All you've got to do is decide to go and the hardest part is over. So go!
TONY WHEELER, COFOUNDER – LONELY PLANET
Modern standard Italian began to develop in the 13th and 14th centuries, predominantly through the works of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio – all Tuscans – who wrote chiefly in the Florentine dialect. The language drew on its Latin heritage and many dialects to develop into the standard Italian of today. Although many dialects are spoken in everyday conversation in Italy, standard Italian is understood throughout the country. Despite the Florentine roots of standard Italian – and the fact that standard Italian is widely used in Florence and Tuscany – anyone who has come Italian will notice the peculiarities of the accent. In Florence, as in other Tuscan cities, you are bound to hear a heavy ‘h’. For people familiar to you or you can use the informal form of speech, in Italian, all nouns and their articles il/la (the) a (a) that go with the noun can be either masculine or feminine. Where necessary, separate genders are indicated with ‘pol/la’.

Goodbye.

Yes./No
Look out for these icons:

- **TOP CHOICE** Our author's recommendation
- A green or sustainable option
- **FREE** No payment required
See the Index for a full list of destinations covered in this book.

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Top Experiences

**Florence**
Visit a Renaissance time capsule (p56)

**Garfagnana**
Enjoy solitary hikes and rustic cuisine (p150)

**Apuane Alps**
Hike wildflower-adorned marble mountains (p150)

**Lucca**
Pedal or promenade atop medieval walls (p136)

**Piazza dei Miracoli, Pisa**
Discover a field of architectural miracles (p126)
Florence anchors any ‘best of’ tour. You’ll need at least three days to do this magnificent city justice – any less and you’ll be selling both it and yourself short. Spend one day visiting the Uffizi, another wandering through the San Marco and San Lorenzo neighbourhoods, and the third crossing the Arno to explore the artisan’s neighbourhood of Oltrarno. After having eaten, drunk, shopped and seen more Renaissance masterpieces than you would previously have thought possible, it’s time to slow down the pace and move on to the enchanting walled city of Lucca for two days. Hire a bike and use pedal power for a leisurely exploration of its cobbled city streets and villa-studded surrounding countryside. On day six, pop into Pisa to scale its Leaning Tower, leaving after lunch to arrive at a Tuscan farmhouse in Chianti before dusk. Check-in for three nights, visiting wineries, taking a day trip to San Gimignano or Volterra, exploring sculpture gardens and feasting on modern Tuscan food during your stay. On day nine, head to gloriously Gothic Siena, home to museums, cafes and churches that will supply a truly fabulous two-day finale to your trip.
12 Days
The Maremma

To make the most of the great outdoors, head to the region’s south. Start in the little-visited but utterly delightful medieval town of Massa Marittima and spend a couple of days visiting its museums and churches, drinking coffee at the cafes in its magnificent central piazza and sampling Maremman food and wine in its rustic eateries. On day three, explore the Colline Metallifere, trekking through the strange landscape of ‘Le Biancane’ geothermal park at Monterotondo Marittimo or exploring a fascinating pyrite mine at the Parco Minerario Naturalistico Gavorrano.

On day four, visit an archaeological dig, Etruscan tombs and an impressive museum at the ancient settlement of Vetulonia. From here, follow the sea breezes to the island of Elba, where Venus sported in the waves and thousands of Italians follow her example every summer. After spending a few days swimming, cycling and gorging on seafood, continue along the coast to the wild and wonderful Parco Regionale della Maremma to walk, canoe, cycle or horse-ride alongside the famous cowboys known as the butteri.

On day nine, those interested in bird-watching should visit the Riserva Naturale Lago do Burano or the Riserva Naturale Laguna di Orbetello, both operated by the Italian branch of the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), whereas art-lovers should head to the whimsical Giardino dei Tarocchi, a sculpture garden that takes its inspiration from the cards in a tarot pack. End your journey inland amid the stunning surrounds of the Pâese del Tufa (Land of the Tufa), where you can visit Etruscan necropolises, and walk along the enigmatic sunken roads known as vie cave.

Also here are three enchanting and historically intact towns: Pitigliano, where you can visit an historic ghetto that was once home to the largest Jewish community in Italy; Sovana, an atmosphere-rich hamlet with two beautiful Romanesque churches; and Sorano, known for its majestic 11th-century fortress. To make the most of your time here, consider taking the 8km walk from Pitigliano to Sovana, which incorporates stretches of vie cave – a truly unique experience.
12 Days

Into the East

Mix it up a bit by balancing well-known destinations with some intriguing off-the-beaten-track alternatives. Spend three days admiring the Renaissance splendour of Florence before branching out east into the little-visited Casentino region, home to the idyllically isolated Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna. Base yourself around the fortified hill town of Poppi for three days, sampling the area’s rustic and delicious cuisine, visiting the medieval monasteries of Camaldoli and La Verna, following the stretch of our driving tour between the Castello di Romena and Pratovecchio, and walking a few trails in the national park. Next, meander southeast to Sansepolcro, proud possessor of charming medieval churches, great restaurants and a museum showcasing the paintings of Piero della Francesca.

