



Eastern Tuscany

Includes ➔

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Castiglion Fiorentino	281
Cortona	281

Best Places to Eat

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- ➔ Il Cedro (p276)
- ➔ Ristorante Da Muzzicone (p281)
- ➔ Mest Osteria (p270)
- ➔ Beerbone Artburger (p282)
- ➔ Creml (p270)

Best Hidden Gems

- ➔ Santuario della Verna (p277)
- ➔ Museo Michelangeloesco (p280)
- ➔ Sacro Eremo e Monastero di Camaldoli (p280)
- ➔ Museo Madonna del Parto (p275)
- ➔ Il Cedro (p276)
- ➔ Osteria dell'Acquolina (p271)

Why Go?

The eastern edge of Tuscany is beloved by film directors who have immortalised its landscape and medieval hilltop towns in several critically acclaimed and visually splendid films. Yet the region remains bereft of tourist crowds and offers quiet trails for those savvy enough to explore here – or those simply in search of peace, tranquillity and mountains of natural beauty. Attractions are many and varied: spectacular mountain scenery and walks in the Casentino; magnificent art and architecture in the medieval cities of Arezzo, Sansepolcro and Cortona; one of Italy's most significant Catholic pilgrimage sites, Assisi; and Tuscany's best *bistecca alla fiorentina* (chargrilled T-bone steak) in the Val di Chiana. Your travels may be solitary and, for the most part, you'll need your own wheels to get around – but they'll always be rewarding.

Road Distances (km)

Arezzo	94			
Cortona	65	29		
Sansepolcro	76	38	52	
Poppi	132	36	62	71
	Assisi	Arezzo	Cortona	Sansepolcro

AREZZO



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Arezzo may not be a Tuscan centrefold, but those parts of its historic centre that survived merciless WWII bombings are as compelling as any destination in the region – the city's central square is as beautiful as it appears in Roberto Benigni's classic film *La vita è bella* (Life is Beautiful).

Once an important Etruscan trading post, Arezzo was later absorbed into the Roman Empire. A free republic as early as the 10th century, it supported the Ghibelline cause in the violent battles between pope and emperor and was eventually subjugated by Florence in 1384.

Today, the city is known for its churches, museums and fabulously sloping Piazza Grande (p269), across which a huge antiques fair (p270) spills each month. Come dusk, Arentini (locals of Arezzo) spill along the length of shop-clad Corso Italia for the ritual late-afternoon *passeggiata* (stroll).

Sights

 **Cappella Bacci** CHURCH
( 0575 35 27 27; www.pierodellafrancesca.it; Piazza San Francesco; adult/reduced €8/5; ☉ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 5.30pm Sat, 1–5.30pm Sun) This chapel, in the apse of 14th-century **Basilica di San Francesco**, safeguards one of Italian art's

greatest works: Piero della Francesca's fresco cycle of the *Legend of the True Cross*. Painted between 1452 and 1466, it relates the story of the cross on which Christ was crucified. Only 25 people are allowed in every half hour, making advance booking (by telephone or email) essential in high season. The ticket office is down the stairs by the basilica's entrance.

This medieval legend is as entertaining as it is inconceivable. The illustrations follow the story of the tree that Seth plants on the grave of his father, Adam, and from which the True Cross is made. One scene shows the long-lost cross being rediscovered by Helena, mother of the emperor Constantine; behind her, the city of Jerusalem is pictured as a medieval view of Arezzo. Other scenes show the victory of Heraclius over the Persian king Khosrau, who had been accused of stealing the cross; Constantine sleeping in a tent on the eve of his battle with Maxentius (note Piero's masterful depiction of the nocturnal light); and Constantine carrying the cross into battle.

Two of the best-loved scenes depict the meeting of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. In the first half she is kneeling on a bridge over the Siloam River and meeting with the king; she and her attendants are depicted wearing rich Renaissance-style gowns. In the second half, King Solomon's palace seems to be modelled on the designs of notable architect Leon Battista Alberti.

THREE PERFECT DAYS

Day One

Two major films are set in **Arezzo**. Day one, explore the historic streets and piazzas where Roberto Benigni filmed *La vita è bella* (Life is Beautiful). Pop into the **Duomo** (p269) and **Chiesa di Santa Maria della Pieve** (p268); see where Arezzo-born painter, architect and art historian Vasari lived and worked; and pay homage to Piero della Francesca's genius in Basilica di San Francesco's **Cappella Bacci**, where Anthony Minghella shot the most memorable scene of *The English Patient*.

Day Two

Tuscany's most famous family of sculptors, the Della Robbias, took ceramics way beyond teacups in the 15th century, creating magnificent devotional sculptures for churches throughout Tuscany. Devote your second day to visiting the medieval monasteries at **Camaldoli** (p280) and **Santuario della Verna** (p277) in the **Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna** (p277), to admire masterpieces in glazed terracotta by the family's most famous member, Andrea (1435–1525).

Day Three

On day three, dip into **Val di Chiana** (p281), well placed between Arezzo and **Cortona** (p281) and also en route to central Tuscany. Home to apple orchards, olive groves and lush pastures where creamy white Chianina cattle graze, the valley invites off-the-beaten-track meanderings. Explore hilltop town **Castiglion Fiorentino** (p281), allowing time for a meaty lunch stop at **Ristorante Da Muzzicone** (p281).