

Bethany Little



Everett and Camden Little in Florence

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SPECIAL REPORT: TAKING KIDS TO ITALY, PART I

# DREAM OF ITALY®



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## THE ITALIAN DAY: A BLUEPRINT FOR TRAVEL WITH KIDS

Traveling with children is never easy, although it can be richly rewarding for both parents and offspring when adults are

thoughtful about both their family's needs as well as the mores and manners of the culture or cultures in which they'll be spending time.

The Italian expression *la dolce vita* (the sweet life) may be a cliché but it's a cliché that can be followed and relied upon when traveling with kids in Italy. Grown-up travel to everyone's favorite country involves images of sun-drenched piazzas, glasses of good wine, amazing food and great conversations.



Your younger traveling companions, however, may screech at the heat, can't drink alcohol, whine for hamburgers, be pre-verbal and rush from activity to

activity without letting up. How can you have a fantastic time in Italy while still making sure your children remain happy and healthy?

### AN ITALIAN VIEW OF TIME

The answer is to know the rhythms of the Italian day and use them to your advantage while on vacation. Here's how to take advantage of a 24-hour cycle with kids of different ages and stages.

*continued on page 2*



Nan McElroy

Row Venice

## Unique Experiences for Kids in Italy's Five Major Cities

If Italy is a full-on sensory experience for adults, can it be much different for children? Absolutely not. Almost everything you can do in Italy – from a visit to a local market to soaking in some of the world's greatest art – can be adapted into a fun and memorable outing for kids of all ages.

The purpose of this list is to share a selection of special experiences that families can enjoy in Italy's five most-visited cities – Florence, Milan, Naples, Rome and Venice. While some of the offerings relate to the major sites, we've purposely focused on other things to do in between visiting the Colosseum or Uffizi.

In our May 2016 issue – the second part of this special report on taking kids to Italy – we will include another round-up of unique experiences in the rest of Italy.

*continued on page 4*

# Carlo Collodi wrote *Pinocchio* in 1883.

ITALIANS DO NOT FEEL THE NEED TO FILL EVERY MOMENT WITH TALK OR ACTIVITY. IT MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO LEARN IF YOU'RE TRYING TO STRUCTURE YOUR ITALIAN DAY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.

The Italians have a different relationship with time than we do here in the United States. When my husband Sam and I first spent long summer days in a little Tuscan village, we would sit under a tree where all the locals gathered to play cards, and we'd sit, and they'd play and we'd sit. After about 15 minutes, we would start to fidget. They didn't seem to notice; they'd sit there for hours.

Sometimes conversations would take place but often it was simply silence. It took us a few days to adjust from the "fill every minute" American mode to this slower pace, but once we did, we could feel our very souls unwinding and airing out.

Italians do not feel the need to fill every moment with talk or activity. It may be the most important thing to learn if you're trying to use the structure of an Italian day to your advantage. If you want to be relaxed, you have to take the time to be relaxed. That means you may miss a few "can't miss" sights, but your reward will be less irritation and more satisfaction with what you do see.

## MORNING ROUTINE

When it comes to eating, the Italians are more strict than we are in the States, and rarely snack. They maintain very regular eating times and menus. You begin your day with a pastry and coffee; kids have cookies and milk; not



Spaghetti fun



Kids on Lake Como

exactly what is considered a healthy diet in the States! But "healthy" is not an absolute.

Consider that a morning *cappuccino* is the only time you'll see an Italian adult drink milk. Italians consider cow's milk hard on the digestion and bad for *la bella figura*, preferring to take their calcium from things like *broccoli rabe*, fresh sardines and cheeses.

So relax, allow the young ones their morning carbohydrates. While you are out and about (more on morning action in *un momento*), you'll find it's easy to pick up a mid- or late-morning snack with protein. Triangular *tramezzino* sandwiches are a popular choice, often filled with eggs and tomatoes or ham and cheese or tuna and artichokes. Kids eat theirs with fruit juice, but many adults indulge in a small glass of *Prosecco*—perfect if the morning has left you a bit frazzled.

Morning is the time for your most ambitious sightseeing activities, particularly those that require stamina or brainpower. Try to get outside hours completed before noon, when the sun may be too much for children of any age; however, also think of the

morning as a time when you can take in the maximum amount of culture—and help your kids enjoy what they see, too. If you've been longing to see a big museum, these are the hours to do it.

