ostia. You and your family won't be alone! You should probably bring a picnic basket, but everything is available right there along Ostia's honkytonkissimo beachfront, including rentable umbrellas, lounge chairs, mats, and towels. This trip is actually fun year-round, and if you want to add "culture" to the trip, there are the ruins of Ostia Antica as well.

4. Mount Etna. Truly spectacular. When we were there 20 years ago, they brought us right up to the volcano's edge, just a few feet away from the lava flow. Much ooh-ing and aah-ing took place, not to mention rosary-murmuring.

5. Lunapark-EUR. One thing

I did do as a child was the amusement park. This was back in the '50s, when things like Epcot and Disney World were unheard of. My grandmother lived in Fall River, Massachusetts, and we frequented the working-class parks like Lincoln and Crescent Parks and loved it. "Lunapark" is the word Italians use for any amusement park, and the one in the Roman neighborhood of EUR is typical. Loads of fun, and utterly "authentic".

6. The Leaning Tower of Pisa. Can I possibly say anything more?

7. Collodi. The birthplace of the author of Pinocchio, and Pinocchio is everywhere to be seen and found. Much fun for smaller children. Close to Pisa, so the two can be combined on a single daytrip.

8. Cascata delle Marmore. I

was cynical: It's a manmade waterfall that they turn on and off on a schedule. But I just visited for the first time last month, and it's pretty spectacular. (Don't expect Niagara.) Full of people, full of kids and grownups both, quite fun overall. A bit over an hour north of Rome. Very Italian.

9. The Sassi of Matera. I visited these cave dwellings before Mel Gibson learned to speak Aramaic. I gave a little boy 10,000 lire to guide me around. It's quite a sight. And so is Matera's truly spectacular late afternoon passeggiata.

10. Giardino dei Tarocchi. Fantastic garden based on the tarot created by the late French-American artist Niki de Saint Phalle in Capalbio, on Tuscany's southern coast. Neat place.



Giardino dei Tarocchi (Capalbio, Tuscany)

TOP 10 ITALY Museums

This is a totally quirky list, partly based on the fact that I cannot any longer tolerate a museum for more than about 90 minutes. And it had better be a good one, or I'm not happy. By good, I mean genuinely interesting — to me. And this "to me" means that it may well not be so to you. I'm not going to give a lot of commentary.

1. Palazzo Massimo, Rome. Ancient statuary is something that interests me for about 15 minutes maximum. But this museum, right in front of Rome's Termini train station, is beautifully, magnificently arranged. And it contains some of the most recognizable ancient sculpture in existence.

2. Museo della Specola, Flor-

ence. A museum dedicated to the taxidermy: of ALL living things. Wild and bizarre.

3. Wolfsoniana, Nervi/Genoa. See the [March issue](#) of our newsletter for information on this beautiful place specializing in Italian Art-Nouveau and Art-Deco ("Liberty") furniture and decorative arts.

4. Palazzo Bellomo, Siracusa. Lovely small museum on Ortigia, Siracusa's most evocative neighborhood.

5. Galleria Carrara, Bergamo. Among many other beautiful objects, the still lifes of Evaristo Bachenis, a wonderful unknown painter who spent his whole life in Bergamo, are outstanding. I saw him for the first time at a recent show at the Metropolitan Museum in NY and was transfixed.

6. Bargello, Florence. For the Donatellos, of course, but the whole thing is so full of atmosphere; I love almost every work in this museum.

7. Rome's "House" Museums. DeChirico, Mario Praz, Casa di Goethe, Keats-Shelley Museum, Museo Canonica, Henrik Christian Andersen Museum. Delightfully quiet, interesting places.

8. Peggy Guggenheim Museum, Venice. Sick of Madonnas? Head here.

9. Galleria Ferrari, near Modena. Ditto. Even for those who aren't car freaks, this place is pretty remarkable.

10. La Scala Museum, Milan. You've got to be an opera freak for this one, and if you are, it's heaven.

TOP 10 ITALY Hilltowns

Just for the hell of it, and again in no order:

1. Erice
2. Bergamo Alta
3. Spello
4. Tuscania

Those four are my favorites. The rest follow:

5. Ravello
6. Civita di Bagnoregio, ruined by Rick Steves but still pretty amazing
7. Cervo
8. Massa Marittima
9. San Quirico d'Orcia
10. Todi. Even though it's been gentrified beyond redemption, it was my first love.



