



Villa Nobile

Tuscany in the frame





Trequanda



Trequanda is a quaint village in the characteristic **Siena countryside**, nestled on one of the bewitching hills of the **Val di Chiana**. Once protected by imposing defense walls, the town is now enveloped by the authentic atmosphere typical of this part of Tuscany. To explore the heart of the town, head through one of the gates still surviving to this day: Porta al Sole, which faces the endless fields outside the village, or Porta al Leccio, looking out at the Lecceto forests. The town is home to a **majestic castle built by the Cacciaconti family**, with a tall tower in white stone and crenelated walls. Inside the fortress, there's a magical Italian-style garden and an airy courtyard.

In piazza Garibaldi, visitors will find the **Romanesque Church of Santi Pietro ed Andrea**, boasting a unique façade and home to a historiated urn from the 1500s by the Sienese school, made to conserve the remains of the Blessed Bonizzella Cacciaconti.

Not far from the historic centre is the fascinating **Molino a Vento Tower**, a dovecote with about 500 terracotta nests that were made to be inhabited by doves.

The charm of Trequanda continues in two of its hamlets, Castelmuzio and Petroio, separated from the town by lush olive groves that have earned this territory **a place in the network of Città dell'Olio, or Cities of Olive Oil**.

Castelmuzio, Etruscan in origin, comprises a single street, around which are nestled stone houses that at sunset are drenched in a beautiful honey colour. Visitors to the hamlet should stop by the **Confraternity of the Santissima Trinità e di San Bernardino**, once a rest stop for pilgrims traveling the via Francigena. Today, the church houses the **Museum of Sacred Art**, with artworks by Giovanni di Paolo and Giuliano Traballesi, as well as a reliquary with fragments of Saint Bernardino's clothing.

There's also the village of **Petroio**, where the ruggedness of the brick facades recalls the barren Crete Senesi. Here, visitors can find the **Church of San Giorgio**, in a panoramic position, and the **Terracotta Museum**. Historically, terracotta production brought work to the entire town, and today visitors can learn about its techniques and history through an extensive display that also touches upon traditional Sienese craftsmanship.



Villa Nobile Cortona



Montalcino



To the south of **Siena** is a classic fairytale hilltop town, set within a full circle of fortified walls and watched over by a mighty castle of medieval perfection. **Montalcino**, west of **Pienza**, is a beautiful village immersed in the breathtaking **Val D'Orcia** Natural Park, renowned all over the world for the production of its precious **Brunello** red **wine**.

The town has scarcely changed in appearance since the 16th century. Once you get up to the town, a magnificent spectacle unfolds for your eyes: rolling sunny hills dotted with yellow and red flowers, ancient oak trees, picturesque olive groves, scenic country roads winding through perfect vineyards and isolated cypress trees atop hills.

The town has been made incredibly rich and famous by its **Brunello** wine, one of the world's best and most appreciated Italian wines. Montalcino was already well-known for its fine red wines during the 15th century. However, the **precious formula** of the fantastic Brunello was invented in 1888 by Ferruccio Biondi Santi, who first had the idea of leaving out the grapes used in the traditional Chianti recipe, such as Canaiolo and Colorino, and using only the Sangiovese variety.

Montalcino is not just wine, it is also very rich in **artistic treasures**. The historical center is dominated by the mighty and imposing **Rocca** or fortress built in 1361 to mark the passage of Montalcino under the domination of Siena. The **views** from its ramparts are spectacular, stretching towards Monte Amiata, across the Crete to Siena, and across all of the Valdorcia and the hills of Maremma.

Another landmark of Montalcino is the tall and slender **clock tower** that graces the **Palazzo dei Priori**, the city's town hall, while below lies the main square known as **Piazza del Popolo** with its characteristic Gothic loggia. Also worth visiting are the Palazzo Vescovile and the **churches** of **Sant' Agostino, Sant' Egidio** and San Francesco.

