



Eastern Tuscany

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Why Go?

There are two good reasons why so many local and international directors have chosen this part of Tuscany as a film location: its scenery offers oh-wow moments galore, and the excellent food, wine and accommodation on offer is the perfect bribe to ensure happy cooperation on a shoot. Up until now, visitor numbers have been largely limited to domestic tourists and these film crews, but we highly recommend that you buck this trend and devote a week or so to exploring here. The rewards are many and varied: spectacular mountain scenery and walks in the Casentino; magnificent art and architecture in the medieval cities of Arezzo, Sansepolcro and Cortona; and Tuscany's best *bistecca alla fiorentina* (chargrilled T-bone steak) in the Val di Chiana. Your travels will be often solitary but always rewarding – a particularly unusual and felicitous combination.

When to Go

Temperatures plummet and many hotels close in this corner of Tuscany over the winter months, so you are best off travelling at other times of the year. Summer is particularly alluring, as the cool Casentino forest offers shady walking tracks, and the historical centres of Arezzo and Cortona stage colourful medieval pageants. Autumn is the pilgrimage season at the important Franciscan sites of Assisi (in neighbouring Umbria) and the Santuario della Verna in the Casentino – book accommodation well in advance if you plan to visit on 4 October, the saint's feast day.

DON'T MISS

Commune with nature or a higher power in the Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna, a national park where two medieval monasteries are located.

Best Museums

» **Museo Civico, Sansepolcro** (p264) Home to three magnificent paintings by Piero della Francesca.

» **Museo Diocesano, Cortona** (p271) Has a small but sensational collection of religious art.

» **Casa Museo di Ivan Bruschi, Arezzo** (p261) Showcases an antique dealer's eclectic personal collection.

Medieval Pageants

» Giostra del Saracino, Arezzo (p262)

» Palio della Ballestra, Sansepolcro (p264)

» Giostra dell'Archidado, Cortona (p273)

Resources

» Casentino: www.casentino.net

» Eventi & Turismo: www.eventiturismo.it, in Italian

» Provincia di Arezzo: www.turismo.provincia.aretzo.it

Itineraries

Lights, Camera, Action In recent years, three major films have been set in this region. Roberto Benigni filmed scenes of *La vita è bella* (Life is Beautiful) in Arezzo and Cortona, Anthony Minghella shot the most memorable scene of *The English Patient* in Arezzo's Cappella Bacci and Audrey Wells shot much of *Under the Tuscan Sun* in Cortona. Both cities well and truly live up to their cinematic selves.

The della Robbia Trail The famous family of sculptors took ceramics way beyond teacups in the 15th century, creating magnificent devotional sculptures for churches throughout the region. Start in the Casentino, where you can visit the Sacro Eremo di Camaldoli and Santuario della Verna, home to works by the most famous member of the family, Andrea. Next, move on to Sansepolcro, where you can admire another of Andrea's pieces in the Museo Civico by day and enjoy a meal at Ristorante Da Ventura or Ristorante Fiorentino at night – both restaurants also offer accommodation.

Val di Chiana Home to apple orchards, olive groves and lush pastures where porcelain-white Chianina cattle graze, this huge valley in the southern section of eastern Tuscany is worth exploring when travelling between Arezzo and Cortona, or from either town to central Tuscany. Base yourself at Villa Fontelunga or Il Borro to the west of Arezzo, and spend your days wandering the cobbled streets and lingering over lunch at towns such as Castiglion Fiorentino, Cortona, Foiano della Chiana and Lucignano.

GETTING AROUND

Arezzo is on the Florence–Rome train line, as is Camucia, a 15-minute shuttle ride from Cortona's historic centre. A regional rail line links Arezzo and the Casentino. Buses in this part of the region are few and far between – you can get from Arezzo to Sansepolcro or Arezzo to Cortona, but that's about it. To explore the Casentino and Val di Chiana, and to take advantage of the region's wonderful rural accommodation options, you'll need a car.

Where to Stay

Most destinations in the region are an easy day trip apart, so we suggest basing yourself at a rural *agriturismo* or villa and exploring by car. If you are travelling by public transport, Arezzo and Cortona are the most convenient bases.

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