

The Spanish Steps are a popular destination for visitors to Rome.



Conquering Rome with a 4-year-old

Story and photos by Sara Goodeyon
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I went to Rome with my 4-year-old son and actually had an amazing time. He enjoyed the historic sights, loved the food and asks me almost every day to take him there again. To my astonishment he loved Rome -- and the Romans loved him.

It seemed a crime to live in Europe and not plan a visit to see the Imperial City. But seeing Rome with a small child? My little one is energetic and curious and almost got us kicked out of Neuschwanstein Castle because he tried to climb onto King Ludwig II's throne. My husband and I have endured countless nasty looks and disapproving frowns because sometimes our little boy acts like a little boy in public.

I kept hesitating about planning the trip due to concerns about the expense and whether my nerves could stand up to a vacation with our little one. That was until a friend offered us a great deal on lodging in Rome. He arranged for my family to stay at a private retreat for a small fee. So, small boy in tow, we set off for Rome.

The retreat was located about four kilometers from the Colosseum and was convenient to a bus line. We went to a nearby coffee bar, purchased a three-day bus ticket for each of us and set about exploring Rome via city bus number 81.

This route passed near our lodging and ended at Vatican

City. There was no need for a pricey tour bus when we could simply see the sights from the city bus, so this made getting around pretty easy.

We also did a lot of walking which is an ideal way to see all that this centuries-old city has to offer -- with our young one happily riding in his stroller.

Armed with a "Frommer's Guide" for Rome we spent three days squeezing in as much sightseeing as we could. The guide was very useful in providing a number of ways to tour the city. It included sightseeing recommendations for one, two or three-day visits to the city that listed "must-see" locations. There were also suggestions for walking tours of Ancient Rome, Renaissance Rome and other possibilities.

We would start the day at a coffee bar with a quick cappuccino and roll for just a few euros, take the bus to the area of the city we wanted to see and then begin exploring.

Lunch was just as easy since there were food carts all around the city center offering pizza, panini and gelato. We ate our lunch alfresco beside the Colosseum one day and by Caesar's Forum the next.

We were in Rome in February so the crowds were not bad, even at the Vatican and Vatican Museum. There was a line to get into St. Peter's but it moved briskly; we didn't wait longer than 30 minutes each of the three times we went. The cathedral is spacious and there was ample room for our little one to scamper.



The line for the Vatican Museum is also long, but again, moved quickly. The museum takes a few hours to view so we were grateful they allowed strollers inside. That came in very handy at the end of the tour which culminates with the Sistine Chapel. Since our son was sitting in a stroller it was easy for him to tilt his head back and marvel at Michelangelo's masterpiece.

Next up was Ancient Rome. Our son was eager to see the Colosseum after we filled him

in about gladiators battling lions and tigers. We purchased tickets for €12 that allowed us admission to the open air museum on the Palatine Hill, the Forum, the Colosseum and the Monumental Fountains.

Palatine Hill is said to be the spot where the first Roman settlements were located. It is one of the Seven Hills of Rome and was the site for the palaces of the wealthy. The ruins of the palaces are scattered atop the hill which overlooks the Colosseum, Circus

Maximus and the area where the Forum and the Temples once stood. The Arch of Constantine is nearby. This was a great experience for our son as he was able to get out of the stroller and run and climb while we soaked up the experience of visiting a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We toured Ancient Rome on a Sunday afternoon and the Via Dei Fori Imperiali that runs through that area had been closed off to traffic. It was a sunny day and there were street musicians

There are ample opportunities for small ones to have fun while visiting Rome -- including posing with Roman Centurions outside the Colosseum. Photo left: Caesar's Forum, temple ruins and the Colosseum in Rome.

playing every sort of music imaginable, the melodies floating on the breeze. We got our little man a gelato and strolled around the area checking out the temple ruins.

That evening we walked over to the Piazza Della Rotonda and dined outdoors at one of the many restaurants. A full moon cast its silver light across the front of the Pantheon, one of the city's best-preserved ancient temples, as our very hungry little son used both hands to stuff buttered fettuccine into his mouth.

Seeing Rome with a 4-year-old didn't turn out to be as challenging as I had feared. What I learned was that Italians really like children. Almost everywhere we went -- waiting in lines, riding buses, eating in restaurants -- Romans, young and old, singles and couples, took a moment to smile and chat with our son. I had been afraid to see one of the world's great cities with such a small child and yet it turned out to be just about the best vacation of my life.

Camp Darby and Tuscany

U.S. base offers ideal tourist launchpad

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A great way to discover the art, history and beauty of the Tuscany region of Italy is by staying at the Sea Pines Recreational Facility at Camp Darby. Situated in the heart of Tuscany at U.S. Army Garrison Livorno it can be a "base location" for day trips to Pisa, Florence, Cinque Terre or even Rome.

