

Italy, October to *April*

A month-by-month planner for travelers who would rather meet the country than queue for it. What is happening, what is open, what is honestly closed.

The off-season is not the off-season. It is the working season.

Between October and April, Italy stops performing and goes back to work. That is the entire argument, and it is worth understanding before you plan around it.

What actually changes

The calendar fills with work, not events. Grapes come in, olives are pressed, truffles are dug, oranges are cut. These are not shows put on for visitors. They are the reason the landscape looks the way it does, and you can stand in the middle of them.

People have time. A producer who has no minutes to spare in July will give you two hours in November. This is the single largest difference, and it is not something money buys in high season.

The famous rooms empty out. The Uffizi, the Borghese, the Last Supper, the Scrovegni Chapel. Same paintings, different experience.

The same budget buys differently. Rates outside the Christmas and New Year window are typically well below summer. That usually means the better room, or the same room and two more experiences.

What you give up

Daylight. In December the sun is gone by half past four in the north. Plan two things a day, not four.

The coast. Large parts of the Amalfi Coast and the smaller islands genuinely close from November to March. Ferries thin out. Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling you a cold hotel.

Guaranteed weather. Rome is wetter in November than in July. It arrives in bursts rather than all day, but it arrives.

THE ONE EXCEPTION

The week from 24 December to 6 January is high season everywhere, at high season prices, with Italian families travelling too. Treat it as summer with shorter days.

HOW TO USE THIS PLANNER

Pick the month by what you want to walk into, not by what the weather app says. Then read the open and closed page before you fix the route, because that is where most off-season trips go wrong.

Autumn

October THE LAST WARM MONTH

- WHAT'S ON** The grape harvest finishes in the north. The International White Truffle Fair opens in Alba and runs on weekends into early December. The olive harvest begins in the centre and south late in the month. Larches turn gold in the Dolomites in the last ten days.
- WHERE TO BE** Piedmont for truffle and Barolo. Umbria and Tuscany for the first oil. Sicily and Puglia, where the sea is still swimmable in the first half of the month.
- KNOW THIS** October is the busiest of the shoulder months and the least discounted. Book Piedmont early: the truffle weekends fill months ahead.

November THE INSIDER'S MONTH

- WHAT'S ON** Olive pressing. If you only ever see one piece of Italian agriculture, make it a frantoio at night in November, with the year's oil coming out of the press green and peppery. Truffle season peaks. Museums are as empty as they get.
- WHERE TO BE** Umbria, Le Marche, Sabina, Puglia, western Sicily, all olive country. Milan and Turin for a city trip that finally feels like a city. Venice, quietly, in the week before the Christmas lights.
- KNOW THIS** Acqua alta season in Venice runs roughly October to January. The MOSE barriers have been in operation since 2020 and are raised for the higher tides, but bring boots and check the tide forecast the night before.

THE ONE BOOKING THAT CHANGES A NOVEMBER TRIP

Ask to be at a working frantoio during pressing, not for a tasting afterwards. The two are completely different experiences, and only one of them is a memory.

Winter

December TWO DECEMBERS IN ONE

- WHAT'S ON** The Christmas markets of Alto Adige open around the Immacolata on 8 December: Bolzano, Bressanone, Merano, Brunico, Vipiteno, and Trento just south. In Naples, the workshops of Via San Gregorio Armeno build nativity figures all month. The Dolomites open for skiing.
- WHERE TO BE** Alto Adige and Trentino for the markets, ideally on a weekday. Naples for the presepi. Rome and Florence, both handsome and comparatively calm until the 20th.
- KNOW THIS** Everything above applies to the first three weeks. From 24 December to 6 January the country is on holiday, prices climb, and the markets are shoulder to shoulder on weekends.

January THE QUIETEST WEEKS OF THE YEAR

- WHAT'S ON** After Epiphany on 6 January, Italy exhales. Winter sales begin. Blood oranges come in on the Catania plain and run through to March. Ski season is in full swing in the Alps and Dolomites.
- WHERE TO BE** Sicily and the deep south, mild and almost empty. Rome, Florence, Naples and Palermo at their least crowded. The Dolomites, if you ski.
- KNOW THIS** This is where the value is, if you can travel then. It is also when some countryside hotels and agriturismi close for their own annual break, so the list of options is shorter and needs checking property by property.

A NOTE ON NORTHERN FOG

The Po valley, Milan to Bologna, sits under fog on many days from November to January. It is atmospheric for a day and tiring for a week. Build the winter trip around the south, or around mountains, and treat the northern cities as stops rather than bases.

The turn

February CARNIVAL AND ALMOND BLOSSOM

- WHAT'S ON** Carnival, which ends on the Tuesday before Lent, 9 February in 2027, with Venice's programme opening roughly two weeks earlier. Viareggio's floats, Ivrea's battle of the oranges, Acireale in Sicily. Almond trees flower among the temples at Agrigento, celebrated by the Sagra del Mandorlo in Fiore.
- WHERE TO BE** Sicily, for blossom and warmth. Venice, if you want the costumes, or anywhere else in the Veneto if you don't. Rome, where spring starts early.
- KNOW THIS** Carnival dates move every year with Easter. Venice confirms its official programme in the autumn, so pin the trip before the dates are published only if you can stay flexible by a few days.

