



Concise Guide to Places of Interest and Restaurants around Florence and Siena

For further information on properties, please visit our web site on www.tuscan-dreams.com or contact us on +44 (0)1626 360336.

Places are in alphabetical order. Ask us for our separate restaurant list.
Please make sure that you book restaurants in advance and check closing day with restaurant.

PART 1: A QUICK INTRO



Chances are that if you are going to Tuscany for a holiday, you will have heard a little about it through friends, family, TV, newspapers or magazines. What they say is true: it is a most amazing and beautiful region with an extraordinary amount of historic treasures. And the food is great too!

Tuscany is a province of Italy, bordered in the north by the province of Emilia-Romagna (the birth place of the famous Spag-Bol), in the south by the provinces of Lazio (Lazio FC and the region of Rome), Umbria (think Saint Francis of Assisi) and Le Marche (can't think of anything). It has also 200 km of coast off the Mediterranean sea.

It has a very hospitable climate: super hot in the summer (great for sunbathing), warm and pleasant during spring and autumn (ideal for sightseeing) and relatively miserable during winter (umm, yes it does rain quite a bit) unless you are into mushroom picking and boar hunting.

As for the Tuscans and their ways, they are very animated like most Italians – I always feel that I am told off when spoken to - but really charming and hospitable. Speaking foreign languages (English or German) is not a priority for many Tuscans, so arm yourselves with patience and a phrase-book. Ah the joy of holidaying in a foreign country!

What to see:

Tuscany is blessed with a variety of scenery from the rustic mountains of the north to the bare hills dotted with cypresses of the south via the lush hills of the centre (aka Chianti), you will be spoiled for choice. You will come across Roman and Etruscan ruins, medieval villages and renaissance palazzos. Florence, the main town, has also some interesting 19th and 20th Century architecture and artefacts on display. Aside from sightseeing and driving on windy roads, many other holiday pursuits have been introduced during the tourist revolution that has swept Tuscany over the last 10 years. Here are a few of them: Winery visits, Mountain biking, Rambling, Horse-riding, Cooking courses, Golfing, Tennis

You are bound to find some of these nearby your accommodation!

There are a few ways you can find out about Tuscany:

1. Ask your friends and family for tips. They might have visited Tuscany and have a few good things to recommend.
2. Ask Tuscan Dreams: Erica and Nicoletta are native Tuscans and they might let you know on the secret stream or the long forgotten ruins of a 15th century church...
3. Buy a good guide book: Green Michelin Guide for hardcore sightseeing or the Lonely Planet for general info are two of many.
4. 9 times out of 10, there will be an information booklet at the accommodation with restaurants names, days of markets, local horse riding school, etc.
5. Ask for information to the owner or manager of the property. Don't be shy!

There are truly so many areas to explore that it is would be foolish of us to try and give you an exhaustive list.



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PART 2: PLACES OF INTEREST AND RESTAURANTS



BAGNO VIGNONI, a few minutes away from San Quirico you will find this very old, renowned spa, with 36 springs welling up from deeper than 1000 m. underground. At the centre of the village are the old pool and the hotel with a swimming-pool open to the public.

Restaurants: Osteria del Leone tel. 0577.887300



BUONCONVENTO Enclosed within the walls erected by the Sienese in 1300, this village already had a rich trade in ancient times, but was also the victim of many raids. The emperor Henry VII died there in 1313 after having conquered it. The main tourism attraction there – apart from the typical gastronomic delights such as the Val d’Arbia DOC white wine and vinsanto and the white truffles from the Crete (Clay Hills) – is the important Sacred Art Museum, which houses works from the local churches.

Restaurants: Ristorante Mario tel. 0577-806157



CASOLE D’ELSA, has always formed a bulwark for the Sienese in a border area strenuously defended against the people of Volterra and Florence because of its strategic position in the upper Elsa Valley, and it still has the air of a final outpost. Romantic traces of fortifications emerge in several places, and of the 14th century noble houses once belonging to the old feudal lords of Casole, the Porrina family, who were later ousted by the Sienese. The main sights to see are the splendid Collegiata Church of Santa Maria Assunta, the Palazzo Pretorio (City Hall), and the great Fortress dating back to 1352 and now housing the town hall. In the vicinity are the fortified villages of Mensano, once a mighty castle, destroyed by the Florintines in 1532, with the fine 11th century Parish Church of San Giovanni, and Pievescola, with the fine Romanesque church with a nave and two aisles.

