



The Terra di Siena self-guided tour (Tuscany)

Introduction:

This is the Tuscany that you always have dreamt of. We will walk in the rolling hills very often portrayed in renaissance paintings and filmed in today's movies, a landscape with a deep blue sky, golden ochre and lush greens. From the famous vineyards of VINO NOBILE and Brunello to walled medieval and renaissance boroughs, visiting superb churches and abbeys with comfortable accommodations and typical restaurants and locandas.

Tour highlights:

- Montepulciano: a medieval walled town built on a limestone ridge. Renaissance style Palazzi and Churches. The Tower in the renaissance Palazzo Comunale, for instance, offers glimpses of the Sibillini Mountains and the Cimone, and even the Gran Sasso d'Italia in Abruzzo on an exceptionally clear day. It is called also the port to the Chianti wine district.
- Pienza: Pienza is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 1459 Pope Pius II (also a humanist philosopher) decided to rebuild his hometown (Corsignano) employing the Rossellino (architect) to build a model Renaissance town: "Pienza" (from Pius).
- S. Quirico d'Orcia: nice little medieval town in the Via Francigena (pilgrim route).
- Bagno Vignoni: roman and Renaissance thermal baths; thirty-six springs rise from 100 m below ground at a temperature of 50°C.
- Abbey of St. Antimo: the beautiful church abbey founded by Charlemagne in 781 that has inspired many poets and painters.
- Montalcino: Medieval hilltop town famous for its Fortezza, the Brunello red wine and the honey
- Monastery of Monte Oliveto Maggiore: founded in the 1313 by a sienese nobleman, benedictine monastery with outstanding frescoes by Sodoma, Signorelli and wood carvings by Fra' Giovanni da Verona

- Buonconvento: small medieval village on the via Cassia
- Siena: the best preserved medieval city in Europe, "the Medieval Pompeii" a true masterpiece of art and architecture with its gothic duomo, the museums and famous buildings and the shell shape square "Il Campo" the scene of the holy (because dedicated to the Virgin), and mad bareback horserace "The Palio".

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival at Rome, Florence or Perugia airports. Train to Chiusi Station (Chiusi is a stop on all train routes between Rome and Florence, about one hour from each). We highly advice you fly to Rome – there are airport shuttle buses leading to Termini Train Station in Rome. From there you can take the train to Chiusi-Chianciano Terme (train ticket is appr. 16 Euro/pax). Make sure you take a fast train between Florence and Rome that stops in Chiusi. There are trains almost every hour (for detailed schedule please visit <http://www.trenitalia.com/en/index.html>). One way to insure that you'll get a seat is to get a ticket and a reservation. The ticket is good for any train going from Rome to Chiusi that day, however the reservation will reserve you a specific seat in a specific wagon. You have to validate your ticket before boarding the train on the platform. It's basically a machine that will stamp your ticket with the date & time. Arrival in Chiusi and transport on your own by taxi or bus to Montepulciano, 20 km drive – bus ticket 6-7 Euro/pax; taxi – 40-50 Euro/car. In Montepulciano you will be met by our local representative who will give you detailed introduction on how the tour will be like, he/she will give you also all the route notes and maps necessary for the walk, with useful contacts (like taxi drivers' phone number, recommended restaurants and sites) she/he

will have also extra maps on sale and walking poles (to be rented or sold). Every day in the late morning a driver will take care of your luggage and deliver it to the next inn. The trip generally runs between 150 and 600 m a.s.l.
/dinner/

Day 2: Montepulciano – Pienza (15 km; uphill/downhill walk 150/200 m)
This hike is interesting for its varied and green landscape. From Montepulciano to Monticchiello you will pass through small plot of land with olive groves, vineyards, some walnut and fig tree, the typical Mediterranean woods, with holm oaks-the evergreen oak- (Quercus ilex), heather and broom. Just 500 m away from Montepulciano town walls you will pass in front of the San Biagio Temple, a beautiful example of Renaissance architecture made of travertine stone by Antonio da Sangallo the elder. From Monticchiello to Pienza the landscape is more contoured by agriculture, you are now in a balcony on Val d'Orcia the valley of the beautiful rolling hills, here you will have a lot of durum wheat fields, with once a while the dark green pinnacles of the cypress. Pienza is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. * Always bring with you a bottle of water and a hat, the climbs to Monticchiello and Pienza are exposed to the sun.
/breakfast/

Day 3: Pienza – Bagno Vignoni (14 km; uphill/downhill walk 220/200 m)
The beauty of this unique landscape has been quite often portrayed by Hollywood movies. Here you have the typical Tuscany landscapes with lines of cypress and hilltop country houses. The road descends first from Pienza (491 m), and

then, about 1 km away from Pienza, climbs to enter San Quirico d'Orcia (409 m), another walled city with an elegant 12th century church and a garden filled with modern statuary. From San Quirico d'Orcia the road leads to the ridge of Vignoni (493 m) and then drops into Bagno Vignoni (306 m) in the Orcia river valley.

