

Guided Southern Tuscany Castles Bike Tour

Duration: 8 Days/7 Nights

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Hilltowns, Castles, Hotsprings, and More

Travelling southeast of Florence you enter a valley called the Valdichiana, a prosperous farming area off the beaten tourist trail. From the valley floor a road winds up through vineyards and olive groves to the medieval hill town of Cortona. Perched 500 meters above sea level, Cortona dominates the valley with big views that stretch from Trasimeno Lake to Amiata mountain. Our bike tour starts here. We ride to a ruined castle and Trasimeno Lake before cycling south into an even more picturesque valley called the Val d'Orcia. This ancient valley has everything that visitors to Tuscany come to see and experience, panoramic hill towns, castles, thermal spas, incredible wines, and organic artisan cheeses. We cycle through Montepulciano, a miniature Florence with wineries in its historic center. We stay in Pienza, a small village with exceptional Renaissance architecture. We cycle to Radicofani, the most impressive medieval castle in Tuscany. Later we visit a family-run organic cheese farm where ewe's milk is transformed into traditional, creamy cheeses. We spend two nights in Montalcino, home to the famous Brunello wine. We have lunch and a tour at one of the most famous Brunello wineries. Our last ride zig zags north through an area called the Crete Senese, one of the most beautiful landscapes in Tuscany. Centuries ago the Crete Senese inspired Renaissance painters. Today photographers immortalize those same breathtaking landscapes. Our tour ends at a country resort located in a little sixteenth century village just outside of Siena. At the end of the trip we shuttle you to Siena for easy train connections.

Route Rating

Moderate: 40-70 km (25-44 km) per day cycling over hilly terrain.

Meet / Finish

Cortona / Siena

Highlights

- Beautiful accommodations
- Barolo winery tour
- Hot springs pool visit
- Organic cheese farm tour
- Two guided wine tastings
- Castle visits
- Overnights in Cortona, Pienza, and Montalcino
- Spectacular riding in the Tuscan countryside

The road to Pienza





Day 1 **Cortona**

Warm-up loop ride, 26 km/16 mi

We rendezvous in the Tuscan hilltown of Cortona. Cortona can easily be reached by direct trains from Florence (1.5 hours) and from Rome (2 hours). Our 4-star hotel is located in a 500-year old Renaissance palace in the center of town. Cortona is an enchanting maze of cobblestone streets and bustling piazzas. The ancient streets are untouched by modern construction. Limitations of space have confined almost all development to the lower town. On the first day we have a group lunch and then are fitted on the bikes. A loop ride takes us up the hill behind town. A group dinner completes the day.

Day 2 **Cortona**

Trasimeno Lake Loop Ride, 52 km/33 mi

Leaving Cortona we ride to the ruins of Pierle castle. Built in 1325, Pierle was once an important medieval castle in Tuscany. Abandoned in the 1500s, the fortress became a safe haven for criminal gangs. In 1576 the Grand Duke of Tuscany ordered the castle to be gutted to drive out the scoundrels. Cycling further south we reach the top of a hill with stunning lake views. A quick downhill leads to the lakeside town of Tuoro. We visit the village and beach before a picnic lunch. The terrain rolls gently after lunch, with a final steep climb to Cortona.

Hotel

Hotel Villa San Michele
Cortona
(2 nights)

The Hotel Villa San Michele is located in one of the oldest buildings in Cortona, the 15th Century Baldelli Palace. The property has been meticulously restored and offers all the comforts of a modern 4-star hotel.

The Rides

Day 1, A short warm-up ride climbs up the hill behind Cortona.

Day 2, A loop ride leads to a crumbling castle and a lakeside village before climbing back to Cortona.

Other Questions?

Toll free 1 888 421 2418
info@charnestours.com

Day 3 **Pienza**

Ride to Montepulciano and Pienza, 60 km/38 mi

Our ride to Pienza passes through Montepulciano, the highest of Tuscany's major hill towns. Montepulciano stretches atop a long narrow ridge 600 meters above sea level. Its main street climbs gradually between scores of Renaissance buildings and churches. Where side streets end you get stunning glimpses of the fertile wine-growing valley below. The town has three wineries right in the center. You can take a tour to learn more about the local *Vino Nobile* wine. Back on the bikes we pass spectacular cypress trees along the road to the fortified village of Monticchiello where we take a quick break before the final push to Pienza. Pienza is an architectural masterpiece. In 1459 Pope Pius II decided to transform his birthplace into the ultimate Renaissance town. Construction was finished in 1463 and the buildings haven't changed since. Our hotel located is a 15th Century convent right in the center of town.

Hotel

Hotel Corsignano

Pienza (2 nights)

The Corsignano has breathtaking views of the Orcia Valley. This family-run hotel offers quiet modern rooms and a terrace with a hot tub.

www.hotelcorsignano.it

The Ride

Day 3, Today's ride is full of rolling hills through gorgeous Tuscan countryside. Along the way we stop in the towns of Montepulciano and Monticchiello.





