

THE ITALIAN JOB

In honor of Italy's 150th anniversary as a country, *Watch!* editors and CBS stars share their favorite places and raise their glasses to one of the most *bellissima* places on the planet





ITALY ISN'T CALLED BEL PAESE—

“the beautiful country”—for nothing. From renowned art and mouthwatering food to fast cars and outrageous fashion, Italy offers something for casual tourists and savvy world travelers alike. In honor of Italy’s 150th anniversary we dispatched three different writers to three different regions—Lombardy, the most populous and richest region in the country; Veneto, which boasts 60 million tourists a year; and Piedmont, which is 43 percent mountainous and nearly surrounded by the Alps—to uncover their favorite hotels, restaurants and, of course, adventures. And we asked one of our favorite CBS stars, Neil Patrick Harris of *How I Met Your Mother*, to share some highlights from his *Watch!* cover shoot in Rome and Venice.

GRAND PRIX

From fast rides to fabulous food, here's what makes LOMBARDY so unique

By Mona Buehler

BRESCIA

You're in a cute 1930s Aston Martin, zipping through stone villages surrounded by glacial lakes, snow-capped mountains and hillsides flecked with olive groves and lemon trees. A classic Maserati passes with a honk, and a cherry-red Ferrari roars up from behind. No, you're not in a scene from *The Italian Job*—you're cruising in the Mille Miglia, the annual 1,000-mile Italian vintage auto race from Brescia to Rome and back.

Every May, this medieval city an hour east of Milan hosts the ultimate auto-aficionado experience, rallying hundreds of classic rides from around the world. Owners of cars from Bentley to Bugatti—even shiny new Ferraris—pose for photographs in Brescia's town square while waiting



The legendary Mille Miglia celebrates Italian cars and vintage autos.

JOSH RUTHNICK

EVERYBODY LOVES ITALY

It's been 11 years since *Everybody Loves Raymond* creator Phil Rosenthal took his beloved sitcom to Italy to shoot its hourlong Season 5 premiere. We talked to Rosenthal about the trip. — Jim Colucci



Watch!: Where did you first get the idea to take *Raymond* to Italy?

Phil Rosenthal: During the first season, I asked Ray [Romano] what he was going to do on his hiatus. He said he was going to the Jersey Shore. I said, "Why don't you go to Europe?" He'd never been—even to Italy, where his family had been from. He said, "Nah, I'm not really interested in other cultures." Even his own! So I said, here's a show: Send this guy over to Italy as Ray Barone, and bring him back as Roberto Benigni, after he's been transformed by

the magic. So I started asking CBS each year if we could do this, and they said, "No, no, no, no." And the fifth year they said yes.

Watch!: Conveniently for a foodie like you, of course.

Phil: This was quite a scam I pulled. Because first, of course, I had to go and scout, and I brought my wife and a few people from the crew. But it wasn't money for nothing. The locations we found started dictating the story. You see a gelato shop next to the water, and you think: What if

Scaligero Castle, below left, is one of the best-preserved castles in Italy, while both the casks and vineyards at Bella Vista winery, below right, are sights to behold, too.



to begin the legendary drive south. Learn about Mille Miglia history from owners Maurella Musatti and Chiara Morandini over homemade *casonsèi* at Trattoria Al Fontanone near the Santa Giulia Museum, or dine at trattoria Pizzeria Plaza and watch the parade of gas-pedal pushers cruise by.

LAKE GARDA

If you're nautically inclined, Italy's largest lake is perfect for boating, sailing and water sports. Channel your inner 007 by chartering a high-speed Riva boat at the lake where the opening scene from *Quantum of Solace* was filmed, and stop in stunning Sirmione for a charming lakeside experience. After lunch at Palace Hotel Villa Cortine, a dunk in the hot

springs at Aquaria at Terme di Sirmione, and exploring the fortified Scaligero Castle, you'll be ready visit to The Vittoriale, the bizarre home of poet Gabriele D'Annunzio.

LAKE ISEO & FRANCIACORTA

Cool your engines here, because these locales are more about walking and quaffing. First stop: picturesque Monte Isola, the largest inhabited lake archipelago in Europe. Accessible only by boat, the island maintains its quiet charm and healthy atmosphere by forbidding motor

vehicles on the island—visitors and locals alike get around on foot, bike and moped. Enjoy local delicacies such as perch, smoked sardines and polenta at Restaurant Vittoria.