## QUIET AFTERNOON

Three Italian words/phrases to know: *aperto* (open), *chiuso* (closed) and *pausa pranzo* (lunch break). Just as the Italians are very regulated with their eating schedule, they plan rest into their days. The *siesta* is still going strong in Italy, particularly in places where it's really hot. Many Italians go home from 1 to 4 p.m., and you should too.

Close up the rolling metal shutters in order to keep the sun out and create your own private "time out" for everyone. Kids can read, watch movies, or take a nap, depending on age. Not only will this break allow grownups a little rest, it will help the young ones later during the long and often quite fun Italian evenings.

I remember once seeing a family of Americans sitting in the shade in *San Gimignano* after lunch. The kids were drawing, the dad was reading and the mom was knitting. They had some yoga mats with them so everyone was comfortable. They looked so relaxed, and the kids seemed to really be taking in the scenery. If they rushed to the next village, the kids might not have noticed much of anything.

*Tramezzini* originated in 1926

Around “tea time” (4 p.m. or so) comes a *merenda*, or snack, which might be *gelato*, fresh fruit or Nutella on bread for children and a “spritz” cocktail with olives or *salumi* for adults. Bars in Italy are family affairs, not just places for lounge lizards, so take the whole gang while you’re heading downtown. A piece of vegetable-topped *focaccia* or a modest cup of *stracciatella* (chocolate chip) gelato might be just the ticket to prevent an offspring’s blood-sugar meltdown.

If anyone in your party was disappointed by a store’s *chiuso* sign earlier in the day, the afternoon-to-evening hours held by most Italian markets and boutiques may cheer them up considerably.

Another suggestion specifically for children: Make a trip to a market or other utilitarian expedition an opportunity to marvel at differences (e.g., the cheese display, the different sorts of candy, the greeting cards) and chat about the culture you’re visiting. Encourage children to search for fun souvenirs in the stores everyday Italians use rather than buying pricey bric-a-brac at tourist traps.

## EVENING BONDING

Let’s say you’ve had an unusually busy day, even if you’re trying to observe Italian daily rhythms. After refueling in late afternoon, take another long break before dinner (never earlier than 7:30 p.m.)—you needn’t worry about hurrying to get things on the table, especially if you’ve taken the time to make a reservation as we suggest. This isn’t important for lunch; lots of smaller places and snack stands are open then. But *trattorie*, *pizzeria*, and *ristorante* work best if you

make a plan and stick with it.

Remember all of those Madonna-with-child paintings? Italians love babies and children! They’ll go out of their way to help you with yours as long as you don’t try and bring them to a four-hour upscale fancy place where they, you and everybody else will be miserable. Family-friendly restaurants always have pasta available, and it can



Pam Mercer and family

be served plain, “just with butter,” a little tomato sauce, etc. Meanwhile, Mom and Dad can breathe a sigh of relief and enjoy their sweetbreads or *zuppa di pesce* and a little *vino*.

Before dinner, take advantage of one of the best parts of any Italian day, *la passeggiata* (the promenade), which usually happens around 6 p.m. but also can take place later in the evening, after dinner. In nearly every town, everyone takes a walk arm-in-arm, stopping to greet each other and to window shop.

Entire families head out to enjoy the cool night air, catch up on the day’s news and take a little exercise. While in modern times some weekdays may find people skipping their stroll, on Sundays, holidays and in summer the pace and population pick up again.

Your kids can join in whether on their own or in groups. We used to buy our kids hula-hoops and balls (you can find these in the tobacconist’s, oddly enough) to share with any locals of similar age. Adolescents might tote along a skateboard, as long as the area is pedestrian only.

By the time everyone heads home to

sleep, even if it’s quite late, they’ll be ready.

Back at your hotel or villa, you might follow up dinner with bath time, story time and bedtime. But remember, you’re on vacation

Again, don’t forget to close the drapes or roll down those shutters: Italians know that a completely darkened room is the best way to combat insomnia. Your family will need rest for the next *dolce giorno in Italia*.

—Pam Mercer

*Pam Mercer is the co-founder of Tuscany Tours, a California-based travel company specializing in small group tours and independent travel planning in Italy and France. She and her husband, author Sam Hilt, and their two children live near Siena in Tuscany. Learn more at [www.tuscanytours.com](http://www.tuscanytours.com)*

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at Turin’s *Caffe Mulasano*.

