

Guided Southern Tuscany Bike Tour

Duration: 7 Days/6 Nights

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hiking and cycling in italy

The Best of Southern Tuscany

The hill towns and valleys south of Siena comprise perhaps the most enchanting and picturesque part of the region. It's a land of medieval castles guarding hilltop villages, isolated farm-houses perched atop limestone ridges, and ancient thermal spas. Southern Tuscany's cities are textbook Italian hill towns. Roman settlements like Montalcino and Montepulciano grew into medieval cities and today produce two of Italy's top red wines, the powerhouse Brunello di Montalcino and the subtle Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. The gemlike village of Pienza, famed for its pecorino cheese, shelters within its tiny ring of walls a Renaissance core of the most perfect proportions and planning. Much of the area is occupied by the Val d'Orcia -- an expansive valley that glows a bright emerald green in spring, and burns to golden-brown under the fierce summer sun. Souvenir-stand postcards and cover shots of coffee-table books are snapped right here. This tour shows you the best of Southern Tuscany with an emphasis on the local culture. We tour a Brunello winery, spend a morning at a cooking class, visit a cheese farm, and enjoy a guided wine tasting in a medieval castle. We cycle quiet backroads and stay in charming inns with spectacular valley views. We carefully weave exercise, sightseeing, slow food, and relaxation into an unforgettable vacation experience.

Route Rating

Moderate: 9-28 miles (14-45 km) per day cycling over hilly terrain.

Meet / Finish

Florence / Florence

Highlights

- Brunello winery tour and tasting
- Cheese farm tour and tasting
- Cooking class
- Swim at a thermal spa
- 12th century castle visit with guided wine tasting
- Lunch at a hilltop abbey
- Tuscan hilltowns of Montalcino, Pienza, Montepulciano, and Cortona

Countryside near Pienza





Day 1 and 2 Montalcino

Montalcino to Biondi Santi Winery

4.3 miles (7 km)

We meet in the center of Florence and shuttle to our hotel in Montalcino. After lunch in Montalcino (not included in tour price) you are fitted on your bike and we do a warm-up ride to the Biondi Santi winery. Brunello di Montalcino, one of the most celebrated wines in Italy, is synonymous with the Biondi Santi family. The winery has bottles of Brunello dating back to 1888. These bottles only survived due to quick thinking during WWII. In early 1942, as the front was approaching, the Biondi Santi family walled up a cantina to hide their most prized vintages. A group dinner (included) caps off our first day. The Re di Macchie restaurant specializes in Tuscan cuisine including hand-made pici pasta with wild boar ragù, truffle and porcini ravioli, and ribollita (a hearty potage made with bread and vegetables). On Day 2 a downhill ride leads to a cooking class in a stone farmhouse. We spend two hours preparing traditional Montalcino dishes using seasonal produce. After our big lunch we cycle to the Sant'Antimo abbey. The ancient abbey stands among olive trees and wild flowers 9 km south of Montalcino. Well over 1,000 years old, Sant'Antimo is one of the most beautiful Romanesque churches in Italy.

Hotel

Dei Capitani

Montalcino (2 nights)
This hotel features incredible views, a swimming pool, and renovated rooms and bathrooms.
www.deicapitani.it

The Rides

Day 1: 4 miles (7 km).
Our warm-up ride leads to a winery in the countryside. Some climbing from winery back to Montalcino.

Day 2: 14 miles (22 km)
A quick downhill leads to a farmhouse and cooking class. After a large lunch we continue downhill to an abbey. A big hill back. Total climbing, 413 feet (126 mt).

Day 3 Pienza

Montalcino to Pienza

23 miles (37 km)

The ride to Pienza is one of those rides you never forget. You pedal through the Val d'Orcia, a picturesque agricultural valley and Unesco World Heritage site. This ancient valley of gently rolling hills and scenic villages can feel blissfully timeless, its rich history and natural splendor exquisitely preserved. We roll through San Quirico d'Orcia, a walled village of Etruscan origin. You will find few tourists here, but you will find a lovely park, a rose garden, and inviting piazzas. Back on the bikes we pedal to a thermal spa called Bagno Vignoni. Instead of a piazza, the center of the village is a giant thermal pool. While this pool is now closed to bathers, other pools are open. We test the waters at a nearby hotel pool. Rich in calcium, iron, and zinc, many believe the waters have medicinal effects, perhaps even reenergizing tired cyclists. The water bubbles out of the ground at a constant 49 degrees Celsius (120 Fahrenheit). By the time the water reaches the pool it has cooled to 38 degrees Celsius (100 Fahrenheit). After lunch an uphill ride leads to our hotel in Pienza. In 1458 a newly elected Pope (Pius II) decided to renovate his hometown. Humble Corsignano was demolished and in its place rose magnificent Pienza, the incarnation of a Renaissance utopia. Remarkably Pienza has been meticulously conserved. The streets, palaces, churches and piazzas are exactly as they were over 500 years ago.

