

Pisoni-Ferrari tours help to erase stereotypes

BY FELICITY LONG

Alvaro Pisoni, president and founder of Denver-based Pisoni-Ferrari Tour Co., might be an architect by training, but the Italy he shares with his clients is as much about contemporary culture as old, elegant buildings.

"My specialty is showing people the real Italy, which is often very different from what they expect," Pisoni said.

Despite the popularity of the destination, he said misconceptions about Italy abound, based in part on popular stereotypical images.

"Many people think Italy is a poor country where children run wild in the streets asking for money," Pisoni said. "This picture of Italy may have existed for a brief period after World War II, but, in fact, we are the fifth-largest economy in the world today."

Noting that his first-time clients are often struck by the sophistication of the destination upon arrival, he said they also find the cuisine a surprise. "Many Americans have a stereotype of Italian food as be-

ing a plate of spaghetti with tomato sauce, so I make sure to take them to places where they can try the specialties of the region," Pisoni said.

Also, many people are surprised by how verdant Italy is, he said.

"People frequently come back raving about how green it is," Pisoni said.

Pisoni designs and accompanies each group tour to dispel these myths and highlight contemporary Italian lifestyle.



Some tourists are not aware that Italy is an economically advanced country, according to Pisoni-Ferrari president Alvaro Pisoni. Above, gondolas in Venice.

Drawing on his background as an Italian-born-and-trained architect and politician, he combines educational and cultural

elements into his tours, based on the interests of his clients.

Specifically, he will design an itinerary after receiving a deposit, which is deducted from the final payment.

Tours are commissionable, and Pisoni is available to meet with groups beforehand.

"We can do a slide show, talk about travel tips and generally go over what they do and don't need," he said.

"Often I'll do three or four meetings before the departure, and then we will travel together," Pisoni said.

Once in Italy, groups of 30 or more ride in the same private chartered bus with the same driver from beginning to end, while small groups travel by van, he said.

"We go to unique places and experience the local culture by visiting artists' studios, private concerts [in venues such as Venetian villas] or hike in the Alps," he said.

Admitting that many younger travelers prefer to go it alone, Pisoni said companies like his can help distinguish which scenic villages are worth stopping for and which are safe for visitors' parked cars and belongings.

"In some little towns outside of Naples and even Milan, your car and luggage could be at risk," he said.

In addition, Pisoni said that driving in Italy can be challenging, even for the adventurous, particularly in big cities.

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DENVER — Although Pisoni-Ferrari Tour Co. president Alvaro Pisoni targets such ready-made groups as affinity clubs and incentive groups, the company also designs upscale programs for as few as two people.

Relevant special interests include architecture, honeymoons, cuisine, shopping, music, photography, hiking, wine tasting, horseback riding and skiing.

The pace of the programs can be adjusted to seniors, fitness buffs or family groups, and business travelers can hook up with their counterparts in Italy through prearranged meetings.

Prices vary according to the length and nature of the program.

Small private groups of six or seven people might expect to pay from \$4,000 per person, double, for two weeks' worth of land arrangements, not including lunches and dinners.

Groups of 40 or more pay from about \$3,500 to \$5,000 for two weeks, including dinners but not air fare.

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Operator offers an educational, cultural focus

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"You can't even enter Florence by car unless you know the exact way to do it, and they are so strict about speeding and parking that they will tow your car without thinking twice," he said.

Mostly, though, Pisoni said the company strives to come up with unique destinations and activities that can't be easily duplicated by self-drive tourists.

"Last year, I arranged a dinner in a windmill in Sicily where fishermen brought us fresh fish for dinner in their boats and cooked it in front of us," he said.

"Women in folk costumes came out of the windmill with cocktails for everyone, and there was a beautiful concert by local musicians," Pisoni said, adding that the event was privately arranged just for his group.

In addition to Italy, Pisoni-Ferrari handles travel to France, Switzerland, Austria and Germany.

For details, call (303) 841-5025 or visit the Web site at www.pisoni.com.



Pisoni-Ferrari tours combine educational and cultural elements, based on the interests of its clients. Above, a view of Florence.