# Let's face it, pizza and gelato are two of the reasons your kids came to Italy!



## Florence

### Bike Ride Into Tuscany

(39) 055 2298747

[www.ibikeitaly.com](http://www.ibikeitaly.com)

Price: 80 to 110€ (adults); 40 to 55€ (kids)

Active kids, seven years old and up, will love this guided nine-mile bike ride from Florence's *Porta Romana* into the Tuscan countryside. The *Florence and Taste of Tuscany* ride takes place on very quiet back roads with no traffic —

allowing mom and dad to relax. Over four hours, the guide shares tales of *Galileo* and his telescope and there's a light lunch of Tuscan foods. Tour includes bike and helmet rentals and water bottles.



IBike Italy

### Climb the Duomo

Enter via *Porta della Mandorla* on north side

(39) 055 2302885

[www.museumflorence.com](http://www.museumflorence.com)

Price: 15€ (as part of entrance to entire complex)

The dome of Florence's grand cathedral is perhaps the most famous in the world. Designed by *Filippo Brunelleschi* in the 15th century, kids may be less interested in the history-making octagonal construction than the freaky frescoes of the *Last Judgment* by *Giorgio Vasari* and *Federico Zuccari*, which visitors can see up close when you climb. But to reach the magnificent view at the top requires climbing 463 steps

that are steep and claustrophobic, so it's probably best for kids age eight and up. And be prepared: if the crowds are too big, officials may restrict traffic.

### Gucci CreaKids

Gucci Museum

(39) 055 75927010

[www.guccimuseum.com](http://www.guccimuseum.com)

Price: 3€

With a good age range (six to 12), low price and options that will appeal to boys and girls alike, this *Museo Gucci* program is a winning choice for parents who wish their children to learn a bit about Italy's contributions to world design. Kids can choose in 2016 from "Florario," "Fashionable People" or "Monsieur Pi" (about *Picasso*). In each workshop they learn while doing, so bring on your fidgety, museum-weary young ones and let them try their hands at designing a pattern, a suitcase or a Cubist painting.

### Make Your Own Fresco

Palazzo Vecchio

(39) 055 2768224

[www.musefirenze.it](http://www.musefirenze.it)

Price: Around 20€

This combination of tour and hands-on workshop is a must for families with older children (the museum suggests ages eight and up). After an hour-long tour with an expert art-history guide of the Palazzo Vecchio's distinguished frescoes, kids create

their own small versions, with design, material preparation and use of authentic implements. Remind your budding graphic-novel enthusiast that what you're learning is how people drew comics back in the old days and watch her eyes open wider than a manga character's.

### Pizza and Gelato Making Lessons

(39) 327 8705610

[www.europe4kids.com](http://www.europe4kids.com)

Price: 58€ (adults); 39€ (kids 5 to 12); kids under 5 are free

Let's face it, pizza and gelato are two of the reasons your kids came to Italy! During *Pizza Master Class and Gelato Delight*, a *pizzaiolo* gives hands-on lessons in making the perfect pie. Then it is on to a gelato lesson with details from how to choose the milk, nuts, and fruits to how the heating and freezing techniques affect the ingredients. The three-hour class is offered at either 3 p.m. or 6 p.m. — with the later class a great alternative to going out to dinner.

### Vintage Fiat 500 Fun

(39) 055 2298747

[www.vintagefiat500tours.com](http://www.vintagefiat500tours.com)

Price: 300€ per day for two people (extra fees for third and fourth)

Kids will adore the "kid size" of the vintage *Fiat 500* and love seeing their parents fit into the tiny car for a five-hour convoy tour from Florence to the Tuscan countryside. One parent must drive manual and the lead car con-



Vintage Fiat 500 Tours

# In colder months, *il passeggi*

nects with your car by walkie-talkie. If parents allow, on quieter back roads, kids can stand up and poke their heads out of the sunroof. Includes multi-course lunch at a family vineyard where *Diego* the dog is always a hit with kids.

