

# 25 Hidden Gems of Italy

That Most Tourists Never Find

From forgotten hilltop villages to secret coastlines, ancient ruins to hidden trattorias - these are the places that make Italy magical, far from the tourist trail.

**A Free Guide from Love Italy**

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## Introduction

Italy draws tens of millions of visitors every year, and rightly so. The Colosseum, the canals of Venice, and the Amalfi Coast are world-famous. But the Italy that locals treasure - the quiet hilltop villages, the untouched coastlines, the places where centuries of history seep from every stone - often goes completely unnoticed.

This guide is our love letter to the Italy most visitors never see. These 25 places rarely appear on tour itineraries. Some require a ferry crossing. Others are simply overlooked because nobody thought to mention them. All of them are real, visitable, and unforgettable.

We have organised them by region so you can build them into your own trip. Whether you are planning your first visit or your fifteenth, we hope this guide leads you somewhere new.

Buon viaggio,  
The Love Italy Team

## Tuscany & Central Italy

### 1. Pitigliano

*Province of Grosseto, Tuscany*

Known as 'Little Jerusalem', this dramatic hilltop town rises from a tufa cliff like something from a dream. An ancient Jewish quarter, Etruscan tunnels beneath the streets, and views across the Lente valley that stop you in your tracks. Most Tuscany visitors never venture this far south.

### 2. Civita di Bagnoregio

*Province of Viterbo, Lazio*

The 'dying city' perched on an eroding plateau, reached only by a narrow pedestrian bridge. Founded by the Etruscans 2,500 years ago, today fewer than ten people live here year-round. On a misty morning, the town appears to float above the valley.

### 3. San Galgano Abbey

*Province of Siena, Tuscany*

A roofless Gothic abbey in the Tuscan countryside, open to the sky. Wildflowers grow where monks once prayed. On the hill above sits a round chapel with a real sword embedded in stone - predating the Arthurian legend by centuries.

### 4. Saturnia Hot Springs

*Province of Grosseto, Tuscany*

Natural thermal cascades in the Tuscan countryside where sulphurous water at 37 degrees flows over travertine terraces into milky-blue pools. Free, open all year, and rarely crowded outside summer weekends. Best visited at sunset.

## 5. Calcata

*Province of Viterbo, Lazio*

A medieval village on a volcanic outcrop, abandoned in the 1930s and reborn as an artists' colony. Narrow lanes wind between studios, galleries, and tiny cafes. The valley below is a nature reserve with Faliscan tombs hidden in the undergrowth.

## The South & Islands

## 6. Matera

*Basilicata*

A city carved from limestone ravines, inhabited continuously for 9,000 years. The Sassi cave dwellings were once considered a national shame - evacuated in the 1950s as uninhabitable. Today they are a UNESCO World Heritage Site, hauntingly beautiful, and home to boutique hotels and restaurants carved into the rock.

## 7. Tropea

*Calabria*

A clifftop town overlooking turquoise water so vivid it looks unreal. The Santa Maria dell'Isola monastery sits on a rocky outcrop below, connected by a staircase cut from the cliff. Calabria's coast rivals the Amalfi but sees a fraction of the visitors.

## 8. Procida

*Campania*

The smallest island in the Bay of Naples, a tangle of pastel-coloured houses, fishing boats, and lemon groves. Named Italy's Capital of Culture in 2022. While tourists flock to Capri and Ischia, Procida keeps its unhurried, authentic character.

## 9. Ortigia

*Syracuse, Sicily*

The historic island heart of Syracuse, where a Greek temple became a Baroque cathedral and the columns are still visible in the walls. A freshwater spring bubbles up in the harbour, papyrus grows wild, and the street market is one of Sicily's finest.

## 10. Castelmezzano

*Basilicata*

A tiny village wedged into the Lucanian Dolomites, surrounded by jagged rock spires. Connected to neighbouring Pietrapertosa by the 'Flight of the Angel' - a zip line strung between the two villages across a 400-metre-deep valley.

