



FLORENCE & CHIANTI

7 DAYS / 6 NIGHTS

For many years **Florence** has been the cradle of culture and art: many of the most famous artists of the Renaissance were born there and thanks to them thousands of tourists choose Florence for their holidays.

Florence signifies abundance or wealth; during the middle-age, thanks to the Medici family, it became an important economic, cultural and artistic city.

Chianti can be compared to a unique vineyard. Hundreds of rows of vines represent the most characteristic feature of Chianti, the land where excellent wines are produced. The high quality of Chianti wine is the result of millenary knowledge and a great tradition of wine-making.



Day 1

Arrival in Florence and Private transfer to the hotel

Introduction tour to the city of Florence

Check in at the hotel in the centre of Florence.

Guided tour then of the centre of the town accompanied by a knowledgeable local guide.

Florence is known all over the world as the city of art, the capital of the Renaissance and one of the most important centres of literary and scientific culture.

You will begin your guided tour of the centre from the **Piazza del Duomo**.

The **Florence Duomo** is dedicated to Santa Maria del Fiore and is typical of Italian Gothic architecture. The present building was designed by Arnolfo di Cambio (c. 1245-1302), one of the greatest architect- sculptors of his age, who considerably enlarged the existing structure.



It will then be time to visit **Piazza della Signoria**, which has been the political heart of the city from the Middle Ages to the present day.

The square however is not just the “civil” centre of Florence, it is also a splendid open-air museum. The square of the Uffizi stretches out on the south side, towards the Arno, with the eye-catching Loggia dei Lanzi, (1376-1382), whose late Gothic roof covers 15 statues which also include Benvenuto Cellini’s wonderful Perseus holding up the head of the Medusa.



The statues in the square deserve a chapter all to themselves. Apart from the great sculptures lined up in front of the facade of Palazzo Vecchio (among them the copy of David by Michelangelo), we can hardly avoid noticing the Fountain of Neptune by Ammannati and the equestrian statue of Cosimo I de Medici by Giambologna.

Close by to the Piazza della Signoria you will visit the **Ponte Vecchio**, the oldest bridge which crosses the Arno at its widest point. It dates back to Roman times and has often been re-built.

After the flooding of 1333 it was re-constructed with a double row of shops, passing from a defensive type of architecture to the actual public one. In 1565 the east-facing Vasariano Corridor above the shops was built and the back-shops were added in the 17th century giving the bridge its actual structure.

The last stop will be made in the **Square of Santa Croce** (Holy Cross), one of Florence's largest squares, and traditionally one of the city's main arenas for ceremonies and festivities.

The **Basilica of Santa Croce**, one of the largest churches in the city, is attributed to the genius of Arnolfo di Cambio who seems to have begun work in 1294.

The presence of a great many funeral monuments and tombstones (276 can still be seen on the floor alone) has led to the Basilica being thought of as the city Pantheon, the burial place of Florence's most illustrious citizens. Here lie the tombs of Michelangelo, Galileo Galilei, Vittorio Alfieri, Gioacchino Rossini. Unfortunately the monument to Dante, whose remains repose at Ravenna, is only a cenotaph.

Dinner will then be served in a local restaurant in town.



Day 2

Lucca and Villa Torrigiani

Lucca is the most civilized of Tuscany's cities, a stately grid of Roman roads snug behind a mammoth belt of tree-topped battlements. It's home to Puccini and soft pastel plasters, an elegant landscape of churches and palaces, delicate facades, and Art Nouveau shop fronts on wide promenades. The sure lines of the churches here inspired John Ruskin to study architecture, and cars truly are few and far between. Everyone from rebellious teens to fruit-shopping grandmothers tools around this town atop bicycles.

Lucca's greatest cultural contribution has been musical. The city had a "singing school" as early as A.D. 787, and this crucible of musical prodigies gave the world Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805), the composer who revitalized chamber music in the 18th century with such compositions as his widely famous Minuet no. 13, and most famously the operatic genius Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924), whose *Tosca*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Turnadot*, and *La Bohème* have become some of the world's favourite operas.





You will visit the highlights of the town with your local guide.

The walls are what make Lucca, and they comprise a city park more than 4km (2 ½ miles) long but only about 18m (59 ft.) wide, filled with avenues of plane, chestnut, and ilex trees planted by Marie Louise Bourbon in the 19th century.

The **Church of San Frediano**, whose facade, especially on a sunny day, vies with those of the Duomo and San Michele as the most attention-grabbing in town, with a glittering 13th century mosaic two stories high taking the place of the other churches' stacks of columns.

Near the north end of **Via Fillungo**, a series of houses were built during the Middle Ages into the remains of a 1st or 2nd century A.D. **Roman amphitheater**, which had been used for centuries as a quarry for raw materials to raise the city's churches and palaces.

Piazza San Michele is the centre of the town, crammed with cafés and shops. The church of San Michele in Foro is as beautiful as a 12th century Romanesque church can get. It boasts a Pisan-inspired façade of blind arches with lozenges and colonnaded arcades stacked even higher than San Martino's, and it's smack in the center of town - on top of the ancient Roman forum, in fact, hence the name.

