

Italy: South of Siena

Tour code: JST (revised: October 10)

For more information see: <http://www.outdoortravel.com.au>

This tour is slightly more challenging than our “Treasures Of Tuscany” and it takes you to see the quieter side of Tuscany, to the South of Siena. Starting in this beautiful bustling city, you head off into a coffee table book Tuscan landscape of gentle hills, tipped by a lonely pine or oak tree while cypresses line the way leading to the distant farmhouses. You pass by one of the most beautiful convents of Tuscany at Monte Oliveto Maggiore. This is a typical red brick Monastery where friars of the Benedictine Order still worship. From Buonconvento the route rises uphill through the vineyards of San Giovese grapes, as far as the walls of Montalcino offering breathtaking views. Another peaceful walk takes you to the St. Antimo Abbey a unique structure in pure Romanesque style where the prayers and songs of a community of French Gregorian friars echo throughout the cloisters. Discover the hot springs used in Renaissance times by Lorenzo dei Medici and by Popes at Bagno Vignoni, where there is a huge pool of healthy sulphurous water. Our tour finishes in the city of Montepulciano where medieval architecture and vineyards line the landscape.



Travel Information

Travel: Our air travel package price includes the flight to Pisa using the scheduled services of British Airways from London Gatwick to Pisa. Alternatively Ryanair & Easyjet fly direct to Pisa from London

Arrival: The tour starts in Siena, which is easily reached by bus from Rome in 3.5 hours or by train from Pisa, 2 hours, and from Florence in a little over 1 hour.

End of Tour: Try to avoid a Sunday finish as returning can be a little slow and buses often don't run. The tour ends after breakfast on day 7 in Montepulciano. Clients can take a bus to Chiusi Scalo, which has good connections by train to Rome (2 hours), Florence (1.5 hours) and Pisa (3 hours).

Season: April to November.

Level of Difficulty

Grade: Moderate.

Fitness: Clients should have a reasonable level of fitness and should be able to walk for up to 5-7 hours a day in hot sun on dusty or stony tracks. One day in particular is 24km.

Waymarking: The route is way marked with red/white signs or, when missing, with blue/yellow signs.

General Information

Hotels: The hotels described are our usual choice of accommodation, however if these are not available then alternatives are used and if these are of a different standard you will be informed at the time of booking.

Baths/showers: Many rooms with ensuite/private facilities have a shower rather than a bath, usually because of limited space. Some hotels/guesthouses may however have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests.

Breakfasts: in countries such as Italy usually consist of coffee and croissant; sometimes, bread rolls, yoghurts, ham and cheese as well. If you want more for breakfast then we would suggest you purchase some food the night before.

Special Dietary Requirements: It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

Single Supplements: are payable on most of our tours. The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms.

Solo Traveller Supplements: are payable when the cost per bag of moving luggage increases.

Language: When travelling in less frequented areas you will not necessarily come across people speaking English. Remember you are experiencing a different culture, buy a phrase book and try to learn a little of the local language!

Luggage: When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room. Please politely ask someone if you need assistance.

Route Notes: Please note that one set of route notes per room booked is included in the cost of the holiday. If you require more sets of notes then there is a charge of £25 per set ordered.

Route notes are not issued to clients booking escorted departures.

Insurance: All clients must have appropriate cover for the activities included for the duration of our trip.

Accommodation & Meals

Accommodation is on a bed and breakfast basis in 3 star hotels with en suite facilities. No evening meals are included. Picnic lunches are not included in the tour price, but materials for picnics can be purchased in each of the towns and most villages where you stay or pass through.

❑ **Nights 1:** In the lively and sophisticated city of Siena we stay at a small, comfortable town hotel (3 star) in rooms with en suite facilities, telephone and colour TV.

❑ **Night 2:** Our 3* hotel in Asciano also boasts a swimming pool.

❑ **Night 3:** In Buonconvento we stay overnight in a recently renovated 3 star hotel, which is located in the center of the town.

❑ **Night 4:** In Montalcino our first choice of hotel is 3 stars rated, all rooms have private bath, TV and telephone. You will get magnificent views and the hotel also has a swimming pool. This is a wonderful town with lots to do and see and we would recommend an extra night here if you wish to extend your holiday.

❑ **Night 5:** In Bagno Vignoni we stay in a 3 star hotel overlooking the ancient thermal pool. The entrance fee for the thermal bath is included.

❑ **Night 6:** In Pienza we stay in a 3* hotel in the town center, which has been restored. Modern room comforts make the stay a high point of the tour.

❑ **Night 7:** The last night of our tour in Montepulciano is spent in a family run 3* hotel.

