



# Florence & Tuscany

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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*. It truly does have it all: extraordinary art and architecture, magnificent landscapes, vibrant festivals and a seasonally driven cuisine that is emulated the world over. There are few places in the world where food, fashion, art and nature intermingle so effortlessly and to such magnificent effect.

This part of Italy has been value-adding since Etruscan times, so there's plenty to see and do. You can explore a World Heritage site in the morning, visit a vineyard in the afternoon and bunk down in a palatial villa or atmospheric *agriturismo* at night. Renaissance paintings and Gothic cathedrals? Check. Spectacular trekking and sensational Slow Food? Yep. Hills laden with vines and ancient olive groves? More than you can possibly imagine.

## Best Places to Eat

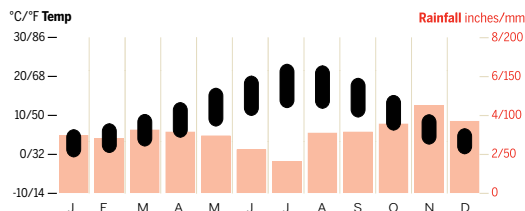
- Il Santo Bevitore (p501)
- iO Osteria Personale (p501)
- Filippo (p521)
- Enoteca I Terzi (p535)

## Best Places to Stay

- Antica Torre di Via de' Tornabuoni 1 (p495)
- Academy Hostel (p495)
- Villa Sassolini (p543)
- La Bandita (p553)

## When to Go

### Florence



**May–Jun** Wild-flower-adorned landscapes beg outdoor action, be it walking, cycling or horse riding.

**Jul** Not as mad-busy as August (avoid) and there are plenty of music festivals.

**Sep–Nov** Grapes and olives are harvested, and forests yield truffles and porcini mushrooms.

## Off the Beaten Track

Though many of Tuscany's monuments and towns are crowded year-round, even in top-drawer destinations it is still possible to follow a less-trodden road. In **Florence**, enjoy extraordinary art in lesser-known museums such as the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi (p486), Museo Marino Marini (p485) and Museo di Orsanmichele (p481). In **Pisa** save the Leaning Tower for sunset, after the coachloads have departed, and spend the day meandering along the Arno River (p509). In **Siena**, relax in the tranquil setting of the Orto de' Pecci (p527) or head to the oft-ignored Pinacoteca (p533), with its outstanding collection of Siennese art.

### ITINERARIES

#### Four days

Base yourself in **Florence** for three nights: spend one day visiting the Uffizi Gallery, another wandering through the San Marco, Santa Maria Novella and San Lorenzo neighbourhoods, and the third crossing the Arno to explore the artisan's neighbourhood of Oltrarno. On your last day, explore outside the city. **Fiesole**, **Siena** and **San Gimignano** are easily accessed by bus, and **Lucca**, **Pisa** and **Arezzo** by train.

#### One week

Three days in **Florence**, two in **Siena** and a final couple of days exploring the countryside will give you a true appreciation of Tuscany's charms. If you have a car, a two-day drive around **Chianti** or through the **Val d'Orcia** and **Val di Chiana** will reap manifold rewards; if using public transport, day trips to **Pisa**, **Lucca**, **San Gimignano** or **Arezzo** are easily achieved.

#### 10 days

This option caters to most interests. After spending three days in **Florence**, move on to **Lucca** for one night, pop into **Pisa** to visit the Piazza dei Miracoli the next morning, and then make your way to **Pietrasanta** or **Volterra**. Spend two nights in your choice of these lesser-known but alluring towns before heading to a beach on **Elba** or to the **Chianti** wine region for two days. End your trip with two nights in gloriously Gothic **Siena**.

### TASTE SENSATIONS

Tuscan cuisine is justly famous. Nosh on delicacies including white truffles from San Miniato, Chianina beef (best sampled in a *bistecca alla fiorentina*), *cinghiale* (local wild boar), porcini mushrooms and chewy *ricciarelli* (almond biscuits).

### Blogs to Excite

- ➔ [www.arttrav.com](http://www.arttrav.com)
- ➔ [www.freyasflorence.com/blog](http://www.freyasflorence.com/blog)
- ➔ <http://tuscantraveler.com>

### Advance Planning

- ➔ Book tickets/accommodation for Siena's Palio one year in advance!
- ➔ Buy tickets for Pisa's Leaning Tower and Florence's Galleria degli Uffizi and Galleria dell'Accademia between 12 and 20 days before your visit.
- ➔ Tuscany's key music festivals – Maggio Musicale Fiorentino in Florence (April to June) Settimana Musicale Senese (July) and Estate Musicale Chigiana in Siena (July and August) – require advance ticket purchase.

## Top Five Wine Tastings

- ➔ Vernaccia (p546) in San Gimignano
- ➔ Brunello (p551) in Montalcino
- ➔ Chianti in...you guessed it (p538)
- ➔ Vino Nobile (p554) in Montepulciano
- ➔ Vin Santo (p538) accompanied by *cantuccini* (crunchy, almond-studded biscuits)

## Resources

- ➔ **Firenze Turismo** ([www.firenzeturismo.it](http://www.firenzeturismo.it))
- ➔ **Terre di Siena** ([www.terresiena.it](http://www.terresiena.it))
- ➔ **Turismo in Toscana** ([www.turismo.intoscana.it](http://www.turismo.intoscana.it))