We also recommend a visit to the **Museo Civico and Diocesano di Arte Sacra**, hosting notable religious paintings and sculptures, and the **Museo del Vetro** (Glass Museum) that tells the history of glass making. The museum, inside the lovely castle of Poggio alle Mura, hosts an interesting collection of glass and instruments from Egyptian to Roman times up to the great Venetian masters.

The **streets of Montalcino** with their stone pavements are truly enchanting and the village is a wonderful place to stroll around among the labyrinth of charming arts and crafts shops, cafes, restaurants and wine bars.



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Sant'Antimo



After visiting **Montalcino**, follow the road signs to the **Romanesque Abbey of Sant'Antimo**, a beautiful and evocative abbey built in the 12th century. The drive along the winding country road leading to the monastery is an incredible pleasure for your eyes: vineyards, olive groves, green hills, and isolated farmhouses here and there. The Abbey, built in travertine stone, stands in perfect isolation on a plain among secular olive groves and lovely wheat fields.

Legend has it that the abbey was founded by **Charlemagne a/k/a Charles the Great** in 781. The king and his army stopped here on the way back from Rome as the soldiers were afflicted by an unknown pestilence. An angel appeared to Charlemagne, telling him to make his men drink an infusion with a local herb. The cure worked and the army was saved so the king decided to build the church in gratitude. Some say that it is possible to remnants of this period on the right side of the church where you will find the '*Carolingian chapel*', which is perhaps the first abbey church.

The monks who live at the Abbey live their day with a motto reminiscent of the Rules of St. Benedict: *Now, lege et labora.*

Now stands for prayer, both as a group and in personal prayer and *lege* means to study the law both divine and man-made. Finally *labora* which stands for :

(the) fundamental aspect of the day for every man, whether manual or intellectual, lived as community service or as activities to provide for themselves.

When you enter the church its solemn and severe atmosphere will take you back to the Middle Ages and the austere **monastic world**. During mass you can still listen to the beautiful and intriguing **Gregorian chants** song by French monks in white robes; truly a mystical and unforgettable experience! It is **a mystic place** surrounded by a whispering silence. The monks meet seven times a day to chant in Italian and to “raise to God hymns and spiritual songs”.



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Monticchiello



In the heart of Val d'Orcia, in the municipality of **Pienza**, there is an ancient village which has succeeded in conserving an authentic beauty: **Monticchiello**.

In **Etruscan and Roman times**, this small village was a crossroads of streets that connected centres and communities in the area. There are still traces of the **medieval fortresses**, greatly contrasting the Renaissance framework of Pienza. **The sturdy walls and the tower of the keep** that stands on the hill are signs of the village's intense past, a stronghold for the defence system of the Republic of Siena.

It is during the period of being under the protection of Siena that the story of Monticchiello begins. There is news of the village which dates to long before the municipal era, as evidenced by the fact that **the name can be traced back to the Roman gens Clelia**.

In the 1200s, the village began to take on its current appearance, with the walls, the cassero and the church, and typical civic institutions were established, all of which were dictated and regulated by statutes written in the vernacular. When the Republic of Siena fell in 1559, Monticchiello was handed over to the Medici, after which it gradually lost the role and importance it once had. In 1777, it became part of the municipality of Pienza.

The Church of Santi Leonardo e Cristoforo still today attests to the village's period of greatest prosperity, home to many frescoes from the Sienese school dating to the 14th and 15th centuries.

A rare example of cultural autonomy and collective effort characterizes Monticchiello and its inhabitants: **the "Teatro Povero"**. **This theatrical experience has been closely tied to the life and history of the community for decades**. The performances offer a glimpse of village life, which addresses current problems, drawing inspiration from local history and re-introducing the customs of rural civilization, now a thing of the past.



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Pienza



Pienza is the most well-known center of the **Val d’Orcia** and is famous as being the **home town of Pope Pius II**, born **Enea Silvio Piccolomini** in **1405**. Pius II, once **elected Pope**, transformed his home town, **Corsignano**, into an **urban-architectural jewel**, in this way contrasting it with the city that had marginalized his family: **Siena**. He entrusted the town’s reconstruction to the architect **Bernardo Rossellino**, who in just four years, from 1459 to 1462, developed the harmonious and typically 14th century appearance of what would become Pienza.

