

Tuscany, Umbria *and* Cinque Terre

Tour Itinerary



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Can there be any place on earth more appealing than the hilly countryside of Tuscany and Umbria or the stunning beauty of the dramatic Cinque Terre? Look closely and you see tiny medieval villages on those hilltops. In among the hills are fascinating ancient cities built by Renaissance geniuses of art and architecture and the princes who exalted them. And if the splendor of artists and perfectly preserved monuments of history are not enough to tempt you, then we dare you to resist the Tuscan, Umbrian and Ligurian gastronomic specialties: exceptional breads, Italy's finest extra-virgin olive oil, a profusion of fresh, seasonable vegetables and herbs, an outstanding range of cured meats and salumi, the freshest seafood from the Tyrrhenian Sea, Chiana beef cooked to perfection over a wood fire, and the finest pecorino cheeses in the country, not to mention Umbria's famous black truffles. And of course to accompany these fine country delicacies you must try some of the region's superlative wines.

We have put together an itinerary that takes in all of the above: the unforgettable art of Florence, Siena, and Perugia; the history of Assisi, San Gimignano, Volterra, Cortona and Pisa; the wines of Chianti, Torgiano, Orvieto, Montalcino, Montefalco, Montepulciano; the enticing magical beauty of Castellina in Chianti, Panicale, Pienza, Spello, Lerici and the Cinque Terre. Every day we will treat your palate to a sumptuous range of savory meals from elegant gourmet to the best home cooked regional specialties. And at night we sleep in palaces and country villas, where you can sip a glass of wine from the terrace looking out over the hills, or go for a stroll to take in the heavenly aromas of a perfect vacation.....



Itinerary

Day 1

We arrive at the Florence airport and spend the day discovering the magnificent art, history and medieval enchantment of Florence. There is no city on earth like Florence, birthplace of the Renaissance. Our Florentine guide takes us to the fabulous Duomo, Campanile and Baptistry, the Piazza della Signoria, the Palazzo Vecchio and the Ponte Vecchio. When your feet are tired, you can relax in a trattoria with a capuccino, a glass of Prosecco, or one of the best gelatos in the world. In the evening we enjoy a sumptuous gourmet Tuscan dinner.



Ponte Vecchio, Florence

Days 2 - 3

Today we head south through the wine country to the region of Montalcino. At a beautiful Montalcino winery we take a tour that ends with a wine-tasting lunch. Then we take a drive through the Tuscan



An Umbrian wine tasting

hills to our home for the next two nights—a dream of an old Umbrian villa, surrounded by hills and vineyards. Our hosts are warm and friendly! Each evening they prepare wonderful multi-course dinners using the freshest local ingredients. The second day our chef

entertains us with a cooking class in the villa's kitchen. Nearby is the Orvieto wine region, where we visit the ancient hilltop town of Orvieto. Our guide shows us the famous Duomo (cathedral) with its unusual green-and-white marble stripes, and then we explore the medieval quarter, its picturesque narrow streets filled with enticing restaurants and boutiques selling the famed Orvieto ceramics.



Fun in the Tuscan cooking class



Marble stripes of Orvieto Cathedral



The salon of our villa in Umbria

Day 4

This morning we visit the beautiful hilltop wine town of Montepulciano, with its winding cobblestone streets lined with tempting wine shops. We sample the excellent local wine, *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*, in an ancient winery whose cellars are underneath a 14th century palace. We pick up some local pecorino cheeses, Tuscan breads, a number of creative antipasti plates and of course the irresistible bruschetta for a gourmet picnic, which we enjoy on the rooftop of our hotel in Spello: a beautiful old palace where we spend the next three nights. Spello is an ancient Umbrian village that is a dream to explore, with Roman arches, medieval streets, and lots of quaint trattorias.

Day 5

Before lunch on our rooftop overlooking the lush hills of Umbria, our local guide takes us on a tour of Umbria's ancient capital Perugia. This is a lively city full of university students, trattorias, shops, and beautiful historic buildings. Later we visit Umbria's



The Umbrian countryside

largest winery and the prestigious wine and olive oil museums of Torgiano. Tonight is a gourmet dinner at a local restaurant.



Roman gate in Spello



Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi

and show us the ancient press still in use. We return to Spello for another wonderful dinner.

Day 6

Today we visit Assisi and the great Basilica di San Francesco and walk through the charming town. After lunch we visit the nearby wine town of Montefalco. This region has recently been acclaimed for both its award winning wines and its olive oil. The "Olive Oil Ladies" tell us their secrets of longevity through their miracle olive oil

Days 7 - 8

Returning to Tuscany, we follow a road winding up through terraces of vines and olives to the hill town of Cortona, celebrated in Frances Mayes' *Under the Tuscan Sun*. After lunch in this delightful medieval town, we drive to the heart of the beautiful Chianti wine region, where we spend the next two nights in a lovely country inn looking out over the

hills. Surrounded by vineyards, our base in Castellina in Chianti is ideal for visiting the wineries that produce the famous Chianti Classico wine. The next day we take a guided walking tour of the ancient city of Siena,



Cathedral in Siena

which is a dazzling maze of medieval streets, churches, shops, and the beautiful Piazza del Campo. Siena's striking cathedral is a marvel. Dating from the 12th Century, its majestic pillars, mosaics, and light and dark marble bands are breathtaking.

After our fill of sight-seeing, we return to the

Chianti hills to visit a local winery and sample their finest. Tonight's dinner is a true gourmet feast.

Days 9-10

Today we head for the fairyland medieval town of San Gimignano. For two days, we explore the ancient streets, mysterious medieval towers, and beautiful squares, monuments and palaces. Enjoy a gourmet dinner the first night. We take a side trip to the fascinating Etruscan hilltop town of Volterra, once a Stone Age settlement, where we see Etruscan ruins dating back thousands of years.



April and the towers of San Gimignano

Day 11

This morning we drive to Pisa to see that magical Leaning Tower and its magnificent cathedral. We continue to the Ligurian coast and check into our lovely hotel on the Mediterranean Sea in Lerici, our gateway to explore the five enchanting villages of the Cinque Terre. Relax in your room with its view of the sea, take a stroll on the beach, or explore the town of Lerici before a dinner of fresh seafood.



Pisa's leaning tower

Day 12

Today we take a boat from village to village to understand what the beauty and mystery of the land of Cinque Terre means. Hikers can enjoy a magnificent walk with incredible views while others can relax at a trattoria on the harbor. We return to Lerici by boat for a relaxing dinner and evening stroll.



Quaint street in Lerici

Day 13

Spend the morning relaxing on the waterfront or exploring Lerici. Next we leave the coast and arrive in time for lunch in the charming Tuscan town of Lucca. We check into our hotel and take a walking tour of this ancient friendly town. We enjoy a last Tuscan farewell feast before retiring.

Day 14

After breakfast we head for the Florence airport for our return flight.



The harbor of Lerici



Riomaggiore, Cinque Terre



One of the many piazzas in Umbria

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