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Pope Leo XIV arrives in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican for his open-air weekly general audience, Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2026. (AP/Gregorio Borgia)

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Pope Leo XIV will visit ground zero of Europe's migration drama, the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, in May and also minister to Italians poisoned by years of toxic dumping by the mafia, according to travel plans announced on Thursday by the Vatican.

The Vatican released Leo's agenda for day trips to a half-dozen Italian cities over the next six months. The Vatican has rarely released such plans together and so far in advance, but word of the visits was starting to filter out.

The busy itinerary, which will take Leo up and down the Italian peninsula, is in addition to plans for some intense foreign travel in 2026. There are plans under study for a four-nation trip to Africa after Easter that would take Leo to Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, Angola and Cameroon. Leo himself has said he hopes to visit his beloved Peru, as well as Argentina and Uruguay, trips that could happen toward the end of the year.

The Vatican previously confirmed that one foreign trip not on the agenda this year is to Leo's native United States.

History's first U.S.-born pope was limited in his ability to leave Rome during his first year as pontiff because of the busy 2025 Holy Year agenda, which saw millions of pilgrims coming to the Vatican for special Masses and papal audiences.

With the Jubilee behind him, Leo can now get out of town more easily: He has begun a series of parish visits within his Roman diocese each Sunday throughout Lent, the period leading up to Easter.

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And the Italy itinerary announced Thursday will take Leo near and far as he gets to know the Italian church and faithful better.

The travels begin on May 8 with a visit to Naples and the nearby ancient city of Pompeii. He'll return to the region later that month, on May 23, to meet with the faithful of Acerra. The area is known as the "Land of Fires," for the years of toxic-waste dumping by the local mafia that has led to increased rates of cancer and other ailments for its residents.

Leo will go north to Pavia, near Milan, on June 20 and then travel July 4 to Lampedusa, an Italian island that is closer to Africa than the Italian mainland. Pope Francis had made Lampedusa his first trip outside Rome after his 2013 election to show solidarity with migrants who landed there after being smuggled from north Africa.

Francis famously celebrated Mass on the island on an altar made of shipwrecked migrant boats and denounced the "globalization of indifference" that greets migrants who risk their lives trying to reach Europe — a mantra that would come to define his papacy.

On Aug. 6 Leo will visit the Umbrian hilltop town of Assisi, which this year is celebrating the 800th anniversary of the death of its most famous resident, St. Francis. And later that month, Aug. 22, Leo will take part in an annual Italian political and religious conference in the Adriatic seaside resort of Rimini.

Leo, who was born in Chicago and spent two decades as a missionary in Peru, has said he loves to travel. He spent many years on the road when he served two, six-year terms as the superior of his Augustinian religious order, which required him to visit Augustinian communities around the world.