March THE COUNTRY REOPENS

- WHAT'S ON** Roman artichokes at their best. Wildflowers across Sicily and Sardinia. Coastal Puglia begins to wake up in the second half of the month. Easter falls on 28 March in 2027, unusually early, which pulls the whole spring season forward.
- WHERE TO BE** Rome, Naples, Matera, inland Puglia, the Sicilian southeast. Anywhere the season is arriving rather than leaving.
- KNOW THIS** Because Easter is early in 2027, late March behaves like high season and April behaves like a bargain. That inversion is worth planning around.

April SPRING, BEFORE THE CROWDS

- WHAT'S ON** Wisteria over the walls. Rome's founding celebrated on 21 April. Liberation Day on 25 April, a national holiday that fills domestic hotels. The Amalfi Coast reopens through the month.
- WHERE TO BE** The whole peninsula, with one exception. The Dolomites sit between seasons in late April: lifts close, mountain huts have not yet opened.
- KNOW THIS** April after an early Easter is the best value week-for-week in the entire year. In 2027 that means the two weeks after 5 April.

What is open, and what is honestly closed

The single most common off-season mistake is booking a summer route in a winter month. This table is the short version of that conversation.

REGION	NOV – MAR	WHAT THAT MEANS IN PRACTICE
Rome, Florence, Venice, Milan, Naples, Turin, Bologna, Palermo	Open	Full year. Reduced queues, full opening hours, occasional Monday closures at museums as always.
Umbria, Le Marche, Emilia, Piedmont	Open	The core of the off-season. Food calendar at its strongest, countryside hotels mostly working.
Tuscany	Mostly	Cities and towns open. A number of rural agriturismo close in January and February.
Inland Puglia, Valle d'Itria, Matera	Mostly	Open and lovely. Some masserie take a January or February break. Verify property by property.
Sicily, Sardinia inland	Open	Mild, green, close to empty. Sardinia's coastal resorts are the exception and shut.
Amalfi Coast, Capri, Ischia, Procida	Largely shut	Many hotels and restaurants close November to March, ferry schedules thin. Reopening runs through April.
Aeolian and smaller islands	Shut	Skip entirely outside the season. Limited transport, almost nothing open.
Cinque Terre	Reduced	Trains run, some paths and many restaurants close. Quiet in a good way in March.
Dolomites, Alps	Two seasons	Ski from December to early April. November and late April are the genuine dead weeks, with lifts and huts closed.
Lakes: Como, Garda, Maggiore, Orta	Reduced	Towns live year round, many lakefront hotels and boat services close from November to March.

What to pack, honestly

- One properly warm coat, and layers under it. Italian buildings are heated later and less than American ones, and stone churches are cold.
- Waterproof shoes you can walk five miles in. Cobblestones plus rain is the whole risk.
- A compact umbrella. Rain here comes hard and briefly.
- For Venice from October to January, add boots that can handle standing water.
- Leave the resort clothes. Winter in Italy is a wool and leather country.

Five routes that only work in these months

Skeletons, not itineraries. Each one is built around something that is physically happening on the ground at that time of year.

OCTOBER — EARLY DECEMBER • 7 NIGHTS

Piedmont: truffle, Barolo, and the fog

Turin → Alba → La Morra and Barolo → Monforte → Turin

Dig with a trifolau and his dog before dawn, eat the result at lunch, and spend the afternoons in cellars that have no time for anyone in summer. Best on weekdays; the Alba fair fills the weekends.

NOVEMBER • 8 NIGHTS

Umbria and the new oil

Perugia → Assisi → Montefalco → Spello → Orvieto

Harvest by hand in the morning, follow the crates to the mill, taste the oil the hour it is pressed. Sagrantino in Montefalco, and hill towns with nobody in them.

DECEMBER, FIRST THREE WEEKS • 7 NIGHTS

Alto Adige at Christmas, without the coach parties

Verona → Trento → Bolzano → Bressanone → Merano

Markets on weekday mornings, mountain lunches in the afternoon. A German-speaking Italy most Americans never see, and the best food-and-wine crossover in the country.

JANUARY — MARCH • 10 NIGHTS

Sicily in winter

Palermo → Agrigento → Ragusa and Modica → Siracusa → Catania

Fifteen to eighteen degrees, blood oranges, baroque towns with no queues, almond blossom among the temples in late February. The most underrated month-for-month value in Italy.

MARCH — APRIL • 10 NIGHTS

The south, one step ahead of the season

Naples → Matera → Valle d'Itria → Lecce → Otranto

Everything reopening, nothing yet full. Artichokes in Naples, Matera before the tour buses, and a Puglia coast you can have to yourself for another six weeks.

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Everything in this planner is the part you can do yourself. The part you cannot is the phone call that gets you into the frantoio at nine at night, or the family estate that does not take visitors, or the table that was full.

IF YOU ARE PLANNING OCTOBER TO APRIL

Tell us the two weeks you have and what you want to walk into. We will tell you honestly whether those weeks work, and what we would change.

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Dates, openings and festival programmes are given as guidance for the 2026 / 2027 season and are confirmed by the relevant comune or organiser closer to the time. Verify anything you are booking a flight around.