

# VITORITALY®

Italy with Italians

## TUSCANY STAR TOUR

### DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY



**Florence, the Cradle of Renaissance, Pisa and Lucca, Siena, the home of the Palio and San Gimignano with its towers. Then, Val d'Orcia and Chianti with their fairytale landscapes, and rural Cortona and Arezzo.**

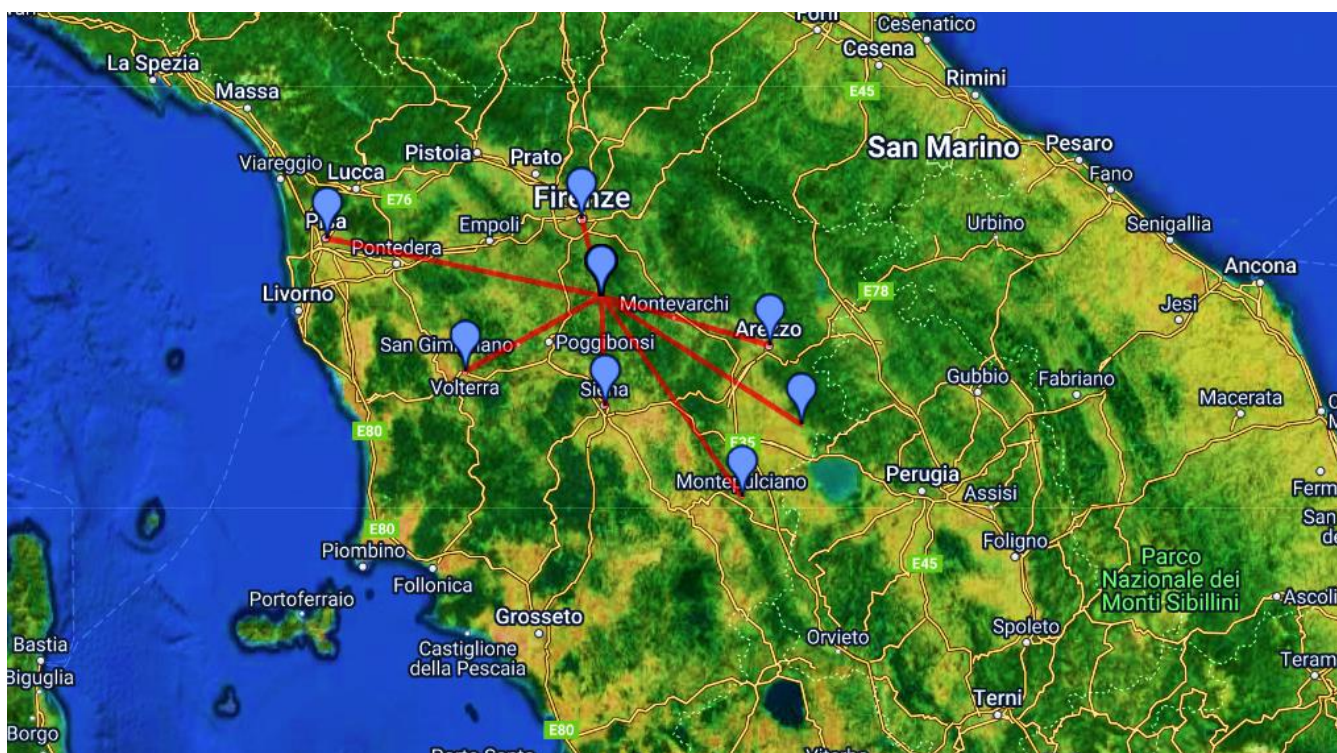
**Explore Tuscany, the land of beauty!**

## TOUR SUMMARY

- Type of tour: Star
- Tour starts and ends in Florence

## TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Chianti, winemakers for 1,000 years
- Pisa, how can it stand?
- Florence, an open-air museum
- Siena and San Gimignano, power in the Middle Ages
- Val d'Orcia, where Man and Nature blend with harmony
- Arezzo, gold, antiques and much more