Restaurants: Ristorante Gemini tel. 0577.948622



CHIANTI REGION A truly unending source of culture, humanity, scenery, architecture, tourist attractions, gastronomy and wines, the Sienese part of its territory contains the “historical” communes of this land: Radda, Gaiole and Castellina (the old Chianti League) and Castelnuovo Berardenga, too. Here lie the lines of defence of the two Republics, Siena and Florence, which have scowled at each other through its woods and vineyards for centuries. We advise you to visit the castles in this area, especially Brolio, belonging to Barone Ricasoli.

The Florentine Chianti has numerous other small charming villages to visit such as Panzano, Greve, Impruneta and San Casciano. An interesting way to visit the Chianti is by taking the the old windy road that goes from Florence to Siena called Via Chiantigiana (S222).

Restaurants: La Bottega del 30 tel. 0577.359226 Loc. Villa a Sesta, Da Antonio tel. 0577.355321 (fish speciality) Loc. Castelnuovo Berardenga, La Taverna del Chianti tel. 0577.322532, Loc. Vagliagli., La Taverna del Guerrino tel. 055 853106 (Montefioralle – Greve in Chianti), Ristorante Carloni (Gaiole in Chianti), La Cantinetta di Rignana (on the road from Panzano to San Casciano) tel 055 852601, La Loggettina (Impruneta) tel 055 2011931, Il Caminetto del Chianti (on Via Chiantigiana between Strada and Greve) tel 055 8588909.



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COLLE DI VAL D'ELSA. Spread over three gradients (Il Borgo, Il Castello, Il Piano), Colle is famous today for its fine handcrafted crystal, but is also an important tourist destination, combining typically mediaeval corners with a purely Renaissance expression. The most important sights are the Town Hall, Palazzo Usimbardi, Palazzo Boninsegna, Palazzo Campagna, the Cathedral, the Bishop's Palace, which houses the Sacred Art Museum, and the picturesque Via delle Volte, the most characteristic corner of the town. From the bulwarks you can look over lower Colle and surroundings hills. The most modern construction in the town is the seat of Monte dei Paschi di Siena Bank, designed by Giovanni Michelucci and completed in 1983.

Restaurants: Arnolfo tel. 0577.920549, L'Antica Trattoria tel. 0577.923747, La Vecchia Cartiera tel. 0577.924116.



FLORENCE: With a population of about 500.000, Florence is a bustling city combining the richness of its medieval and renaissance heritage with the modern life. Score of churches, museums and historical palazzos exist side by side with luxury- good shops (Gucci, Prada etc), mad moped drivers and funky cocktail bars. Beware of bus load of tourists during the summer though!

This magnificent town has a never ending list of places of interest. We suggest you buy a guide of Tuscany with all references to the cultural sites. Even if you are there just for the day, make sure you visit the Duomo, Piazza Signoria, Ponte Vecchio, Uffizi Gallery and Piazza Santa Croce.

Again there are so many good restaurants. Just to name a few: Il Cibreo 055 234 1100, Trattoria 4 Leoni 055 218562, Trattoria Zà Zà 055 218562, Beccofino 055 29007, Osteria de' Benci 055 217134



GROSSETO REGION –SEA SIDE has also very much to offer. Here are just few suggestions: Massa Marittima (one of the oldest fortified towns around Grosseto), the Etruscan and Roman ruins in Roselle, the necropolises of Vetulonia, Sovana and Sorano, the old city centre of Grosseto, Castiglione della Pescaia with its castle and beaches. For those who wish to spend a relaxing day at the seaside, we also recommend Punta Ala, Le Rocchette and Marina di Alberese. The latter is part of the Uccellina Nature Park, where you can make excursions on foot or on horseback. Further south, you could visit Ansedonia, Capalbio and Orbetello, as well as Monte Argentario with Porto Santo Stefano and Porto Ercole.



MONTE OLIVETO MAGGIORE (ABBAY), situated on a lonely, wooded hill overlooking the Crete. It was the first abbey of the Olivetan Congregation of the Benedictine Order and certainly finer than all those which came later.