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: 23 miles (37 km). A beautiful ride through the gorgeous Val d'Orcia. Big downhill at the start and big uphill at the end to Pienza. 2,114 feet, 644 mt of climbing.

Other Questions?

Toll free 1 888 491 2760

info@charnestours.com



Day 4 Pienza

Pienza to Cheese Farm 21 miles (34 km)

This area offers more than great architecture, thermal waters, and landscapes. The Val d'Orcia is also known for its cheeses, in particular a goat's cheese called Pecorino. The Italian word for sheep is *pecora*, hence pecorino cheese. On Day 4 we cycle to a *caseificio* or dairy and cheese factory. This family run business makes cheese the old-fashioned way. Seven hundred ewes roam 200 acres of farmland. The sheep are milked twice a day, the milk is immediately pasteurized, rennet is added and the cheese is born. The farm also produces its own organic extra virgin olive oil. After our cheese tour return to Pienza or complete a longer loop ride in the countryside.

The Ride

Day 4: 21 miles (34 km)
A short ride leads to a cheese farm. Ride directly back to Pienza or do a longer loop in the countryside.

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Day 5 Montepulciano

Pienza to Montepulciano *15 miles (24 km)*

This morning we ride to a Monticchiello, a tiny medieval hilltop village with just 200 residents. The village has a wall, a gate, and a superb restaurant. Lunch at the restaurant is included today. The restaurant is just the kind of place you want to go to for lunch on an Italian bike tour; small, off the beaten path, and run by proud Tuscans who take their food very seriously. Our ride ends in Montepulciano. High on a tufa ridge, Montepulciano seems to have been positioned by a landscape painter and laid out by a designer of Renaissance opera sets. It has one of the most intact and architecturally unified historic centers of any Italian town. Our hotel has its own spa set in old wine cellars where barrels of precious Vino Nobile di Montepulciano were once aged. If you want to learn more about the local wines head to the center of town where you will find wineries with cavernous cellars bursting with huge oak barrels.

Hotel

Etruria Resort and Spa
Montepulciano (1 night)
the Etruria Resort is set in a historic building from the 1800s, and features outdoor swimming pools, a spa, and stylish rooms with a rustic feel.
www.etruriaresort.it

The Ride

Day 5: 15 miles (24 km)
Ride to a small hilltop village for lunch. After lunch a big uphill to Montepulciano. Total climbing 1,719 feet (524 mt).

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Day 6 Cortona

Montepulciano to Cortona 27 miles (44 km)

A rolling ride through farmland and old villages leads to Cortona. More of a hillside town than a hilltop town, Cortona is enveloped with beautiful Medieval and Renaissance architecture. The medieval street plan was never changed. Narrow streets climb steeply up the hillside. The main drag, called Via Nazionale, is the only flat street in town. Wandering the historic center you'll be rewarded with fabulous views of the countryside along the medieval town walls. From the end of town you have a beautiful view of Trasimeno Lake. On our last night we indulge in 4-course dinner with plenty of local wines.

Day 7 Shuttle to Florence

To keep things simple we shuttle you back to Florence. As long as we are out, we stop for lunch at the Badia a Coltibuono. This property was an abbey until 1810 when it was secularized under Napoleonic rule. Today the estate is privately owned and produces oils and wines. A stone barn has been transformed into an exceptional restaurant where young chefs prepare traditional Tuscan dishes with interesting modern twists. Our weeklong adventure ends back in Florence.

Hotel

Hotel San Michele

Cortona (1 night)

The Hotel San Michele is the nicest hotel in the center of Cortona. The hotel is located in a 15th century mansion. The building has been completely renovated, but retains its Renaissance charm.

www.relaasilchiostrodipienza.com

The Ride

Day 6: 27 miles (44 km)

We saved the longest for last. Long downhill, followed by some rolling countryside with a climb up into Cortona. 1,742 feet (531 mt) of vertical ascent.

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