## ITINERARY SUMMARY\*

AREA	ACTIVITIES INCLUDED IN THE PROGRAM
<b>Florence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arrival in Florence</li> <li>- Transfer to your accommodation in Chianti area</li> </ul>
<b>Chianti</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full-day excursion to Chianti area - Visit of a local wine cellar with tastings</li> <li>- Full-day E-bike tour of Chianti area - Visit of a local olive oil mill with tasting</li> </ul>
<b>Pisa &amp; Lucca</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full-day excursion to Pisa &amp; Lucca - 3-hour private walking tour of Pisa city centre with an <u>Authorised Tourist Guide</u> - Admission to the Leaning Tower</li> </ul>
<b>Florence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full-day excursion to Florence</li> <li>- 3-hour private walking tour of Florence city centre with an Authorised Tourist Guide</li> <li>- Admission to Galleria dell'Accademia (Michelangelo's David), Galleria degli Uffizi, Cappelle Medicee</li> </ul>

AREA	ACTIVITIES INCLUDED IN THE PROGRAM
<b>Siena, Monteriggioni &amp; Chiusdino</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full-day excursion to Siena, Monteriggioni- Free time</li> <li>- 2-hour private walking tour of Siena city centre with an <u>Authorised Tourist Guide</u> - Admission to the Duomo Cathedral in Siena</li> <li>- Visit of San Galgano Abbey in Chiusdino</li> </ul>
<b>San Gimignano &amp; Volterra</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full-day excursion to San Gimignano and Volterra - Free time</li> </ul>
<b>Val d'Orcia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full-day excursion to Val d'Orcia area</li> <li>- 3-hour private walking tour of Montepulciano city centre with a <u>Sommelier Guide</u>, with tastings of Vino Nobile, Pecorino cheese and truffle</li> <li>- Visit of a Supertuscan Brunello di Montalcino wine cellar with tastings</li> </ul>
<b>Arezzo</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full-day excursion to Arezzo - Free time</li> </ul>
<b>Cortona</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full-day excursion to Cortona - Free time</li> </ul>
<b>Florence Airport / Railway Station</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transfer to Florence Airport / Florence Railway Station</li> <li>- Departure from Florence Airport / Florence Railway Station</li> </ul>

(\*) Tailor-made tour customizable to your desires. Choose as many activities as you like

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- **Accommodations in Chianti area with Continental Breakfast, to be chosen among the following:**
  - Villa
  - Relais
  - Country House
  - Hotel
- **Private Guided Visits / Tours / Activities to be chosen among the following (\*\*):**
  - Full-day excursion to Chianti area - Visit of a local wine cellar with tastings
  - Full-day E-bike tour of Chianti area - Visit of a local olive oil mill with tasting
  - Full-day excursion to Pisa & Lucca - 3- hour private walking tour of Pisa city centre with an Authorised Tourist Guide
  - Full-day excursion to Florence - 3-hour private walking tour of Florence city centre with an Authorised Tourist Guide
  - Full-day excursion to Siena, Monteriggioni- 2-hour private walking tour of Siena city centre with an Authorised Tourist Guide
  - Full-day excursion to San Gimignano and Volterra
  - Full-day excursion to Val d'Orcia area - 3-hour private walking tour of Montepulciano city centre with a Sommelier Guide, with tastings of Vino Nobile, Pecorino cheese and truffle - Visit of a Supertuscan Brunello di Montalcino wine cellar with tastings
  - Full-day excursion to Arezzo
  - Full-day excursion to Cortona
- (\*\*) All transfers and tours by private car (2 pax) / minivan (3 to 7 pax) / minibus (8 to 10 pax) / Rental car
- **Admission tickets to be chosen among the following:**
  - Leaning Tower in Pisa
  - Galleria dell'Accademia (Michelangelo's David) in Florence
  - Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence
  - Cappelle Medicee in Florence
  - Duomo Cathedral in Siena
  - San Galgano Abbey in Chiusdino
- **Full emergency assistance 24 hours/day by our Back Office**
- **List of recommended restaurants along the itinerary**

- All taxes

## OPTIONS

- Other options upon request

## TOUR MAIN FEATURES

### CHIANTI



Benvenuti in Italia, welcome to Chianti!

