



FROM LEFT: Rome; the Dolomites; Lake Garda

# The Italian jaunt

Gorgeous landscapes and rich culture make Italy a top touring destination. **Joanna Booth** checks out the trends

"You may have the world if I may have Italy." So said Giuseppe Verdi, and while the composer of the operas *Aida* and *La Traviata* might have been biased – he was born near Parma – many a traveller will understand why he felt his home nation had it all.

Cuisine, culture, countryside – Italy excels in three facets that make for a great touring destination. So it's little wonder it has been the top seller for Association of Touring & Adventure Suppliers (Atas) members since the organisation began collecting supplier booking data in 2022.

Atas agents' sales to Italy grew by 13% in 2024, and while 2025 numbers seem to signal a slower rate of growth,

sales across all channels are still up by 3%. Many individual operators also report a strong performance for Italy – 2025 bookings are up 29% year on year for Titan Travel, 26% for Great Rail Journeys and 17% for Mercury Holidays. Looking further ahead, sales for 2026 are up by 39% across The Travel Corporation's (TTC) tour brands.

## SHIFTING SUMMER

Operators including Cox & Kings and TTC report a trend for travel in the shoulder seasons, when temperatures are more conducive to touring. Riviera Travel has extended departures into April and November, reflecting this desire for cooler, quieter and cheaper holidays.

The shift seems particularly marked in Italy's hotspots of Rome, Venice and Florence; Intrepid Travel's Highlights of Italy in Winter is selling well; and Exoticca operates more departures in winter than in summer for its Escorted Eternal Cities tour. G Adventures, meanwhile, notes that clients are "avoiding midsummer" and this year will operate its National Geographic Italy Family Journey in the Christmas holidays for the first time.

Kirker Holidays will launch in-depth, off-season itineraries in Venice and Rome next year. In the former, a two-week immersive cultural tour will feature lectures from world-renowned experts in topics ranging from art and architecture to Venetian cuisine, with associated visits to lesser-known sights. The new Insider's Rome itinerary will be led by a resident expert and will swap tourist traps for off-the-beaten-track treasures.

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## GROWING SOLO

In line with the wider shift in favour of solo travel, going it alone is on the rise in Italy too. Jules Verne unveiled three new solo tours this year – in Sicily, Lake Garda and Sardinia – and has departures with no single supplements on other itineraries.

Shearings has new solo tours in Lake Garda and the Dolomites, while sister brand Leger Holidays has introduced a wine-focused itinerary in Venice ➔

## 3 TOUR TYPES TO TEMPT CLIENTS

● **Rail:** Cox & Kings and Contiki report a rise in popularity of train travel in Italy, highlighting that both older and younger clients are embracing sustainable, experiential journeys. Options include the luxurious Venice Simplon-Orient-Express between Venice and Paris and the picturesque mountain railways of the Dolomites.

● **Sail:** The growing popularity of Intrepid Travel's small-boat sailing holidays is a standout trend for the operator, giving travellers a different perspective on the Amalfi Coast and Sardinia.

● **Sports:** There are increasing options to get active in Italy, with five new walking itineraries from Headwater, plus cross-country skiing in the Dolomites and e-biking in Tuscany. If clients would rather spectate, Travelpack is offering tickets to Serie A football matches, as well as packages to the Formula One Grand Prix in Monza.







FROM LEFT: Lake Maggiore; Amalfi Coast BELOW: Vieste, Puglia PICTURES: Intrepid Travel; Shutterstock/Sina Ettmer Photography, marcobriviphotocom; ENIT

and the Dolomites. Small-group walking specialist Involved Holidays, whose Italy sales are up 30%, has seen a “massive increase” in demand for solo travel, and has added a no-single-supplement version of its Tuscany walking holiday for 2026.

G Adventures added Italy trips to its tour selection for those travelling solo, with Solo-ish Italy and Solo-ish Sicily itineraries – both featuring ice-breaking cooking classes on the first day – new this year.

## FIRM FAVOURITES

Italy’s most popular regions are still a big driver for bookings. Exodus Adventure Travels, Exoticca and Newmarket Holidays report strong sales for the Amalfi Coast, where Explore has also launched a family itinerary. Both Travelsphere and Just You have added capacity to Pompeii.

The Italian Lakes are selling well for Trafalgar, while Titan has responded to rising demand by adding a trip combining Garda, Maggiore and Como. Shearings will run a tour next year focusing on lesser-known Maggiore – a new take on the lakes region.

Southern gem Puglia, once the preserve of in-the-know Italophiles, is now an established favourite and Riviera has launched itineraries combining it

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Italy’s most popular regions, such as the Amalfi Coast and Pompeii, are still a big driver for bookings

with lesser-known neighbour Basilicata.

One of the reasons Italy continues to dominate the touring agenda is its seemingly endless variety and capacity to offer something new,

even to those visiting time and again. Riviera’s 2026 programme features a Hidden Italy tour that visits Padua, Vicenza and Mantua, which is close to Venice but less crowded.

Cox & Kings has a strong focus on less-touristy areas, both in group tours and in its tailor-made offering. The operator has added a trip to Umbria, while client requests range from quiet areas of Tuscany and Lazio, to the much-less-visited northeastern province of Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

Newmarket Holidays also has a new group tour in Friuli, which takes in its history-packed capital Trieste along with a host of other cultural highlights.

