

ITALY – TUSCAN HIGHLIGHTS, MONTEPULCIANO & VAL D'ORCIA

8-days / 7-nights **SELF-GUIDED** inn-to-inn walking across classic landscapes and wine country



Tuscany – the name conjures up images of medieval walled towns; landscapes dotted with olive groves, vineyards, sunflower fields and cypress trees; rustic cuisine accompanied by cafes filled with Chianti. On this self-guided walk you will see, smell and taste the highlights of Tuscany as you walk through the heart of this storied region.

Stop in charming hilltop towns with their distinctive architecture and far-reaching views, where you can climb feudal towers and see early Renaissance frescoes. Walk across rolling, vineyard-covered hills, where you can stop to taste some of the best wines in the world. Visit the 12th Century Abbey of Sant'Antimo and hear the Gregorian chants of the monks during Mass. Your journey ends in the historic town of Siena, a UNESCO World Heritage Site which is home to some of the most remarkable art and architecture from the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance period. With its natural parks, centuries of culture, complex wines and perfectly simple cuisine, there is no match for the beauty of Tuscany.

Cost from: \$1995 per person twin share. Single room supplement \$350. Solo traveller supplement \$585

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

Starts: Montepulciano **Ends:** Siena

Includes: 7 nights in boutique B&Bs, *agriturismo* or 3 and 4-star hotels; 7 breakfasts; luggage transfers, transfers as per itinerary, information package of route notes and maps (one set per room), GPS tracks, emergency assistance.

Not included: Travel to/from the walk, lunches, dinners, wine tasting, entrance fees, gratuities, hotel taxes (paid locally), personal expenses.

Grade: Easy to Moderate; daily distances 14 - 32km mainly on unsealed trails and country roads. Some undulating terrain and short, steep hills. Temperatures during summer months can be warm and there is little shade – avoid July/August if you can.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Arrival in Montepulciano

Arrive in Montepulciano where you will be met at the train station by our local representative. They will transfer you to tonight's accommodation in a charming B&B, and go over the tour with you and answer any questions you may have. You should have time this evening to visit the town's Piazza Grande, which is surrounded by 15th Century buildings including the town hall, clocktower and cathedral.

Day 2: Montepulciano – Pienza

walking @ 16km

Depart Montepulciano through one of its medieval gates and pass by the 16th Century San Biagio church. Gravel roads alongside vineyards and olive groves lead to Monticchiello, a well-preserved hilltop village from where there are views back to Montepulciano and ahead to your destination. This is a great stop for lunch or a cappuccino before continuing on an undulating route to Pienza, a jewel of Renaissance architecture.

Day 3: Pienza – Bagno Vignoni

walking @ 15km

The landscape of the Crete Senesi area south of Siena is one of the most famous in the world: rolling hills in varying shades of brown and green; cypress-lined lanes leading to rustic brick farmhouses atop ridges; the lunar-like features of the clay 'badlands'; and cultivated fields of cereal grains combine to form scenery that has inspired painters and photographers for centuries. Your walk takes you through this landscape to the delightful walled town of San Quirico d'Orcia and thence to the spa town Bagno Vignoni, known for its thermal baths.

Day 4: Bagno Vignoni – Sant'Antimo – Montalcino

walking @ 15km - 23km

A challenging walk along dry riverbeds and over undulating terrain in a rather wild environment to reach Sant'Antimo, a lovely abbey isolated in the middle of a pastoral landscape. According to legend the abbey was founded by the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne in 781 after his army was miraculously cured of illness by an infusion of local herbs. Either transfer by vehicle or continue on foot to Montalcino, the centre for production of Brunello di Montalcino. There are many *enotecas* and restaurants where you can sample this 'noble' red wine.

Day 5: Montalcino – Buonconvento

walking @ 16km

Leaving Montalcino you descend past vineyards of Sangiovese grapes then through a largely rural landscape dotted with farms, olive groves and grazing sheep. The walking route today follows part of the Via Francigena, the ancient pilgrims' route to Rome. Stay the next two nights in a beautiful *agriturismo* outside of Buonconvento.

Day 6: Monte Oliveto loop

walking @ 10km

Start the day with a transfer to Monte Oliveto Maggiore monastery to visit before the tourist crowds arrive. This is a 13th Century red brick abbey situated in the typical 'badlands' landscape of the Crete Senesi and is worth a visit to view its frescoes and to taste wine in the cellar below the cloister. The walk back to your *agriturismo* takes you through the little village of Chiusure, past farmhouses and through a forested area for some well-earned shade.

Day 7: Grancia di Cuna – Siena

walking @ 16km

Transfer to Grancia di Cuna first thing, which saves 10km walking and allows an earlier arrival into Siena. Grancia di Cuna is a fortified farm that was once a hospice and hospital for pilgrims on the Via Francigena, the Road to Rome. Your last day of walking takes you through farmland and meadows, past vineyards and olive groves, with the skyline of Siena visible almost the entire route. Upon reaching Siena, reward yourself with a delicious gelato at a café on the edge of the Piazza del Campo where the famous Palio is run twice a year. Stroll the small *vicoli* (laneways) and cobbled streets, taste wines at an *enoteca*. The Romanesque-Gothic Duomo, Siena's majestic cathedral, is a treasure trove of frescoes, sculptures, mosaics, and exquisite stained-glass windows, and is well worth a visit.

Day 8: Departure day

Tour ends in Siena after breakfast. Ask when booking about extra nights in Siena, at additional cost.

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**.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:

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