Only a few regions can offer such a beautiful and rich panorama as Chianti: green hills sketched by miles and miles of vineyards and olive groves, ancient walled villages, and panoramic curvy roads. Chianti Classico spreads from Florence to Siena and includes the municipalities of Greve, Panzano, Radda, Gaiole and Castellina. Most of the route consists of roads connecting larger towns to villages and castles, like the one leading to **Radda**, the former headquarters of the Chianti Military League, and then to **Castello di Brolio** where Bettino Ricasoli devised the "recipe" for Chianti wine.

### PISA

Pisa is famous worldwide for its "**Torre Pendente**" (Leaning Tower), but its wonderful square, **Piazza dei Miracoli**, set over an ample greenfield, hosts three other whiter-than-white masterpieces of exquisite Medieval art: the Cathedral, the Baptistry and the "Camposanto" (Graveyard). They are so unique that their creation originated a new style, "Pisan Romanesque".

This area was chosen to construct the **Duomo of Santa Maria Assunta** strictly for its centrality; founded in 1064, it was intended to celebrate the grandeur of Pisa during the Marine Republic's epoch of power. "The temple of marble white as the snow"; that's how the structure is described on the gravestone of its architect, Buschetto di Giovanni Giudice. Consisting of five naves with its transept divided into three naves, it is surmounted by a splendid dome encircled by a loggia. The Duomo's façade and exterior lateral sections feature elaborate decoration in marble (which can also be seen on its interior), mosaics, and bronze.



In front of the Cathedral stands the **Baptistry**, also in a particular version of the Romanesque style. Initiated in 1152 by Diotisalvi, the Baptistry was finally completed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century; Gothic elements were added then. Of cylindrical form and circled by arcades of columns, this structure in white marble even boasts impressive acoustics.

The **Camposanto** closes the northern end of the complex's piazza. This monumental cemetery, begun in 1278, is bordered by a marble fence and houses a cloister at its centre. Unfortunately, most frescoes that once coloured its walls were destroyed in a fire in 1944 during the battle for Pisa.

Ultimately, the true symbol of Pisa is the **Campanile**, the Leaning Tower, which completes the image of this city. Because of land sinkage beneath it, the Tower stands at a significant incline. Its construction started in 1173, but the Tower was not completed until the second half of the 1300s. In cylindrical form, the blind arcades of its lower part mutate into six floors of loggias, repeating motifs from the Duomo. Inside, a spiral staircase of 294 steps leads to the heights of one of the most famous towers in the world, where the lovely belfry and a spectacular view of the surrounding landscape await.

## FLORENCE

Welcome to Florence, the land of Giotto and Dante!

Despite its international fame and greatness, Florence is also a small city whose history has been interwoven with that of its passionate citizens for more than one thousand years.

In Piazza Duomo, you will be astonished by the **Duomo** with the incredible Brunelleschi's dome, a masterpiece of art and architecture whose building techniques are still covered by a veil of mystery. Beside it, Giotto's Campanile (Belltower) and the Baptistry, one of the oldest buildings in the city, with its famous bronze doors made by



Giambellino and Ghiberti in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Piazza della Signoria, you will walk in the middle of bronze and marble masterpieces by Giambologna and Cellini inside the marvellous **Loggia dei Lanzi**, and will admire the imposing **Palazzo Vecchio**, one of the symbols of Florence and still the seat of government of the city. You may also spare some time to relax, visiting a typical market for shopping, strolling through the city's pedestrian streets, and crossing the oldest bridge in Florence, "**Ponte Vecchio**" (Old Bridge), rich in jewellery shops.

Your itinerary will include **Galleria dell'Accademia**, hosting Michelangelo's David, the most famous sculpture in the world. The

David was uncovered and shown to the Florentines on September 8, 1504, and with its height of 4 meters, the impeccable physical features and the political significance that the iconography of David had taken over the previous century left the Florentines of the time speechless and has done the same ever since with visitors from all over the world. And you will not miss the **Uffizi Gallery**, one of the most famous museums in the world for its extraordinary collections of paintings. Here you will admire works by Botticelli, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Caravaggio and a lot more.

Florence is also the main Italian centre for the production of **high-quality leather goods**. Florentine artisans are so famous that many fashion brands have opened factories in the city or close to it due to their high skill and the continuous inspiration designers take from the town's masterpieces. The area around Piazza Santa Croce, in particular, hosts numerous leather shops and workshops.