## Milan

### Marionettes in Action

Carlo Colla & Figli Theater and Workshop

(39) 02 89531301

[www.marionettecolla.org/en/](http://www.marionettecolla.org/en/)

Price: 8€ per ticket

The marionette shows of the *Teatro Colla* (a three-centuries-old endeavor) are a real treat for children old enough to sit through a performance. This spring the “company,” which consists of 30 trained puppeteers who also craft all of their performers by hand, will stage *Don Quixote* and *Macbeth*. These are no ordinary marionettes. Each is two to three feet high and garbed in miniature, yet perfectly tailored, costumes. While the shows have an admission fee, tours of the atelier where the puppets “live” are free.

### Milan Children's Museum

Via E. Besana 12

(39) 02 4981980

[www.muba.it](http://www.muba.it)

Price: 8€ (adults); 6€ (kids)

Great news for parents of wee ones: At Milan's *Museo dei Bambini*, not only are infants and toddlers welcome—there's a once-a-month exhibit designed specifically for their size, interests and safety. The 75-minute experience, held five times each day on the designated weekend (check website for details), is ticketed and families are encouraged to make reservations in advance. Everyone removes shoes, sits (or lies!) on a big carpet, and educators guide parents and kids through touching and sorting all sorts of materials, from wood to fabric to rubber and so forth.



### Nano Bleu Toy Store

(39) 02 76020595

[www.nanobleu.it](http://www.nanobleu.it)

Price: Free, in a way...

Few children will appreciate Milan's *Galleria Vittorio Emmanuele* the way their parents might—until they reach Nano Bleu, this northern city's answer to FAO Schwartz in the USA and Hamley's of London. This store has all the latest models and versions of Lego sets and Furby dolls, but also local selections like *Burago* cars and motorcycles will thrill young gearheads. Italian-made *Trudi* stuffed animals will please almost everyone.

### San Siro Stadium Tour and Museum

Piazzale Angelo

Moratti

(39) 02 4042432

[www.sansiro.net](http://www.sansiro.net)

Price: 17€ (adults);

12€ (up to 14);

free for kids under 6

A treat for soccer fans of all ages, this open stadium is Italy's largest with room for 81,000 fans of *A.C. Milan* and *Inter*. The tour allows you to visit the spots that are usually off-limits during games, like the locker rooms and the Tunnel of Champions that takes you onto the field, as well as stroll through the stands. For true die-hards, the museum captures 100 years of soccer history as it relates to the Milanese teams. Private tours in English available daily.



San Siro Stadium



Napoli Sotterranea

### Triennale Design Museum

(39) 02 724341

[www.triennale.org](http://www.triennale.org)

Price: Workshops are 5 to 12€; must pay entrance fee of 4 to 15€

The *Triennale* is a center for contemporary art, architecture, and design that has continually changing exhibitions. This year's event, *XXI Century: Design After Design*, is spread over several locations and focuses on gender issues,

historical traditions and the impact of globalization on the arts. On the weekends, the museum offers special guided tours and workshops geared for kids ages three to 10. The museum also has a permanent educational space called *The Whale* that's dedicated to children and teenagers.

## Naples

*Note: The great city of Naples also offers many unique experiences outside of the city, which we will detail in the May 2016 issue of Dream of Italy.*

### Funicular to Vomero Heights

Price: 4.50€ (for a one-day Naples Metro ticket)

[NapoliUnplugged.com](http://NapoliUnplugged.com) is a great resource for visiting Naples and we loved their suggestion of this fun excursion via funicular. Take the *Centrale* funicular line (*Via Roma*) to *Castel Sant'Elmo*—be sure to stop and admire the vintage Roma station. Then, walk for about 20 minutes down the graceful *Pedamentina San Martino* path, lined with the gorgeous villas and well-manicured terraces that make Vomero Heights the toniest spot in *bella Napoli*. At the end you will be enthralled with the panoramic views of the Bay of Naples, and on most days you can see Mount Vesuvius in the background, too.

Kids of all ages will enjoy, but take a stroller along for tired tots on the return walk.

### Go Underground

(39) 081 296944

[www.napolisotterranea.org](http://www.napolisotterranea.org)

Price: From 15€

Show us the child who isn't intrigued by touring beneath a city and we'll show you a child who may not be old enough to visit *Napoli Sotterranea*—but most over five and up to adulthood will be captivated by the tunnels and chambers beneath this city, made possible cen-

*ata* may occur before dinner.