* Always bring with you some water and a hat, today's walk is almost all without any shade. You can fill your water bottle again in San Quirico d'Orcia (8.2 km). If it has recently rained the parts from Corsignano to Costilati and from the Rigo river to S. Quirico will be quite muddy. In Bagno Vignoni the Posta Marcucci hotel has an outdoor hot springs bathing pool that can be used by non-residents between 09:00 and 18:00 (swimming cap is mandatory – you can buy it at the pool or take it from your bathroom at the hotel).

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 4: Bagno – Vignoni – S. Antimo (13.8 km; uphill/downhill walk 300/225 m)

This is the hike with most of trees along the way. In fact, you will pass through a holm oak wood that separates Bagno Vignoni to Ripa d'Orcia. The area is quite rich of wild life like wild boar, roe buck dears, foxes, badgers. The road first descends to the Orcia River, and follows the river for several hundred meters. Then it climbs up into the forests until it reaches a water fountain. Just a few hundred meters from this point you can see the Ripa d'Orcia Castle. A short detour to the castle can be recommended. About half an hour's walk from the castle the road leads to a great field. On the other end of the field there is an ankle deep river, which can either be crossed by taking your shoes off, or by climbing up to the railroad bridge. It is actually not allowed for pedestrians, but is often used by tourists, and is broad and short enough not to be dangerous. Once on the other side you have to be prepared for several uphill distances, about 1 -2 km altogether. The road is steep, but quite good. A car or a tractor from the nearby farms passes now and then. The last part of the road is downhill, leading directly to the centre of S. Antimo.

* If you choose to cross the river by foot, its ford requires a pair of sandals. The idea of the plastic shoppers on the shoes does not work well. The climb from after the ford is quite steep too and exposed to sun so save some water for this part and wet your hat to keep yourself cooler.

/breakfast/

Day 5: S. Antimo – Montalcino (10 km; uphill/downhill walk 350/115 m)

From the vineyards and olive groves around the Abbey you will move towards the holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) woods that cover the hills between the Abbey and Montalcino. Once on the top of the hills there are some meadows with outstanding view of Val d'Orcia and Mt Amiata (1700 m a.s.l. ex-volcano located S of St. Antimo). The terrain is moderate with mostly uneven dirt roads. Your path starts on the left side of an asphalt road. Cypress trees decorate the path on both sides until it reaches the vineyards. After the vineyards, follow some olive grooves, leading to an oak wood. When you exit the wood, the track becomes more uneven. Yet another olive groove and vineyard follow after the oak wood and then there is a

pond, surrounded by pine trees, just before you reach a mountain ridge. There are no trees on the top of the ridge; there is only a line of bushes (blackberry and wild prune) that goes parallel to the road. From the hilltop, there is a perfect view (on your right) to the sites you have passed these last days: S. Quirico d'Orcia, Pienza and Montepulciano. Further on up the road you will pass by some archeological excavations of remains of a 4th C B.C. Etruscan fortress. After a few kilometers of winding paths passing vegetable gardens and small woods, you reach the beautiful Medieval town of Montalcino.

* There are no reliable facilities on today's route to buy some food, so don't forget to carry your own lunch. The only settlement that you will pass is a group of country houses (Villa a Tolli few km from St. Antimo)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 6: Montalcino – Buonconvento (16 km; uphill/downhill walk 100/300 m)
Today's hike is very varied. The beginning is a nice descent towards the wine area of Montalcino hill. We will pass through some famous local wine estate such as Baricci and Casato Prime Donne. After 5km there will be more meadows for sheep farming, and plots of land for crops like corn, tobacco, wheat and barely. The area is greener than the Val d'Orcia thanks to the river Ombrone, Arbia and water reservoirs. The hike will be all on dirt road (strada Bianca). There are few buildings on the way, a couple of farm houses and a small monastery, which is quite suitable for a short rest, as it is almost halfway. For the last quarter part of the route there are two possibilities: a shortcut (with a couple of km of asphalt road) and a bit longer, but more picturesque road.

