



Southern Tuscany

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Why Go?

If you love the great outdoors, southern Tuscany is for you. A landscape dotted with dramatically sited inland hill-towns, biologically diverse coastal plains and craggy mountain ranges stretching to the sea, it offers visitors activities of every description. Here, you can walk, horse-ride and bird-watch to your heart's content, spending your days in the fresh air and your nights relaxing in atmospheric *agriturismi* (farm stay accommodation).

Locals here are fiercely proud of the ancient customs of the Maremma, as the region is commonly called, and history resonates in every city, town and village. Inland, there's a wealth of Etruscan sites, including settlements, necropolises (burial sites) and the enigmatic sunken roads known as *vie cave*. There are also plenty of medieval and Renaissance towns scattered across the hills – exploration of these will inevitably culminate with lunch or dinner at a local eatery serving rustic Maremmese dishes that are perfectly complemented by the region's robust wines.

When to Go

The shoulder seasons (spring and autumn/fall) are the best times to visit. In summer, Romans descend upon the coast en masse, causing traffic to snarl, prices to skyrocket and hotels to overfill. Outdoor activities are best enjoyed outside summer also, as the heat can be oppressive and bushfires are an occasional threat. Birdwatching opportunities are plentiful in the two WWF reserves on the coast from September to April, and the spring season is welcomed with one of Tuscany's most evocative events, Pitigliano's Torciata di San Giuseppe.

Itineraries

Coastal Landscapes The southwest coast is home to three of Tuscany's most important nature reserves: the Parco Regionale della Maremma, the Riserva Naturale WWF Lago di Burano and the Riserva Naturale Laguna di Orbetello. Come here to walk, bicycle, canoe or horse-ride through the wild natural scenery, and consider signing up for a farm experience at Agenzia Regionale Agricola di Alberese in the regional park, where the famous *butteri* (Maremmese cowboys) ride the range.

Etruscan Sites Though the Etruscans have left their mark on towns, cities and landscapes throughout this region, the southeast corner is a particularly rich repository of their heritage. Base yourself in picturesque Pitigliano and then explore the neighbouring settlements of Sorano and Sovana to see Etruscan necropolises and explore the mysterious *vie cave*. After a morning's exploration, head to the Etruscan town of Saturnia for a soak in its hot, sulphurous waters.

Rural Relaxation This part of Tuscany is home to some of the best *agriturismi* in the country. Turn your back on city life and sign up for a week in the country, visiting medieval towns such as Grosseto and Massa Marittima in the morning and exploring *strade del vino e dei sapori* (wine and speciality products routes) in the afternoon. At day's end, head back to relax by the pool or enjoy a late-afternoon *aperitivo* (pre-dinner drinks) on a vineyard-facing terrace before sampling flavourful local dishes over dinner.

GETTING AROUND

You'll need a car to explore this pocket of Tuscany thoroughly – try to veer off the S1 autostrada and explore secondary roads whenever possible. Train travel won't get you far – the *Frecciabianca* stops in Grosseto on its trip between Rome and Genoa and *regionale* (regional) trains servicing that route also stop in Capalbio (for Lago di Burano) and Orbetello-Monte Argentario, but the only other rail link is between Siena and Grosseto. Bus travel is even worse, with limited routes and infrequent services.

Where to Stay

Accommodation options in Grosseto and Massa Marittima leave a lot to be desired, so we highly recommend staying in an *agriturismo* instead – the area between Massa and Vetulonia is rich in alluring farm-stay options. There are also good budget *pensioni* in Pitigliano.

DON'T MISS

The hilltop town of Massa Marittima has one of the most beautiful central piazzas in Italy, adorned with a splendid medieval cathedral, handsome 13th-century *palazzi* and a clutch of atmospheric cafes.

Best Walks

» Pitigliano to Sovana

Incorporating parts of *vie cave* (see the boxed text, p245).

» Le Biancane Park, Monterotondo Marittimo

Through a strange geothermal landscape (see the boxed text, p241).

» Parco Regionale della Maremma Along the beach and through a forest to reach the ruins of a 12th-century tower (p252).

Archaeological Sites

» Vetulonia (p243)

» Parco Archeologico della Città del Tufo (p249)

» Roselle (p251)

Resources

» Maremma Tourism: www.turismoinmaremma.it

» Parco degli Etruschi: www.parcodelglietruschi.it

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