The façade of **Lucca's Duomo** is an excellent and eye-catching example of the Pisan-Lucchese Romanesque school of architecture. Long lines of baby columns - every variety imaginable - backed by discreet green-and-white Romanesque banding are stacked into three tiers of arcaded loggias.



After the guided tour you will have some free time to browse around on your own.

Lunch will then be served in a local restaurant in town.

You will then reboard the coach to reach **Villa Torrigiani**.

The villa and its park sum up all the splendour and magnificence of the Lucchese tradition of the country mansion-house. The long and monumental avenue leading to the villa is lined with cypresses, and has a pompous gate from where the façade can be seen, so rich and adorned that it seems to be embroidered on the stone and marble in a triumph of niches, statues and balustrades. The original building dates back to 1500, but it was radically rearranged a century later by Maurizio Oddi, the same architect that had so deeply transformed Villa Mansi. The "garden of Flora" is the clearest example of the Lucchese taste, a bright and surprising ensemble of grottoes, nymph temples, flowers, masks, water games, that make you feel as if you were in a fairy-tale.

After the visit you will be back to Florence.

Dinner at leisure.

Day 3

Treasures of Pisa



The morning will be dedicated to the visit of Pisa.

On a grassy lawn wedged into the northwest corner of the city walls, medieval Pisans created one of the most beautiful squares in the world. Historically dubbed the **Campo dei Miracoli** (Field of Miracles) , Piazza del Duomo contains an array of elegant buildings that heralded the Pisan Romanesque style.

The most important of all is the **Leaning Tower**, whose fame is known all over the world.

Your local guide will also take you out of the Campo dei Miracoli to visit **Piazza dei Cavalieri**, one of Pisa's most interesting sites, a large square that opens unexpectedly from the narrow backstreets.

Perhaps the site of the Roman Forum, it was the central civic square of medieval Pisa, before being remodelled by Vasari as the headquarters of the Knights of St. Stephen.

On the Western side of the Square is the Renaissance adapted Palazzo dell'Orologio, in whose tower the military leader Ugolino della Gherardesca was starved to death in 1208, with his sons and grandsons, as punishment for his alleged duplicity with the Genoese enemy.

Some free time after the guided tour before coming back to Florence.

Free time to explore Pisa on your own.

Afternoon at leisure.

Dinner at leisure.

Day 4

Siena and San Gimignano

Transfer to the Relais in the Chianti area

Draped on its three hills, **Siena** is a very beautiful city to visit, a flamboyant medieval ensemble of places and towers cast in warm, brown, Siena-coloured bricks.

Its soaring skyline is its pride, dominated by the gothic **Cathedral (Duomo)** and the taut needle of the **Torre del Mangia** and yet the shell shaped **Piazza del Campo**, probably captures the most attention and fame. It has been seen in films, photographs, and advertising campaigns. The bricks cover the sweetly sloping land underneath and are witness to many events in history, but the most intriguing is the "**Palio**" horserace, one of the most important things in the life of a Siena native. In the piazza on July 2nd and August 16th there is a bareback horse race that was first recorded in 1283, but may have had its origins in Roman military training. On those days mayhem takes over this small town and non-natives can observe local patriotism at its best and worst. Any and everything will be done passionately to bring home the prize. The prize is the "**Palio**" a banner to be shown off with pride for the whole neighborhood it represents.



Your local guide will make you discover some of the highlights of Siena, including:

The **Church of San Domenico** was founded in 1125 and it is closely identified with St Catherine of Siena. Her own chapel has frescoes of her in ecstasy, by Sodoma, and a reliquary containing her head.

Piazza del Duomo, with the huge **Cathedral** (1136 - 1382), is one of the most spectacular in Italy.

The Duomo, as it stands, is a delight. Its style is an amazing conglomeration of Romanesque and Gothic, its lineaments picked out in bands of black and white marble, an idea adapted from Pisa and Lucca, though here with extravagant effect.

The use of black and white decoration is continued in the marble floor, which begins outside the church and takes off into a startling sequence of 56 panels within.

The spectacular **Libreria Piccolomini**, inside the Cathedral, is mainly well known for its great frescos by Pinturicchio covering all the walls and the ceiling and for its books - all of them handwritten and decorated with wonderful ornaments.



Piazza del Campo, which is bordered by elegant palaces has an elaborate fountain as its focal point, the Fonte Gaia, a rectangular marble basin decorated by statues. The remarkable **Palazzo Pubblico** still serves as the town hall. This is also the square where the Palio horse race takes place.

After the tour you will have some free time for shopping and browsing around before having lunch in a very nice restaurant in town.

You will then reboard the coach to reach **San Gimignano**.

Here free time will be given to you.

San Gimignano, the town of beautiful towers, lies in a picturesque position on a hill dominating the Val d'Elsa, inhabited since the times of the Etruscans. This town went through the most prosperous period of its history towards the end of the Middle Ages when the urban civilisation flourished.

Its squares that are guarded by ancient buildings, its narrow and shady alleys and the soaring slender towers all create the character of this stunning town. Only 15 of the original 72 towers are intact.

