



Via Francigena

Lucca to Siena

Along the Via Francigena through the enchanting Tuscan landscape – with a visit to San Gimignano



TRIP NOTES 2021

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****GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit Of Italy****



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, a full immersion in the stunning Tuscan landscape! 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: starting from beautiful Lucca, you'll pass through Fucecchio, San Miniato, Gambassi Terme, the stunning San Gimignano with its medieval skyscrapers and Monteriggioni, admired by Dante in his Divine Comedy.

An optional detour can bring you to beautiful Colle Val d'Elsa and the tour ends in 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 one of the best agriturismos in Tuscany, and the final night in the heart of Siena, in one of the most characteristic little hotels.



Please note: this is a moderately difficult tour which is suitable for experienced walkers with a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are along good paths and small rural roads, sometimes on steep terrain. Average walking times: approx. 4 to 7 hours each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in Lucca

Arrival in Lucca, where you settle in at your hotel in the old town, known for its perfectly preserved city walls and the famous 'Amphitheatre' square. Depending on your arrival time, you can go for a short visit to the town centre.

Accommodation: Lucca - Hotel***

Approx. walking time: 1 h. + sightseeing time.

Day 2 – From Lucca to Altopascio

The first day walk takes you from the historical town of Lucca to the nice medieval town of Altopascio. This first stretch is a good warm-up hike, through a pretty flat landscape. The route brings you through the plain, densely populated, but with a large number of interesting historical and religious buildings. Of course you should take your time to visit the historical town of Lucca (and perhaps make a roundwalk over its town walls), but you'll also pass at other interesting places such as the 'Pieve' (rural chapel) of Capannori and the Abbey of Pozzeveri. Also the old city centre of Altopascio is beautiful.

Accommodation: Altopascio - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 19 km. Approx. walking time: 4,5-5 h.

Day 3 – Through the Tuscan hills to San Miniato

After an early breakfast you begin your long walk to San Miniato. After another flat initial stretch you'll finally tackle the first Tuscan hills, the area of the Cerbaie Nature Reserve, wild and deserted. Then you walk over the ancient Medici bridge in Ponte a Cappiano. Follows another flat section, through the plain of the reclaimed Fucecchio swamp (parts of which are still wetlands – a very interesting area for birdwatching). By lunchtime you'll enter the beautiful historic town of Fucecchio. Shortly after you'll cross the River Arno, and follow it for a while, heading to the small medieval town of San Miniato, beautifully located on the hilltop.

Accommodation: San Miniato - Hotel****

Total walking distance: 27 km. Approx. walking time: 6,5 - 7 h.

Day 4 – From San Miniato to Gambassi Terme

Today you leave San Miniato with a beautiful daywalk ahead. After a stretch along a small asphalt road, you finally reach the typical Tuscan landscape of rolling hills, cypress lined lanes and isolated farmhouses. Here the Via Francigena enters the area of the Val d'Elsa. This area has been inhabited since pre-historic times, but became an important trading area in the Etruscan era. The medieval Via Francigena here basically followed the old Etruscan trading routes and the Roman 'Via Clodia' between Siena and Lucca. You'll walk past the Pieve of Coiano and the Pieve in Chianni, heading for Gambassi Terme. In the Early Middle Ages many travellers passed through here, and it is testified that the Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury stayed overnight in Gambassi Terme, a charming little town with thermal baths. If you arrive on time here, perhaps you have the time for some 'wellness', otherwise you can visit the nice town centre with the beautiful Church of Santa Maria Assunta in Chianni, a fascinating and significant example of Romanesque architecture (with a bit of luck, you can even attend one of the frequent concerts here).

Accommodation: Gambassi Terme - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 24 km. Approx. walking time: 6 – 6,5 h.

Day 5 – Exploring San Gimignano

Today's route is one of the best-known parts of the Via Francigena, as it passes right through one of the most scenic medieval Tuscan towns, San Gimignano. From Gambassi Terme you first walk a stretch through the hills, up to the Sanctuary of Pancole. Soon after, walking past several old 'pievi' (countryside churches) and villas, with picturesque vineyards and olive and cypress groves on either side, you will already have the first views of the famous San Gimignano skyline. This wonderful medieval town – with its famous 'skyscrapers' – is an absolute must!



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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 continue the Via Francigena to your accommodation for the night: a beautiful agriturismo. You'll have two options to walk there: either along the convent of Monte Oliveto, located on a wide ridge, then down to a small stream, which you have to cross, before climbing up to your agriturismo, or along a beautiful route through the rolling vineyards. Make sure you get there on time to fully enjoy its fabulous setting and surroundings, and perhaps its library or swimming pool too. Dinner at the private restaurant is included tonight.

Accommodation: San Gimignano - Agriturismo

Total walking distance: 19 km. Approx. walking time: 5 h. + sightseeing time.

Day 6 – From San Gimignano 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, before settling in at your centrally located hotel. In the evening you can take a nice stroll into town to have dinner in one of the nice restaurants.

Accommodation: Monteriggioni - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 24 km. Approx. walking time: around 6 hours + sightseeing time.

Day 7 – Heading to medieval Siena

Today you leave Monteriggioni in southern direction, heading for Siena. After having crossed the Via Cassia you follow the so-called 'strade bianche' (gravel roads) through the hills and forests to the Northwest of Siena. There are several interesting sights along the way like the abandoned medieval village of Cerbaia, the castles of Chiocciola and the Convent of San Leonardo, just above the reclaimed plain of Pian del Lago. Then you'll walk through the forest of Renai and will approach Siena from the West. You'll enter the city through Porta Camollia, the traditional access to Siena from the North. Indeed you will notice several medieval 'Hostels' along the road towards the centre of town. 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: 17 km. Approx. walking time: 4,5 h. + sightseeing time.

Day 8 – 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 night at the agriturismo is 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.

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 Lucca*** – BB
- 1 night in Altopascio*** – BB
- 1 night in San Miniato*** – BB
- 1 night in Gambassi Terme*** – BB
- 1 night in S. Gimignano**** – HB
- 1 night in Monteriggioni*** – BB
- 1 night in Siena*** – BB
- Luggage transport (those carrying their own luggage get a 75 euro discount)
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 25.000 scale or better
- GPS-tracks
- 24/7 assistance
- 'Credenziale' (Pilgrim's Passport)

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes
- Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips
- Items of personal nature



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ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in LUCCA, linked to PISA and FLORENCE by a frequent train 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 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.

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 with the signage of the 'Via Francigena', 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.

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 of the tour there is the opportunity to visit Lucca, Pisa and Florence. This can be done as a day trip from Lucca, but the tour can also easily be extended with a few days there. 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. Check out our other Tuscany & Via Francigena tours as well!

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