



Travel Experience Club

The Best of Tuscany/Umbria Using One Villa-Style Hotel Mid April 2012 11 days/ 9 nights

The TE will be repeating this trip and will have dates and prices available by the second week of december 2011.

Many people consider *Tuscany* the most beautiful region of Italy. Among the many things the region is noted for is its hill towns and villas. To visitors, medieval "hill towns" are like storybook towns that time forgot; they did not develop into big cities over the centuries, but rather kept their narrow lanes, massive gates, stone buildings, and other features we find so charming. This Travel Experience Club trip will visit many of the cities and towns of the region. The price of the trip includes R/T air from JFK, 8 nights in a villa style hotel with deluxe room. Our Villa hotel is in the heart of the Tuscan countryside near Siena. Full breakfasts each day, 8 dinners including many at local restaurants and one special dinner in a country house in the hills near Florence. We also include transfers, tours, admissions, wine tastings as indicated in the itinerary all tips for drivers and guides along with air and land taxes at the time of printing. The T.E. has reserved only a limited number of deluxe rooms for this trip. If you don't want to miss out we suggest that space be reserved immediately.



Day 1: Overnight flight from JFK to Italy. Our hotel, the Villa Borgo San Luigi Villa hotel is near Siena in the Tuscany countryside.

Day 2: Arrival at the hotel with free time to relax and enjoy the beautiful surroundings. The resort hotel, **Relais Borgo San Luigi**, is set in the centre of the Sienese countryside, just outside the ancient fortified town of Monteriggioni. The hotel - which respects the original layout of the ancient village - includes 5 original traditional buildings: "**La Villa**" (the Villa), "**La Foresteria**" (the Guest House), "**La Fattoria**" (the Farm), "**Il Fienile**" (the Barn) and "**Il Frantoio**" (the Olive Mill). Two extensions have been added recently which blend perfectly with the other historical buildings and landscape. The T.E. has reserved the deluxe rooms for our group. All rooms look out over the magnificent park. The park, covering over 60,000 sq. m., holds the restaurant - where both international and traditional Tuscan dishes are served -, the two bars, the swimming pools, the tennis courts, a giant chessboard in the middle of the olive grove and much more. Dinner at the hotel restaurant this evening.



Volterra has become a cult visiting place since major scenes from the Twilight series of movies was filmed here. It is an attractive Tuscan medieval hilltop town in an impressive setting, with far-reaching views across the plains of Tuscany. The ride up to the town and the beautiful views represent the best of Tuscany.

San Gimignano will be the final place we visit today. San Gimignano, known as the "City of Beautiful Towers", is a classic medieval walled hill town in Tuscany. Its 14 surviving medieval towers create a beautiful skyline visible from the surrounding countryside. As a result, it is also called the "Manhattan of Tuscany". Its historic center is a UNESCO world heritage site for its architecture. During the middle ages, the town was an important center for trade and for pilgrims. Our dinner and wine tasting will be at a local winery near San Gimignano.



Day 4: Our excursions today take us to Arezzo & Greve in Chianti. **Arezzo** is a provincial capital within the central Italian region of Tuscany (Toscana). Like so many Italian towns, the historic part of the city is on a hill, in a defensive position close to the base of a stronghold. The lower part of town, around the railway station, is more modern, with a well-ordered and prosperous buzz.

Arezzo's most powerful period came in the Middle Ages, before the town was taken over by Florence. Consequently the historic part of town is predominantly medieval, giving Arezzo a humbler and quainter air than Renaissance Florence. Behind the cathedral is a pleasant, leafy park, leading up to the sixteenth-century Medici fortress, which offers impressive views over Arezzo and the surrounding countryside.

Greve is surrounded by delightful villages. There are also many castles in the area of Greve; originally defensive bastions they are now elegant residences or famous estates. Of considerable interest in terms of landscape is the Monte San Michele, the highest peak in Chianti (892 m). Wine tasting and dinner at a local restaurant in the Chianti region.



Day 5: Today we visit nearby Siena & Monteriggioni. In **Siena**, a local guide will welcome you back to the Middle Ages. Siena is probably the best preserved Medieval city. Siena is the perfect antidote to Florence. It's a unified, modern city at ease with medieval aspects, ambience and traditions – indeed, exultant about them. Self-contained behind its medieval walls, Siena's great attraction is its cityscape, a majestic Gothic ensemble that could be enjoyed without venturing into a single museum. The physical and spiritual heart of the city is the great scallop-shaped piazza Il Campo, loveliest of all Italian squares and scene of the thrilling Palio bareback horserace. Our guide will take us to Siena's Duomo and Palazzo Pubblico two of the purest examples of Italian Gothic architecture, and the best of the city's paintings – collected in the Museo Civico and Pinacoteca Nazionale – are in the same tradition.

After the tour there will be free time to explore and get your own lunch at a local restaurant. Our other visit today will be to **Monteriggioni** the town nearest to our villa accommodations. Monteriggioni just might be the quintessential walled medieval village in Tuscany. Monteriggioni began as a border fortress built on a round hill by Siena against the Florentines. It is famous for the intact defensive structure that held up against repeated Florentine attacks in the 11th century; its 10 meter high walls and 14 towers can still be seen for miles around. Monteriggioni has been featured in movies as a typical medieval village. Dinner with wine at a local restaurant this evening.