* Always bring with you a water and a hat. A bandana that may cover your nostrils (like cowboys) may be useful in dry days if you meet on your way some impolite driver that does not slow down.

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 7: Buonconvento – Monte Oliveto Maggiore – Siena (13.2 km; uphill/downhill walk 200/130 m)

Today's route starts on an asphalt road. After 2 and half km of asphalt and 2 and half km of dirt road the terrain gets quite clayish. In rainy days it will be muddy. The First part of the road is relatively wide, and even a car or a tractor can pass through the woods to a nearby barn and a farm yard. After the barn the road continues over a field until it becomes a narrow path submerging into a large forest area. Before we enter the forest we can see the Monte Oliveto Maggiore Abbey at the distance. After one/two hour's walk through the forest, we reach the Abbey. Our representative will be waiting there for transfer to the beautiful city of Siena where we stay for the last night of this lovely walking trip.

* The meeting time for the transfer should be arranged in advance. This is one of the details, which have to be fixed at the first meeting with our representative. It is advisable to bring a mobile phone, just in case.

/breakfast /

Day 8: In Siena.

Departure on your own. The hotel will usually be situated in the city centre, at a walking distance from the central railway station.

We also recommend that you check for the connections from Siena on the specific date of your departure from Italy. The information is available at www.trenitalia.com (normally there are trains to Rome and Florence every 30 min).

/breakfast/

DETAILED ROAD BOOK AND MAP WILL BE PROVIDED UPON ARRIVAL

Accommodation: You will stay 7 nights at 2-3 star hotels, most of them are family run; they are all centrally located (in the days you are supposed to stay in town). Breakfast is included on all days as well as 4 evening meals as per itinerary.

Extension: Additional nights in Rome or Florence.

Terrain:

Most of the routes will follow minor gravel roads, "strade bianche", and mule tracks (70%) rarely attended by cars and some paths (30%).

Equipment and clothing:

Light trekking shoes. See "General" for the full list with recommended items.

Cuisine:

No doubt one should try the "pici" or "pinci" - a hard wheat homemade kind of pasta traditional of southern Tuscany, that are usually served with aglione (garlic) or with "porcini" mushrooms, the famous ribollita, the tasty Pecorino di Pienza (sheep cheese), the wild boar cooked in various ways... This is a wonderful area for red wine lovers. Here you have the superb "Nobile di Montepulciano" famous since the renaissance and the outstanding "Brunello di Montalcino".

Difficulty grade: B

Best period: May-June; September-October

Weather:

The climate in Tuscany is temperate along the coasts and in the valleys and considerably cooler in the mountains. Spring is pleasantly warm; it may rain occasionally. In the spring you will have fields and gardens that brim with flowers, Summers are hot and quite humid, Autumn is a wonderful moment for a visit with all the beautiful colours of the Tuscan foliage, the new wine and truffles, It rains more in the Autumn, so it might be important to have appropriate rain gear.

Group size: Min. 2 persons

The price includes: luggage transportation on each of the days (except

for day 8); accommodation in 2-3 star hotels with en-suite facilities with mealplan as per itinerary; detailed roadbook and map in English; transfer to Siena on Day 7

The price does not include: flight tickets; tickets for the public transport; alcohol drinks; personal expenses.

GENERAL

TOUR TYPES & GRADES

We provide different varieties of tours as regards to their types and difficulty grades! Whether you will choose individual and group tours with a guide or combined tours with a guide for some part of the trip depends on you. We emphasize on using local experienced guides with knowledge of the local language, culture, history, art, etc. The tours are conducted in the English language. Guides in other languages are available upon request.

Tour types Our tours are divided in different tour types, regardless of being guided or not or if someone travels alone or in a group. We have prepared your vacation so that you can concentrate on new impressions and experiences, awaiting you all the time. Here is a description of the various tours: **IT:**

Individual tours There is no guide on this tour. You travel individually and we are responsible for the hotel overnights and /some/ transfers. Sometimes you will travel together with other people. If you wish a guide can be arranged, if ordered. We take it for granted that you can read maps, provided by us upon arrival.