It was founded by Bernardo Tolomei, a member of one of the most important Sienese families, in 1313. Its founding was approved in 1319 by the bishop of Arezzo and it was included in the Benedictine Order. Building began in 1320. Pope Clement VI confirmed the Olivetan Congregation in 1244. The Abbey is still the normal residence of the General Abbot of the Benedictine Congregation of Mount Olivet. The church was built in the 1400s and renovated inside after 1772. In Gothic style, it contains inlaid choir stalls by Giovanni di Verona and a lectern by Raffaello da Brescia. There are some fine frescoes in the cloister by Signorelli and Sodoma in early 16th century. The tower at the entrance to the grounds houses a good restaurant/coffee bar with a terrace garden.

Restaurants: La Torre tel 0577.707022.





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MONTALCINO, is well known for its Brunello wine, honey and biscuits called “dead man’s bones”. From the height of its 567 m. the town dominates the surrounding countryside, clinging to the slopes of a hill crowned by the imposing 14th century fortress, which houses the stock of vintage wines. The sights worth seeing are the fine Town Hall, the Bishop’s Palace, the ancient crucifix of St. Antimo, dating back to the middle of the 12th century, and the churches of Sant’Agostino, Sant’Egidio and San Francesco, all built between the 12th and 14th century.

There are many castles on the Montalcino lands: the one most worthy of mention is Poggio alle Mura, of Longobard origin. The most popular of the various folk-events taking place in Montalcino, is the Sagra del Tordo (Thrush Festival) in October.

Restaurants: Il Grappolo Blu tel. 0577.847150, La Cucina di Edgardo tel. 0577.848232, Poggio Antico tel. 0577.849200, La Taverna dei Barbi tel. 0577.849357.



MONTEPULCIANO You should visit Palazzo Buccelli (with Etruscan and Roman urns on the facade), Porta al Prato, the Fortress, the Civic Museum, the Crociani Art Gallery, Piazza Grande and the palazzi around it, the Cathedral (with fine works of art) the Churches of Sant’Agnese, Santa Maria dei Servi, San Bernardo, San Francesco, Sant’Agostino, the Chiesa delle Grazie, the Sanctuary of the Madonna della Querce and the temple of San Biagio outside. Do not miss the Redi Cellar, a 15th century marvel where the famous “Vino Nobile di Montepulciano”, already known in the 14th century, is aged. The Bravio delle Botti, held in August, is also a folk event not to be missed.

Restaurants: La Grotta tel. 0578.757607, Il Cantuccio tel. 0578.757870



MONTERIGGIONI, easily reached in about 30 minutes along the main Siena-Florence road, from afar appears as a fortress still protected by a perfect circle of walls (mentioned by Dante in 21st Canto of his Inferno), 560 m. long and surmounted by towers enclosing a perfectly preserved village. Inside the castle stands the Romanesque-Gothic Church of Santa Maria, with splendid windows. The characteristic mediaeval festival held there in the first half of July.

Restaurants: Ristorante Il Pozzo tel. 0577.304127.



MURLO, 20 minutes away, a little medieval fortified village worth stopping at for a visit to its Etruscan museum: one of the most interesting in the whole of Tuscany. Murlo has recently become famous also because its inhabitants’ DNA has been shown to contain the genetic heritage of the Etruscans.

Restaurants: Pizzeria dell’Arco tel. 0577.811092, Osteria del Castello.



PIENZA is the town built for Pope Pius II (Enea Silvio Piccolomini). The palaces to visit are Palazzo Piccolomini and its garden with a view of half the province of Siena, the Cathedral and its museum, Palazzo Borgia and the Town Hall. Pienza is also famous for its excellent sheep’s cheese!

Restaurants: Osteria Sette di Vino da Luciano tel. 0578.749092, Ristorante Latte di Luna tel. 0578.748606, Trattoria la cucina di Fiorella tel. 0578.749095.