Across the southern banks of the lake, venture to the rolling Franciacorta hillside for wine tasting at Bella Vista winery. If you have a soft spot for sparkling wine like Blair Waldorf (*Gossip Girl*), be prepared to fall in love with Franciacorta sparklers, made using the same traditional *méthode champenoise* bottle fermentation techniques as France uses.

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Robert fell in love with the beautiful gelato girl? Here's a restaurant inside an idyllic park—maybe this is the spot where Ray starts to "get" Italy. Or Rome's Spanish Steps. You start thinking of the lines each character would say. Debra would find it gorgeous, and Ray would see it as steps. "We have to climb all the way up? Is there a Spanish Elevator?"

Watch!: In what areas did you shoot? Here Ray's name is actually "Romano," and you went to Rome.

Phil: Ray wasn't clear where his family came from, but his wife still had family in Sicily. And after we finished, they went to Sicily, and had



the exact experience as in the script we'd just shot, with tiny, cramped arrangements, and life imitating art. Apart from Rome, to mix it up a little, we wanted a scene in bucolic countryside. We found a lake about 40 minutes north

called Lago di Bracciano. And a little perfect town there called Anguillara.

Watch!: Speaking of life imitating art, did Ray the actor have the same epiphany?
Phil: We all had such a beautiful time together, and sure enough, Ray followed his character exactly. After shooting each night, when we would go for dinner, you could see him go "Oh, my God!" We'd have a glorious meal, then we'd have to try some pizza, then he'd need gelato, then he'd find another pizza and we'd have to have some of that, and then some more gelato. He became completely enamored.



THE HILLS ARE ALIVE

The views are breathtaking in PIEDMONT, called “at the foot of the mountains” thanks to the surrounding Alps *By Jim Colucci*

It's only fitting to visit Piedmont in 2011, the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy: It was here that the Risorgimento movement was born, and where the Italian Parliament first met in 1861. Just make sure you leave wiggle room in your waistband for some of the world's finest fare.

At the delicious intersection where Italy meets France, all of Piedmont is within a few hours from Milan's Malpensa Airport. In Piedmont's southeastern corner is the town of Acqui Terme, named for its ancient, sulfuric hot springs. The palazzo-style Hotel Roma Imperiale, perched above the city center, serves the town's pink sparkling wine, Brachetto d'Acqui, and Ristorante Enoteca La Curia offers such regional specialties as tortelli with the goat cheese Robiola di Roccaverano.

BRA & ASTI

SLOW FOOD AND FINE WINE

2011 also marks the 25th anniversary of Slow Food, a worldwide culinary

movement, founded in the Piedmontese city of Bra, that works to rescue local culture as expressed by artisanal foods and wines. The Slow Food folks were the ones to save Piedmont's traditional tri-layered, wedding-cake-shaped Montebore cheese, rescuing the recipe from the one woman who still knew how to create it.

Next to Bra, in the mountain-top village of La Morra, you can catch a great view of towns boasting the best wine pedigrees: Barolo, Barbaresco. The eastern part of Piedmont is an oenophile's dream, where in

towns like Asti you can tour vineyards and taste one of Italy's famed spumante wines, opened by ceremonial saber.

CUNEO

SAVOR THE SWEET

Continue southwest to Cuneo, home of the Cuneesi, gobstopper-size chocolate bonbons filled with goodies like rum or *gianduja*, a combination of chocolate and hazelnut. Then, venture to Fossano, where at restaurant Antiche Volte, inside an ornate 1618 monastery converted into the hotel Palazzo Righini, a five-course meal might begin with a poached egg served on asparagus tips and wrapped in crispy Cuneo ham.

As any foodie worth his sea salt would attest, timing is everything; if you're into truffles, another Piedmont specialty, visit in the fall.



Clockwise from top: Piedmont's rolling vineyards; Montebore cheese; truffles; architecture in Acqui Terme.



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VIVA ITALIA!