Day 6: Montepulciano & Cortona will be our destinations today. **Montepulciano** - is a dignified and interesting hilltop town, commanding the southeast part of Tuscany near the Umbrian border. It is particularly well preserved and has many handsome 16th Century palaces. The area is noted for its red wines, the most famous being the *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*. The town of **Cortona** will be our other stop today. There will be time to explore and have lunch on your own. If you saw the movie *"Under The Tuscan Sun"*, Cortona is where much of it was filmed. This ancient and noble city sits on a high Tuscan hill, fifty miles from Florence between Arezzo and Perugia. Before the city lays a vast and beautiful plain, it is flanked on either side by distant hills and valleys while behind it are towering yet fruitful mountains. Dinner with wine at a local restaurant this evening.



Day 7: A full day visit to **Florence (Firenze)** is on the agenda today. Florence is often described as a "City of Stone". If it's visual delight you're after, you've definitely in the right place. Florence is home to several priceless art works — Michelangelo's David, Botticelli's Birth of Venus and Raphael's Madonnas. The city is brimming with art, history and culture that can lead anyone to be overwhelmed. There are also simple pleasures tourists can enjoy — wandering the medieval streets in Dante's old neighborhood, a cup of coffee on Piazza della Signoria, or bargain shopping at the street markets around San Lorenzo. If it's nature you crave, you can also take a leisurely stroll in the greenery of the Boboli Gardens. It seems there is no shortage of things to do in Florence. Florence is also an environmentalist's dream. There are several beautiful parks and gardens but the best park is the Medici grand dukes' old backyard to the Pitti Palace, the Giardino Boboli. On our tour a local guide will take us back to the days of the Renaissance. Our first stop will be to see Michelangelo's most famous statue of David. We will also visit the Duomo and the Ponte Vecchio and many other sites during the tour. There will also be free time to shop, explore and enjoy a great gelato. In the early evening The TE has planned a special dinner with music in a Tuscan Farmhouse. This will be an evening to be remembered.

Day 8: Today will be a free day to enjoy the villa hotel or one might have the opportunity for an optional extra day in Florence.

DAY 9: A visit to enjoy two of the most important **towns of Umbria** will be our menu today. **Assisi** is a superb hill town in the beautiful region of Umbria in Italy. But Assisi is much more than a pretty hill town. Thousands come to worship in Assisi's magnificent churches, and to pray to Francis of Assisi, a much-beloved saint. St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), the patron saint of Italy, is affectionately called "Il Poverello", the Little Poor One, because he lived and preached a life of simplicity and poverty. He did not, however, start life that way; in fact, the life of St. Francis of Assisi is "a riches to rags" tale. A local guide will take us to the major sites and there will be a visit inside San Francesco Basilica and Santa Maria Degli church.

Perugia will be next on tap today. There will be time to have lunch and explore. Perugia is a lovely medieval city located in the Umbria region of Italy, and is surrounded by many historic buildings with many Roman and Etruscan monuments seen across the hilltop. The modern parts of the city are comprised of well-known universities with thriving student population and provide some good facilities for shopping and recreation. Chocoholics take note; this city is also home to the Perugina chocolate company, makers of the famous chocolate and hazelnut kisses (bacci). Dinner included this evening.



DAY 10: On our last full day in Tuscany, we will visit three smaller cities.

Our first stop will be **Pienza** - The town, conceived by Pope Pius II, was built on top of the medieval castle of Corsignano, which marked the border between the possessions of Siena, Florence and Orvieto. It has been designated as part of the "world-wide heritage of humanity by UNESCO.

The next stop will be a visit to **Castiglione D'Orcia** Castiglione d' Orcia - First mentioned in 714, it was a possession of the Aldobrandeschi family and in 1252 became a free municipality. During the 14th century it became a Siennese possession. The centre of the town, with its stone-paved streets, is picturesque, and the Piazza il Vecchietta is particularly interesting. This square is dedicated to Lorenzo di Pietro (1412-1480), called "II Vecchietta", who was painter, sculptor and architect. At the centre of the square, completely sloping, there is a fine fountain in travertine dated 1618, and in front of which there is the Municipal Palace, containing a fresco by the Siennese school (a Virgin Mary with Infant Jesus and two Saints) coming from Rocca d'Orcia.



Montalcino is a fabulous place to visit during your tour of Tuscany's vineyards, as it is home to the famed Brunello wine. The hill-topped village of Montalcino has been in existence since the time of the Ancient Etruscans and the nearby Sant Antimo monastery was founded in the 8th century! It was founded on an ancient road called the Via Francigena which was a principal road between Florence, Rome and France. The medieval walls were erected in the 13th century by architects from Siena.. Wine has been made here for millennia, and records of commercial wine production date back to the 1400's. The village that we see today contains many reminders of medieval times including the impressive 14th century Fortress, the ancient Basilica, a lovely Romanesque chapel, the tower of San Giovanni and a multitude of narrow cobblestone alleyways. Olive groves and vineyards surround the hamlet and from the top of the village you have great views over the whole Orcia Valley, with its rolling hills and Cyprus lined country roads. Dinner, with wine at a local restaurant in the area, this evening.

DAY 11 After breakfast we depart for the airport in Pisa for our direct flight home.

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Exact dates and
prices will be available by
the 2nd week of Dec 2012

Name(s) as they appear on your passport _____

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\$100 non-refundable deposit p.p. Amount Enclosed _____

Send the deposit to The Travel Experience 54 Satellite Dr.

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