

ITALY – HEART OF TUSCANY

8-days / 7-nights **SELF-GUIDED** inn-to-inn walking across the rolling hills of Chianti



There is something for everyone in Tuscany: the walking, the history, architecture, art, wine and food; the changing colours of the landscapes from the fresh emerald greens of spring and the biscuit browns of autumn always against crystal clear azure blue or moody cloud filled skies; the towers of San Gimignano, the walled village of Monteriggioni and the spectacular city of Siena.

One of Europe's most famous landscapes and revered cultures, and always one of our most popular walking destinations, the Italian region of Tuscany has attracted visitors from around the world for centuries and will continue to do so. The important historical towns attract an enormous number of tourists at any time of year, but if you venture outside the town walls and wander into the countryside (as we do on our self-guided walks), the buses disappear and you find some beautiful trails across peaceful, undulating rural landscapes which, like some of the towns themselves, have not changed greatly in hundreds of years.

A **moderate** walking tour, suitable for experienced walkers as there are some short, steep hills and long daily distances. Temperatures during the summer months can be warm (try to avoid July/ August). This is an ideal walk through classic Tuscan landscapes of olive groves, fields of sunflowers, barley and beans, evergreen oak and ancient forests, vineyards and historical villages and buildings. There are longer walk options on some days with hillier climbs and extra kilometres for those searching for the *roads less travelled*.

Departs: Daily on demand from mid-April to mid-October

Grade: Easy to Moderate; daily distances 14 - 32km on unsealed trails and country roads.

Cost from: **\$1725** per person twin share. Single room supplement \$280. Solo traveller supplement \$235

Includes: 7 nights in characterful B&Bs, *agriturismo* (farm stay) and 3-star hotels; breakfast daily; 5 dinners; luggage transfers, information package of route notes and maps (one set per room), emergency assistance.

Not included: Travel to/from the walk, other meals, entrance fees, hotel taxes (paid locally), personal expenses.



Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Arrival in San Miniato.

Make your way by mid-afternoon to your hotel. San Miniato is a Tuscan hilltop town, with the older, historic San Miniato Alto atop the hill, and San Miniato Basso at the base. The train station is on the flat near San Miniato Basso. The township can be difficult to navigate, so you may wish to book a taxi transfer (at extra cost) to meet you off the train and take you to your accommodation. Your route notes and maps await you at hotel reception.

Day 2: San Miniato to Gambassi Terme

walking @ 24km (7 hours)

Walk on a quiet back road, then continue on *strade bianche* through oak forest and past vineyards, with views of castles, fortresses, churches and monasteries dotting the countryside. In the small town of Coiano the 12th Century Romanesque church is worth a visit. There has been a church just outside Gambassi Terme since the 10th Century; the present-day church of Santa Maria a Chianni dates to the 12th Century. Gambassi is a charming medieval town. During the Middle Ages it was a centre for the production of glassware and terracotta.

Day 3: Gambassi Terme to San Gimignano

walking @ 14km (4 hours)

A shorter walk today to allow time to explore San Gimignano this afternoon. The highlights are the views over rolling hills and the ruins of Castelvecchio. Ramble through Chianti vineyards and oak woods with wild cyclamen in flower in autumn, rewarded with views of San Gimignano, one of the most popular towns in Tuscany with its 'dreaming towers'. During the day it is busy with tour buses and day-trippers but in the evening it is peaceful. Perhaps have a glass of the local Vernaccia di San Gimignano, a dry white wine, with dinner.

Day 4: San Gimignano to Strove

walking @ 23km (6 hours)

A beautiful, peaceful walk on country roads, tracks and *strade bianche*, passing by hills covered with vines and with views of hilltop towns and ancient fortresses. In Strove you may like to visit the 10th Century village church, dedicated to St Martin of Tours. You stay in a charming 3-star hotel with attached wine bar.

Day 5: Strove to Siena

walking @ 23km (6 hours)

In the morning pass through Abbadia Isola, a tiny village in what was once a large bog; in the late 11th Century, Benedictine monks chose a small area of solid ground and built up an island (*isola*) for their abbey. The 12th Century abbey church is a masterpiece of Romanesque architecture. Continue to Monteriggioni, one of the most beautiful and intact walled towns in Tuscany. From here to Siena you walk a pleasant route through a classic Tuscan landscape. Siena is a city of districts (*contrade*), each with their own distinct identity. You could spend days exploring the medieval brick buildings, churches and museums of Siena, including the Duomo (cathedral), a Romanesque-Gothic gem with many artworks, including mosaics and Renaissance frescoes. Or, simply relax with a gelato at a café in the Piazza del Campo. Perhaps stay an additional night in Siena (at extra cost).

Day 6: Siena to Buonconvento

walking @ 32km (8 hours) or 19km (5 hours)

Follow a winding route on paved roads and *strade bianche* to Grancia di Cuna, a farm and granary fortified in the 14th Century to protect grain stores from marauders and the warring city-states of medieval Italy. You can shorten the distance by walking 19km to Grancia then arranging a transfer from Grancia to Buonconvento (at extra cost – please ask when you make your booking). If you prefer to continue on by foot, walk over rolling terrain through small villages to Ponte d'Arbia, where you are collected and taken to your hotel in Buonconvento.

Day 7: Buonconvento to San Quirico d'Orcia

walking @ 24km (7 hours)

Walk on quiet paved back roads and along the route of the Via Cassia, an old Roman road, with the typical Tuscan landscape unfolding before you, and views into the Val d'Orcia with its wheat fields and cypress trees. San Quirico d'Orcia was once an important stop on the Via Francigena, the pilgrims' Road to Rome. It retains part of its medieval fortifications and has many historic churches, gardens and palazzos, as well as the remains of a 12th Century pilgrims' hostel.

Day 8: Departure day.

Tour ends in San Quirico d'Orcia after breakfast. The nearest train station is in Buonconvento, a local bus ride or a short taxi transfer away.

Outdoor Travel offers walking holidays in many parts of Europe including in France the **Dordogne**, the **Vermillion Coast**, **Corsica**, **Burgundy**, the **Loire Valley**, and the **Cevennes**. For long distance routes see the **Way of St James** from Le Puy in France to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. In Italy, the **Dolomites**, **Amalfi Coast**, **Cinque Terre** or in **Umbria**. In England Wainwright's **Coast to Coast** route or walks in the **Lake District**,

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