

The Best of Florence, Tuscany & Umbria

This book will provide you with countless insider tips, show you places as yet undiscovered by most tourists, and tell you where to find a comfortable room and a great meal in an out-of-the-way town. Get ready to discover some of the best of both known and hidden Tuscany and Umbria.

1 The Best Tuscan & Umbrian Experiences

- Exploring the Back Roads:** Rural Tuscany and Umbria just beg to be explored by car, and your own set of wheels really is the only way to discover the hidden side of these often overtouristed regions. Just picture yourself winding your way among olive groves and forests on back roads, cruising past vineyards and waving fields of emerald grass dotted with sheep. You'll find tiny medieval villages that don't appear in any guidebook, and you'll turn off at every **VENDITA DIRETTA** (direct sales) sign to meet the vintner or farmer and sample his wine, herb-scented honey, or home-pressed olive oil. Buy the best regional map you can find, fill the tank, and get ready to put your rental car to the test on dirt roads, steep mountain switchbacks, and the occasional manic Italian highway.
- Enjoying a 3-hour Dinner:** A simple pleasure, but one that can make for a most memorable evening. Good friends, good conversation, and good wine can easily extend a meal for hours, and the Italian dinner is a perfect excuse and vehicle, what with four or five major courses, big pauses in between, and cheese, dessert, coffee, and *digestivo* liqueur all lined up at the end.
- Catching Festival Fever:** Italians will throw a *festa* at any excuse—the local saint's day, the harvest, boar-hunting season, or sometimes just because it's the second Tuesday in May. Flower-strewn streets, fountains spewing wine, solemn religious processions, people in Renaissance garb shooting crossbows, horse and footraces through medieval streets, big roasting spits of wild birds, mass blessings of sheep and Fiats, violent Renaissance soccer, jousting matches, High Masses, and vats bubbling with polenta—you never know what you'll be in for, but it's bound to be memorable. See the "Calendar of Events," in chapter 2, and each town's "Essentials" section.
- Haggling in Florence's San Lorenzo Street Market:** Every day, the streets around the Mercato Centrale and San Lorenzo are filled with proprietors hawking marbleized paper, knockoff Gucci silk scarves, T-shirts emblazoned with Michelangelo's *David*,

and wallets, purses, jackets, and other leather products galore. All the stall keepers promise “the lowest prices in Florence.” That so-called lowest price is usually far from it, and the best part of shopping here is using every bargaining trick in the book to drive the “lowest price” even lower. See “Shopping,” in chapter 5.

- **Hiking the Hills of Florence:** The walk from Florence up to Fiesole is famous enough to earn a scene in the movie adaptation of E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View* (even if they cheated and took carriages). But don’t neglect the hills of San Miniato and Bellosguardo that rise south of the Arno; the views over the city here are closer at hand, and the land is less developed. See chapter 5.
- **Biking Lucca’s City Walls:** The elegant Republic of Lucca is still snuggled comfortably behind its 16th-century walls, ramparts so thick they were able to be converted into a narrow city park—a tree-lined promenade running a 4.9km (3-mile) loop around the city rooftops. The bicycle is the preferred mode of transportation in Lucca, and you’ll be in good company as you tool under the shade past parents pushing strollers, businessmen walking their dogs, and old men at picnic tables in their 40th year of a never-ending card game. See “Walking the Walls,” on p. 279.
- **Picnicking under the Leaning Tower:** Pisa is home to the most felicitously gorgeous piazza in all of Italy, the Campo dei Miracoli. Even if you’re in town for just half a day, grab a sandwich or a slice of pizza and picnic on the small triangle of grass in

front of the famous leaning tower—the campanile with the world’s worst posture. Afterward, saunter down to the patch of green surrounding the baptistery and take a nap on the grass with the sun warming your face. And, oh yeah: You can climb the tower, too. See “Pisa & Its Tippy Tower” in chapter 8.

