

Welcome to Florence & Tuscany

With its lyrical landscapes, world-class art and a superb cucina contadina (farmer's kitchen), the Tuscan experience is perfectly in symbiosis with the land.

Postcard-Perfect Landscapes

Tuscany has a timeless familiarity, with its iconic Florentine cathedral dome, gently rolling hills dipped in soft morning mist and sculptural cypress alleys – the whole of this central Italy *regione* is postcard material. Golden wheat fields, silver olive groves and pea-green vineyards marching in sharp terraced rows on hillsides form a graceful prelude to soul-soaring medieval hilltop villages, mountain ranges and fecund forests in the north, and a garland of bijou islands beaded along the coastal south. Get out, explore, hike, bike and ding your bicycle bell, as this rousing postcard-perfect landscape demands.

Sensational Slow Food

No land is more caught up with the fruits of its fertile earth than Tuscany, the gourmet destination for foodies where locals spend an inordinate amount of time thinking, talking and consuming food and wine. Produce sourced locally, seasonally and sustainably is the Holy Trinity and Tuscans share an enormous pride in the quality of their produce and culinary tradition. Tuscan travel is grass-roots: to wineries to taste blockbuster wines like Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano; to a family-run *pastificio tradizionale* where artisans still cut pasta by hand; or on road trips in quest of the best *bistecca alla fiorentina* (chargrilled T-bone steak). *Buon appetito!*

Living History

Ever since the Etruscans dropped by to party and stayed on, Tuscany has seduced. The Romans stocked their grain silos here, Christians walked stages of a medieval pilgrimage route, and Napoleon plundered art (and suffered terribly in exile in a beautiful neoclassical villa with fig trees and sea views on the paradise island of Elba). Florence's historic churches, chapels and monuments were a key stop for British aristocrats on the Grand Tour in the 19th century – and remain so today. And at sundown when the River Arno turns pink, whether you like things old-fashioned simple or so boutique chic you even get to pick your sheets before checking in, know that this achingly handsome city will oblige.

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, 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 struck gold with painters, sculptors and architects creating world-class masterpieces. Squirrelled away and safeguarded today in churches, museums and galleries all over the region, art in Tuscany is truly unmatched.



Why I Love Florence & Tuscany

By Nicola Williams, Author

Tuscany won me over at a *farro* farm in the Garfagnana. We were tucking into dinner when the farmer's wife rushed into the kitchen mid-*secondi* and wildly urged us to join her in the stable to watch a calf being born. Later, when she joyfully declared 'We'll call her Kaya after your daughter!' I was speechless. So my five-year-old now has a cow in Tuscany and I the honour of being privy to yet another intimacy of this diverse, soulful, passionately earth-driven region. This (and its white truffles, Florence, *aperitivi* tradition, Renaissance art, Chianti wine touring and glorious farmhouses) is why I love Tuscany.

For more about our authors, see page 352.