

Italy: Treasures of Tuscany 11-day tour

Revised: Nov 07

This walk threads together some of the most attractive towns and villages in Tuscany in an eloquent procession. It is a perfect introduction to the region and for people who love museums and galleries, Gothic and Romanesque architecture, there is plenty to see and do. You have plenty of time for attraction visits on most days. However the emphasis of the tour is to enjoy the countryside, the rolling vineyards, the poppies in spring and the wild cyclamen in autumn. Most of all, many of the views have changed little for hundreds of years.

This is a relatively gentle tour, which is suitable for those who are new to walking tours. More experienced walkers will also enjoy the classic Tuscany landscape of small (although sometimes steep) hills, olive groves and vineyards. We pass close to the classic wine-growing region of Chianti, and visit the historic towns of Volterra, San Gimignano (with its famous towers) and Siena. From Siena, we are transferred to the Chianti region and to Radda and Gaiole passing fortified villages and castles. The walking continues onto Greve in Chianti/ Panzano before we finally take a local bus on to Florence where you have a free day before returning to Pisa for your flight home. Depending on flight times you may have enough time to visit Pisa's famous attractions (the field of Miracles Leaning Tower, and Duomo).

The walking takes in classic Tuscan landscapes and as most days are not too long, you will have plenty of time to sightsee, or picnic.

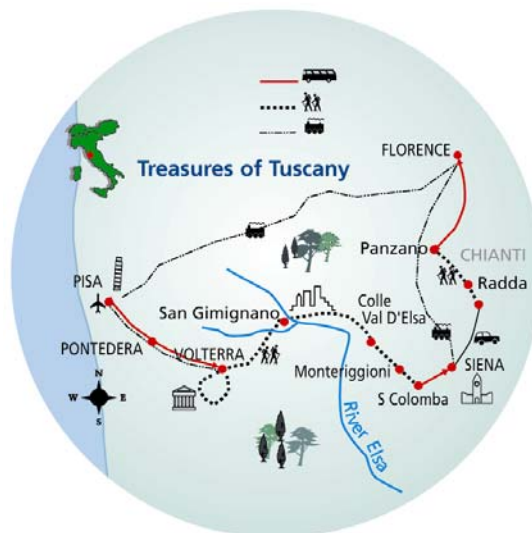
Travel Information

Arrival: The tour starts in Volterra, which is reached by bus from Pisa, the nearest city with an international airport. The bus ride takes 2 and half hours, with a change en route at Pontedera. The bus service runs 4 times per day (not on Sundays). Details are given in our route notes.

Clients could also take the train from Pisa or Florence to Pontedera and continue their journey to Volterra by bus. On Sundays it is necessary *either* to take a taxi from Pontedera (or from Pisa) to Volterra - 2007 price for this was around AU\$270 Equiv for up to four people plus luggage *or* to travel by a different route, taking the train from Pisa or Rome to Cecina, then a branch line train (or railway bus) to Salinas de Volterra and finally a bus to Volterra itself.

The restaurant of our preferred hotel in San Gimignano is normally closed on Tuesdays, so this is another reason for not starting the tour on a Sunday. Land-only clients arriving via Rome airport should change trains at Roma Termini and continue by train to Cecina (on Sundays, for branch line to Salinas de Volterra) or to Pisa or Pontedera (for bus from Pontedera to Volterra). Seat reservations are advisable on trains between Rome and Cecina/Pisa. There is also a three times daily (including Sundays) bus service from Florence to Volterra via Colle Val d'Elsa where you change buses.

As an extra service: we can normally arrange an economical transfer to the start of the walk from either Pisa (70 Euros) directly to Volterra, or from Certaldo (65 Euros)



that is on the railway via Pontedera. Please note that this transfer is an additional cost and should be pre booked.

End of Tour: The tour ends after breakfast on day 11 in Florence. The return to Pisa is most easily made by train and the approximate journey time is 1 hour. For those land-only clients flying from Rome there are frequent direct trains from Florence to Roma Termini. Transfers from Florence are not included in the tour price.