Thus, the *Città d’Autore* took shape, the Ideal City “**born from a thought of love and a dream of beauty**,” as **Giovanni Pascoli** once wrote. Another almost unique characteristic of this place is that it has survived to today intact, allowing us to admire the sense and intention of Rossellino’s work.

Indeed, after those four years, Pienza has **largely remained unchanged**, thanks also to the premature death of Pope Pius II.

In 1996, together with the whole of the Val d’Orcia, Pienza was recognized as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. Monticchiello also deserves a mention, a small medieval hamlet near the town that, with its **Cassero, walls, and medieval gate**, stands out in the stunning landscape of the valley. Residents of Monticchiello keep the ancient tradition of **Teatro Povero**, or Poor Theatre, alive and active, evidence of the town’s cultural vivacity and the community’s attachment to their history and identity.

It’s simply not possible to visit Pienza without having a **food and wine experience** par excellence. Here you can taste some unique products, such as the renowned *pecorino*, a typical local cheese. The **wines** are equally superb, perfect when paired with locally reared meat and homemade pasta, as well as the prized **extra-virgin olive oil**.



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Montepulciano



Montepulciano rests atop a narrow chalky hill where the **Val d'Orcia** and **Val di Chiana** meet. This beautiful **medieval village** can be found in what seems like a **postcard-perfect landscape**, your mind conjuring up the classic **idea of the Tuscan countryside** no matter which direction you look in, with the green waves of the hills and golden fields dotted with cypress trees.

The best way to discover the **elegant historic center** atop the hill is **on foot**: as you walk along, you'll come across **mighty Renaissance palaces** before reaching – at the highest point of Montepulciano – the main piazza.

Piazza Grande is dominated by the **beautiful tower** and the Gothic-façade of the **Palazzo Comunale**. Opposite the town hall is the **Cathedral**, dating to the end of the 1500s. But despite its indisputable beauty, Montepulciano is **best known internationally** for its **Vino Nobile**, considered one of the top Tuscan wines in the world, made with grapes coming from **vineyards surrounding the village**.

Returning to the town: just under the medieval walls, you can admire the beautiful temple of the **Madonna di San Biagio**. The travertine used to construct the building at the beginning of the 16th century can be seen far off amongst the greenery of the countryside, offering the best welcome for anyone who decides to spend an afternoon strolling through these streets or soaking in the hot **sulphurous waters** at the nearby **Thermal Spa**.



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Sant'Anna in Camprena



The monastery of Sant'Anna in Camprena stands around seven kilometres from **Pienza**, in the middle of a beautiful oasis of green. The **former monastic complex** was founded by Bernardo Tolomei and inhabited from 1334 onward, but between 1400 and 1500, it was completely remodelled into the form that we see today.

Steeped in history and spirituality, this place has bewitched some great artists. The Italian-American director **Anthony Minghella**, for example, chose Sant'Anna in Camprena to shoot some of the most famous scenes of his film *The English Patient*, winner of nine Oscar awards.

Falling within the diocese of Montepulciano-Chiusi-Pienza, Sant'Anna is now an agritourism centre teeming with activities, such as **art courses** in painting, design, and photography. It also puts on **classical music concerts**, and for some it is even the perfect location for an unforgettable **wedding**.

The complex includes the monastery and the adjacent abbey church, behind which lies a little cemetery. The church, which is dedicated to Saint Anna, holds paintings depicting *Saint Scholastica and the Angel* and the *Madonna Enthroned with the Child and Saint Anna* between two kneeling Olivetan monks. Along the walls, meanwhile, are 17th-century works concerning the *Scenes of the Life of Saint Bernardo Tolomei*.

