

# Tivoli a great escape for 2,000 years



**Rick Steves**

When travel dreams take people to Europe, Italy is often their first stop. There's something seductively charming about this country, its people, and la dolce vita. I always feel at home in Italy, whether struggling onto a crowded bus in Rome, navigating the fun chaos of Naples, sipping a cocktail in a Venetian bar, or sitting on the banister of Florence's Ponte Vecchio for a midnight street-music concert.

But I also seek escapes from Italy's urban intensity. When I'm in Rome, I like to travel about 20 miles east to the hill town of Tivoli, a popular retreat since ancient times. Today it's famous for two very different villas: Hadrian's Villa, a Roman emperor's countryside getaway, and Villa d'Este, the lush and watery 16th-century residence of a Catholic cardinal.

Hadrian (ruled AD 117-138) had a perfectly good villa in Rome, but he preferred to live outside the capital, and toward the end of his reign, he lived full-time at Tivoli. Just as Louis XIV governed France from Versailles rather than Paris, Hadrian ruled Rome from this villa complex of more than 300 evocative acres.

An architect, lover of Greek culture, and great traveler, Hadrian envisioned the site as a microcosm of the lands he ruled, which at that point stretched from Great Britain to Iraq. In the spirit of Legoland, Epcot and Las Vegas, he re-created famous structures from around the world, producing a kind of diorama of his empire.

By the time Hadrian was finished, he'd erected more than 30 buildings and created extensive gardens.



After the fall of the Roman Empire, Hadrian's Villa was plundered, and most of its original art and material has been scattered. LAURENT KALFALA/GETTY-AFP 2012

With libraries, temples, baths, theaters and palaces for himself and his friends and staff, the estate was completely self-contained.

Although most buildings have long since vanished, you can feel Hadrian's hand in some remaining structures. The emperor surrounded a rectangular water basin — meant to represent the Nile — with columns and statues, including copies of the caryatids he had admired at the Acropolis. At one end he built a temple in memory of his close friend (and perhaps lover) Antinous, who had tragically drowned in the Nile.

Regrettably, with the fall of the empire, this "Versailles of Ancient Rome" was first plundered by barbarians and then by Renaissance big shots, who all wanted something

classical in their courtyards. They even burned the marble to make lime for cement. While some of the scavenged art ended up across town at the Villa d'Este, much of it wound up far away in museums throughout Europe.

Much later, in 1550, another patron of the arts, Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, further transformed the Tivoli landscape. Even though he was a man of the cloth, Ippolito, cultured and wealthy, lived like a secular prince. When he lost a closely contested election to be the next pope in 1549, he consoled himself by building his sumptuous villa in Tivoli. He cleared a Benedictine convent from the site and erected a luxurious Renaissance palace, with elaborately frescoed walls and ceilings.

But the main attraction is the spectacular garden (which wasn't fully installed until after Ippolito's death). A hallmark of Italian design, it clings to a steep hill cascading with pools, streams, waterfalls, and thundering fountains. Towering cypress, boxwood hedges, Roman statuary, and pleasant paths direct the eye toward stately vistas all around.

Creating such an elaborate water park required the collaboration of an architect (to lay out the garden), a hydraulic engineer (to get water to the site), and a plumber (to make sure the fountains worked). At Tivoli, the site was massively excavated and re-engineered so the water features could be gravity-fed.

Pirro Ligorio, Tivoli's architect, was conveniently

also excavating Hadrian's Villa at the same time. That site provided much in inspiration — and raw material — for the fountains of Villa d'Este. Ligorio basically used Hadrian's Villa as a quarry to provide statuary and decorative stonework for his vision.

After Ippolito's death, the estate was passed down in the Este family, but by the 19th century the house was in disrepair and the fountains plugged up. Now in the hands of the Italian state, it's been completely restored, with all its fabulous water features flowing again.

While Hadrian's Villa is about haunting ruins and a storied history, Villa d'Este is simply beautiful and relaxing (and is especially appealing when it's sweltering in Rome). The two sights complement each

other well and combine to make a satisfying day trip from Rome. An easy subway/bus combination gets you from the city to Tivoli, where a public bus connects the two villas.

When I'm in Italy, I savor my cappuccino and imagine what it was like centuries ago. At Tivoli, I can ramble through the rubble and rubble, mentally resurrecting those ancient stones. Escaping the hubbub in Rome, I get chummy with the winds of the past — and connect with the pleasures of the moment.

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## CELEBRITY TRAVEL

### Singer comes up with ideas on planes

By Jae-Ha Kim  
Tribune Content Agency

Born and raised in Hawaii, singer-songwriter Mikah said every day felt like he was in paradise.

"The beach is right there, the weather is almost always perfect, you see rainbows nearly every day, and you drive home after school with the most beautiful sunset in front of you," said Mikah, 26, who lives in Shanghai.

"Being a kid in Hawaii is like having a huge playground you can explore endlessly. I used to hike to watch the sunrise, surf, bodysurf, dive, bike around the island, skateboard ... the list just goes on. I always think back to my childhood and reminisce about how beautiful it was."

