



From San Gimignano to Siena

Through the enchanting Tuscan landscapes along the Via Francigena & other medieval pilgrim paths



TRIP NOTES 2020

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INTRODUCTION

This is a moderately easy tour which is suitable for those who have some experience of walking and a good general physical condition. Through the extensive footpath network of the area, roughly following the traces of the Via Francigena, one of Europe's most important 'highways' in medieval times, you walk from village to village, a full immersion in the world-famous Tuscan landscape.

This tour is perfect as an introduction to the region, and, for people who love museums, galleries and Gothic and Romanesque architecture, there is more than enough to see and do. You have plenty of time to visit attractions on most of the days.

You will also have time to visit all the beautiful medieval villages and historic towns along the Via Francigena: Monteriggioni, admired by Dante in his Divine Comedy, San Gimignano, Colle Val d'Elsa and of course Siena, arguably the most perfectly preserved medieval town in Tuscany. This tour threads together some of the most attractive towns and villages in Tuscany in an eloquent procession.

However the emphasis of the tour is to enjoy the countryside, the rolling vineyards, the poppies in spring and the wild cyclamen in autumn. Most of all, many of the views have barely changed for hundreds of years. The area north of Siena is an amazing landscape of rolling hills, alternating vineyards and forests, while cypresses line the way leading to the distant farmhouses. Walking here is an unforgettable experience!

You spend a night in beautiful Colle Val d'Elsa, a few nights in one of the best agriturismos in Tuscany, and the final night in the heart of Siena, in one of the most characteristic little hotels.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in Florence

Arrival in Florence and transfer to Colle Val d'Elsa (either by private taxi or public transport), where you settle in at your hotel in the old town, known for its perfectly preserved 'tunnel' streets and its crystalware. Depending on your arrival time, you can go for a short visit to the town centre.

Accommodation: Colle Val d'Elsa - Hotel***

Total walking time: around 1 hour + sightseeing time.

Day 2 – Colle Val d'Elsa - Torracchia di Chiusi

The first day walk takes you first through the whole historic town centre of Colle Val D'Elsa, perhaps not as famous as other Tuscan towns, but with a very interesting centre. Then you descend into the valley where you pick up one of the supposed routes of the ancient Via Francigena along which, through a pleasant hilly landscape of vineyards and forests, you reach the small hamlet of Bibbiano. Another descent brings you down into the valley of the River Foci. Here you follow a short stretch through the river valley and past an old watermill. Then you start to climb up along a comfortable track to the beautiful agriturismo, where you will spend the next two nights. Make sure you get there on time to fully enjoy its fabulous setting and surroundings, and perhaps its library or swimming pool. For those who feel like it there is also a longer walking option to get to here. Dinner at the private restaurant is included tonight.

Accommodation: San Gimignano - Agriturismo

Total walking distance: 14 km. Approx. walking time: 3,5 hours + sightseeing time (4-5 hours with extra option).

Day 3 – Roundwalk to San Gimignano

After breakfast you begin your walk to San Gimignano, straight from the agriturismo. First you make your way up along the ridge to the hamlets of Ciuciano and San Donato, going past several old 'pieve' (countryside churches) and villas and often with wonderful views of the San Gimignano skyline. This wonderful medieval town – sometimes referred to as having the only "skyscrapers" in Tuscany – is an absolute must, with picturesque vineyards and olive and cypress groves on either side. You have some time to explore this little romantic town with its medieval towers, of which there were once 52 (there are now less than a dozen) – wealthy, prominent families would use the height of these towers to distinguish themselves, but the towers also had a practical use in alerting the inhabitants of this walled town of approaching friends and foes. Do make a nice stroll around its impressive town walls. Then you follow the Via Francigena back to your agriturismo: first to the convent of Monte Oliveto, located on a wide ridge, then down to a small stream, which you have to cross, before you climb back up to your agriturismo. In the evening you have another nice meal at the agriturismo.

Accommodation: San Gimignano - Agriturismo

Total walking distance: 16 km. Approx. walking time: 4 – 5 hours (+ about 1 h. in San Gimignano - various options).