Outline Itinerary

❑ **Day 1:** Arrive in Siena by train from Pisa or Florence via Empoli, where you change trains. From the train station the hotel is a 10-minute walk or you could take a local taxi available in front of the station (not included). You can travel by bus from Rome or Florence. If you arrive at Rome Fiumicino airport take the train to "Roma Tiburtina". In front of the station from the bus terminal take the "Sena" bus for Siena. In Siena get off at Piazza Gramsci. The hotel is a 5 minute walk. After settling into the hotel you will find all the famous places of the city within walking distance, with the Duomo, *the huge Pisan Romanesque and Gothic cathedral*, the Palazzo Salimbeni, *(the ancient head-quarters of the Monte dei Paschi di Siena, the oldest bank of the world, founded in 1472 and still today one of the biggest banks in Italy)* and The Piazza del Campo, *the shell like square, centre of the medieval city, where twice per year they hold the "Palio" horse race*. You can easily get lost in the warren of streets of Siena! Overnight Siena.

❑ **Day 2:** Take a bus from Siena to Taverne d'Arbia (20 mins). Its then an approx 17km / 10.5 miles through Crete Senesi to Asciano.

❑ **Day 3:** Asciano to Buonconvento (5h walk/ 13.5 miles/22km). From Asciano you continue crossing the fascinating area of hills called the Crete Senesi and you reach

the Monastery of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, built in the 14th century by the Olivetan monks. Surrounded by a forest of cypresses, this place is world-famous for the frescoes in the courtyard painted by the 15th century painters Signorelli and Sodoma. Even the library and the church of the convent are architectural masterpieces. Crossing olive tree fields along woodland tracks and white roads, you will eventually reach the small town of Buonconvento, where the Emperor Henry VII died in 1313.

❑ **Day 4:** Buonconvento to Montalcino, (6hours walk/12 miles/19.5km). A general gentle up & down hill walk passing some great Villas, e.g. Castelrosi and Castles, e.g. Bibbiano. You will then cross the Ombrone river and come into the wine producing area of Brunello de Montalcino. The last part of the walk will lead you up to Montalcino, a 328m climb. The walk is steep but panoramic and reaching the gate in the town-walls, it will feel like a conquest! Overnight in Montalcino.

❑ **Day 5:** Montalcino to Bagno Vignoni (7/8hours walk/14.9 miles/24km). This is the longest walk, crossing one of the most remote areas. Today you have a long downhill walk to the Romanesque abbey of Sant Antimo, one of the most beautiful in all of Tuscany and now lived in by the French Gregorian friars. Their prayers and songs give the ambience a special mystic atmosphere. From here we make a visit to the medieval town of Castelnuovo dell'Abate, with great views across to Monte Amiata, a former volcano, which is still important for its thermal water. From here you continue and cross the Canyon of the Orcia River. On your side of the Canyon is the castle of Ripa d'Orcia and on the opposite side there is the castle of Rocca d'Orcia. You then reach Bagno Vignoni, which was built in the 13th century to permit Lorenzo de'Medici and the popes to relax in healthy thermal water. In this small village, instead of the usual central square, there is a large pool! Especially on cooler days the effect of the rising steam is incredible. Overnight in Bagno Vignoni (included is the entrance to the more modern thermal pool, so that you don't have to go in with the pope!). Extend your stay, after yesterday's hard walk, relaxing in the baths and walking to S.Quirico & Rocca d'Orcia.

Note that the pool has occasionally been closed due to different reasons and we cannot guarantee its status for the date of your visit.

❑ **Day 6:** Bagno Vignoni to Pienza (5hours walk/14.5km/9 miles). A steep hill brings you to the village of Vignoni, the view is quite unique. From here you walk on to S.Quirico d'Orcia. A small town surrounded by some 15th century town-walls, topped with 14 turrets. Things to see there include the 13th century Romanesque Collegiate Church, with the "Horti Leonini" - an unusual Italian-style garden. To reach Pienza your walk crosses open countryside. Instead of the vineyards, many sheep populate this area that it is known for its good "Pecorino cheese". Pienza, built by Pope Pius II, (Piccolomini), who was born in Siena, is the perfect Renaissance town. Overnight in Pienza.

❑ **Day 7:** Pienza to Montepulciano (4hours walk/8.39miles/13.5km). A gentle up & downhill walk to reach Montepulciano another wine area. On the way you can stop at Montichiello, a surprising small village located on the top of a hill with a marvellous surrounding view, before you reach your last amazing bastion, the medieval town of Montepulciano. This has one of the most impressive Renaissance buildings in Italy: the church of San Biagio

❑ **Day 8:** End of tour, by bus or train back to Pisa, Florence or Rome.

Extra nights

Siena is certainly a beautiful city, yet despite its size, it has something of a village feel to it. There is so much to see and so many good places to eat that it is worth an extra day. We would also recommend a full day to really discover Montalcino and to sample the best "Brunello" wine and why not have an extra night in Bagno Vignoni relaxing in the baths and visiting the nearby hamlets of S.Quirico & Rocca d'Orcia.

Route Notes

On self guided tours we provide you with route notes and maps at 1:25.000 scale.

ESCORTED DEPARTURE 2011

Research & Development trip

EJST16: Sat 16 April – Sat 23 April