

Understand Florence & Tuscany

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

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

Florence & Tuscany Today

It is not all fabled romance in this land of super wines and old stone farmsteads lost in cinematic rushes of rolling hills, vineyards and cypress alleys. The Tuscan cart still turns around the same 'go slow' spindle it did three millennia ago – but with bank troubles, diminishing state coffers and modern new regulations to dodge en route.

Best in Print

The Stones of Florence (Mary McCarthy; 1956) A timeless portrait of Florence.

Tuscan Cities (William Dean Howells) Wonderful travel narrative penned by the American consul to Venice in 1883.

The Birth of Venus (Sarah Dunant; 2003) The daughter of a wealthy merchant falls in love with a fresco painter in 15th-century Florence.

The Decameron (Giovanni Boccaccio; 1353) A bawdy masterpiece.

A Tabernacle for the Sun (Linda Proud; 1997) Book One of the Botticelli Trilogy.

Best on Film

Life is Beautiful (Robert Benigni; 1998) Oscar-winning Holocaust comedy set in Arezzo.

A Room with a View (James Ivory; 1985) Exquisitely rendered screen version of EM Forster's 1908 novel.

Tea with Mussolini (Franco Zeffirelli; 1999) Semi-autobiographical film, opening in Florence in 1935.

The English Patient (Anthony Minghella; 1996) Romantic drama starring Arezzo's Cappella Bacci.

A Tough Sell

Tuscany, like every *regione* in Italy and beyond, is feeling the strain of ongoing financial crisis in Europe. With economies floundering for over five years now, it's increasingly tough. In 2013 Tuscans had already been shaken to the core by the near-collapse and subsequent government bail-out of their oldest financial institution, in business since 1472, the Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena. Restructuring and raising capital through a €5 billion share sale 12 months later seemed to right matters at the bank, but late 2014 dealt a new blow to Tuscan morale: Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena failed European regulator stress tests – the largest bank in Europe to do so. In May 2015 the Sienese bank announced it would raise another €3 billion from its shareholders, but with all confidence lost, and promised 8% return on equity by 2018 only, it will clearly be a tough sell.

Chest of Treasures

As state coffers diminish, museums are increasingly unable to afford a full quota of staff; hence opening certain floors or rooms to visitors for limited hours only. Yet milestones have been reached in Tuscany's endless quest to safeguard its treasures, unmatched in Europe. In Prato the Museo di Palazzo Pretorio reopened as one of Italy's smartest museums after 20 years of renovation. And hopes are high for a 2015 opening of the Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci in Prato – a 1980s contemporary art museum expected to dazzle once its much-delayed €9 million renovation job is completed.

In Florence the €65 million 'New Uffizi' refurbishment project continues to move two steps forwards, one step backwards: dozens more rooms on the 1st floor have opened, but the radical exit loggia designed by Japanese architect Arata Isozaki is off the agenda for the foreseeable future (find it pigeonholed on *pala-*