Tear yourself away after two nights and continue to your final destination, the Val di Chiana. Book into a rural retreat and spend a few days eating and drinking your way around the valley. While here, pop into the provincial capital, Arezzo, where locals outnumber tourists by a healthy margin and where churches are the highlight – don’t miss the Cappella Bacci, Pieve di Santa Maria and Cattedrale di San Donato.

A number of nearby medieval hilltop towns are also well worth visiting – Castiglion Fiorentino and Lucignano are extremely pretty, but both pale in comparison with Cortona, which deserves a full-day visit at the very least. Be sure to walk up the steep cobbled streets to its Fortezza Medicea, and also check out the collections at the Museo dell’Accademia Etrusca and the Museo Diocesano.

When your time runs out, head south towards Rome on the A1 autostrada, stopping to visit the stunning cathedral at Orvieto en route to admire Luca Signorelli’s famous fresco cycle of The Last Judgement. Alternatively, head into the neighbouring region of Umbria to visit one of Italy’s most famous pilgrimage centres, Assisi, home to the Basilica di San Francesco where Giotto’s extraordinary frescoes portraying the life of St Francis stun all beholders.
One Week

Pisa & its Provinces

Start your peregrination in **Pisa**, spending two days admiring the marble pulpits in the Baptistry and **duomo**, the paintings and sculpture in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo and the exquisite exterior decoration of the Chiesa di Santa Maria della Spina. Conclude your visit at the Piazza dei Miracoli, home to that famous engineering project gone horribly wrong, the Leaning Tower. On day three, spend the morning paying homage to Italy’s famous Vespa scooter at the Museo Piaggio in **Pontedera** before driving through gently rolling hills covered in olive groves and vineyards to hunt truffles and sleep in style at the gourmet destination of **San Miniato**. From here, head to spectacularly sited **Volterra** in the Val di Cecina, where visits to alabaster ateliers and an extraordinary museum of Etruscan art await. Spend two nights here and then finish your tour in the neighbouring province and city of **Livorno**, home to an atmospheric central market, the delectable seafood stew known as **cacciucco** and the world-famous Sassicaia super Tuscan wine.

One Week

The Heart of Tuscany

Head to the sun-kissed centre of Tuscany to indulge in some of Italy’s best wine, architecture and scenery. Kick off in **Siena**, where you should gravitate towards Gothic glories such as the Museo Civico and Opera della Metropolitana. During your two days here be sure to nibble on the city’s famous sweet biscuits – preferably accompanied by a glass of local Vin Santo – and explore the atmospheric streets and piazzas of the incredibly intact centro storico (historic centre). From Siena, head south through the stunning scenery of **Le Crete** and base yourself at a rural retreat somewhere in the area for four nights. From here, you’ll be able to explore the Val d’Orcia and Val di Chiana, visiting the charming hill towns of **Montepulciano**, **Pienza** and **Montalcino** and sampling the gastronomic products that this part of Tuscany is known for – Chianina beef, **cinta senese** (indigenous Tuscan pig), and Brunello and Vino Nobile wine. In between meals, visit medieval abbeys, take a scenic driving tour and soak in ancient hot springs. End your Sienese sojourn with one night in romantic **San Gimignano**, home to medieval tower houses and golden-hued Vernaccia wine.
Virginia Maxwell

Coordinating Author, Siena & Central Tuscany, Southern Tuscany, Eastern Tuscany

Based in Australia, Virginia spends part of every year in Italy indulging her passions for history, art, architecture, food and wine. As well as having been the coordinating author of the previous edition of this guide, she works on Lonely Planet’s Sicily guidebook and covers other parts of the country for the Western Europe book. Though reticent to choose a favourite Tuscan destination (arguing that they’re all wonderful), she usually nominates Florence if pressed.

Nicola Williams

Florence, Northwestern Tuscany, Central Coast & Elba

Nicola is a British writer, editorial consultant, newbie video journalist and mother-of-three. For over a decade she has lived on the shores of Lake Geneva in France, an easy getaway through the Mont Blanc Tunnel to Italy, where she’s spent years eating her way around and revelling in its extraordinary art and landscape. When she’s not working she skis the Alps, dines fine, hunts truffles... This time around she travelled camera-in-hand to catch the region on film. Nicola has worked on numerous titles for Lonely Planet, including Florence & Tuscany, Milan, Turin & Genoa and Piedmont. She blogs at tripalong.wordpress.com and tweets @Tripalong.

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