

ASK THE operator

Italy has bounced back from its Covid crisis, so how can you tap into its perennial popularity with sales for 2021? **Laura French** finds out



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1 FOOD AND DRINK

WHAT'S THE BRIEF?

Clients are looking for a food and wine-themed holiday with a chance to get involved and learn more about Italian gastronomy. They want an authentic, rural experience in the countryside with sightseeing opportunities as well as walking, cycling and relaxing activities on hand.



Heather Green
senior regional destination manager,
Citalia

WE SUGGEST

For a food and wine-themed holiday, there is no place better than Tuscany. The southern part of the region in particular is excellent – the countryside is full of vineyards and olive groves, with numerous trattorias serving delicious food with fresh ingredients. Wild game is a speciality.

For an especially atmospheric place to stay, I'd recommend the five-star Castel Monastero. Located near the town of Castelnuovo Berardenga in the Chianti region, it offers a touch of luxury in a beautiful 11th-century hotel, with an emphasis on local ingredients. Cooking classes are available and the hotel boasts an amazing spa as well as a tennis court and bikes for hire.

The surrounding area is especially good for visitors wanting to enjoy some of the best wines, and a visit to medieval Siena is not to be missed, with its cobbled streets and Piazza del Campo.

Tuscany is awash with beautiful colours and flavours, and travelling outside peak season means comfortable temperatures and fewer crowds.

We are seeing particular interest in private villas, lesser-known parts of the country and rail trips. As Italy was the first European country to go into lockdown, hotels and destinations have all adopted Covid protocols and they're very used to the 'new normal', so it's a great destination to visit.

2 BEACHES

WHAT'S THE BRIEF?

A family is after a sunny island getaway with sandy beaches, snorkel-friendly waters and historic towns to explore. They want the privacy and seclusion of a villa while still being close to the action, with opportunities to explore beyond the beach and get a taste of local life.



Karen Rowley
Sardinia-based rep,
Sardinian Places

WE SUGGEST

Sardinia is the perfect getaway for clients looking for excellent beaches, food and hospitality. It offers a wide choice of quality hotels and good-value villas, and the island has managed to keep Covid under control.

For beach holidays on the island, I'd recommend Alghero. It has several wonderful beaches, including Maria Pia, which is a beautiful long stretch of sandy coastline backed by pine woods, and Spiaggia Lazzaretto, a strip of pure white sand and crystal-clear sea with superb views across to Capo Caddia and its towering limestone cliffs.

Alghero is home to a charming old town with cobbled streets and ramparts offering a good selection of restaurants. You can also go out on sailing trips to visit caves, snorkel or see marine biologists doing dolphin research.

For clients looking to stay in a private villa, I'd suggest Casa Angelica. It has a wonderful pool and garden and is in a secluded setting, but still close to Alghero's town and beaches.

We're seeing some of the best early-booking discounts in years, so my advice for agents is to encourage customers to book now and assure them their money is protected.

3 CULTURE

WHAT'S THE BRIEF?

A couple are looking for a city break where they can explore Italy's renowned architecture, music and arts scene without the crowds. They might be concerned about travelling in the current climate and want to be reassured about safety and the overall experience.



Tony Byrne
trade support executive,
Typically Italian

WE SUGGEST

People looking for a quick, cultural city break will find Italy ideal, with most of its northern cities only a two or three-hour flight away.

I visited in July and again in September and it's certainly much quieter than usual, giving visitors the chance to explore cities such as Venice, Florence and Rome without the crowds. It's also ideal for multi-centre trips; for example, combining Bologna, Ferrara and Modena in Emilia-Romagna is a great option as they're all connected by rail.

We've seen more interest in music-themed trips in recent years. La Scala in Milan is always popular, while the Opera Festival in Verona during the summer is a must for music lovers, and our customers often combine it with time around the Italian Lakes. When it comes to accommodation, the smaller, family-run hotels are proving especially popular. It seems the Italians have adapted very quickly to the new way of life, so masks and safety measures are everywhere, but it doesn't take away from the experience. Most people who have visited recently say there has never been a better time to see it.

My tip for agents would be to focus on the experiences available. Our customers tend to look for something slightly different and are always open to suggestions, so your expertise is valued.