Season: April to November

Level of Difficulty

Grade: Easy to Moderate. Hilly at times.

Fitness: Super- fitness is not necessary but you should be able to walk for up to 6 hours a day in hot sun on dusty and stony tracks. There are some steep hills on this tour, but nowhere could the terrain be described as mountainous.

Waymarking: Part of the route is generally waymarked with red and white signs. On occasion there are also blue and yellow indicators. Elsewhere it is necessary to follow the route descriptions provided together with the maps. Most clients find the route finding straightforward.

General information

Baths: it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main it is showers.
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. 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. 1) 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. 2) You are not just paying a supplement on the room but the luggage transfer costs you are paying in full. The cost of moving 1 bag or 2 bags etc remains the same. On some of our trips it is possible to reduce the cost of the single supplement if you happen to be a 3rd person travelling, or have chosen a date when other clients are booked.

Language: Note that you will not necessarily come across people speaking English. Remember you have left home to find things different bring a phrase book, try to learn a bit of Italian!

Luggage: When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage may 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.

Accommodation & Meals

Accommodation is on a bed and breakfast basis in a mixture of 2-3 star hotels and guesthouse/agritourismos /room rentals with en suite facilities. Two evening meals are included (normally one in Volterra and one in San Gimignano); the other evening meals can readily be obtained locally without pre-booking. Night 5 (in or near Monteriggioni) is normally spent either at a small unclassified guesthouse/room rental with private facilities or at an unclassified agriturismo (farm guesthouse). On 2 nights in Radda-in-Chianti we use an unstarred but very welcoming *agriturismo* (farm guesthouse or B & B). Picnic lunches are not included in the tour price, but materials for picnics can be purchased in each of the towns and villages where you stay. As the walking days are quite short clients may on occasion reach their destination in time for a late lunch. According to Italian Law, all hotels must close their restaurants on one night each week, so it is not uncommon for clients to be given a voucher to eat dinner at a nearby restaurant, or be given the equivalent amount of money to eat in a restaurant of their own choice.

(Our standard accommodation is subject to variation: This is a very popular route and we sometimes have to use alternatives to the hotels described below. These are however of a comparable standard).

□ **Nights 1 & 2:** These are spent at Volterra, one of the oldest cities in Italy, in a welcoming and comfortable 3 star hotel, which is in fact a villa from the late 17th century that has been restored. It is situated in a peaceful area near the mediaeval town-wall. The hotel commands a magnificent panoramic view. All rooms have their own shower and toilet. The hotel also boasts an outdoor swimming pool.

□ **Night 3:** We stay at San Gimignano where our first choice is a 3-star hotel set in the pulsating heart of the town of towers, little changed for 600 years.

□ **Night 4:** This night is spent in the town of Colle di Val d'Elsa, normally in an historic building dating from the 15th century in the old Upper Town (Colle Alta). It is a 3-star hotel with en suite rooms.

□ **Night 5:** Either a small guest house/room rental within the mediaeval walled village of Monteriggioni; once the day-visitors have gone it is a haven of peace; the rooms

(limited in number) are simply furnished, but all have private facilities; or (if all the rooms in the guest house within the walls are fully booked) at an *agriturismo* (farm guest house) 2km away from the walled village along a white road. We provide full instructions on how to walk from the walled village to the *agriturismo* and back. On escorted departures (see below) night 5 is spent in Siena due to the lack of accommodation in Monteriggioni.

□ **Night 6:** In the lively and sophisticated city of Siena we stay at a small, comfortable town hotel in rooms with en suite facilities, telephone, and colour TV

□ **Nights 7 & 8:** We spend two nights in the small hilltop town of Radda in Chianti. A clean friendly welcoming B&B. You'll have a cozy room with en suite facilities and a private entrance. Possibility to have breakfast in the garden. There is limited accommodation here so if the guesthouse isn't available then we will use the clean, comfortable room rental.