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RADICOFANI This typical town lies at the foot of a fortress built by Pope Adrian IV. It was the lair from which Ghino di Tacco was wont to set out on his exploits, as Boccaccio narrates in the Decameron. In the town centre rises the Romanesque Church of San Pietro, containing Della Robbia terracottas, and restored after the war. Facing it is the Quattrocento Church of Sant'Agata. Near the built-up area is Palazzo La Posta, a Medicean villa in the Mannerist style where Chateaubriand, Montaigne and Dickens stayed. The original 13th century fortress was rebuilt in 1565 and in 1929: the keep and stretches of the walls still stand. There is a sweeping 360° panorama. In the vicinity we find the Bagni San Filippo spa, the old thermal baths of San Casciano dei Bagni, a village girded by walls with a Renaissance Palazzo Comunale and the Cinquecento Church of the Santissima Concezione which houses a painting by Pomarancio.

Restaurants: La Grotta tel. 0578.55866



RADICONDOLI Until recently it was very well known for its fumaroles. In fact, it was on Radicondoli land that the Travale 222, one of the most powerful fumaroles in the world, was found. It is worth visiting the Collegiate Church and the Pieve Vecchia (Old Parish Church) and admiring the view from the walls. The woods and hills all around hide little mediaeval villages and castles such as Belforte, Montignegnoli, Frosini and the convent of San Francesco. It is nice to stop at the Galleraie spa, where the baths are open in summer, but the attractive coffee bar/restaurant is open all year round.

Restaurants: La Pergola tel. 0577.790717



TERME DI PETRIOLO This is a little spa with hot sulphur water swimming-pool, or a little pool of the same water next to Roman remains and river where you can also swim.



SAN GALGANO The large Cistercian abbey in the Merse Valley began its decline in the 16th century; the illustrious monastery was abandoned and even the lead plate roofing was sold. Today the Abbey is a suggestive stone skeleton with the blue sky for a roof, but it is the most photographed ruin in the whole of Tuscany. On the hilltop close by stands a little chapel next to a modest convent. Inside one can still see the stone with the sword Saint Galgano thrust into it before kneeling in adoration of its hilt in the form of a cross.

Restaurants: Locanca Da Vestro in Monticiano tel. 0577.756618-756466.



SAN GIMIGNANO Famous for its many towers, it is an exceptional example of mediaeval architecture. Even now one can admire 15 of the 72 noble towers originally standing in a milieu of antique noble houses, narrow lanes and squares. One of these, the beautiful Piazza della Cisterna, is undoubtedly the true heart of the town. It is encircled by the Cathedral Square, the Palazzo del Podestà and the Town Hall, which houses the Civic Museum (amongst the paintings hang Lippo Memmi's Majesty and works by Pinturicchio and Filippino Lippi). A magnificent view over the town can be enjoyed from the only surviving tower of the 14th century pentagonal Fortress, demolished by the Medici in 1555.

Restaurants: Da Beppone tel. 0577.943135, Le Terrazze tel. 0577.940328



SANT'ANTIMO, a splendid Romanesque Abbey at about 10 Km from Montalcino.



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Tradition has it founded by Charlemagne in the late 7th century, and it definitely existed in 812. It was powerful Benedictine abbey, which began to war with Siena in 1202.



***SAN QUIRICO D'ORCIA**, 40 minutes away, is one of the least known and best preserved of the old fortified villages in the province of Siena. In fact, the 15th century walls with their 14 turrets are almost intact, carefully enclosing the magnificent 13th century Romanesque Collegiate Church. Leading up to the walls are the Horti Leonini, a large, unusual public park comprising an Italian-style garden and a holm-oak copse.*

Restaurants: Il Vecchio Forno tel. 0577.897380



***SIENA:** The little sister of Florence, Siena is more tranquil and quiet but what a sibling to have. Home to the first even bank, Siena has its own historical heritage and atmosphere. It is mainly pedestrianised so just wonder through the streets and let yourself be charmed by its cobbled streets and medieval palazzos. Beware of The Palio, the mad horse race on the main square, attracting absolute hordes of visitors twice during the summer.*

Major attractions: the Palio (horse race on 2nd July and 16th August held in Piazza del Campo), Piazza del Campo (main square) and Palazzo Comunale, the Duomo, the Pinacoteca Nazionale.

