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Tuscany



TUSCANY

A DRIVE THROUGH TUSCANY is a chance to explore sun-drenched towns like Pienza and Montepulciano, names that roll off the tongue like a sip of vintage Brunello di Montalcino. It's a landscape of dome-smooth verdant hills, with perfect lines of tall cypress and fields of wild poppies. Tuscany is where the arts of the Renaissance took full flight. You may stumble upon a Fra Angelico fresco and Etruscan ruins, but you'll find that cities like Lucca and Siena are far from museum pieces. A meandering drive can take you to half-forgotten villages with medieval churches, to alfresco picnic lunches in vineyards and candlelight dinners in courtyards. Your meals may include such well-known Tuscan favorites as tortellini and bruschetta as well as unfamiliar ones like cinghiale (wild boar) and finocchiona (fennel-scented salami). Your repast will undoubtedly include the local wine, arguably the most famous as well as the best in all of Italy, from Chianti to the rare Carmignano. This is the rich and fertile land that Frances Mayes wrote about in her best-selling book, *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Devotees should note that there are still ancient stone farmhouses that have yet to be reclaimed. They may well generate your own fantasy about settling down to the rustic life in the paradise of rural Tuscany.



T U S C A N Y

(Mileage is estimated from each preceding city or site. Before you begin your trip, please note: For space reasons, we could not provide the most detailed map with this brochure. We recommend the use of **Michelin Map #988 Italy** in conjunction with this guide.) To order Michelin maps, call 1-800-223-0987.

MILAN—Begin your trip at Malpensa Airport. If you've got time, spend a night in Milan, Italy's fashion capital. Stroll through the Piazza del Duomo. Go window shopping inside the spectacular glass-roofed Galleria Vittorio Emmanuelle II. And then find a nice trattoria where you can sample risotto alla Milanese, the saffron-infused dish most closely associated with this stylish town.


182 miles

LUCCA—The intact Renaissance-era walls of Lucca testify to the fact that for most of its existence, it was a peaceful place. It's a gem of a town, less visited than many others in Tuscany. Perhaps the most famous site is the Torre die Guinigi, a medieval tower with mature oak trees growing from its top. Start there, continue through the city center, and stop at the Cathedral San Martino, with its asymmetrical 11th-century facade. It's a masterpiece of columns, arcades and decoration done in the Pisan-Romanesque style. Stop at the Casa di Puccini, the birthplace of Giacomo Puccini,

the composer of such operas as *Madame Butterfly* and *Turnadot*. Like any Italian city of this size, the shopping is good, highlighted by the art nouveau buildings along Via Fillungo, the main shopping street. The Piazza del Mercato has a wonderful elliptical shape, the curved buildings perfectly echoing the Roman amphitheater that once stood there. End a day by strolling along the top of Lucca's ramparts, which allows you a glimpse of some private gardens.

47 miles

FLORENCE—There's enough to keep a curious visitor to Florence busy for a lifetime. This is the city of artists, which an afternoon in the Uffizi Gallery will make abundantly clear. The museum houses masterpieces by Piero della Francesco, Ucello and Botticelli, including the latter's *Birth of Venus*. You could profitably spend a week in the Uffizi, which has a wealth of work by Leonardo Da Vinci, Giotto and Fra Lippo Lippi. But you probably won't, because the rest of Florence is so engaging. Buy a little hazelnut gelato and eat it as you cross the medieval bridge known as the Ponte Vecchio, with its shops and houses. Check out the tomatoes and zucchini at the Mercato Centrale, a temple to Tuscan food. Do spend as much time as you can exploring the Duomo, the cathedral that lies in the heart of Florence. Its enormous dome by Brunelleschi is indeed magisterial, and it dwarfs every other structure in this marvelously preserved city. Explore the various chapels and then, if your legs can stand it, climb the 463 steps to the top of the dome. Visit the Bargello, which has a marvelous collection of Renaissance sculpture. Have a look at Galileo's telescope in the Museo di Storia della Scienza. Examine the Vasari frescoes at the Palazzo Vecchio. Then unwind at a simple



trattoria
with a meal of
ribollita soup, ravioli with
butter and sage, and a bottle
of Rosso di Montalcino.

