

## Don't let a rental car shortage keep you from these bucolic Italian destinations

If you're ready to dip your feet back into European travel, Italy may be high on your list of destinations. After a brutal year-plus of pandemic lockdowns and restrictions, the country is cautiously open to foreign tourists. Reduced crowds — for now, at least — and businesses eager to welcome back customers make this a surprisingly splendid time to visit.

But if your plans for an Italian vacation involve a rental car, you may want to rethink that strategy. Record rental car prices and a lack of available cars, especially on short notice, mean that 2021 and 2022 aren't the best years for the Great Italian Road Trip.

Fortunately, Italy provides options. Travelers with a little affinity for planning and an appetite for slow travel can find smaller cities and towns reachable by public transportation that can serve as bases for exploring the surrounding areas by foot, bike or motorized methods that don't involve signing a rental car contract.

### **Fewer, costlier rental cars**

The rental car shortage, well-documented in the United States, is no less dire in Europe. The causes behind it are much the same: companies sold off their fleets during the pandemic, factories suspended production of new cars and semiconductors are scarce. Giuseppe Benincasa, general director of **ANIASA**, Italy's rental car trade association, explained that the Suez Canal blockage in March created a "pazzesca" ("crazy") chain reaction, as massive containers full of materials were delayed for a month or more.

On top of the same perfect storm of problems afflicting North America, Italy's rental car industry has additional challenges. Getting rental cars to islands such as Sicily and Sardinia is next to impossible, says Benincasa, because even if cars were available, "there's no space on the ferries," as Italians flock to these summer destinations with their own cars.

### What to know as Europe reopens to U.S. travelers

And when inventories do start to return to pre-pandemic levels, prices are still going to be high as Europe gradually converts to a greener fleet. There's an industry-wide commitment on the continent to move to hybrid and electric cars; Benincasa says rental car suppliers buy an average of 40 percent of all hybrids and electrics built in Europe. Not only can manufacturers not meet the demand for eco-friendly cars, but these cars also cost more. And until their technology and production become the industry norm, those costs will get passed on to renters.

## The case for no car

Madeline Jhawar, who runs the aptly named trip-planning service [Italy Beyond the Obvious](#), urges travelers to look at the absence of a rental car as a bonus. “Curious travelers can discover Italy’s magic in so many different ways,” Jhawar says. “Going without a rental car is not just ‘making do,’ since you can have an amazing trip, discover the sights and scenery, connect with locals and have an authentic experience, all without a rental car.”

Besides, as anyone who has ever tried to maneuver through the narrow streets of a centro or find a legal parking spot in a historic town knows, having a car in Italy can be a real hassle. Park in a residents-only lot in Florence, and you’ll risk being towed. Wander unwittingly into a ZTL (a limited traffic zone), and you’ll be greeted with a hefty traffic ticket as a post-vacation homecoming gift. Other places, such as the notorious Amalfi Coast drive, with its steep drop-offs and hairpin turns, or the vertigo-inducing roads around the lakes of Northern Italy, are nerve-racking enough to suck the joy right out of the scenery.

“Don’t think that you can’t get into the Italian countryside without a car,” Jhawar says. With trains, ferries, water buses, taxis, drivers, mountain cable cars and funiculars, bikes, e-bikes and hiking paths, “you can really explore the corners of Italy for quite a ways before you need a car.”

Jhawar says visitors are often surprised that many hotels — especially those just outside of smaller towns with train stations — offer free shuttle service for station pickup and drop-off. Some countryside restaurants even offer the service, so you’re not limited to eating just at places within walking distance of your lodging.

### [Everything you need to know about traveling to Italy this summer](#)

## By boat, bike or ski gondola

We asked Italian travel experts for their ideas on where to go and how to get there and around — all without a car. Here are some of their favorite destinations.