- **Taking an Evening Stroll in Perugia:** Perugia’s wide Corso Vannucci is perfect for the early-evening stroll Italians everywhere turn out for—the *passaggiata*. It’s the time to see and be seen, to promenade arm in arm with your best friend dressed in your best duds. The crowd flows up the street to one piazza and then turns around and saunters back down to the other end. When you tire of meandering, take a break to sip cappuccino and nibble Perugia’s fine chocolates in one of the classy cafes lining the street. See “Perugia: Capital of Umbria & Quaint Hill Town,” in chapter 11.
- **Going Off the Beaten Path in Assisi:** Who would’ve thought you could find a primal Tuscan country experience in overtouristed Assisi? Save the basilica’s frescoes for the afternoon and get up early to hike into the wooded mountains of Monte Subasio to St. Francis’s old hermitage. After a morning spent in contemplation with the monks and wandering the state parkland, head back to Assisi, but be sure to stop a mile outside town for a big lunch at **La Stalla**, one of the last die-hard countryside *trattorie* in central Italy (see “The Best Countryside *Trattorie*,” later in this chapter). See “Assisi: An Artistic Pilgrimage,” in chapter 11.

2 The Best Hill Towns

- **San Gimignano:** The “Medieval Manhattan” bristles with more than a dozen tall stone towers, all slightly

askew. It wins the “Most Densely Decorated Church” award for its old Duomo, whose interior walls are

slathered with 15th-century frescoes. San Gimignano's skyline and back alleys, especially when moonlit, make it one of Italy's most romantic hill towns. Stay until all the tour buses have left, when you'll have the gardens and small *piazze* all to yourself. See "San Gimignano: The Medieval Manhattan," in chapter 6.

- **Volterra:** Proud Volterra has been important in western Tuscany since the Etruscan Age. From its magnificent rocky promontory, the city surveys the sometimes wild, vast countryside surrounding it. Volterra is full of workshops where artisans craft the native alabaster into translucent souvenirs. And from a wind-swept terrace road you can look over some of Tuscany's best-preserved Roman ruins. See "Volterra: City of Alabaster," in chapter 6.
- **Montalcino:** Impressive from a distance with its broken-toothed fortress on a high hill, Montalcino turns out to be surprisingly tiny when you get close. It has a few sights and churches and a good small museum, but what you really come for is to sip the town's beefy Brunello wine, take a *passaggiata* with the locals in the evening, and watch the shadows fill the valley far below your hotel window as the sun goes down. See "Montalcino: Home of the Mighty Brunello," in chapter 9.
- **Montepulciano:** Although Montepulciano has medieval side streets galore, its main attractions are the deep red Vino Nobile wine and one of Italy's finest centrally planned Renaissance temples, a church set in its own little green park below the ancient walls of the town. See "Montepulciano & Its Noble Wine," in chapter 9.

- **Cortona:** This stony hill town is no longer big enough to fill its medieval walls, but it still has its museums of paintings by Fra' Angelico and local boys Luca Signorelli and Pietro da Cortona. The restaurants serve steak from the famed Chiana cattle, raised in the valley below, where Etruscan tombs hint at the city's importance in a pre-Caesar Tuscany. See "Cortona: 'City of Art,'" in chapter 10.
- **Gubbio:** This ancient Umbrian stronghold and renowned ceramics center is like the last outpost of civilization before the wilderness of the high Apennines. The central piazza cantilevers over the lower town like a huge terrace. The square is bounded on one end by a mighty palace, all sharp stone lines and squared-off battlements. Inside is a cluttered archaeological museum and the same echoey medieval atmosphere that pervades the entire town. Gubbio is unique among hill towns—an antique center unto itself, to which surprisingly few visitors venture. See "Gubbio: Town of Festivals," in chapter 11.
- **Todi:** When they were handing out quaintness to Italian hill towns, Todi took far more than its share. Many of its streets are so steep they've been chipped with shallow staircases down the middle. Vistas across the valley open up unexpectedly, and on the perfectly medieval main piazza is a town hall sprouting a staircase perfect for an Errol Flynn sword-fight scene. The church on the outskirts of town is perhaps Italy's most beautiful High Renaissance construction. See "Todi: A Taste of the Middle Ages," in chapter 12.

3 The Best Festivals

- **Florence's Gioco di Calcio:** First, divide the city into its traditional

neighborhoods, cover Piazza Santa Croce with dirt, and don Renaissance

costumes. Next, combine two parts soccer, one part rugby, one part football, and a heaping helping of ice-hockey attitude. This game, in which a few dozen men forget all the rules while they do anything they can to score goals, is like soccer-cum-croquet on quaaludes. Give the winners a whole calf to roast in the streets and write it all off in honor of St. John the Baptist. See the “Calendar of Events,” in chapter 2.

