

welcome to Florence & Tuscany



Living History

Home to some of the world's most recognisable tourist icons, Tuscany has been enticing visitors ever since the Etruscans arrived here to party and decided to stay. The Romans came to pave roads and stock their grain silos, Christians came to walk the stages of a medieval pilgrimage route, and British aristocrats came to admire art, drink way too much of the local wine and complete their Grand Tour. Once here, these visitors swiftly fell into the local swing of things, partaking of the food and wine with gusto and soaking up the region's rich historical and cultural heritage. You're sure to do the same.

An Artistic Powerhouse

Then there's the art. And oh, what art! The Etruscans indulged their fondness for a classy send-off with exquisite funerary objects that are still being excavated to this day, and the Romans, always partial to puffing up their own importance, left their usual legacy of monumental sculptures. But it was during the medieval and Renaissance periods that Tuscany really hit its artistic stride, with painters, sculptors and architects creating the masterpieces that now entice visitors into churches, museums and galleries across the region. Giotto, Brunelleschi, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Botticelli – these and dozens of equally famous names hailed from Tuscany and left seminal works for us to enjoy.



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Travel writers and tour operators tend to deploy the word 'idyllic' far too often, devaluing it in the process. But here in Tuscany, it really does apply.

(left) Hills of molten gold in the Val d'Orcia (p224)
 (below) Stunning interior of the Museo dell'Opera, Siena (p200)



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Taking It Slowly...and Enjoying Every Minute

It's not all about art and history, though. The local obsession with food and wine trumps every other regional characteristic, and then some. Three of Italy's greatest wines – Brunello di Montalcino and Vernaccia di San Gimignano – are produced here, and gastronomic gems such as *bistecca alla fiorentina* (chargrilled T-bone steak), *cacciucco* (Livornese fish stew) and *pici con ragù di cinghiale* (hand-rolled pasta with wild-boar sauce) are just some of the region's signature dishes. Tour here and you'll develop a true understanding of what Slow Food is, and how truly delectable it can be.

Postcard-Perfect Landscapes

Yes, the scenery really *is* that gorgeous. Central Tuscany is dotted with medieval hilltop fortresses and sculptural stands of cypress trees; the northwest and east harbour boast dramatic mountain ranges and fecund forests; and the central and southern coasts feature a garland of islands floating tantalisingly close to a shoreline teeming with wildlife. The range of outdoor activities on offer is equally diverse, contributing to the region's reputation as a repository of grand-slam sights and experiences unmatched anywhere in the world. Enjoy!

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