## Unique Experiences *continued from page 5*

turies ago by the porous volcanic rock known as *tuffo* upon which Naples rests. Ancient Greek areas, Roman Empire aqueducts and even some World War II-era rooms may be seen, depending on your tour and guide. Check website for the tours in English, which take place about five times daily.

### **Pietrarsa Railway Museum**

(39) 081 472003

[www.museodipietrarsa.it](http://www.museodipietrarsa.it)

Price: 6€ (adults), 3.50€ (kids)

The large, light-filled National Railway Museum just outside *Pietrarsa* has been renovated—but thank goodness, that only means the facilities, not the dozens of retired steam engines and rail cars that still have signs of honest wear and tear

on their iron wheels. Train fanatics from three to 93 may not want to leave, so plan a good long visit (until recently closing daily at 1 p.m., the museum is now open longer hours from Friday to Sunday). Don't miss Pavilion F and its workshop tool exhibits—if you can convince your kids to leave the locomotives.

### **Visit An Active Volcano**

(39) 081 5262341

[www.solfatara.it](http://www.solfatara.it)

Price: 7€ for entrance; 18€ and up including tour

Bubble, bubble—but your kids won't be in trouble! The *Solfatara* craters just outside Naples (a 20-minute hike from *Pozzuoli*) will fascinate children aged five and up when you explain that real lava bubbles just beneath their feet, as they watch the smoldering plumes of belching smoke. Neapolitans call these “the Big Mouths.” They'll love it even more after a guide holds a lighter to an opening and sets the unseen gasses alight. Evening and geothermal tours also available.

### **Said Vintage Chocolate Factory**

Via Tiburtina, 00185

(39) 06 4469204

[www.said.it](http://www.said.it)

Price: Free, but you will want to buy some chocolate

With walls covered in antique candy molds, *Said Rome* (there's also a London outpost) shows off its handcrafted history the moment your kids walk in. They'll delight in a tour highlighting how artisanal chocolate is made, from bean to bar to bonbons—and with plenty of opportunities to sample the wares along the way, they'll probably convince you to stay a bit for an incredible *cioccolato caldo con panna* (hot chocolate with whipped cream) if not a whirl through the irresistible onsite shop.

### **Gladiator School**

Gruppo Storica Romano

(39) 065 1607951

[www.gruppistoricoromano.it](http://www.gruppistoricoromano.it)

Price: 60€

This is the ultimate Roman experience and every kid or adult we know who has done it says it has been the highlight of their trip. The cultural association *Gruppo Storica Romano* offers the most authentic gladiator training right on *Via Appia Antica*. The two-hour experience includes lesson, costume and weapons rental, refreshments and entrance to the gladiator

museum. Your children will burn up plenty of physical energy during this class as they learn why the Colosseum's floor is covered with sand and how ancient fighters made decisions about which blows to strike where. Great photo opp!

### **Learn More About Leonardo**

(39) 06 69887616

[www.mostradileonardo.com](http://www.mostradileonardo.com)

Price: 9€ (adults); 7€ (kids)

Imagine visiting Leonardo da Vinci at his workshop and having him show you 51 of his large



## Context Travel: Family Tours in All Five Cities

(215) 392-0303 (main U.S. number)

[www.contexttravel.com](http://www.contexttravel.com)

Price: About \$350 per family for private 2.5-hour walks

Context has an excellent reputation for their small group walks (six people or a few more for private tours) led by scholars with Masters and PhDs. It was one of the first companies to offer train-dedicated family guides (they call them docents). Context can take families — all family walks are private — through the major sites with walks such as the *Vatican for Families* and the *Uffizi for Families* and also a little more far afield with *Daily Life in Venice for Families* and *Ancient Naples: Above and Underground for Families*.

## Rome

### **Explora Children's Museum**

Vian Flaminia, 80/86

(39) 06 3613776

[www.mdr.it](http://www.mdr.it)

Price: 8€ adults and most children, 5€ toddlers, babies free

If you've never had the opportunity to take your little ones to a well-run children's museum, the *Explora Musei dei Bambini di Roma* is a charming place to start—and between its exhibits, easy parking, lovely park, family restaurant and book/gift shop, Explora offers something for everyone in your group. But the kids will flock to interactive areas that allow them to drive a tiny metro train, shop for food just like Dad does and plant a garden. Oh, there's a water play area, too!