- **Siena’s Palio:** Anything goes at this bareback, breakneck horse race around the dirt-packed Il Campo, and the competitive *contrade* (traditional neighborhood wards) usually make sure everything does. The square is filled with costumed pageantry before the race, and massive feasts are set up on long outdoor tables that can stretch for blocks on the medieval side streets. See “Siena: A Taste of the Tuscan Middle Ages,” in chapter 6.
- **Prato’s Display of the Virgin’s Girdle:** Prato keeps the Madonna’s girdle under heavy lock and key year-round, but takes it out occasionally, amid much religious pomp and some medieval drum rolling, to show it to the crowds massed on the piazza. See “Prato & the Virgin Mary’s Girdle,” in chapter 7.
- **Arezzo’s Giostra del Saracino:** Arezzo really comes alive for this Renaissance titling tournament where the target at which the mounted jousts aim their lances swivels around and can actually hit back. See “Arezzo: Where Life Is Beautiful,” in chapter 10.

- **Perugia’s Umbria Jazz:** Umbria’s capital gets mellow and funky every summer in one of Europe’s biggest jazz fests. Headliner acts and little-known maestros fill the squares, streets, and bars with some of the smoothest music around. See “Perugia: Capital of Umbria & Quaint Hill Town,” in chapter 11.

- **Assisi’s Calendimaggio:** This pagan rite-of-spring fest is held in Italy’s holiest hill town. The town’s almost-forgotten factions revive to wage medieval competitions and display feats of strength, and the entire town spends the week in courtly Renaissance dress. After a singing competition on the main square, the winner gets to crown his own fair damsel Lady Spring. The town returns to Christianity the next day. See “Assisi: An Artistic Pilgrimage,” in chapter 11.

- **Gubbio’s Corso dei Ceri:** In one of Italy’s most ancient festivals, teams of burly, costumed men trot about town all day carrying three huge towers topped with statues of saints. After a wild invocation ceremony in the piazza, they shoulder the towers and tear up the mountainside as fast as they can. The town’s patron saint invariably wins. See “Gubbio: Town of Festivals,” in chapter 11.

- **Spoleto & the Spoleto Festival:** Gian Carlo Menotti’s annual bash brings some of the biggest names in orchestral music, dance, and theater to this ancient hill town. Many of the events are staged outside in the Piazza del Duomo or the remains of a Roman theater. See “Spoleto & the Spoleto Festival,” in chapter 12.

4 The Greatest Artistic Masterpieces

- **Michelangelo’s *David*** (Galleria dell’Accademia, Florence): The Big Guy himself, the perfect Renaissance nude, masterpiece of sculpture, icon

of homosexual camp, and symbol of Italy itself. See p. 164.

- **Sandro Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*** (Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence): Venus

on the half shell. The goddess of love is born from the sea; a beauty drawn in the flowing lines and limpid grace of one of the most elegant masters of the early Renaissance. See p. 152.

- **Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation*** (Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence): A young Leonardo had already figured it all out in this painting, with classical details, graceful figures, and his patented *sfumato* technique of blurring all edges and fuzzing the background to achieve a remarkably realistic illusion of depth and perspective. See p. 152.
- **Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Gates of Paradise*** (Battistero, Florence): In 1401, young Ghiberti won a sculpture competition to craft the doors of Florence's Baptistry. Fifty-one years later, he completed his second and final set, boosting the Gothic language of three dimensions into a Renaissance reality of invented space and narrative line. Art historians consider that 1401 competition to be the founding point of the Renaissance. Michelangelo looked at the doors and simply declared them "so beautiful they would grace the entrance to Paradise." See p. 144.
- **Filippo Brunelleschi's *Dome*** (Duomo, Florence): Florence's noble orangey-russet cupola reigns over the town in perfectly engineered immensity. When the cathedral was built, all the learned architects in town agreed the space was far too large to support a dome. Brunelleschi revived the secrets of Rome's ancient Pantheon to prove everyone wrong. See p. 142.
- **Masaccio's *Trinità and the Cappella Brancacci*** (Santa Maria Novella and Santa Maria della Carmine, Florence): The greatest thing since Giotto. Masaccio not only redefined figure painting with his strongly modeled characters of intense emotion and vital energy but also managed to be the first painter to pinpoint precise mathematical perspective and create the illusion of depth on a flat surface. The world's first perfecter of virtual reality. See p. 163 and 178.
- **Fra' Angelico's *Annunciation*** (San Marco, Florence): This is the summation of the devout friar's exacting early Renaissance style—a graceful Mary, a deep cloistered space, and a carpet of wildflowers behind the rainbow wings of the angel Gabriel, communing intensely with the Madonna. See p. 167.
- **Pisano Pulpits** (Duomo, Siena; Sant'Andrea, Pistoia; Baptistry and Duomo, Pisa): Between father Nicola and son Giovanni, Gothic sculpture was first invented and then refined, bringing a new emotional language and volume to sculpture and turning hard stone into fluid grace. See p. 217 in chapter 6, p. 268 in chapter 7, and p. 297 in chapter 8.
- **Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good and Bad Government*** (Museo Civico, Siena): This is the single greatest piece of secular art to survive from the Middle Ages. Ambrogio's depiction of the effects of good government on the town is a detailed encyclopedia of a medieval urban utopia. See p. 216.
- **Duccio's *Maestà*** (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Siena): This is the painting on which the Siennese school was founded—ranks of angels on glittering gold and a masterful Gothic comic book on the life of Christ in square-foot panels. See p. 219.
- **Rossellino's *Pienza***: Many Renaissance artists painted their idea of the perfect city; Rossellino was the only architect who actually got the funding to build one. Pope Pius II used his money and power to remake the