His songs "Escape," "In Between" and "Dream" are dreamy, self-reflective tales that speak of who he is.

This interview with Mikah has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q: You've lived and worked in the U.S., Japan and China. What kind of challenges did you face?**

**A:** There were countless challenges I faced while moving around, but the biggest ones were leaving my friends and family, making new friends and dealing with language barriers. Even now, I still feel the pain I felt when I left Hawaii. It's like I lost a part of my life that I can never get back, and the only way I can feel that same joy again is by reminiscing about it. When it comes to making new friends, ever since I left Hawaii, I haven't been able



Mikah said that even though he grew up in Hawaii, it's still his favorite vacation spot. PIERRE BOISSEL & MATHIAS PONARD

to build the same kind of close friendships. Because of that, I really miss the friends I grew up with. I moved to two places that speak completely different languages, and having to learn them — not just to live and work, but also to sing and write music in them — was a huge obstacle.

**Q: As a global artist, how have your experiences in other parts of the world made their way into your music?**

**A:** I'd say it helped me learn more about the music people listen to in other countries. Because of that, when I create music, I naturally consider those influences, so my songs can reach a wider audience and hopefully be appreciated by more people.

**Q: What do you remember about your first professional gig?**

**A:** It was probably a small show I did when I was around 17 or 18 with my band, Intersection. I remember being so nervous that I could barely open my (mouth) to sing or even move my body. When I first started, I was really introverted, unconfident and couldn't stand in front of an audience. But after each show, I slowly learned to accept it. I still get nervous, but it's like 10 times better than before.

**Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?**

**A:** Hawaii. Even though it's my home and my parents still live there, I kind of see it as a vacation destination now because I rarely have time to go back. So when I do get that once-a-year chance, it feels rare and rewarding, almost like a vacation. And on top of that, Hawaii really is a vacation capital, so every time I go back, I feel that same sense of relaxation and the warm, beach vacation vibe.

**Q: Have you written or worked on any songs while you were on the road?**

**A:** I usually write lyrics and come up with creative concepts when I'm on a plane. I travel about six times a month, so I use that quiet, disconnected time to brainstorm and write lyrics for whatever song I'm working on.

**Q: What is your bucket-list venue that you have yet to perform in?**

**A:** Coachella or Head in the Clouds.

**Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?**

**A:** I think one of my earliest memories was a trip I took to Colorado and Utah to visit my grandma, but also camp and snowboard. I think that trip made me love and appreciate the outdoors more and is the reason I love nature now.

For more from the reporter, visit [www.jaehakim.com](http://www.jaehakim.com).

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

### Avis charges nonsmoker fee for heavy smoke smell in car

By Christopher Elliott  
King Features Syndicate

I rented a car from Avis for a quick 7-hour trip between California airports. I returned the vehicle clean with no odors or damage.

A week later, I received a \$450 cleaning fee for a "heavy smoke smell," even though neither I nor my wife smoke.

The company's "proof" included photos of dust and a form that was dated for three days after my return, with a mileage reading that was 1 mile higher than it was at drop-off.

I fought the charge, sent time-stamped security footage of the car sitting unused in my driveway, and escalated this to the executives. But Avis still charged my card.

How can a company bill me for damage that didn't happen? And how do I make this right?

— Randall Lee, in Los Gatos, California

**A:** Avis should have inspected the vehicle immediately upon return and notified you of any issues right away. Anything could have happened in the three days between you dropping off the car and the inspection.

Although California's Civil Code Section 1936 doesn't require rental companies to provide detailed invoices for post-return charges, it strictly regulates how charges must be calculated, disclosed and justified. If you dispute a charge, the burden is on the rental company to prove its validity through itemized documentation.

You did almost everything right. You kept records, challenged the discrepancy, and contacted executives. For future rentals, take "before" and "after" photos of your car, including photos of the interior, odometer, fuel

gauge, license plate and VIN placard. Paper trails are critical, and yours made this case winnable.

Of course, there's no way to document a strong smoke smell with an image. And there's no way to quickly and objectively verify that you didn't smoke in the car or that one of your passengers didn't smoke. But in my experience of resolving hundreds of rental car smoke cases, smokers are usually pretty honest about their habits.

You were a careful renter, and it looks like you were being charged for something you didn't do. There were also the time and mileage discrepancies, which were problematic.

I see you also appealed this case to an Avis executive. (I list the names, numbers and email addresses of the Avis executives on my consumer advocacy site, [elliott.org](http://elliott.org).)

A manager should have reviewed your case and fixed it.

My advice? Document every scratch, smell and mile on your rental car. If you catch even a whiff of impropriety, say something immediately. Don't wait for the car rental company to write it up because at a time when car rental companies are monetizing everything, they probably will write it up. I thought Avis should take another look at this claim given the inconsistencies in its files and the fact that you don't smoke. Avis agreed to reopen your case, and it refunded the \$450 that it had charged for your car.

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