



# Siena & Central Tuscany

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## Why Go?

This swathe of Tuscany has a landscape to fall in love with. Rugged Chianti's bumpy backroads reveal a timeless terrain traced with cypress avenues and criss-crossing vines. In vineyards innovative and ancient you'll hear people talking of wine having a soul; taste it and see if you agree. Verdant western valleys shelter San Gimignano, where 14 medieval towers stretch for the sky. Nearby, Volterra's alleys deliver ancient hill-town atmosphere and 21st-century vampire tales.

Rolling and vine-lined, the gentle Val d'Orcia is dotted with Romanesque abbeys and thermal springs. Pienza presents a unique Renaissance cityscape; blockbuster wine towns Montepulciano and Montalcino wait in the wings. And then there's Siena: rich in spectacular architecture and exquisite art, it's both Gothic time capsule and vibrant city, where good food and drink and taking time for conversations are still cornerstones of everyday life. All in all, it's very easy to love.

## Road Distances (km)

Siena	70			
San Gimignano	112	46		
Volterra	120	50	30	
Greve in Chianti	102	48	33	53
	Montepulciano	Siena	San Gimignano	Volterra

## SIENA

POP 54,100

In Siena the architecture soars, and could well lift your soul. Effectively a giant, open-air museum to the Gothic, its spiritual and secular medieval monuments still sit in harmony, many filled with collections of Sienese art. Add vibrant streets where every third door (literally) opens into a restaurant, *enoteca* or deli, and you're in for a very fine time indeed. This is Italy before the Renaissance, magically transported to the modern day.

### History

Legend tells us Siena was founded by the son of Remus, and the symbol of the wolf feeding the twins Romulus and Remus is as ubiquitous in Siena as it is in Rome. In reality the city was probably of Etruscan origin, although it didn't begin growing into a proper town until the 1st century BC, when the Romans established a military colony here called Sena Julia.

In the 12th century, Siena's wealth, size and power grew along with its involvement in commerce and trade. Its rivalry with neighbouring Florence grew proportionately, leading to numerous wars during the 13th century between Guelph Florence and Ghibelline Siena. In 1230 Florence besieged Siena and catapulted dung and donkeys over its walls. Siena's revenge came at the Battle of Montaperti in 1260, when it defeated its rival decisively. But victory was short-lived.

Only 10 years later, the Tuscan Ghibellines were defeated by Charles of Anjou and Siena was forced to ally with Florence, the chief town of the Tuscan Guelph League.

In the ensuing century, Siena was ruled by the Consiglio dei Nove (Council of Nine), a bourgeois group constantly bickering with the feudal nobles. It enjoyed its greatest prosperity during this time, and the Council commissioned many of the fine buildings in the Sienese-Gothic style that give the city its striking appearance, including lasting monuments such as the *duomo* (cathedral), Palazzo Comunale and Piazza del Campo.

The Sienese school of painting also had its origins at this time and reached its peak in the early 14th century, when artists such as Duccio di Buoninsegna and Ambrogio Lorenzetti were at work.

A plague outbreak in 1348 killed two-thirds of Siena's 100,000 inhabitants, leading to a period of decline that culminated in the city being handed over to Florence's Cosimo I de' Medici, who barred inhabitants from operating banks, thus severely curtailing its power.

But this centuries-long economic downturn was a blessing in disguise, as lack of funds meant that Siena's city centre was subject to very little redevelopment or new construction. In WWII the French took Siena virtually unopposed, sparing it discernible damage. Hence the historic centre's listing on Unesco's World Heritage list as the living embodiment of a medieval city.

### THREE PERFECT DAYS

#### Day 1: Chianti Food & Wine

Prime your palate by touring the ultra-modern [Antinori nel Chianti Classico](#) winery (perhaps lunching at [Rinuccio 1180](#)) before exploring a historic one; try [Badia a Pasignano](#) or [Castello di Verrazzano](#). Next navigate vine-backed backroads to Greve in Chianti to browse the [Antica Macelleria Falorni](#). Motor south to Panzano in Chianti, dining at a [Dario Cecchini](#) eatery, then check into your chosen sleep spot: [Locanda La Capannuccia](#) or [Il Colombaio](#) might appeal.

#### Day 2: Val d'Elsa

Explore Volterra's cobbled streets, admiring artefacts in the [Museo Etrusco Guarnacci](#) and visiting the workshops of alabaster artisans. Lunch might be at [Ristorante Enoteca Del Duca](#) (fine dining) or [L'Incontro](#) (cafe-style). Next, to the perfectly preserved medieval town of San Gimignano for art that balances the gravitas of the old ([Collegiata](#)) with the exhilaration of the new ([Galleria Continua](#)).

#### Day 3: Around Montalcino

At the medieval abbey of [Sant'Antimo](#), you'll hopefully hear the monks chanting during mass. Drive beside sangiovese grape vines for lunch alongside local winemakers at [Il Leccio](#). Next comes Montalcino, home to blockbuster Brunello wines; climb the [Fortezza's battlements](#), taste vintages in its *enoteca*, then stroll to [Osticcio](#) to sample some more.