

# Welcome to Florence & Tuscany

*With its lyrical landscapes, world-class art and a superb cucina contadina (farmer's kitchen), the Tuscan experience is perfectly in symbiosis with the land.*

## Perfect Landscapes

Tuscany has a timeless familiarity, with its iconic Florentine cathedral dome, gently rolling hills dipped in morning mist and sculptural cypress alleys. But then, this *regione* in central Italy is postcard material. Golden wheat fields, silver olive groves and pea-green vineyards marching in terraced rows on hillsides form a graceful prelude to soul-soaring medieval hilltop villages, mountain ranges and fecund forests in the north, and a garland of islands along the coastal south. Get out, explore, hike and ding your bicycle bell, as this rousing landscape demands.

## Sensational Slow Food

No land is more caught up with the fruits of its fertile earth than Tuscany, a gourmet destination whose residents spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about, discussing and consuming food and wine. Local, seasonal and sustainable is the Holy Trinity and Tuscans share enormous pride in the quality of their produce. Tuscan travel is grassroots: to wineries to taste blockbuster wines like Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano; to a family-run *pastificio tradizionale* where artisan pasta is cut by hand; and road trips in quest of the best *bistecca alla fiorentina* (chargrilled T-bone steak). *Buon appetito!*

## Living History

Ever since the Etruscans dropped by to party and stayed, Tuscany has seduced. The Romans stocked their grain silos here, Christians walked stages of a medieval pilgrimage route, and Napoleon plundered art (and suffered terribly in exile in a beautiful neoclassical villa on the paradisiacal island of Elba). Florence's historic churches and monuments were a key stop for British aristocrats on the Grand Tour in the 19th century – and remain so. And at sundown when the River Arno turns pink, whether you like things old-fashioned and simple or boutique chic, know that this handsome city will oblige.

## An Artistic Powerhouse

Then there's the art. And, oh, what art! The Etruscans indulged their fondness for a classy send-off with exquisite funerary objects, and the Romans left their usual legacy of monumental sculptures. But it was during the medieval and Renaissance periods that Tuscany really struck gold, with painters, sculptors and architects creating world-class masterpieces. Squirrelled away and safeguarded today in churches, museums and galleries all over the region, art in Tuscany is truly unmatched. Edgy street art in Florence and countryside sculpture parks bring the art scene right up to the 21st century.



## Why I Love Florence & Tuscany

By Nicola Williams, Writer

Tuscany won me over at a farm in the Garfagnana. We were tucking into dinner when the farmer's wife rushed in mid-*secondi* and urged us to join her in the stable to watch a calf being born. Later, when she joyfully declared 'We'll call her Kaya after your daughter!' I was speechless. So my seven-year-old now has a cow in Tuscany and I the honour of being privy to yet another intimacy of this wildly diverse, soulful, earth-driven region. This (and its truffles, Florence, *aperitivi* tradition, Renaissance art and Chianti wine) is why I love Tuscany.

**For more about our writers, see p352**