35 miles

RADDA-IN-CHIANTI—Radda-in-Chianti was the capital of the Medieval League of Chianti, part of a chain of Florentine defensive fortifications against Siena. All is peaceful now, and at the center of Radda you'll find the Piazza Ferrucci, the town's medieval heart. There are marvelous views from town over the Parco Naturale della Viriglia, and the prime vineyards of Chianti surround you.

7 miles

GAIOLE—This is a charming and quiet agricultural town that has a stream running through its center. Just north of town is Badia a Coltibuono, a Vallombrosan abbey set amidst a cedar forest. South of town is the Castello di Brolio, one of Chianti's most famous castles. It is, in fact, a 19th-century re-creation of what a medieval castle should look like, as the original was destroyed by the Siennese in the early 16th century.

17 miles

SIENA—At the center of Siena is the Piazza del Campo, shaped like a scallop shell and walled in by noble palazzi. It's a marvelous space when empty and an incredible space when jammed with spectators who've come for the Palio. Dating back to at least 1283, this bareback horse race is Tuscany's most spectacular festival and is held twice yearly, on July 2 and August 16. The horses are blessed in

church and the course is notoriously difficult. But if you can't make it, enjoy the Piazza and then wander the narrow, hilly medieval streets that radiate from it. The Duomo is in the Gothic style and dates in part as far back as the 12th century, with an inlaid marble floor and frescoes by Pinturicchio in the Piccolomini Library. Next door, some of the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo is devoted to sculptures removed from the church's facade to preserve them from erosion. But the best activity in Siena is to wander the miraculously preserved streets and alleys that transport you back to the middle ages.

23 miles

ASCIANO—This medieval walled town is in the heart of the Crete Senesi, an area of white clay hills and deep gullies that's nearly bereft of vegetation. Go down the main street, Corso Matteotti, which has some fine examples of Renaissance palazzi, as well as some trendy boutiques. Visit the Basilica di Sant'Agata, a 13th-century Romanesque church. Go next door to the Museo d'Arte Sacra, which has some paintings of the Siennese school, the most famous of which is probably Duccio's *Madonna and Child*. To go a little further back into Tuscan history, spend a few moments at the Museo Archeologico, which has Etruscan finds recovered from the Necropoli di Poggi Pinci, just outside of town. Then have a Campari at the locals' hangout, the Bar Herve, on the central Plaza Garibaldi.

26 miles

MONTEPULCIANO—Built on a limestone ridge, Montepulciano lays claim to being one of the highest hilltop towns in Tuscany. Just outside the town is Madonna di San Biagio, a travertine marble church that has been a destination for pilgrims since the 16th century. Montepulciano itself is a walled



Etruscan town, and the Corso is the main drag, which winds up to the main square. There are dozens of cafés serving the famed Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, just the thing to fortify you before climbing the streets. Among the best is the Caffè Poliziano, an Art Deco masterpiece and host of the annual Cantiere Internazionale d'Arte festival every July. You should climb the tower in the 15th-century Palazzo Comunale, a smaller version of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, just for the views of the Tuscan countryside. If you're lucky enough to be here in August, you can witness the Bravio delle Botti, when citizens in medieval garb compete to push enormous wine casks up the nearly vertical streets.

9 miles

PIENZA— Pienza is close to Renaissance perfection, a town that was conceived by Pius II and built by architect Bernardo Rossellino, but effectively finished in 1464 when both men died. Rossellino built the Duomo in 1459, and although in need of restoration, it is a fine example of a Renaissance church. Pius II requested the enormous stained glass windows in an attempt to have a true house of glass. Adjacent to the Duomo is the Palazzo Piccolomini, which allows you to wander room by room through the centuries of a place that was home to Pius II's descendants until 1968. No trip to Pienza is

complete without sampling the famous local pecorino (sheep's milk cheese) at an alimentari.