☒Ponza, the largest of the Pontine Islands, is still less than four square miles in area. “Ponza is an island that is sure of itself,” says Rome-based [blogger](#) Gillian Longworth McGuire, who runs the Instagram account for [Visit Ponza](#). Visitors to the island, which is connected by daily ferries from Anzio, Terracina and Formia (all on the Rome-Naples train line), don’t miss what’s missing here — namely the superyachts, high-end shopping and luxury hotels of tonier places such as Capri or Sardinia’s Costa Smeralda. Ponza, she says, “has a wild, rugged charm complete with electric-blue water, fiery sunsets and rocky paths that lead to secret coves. The food scene ranges from panini on the beach to fine dining on fresh fish.” Here, Longworth McGuire says, “the best parking spots in the port are for the local fishing boats and not the

visiting yachts.” And there’s no place on the island that can’t be reached by foot, scooter, public minibuses, or self-driven or piloted boat or Zodiac raft. That said, it’s a summer-only destination, with most hotels, rentals and restaurants open only from May through September.

With their toothy peaks, high mountain valleys and sheer vastness — more than 350,000 acres — the Dolomites don’t look easy to get to. But the dramatic mountain landscapes of Italy’s second-largest UNESCO World Heritage Site (just behind the [Cilento and Vallo di Diano National Park](#) in Southern Italy) are remarkably accessible, thanks to a system of major and secondary rail lines, buses, ski lifts and funicular railways. From Trento, Katia Vinco of [Trentino Marketing](#) recommends taking the local train toward Mezzana to reach the mountains. “You’ll pass through two of Trentino’s most enchanted valleys, Val di Non, with its orchards and castles, and Val di Sole, the realm of the Stelvio National Park, mountain biking and rafting,” Vinco says. Jhawar is a fan of Bolzano, with its pretty, walkable medieval center; excellent archaeological museum dedicated to Ötzi the Iceman; and connecting trains to Bressanone/Brixen and Merano. “There’s no need for a car in those towns,” she says, “and ski lifts connect to well-marked hiking trails of every level of difficulty.” In high summer season, hikers can take one lift up, hike for hours in one direction, then take a different lift back to lower elevation and catch a bus to their point of origin.

If you’re set on exploring the smaller towns of Italy’s green, rolling heartland, don’t despair about a lack of wheels. Several of Umbria’s hill towns are on the main or secondary rail lines. At Orvieto and Spoleto, for example, trains arrive at the lower towns, and visitors reach the upper towns via funiculars, elevators or escalators cut into the “rocca,” or “rock,” on which the ancient settlements were built. Although the countryside around them is not always easily accessible without a car, the towns offer a slower pace, small museums, important churches and cathedrals, and plenty of opportunities to taste local food and wine. Orvieto (bias alert: this author lives nearby) was a major Etruscan city, and extant sites include a necropolis, remains of a temple, and an extensive cave network carved into the volcanic tufa plateau underneath. Its duomo, or main cathedral, has a soaring, mosaic-covered Gothic facade and is among the most famous in Italy. Spoleto also predates the Romans, but its oldest sites, including a theater, an amphitheater, a restored house and traces of an ancient road, all date to Imperial Rome. A massive 14th-century fortress looms over the upper town, which contains a dozen or so churches that date to the high and late medieval era.

Not only do you not need a car to visit Lake Como, but you also really shouldn’t have one, says Samy Ghachem, managing director of [Il Sereno](#), a lakefront hotel in Torno. “The real magic of Lake Como is best seen from the water, as all along the shores are charming little villages,” he says, noting that the road around the lake is at a much higher elevation than the waterfront. “When these lake towns were first built, they were connected by boat, not by roads,” Ghachem says, “and boats are still the best way to get around.” A network of ferries, including hydrofoils and historic steamers, has been in place since the 1800s and makes it easy to hop from town to town, either on day trips or in a multiday tour of the lake. Frequent direct trains from Milan reach the towns of Como and Lecco, at the southern end of each of the lake’s two forks. From there, several boats a day ply the lake, calling at small towns along the way — although we doubt actor and director George Clooney uses public transportation

to reach his lakefront villa – and offering one stunning vista after another. On the northern Italian lakes of Maggiore and Garda, Jhavar likes the towns of Stresa and Salò, respectively, as car-free bases for exploring those waters. Direct trains from Milan serve Stresa, while Salò is reachable by bus from Brescia.