Bergamo Alta

1. Trani Cathedral. The most beautiful church in Italy, I think, not to mention its incredible position, practically floating on the sea. So many of the Puglian churches have moved me: Lucera, Troia, Bitonto, Ruvo di Puglia, but Trani tops everything.

2. San Zeno, Verona.

3. Monreale Basilica, Sicily. This must have the most beautiful cloister in existence.

4. Parma Cathedral and Baptistery.

5. The Cathedral of Massa Marittima and the square it dominates.

6. Abbeys in Tuscany and Lazio, with Sant'Antimo in first position, but also Casamari, Valvisciolo, Fossanova, Monte Oliveto Maggiore, and San Galgano.

7. The parish church of Gropina, in Tuscany. Almost pagan.

8. San Miniato al Monte, Florence.

9. The basilican and "Romanesque" churches of Rome: San Lorenzo above all (this is my current favorite church in Rome), San Crisogono, Santa Sabina, Santi Quattro Coronati, San Giorgio in Velabro, San Giovanni a Porta Latina, Santa Maria in Cosmedin (this one has recently had a garish lighting system installed; for the first time, you can really see it, which has its advantages, but the atmosphere is gone).

10. San Vitale and Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna. Unforgettable.



San Vitale (Ravenna)

Now, who am I to judge? Anyhow, here are some Italian films I've loved. At least they're the ones I remember at this moment: my mind is beginning to go. They're in no particular order. Oh, yes: you'll find no Fellini; I've just never liked him. And yes, too, they're mostly old and b + w. What can I say? They're what I love.

1. *La meglio gioventu'* (*The Best of Youth*), 2003, dir. Marco Tullio Giordana. A 6-hour epic of the life of one Italian family through the last century. A soap opera but an involving one.

2. *Cronache di poveri amanti* (*Chronicle of Poor Lovers*), 1954, dir. Carlo Lizzani. Touching and interesting story of how the residents of a single street in Florence faced the rise of Fascism. With a very young Mastroianni. The still-living director is practically unknown in the US.

3. *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and His Brothers*), 1960, dir. Luchino Visconti. I'm over Visconti's overheated later films, but I will never get over this film, in part because I saw Alain Delon for the first time. The vicissitudes of a poor Sicilian family once they move to Milan.

4. *Il posto* (*The Job*), 1961, dir. Ermanno Olmi. A vulnerable young man gets his first job. One of the greats by a very serious director, also still alive and productive.

5. *Il grido* (*The Cry*), 1957, dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. When I



A Special Day

saw Antonioni's films at university, I was bored out of my mind. These films are still not easy, but at nearly 60, I am overwhelmed by the bleakness and lack of communication. No frame is un contemplated. With Alida Valli, both she and director gone in the past year.

6. *La battaglia di Algeri* (*Battle of Algiers*), 1966, dir. Gillo Pontecorvo. By another recently gone maestro of the cinema, this film is one of my all-time favorites, particularly timely today. About how to lose a "war on terrorism".

7. *Le fate ignoranti* (*His Secret Life*), 2001, dir. Ferhan Ozpetek. A recent widow's gradual discovery of her late husband's secret life. Utterly captivating.

8. *Una giornata particolare* (*A*

Special Day), 1977, dir. Ettore Scola. The late 1930s. Mussolini and Hitler meet for the first time in Rome. So do the bored and exhausted wife of a Fascist fanatic and her gay neighbor. Loren and Mastroianni in two of their greatest roles.

9. *La notte di San Lorenzo* (*Night of the Shooting Stars*), 1982, dir. Taviani brothers. Villagers flee upon hearing the Nazis intend to blow the place up. A magical film.

10. *Il Generale della Rovere* (*General della Rovere*), 1955, dir. Roberto Rossellini. Rossellini directing De Sica in perhaps his greatest acting role (though I also loved his cameo in Andy Warhol's *Dracula*). A charming grifter finds he must turn serious and face the terrible consequences.

See you in 3 months or so. In the meantime, do browse our website, www.vbella.com, for Italian travel ideas.

Daniel