AUTHENTIC ITALY

My wife Rebel and I were having dinner with Italian friends in Rome a while ago, who asked, “Why not a Wheeler Expedition in Italy?”

I answered, “We’d love to, but it has to be an *adventure* to really cool places in Italy that folks who’ve been to Rome-Venice-Tuscany don’t know about and would love to go to if they did. It has to be to the *real authentic Italy* for a true experience of a lifetime.”

Our friends smiled – to us and each other. “We’ve been exploring just those places for years – it’s our hobby. We’d start in the Apennines of course, Italy’s mountain spine, to Abruzzo…”

And that is how, after many months of exploring and planning, Rebel and I with our Italian friends created the unique and extraordinary adventure of *Authentic Italy*. I’d like to invite you to experience the Italy you’ve dreamed of and you’ll never ever forget.

No use wasting time. Relax or see Rome at the end of our adventure. Arrange to arrive in Rome by mid-morning this coming *Saturday September 28*, and you’ll be whisked up into the heart of Abruzzo to the preserved fortified medieval village of *Santo Stefano di Sessanio*.

Here we find a medieval clifftop village dating back to the time of the Romans -- with cobbled, quirky streets, arches, tiny passages, it’s a world apart from any city or town in the modern world, with no TV, internet or fast food.

We check-in at the peaceful and charmingly restored former 500 year-old monastery, the *Convento di San Colombo*.

After a lunch of authentic Abruzzo cuisine, we have a short walk to the *Rocca Calacio* fortress built over a thousand years ago to enjoy the magnificent view.

We'll spend the rest of the afternoon exploring Santa Stefano – and enjoy a glass of wine with the friendly locals

Dinner tonight is at the marvelous *Locanda sotto gli archi* restaurant.

We’re off after a great breakfast on *Sunday, September 29* for a beautiful drive through the Apennines, where in the region of *Molise* we come to a haven of nature, the *Montedimezzo Forest Reserve,* famous for its serenity and wildlife. We can’t resist a walk on its paths.

From here we make our way to a hidden jewel of the Apennines, the ancient hill town of extraordinary history, *Agnone.*

It is older than the Romans, the capital of a Bronze Age tribe called Samnites who fought many wars with Rome, the earliest in 394 BC. A medieval village to this day, it has 19 medieval churches – and *the oldest continuously run family business in the world*. The *Marinelli Pontifical Bell Foundry* has been making bells using the “lost wax casting” method for over a thousand years.

A visit here is fascinating learning experience both for the history and the amazingly intricate technology. Pope John Paul II was mesmerized by his experience here and so will you.

After our visit and exploring ancient Agnone, we enjoy our stay at the charming *Masseria Santa Lucia Inn*.

The heart of our immersion into Authentic Italy begins this morning. For at least 3,000 years, shepherds in the Apennines have practiced *transhumance*, taking their flocks and herds up to

summer pastures in the mountains, and down to the winter plains below. The ancient well-worn trails of their annual migrations are called *tratturi* (singular: *tratturo*).

Many are still intact today, and even though most shepherds now use trucks, there are a few families that practice the old way. You'll be getting to know one of them. The *tratturi* however are off-road. To traverse them, you must walk, ride a horse, or take a 4WD jeep. And that's the joy of it, for you resonate with the rhythms of millennia amidst pure tranquility of natural beauty.

For the next four days – *Monday September 30 to Thursday October 3* – we will live in this dreamworld. And find the unexpected, like the funky *La Fucina Brewery* in the tiny Tratturo Trail village of *Pescolanciano* – that makes the best craft beer in all Italy.

So here we go, off on the Tratturo Trail!

While walking is an option for some, and a 4WD jeep for others, we hope you'll choose to ride a

gentle well-trained trail horse. You can see why.

But Jeeps can be fun too! You can trade off, ride, walk, jeep whenever you wish.

We'll have picnics with local foods – and wine, and La Fucina beer.

And every night stay at wonderful inns and lodges with sumptuous food in stunningly picturesque small hill towns – like *Bagnoli del Trigno…*

…*Guardiaregia* or *Basilicata.*

We finish our Tratturo adventure at *Saepinum*, where we can see the shepherds leading their flocks through the spectacular ruins of the Samnite and Roman sacred city dating back to 600 BC.

We end the day at a country lodge overlooking idyllic *Lake Occhito.*

We wake up *Friday October 4* to an early breakfast and lakeside stroll. By mid-morning we drive deep into the region of *Apulia* -- and by Noon we're at what many consider "the most spectacular city in Italy," the "oldest continuously inhabited settlement in the world" where people have been living for the last 9,000 years (7,000 BC), the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Matera.

Matera is a place you to have to personally experience to believe it exists. Homes here are cave dwellings carved out of the soft rock.

In fact, our Luxury Five Star Hotel, the *Palazzo del Duca*, is the same. Who could imagine sleeping in a cave could be so luxurious?

Matera is a magic place that will completely entrance you.

We wake up *Saturday October 5* realizing this is our last day and we'd better make it special. But how can we top Matera and all else we've seen? Let's try.

After a marvelous breakfast, let's be off by 9 for an hour away is the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Trulli of Alberobello. *Trulli* are the world-unique homes found only here with conical dome roofs of unmortared rock slabs. They are found nowhere else.

It's a wonderland to explore – but soon, the sea is calling for it's just 30 minutes away, the *Adriatic Sea*. How about having lunch right here?

For this is where we're staying tonight, the *Covo dei Saraceni* right on the water at *Polignano a Mare*. Directly below is this gorgeous pocket beach for your pleasure.

Just relax here and enjoy.

Tonight is our Farewell Dinner. What could be better than the best seafood you've had in your life while watching the sunset on the Adriatic? We have a lot to celebrate – for we will have seen the real and authentic Italy in a way few others ever have.

Sunday October 6 is our Departure Day. We are close to *Bari* and its international airport with flights to Rome and major cities in Europe.

To make Authentic Italy a part of your life, **Click here to find out how you can join us on Authentic Italy.** I'll see you on the Tratturo Trail!

Carpe diem. If not now, when? Life is short. The time for a great adventure is now.

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