Thanks to the tradition of Tuscan tanneries, there is no better place to find **shoes for all tastes** than Florence: from the creations, designed and produced by hand by skilled craftsmen, to the extensive collections available in stores, renewed every season. Above all, Ferragamo (also worth seeing the museum), Gucci and Prada for refinement and elegance. If you prefer a simpler style, many shops across the river Arno specialise in handmade shoes and sandals.

At lunch, you may enjoy "**Panino con Lampredotto**" in a typical Florentine market. At dinner, taste the simple yet unforgettable recipes of the Tuscan tradition, such as "**Crostini**", "**Panzanella**", and "**Peposo**". And remember, Florence is the home of "**Fiorentina**" steak! In case you are a vegetarian, don't worry: Tuscan cuisine offers tasty alternatives like "**Pappa al Pomodoro**" or "**Ribollita**" (read the article in our BLOG to know more about Tuscan Cuisine).

## SIENA AND SAN GIMIGNANO

In Siena, the city of the Palio, you will walk on the famous **Piazza del Campo**, the concave square where horses run twice a year in a dangerous race that symbolizes the city's freedom. On the days of the Palio, the whole town goes crazy; read about it in our [BLOG](#).

Indeed, you will not forget the colour of frontages and roofs, the renowned colour "Sienna", a pigment first produced during the Renaissance, that makes the city lovely and warm. And don't forget to taste the Senese sweets: "*cantucci*" (biscuits with toasted almonds), "*ricciarelli*" (soft biscuits with icing sugar), "*panforte*" (cake with fruit nuts and spices) and "*cavallucci*" (biscuits with honey, walnut, candied fruits and spices). Travellers who love dessert will be delighted!



In the afternoon, you will stroll with your head upwards along the streets of one of the most beautiful cities in Tuscany, San Gimignano, also known as the "Medieval Manhattan", thanks to its old and impressive 14 towers that dominate the town skyline. Originally, the towers were 72, built by patrician families probably to demonstrate their wealth and power. Seven of San Gimignano's towers are around Piazza del Duomo; the tallest one is **Torre Grossa**, 54 meters high, dating back to 1298.

From Siena, you will move to **Monteriggioni**, the famous Senese fortress which guarded the boundary between the Senese Republic and the Florentine "Signoria". A step back to medieval times that will impress you. All around are Chianti vineyards and pasturelands; it's fantastic! The village can only evoke the Middle Ages with its 13<sup>th</sup>-century walls and 14 quadrilateral towers. Towers that Dante compared to the Giants of Hell, in the time when this fortified site was an outpost of the Senese against the Florentines, passing several times from one to the other.

## SAN GALGANO

On the way to Val d'Orcia, we will take a diversion to one of the most fascinating spots in Tuscany. Here we are in **Chiusdino**, to visit the famous Abbey of San Galgano. What a stunning place! Dating back to 1218, the Abbey was



considerably wealthy until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, so much as to be disputed between the Papacy and the Republic of Siena. Unfortunately, a remarkable decline followed so much splendour: local people used it as a warehouse of building materials, even selling the roof of lead to make ammunition and transforming it into what we see today. For those who see it for the first time, it is awe-inspiring due to its isolation and the absence of a roof. Finding yourself inside a church and having the sky as a cover is not usual, and when the evening comes, the stars offer a fantastic show. But why did the Cistercians Monks decide to build such an imposing complex in that secluded valley? The answer is simple. Very close to it, a church, the hermitage of Montesiepi, whose first nucleus is

due to the same saint (and his direct followers), already existed. In its Chapel, also called "Rotonda" because of the circular shape of the central structure, an old iron sword is encased in stone, a clear reference to the legend of Excalibur, the mythic sword of King Arthur!

## VOLTERRA

Not far from San Gimignano is Volterra, Tuscany's oldest continuously-inhabited town, with settlements documented since 1,500 B.C. It's, therefore, an excellent way to know not only about Volterra's history but also about Tuscany as a whole.

