

# The Etruscans

The ancient Etruscans were the first civilization native to ancient Italy & a dominant power on the peninsula for some 300 years, during part of which time Etruscan kings ruled Rome & bestowed on it the attributes of a city. The Etruscans have been regarded as a mysterious people, a misleading label, because most of the mysteriousness is simply a product of the paucity of information that archaeologists & historians have succeeded in wresting from very meager sources. Our purpose in this brief tour is to discover a little known & much misunderstood people.

## Day 1

Arrival in Rome. Brief bus tour of the city with panoramic views from the Gianicolo Hill and other heights. Afternoon free for rest & leisurely individual sightseeing. Dinner at a local restaurant followed by an evening walk around Rome's historic center: Piazza Navona, the Pantheon, Campo dei Fiori & Piazza Farnese.

## Day 2

We begin our tour with a visit to the Villa Giulia, National Etruscan Museum, the world's foremost collection of Etruscan art & artifacts. It is housed in a Renaissance villa created from an earlier villa by Pope Julius III shortly after 1550 to entertain his guests & to get away from the pressures as head of the Church & of the Papal States, which covered much of central Italy. Next we drive out to Cerveteri, site of one of the most powerful of Etruscan city-states, to the necropolis which furnished some of the objects in the Villa Giulia Museum. Here we see tombs & large burial mounds laid out along streets forming a true city of the dead. Dinner and overnight in Rome.

## Day 3

A full day in Tarquinia, another important Etruscan city a bit further to the north of Cerveteri, which is largely unexcavated and is famous for its frescoed tombs dating from the 6th to 2nd centuries B.C. These are unmatched in the ancient world for their sheer number, their engaging color, and their vitality. They amply reveal the Etruscan outlook on life and death. Tarquinia has a local Etruscan museum, which is housed in a Gothic-Renaissance palace and is truly a jewel. In the museum's very fine collection, there is a truly unique piece, a sculpted terracotta decorative plaque depicting a pair of winged horses. This sculpture once adorned the pediment of an Etruscan temple, the ruins of which we will visit after lunch at the site of the ancient city on a nearby plateau, conditions permitting. Return to Rome for dinner and overnight.

## Day 4

Today's visit is to San Giovenale, one of only a handful Etruscan town-sites so far excavated in central Italy. The site was excavated in the late 1950's and early 1960's by the king of Sweden and a team of Swedish and Italian archaeologists. San Giovenale another site, Acquarossa, have provided Etruscologists with most of the available information on Etruscan houses and are among the very few sites where ruins of Etruscan houses can be seen. On our way to San Giovenale we shall make a brief stop at Blera to walk down to a small Roman bridge which spans a brook lost in a ravine far below the modern road. Then a brief stop at the gracious medieval town of Barbarano Romano, after which we proceed to Viterbo, a gracious provincial capital north of Rome with one of the most picturesque medieval quarters in central Italy. But first a visit to the unique exhibit on Etruscan houses, the only one of its kind in the world. All the material on display has come from the San Giovenale & Acquarossa. Dinner and overnight in Rome.

### **Day 5**

Visit to Orvieto, a gracious medieval town with a past reaching back to Etruscan times. It was the Etruscan Velzna, called Volsinii by the Romans, before they destroyed it in the 3rd century B.C. We approach Orvieto from the west offering us a stunning view of the city atop its high outcropping with sheer cliffs on all sides. It fills the high outcropping on which it sits right up to the sheer cliffs that dominate the valleys on all sides. Orvieto's table-like plateau, made of soft tuff stone is riddled with underground chambers and drainage channels carved out by the Etruscans. They can be visited on a tour of "Underground Orvieto." Also of particular interest is the cathedral begun in 1290 following a miracle that occurred in nearby Bolsena, while the Pope was in residence in Orvieto. The real treasures of Orvieto are the frescoes in a side chapel of the Last Judgment painted by Luca Signorelli, an exquisite work which provided the inspiration for Michelangelo's Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel. These frescoes were re-opened to the public after a 9-year restoration. A walk down the 34-meter deep well built at the time of the sack of Rome in 1527 illustrates how far below the surface the water table is. Just a short drive from the well which is at one end of Orvieto is a necropolis with a number of inscriptions in the Etruscan language, which identify the ancient occupants of the tombs.

### **Day 6**

Departure for return flight home.