In the monastery's **refectory**, we find a beautiful **cycle of frescoes**, datable to 1503-1504, with the back wall showing the multiplication of the bread and fish, and on the wall by the entrance, three images of Saint Benedict Enthroned surrounded by monks, a Pietà, the Madonna and Child, Saint Anna and two Olivetan monks. All of it is the work of **Antonio Bazzi**, known as **il Sodoma**, a genial Piedmontese artist who lived between the end of the 15th and the first half of the 16th century.



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San Feliciano



The city takes its name from San Feliciano, bishop of Foligno (around 160 - 249 ca.), who went to the Trasimeno lake to preach among the fishermen of the lake.

After his martyrdom, the people of the city wanted to honor his memory, calling with his name the small village that had welcomed him. A relic of San Feliciano is kept in the church of the hamlet and is exhibited on January 24th of each year, on the occasion of the Patronal Festival. In addition to San Feliciano, the town has a second Patron, more specifically a protector of fishermen, who is celebrated on December 14 of each year; this is Saint Spiridion, also patron of the Greek island of Corfu.



Orvieto



Orvieto is a city with significant cultural heritage, fascinating traditions and an exciting life-style.

Discover this medieval umbrian city, its world famous “wonders”: the tufa outcrop, the **Duomo** and the **Saint Patrick’s Well** and the whole ancient town center filled with narrow streets, beautiful churches, historic palace and the suggestive underground life: a maze of tunnels and caves.

And beside the historic center it is no less interesting the surroundings of Orvieto, a large area lying between the borders of **Lazio** and **Tuscany** regions alternating green hills cultivated with olive trees and vineyards with other mountainous areas. Just a few distances from Orvieto, in fact you will find fascinating villages and natural beauties, unusual places and protected areas. One the most visited places around Orvieto are the village of **Civita di Bagnoregio** and **Bolsena**.



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Firenze



Florence is a city in central **Italy** and the capital city of the **Tuscany region**. It is the most populous city in Tuscany.

Florence was a center of **medieval European** trade and finance and one of the wealthiest cities of that era. It is considered by main academics the birthplace of the **Renaissance**, and has been called "the **Athens** of the **Middle Ages**". Its turbulent political history includes periods of rule by the powerful **Medici** family and numerous religious and republican revolutions. From 1865 to 1871 the city served as the capital of the **Kingdom of Italy** (established in 1861). The **Florentine dialect** forms the base of **Standard Italian** and it became the language of culture throughout Italy due to the prestige of the masterpieces by Dante Alighieri, Petrarch, Giovanni Boccaccio, **Niccolò Machiavelli** and **Francesco Guicciardini**.

The city attracts millions of tourists each year, and UNESCO declared the **Historic Centre of Florence a World Heritage Site** in 1982. The city is noted for its culture, **Renaissance art and architecture** and monuments. The city also contains numerous museums and art galleries, such as the **Uffizi Gallery** and the **Palazzo Pitti**, and still exerts an influence in the fields of art, culture and politics. Due to Florence's artistic and architectural heritage, *Forbes* has ranked it as one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

Florence plays an important role in **Italian fashion**, and is ranked by in the top 15 **fashion capitals** of the world by **Global Language Monitor**; furthermore, it is a major national economic centre, as well as a tourist and industrial hub. In 2008 the city had the 17th-highest average income in **Italy**.



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Arezzo



Arezzo, located in southeastern Tuscany, clearly visible on a hilltop at the crossroads of four valleys: the Val Tiberina, **Casentino**, Valdarno, and **Valdichiana**. An important player in the history of Tuscany you will find that the area houses many artifacts, in fact, its ancient origins are verified by the stone tools and the so-called *Man of the Elm* who was discovered here, dating back to the Paleolithic era.

The original foundation of the city was Etruscan, **Aritim**, and dates from around the 9th century B.C. It quickly became one of the most pivotal centers in Tuscany, playing an important role over the centuries due to its strategic position along the Roman **Via Cassia**.

