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.

Official website: comune.pitigliano.gr.it

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.

Official website: comune.bagnoregio.vt.it

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 - dating to the 12th century.

Official tourism page: visittuscany.com

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.

Official tourism page: visittuscany.com

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.

Official tourism page: visitlazio.com

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.

Official website: comune.matera.it

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.

Official tourism page: calabriastraordinaria.it

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.

Official website: comune.procida.na.it

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.

Official tourism page: visitsicily.info

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.

Official website: comune.castelmezzano.pz.it

Flight of the Angel: volodellangelo.com

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.

Official website: visitbergamo.net

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.

Official website: comune.ortasangiulio.no.it

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.

Official website (Burano Lace Museum): museomerletto.visitmuve.it

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.

Official website: **sacradisanmichele.com**

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.

Official website: **comune.brisighella.ra.it**

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'.

Official website: **comune.polignanoamare.ba.it**

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.

Official website: **parconazionale5terre.it**

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.

Official website (FAI): **fondoambiente.it**

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.

Official website (Stabilimento Florio): **comune.favignana.tp.it**

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.

Official website: comune.ponza.lt.it

Hidden Valleys & Mountains

21. Alberobello

Puglia

A town of trulli - whitewashed stone huts with conical grey roofs, unique to this part of Puglia. Over 1,000 trulli cluster in the Rione Monti quarter. The technique dates to prehistoric times, and the effect is like stepping into a fairy tale.

Official website: comune.alberobello.ba.it

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.

Official tourism page: italia.it

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.

Official website: villnoess.com

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.

Official tourism page: umbriatourism.it

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.

Official website (Fortress): fortezzacivitella.it

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This guide is published by Love Italy, part of the Love To Visit network.
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