□ **Night 9:** In Panzano we stay in a small but comfortable hotel near the centre.

□ **Night 10:** The last night is spent in Florence at a 2* hotel located close to the train station of Florence.

Outline Itinerary

□ **Day 1:** Arrive Volterra via Pisa. Either bus or train is taken from Pisa to Pontedera, where you change onto a local bus service (not Sundays) to Volterra. Journey from the airport to the first hotel is not included in the tour price. The combined train and bus fare is around 13 Euros, £8 per person. It is possible to reach Volterra by public transport on Sundays, but by a more circuitous and expensive route.

□ **Day 2:** By road to Pignano, walk back to Volterra. One option for today, involving about four hours walking, is a short bus or taxi ride (1 Euro approx by bus, not included in tour price) to near the hamlet of Pignano, from where it is an easy walk back to Volterra, mostly along white roads which follow a broad winding and panoramic ridge. Halfway through the walk there is normally the opportunity to stop for a welcome drink at a retreat centre, from where you can contemplate exploring the steep and somewhat overgrown Monte Voltraio- a mysterious attraction on account of its peculiar truncated cone shape. A paleontologist's dream as the ground appears to be scattered with fossils. On a hot day the less adventurous will be more inclined to continue on to Volterra. Overnight Volterra.

□ **Day 3:** Pignano to San Gimignano. About 4 hours' walking (8 miles/12km). The hotel arranges for a taxi to take you to the starting point of the walk at Bivio di Castelvecchio (taxi fare included in price of holiday). Alternatively you can be dropped off by the taxi at yesterday's starting point, Pignano, from where it is about 30 minutes' pleasant walking to Bivio di Castelvecchio. This extra half hour would enable you to cover the whole distance between Volterra and San Gimignano on foot in the course of days 2 and 3. You walk between vineyards and through oak woods with wild cyclamen in flower in autumn and fine views of the old ruined fortifications of Castelvecchio. You continue to the pretty village of San Donato and the small hamlet of Montauto with fine views of San Gimignano, before continuing by farm track and / or road to San Gimignano, known as the town of the beautiful towers that has dominated the hills south of the Elsa Valley since Etruscan times. There is much to explore in this small town, in particular the narrow streets and squares of the medieval quarter. Overnight in San Gimignano.

□ **Day 4:** San Gimignano to Colle Val d'Elsa. 3.5 hours walking (10 miles/16km). You follow a white road along a broad panoramic ridge with fine views back to the towers of San Gimignano. On either side are vineyards (source of the local dry white Vernaccia), olive groves and cypress avenues. Later we climb up through shady woods to the small village of

Montecchio and across level fields to Borgatello, and on into Colle Val d'Elsa, where the fascinating old town occupies the crest of a ridge high above the valley of the Elsa. Overnight Colle Val d'Elsa.

□ **Day 5:** Colle Val d'Elsa to Monteriggioni. 6 hours' walk (12 miles / 20km). After walking out of Colle through the suburbs, and then through attractive undulating woodland following at one point a beautiful clear stream; you cross a broad and mostly treeless agricultural plain, with farming hamlets such as Scarna and Acquaviva. As you approach the base of the densely wooded Montagnola Hills you reach the attractive village of Strove, with the nearby manor house of Castel Petraia. At the village of Abbadia an Isola you should stop to see the abbey church. Eventually you arrive at the base of the little hill, clad with vineyards, on which is built the mediaeval walled village of Monteriggioni with its famous watchtowers. Overnight *either* within the walled village Monteriggioni *or, if* the very limited accommodation in the village itself is fully booked, at an agriturismo (farm guesthouse) 2km away along a white road. In the latter case we provide full directions on how to reach the agriturismo.