Day 4 – Walk to Monteriggioni

Today you leave the agriturismo and head for Monteriggioni, described as a crown in the landscape by Dante. The walk first brings you down into the river valley, and then, more or less following the Foci, you reach one of the most wonderful Romanesque churches in Tuscany, la Badia a Conèo. The next stop is Quartaia, followed by Gracciano, once one of the most important wheat towns in Tuscany. Another short stretch brings you to the Badia ad Isola, once an important stop on the medieval Via Francigena, and a very intriguing building. The final destination for today is Monteriggioni, where you'll have time for a drink in the square. Then you are picked up by your taxi and transferred to Siena, where you settle in at your centrally located hotel, just a few minutes away from the famous 'Piazza del Campo'. In the evening you can take a nice stroll into town to have dinner in one of the many nice restaurants, or sip a drink in the 'Piazza del Campo'.

Accommodation: Siena - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 20 km. Approx. walking time: 5 hours + sightseeing time.

Day 5 – Departure

End of the tour. From Siena there are regular buses back to Florence (and also to Rome).



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TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in beautiful, characteristic family-run hotels (generally 3-star; 4/5-star on request) and beautiful *agriturismos*. All rooms have en-suite facilities.

Only the two nights at the agriturismo are on a half-board (HB) basis, i.e. with dinner included; the other nights you will be free to make your own dinner arrangements. You can then choose from the wide choice of restaurants in the area. Your accommodation holder can give you good tips.

No picnic lunches are included in the tour price, but these can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages where you'll be staying. On some occasions you have the option to have your lunch in a restaurant along the way.

Night 1: The first night is spent in Colle Val d'Elsa. Here you stay in a comfortable 3-star hotel in the old town centre, centrally located, at walking distance from the bus station and all the main monuments of the medieval town centre and close to many nice restaurants.

Nights 2 & 3: These nights are spent at one of the nicest agriturismos in Tuscany, a beautifully restored old fortress along the Via Francigena. The evening dinners are prepared by an extravagant Tuscan chef (also painter and author of a cook book with Tuscan recipes).

Night 4: The last night is spent in a nice hotel in the historic heart of Siena.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

It is possible to upgrade this tour, staying in more luxurious 4-star hotels (except for the agriturismo in San Gimignano which is already 4-star level). Accommodation in Pienza is also available as an alternative to the hotel in Montepulciano.

INCLUDED

- 1 night in Colle Val d'Elsa*** – BB
- 2 nights in S. Gimignano**** – HB
- 1 night in Siena*** – BB
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 25.000 scale
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transport throughout the tour
- Private transfers as specified

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes
- Visa & travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips & items of personal nature



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LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderately easy (2-3): Mostly easy walks, though some involve uphill walking, sometimes on paths with rough surfaces. On some days extensions or shortcuts are possible.

Fitness: High standard of fitness is not necessary but you should be able to walk for up to 5 hours a day in the hot sun on dusty or stony tracks.

N.B. During summer the difficulty of this tour definitely increases due to the heat. We therefore advise against booking this tour during the period between about 14th July and 20th August.

FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

Most paths are relatively well maintained; on many occasions you'll follow so-called *strade bianche* (unsurfaced roads), easy to follow and very unlikely to get overgrown (*we continuously check our routes – please help us by providing your feedback on the quality of the paths*).

Waymarking: A large part of the route is waymarked, but on some occasions we have found more interesting routes than those actually waymarked; therefore you should follow the route descriptions provided together with the maps. With these you will always be able to find your route.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in COLLE VAL D'ELSA, linked to FLORENCE by a frequent bus service. A taxi pick-up service can be arranged either from Florence (hotel, airport or train station), or from Pisa (airport).

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast in SIENA. A frequent bus service can bring you back to Florence. Upon request a taxi service is available to bring you directly to your next destination.

TOUR VARIATIONS

It is possible to include some extra nights in your tour, in any of the accommodations 'en route'. For those who have never been to Siena an extra day here is strongly recommended.

At the beginning or the end of the tour there is the opportunity to visit Florence. The tour can easily be extended with a few days there. Several good accommodations are available in ROME as well. Details and prices on request.

The tour can also be extended with a few days at a beautiful agriturismo for some relaxation in the countryside. Several superb accommodations are available. Details & prices on request.

Longer and shorter versions of this tour are also available. Prices on request. Why not check out our other Tuscany tours as well?

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