29 miles

CORTONA— This is one of the oldest cities in Tuscany, an Etruscan city, with ladder-like alleys and a marvelous square, the Piazza Garibaldi. This is Frances Mayes country, and anyone who's read *Under The Tuscan Sun* will likely feel a twinge of recognition at the city's shops and cafés. From the Piazza, you can get a nice view of the Santa Maria delle Grazie, one of the only surviving churches by the great Francesco di Giorgio Martini. It's worth the 15-minute walk from town to see this early Renaissance gem. Other fine walks include the Via Crucis, an uphill lane with nice gardens on either side that leads to the Santa Margherita church. Inside are mosaics by the Futurist artist Gino Severini.

19 miles

AREZZO— Stop here for the antiques market in the Piazza Grande, the Piero della Francesca frescoes in the San Francesco church, and a chance to visit Casa del Vasari, the home of one of the great Renaissance painters.

68 miles

CASTELLINA-IN-CHIANTI— This walled hilltop village is one of the major wine centers of Chianti. A major pastime here is tasting local wines and olive oils at a showcase like the Enoteca Vini Gallo Nero. Look out the surrounding hills, where the armies of Siena and Florence once warred, and you can appreciate the town's fortifications.

19 miles

SAN GIMIGNANO— This city has been likened to a medieval version of Manhattan because of its skyline, which has 14 stone towers that date back as far as the 13th century. As imposing as they are today, it's worth reflecting on the fact that originally there were 76 of them. Windowless, these towers served as both fortresses and symbols of wealth. Go down the medieval streets, especially Via San Matteo and Via San Giovanni, which are filled with shops and galleries. The facade of the church known as the Collegiata is perhaps the most heavily frescoed in Italy. Take a picnic lunch to the Rocca, a fortress with a public garden filled with fig and olive trees, with views of the prized local vineyards. Walk your lunch off by climbing the Torre Grossa for the best panorama in town.

223 miles

MILAN— Back to Milan, where you might get the last pair of tickets to a Puccini opera at Teatro alla Scala and still have time to check out the paintings and sculpture in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana.

HOTELS

Locanda dell'Amorosa. This restored 14th-century stone village is now an estate and hotel, with a walled courtyard and grand entrance along a corridor of cypress trees. Guest rooms have beamed ceilings and antiques. 53048 Sinalunga.

Tel: 39 0577 679 497

Fax: 39 0577 632 001

Hotel Relais Il Chiostro di Pienza.

A small, charming, restored 15th-century cloister. The rooms are large and airy and have terrific views of the surrounding countryside. Corso Rossellino, 26, Pienza 53026.

Tel: 39 0578 748 400

Fax: 39 0578 748 440



Villa San Michele. This former monastery on a hillside outside of Florence has pure Renaissance views of the distant Duomo, rolling hills and rows of poplars. The façade was allegedly designed by Michelangelo, and the rooms are simple yet incredibly elegant at this member of Orient Express Hotels. Via Doccia 4, Fiesole.

From the USA: 800 525 2420

Hotel Excelsior. This grand dame occupies two houses that overlook the Arno River. The marble floors, 19th-century staircases and stained glass windows transport you back to grander times. Rooms are filled with antiques, damask and brocade. Piazza d'Ognissanti 3, Florence 50123.

Tel: 39 055 264 201

Fax: 39 055 210 278

RESTAURANT

Ristorante Tonino. You come to this venerable place, with its panoramic terrace bar that looks out over the Val di Chiana, for simple pastas, antipasto and a chance to soak up the atmosphere of Cortona. Piazza Garibaldi, Cortona.

Tel: 39 0575 630 500



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