



Florence & Tuscany

POP 1.03 MILLION

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Why Go?

Laden with grand-slam sights and experiences, Tuscany (Toscana in Italian) offers the perfect introduction to Italy's famed *dolce vita*. Despite incessant praise, its beauty and charm defy description. It has extraordinary art and architecture; vibrant festivals; a seasonal cuisine emulated the world over; and never-ending, picture-perfect landscapes of olive groves, vineyards and poplars. There are few places in the world where food, fashion, art and nature intermingle so effortlessly and to such magnificent effect.

Then there is that over-abundance of things to do and see: visit a World Heritage Site in the morning, drive through a national park in the afternoon and bunk down in stylish vineyard accommodation at night. Medieval sculptures, Renaissance paintings and Gothic cathedrals? Check. Spectacular trekking and sensational Slow Food? Yep. Hills laden with vines, ancient olive groves...what more could one possibly desire?

Best Places to Eat

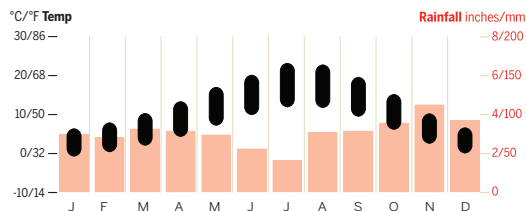
- » Il Santo Bevitore (p484)
- » L'Osteria di Giovanni (p482)
- » Filippo (p508)
- » Osteria di Passignano (p528)
- » Enoteca I Terzi (p521)

Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel L'Orologio (p479)
- » Barbiella Nuova (p508)
- » Tenuta La Chiusa (p515)
- » Campo Regio Relais (p520)

When to Go

Florence



May-Jun Spring, strewn with wildflowers, begs outdoor action be it walking, cycling or horse riding.

Jul It's not as mad-busy as August (avoid) and its music festivals are magnificent.

Sep & Oct Grapes and olives are harvested, porcini mushrooms and chestnuts fill forests.

The Tuscan Table

'To cook like your mother is good; to cook like your grandmother is better', says the Tuscan proverb. And indeed, it is age-old recipes passed between generations that form the backbone of Tuscan cuisine today. Originally cooked up over an open wood fire in *la cucina contadina* (the farmer's kitchen), it is essentially a peasant fare built around beans, bread and other cheap, abundant essentials. The basic premise of Tuscany's so-called *mangiafagioli* (bean eaters): don't waste a crumb. Fresh local seasonal produce is key, fussy execution eschewed, and the result – a stunning feast of gastronomic experiences. Be it by sinking your teeth into a brilliantly blue *bistecca alla fiorentina* (T-bone steak), sampling wafer-thin pig fat marinated in marble vats near Carrara, savouring flavoursome fish stew in Livorno or hunting white truffles in San Miniato, Tuscany is foodie paradise.

LESS-TRODDEN ROADS

Few regions in Italy have so many big hitters as Tuscany – which means crowds. Yet even in top-drawer destinations like Florence, Pisa and Siena, with savvy planning it is still possible to get away from it all along a less-trodden road. In Florence enjoy extraordinary art in lesser-known museums like **Museo del Bargello** (early Michelangelos), **Museo di San Marco** (superb frescoes) and **Chiesa di Orsanmichele** (medieval statuary) or hidden treasures such as Michelangelo's curvaceous staircase and vestibule in the **Biblioteca Laurenziana Medicea**. In Pisa save the Leaning Tower for sunset when the coach loads have gone for the day and indulge in peaceful meanderings along the Arno river, over its bridges and through Pisa's medieval heart – or trade the over-touristed town for unknown **Pietrasanta** with its outstanding contemporary art and dining. Wedged between Siena and the coast, hilltop town **Massa Marittima** is a particular less-tourist-trodden fave, while in busy San Gimignano, a **guided nature walk** in the hills is just the ticket – or what about a peaceful walk to **Abbazia di Sant'Antimo** near Montalcino?

Top Five Wine Tastings

- » Vernaccia in San Gimignano (p528)
- » Brunello in Montalcino (p536)
- » Chianti in guess where (p523)
- » Vino Nobile in Montepulciano (p536)
- » Vin Santo in the company of *cantuccini* (crunchy, almond-studded biscuits), anywhere in the region

CYCLING TUSCANY

Italy's most eminently cycle-able region is not only for pros. Guided tours in Florence (p477) are big, or consider a two-wheeler foray fuelled only by wine around Chianti (p523).

Blogs to Excite

- » Emiko Davies: www.emikodavies.com
- » Tuscan Traveler: <http://tuscantraveler.com>

Advance Planning

- » Book tickets/accommodation for Siena's Palio (p520) one year in advance!
- » Buy tickets for the Uffizi and Leaning Tower 15 days in advance and earlier for the Vasari Corridor (p473).
- » Tuscany's key music festivals – Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (p477) and Settimana Musicale Senese and Estate Musicale Chigiana (p520) – need advance planning; snag tickets early or miss out.
- » Work out which Florence museum pass suits you best (p463) and purchase online.

Resources

- » Regione Toscana (www.turismo.intoscana.it)
- » The Florentine (www.theflorentine.com)
- » Florence Museums (www.firenzemusei.it)