

Horse racing in Siena

Visitors treated to pageantry, breakneck competition at Palio

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A wave of adrenaline electrifies the crowd as the mad dash begins. The contest is short and fast. It's all over in about 75 seconds, but in that time, 10 horses run three laps around the Piazza del Campo cutting the sharp turns around the Magia Tower.

It is an intense experience, and the excitement is infectious.

This is no Kentucky Derby. It is Siena's "Palio delle Contrade," a traditional bareback horse race held every year since 1656. Nowadays, the race is held every July 2 and Aug. 16 on a temporary clay track constructed in the Piazza del Campo.



Photo by Karl Weisel
Jockeys will race feverishly around the Piazza del Campo during the Palio delle Contrade on Aug. 16.

Located in the center of town, this 14th-century piazza is considered one of Europe's most beautiful squares and is a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage Site.

Tourists will have the opportunity to witness parading and posturing that is second to none — colorful costumes, banner waving and the thrill of victory.

The winner is awarded a banner of painted silk, called the "palio." The victorious horse is so venerated that in previous years it was brought into the winning neighborhood's church to be blessed. This is quite a sight to witness as flag-waving supporters follow the entourage of village people trailing into the church behind the horse.

According to organizers and popular myth, the event is full of rivalry and vengeful activity. Injuries to horses and jockeys are frequent, especially around the notorious San Martino corner. Jockeys are permitted to whip competitors and their horses in an attempt to get around first. In one race a horse hit the base of the tower on the second lap; fell, pinning the rider underneath. The animal then jumped up and continued to run around the track. If the riderless horse had crossed the finish line first (with its head ornaments intact), it would have won the race even though it had

no rider.

Each jockey and horse represents one of the town's districts called "contrades" in Italian. The residents of Siena divide the town into 17 rival neighborhoods, and 10 of these wards participate in the race. This rivalry is known throughout Italy, and many say this competitive nature defines the character of its inhabitants.

Colorful districts

The city streets are decorated in coats of arms, colors and mascots that define each area. Flags, banners, wall torches and relief sculptures distinguish the sections of each district by colors and symbols. Horse and rider are dressed in the colors and arms of their district. The names of each area are the Aquila (eagle), Bruco (caterpillar), Chiocciola (snail), Civetta (owl), Drago (dragon), Giraffa (giraffe), Istrice (porcupine), Leocorno (unicorn), Lupa (wolf), Nicchio (shell), Oca (goose), Onda (wave), Pantera (panther), Selva (forest), Tartuca (tortoise), Torre (tower) and Valdimontone (ram).

The race may be the high point of the festivities, but it is not the only event. Listen for the drums at the height of the day heralding the pre-race celebrations. The preceding pa-

rade that winds throughout the town attempts to recreate the costumes and entertainment that roughly coincide with the time of the medieval crusades.

Trumpeters, jesters and jugglers entertain alongside a procession of flag-twirling standard-bearers who put on a dazzling show of precision baton tossing. During the march, delegations of all the neighborhoods wind through the streets. Drummers follow, their sound pulsating through the city. Horses, draped as if about to embark on a crusade, carry elegantly costumed riders with elaborate headdresses. Participants sing in the street, as they follow the procession into the Piazza del Campo.

The race may be observed free of charge by standing in the piazza. It affords a good vantage point, but it's crowded and hot. The greatest disadvantage is that fences are closed before the pageant (at about 4:30 p.m.) and it is impossible to leave the center until the race is completed (at about 8 p.m.). Since the piazza is in the sun most of the afternoon, those who stand should stock up on bottled drinks.

Onlookers may also reserve a seat in the grandstand. Most seats belong to residents by birthright, but those who would like to sit in this area can purchase tickets (from a travel agent well in advance) at about €100 each. Expect to pay more for better seats (the best are on the southwest corner of the Campo, which is the first corner of the Campo to receive the afternoon shade). It is also possible to rent private homes owned by people who host visitors.

After the race settle in at one of the many family trattorias (family restaurants) for a Tuscan meal and to watch reruns of the race on television. Viewers get a seemingly endless rerun of the mad dash while locals commiserate or celebrate. To the Senese, Il Palio is a race that never ends.

Siena is located southeast of Livorno and Camp Darby. Visitors can take a day's drive to Siena or seek accommodations in Siena.



Travelers get a waterfront view of Venice courtesy of the steady strokes of a gondolier.

Fantastic works at Da Vinci Museum

By Susan Huseman

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If "The Da Vinci Code" has sparked an interest in Leonardo Da Vinci's artistic works, the Leonardo Museum in Vinci offers a glimpse of the man as a visionary.

Vinci, the birthplace of Leonardo, is 28 miles from Florence. This quiet hamlet perched on a hilltop is famous for olive oil, Chianti wine and, of course, all things Da Vinci.

Visitors won't find the Mona

Lisa or the Last Supper in this 11th century medieval castle. Instead its exhibits are dedicated to the machines inspired by Da Vinci's drawings.