Day 4 Pienza

Radicofani castle and cheese farm loop ride, 66 km/41 mi

A loop ride takes us south to Radicofani castle. Now this is how you imagine a European castle. This is a Walt-Disney castle, with steep walls, a tower, and an ancient village below. The first written record of the castle dates from 973. Today the castle is completely restored. You can climb the tower for spectacular 360-degree views. We enjoy a group lunch at a restaurant below the castle walls. On the way back to Pienza we stop at an organic cheese farm where sheep graze freely. These hills have a variety of herbs and grasses that make for a more aromatic milk, which in turn produces a flavorful cheese. The farm makes over thirty different types of organic cheese. A guided cheese tasting completes our visit.

The Ride

Day 4, A hilly loop ride takes us to a 1,000 year old castle and an organic cheese farm. The ride finishes with a big climb back up to Pienza.

Pecorino Cheese

Pienza is known for its sheep cheese, called Pecorino. It's a firm, pale cheese with a buttery, nutty character. Free range sheep consume local herbs and grass providing fresh, high quality, aromatic milk.

Day 5 **Montalcino**

Ride to Bagno Vignoni and Montalcino, 37 km/23 mi

We ride through a landscape of gentle, cultivated hills where cypress trees line the roads to picturesque stone farmhouses. We stop for a long break at a thermal bath. Bagno Vignoni has been soothing travelers since Roman times. Instead of a piazza, the center of this little village is a huge 16th Century thermal pool constantly filled with sulphurous waters that bubble from the ground at 49° C. Today this ancient pool is closed to swimmers so we head to a nearby hotel that has two thermal pools (hot and hotter). Italians believe the mineral waters have therapeutic effects, so give your cycling legs a good soak. We have a group lunch in a local trattoria before continuing our ride. After lunch we roll through the walled town of San Quirico before the steep climb to Montalcino. Montalcino is a classic fairytale hilltop town, set within a full circle of fortified walls and watched over by a mighty castle of medieval perfection. In the hills surrounding Montalcino dozens of small farms produce a spectacular red, the Brunello of Montalcino. Before dinner we climb the castle walls for breathtaking views. Conveniently the castle also has its own Enoteca (wine shop). We sit down and a sommelier leads a guided wine tasting.

Hotel

Hotel Dei Capitani

Montalcino (2 nights)
The Hotel Dei Capitani is situated in the center of town in an 18th Century building. Rooms have breathtaking views of the valley below. The hotel has a large garden and swimming pool.

The Ride

Day 5, A downhill leads to the thermal baths at Bagno Vignoni. Rolling hills after lunch before a big climb up to the town of Montalcino.

Thermal Pool in Bagno Vignoni



Day 6

Montalcino

Loop ride to Banfi winery, 43 km /27 mi

A gentle downhill through vineyards and olive groves takes us to a graceful Benedictine monastery called Sant'Antimo. This 12th Century abbey, built in travertine stone, stands isolated below a hill, surrounded by secular olive trees and fields of wheat. This was a typical pilgrimage church that served travelers along the road to Rome. Leaving the abbey we continue south to the Banfi winery. We tour the cavernous wine cellars and sample their wines. Later we retreat to their classical Tuscan restaurant for a group lunch. At the Taverna Banfi we eat beneath the vaulted brick arches of the former barrel cellars. A challenging climb leads back to Montalcino.

Day 7

Castelnuovo Berardenga

Ride to Monte Oliveto Maggiore Abbey, 56 km/35 mi

Today we ride through a special Tuscan landscape called the Crete Senesi (or Senese Clays). You won't find olives or grapes here. Instead you will cycle past endless grassy hills, exposed white ravines, traditional Tuscan farmhouses, and long driveways lined by tall cypress trees. We stop at Monte Oliveto Maggiore, a huge monastery on a steep hill surrounded by a forest of cypresses and oaks. Lining the walls of the great cloister is a fresco series detailing the life of Saint Benedict. You can see Benedict leaving home and even casting out the harlots. Our last ride ends at the Villa Curina, a resort just outside of Siena. The hotel is set in a 16th-century hamlet. Gardens surround the entire property, including a large outdoor pool. We celebrate the tour with a final group dinner at the hotel restaurant.

Hotel

Villa Curina Resort
Castelnuovo Berardenga
(1 night)
Surrounded by rolling Chianti hills, the Villa Curina Resort is located in a 16th Century village. The hotel has a large garden and swimming pool.

The Rides

Day 6, A long downhill takes us to the Sant'Antimo abbey. Riding further south we visit the Banfi winery. After a tour, tasting and lunch a big uphill takes us back to Montalcino.

Day 7, We cycle to a large abbey on a hill in an oak and chestnut forest. Our ride continues through a lunar landscape of clay hills, grassy fields, and stately Tuscan farmhouses. We finish our ride at a country resort near Siena.

Other Questions?

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