

Understand Florence & Tuscany



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Facts, figures and some cultural and political context to inform the travel experience.

HISTORY 278

Plagues, plotting and patronage – Tuscany's wild and wonderful history is stranger than any fiction.

THE TUSCAN WAY OF LIFE 291

Family, fashion and tradition reign supreme in this privileged pocket of Italy.

THE TUSCAN TABLE 294

Food here is seasonally driven, flavour-charged and best savoured slowly.

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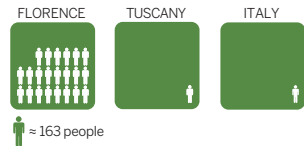
The rundown on books and films – good and bad – that have been set in the region.

ART & ARCHITECTURE 306

Its Gothic glories and Renaissance masterpieces give Tuscany an artistic heritage unmatched anywhere in the world.



population per sq km



Florence & Tuscany Today

Famously Red

Tuscany has been a stronghold of the Italian left ever since rapid industrialisation post-WWII. And regional elections in 2010 proved no exception. Much-loved incumbent Regione Toscana president Claudio Martini (p289) chose not to stand for a third term, only for fellow centre-left candidate Enrico Rossi (b 1958) to storm into office with an easy landslide victory over the centre-right. What made the red Tuscan politician's victory so poignant was the fact that other like-minded, traditionally left regions (such as neighbouring Lazio) fell to Berlusconi's governing centre-right coalition (p289). But famously red Tuscany stood firm.

- » Population: 3.73 million (2010)
- » Area: 22,994 sq km
- » GDP: €106 billion (6.7% of national GDP)
- » Annual inflation: 1.9%
- » Unemployment rate: 6.3%

Tuscany 2.0

Tuscans rapidly warmed to their region's new president, who tweets at @rossipresidente and uses Facebook to chat with them, answer questions and communicate key developments in Tuscany – such as the region-wide switch to digital TV in November 2011; Pisa being hailed as one of Italy's most wi-fi-connected cities; and the opening of the first leg of the controversial, Rome-bound toll motorway that will run from just south of Livorno to Civitavecchia, 206km further south, when complete in 2016.

Green for Go

In a region known for its traditional agriculture, soft rolling green hills and century-old cypress alleys (visited by 47 million tourists in 2010), it is natural that ecofriendly travel should be of increasing importance. In notoriously traffic-clogged Florence, the city's smart young mayor, Matteo Renzi (another big 2.0 guy who cleverly combines all the social media tools with old-fashioned visits to local schools and so on), is considering a London-style scheme limiting the number of cars entering downtown

Tuscan Icons

- » The Vespa scooter
- » Gucci
- » Chianti wine
- » Michelangelo's *David*
- » Renaissance art

Dos & Don'ts

- » Flip-flops and singlets are reserved for the beach.
- » When visiting someone's home, take *dolcetti* (sweet cakes or biscuits) for your host.
- » Splitting the bill is uncouth. The person who invites pays, but close friends often go Dutch.

Out & About

- » Strangers and acquaintances – men or women – shake hands.
- » Friends exchange a peck of a kiss on each cheek.
- » Italians are chic. Make an effort with your presentation and never remove your shoes in public.

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