Arezzo boasts a wide range of sites to see including fortresses, monuments, churches, and museums which all offer visitors a chance to step back into history. There are even the remains of a **Roman amphitheater!**

The **Church of San Francesco** is probably the most famous in Arezzo, with the incredible Early Renaissance fresco cycle by **Piero della Francesca** depicting the *Legend of the True Cross*. Followed by the impressive **Piazza Grande**, where they hold a **jousting matching** twice a year. Be sure to include the newly restored **Medicean Fortress**, and a visit the **Cathedral** dedicated to San Donato, as well as the **Church of San Domenico** with the wooden *Crucifix* by **Cimabue**.



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Cortona



Cortona is a small charming town in the **Valdichiana**, or Chiana Valley, in the province of **Arezzo** in southern Tuscany. The city, enclosed by **stone walls** dating back to Etruscan and Roman times, sits on the top of a **hill** about 600 meters (about 1968 feet) above sea level. This dominant position over the valley offers a spectacular view from all over the town of the surrounding valley and even Lake Trasimeno.

The city is small but offers many interesting places to visit, among these the **Diocesan Museum** (where you can admire a beautiful panel painting of the Annunciation by Beato Angelico) and the **MAEC** (The Etruscan Academy Museum of the City of Cortona), where it is possible to see many artifacts found in the Etruscan archeological sites in the area. You can also request additional information about the **Archeological Park** at the museum.

You should not miss a visit to the beautiful **Santa Margherita Sanctuary**, patron of the city, and to the **Girifalco Fortress**. Both are on the highest point on the hill and are easy to reach after a short, uphill walk. Following the path that follows the city walls, you can also enjoy a beautiful view over the surrounding countryside. The Girifalco Fortress, constructed for military purposes, has undergone many substantial changes throughout the centuries and today only a part is open to the public.

Various small shops on the main streets of Cortona offer **local handmade items** and **gastronomical products**. **Great red wines** are made in the area (we are just a few kilometers from Montepulciano and Montalcino) and all of the wine bars offer a wide selection.

There are many restaurants in the city, most offering traditional local and Tuscan cuisine (the **Chianina** cattle, one of Italy's oldest, high quality bovine breeds is bred in Valdichiana).

Just outside of Cortona's walls you'll find the **Franciscan hermitage Le Celle**, the first monastery built by Saint Francis of Assisi in 1211, where a small community of friars still lives today. Through the course of the centuries, the hermitage was restructured and enlarged several times but Saint Francis's small cell has always been conserved in its original state and can be visited today.



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Siena



Siena is likely Italy's loveliest medieval city, and a trip worth making even if you are in Tuscany for just a few days. Siena's heart is its central piazza known as **Il Campo**, known worldwide for **the famous Palio** run here, a horse race run around the piazza two times every summer.

Siena is said to have been founded by Senius, son of Remus, one of the two legendary founders of Rome thus Siena's emblem is the she-wolf who suckled Remus and Romulus - you'll find many statues throughout the city. The city sits over **three hills** with its heart the huge piazza del Campo, where the Roman forum used to be. Rebuilt during the rule of the **Council of Nine**, a quasi-democratic group from 1287 to 1355, the nine sections of the fan-like brick pavement of the piazza represent the council and symbolizes the Madonna's cloak which shelters Siena.

The Campo is dominated by the red **Palazzo Pubblico** and its tower, **Torre del Mangia**. Along with the **Duomo of Siena**, the Palazzo Pubblico was also built during the same period of rule by the Council of Nine. The civic palace, built between 1297 and 1310, still houses the city's municipal offices much like Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. Its internal courtyard has entrances to the Torre del Mangia and to the Civic Museum.

If you feel energetic, a climb up the over 500 steps will reward you with a wonderful view of Siena and its surroundings. The Museum, on the other hand, offers some of the greatest of Siennese paintings. **The Sala del Concistoro** houses one of Domenico Beccafumi's best works, ceiling frescoes of allegories on the virtues of Siena's medieval government.

But it is the **Sala del Mappamondo** and the **Sala della Pace** that hold the palaces's highlights: Simone Martini's huge **Maestà** and Equestrian Portrait of Guidoriccio da Fogliano and Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Allegories of Good and Bad Government, once considered the most important cycle of secular paintings of the Middle Ages.



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