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## European vacation: car rentals complicated and expensive

After long months of lockdowns and curfews Europeans are looking forward to jetting off for a bit of sun and sand -- only to find that their dream vacation risks turning into a nightmare as no rental cars are available.

In many areas popular with tourists cars are simply not available or subcompacts are going for a stiff 500 euros (\$600 per week).

Car rental comparison websites show just how expensive renting a vehicle has become for tourists this summer.

According to Carigami, renting a car for a week this summer will set tourists back an average of 364 euros compared to 277 euros two years ago.

For Italy, the figure is 407 euros this summer compared to 250 euros in 2019. In Spain, the average cost has jumped to 263 euros from 185 euros.

According to another website, Liligo, daily rental costs have nearly doubled on the French island of Corsica. At the resort city of Palma on the Spanish island of Mallorca, rental prices have nearly tripled.

Today's problem is a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Faced with near absence of clients, selling off vehicles to raise cash made a lot of sense for car rental firms struggling to survive.

"Everyone drastically reduced their fleet," said the head of Europcar, Caroline Parot.

Until the spring, most companies still had fleets roughly a third smaller than in 2019, she said.

Car rental firms are used to regularly selling their vehicles and replacing them, so rebuilding their inventory should not have been a problem.

Except the pandemic sent demand for consumer electronics surging, creating a shortage of semiconductors, or chips, that are used not only in computers but increasingly in cars.

"A key contributor to the challenge right now is the global chip shortage, which has impacted new vehicle availability across the industry at a time when demand is already high," said a spokesman for Enterprise.

It said it was working to acquire new vehicles but that in the mean time it is shifting cars around in order to better meet demand.

- No cars, try a van -

"We've begun to warn people: if you want to come to Italy, which is finally reopening, plan and reserve ahead," said the head of the association of Italian car rental firms, Massimiliano Archiapatti.

He said they were working hard to meet the surge in demand at vacation spots.

"But we've got two big islands that are major international tourism destinations," he said, which makes it difficult to move cars around, especially as the trip to Sardinia takes half a day.

"The ferries are already full with people bringing their cars," he added.

"Given the law of supply and demand, there is a risk it will impact on prices," Archiapatti said.

The increase in demand is also being seen for rentals between individuals.

GetAround, a web platform that organises such rentals, said it has seen "a sharp increases in searches and rentals" in European markets.

Since May more than 90 percent of cars available on the platform have been rented on weekends, and many have already been booked for much of the summer.

GetAround has used the surge in demand to expand the number of cities it serves.

For some, their arrival can't come fast enough.

Bruno Riondet, a 51-year-old aeronautics technician, rents cars to attend matches of his favourite British football club, Brighton.

"Before, to rent a car I was paying between 25 and 30 euros per day. Today, it's more than 90 euros, that's three times more expensive," he said.

In the United States, where prices shot higher during the spring, tourists visiting Hawaii turned to renting vans.

In France, there are still cars, according to Jean-Philippe Doyen, who handles shared mobility at the National Council of Automobile Professionals.

"Clients have a tendency to reserve at the last minute, even more so in the still somewhat uncertain situation," he said.

They will often wait until just a few days before their trip, which means car rental firms don't have a complete overview of upcoming demand, he added.

He said business is recovering but that revenue has yet to reach pre-pandemic levels as travel is not yet completely unfettered.

(Aniasa)

## Location de voitures cet été: la reprise au risque de la pénurie

Louer une voiture risque d'être compliqué cet été après des mois de pause pandémique, notamment dans les zones les plus touristiques.

Aucune disponibilité dans certaines agences ou des "pots de yaourt" à 500 euros la semaine: louer une voiture risque d'être compliqué cet été après des mois de pause pandémique, notamment dans les zones les plus touristiques.