The area around Camp Darby itself offers plenty to do such as spending a day at the American beach, taking a boat trip to the island of Elba or checking out the world famous Torre Pendente -- the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

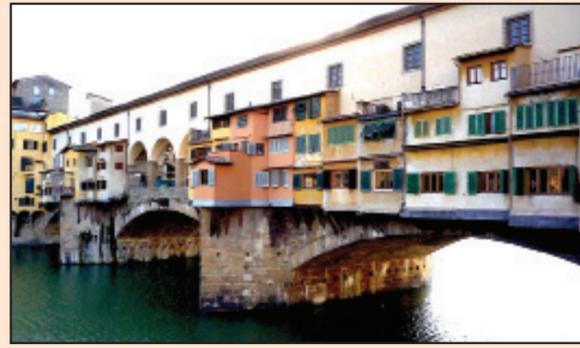
Venturing farther afield takes just a little effort but is worth the trouble. There is a train station in Livorno with connections to Florence and Rome. Tickets are reasonable and can be purchased at either the ticket office or a self-service ticket machine. Just remember to validate the ticket at one of the timestamp machines before boarding for the outbound and return trip on the train.

The trip to Florence is less than two hours, ending at the Santa Maria Novella station in the city center west section. There is so much to see in Florence it's wise to prioritize what are "must see" points of interest and plan accordingly.

Florence is known as the "cradle of the Renaissance" and as such is home to great art, architecture, shopping and food. It is possible, with an itinerary and reserved tickets, to see a lot of Florence in one day.

A one-day visit to Florence could include a stop at the Galleria degli Uffizi to see ancient Greek and Roman sculptures, Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, Leonardo's *Annunciation* and *Adoration of the Magi* and Michelangelo's *Holy Family*. The tickets are not expensive but the wait can be long so it is a good idea to reserve in advance. It will take a minimum of two or three hours to walk through the Uffizi by going through all the room exhibits, but it has a cafe inside the museum so it easily could be an all day event.

Just outside the Uffizi is the Palazzo Vecchio (Town Hall), the Piazza della Signoria (filled with significant sculptures) and the Ponte Vecchio or Old Bridge. The bridge is lined with jewelry shops, some of which have been there for centuries. It is worth strolling over the bridge for the view of the jewelry displayed in the shop windows and of the Arno River below.



Florence's Ponte Vecchio is home to gold and jewelry shops that hang suspended over the Arno River.

Not far away is the Santa Maria del Fiore, the Florence Duomo, famous for its egg-shaped dome. This gothic cathedral's exterior is made of pink, green and white marble. The cathedral and the baptistery are open to the public but there is an admission fee for the dome and the crypt.

A final stop for the day could include seeing Michelangelo's sculpture *David* on display at the Galleria dell'Accademia. It is possible to get there late in the day, about an hour before closing, and not encounter a long wait to purchase a ticket.



Manarola, the first of the five villages of Cinque Terre.

Florence is in the heart of Tuscany and boasts numerous restaurants featuring the world famous cuisine of the region. Specialties include bread, rustic soups, cheeses, Florentine steak and of course Chianti wine. After a day of sightseeing there should still be time to enjoy a traditional Tuscan meal and catch a late train back to Camp Darby.

Cinque Terre is about an hour or so north of Camp Darby and is worth the time and effort it takes to get there. Located on the rugged coastline of the Italian Riviera these five villages are on the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. A train runs from La Spezia to each of the villages that cling to the cliffs along the Ligurian Sea. It is also possible to drive to the first village and pay to park. Beware, the lot fills up quickly and then it may be necessary to park at the top of the mountain along the roadside and hike down to the first village.

Hiking the path connecting the five villages is a popular outing for visitors and locals alike. The path is a wide, smooth paved thoroughfare between the first two villages and is stroller friendly. The path becomes a little more rugged about halfway between the second and third villages. All along the path are benches and picnic areas for those who prefer to relax and enjoy the fresh air and breathtaking vista. There are also steps leading down to the rocks below allowing for sunning or dipping a toe into the Mediterranean.

There are plenty of restaurants offer-



Visitors make their way between the five villages of Cinque Terre.

ing regional cuisine (seafood and Focaccia) and shops where regional wines, olive oil and gifts may be purchased.

Camp Darby is a few minutes away from Pisa and the world famous Leaning Tower of Pisa. The train runs from Livorno to Pisa or to drive there follow signs for Torre Pendente and there is a parking lot across the street from the Piazza Del Duomo where the tower is located.

Torre Pendente is actually the bell tower or campanile for the cathedral and is in the heart of Pisa. It is said to be the place where Galileo conducted an experiment on gravity. Outside the tower there is information posted detailing the history of the tower's construction, why it leans and efforts that have been made to stabilize the tower.

The Piazza is a bustling place filled with visitors posing for photos with the tower in the background and there are plenty of vendors hawking every sort of Leaning Tower souvenir imaginable. There are also restaurants nearby as well as an official souvenir shop within the Piazza.

Little wonder that Camp Darby calls itself "the southern destination of choice." With so much to see so close by, making the Sea Pines a sort of "base" for day trips is one way to see a lot of Italy.

For more information about USAG Livorno visit www.livornomwr.com.