



Siena & Central Tuscany

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Why Go?

When people imagine classic Tuscan countryside, they usually conjure up images of central Tuscany. However, there's more to this popular region than gently rolling hills, sun-kissed vineyards and artistically planted avenues of cypress trees. Truth be told, the real gems here are the historic towns and cities, most of which are medieval and Renaissance time capsules magically transported to the modern day.

This privileged pocket of the country has maintained a high tourist profile ever since the Middle Ages, when Christian pilgrims followed the Via Francigena from Canterbury to Rome. Towns on the route catered to the needs of these pilgrims and local economies prospered as a result. Today, not a lot has changed, with tourism being the major industry and travellers being thick on the ground.

Come here for art, for architecture and for gastronomy. But most of all, come here for enchantment – we promise you won't be disappointed.

When to Go

This is a year-round destination, although the landscape south of Siena can get very hot in high summer – make sure your accommodation offers a pool and air-con. In the cities, locals tend to spend summer nights outside, making for atmospheric street scenes but meaning that you should book in advance to dine at an outdoor table. Summer is also when the festival season reaches its peak, with high-profile cultural festivals in Siena, San Gimignano, Volterra and Montalcino. Autumn/fall is when *La Vendemmia* (the grape harvest) is celebrated.

Itineraries

Val d'Elsa Two of the region's most compelling attractions are perched atop hills in this idyllic landscape. Spend your first day wandering the perfectly preserved medieval streets of San Gimignano, following an artistic itinerary that balances the gravitas of the old (Collegiata) with the exhilaration of the new (Galleria Continua). For lunch, enjoy a sandwich at Dal Bertelli, followed by a delectable gelato from Gelateria di Piazza. Overnight and dine at Podere San Lorenzo outside the walled city of Volterra, and devote the next day to exploring Volterran streets and ateliers where artisans have worked for millennia.

Chianti Base yourself at an *agriturismo* (farm stay) for a few nights and spend your days touring vineyards, visiting sculpture parks and sampling modern Tuscan cuisine. Cellular visits will be the highlight of your time here – prime your palate at Le Cantine di Greve in Chianti and then sign up for tours and wine tastings at Castello di Verrazzano, Badia a Passignano, Castello di Ama, Castello di Volpaia or Castello di Brolio.

South from Siena Start in Tuscany's Gothic heartland and then head south to explore the spectacular scenery of Le Crete, the Val di Chiana and the Val d'Orcia. Base yourself at a rural retreat and spend your days exploring the countryside around Montepulciano, Montalcino and Pienza, where the landscape is dotted with majestic medieval abbeys, picturesque fortified hill towns and sybaritic hot springs.

GETTING AROUND

Siena is the region's transport hub, with buses zooming up and down the RA3 *superstrada* (expressway) between it and Florence and also travelling to other major cities in the country. Buses travel between Siena and smaller towns throughout the area as well, although services can be infrequent and connections convoluted. There are few primary train routes, and the only truly useful service is between Siena and Grosseto. Most towns and cities have strictly enforced *Zone a Traffico Limitato* (Limited Traffic Zones; ZTLs) in their historic centres.

Where to Stay

Siena's wide array of B&Bs, *pensioni* and hotels caters to every budget, and most other towns have at least one good midrange option. If you are travelling by car, consider basing yourself at a rural villa or *agriturismo* and exploring the countryside and towns on day trips.

DON'T MISS

You'll need to adopt the same breakneck pace as a Palio entrant to do justice to Siena in one day – its extraordinary art and architecture deserve leisurely investigation.

Best Wine Tastings

- » **Castello di Ama** (p213) Taste-test Chianti Classico and admire a sculpture park.
- » **Ristorante di Poggio Antico** (p226) Tour the high-tech cellars and then linger over award-winning Brunellos and Super Tuscans.
- » **Badia a Passignano** (p208) Visit the historic cellars and vineyards of this Antinori-owned abbey.

Advance Planning

- » Book terrace tickets for Siena's Palio at least a year in advance (p203).
- » Book online if you wish to attend concerts organised by Siena's Accademia Musicale Chigiana (p202).
- » Book ahead if you plan to attend San Gimignano Estate festival (p218).
- » Check the website to time your visit to the Abbazia di Sant'Antimo to coincide with Gregorio chanting (p225).

Resources

- » Terre di Siena: www.terresiena.it
- » Lonely Planet: www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/tuscany, www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/tuscany/siena

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