Bethany Little

# Italian “children” often li

The company's truly unique offerings include **Time Inspectors Act**, where the guide, an actor, morphs from **St. Peter** to **Emperor Hadrian** to **Bernini** along the way. In the 2.5-hour **Travel Log Challenge**, kids create their own travel journal.

machines—that's the experience at the *Mostra di Leonardo Museum* in Rome's Palace of the Chancellery. Divided into exhibits according to air, water, earth and fire, the inventions are all to da Vinci's specifications, and some are even interactive. Suitable for children five and older, tours are geared towards families and led by art historians who will help kids big and little operate the mechanisms, understand the cool holograms and answer the many questions this great man's work will inspire.



Rome 4 Kids

**Like Gepetto's Workshop**

Bartolucci

(39) 06 69190894

[www.bartolucci.com](http://www.bartolucci.com)

Price: Free to browse!

If you can resist the craziness of a *Bartolucci* toy shop (see website for locations around Rome), with its brightly colored wooden clocks' pendulums swinging in different directions, its google-eyed characters smiling from every nook and—most important—its beautifully carved *Pinocchio* figures of every size, you're too grownup to be there. Don't miss the Pinocchio riding a wooden bike, the Pinocchio where you can put your face in for a photo, and much more.

**Rome 4 Kids Family Tours**

(39) 327 8705610

[www.rome4kidstours.com](http://www.rome4kidstours.com)

Price: from 29€ per person for group tours; from 250€ per family for private tour

All 52 *Rome 4 Kids* guides are trained to creatively explain to the delights of the Eternal Cities to kids from pre-schoolers to teenagers.

Families can join an affordable group walking tours for as little as 29€ per person. The company's truly unique offerings include *Time Inspectors Act* where the guide, an actor, morphs from *St. Peter* to *Emperor Hadrian* to *Bernini* along the way. In the 2.5-hour *Travel*

*Log Challenge*, kids create their own travel journal. Their popular *Ultimate Pizza Master Class* offers hands-on pizza-making with *Chef Maurizio* utilizing a real stone oven.

**Sketching Rome Tours**

(39) 334 9835677

[www.sketchingrometours.com](http://www.sketchingrometours.com)

Price: \$125 per person or \$475 for a group of four

American plein air painter Kelly Medford trained in Florence and has been living in Italy since 2005. She offers three-hour sketching tours for the whole family (kids aged three to five are accepted but aged five and up usually enjoy it best). After meeting Kelly in one of Rome's parks, such as the Villa Borghese, kids are given a materials kit and she teaches simple art exercises in drawing and color as students capture images from the surrounding park. The emphasis is on fun; no experience is necessary.

**Torre Argentina Cat Sanctuary**

(39) 06 68805611

[www.romancats.com](http://www.romancats.com)

Price: Free

Forget Japan's "cat cafés;" the *Largo di Torre Argentina* is the best place to cavort with the most kitties. Excavated in the mid-20th century and archaeologically important (many older kids, as well as their parents, will want to see its Theater of Pompey, the site where Julius Caesar was murdered on that long-ago Ides of March), today it is most famous for the 150 cats who lounge there and are cared for by volunteers. (Parents beware: There's a tempting CatShop of gifts, but the volunteers can also help you adopt one of the cats, most of whom have special needs.)

**Vatican Cupola: Climb to the Sky**

[www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

Price: 7€ for elevator, 5€ for stairs

At the entrance to St. Peter's Basilica, just past the security check, look for a sign directing you to the elevator that will take you to the 200 odd steps up to the Vatican Cupola. Those steps may be tough for children under 10, so consider your family's needs: Everyone can ride up together in the elevator, and some can rest at roof levels, which offers restrooms, a gift shop and a coffee bar. The intrepid will be rewarded by views of Rome usually seen only by birds.

**Villa Borghese**

Several entrances: Via Aldrovandi, Via Raimondi, Piazzale Flaminio and others

Price: Free (bike and other rentals vary price/hour) for the park and 13 to 16€ to enter zoo.

[www.bioparco.it](http://www.bioparco.it)

*The Villa Borghese* is the largest public park in Rome, and the grounds of the Borghese Gallery, a sumptuous palazzo housing an

ve at home until their 30s.