□ **Note that on escorted departures** due to the limited accommodation in the village and depending on reservations, you may, but not necessarily, have two nights in Siena instead. In this case you will be transferred to Monteriggioni directly and do tomorrow's walk today, giving you a whole extra day in Siena compared to the self guided programme. For those who do not want to spend a whole day in the city there is the opportunity to have a good escorted half day walk to the south of Siena..

□ **Day 6:** Monteriggioni to S. Columba. 4 hours' walk (8miles 12.8 km). From Monteriggioni we walk uphill past farmland through forests and descend through woods to the small village of Funghaia. We continue on small peaceful farm and forest tracks through farms to the village of San Colomba. A magnificent renaissance villa and a church with lovely frescoes are situated here. From here we can take a taxi or bus into Siena (not included in the tour price). After setting in to the hotel you will find all the famous places of this city within walking distance, with the Palazza il Campo being the famous centre of this mediaeval city. There are many museums, churches, and the huge Pisa Romanesque and Gothic cathedral. You can easily get lost in the warren of streets, all arranged into areas called "Contrada," as they have done for hundreds of years and from where the Sienese population gain their group loyalties and rivalries. Overnight Siena. (Note that on the escorted tour there are two nights in Siena and the escorted segment ends here).

□ **Day 7:** Starts with a taxi ride to the village of San Sano (included in tour price). From here we walk on white roads, farm and woodland tracks across undulating hills, covered with a patchwork of oak woodland, olive groves and 'Chianti Classico' vineyards to the hill-top town of

Radda-in-Chianti (13km/4.5hrs walking). Overnight Radda-in-Chianti.

□ **Day 8:** A circular walk of about 12km/4hours from Radda-in-Chianti to Gaiole-in-Chianti and back, taking in the attractive villages of Vertine and Selvole. You may be tempted en route by the plentiful, luscious vineyards and succumb to the delicious local Chianti, for which the region is famous. Overnight Radda-in-Chianti.

□ **Day 9:** Today there is a choice of 3 routes of differing lengths, all finishing at the delightful hill town of Panzano. Starting in each case at our accommodation in Radda the longest of the three routes goes through the fascinating *borgo* (fortified village) of Volpaia and across the heathland and pine forest of Monte San Michele, the highest hill in the Chianti region, before a long descent past several delightful hamlets to the valley town of Greve-in-Chianti, from where you can either walk or catch a bus to the well-known hill-village of Panzano-in-Chianti, with its inspiring church and castle.

□ The shortest route takes a direct line past the *pieve* (isolated church and sanctuary) of S. Maria Novella and the vineyards of Castelvecchio to Panzano. From Panzano it is only a short bus ride or 1.5-hour walk to Greve-in-Chianti, another centre of winemaking and the birthplace of Giovanni di Verrazzano who first circumnavigated Long Island, New York.

□ The intermediate route includes both Volpaia and Panzano, between which you cross some high ground with fine views on the flank of Monte San Michele. Overnight Panzano.

□ **Day 10:** Bus from Panzano to Florence; about 2 hours' journey (fare not included). You will need to take your luggage on the bus with you. The rest of the day is free for you to explore this beautiful city at your leisure. Or you can do a walking excursion from Fiesole to Settignano (6-7 km, 2 hours). This is a panoramic walk through olive tree fields overlooking Florence and some of the most beautiful villas surrounding the city. Fiesole alone is worth visiting as it is an important archaeological site and has a Franciscan monastery. Overnight Florence.

□ **Day 11:** Train from Florence to Pisa (approx 1 hour) for your flight home [approx 2 hours]. You can check in for your flight at the train station in Florence before catching the train to Pisa.

Extending you Tour

It is possible to include extra nights in Pisa, Siena, Florence...in fact we can book up anywhere on the route! If you would like to do more walking, why not try our coastal extensions in the "Cinque Terre" a beautiful coastal region centered on the town of Monterosso? Details and prices on request.

On Self Guided Tour we provide you with . . .

Route notes, maps at 1:25,000 scale.