Celebrity Scrapbook

Even after two years, Neil Patrick Harris calls his visit to Italy the “trip of a lifetime.” Over a week in April 2009, the actor and his partner, David Burtka, joined *Watch!* for a cover shoot in Rome and Venice, where he boarded the *Orient-Express* to Paris. Some highlights:



// THE ORIENT-EXPRESS

“It was a thrill getting to ride on the *Orient-Express*—and the very same train cars used in the *Murder on the Orient Express* feature film, to boot. I remember everyone glancing around, taking it all in, expecting someone to drop dead from arsenic poisoning or a knife in their back. Thankfully—though unfortunately—no one did.”



// ROME CAVALIERI

“The panorama was outrageous, and it just got better and better. When we first arrived [at the hotel, part of the Waldorf Astoria Collection], you could see the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica, but it was sort of overcast and misty. And then at other times, like at sunset, you could see the orange glow of the entire landscape.”



// ST. MARK’S SQUARE:

“I thought it would be a great plan to shoot me covered in pigeons in the middle of St. Mark’s Square. The last time we visited, that’s what everyone did—it’s a rite of passage. But apparently, the city decided to stop the tradition and stopped allowing vendors to sell birdseed in packages. So our amazing team went from shop to shop trying to buy anything that might interest what few pigeons had remained. I ended up with crushed cookie all over my shirt and hands ... but finally, we got the shot!”

// VENETIAN GONDOLA

“At first, there were schoolkids and tourists everywhere. Then we turned between two buildings and suddenly—silence. And the water lapping. And hearing our gondolier softly humming to himself. And *then* it was, ‘Ahhh, Venice!’ ”



// HOTEL CIPRIANI

“Absolutely stunning. I felt like I was in a movie filmed in the 1920s or ‘30s. The air smelled of wisteria.”

Follow Venice's elite into the heart of Italy's VENETO region and enjoy the rich culture and cuisine in charming Vicenza

For those looking to savor a true taste of Italy, the Veneto region is ideal. This gem of a countryside extends across a landscape that boasts a mild climate and beautiful scenery. For centuries, noble families and Venice's elite escaped the everyday to relax in rural villas that dot the gentle, rolling hills.

VICENZA

At Veneto's heart lies Vicenza, a city and province rich in culinary and cultural importance thanks to its architecture, craftsmanship and agriculture. For gastronomes the local treasures are Bassano del Grappa's white asparagus and Marostica's cherries. Restaurants like Locanda Casanova in Cassola, which offers garden views of Monte Grappa, transform their menus during harvest season to feature dishes made with these succulent delicacies.

And, of course, there are wines to taste—the Zonin Winery in Gambellara



has produced wine for seven generations—and grappa to savor. The Poli family in nearby Schiavon has distilled grappa since 1898 and offers seven varieties, as well as many brandies and liqueurs.

Vicenza's most popular export—architecture—is

well-known to Americans. For his Monticello home, Thomas Jefferson copied Vicenza's most famous building, Villa Rotonda. The villa is one of 23 created in the 16th century by Andrea Palladio, a contemporary of Michelangelo who arrived in Vicenza as an apprentice stone-cutter in 1524 and became one of the world's most celebrated architects. Palladio's works still attract admirers today: In Vicenza's center is the world's oldest indoor theater, the Teatro Olimpico, which hosts concerts and performances to the delight of audiences from around the world.

Vicenza's winding cobblestone streets offer visitors a variety of cultural attractions around the Piazza dei Signori, including tasty local dishes (try the region's specialty, *baccalà alla Vicentina*—salted cod with hot,



soft polenta—at Antico Ristorante agli Schioppi) and shopping distractions (Bottega Veneta is headquartered here). Named for the city's adopted son, the Hotel Palladio is a fantastic place to stay, offering modern amenities in a classical, centrally located setting.

For panoramic sights, grab your camera and make a pilgrimage to the shrine at the Basilica di Monte Berico. The view that waits at the top extends all the way to the foothills of the Italian Alps and the Venetian Lagoon—a reminder of why Vicenza is such a spectacular retreat.

From top: Vicenza's historic architecture, including Teatro Olimpico; Villa Rotonda, the inspiration for Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Inset: local delicacy white asparagus.

COUNTRY ESCAPES

By Jennifer Goddard Huete