Lors de cette saison déjà tendue d'ordinaire pour les loueurs, le comparateur en ligne Carigami a observé des paniers moyens plus chers qu'en 2019 entre juin et août, à 364 euros pour une semaine de location en France contre 277 euros il y a deux ans. La semaine monte à 407 euros en Italie, contre 250 euros en 2019, et en Espagne à 263 euros contre 185 auparavant.

Selon un comparateur concurrent, Liligo, les prix à la journée ont presque doublé en Corse, à Ajaccio ou Bastia, et presque triplé à Palma de Majorque. Les requêtes sur la plateforme ont quasiment atteint les niveaux de l'été 2019, s'est félicité un porte-parole.

Cette tension dans les agences s'explique d'abord par la prudence des loueurs face à une pandémie imprévisible, qui les paralyse depuis mars 2020.

"Tout le monde a largement réduit ses flottes", explique à Europcar la directrice générale Caroline Parot.

"Jusqu'à mi-avril, il y avait un positionnement très négatif sur l'été", souligne-t-elle, les yeux rivés sur les chiffres de la vaccination dans chaque pays d'Europe, augures de la reprise du tourisme. "On a pris des précautions pour ne pas accélérer outre mesure (...) Tout le monde a entre -30 et -35% de véhicules par rapport à 2019".

Le loueur américain Enterprise Rent a Car explique aussi que l'on risque de manquer de voitures à cause de la pénurie de semiconducteurs, qui freine la production automobile à travers le monde. "Face à une demande croissante, nous travaillons avec nos partenaires pour sécuriser notre approvisionnement en véhicules supplémentaires", a indiqué un porte-parole d'Enterprise.

"Nous nous appuyons aussi sur notre large réseau d'agences de proximité et dans les aéroports pour transférer les véhicules dans les régions qui enregistrent la plus forte demande", souligne Enterprise.

"On a commencé à prévenir les gens: si vous voulez venir en Italie, qui s'ouvre finalement, réservez à l'avance, organisez-vous", lance le président des loueurs italiens Massimiliano Archiapatti.



"Nous nous sommes organisés pour faire face à la demande locale. Mais nous avons deux grandes îles qui sont de grandes destinations pour les touristes internationaux", souligne le président de l'Association italienne des loueurs (Aniasa). "Y déplacer des flottes n'est pas simple, notamment pour la Sardaigne qui est à une demi-journée de navigation. Les bateaux sont déjà pleins de gens qui y vont avec leur voiture".

"Avec la loi de l'offre et de la demande, ça risque d'avoir une conséquence sur les prix", concède M. Archiapatti.

Cette hausse des réservations dans le privé se répercute aussi sur la location entre particuliers. GetAround (ex-Drivy) a observé "une très forte augmentation des recherches et des locations" sur les marchés européens.

Depuis le mois de mai, plus de 90% des voitures disponibles ont été louées durant les longs weekends, souligne un porte-parole de la plateforme, et beaucoup de voitures ont déjà été louées pour les weekends et semaines de l'été. GetAround a profité de cette demande pour se lancer dans de nouvelles villes, notamment dans le sud de la France et en Corse.

Certains clients se font une raison. Bruno Riondet, 51 ans, technicien dans l'aéronautique, prendra les transports pour aller voir son équipe de foot britannique favorite, Brighton & Hove. "Avant, pour la location de voiture sur place, je payais entre 25 et 30 euros la journée. Maintenant, c'est plus de 90 euros, c'est trois fois plus cher!"

Aux Etats-Unis, où les prix des locations ont explosé dès le printemps, les touristes en visite à Hawaii se sont rués sur les camionnettes, faute de voitures abordables.

Il reste encore "pas mal de véhicules disponibles" dans les agences françaises, tempère Jean-Philippe Doyen, président des mobilités partagées au Conseil national des professions de l'automobile.

"Les clients ont tendance à réserver à la dernière minute, qui plus est dans un contexte encore un peu incertain, jusqu'à quelques jours avant la date de location, ce qui fait qu'on n'a pas encore une visibilité complète sur le niveau d'activité", souligne M. Doyen. "La reprise se fait progressivement mais on n'est pas encore revenus au niveau pré-crise, avec encore de nombreuses frontières fermées".