## The North

## 11. Bergamo Alta

*Lombardy*

The upper town of Bergamo, encircled by Venetian walls and reached by funicular. Cobbled piazzas, Romanesque churches, and views to the Alps - yet most visitors to Lombardy head straight to Lake Como. Bergamo Alta rewards those who stop.

## 12. Orta San Giulio

*Piedmont*

A medieval village on the shore of Lake Orta, the quieter sister of Lake Como. A tiny island in the lake holds a basilica and a Benedictine monastery. The village streets are car-free, and the pace of life here is genuinely slow.

## 13. Burano

*Veneto*

An island in the Venetian lagoon famous for its brilliantly coloured fishermen's houses and centuries-old lace-making tradition. Every house is painted a different shade, creating one of the most photogenic villages in all of Italy.

## 14. Sacra di San Michele

*Piedmont*

A medieval abbey perched on a rocky summit at the entrance to the Val di Susa. Said to have inspired Umberto Eco's 'The Name of the Rose'. The Stairway of the Dead leads through archways carved with zodiac signs to the church above.

## 15. Brisighella

*Emilia-Romagna*

A medieval village with three hills, three towers, and a raised covered lane called the Via degli Asini - once used by donkey drivers transporting goods. The village produces exceptional olive oil and hosts a lively truffle festival.

## Coastal & Island Gems

## 16. Polignano a Mare

*Puglia*

A town built on limestone cliffs above the Adriatic, with a beach wedged into a narrow cove between the rocks. The old town is a maze of whitewashed houses with poetry painted on doorsteps. Birthplace of Domenico Modugno, who sang 'Volare'.

## 17. Vernazza at Dawn

*Liguria*

Every Cinque Terre village is famous, but Vernazza before 7am belongs to the fishermen. The harbour empties of tourists, the morning light turns the houses gold, and the castle tower stands silhouetted against the sea. Set your alarm.

## 18. San Fruttuoso

*Liguria*

A medieval abbey on a tiny beach, reachable only by boat or a two-hour coastal hike from Portofino. An underwater bronze statue of Christ - the Cristo degli Abissi - stands in the bay at 15 metres depth, arms raised towards the surface.

## 19. Favignana

*Egadi Islands, Sicily*

The largest of the Egadi Islands off western Sicily, with Caribbean-blue coves carved into white tufa cliffs. The old tuna processing plant - the Stabilimento Florio - is now a museum documenting centuries of the mattanza tradition.

## 20. Ponza

*Pontine Islands, Lazio*

A volcanic island two hours by ferry from the mainland, with pastel houses tumbling down to a crescent harbour. Roman tunnels pierce the headlands, natural pools hide in the rocks, and the seafood is extraordinary. Rome's best-kept summer secret.

# Hidden Valleys & Mountains

## 21. Alberobello

*Puglia*

A town of trulli - whitewashed stone huts with conical grey roofs, unique to this part of Puglia. Over 1,500 trulli cluster in the Rione Monti quarter. The technique dates to prehistoric times, and the effect is like stepping into a fairy tale.

## 22. Furore

*Amalfi Coast, Campania*

The village that does not exist - houses scattered across a mountainside above a dramatic fjord. The tiny beach at the base of the gorge is one of the most secluded on the Amalfi Coast. A painted village, with murals on every available wall.

## 23. Val di Funes

*South Tyrol*

A green valley beneath the Odle mountain range in the Dolomites, centred on the Church of St Magdalena. The view of the tiny church against the jagged peaks is one of the most iconic in the Alps. In autumn, the larch forests blaze golden.

## 24. Norcia

*Umbria*

The birthplace of St Benedict and the capital of Italian black truffle country. The town was badly damaged by earthquakes in 2016 but the surrounding Piano Grande - a vast highland plateau that erupts with wildflowers each June - remains breathtaking.

## **25. Civitella del Tronto**

*Abruzzo*

Home to one of the largest fortresses in Europe, stretching 500 metres along a hilltop ridge. The last Bourbon stronghold to fall during Italian unification in 1861. Below it, one of Italy's narrowest streets - the Ruetta - measures just 43 centimetres wide.

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