

# Gladiators, gardens & gelato

**SARAH KNIGHT** finds a summer family holiday in Italy 'sunny with a chance of La Dolce Vita'.

It's said that Italy is the birthplace of Western culture – inspiring our food, fashion and lifestyle – so it's no surprise we immediately felt at home in this boot-shaped beauty. Our kids loved its beaches, pizza, pasta, gelato and especially all the talk of gladiators.

## A Sicilian sojourn

We kick off our getaway on the largest Mediterranean island, Sicily (located near the 'toe' of Italy's boot). An **Airbnb** in Taormina's beach area of Mazzarò proves the ideal base to explore Sicily with the charming island of Isola Bella at our fingertips. Within hours of arrival we are on the beach and decked out with 'aqua shoes' – not the most flattering footwear, but essential for surviving the pebbly, rocky coast!

The Taormina cable car service is a hit with the kids, taking us on picturesque rides up to the historic centre with its breathtaking views, boutique shops and delicious food, and a nearby bus station proves handy for day trips to beautiful beaches at nearby Giardini Naxos.

If you're confident driving on the right-hand side of the road, a hire car is handy for getting to neighbouring towns such as Syracuse, Messina, Catania and Cefalù.

Off the northern coast we take a day trip to Lipari Island via a hydrofoil ferry and encounter the deepest, most vibrant blue water I think I've ever seen. We stop for lunch at **Latteria 581** and some quality beach time at Spiaggia Bianca.

## Pretty Positano

A two-hour flight and an hour-long taxi trip later, we are checking into our Positano Airbnb. It's true that Positano – a cliffside village rife with steep streets and stairs – can be challenging with children, but once we set eyes on the most spectacular view of the Mediterranean Sea from our balcony, we are all immediately thankful for our efforts.

Our days are filled with sightseeing and delicious food (**Chez Black** and **Latteria** for wine and cheese are standouts). And, of course, there is time for sun and seaside fun at Positano's main beach, Marina Grande, and nearby Fornillo Beach. We use the convenient



**Sita Bus** service to reach nearby Ravello and Amalfi, although the winding roads take a little getting used to.

In Sorrento we slip down a hidden laneway to enjoy a magnificent Italian lunch at **TavernAllegra Ristorante & Bar** before renting sun beds to laze away the day at popular Peter's Beach.

### Remarkable Rome

Only three hours by train and we're in the heart of Italy and its cosmopolitan capital, Rome. We're thrilled with our Airbnb, a stunning 16th-century building which was used as a set for movies *Eat, Pray, Love* and *Life is Beautiful*. The open-air market at nearby **Campo de' Fiori** is equally entrancing by day and night, and comes in handy for fresh fruit and veggies for our crew.

The vast depth of Rome's history inspires awe at every turn. What we love most is the refreshing lack of advertising and billboards in the city, allowing the magnificent buildings to take centre stage. Our Roman holiday is loaded with sightseeing, a vast contrast from the days of beach-lazing in Positano. We tick the usual suspects off the list – the Colosseum with its gladiatorial history, the famous Spanish Steps, pretty Trevi Fountain and majestic Vatican City – punctuating each stop with a playground visit or gelato to keep the children happy.

The gardens of **Villa Borghese** is another must-visit for families in Rome with plenty of space for kids to run around. There are Segways and bikes for hire to explore its attractions and playgrounds, as well as space for a picnic or Casina del Lago cafe for an al fresco lunch.

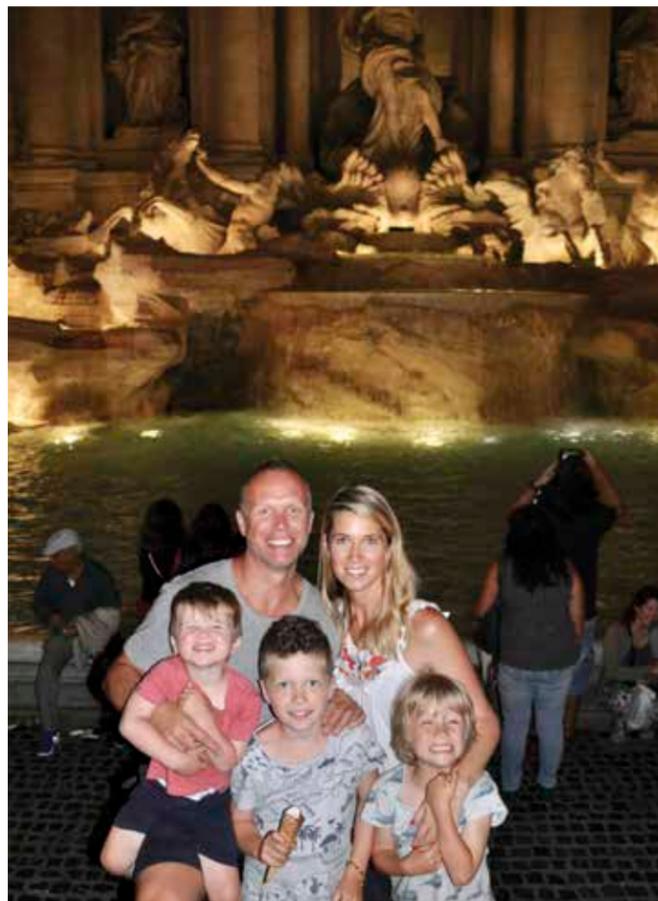
**Piazza Navona** is a particular favourite with our little ones and we book an outdoor table for an early dinner to enjoy the fountains and the spectacle of colourful street artists, entertainers and hawkers.

### Milanese moments

Another train ride whisks us to our final destination: the city of elegance and fashion, Milan. A visit to the **Duomo di Milano** is non-negotiable. This exquisite cathedral took nearly six centuries to build and a climb up the narrow staircase (or a ride in the lift) to see the famous gargoyles up close, and take in the spectacular view of the piazza below, is a must. Chasing the pigeons across the Piazza del Duomo is another unmissable experience, at least according to our kids.

Adjacent to the cathedral, we visit the world's oldest shopping mall, **Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II**, and enjoy a well-earned afternoon *aperitivo* at the Aperol bar.

Other Milan highlights include Sforza Castle and the adjacent park, Parco Sempione; a play at Giardini Pubblici Indro Montanelli, the oldest city park in Milan; and a visit to Milan's renowned **National Museum of Science and Technology 'Leonardo da Vinci'**. There's also time for shopping along Via Monte Napoleone, a visit to the LEGO Store (the largest in Italy) and, of course, indulging in endless gelato.



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**“ We escape the city by train to Lake Como and explore the beautiful cobblestone streets.”**



But by far our most unforgettable day is escaping the city by train to Lake Como, where we explore the beautiful cobblestone streets, ferry-hop to nearby Bellagio and enjoy the playgrounds and a delicious lunch with a view of the breathtaking Swiss Alps. Just wow.

As we begin our long journey home, our only disappointment is having to leave, because two weeks of *la dolce vita*, 'the sweet life', is never enough. ●

### Italy Report Card



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