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FOUNDER OF
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HOLIDAY
STYLE



Velvet Rope Access
Access Italy gives visitors a VIP glimpse of Italy—including hallowed ground of the Vatican and St. Peter's Basilica



When in Italy

Samia's semi-annual European jetaway takes her to Italy. This time, thanks to Access Italy, she gets the royal treatment

Usually, I love the trip planning process. Researching all the essential options, but adding the more esoteric variety, is fun. Booking restaurants puts notions of the regional cuisine in my psyche, and invariably there are fabulous spa treatments or sightseeing excursions worth further investigation. But once in a while, I like to kick back and let someone else do the digital leg work. That's when I call Angelo Amorico!

About 30 years ago, this charismatic man—full of energy and joke-telling prowess—founded **Access Italy** to provide exclusive private tours of Italy, France, Greece, and Spain. Since then, his clients have included the then-sitting President Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Ben Stiller, Penelope Cruz, Michael J. Fox, and a range of top executives. Angelo and his sons Simone and Marco form the family business, and their service extends from private tours of the Vatican (when no other guests are present) to truffle hunting in Umbria, to yacht charters to nearby islands. For the Obama family vacation, Angelo planned a gelato-making class. *Che cosa?! Gracie mille* to Angelo and his fabulous team. accessitaly.net

MUST STAY:

Mama mia, the **Four Seasons Hotel Firenze** is lush with history! The 116-room property includes both the 15th-century Palazzo della Gherardesca and the 16th-century former convent, known as La Villa, which frames the city's largest private garden. La Villa, the hotel-within-the-hotel, is where you'd want to stay. The residential atmosphere makes one feel at home with a private entrance, and it's only a 10-minute walk to the Duomo and other historical attractions. My suite was facing the beautiful tranquil garden. On my arrival, I wasn't feeling well, so I took a bath, ordered room service and slept like a baby. fourseasons.com/florence





MUST VISIT:

Thanks to Angelo's connections, I visited the Vatican, as few, outside of, well, maybe the Pope's BFF, have. Angelo and Simone took us behind the scenes as they did for Oprah and other VIPs, where we got to enter hidden rooms filled with centuries-old priceless artifacts and vestments belonging to the Popes. We accessed St. Peter's Basilica through a back door that was manned by the famous Swiss guards. We were in the presence of so many treasures (which I am not allowed to elaborate on) but believe me, it was breathtaking. We even accessed the Sistine Chapel through a secret door.



MUST SUNSET:

Another remarkable hotel is the Palazzo Fendi. Take the elevator to Zuma restaurant on the rooftop and enjoy the magnificent views! Appreciate the lush beauty and the sunset while sipping on a glass of Champagne.

MUST DINE:

For a quintessential Roman experience, try the

Hostaria Da Pietro, (reservation suggested). It's so small and intimate; you can't help but converse with people sitting nearby. We went three times—the food is *that* good! hostariadapietro.com

For another excellent dining experience, head to Magnolia, a Michelin star restaurant found inside the Grand Hotel Via Veneto. Chef Franco Madama creates exquisite works of edible art. *Highlight:* Tasting rose petal risotto with capers, chili and negroni leaves. *Delizioso!*



MUST STAY:

When in Rome, the Grand Hotel Via Veneto is the place to stay. Not long ago, the property made *Condé Nast Traveler's* "101 Most Beautiful Hotels In The World" list. More than 500 original paintings hang on its walls including Giovanni Battista Nolli's original, "Map of Rome" (1748), which gives guests a warm, "Benvenuto a Roma!" ghvv.it

MUST YACHT:

One beautiful morning, Simone drove us to Terracina, where we boarded a private boat, and spent the day navigating the Mediterranean Sea. We paid a visit to the volcanic island Ponza, and it was one of the highlights of my trip. The unpolluted beaches and limpid sea water; the narrow streets, the colorful walls and various delightful flavors of reminded me of Greece. Being born in France and traveling so much to Italy, I couldn't believe I had never been there before.



MUST SIP:

Another highlight was our private tour of the winery at Badia a Passignano—a breathtaking property nestled in the gorgeous Tuscan countryside. Our guide, Veronica, filled our souls with historical anecdotes and stories about the world of grapes, corks and exclusive labels. This was followed by an indulgent lunch at the Osteria di Passignano—complete with tasty Chiantis. *Fino alla prossima volta! Badia a Passignano winery, Osteria di Passignano, antinori.it*

MUST HUNT:

On our way to the capital city of Tuscany, Firenze, we made off to the Umbria countryside for an exclusive experience. With the help of truffle-hunting dogs, we learned to scout this rare, edible mushroom. Following the hunt, we broke for lunch with La Casa delle Cuoche's talented chef, Laura Colaiacovo, who incorporated the truffles we'd just harvested. *Truffle hunting at Poggiovalle Country House, poggiovalle.com*