We will visit **Piazza dei Priori**, the main square, the centre of civic power since the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and Porta all'Arco, the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Etruscan gate to the city walls, its 12<sup>th</sup>-century **Cathedral** and the ruins of the **Roman Theater** (40 B.C.) and **Roman Baths** (3rd century AD). Volterra is famous for its alabaster; here, you will find beautiful shops selling artefacts and unique handmade pieces carved into this semi-transparent stone.



## VAL D'ORCIA

Val d'Orcia is one of the most fascinating places in Italy, included by UNESCO in the list of World Heritage Sites. Its landscape is a part of the agricultural hinterland of Siena, redrawn and developed when it was integrated into the city-state's territory in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries to reflect an idealized model of good governance and create an aesthetically pleasing picture. The landscape's distinctive aesthetics, flat chalk plains with almost conical hills and fortified settlements on top, inspired many artists. Their images have come to exemplify the beauty of well-managed Renaissance agricultural landscapes.



Your first stop will be in **Pienza**, "Pio's town": here, Pope Pius II decided to build the perfect palazzo for his papal court according to the project of an "Ideal City" drawn up by artists such as Piero della Francesca. From the loggia of the Palace, you will enjoy a breath-taking panorama of the valley. Pienza is also the area of the typical "*Pecorino di fossa*" cheese, an absolute delight to the palate!

In **Montepulciano**, our friend Francesca will lead you to discover this beautiful town full of stories, legends and thousand flavours, introducing you to the excellent products of this unique land: *olive oil, pecorino cheese and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano.*

Then, you will get to **Montalcino**, one of the prettiest hill towns in Tuscany. Around the village, rows of olive trees, precious grapevines and yellow fields create an enchanting landscape. Here you may visit a *Brunello* winery to taste the most famous *Supertuscan* wine, probably the best Italian red!

Then, you will stop in **Bagno Vignoni**, a tiny and charming village where the main square is a pool 49 meters long and 29 wide. Several hot springs, whose therapeutic qualities have been renowned since antiquity, bubble up from its bottom! All this creates a pleasant sensation; leaving will be hard!

## AREZZO

In the Middle Ages, Arezzo was a free municipality in which the Ghibelline part prevailed, and it lived in historical opposition with the not-too-distant Florence. The frescoes by Piero della Francesca in the **Duomo** alone are worth visiting the city. But once you have arrived, how not to be amazed in the heart of the medieval village, which elegantly recounts the great seasons of Aretine art and architecture. Next to the medieval towers stands the imposing **Loggia del Vasari** (for some general rehearsal and model of the one then realized by the Aretine artist for the Uffizi), then the Palazzo della Fraternita dei Laici, a synthesis of Gothic and Renaissance architecture, then the apse of the Pieve di Santa Maria. If you enter the Basilica of San Domenico, remember a painted cross of Cimabue.

Arezzo became internationally famous as the backdrop to a widely acclaimed movie when some of the most beautiful corners of the city's monumental centre formed the setting for scenes in Roberto Benigni's film "Life is Beautiful", three-time Oscar winner in 1999. You will also visit the Basilica of Saint Francis, where Piero della Francesca painted one of the most remarkable Renaissance frescoes, "The Legend of the true Cross".

Piazza Grande becomes the scene of the Giostra del Saracino, a knightly tournament of medieval origins, during the penultimate Saturday in June or the first Sunday in September. On every month's first weekend, the Antique Fair takes place, a vast market of often surprising objects. Here you will need to arm with patience and practice the fine discipline of the negotiation: bargaining the price is an art for the "bancherellai" of Arezzo, and it is necessary to adapt.

North of the city, we find the marvellous National Park of the Casentino Forests. Here you will ride up towards the mountain on an ancient forest road, where you will meet the shepherd and his sheep: you will discover how sheep cheese is made and have a tasty treat. Continuing our journey through the forest, you will arrive at the monastery of Camaldoli: for thousands of years, the monks have lived here in symbiosis with nature, finding peace and inspiration: it will also be an opportunity for you to stop for lunch in the peaceful surroundings. You will see the cells where the monks still retire to their prayers. A long and exciting descent will take you back to the valley, with wonderful views of the Casentino forests.

The tour is over, but the memories of a fantastic journey will accompany you for a lifetime!

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