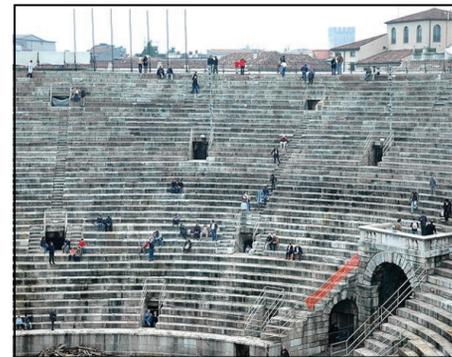
The Leonardo Museum is filled with more than 30 exhibits featuring working models based on copies of Da Vinci's sketches. Military machines such as machine guns and tanks, flying machines, building-construction machines and instruments for scientific use are brought to life here. Some of the more interesting exhibits are those of the diving equipment and, of course, Leonardo's flying machine,

essentially a large set of wings.

Could the machines have really worked? Probably not, but the great artist certainly had brilliant intuition for what was to come in the centuries that followed.

While at the museum one can take in the beauty of the Tuscan countryside from the castle walls. Visitors can also take a three-kilometer hike to Leonardo's birth home. It was restored in 1986 and adds a finishing touch to a tour of the museum.

The Leonardo Museum, located in the Castello dei Conti Guidi, is open everyday from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Readers can find out more at [/www.leonet.it/comuni/vinci](http://www.leonet.it/comuni/vinci).



Built originally in the 1st Century by the Romans, Verona's Arena lost parts of its outside walls in a 12th-century earthquake. Photo left: pigeons welcome sightseers to St. Mark's Square in Venice.

MWR helps in exploring Italy

Army lodging available in Camp Darby and Vicenza

Story and photos by
Karl Weisel

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The U.S. Army in Europe may be shrinking through transformation, but travelers will still find a wealth of Morale Welfare and Recreation support to help them enjoy a vacation in northern Italy.

Whether staying at the Sea Pines Resort on Camp Darby near Livorno and relaxing on the American-run beach or stopping at Vicenza for travel tips and supplies before exploring the Veneto region, one will discover a host of services and support. Everything from Outdoor Recreation, commissaries and PXs to the Information, Tours and Registration Office can help make a trip to Italy affordable and easy to plan.

Travelers seeking a place to stay while visiting such noted Italian cities as Florence, Siena or Pisa, the islands of Elbe or Sardinia, the walled city of Lucca or the famed Cinque Terre villages will find a welcome oasis in Camp Darby.

Accommodations at the U.S. Army camp's Sea Pines Lodge recreational facilities range from small apartments to camping under tall pine trees with a range of shower facilities and nearby eateries. Go sightseeing in the morning,

relax on the American beach at Tirrenia in the afternoon, have an evening meal in the nearby town of Pisa and then head back to Camp Darby for a good night's sleep under the tall pines.

Before leaving for Italy by car, train or on a flight into the nearby Galileo Airport at Pisa, make sure to call the Sea Pines at mil 633-7225 or civ (0039) 050-547 225 to make reservations and to get more information about services available on Camp Darby.

Those who would prefer visiting Venice, Verona and the other sights of the Veneto Region might want to consider making Vicenza their home base during a visit. At Camp Ederle, visitors will find a food mall, tours office, Outdoor Recreation, Army lodging at the Ederle Inn and various other amenities.

A short train ride from Vicenza takes one across the Veneto region and a causeway directly into the watery city of Venice. Step off the train and begin wandering along the

Grand Canal to immerse yourself in the centuries-old ambience of a city renowned for gondolas, sinking palaces, great works of art, glass-blowing, maze-like passageways and squares overrun by pigeons.

To get an introduction to the city consider catching a ride on a vaporetto — a water bus — for a waterfront view of Venice's famed barber pole pylons and its stately architecture. After getting lost many times while strolling from one piazza to another, stop for a plate of spaghetti vongole (spaghetti with clams) washed down with some of the local graze and chased by a strong cup of espresso before moving on to the next attraction.

While summer is probably not the best time to visit Venice's most famous attractions — St. Mark's Basilica or the Doge's Palace (the lines are hours long) — there are plenty of other museums such as the Galleria Dell'Accademia and Guggenheim, and sights guaranteed to make your time

well spent.

When the fortunes of Venice declined several centuries ago, its citizens were quick to realize the touristic value of its unique appearance. While the city has long attracted visitors from around the globe, many of the local merchants invested their money in land and villas farther inland.

The rolling hills in and around Vicenza and in much of the Veneto region are rich in striking villas and churches, many of them designed by 16th century architect Andrea Palladio.

A short drive or an MWR trip from Vicenza takes one to visit the grappa distilleries and Palladio's famed wooden bridge over the Brenta River in Bassano Del Grappa, the Roman Arena in Verona or the castle and wineries in Soave. After climbing the hundreds of steps of the 1st century amphitheater in Verona wander over to the Casa di Giulietta to examine a statue of Shakespeare's star-crossed lover and the graffiti missives scrawled by hundreds of visitors. Or hop back in the car for a drive through the vine covered hills and medieval towns overlooking Lake Garda.

Stop by Camp Ederle's Information, Tours and Registration Office in Building 249 to ask about other sights in the area and upcoming tours. Visit www.vicenzamwr.com/visitors.html for more information and links to local services. More information about exploring northern Italy is also available at your local library or SatoTravel Office.



Italy's famed cliffside towns of Cinque Terra are within an easy drive of Camp Darby, Italy.