Difficulty grades To prepare yourself for the best of your vacation we recommend that you start planning it in an advance. Good physical condition is required. In order to achieve it we advise you to start walking, jogging or cycling everyday. Swimming a couple of times a week is also highly recommended. You do not need much to get yourself in shape. And don't forget that the most important tip for an unforgettable active holiday is to choose a trip which corresponds to your physical condition!

B: Moderate Most of you, who are used to walking during a long weekend, will be in condition to cope with a tour of this level. You should be in good health condition and not too bad physical condition. We have successive days of longer and more difficult walking and days of lighter walking. Some parts of the day routes are done at a higher altitude. The paths are in good condition. We walk for 5-7h a day. You are free to skip some walks and have a rest.

Equipment and clothing:

You should always remember that you must try to keep the weight of your clothing equipment down to a minimum. Your packed rucksack should weigh no more than 10-15 kilograms. Recommended items: waterproof rucksack (60 l) & daypack (35 l); walking waterproof boots with suitable ankle support; sandals; light casual shoes for walking and/or for travelling; gaiters; loose, casual trousers for trekking; waterproof trousers; fleece windstopper jacket; windproof, waterproof outer shell garment (breathable if possible!); hat for sun protection; sunglasses with UV protection; sunscreen lotion and lip balm; water bottle; torch

(headlamp); mobile phone; underwear (not cotton); mosquito repellent; trekking sticks.

Vaccination

Immunisation against Hepatitis A is recommended two weeks prior departure.

Money and personal expenses

You will need some extra money to cover drinks, other sightseeing, museums, laundry and souvenirs. National currency in Italy has become the Euro, divided into 100 euro cents. Some small pensioni, trattorie and pizzerie will only accept cash but ATMs are widespread and easy to use. Here are examples of some comparative prices:

- Tea/coffee - 0,5-1 Euro
- Beer - 1,5-2 Euro
- Bottle of water - 1 Euro
- T-shirt - 10 Euro
- Slice of pizza -2-3 Euro

Cell phone coverage

Cellular phone coverage in Italy is excellent. The phone system available in Italy, GSM, offers superior digital audio quality and reception and cellular coverage in Italy is virtually all over the country. There will be some spots where coverage is not available or even the possibility of areas where there are temporary downs but in general, cellular coverage and network availability are not issues.

Electricity

Electricity in Italy is 220 volts, 50 cycles alternating current (AC). For comparison, in the United States it is 110 volts, 60 cycle AC current.

If you plan on using your own 110-volt appliances, you will need a voltage converter, unless your appliance is designed to also work with 220 volts electricity (dual voltage). For example, most laptops and some electric shavers are designed to work both at 110 and 220 volts. Plugging in an appliance that is not designed to run on 220 volts electricity without using voltage converter will most likely kill it.

Brief about Italy

- Geographical coordinates: 42 50 N, 12 50 E
- Area: 301,230 sq km (incl. Sardinia and Sicily)
- Borders: France (Northwest), the Ligurian Sea and the Tyrrhenian Sea (West), the Ionian Sea (South), the Adriatic Sea (East), Slovenia (Northeast), Austria and Switzerland (North).
- Coastline: 7, 600 km
- Elevation extremes: lowest point: Mediterranean Sea 0 m; highest point: Mont Blanc (Monte Bianco) de Courmayeur 4,748 m (a secondary peak of Mont Blanc)
- Land use: arable land: 28.07%; permanent crops: 9.25%; other: 62.68% (1998 est.)
- Population: 57,998,353 (July 2003 est.)
- Religions: predominately Roman Catholic with mature Protestant and Jewish communities and a growing Muslim immigrant community

Weather in Tuscany

Tuscany encompasses many diverse terrains and landscapes and the rules change from

one zone to the next. You can be sure that July and August in Tuscany will be hot, sometimes stiflingly so, thanks to the *afa* and humidity levels that can make Florence and the major cities of Tuscany veritable hothouses.

This situation is supposed to break around the day of *feragosto* in the middle of August, when the first rains are expected and with them a beginning of a decrease in temperature. September can still be very hot with October being a fine month to visit Tuscany - blue skies without the packed cities and the intense heat. But, some like it hot! November sees night-time temperatures really begin to drop, with crisp autumn days to accompany the main olive harvest throughout Tuscany. Winter in Tuscany can be cold and wet but spring always seems to come quickly. March is azalea and camelia time, whilst April and May are *sometimes* very wet months.