



The Epitome of Italy



Since its inception in 1945, the destination remains very much the focus for Perillo Tours.

| TOUR OPERATOR | HARVEY CHIPKIN



Colosseum, Rome, Italy. (photo via Unsplash/Willian West)

Perhaps no tour operator is more associated with a destination than Perillo Tours is with Italy. So connected are the company and the country that when Adam Sandler did a parody of a Perillo commercial on "Saturday Night Live," everybody knew who he was talking about although he used a different name for the advertiser.

There's a reason for that. In 1945, Joseph Perillo, an immigrant from Italy, began selling travel to his home country. His son Mario continued the tradition and became a television personality known as "Mr. Italy" because of his commercials. Mario's son Steve, now the company's president and owner, took over in 2005.

"Our buses have been going up and down the streets of Italian cities and towns for decades," Steve Perillo said.

"They know who we are." He added that tour leaders have grown up with the company and that deep connection is a great advantage.

Italy Centric

His father was frequently advised to broaden the operator's geographic scope, but he refused to do so, Perillo said. As a result, when travelers – or search engines – look for Italy travel online, Perillo enjoys a dominant presence. While Hawaii and Spain have been added in recent years, Italy remains very much the focus.

The company's first Italy departures were set for the end of August, beginning with smaller groups and following all health protocols; tours to Spain will begin shortly afterward, and Hawaii programs have been running for a while. By 2022, operations should be back up to full speed while following whatever restrictions are in place at the time.

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While the content of tours hasn't changed, travel patterns are shifting. For instance, private villas are very popular in Italy because "they are the ideal vacation now for many clients," Perillo said.

Proving the love of tradition of company loyalists, Perillo's 14-day "Italy North Classic," developed in 1975, remains the most popular itinerary today. It features Rome, Pompeii, Sorrento, Capri, Florence, Venice, Padua, Milan, Lugano, Lake Como and Sirmione.

Before the pandemic, 2020 was on track to be the best in 10 years because the company's heavily Baby Boomer clientele had the money and the time, Perillo said.

Virtual Reality

Perillo has also made a strong commitment to virtual reality, forming Perillo Tours VR and Travel World VR, both available as smartphone apps. Travel World VR is also open to producing content for other suppliers. The company has sent thousands of cardboard and plastic headsets to travel advisors and meeting planners so they can enjoy a better VR experience. Eventually, the company aims to offer videos incorporated into headsets that can store two hours of content.

Selling Perillo

Agents are kept up to date on developments with weekly email blasts, and regular webinars are held mostly for consortia, said Steve Perillo, owner and president of Perillo Tours.

The company has also printed brochures for the first time in a while. True to his traditionalist leanings, Perillo said he believes that printed brochures "are still the most powerful sales tool" because "your website is one in a billion while the

brochure on the kitchen table stands out."

While the operator pays a standard 12 percent with incentives, Perillo, always upfront, said that if an advisor sells a few tours, "they should call me and talk about additional commission."

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