Restaurants: Trattoria Le Logge, via del Porrione tel. 0577.48012, L'Osteria, via dei Rossi tel. 0577.287592, Taverna di Cecco, via Cecco Angiolieri tel. 0577.288518, Ristorante Da Guido, Vicolo Pier Pettinaio tel. 0577.280042.





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PART 4 : SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

There are many, many other places to go and visit. A good suggestion is to plan a little itinerary. Done at a leisurely pace, maybe over the course of a few days, it should satisfy anyone in the family:



Itinerary 1: Siena & Le Crete Region ****

Route: Siena, Asciano, Trequanda, Pienza, Sant Antimo, Montalcino, Buonconvento, Murlo, M. Oliveto Maggiore

This itinerary will take you through the most breathtaking and often photographed area of Tuscany. You will recognise this “no where else seen” landscape, so often featured in calendars. The countryside is made of pale clay hillside, wheat fields and gentle hills dotted with occasional but monumental farmhouses and crowned by rows of cypresses. Here and there, you will come across sleepy little towns and villages either renowned for their wine, or their Etruscan Museum or simply the nearby Gothic abbey. Not to be missed!



Itinerary 2: Chianti – Wine region***

Florence, Strada in Chianti, Greve in Chianti, Panzano, Castellina in Chianti, Tavernelle, San Casciano in Val di Pesa, Montespertoli.

This is a rather big itinerary comprising the whole of the Chianti. You will find this area very green and hilly. You will be able to glimpse at medieval castles standing proud on top of the hills. The roads are often windy and you might end up feeling a little dizzy. It is a small price to pay to visit this enchanting region so famous for its wine. You will find plenty of wine coop or farms (“Azienda Agricola” or “Fattoria”) selling wine directly to the public by those windy roads. Or simply stop in Castellina or San Casciano in Val di Pesa for a gentle stroll in the village and a quick visit to the local wine shop.

Note: The Italians, and particularly the Tuscans, have done a lot over the last 15 years to market and improve the quality of their wines. So generally, what you can buy in wine shops, at the Fattoria or in the local Supermercato, is of very good standard and good price compared to what you get at home. However, don’t be fooled you might also come across some plonk so do your research and tasting before you buy a whole case to bring home!



Itinerary 3: Monteriggioni, San Gimignano and Volterra *****

North west of Siena, you will find this tiny but precious village of Monteriggioni, a perfectly preserved medieval village. Just magnificent! There are two great restaurants there that are worth a try. A little further west is San Gimignano or San Gimignano as it is known now. The village might have lost a little of its charm due to the many visitors in bus loads but like many gems of this world, it is the price to pay to be so famous. And finally, a little further west again, you will come across Volterra, which at a first glance might look a little grim but its old medieval centre is definitely worth a look.





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Itinerary 4: Coast: Grosseto Region / South of Livorno and Maremma/ ***

Again this is a long itinerary but we wanted to mention some areas by the coast – and it is quite a fair bit!

South of Livorno: For nice little beaches (no sand) and nice clear blue sea, go to Castiglioncello or Marina di Cecina. Those places are only 1 h 30 minutes from Florence so it is quite easy reach. Worth a visit if you fancy a day on the beach.

Maremma: A less known area of Tuscany, the Maremma is a great place for nature lovers, bird watchers or horse riding enthusiasts. Visit nature reserves of the Monti dell' Uccellina, Burano or Orbetello or enjoy the resort towns around Punta Ala and Castiglion della Pescaia.



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PART 5: USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS



USEFUL NUMBERS	SOS	113	
	Fire Brigade		115
	Carabinieri Siena	112	
	Road Police		0577.47047
	Road Assistance ACI	116	
	Emergency Doctor		118
	Ambulance		118
MASS	Sant' Antimo Abbey (10 Km from Montalcino), Mass with Gregorian chants.		
	Monte Oliveto Maggiore Abbey tel. 0577.707106.		
MARKETS	Siena every Wednesday from 7.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. Poggibonsi every Tuesday, from 7.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. Colle Val d'Elsa every Friday from 7.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. Buonconvento, every Saturday from 7.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. Florence – San Lorenzo Market –every day morning and afternoon except Sundays.		
ANTIQUE MARKETS	Siena, the third Sunday of every month. Arezzo, the first Saturday and Sunday of every month.		