## Unique Experiences *continued from page 7*

astounding collection of 15th-18th century art and sculpture. The surrounding park is great for kids to explore, with lots of shade, several playgrounds and merry-go-rounds. Families can rent bikes, go-karts, golf carts and boats. The four-wheeled “electric rickshaws” (a motor kicks in when you pedal) are great fun. A zoo (*Bioparco di Roma*) is also in the Villa Borghese with a wide range of animals and a regular schedule of feedings. The park is always open and the zoo is open daily 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.



Villa Borghese

### Natural History: Fontego dei Turchi

Santa Croce  
(39) 041 2750206  
[www.msn.visitmuve.it](http://www.msn.visitmuve.it)  
Price: 8€ (adults); 5.50€ (kids/students)

The 13th-century *Fontego dei Turchi*, with its beautiful façade on the Grand Canal, is one of the oldest palaces in Venice, and originally served as a trading depot for goods coming from the East. Inside, it houses the Natural History Museum, which includes an aquarium with more than 50 species of fish and coral. Great for kids of all ages, the museum also has a 22-foot-long dinosaur skeleton and a large fossil collection. All their senses come into play, including touch, as kids learn about the form and function of a variety of living things. Closed Monday.

### Row Venice

(39) 347 7250637  
[www.rowvenice.org](http://www.rowvenice.org)  
Price: 85€ for up to two people (140€ for four) for a 1.5-hour lesson

It doesn't get more authentically Venetian than this... American expat Nan McElroy or one of her mostly female *vogatori* will teach your children (ages seven and up do best but younger are welcome to try with the help of a parent) *voga alla veneta*, the style of rowing, standing up, facing forward, native to Venice and made famous by gondoliers. Lessons take place on a stable and comfortable *batelina*.

### Secret Tour of the Doge's Palace

San Marco  
(39) 041 42730892  
[www.palazzoducale.visitmuve.it](http://www.palazzoducale.visitmuve.it)  
Price: 20€ (adults); 14€ (students); children under 6 not admitted

The *Palazzo Ducale* overlooking St. Mark's Square is a historical landmark that no visitor to

Venice should miss. And for young people (best for ages eight and up) who want to go behind the scenes of Venice's remarkable history and learn the secrets of the city's powerful, wily leaders, this tour fills the bill. Filled with hidden passageways and concealed doors, the tour reveals cabinets that held secret documents, takes guests through a torture room, and even into the city jail from which famed lover *Casanova* escaped in 1775. Tours offered daily in English at 9:55, 10:45 and 11:35 a.m.; reservations required.

—Lisa Chambers, Kathy McCabe,  
Pam Mercer and Bethanne Patrick

## Venice

Note: Some of our best ideas for unique experiences in Venice — cooking classes, a ghost tour, a mask-making lesson — can be found in Rebecca Winke's excellent article *Exploring Venice with Kids in the December 2013/January 2014 issue of Dream of Italy*.

### Lido: Day at the Beach

Blue Moon public beach  
At the end of Gran Viale Santa Maria Elisabetta  
Beach chair/umbrella rental:  
20 to 40€ per day  
A few minutes by *vaporetto* (lines no. 1, 2, 5.1, 5.2, 6) from Venice's center, the *Lido* is a small island oasis with a series of beaches on the Adriatic Sea. The public *Blue Moon* beach—with showers, toilets, a restaurant and bar—is free of charge. Families can rent chairs, umbrellas, and cabanas by the day at some of the private clubs along the sand. To go beyond the beach, rent a bike (check out the *Biciclette Gardin* just north of the *vaporetto* stop, where bikes are as low as 3€ per hour) and, of course, there is gelato galore!



Lido, Venice

1€ = \$1.14 at press time



## Arte al Sole:

### Art Experiences in Florence and Venice

(805) 680-7913

[www.artesole.com](http://www.artesole.com)

Price: 175 to 350€ for a family of four  
Arte al Sole is best-known for their weeklong arts camps for English-speaking kids (there's one in Florence in June). The company also offers private art classes in Florence and Venice. In Florence, the whole family can learn about Tuscan ceramics and make their own pieces or join a docent for museum visits and interactive activities comparing *Galileo* to *Da Vinci*. In Venice, offerings include a Murano glass working studio visit and a glass bead art class; a Venetian mask-making workshop that teaches about *Carnavale* traditions; a treasure hunt and art workshop for the whole family; and a role-playing game and private boat tour on the Grand Canal.

# Italian kids record their homework in *il diario*.