In the centre of the town is a square called Cisterna which is surrounded by ancient and towered palaces. In the middle, on massive stony steps, is the Cisterna, an elegant public fountain built in 1273. The square of the Cathedral (Duomo) is the oldest part of San Gimignano. The mighty towers of the Salvucci, the Mayor's palaces and the simple, bare façade of the Collegiata, flanked with the Torre Grossa (Big Tower) and the 13th century new Palace of the Mayor, make this square one of the best preserved scenes of medieval architecture.

San Gimignano is small enough to be explored in one or two hours. It is a delightful place to shop with two main streets lined with speciality outlets selling almost everything. Several shops also sell the local wine.

It will then be time to reach the hotel in the Chianti area.

The **Relais** is perfectly situated in a delightful position among the green Tuscan hills. It has been carefully renovated whilst maintaining the traditions of the rural Tuscan lifestyle.



Dinner included in a local restaurant

Day 5

Cooking Class and Lunch at the Castle

Italy is a country full of strong emotions and passion which naturally extends to the food and wine. This is particularly reflected in Tuscany which has a special relationship with food as a way of life. The creative and colourful use of ingredients, the time and passion in preparation, and the attention to detail has produced recipes brought down through generations to please everyone. The pleasure in tasting the final result combined with locally produced Chianti, Vernaccia or Brunello produces a style and way of life second to none.

In Tuscany there are thousands of restaurants where you can sample unique dishes and interesting wines, but even walking into a small village delicatessen or 'alimentare' you can acquire any number of delicacies, homemade pastas, vegetables in olive oil, or other simple ingredients to make a meal that can be washed down with a good local wine.

A good time to have the authentic taste of Tuscany is during the winter, when the locals have a chance to enjoy long weekends of hunting, powerful red wines and the rich, game stews typical of their cuisine. Wild boar is increasingly featured on menus with recipes like Pappardelle con Cinghiale (pasta with wild boar meat sauce).

Tuscan cooking today is characterized by simple food, not covered in heavy sauces. Cooking is done with olive oil—used as salad dressing, poured over bread, and in soups and stews. Beans are a staple. Sage, rosemary, thyme, and marjoram are popular herbs. The farmland produces olive oil and wine, wheat, and fruits. Chickens, ducks, rabbits, cows, and pigs are raised in small estates. The vegetables grown here include artichokes, asparagus, spinach, beans, and peas; and, a great number of wild mushrooms, including *porcini* and morels, is found.

This cooking class will give you the chance to make a full immersion in the Tuscan traditions and roots, learning the basic rules of the simple but tasty and unique cuisine of the area.

All the participants will be given an apron, a cooking hat and the necessary cooking tools.

Depending on the numbers, participants may be divided in small groups and concentrate on a specific dish.

If less than 10 participants the program will include the preparation of an entire meal.

Lunch will follow and clients will enjoy the dishes they have cooked.

Free time before going back to the Chianti area.

Dinner included in a local restaurant.



Day 6

Pienza & Montepulciano

The day will be dedicated to two beautiful towns of Southern Tuscany: Pienza and Montepulciano.

TFL Tours Srl - Via S. Orlando, 3A int. 11 - 57123 Livorno - ITALY

Tel. +39 0586 880855 - Fax +39 0586 895778

www.tfltours.it - info@tfltours.it

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Pienza is a small town of the Sienese, and it is a rare example of Renaissance town planning. Pienza is defined the "ideal town", the "utopia town", and it represents nowadays one of the most concrete method construction through which in Renaissance age they tried to realise a model of life and an ideal government on earth, working out an idea of town able to give concrete answers to the desire of civil, pacific and laborious coexistence between man. It was the "utopia of civitas" vainly pursued by ancient time men.

The heart of the built-up area is Piazza Pio II, with a trapezoid form, surrounded by the Cathedral, Palazzo Piccolomini, Palazzo Borgia and Palazzo Priori. Other houses and palaces were built around the main buildings and spread through the streets of Pienza, they were constructed with a similar taste and material as the Rossellino construction, under the surveillance of the architect Pietro Paolo del Porrina. The constructions have a sort of albertiana stile, intermixed at the ancient tune.

After the visit of Pienza you will have some free time to browse around and have lunch on your own in one of the local restaurants or cafés.

It will then be time to depart to Montepulciano.

Montepulciano is built along a narrow limestone ridge and, at 605 m above sea level. The town is encircled by walls and fortifications designed by Antonio da Sangallo the Elder in 1511 for Cosimo I.



Inside the walls the streets are crammed with Renaissance-style palazzi and churches, but the town is chiefly known for its good local "Vino Nobile" wine. A long, winding street called the Corso climbs up into the main square, which crowns the summit of the hill.

After the visit of the town you will continue to a beautiful farmhouse in the area where a wine tasting will take place.

The winery is part of a larger property situated on the hills around the town of Montepulciano, renowned for its fine wines.

The Chianti Colli Senesi DOCG is made from selected grapes from these vineyards; the highly enjoyable Rosso di Montepulciano aims to satisfy the demands of any connoisseur in any circumstances; and scaling the quality heights of the sector is the sophisticated Vino Nobile di Montepulciano.

Day 7

Transfer to the airport