central square of his home village in the image of Renaissance order, proportion, and grace. A papal bull has ensured that not a whit has changed over the centuries. See “Pienza: The Ideal Renaissance City,” in chapter 9.

- **Piero della Francesca’s *Resurrection of Christ*** (Museo Civico, Sansepolcro): Piero’s dead-on geometric perspective and exquisitely modeled figures helped make this haunting work the model for all later depictions of the Risen Christ. This is quite possibly the only fresco whose reputation as the “best painting in the world” actually saved it from Nazi bombs during World War II. See p. 359.
- **Giotto’s *Life of St. Francis*** (Basilica di San Francesco, Assisi): This fresco cycle shocked the painting world out of its Byzantine stupor and thrust it full tilt on the road to the Renaissance.

Giotto perhaps did more groundbreaking work in this one church than any other single painter in history, bringing a realism, classicism, concept of space and bulk, and pure human emotion that parlayed humanist philosophy into paint. These frescoes were damaged in the 1997 earthquakes that destroyed other works in the church, but restoration was completed in November 1999. See p. 395.

- **Luca Signorelli’s *Last Judgment*** (Duomo, Orvieto): Having recently emerged from years of restoration, Signorelli’s signature piece uses the separation of the blessed from the damned as an excuse to display his mastery of the human nude. Michelangelo studied this seminal work before having his own go at the subject in the Sistine Chapel. See p. 434.

5 The Best Offbeat Sights & Experiences

- **Ballooning over Tuscany:** What better way to see Europe’s most famous countryside than floating lazily over the olive- and vine-covered hillsides in a hot-air balloon while having a champagne breakfast? Many outfits offer this indulgent pastime. Rates start around 200€ (\$260) for a sunrise 1½-hour flight (champagne included). Contact **Ballooning in Tuscany** at ☎ 0577-725-517 (fax 0577-725-519; www.ballooningintuscany.com).
- **Museo Zoologico la Specola** (Florence): As if a 19th-century natural history museum full of glass cases displaying stuffed specimens from species around the world weren’t enough, you’ve also got room after room of well-crafted late-18th-century wax models of humans in just about every stage of dissection imaginable. These models are medical study aids from the days before genuine corpses for

gross anatomy were available in every med school. See p. 178.

- **Museo Stibbert** (Florence): This former private museum of an eccentric Scottish-Italian is made up of the general clutter of more than 50,000 random items and a huge collection of armor from all eras and world cultures, including an entire regiment of armored mannequins. See p. 180.
- **Prehistoric Lunigiana Statue-Stele** (Pontremoli): These mysterious tombstone-shaped statues were carved over a 3,000-year period starting about 3000 B.C. by an extraordinarily long-lived cult isolated in the Lunigiana. Some of the abstracted figures bear a suggestive resemblance to how ancient Roman historians described Celtic warriors from Gaul. See “North of Lucca: The Garfagnana & the Lunigiana,” in chapter 7.

- **Etruscan “Sunken Roads”** (Maremma): No one is quite sure why the Etruscans of the Maremma carved a network of passages, some more than 20m (66 ft.) deep, into the tufa surrounding Pitigliano, Sorano, and Sovana. Many stretches of the Via

Cave have survived the millennia, and you can follow them (sometimes up to a kilometer/half-mile) in what are kind of open-air cave tunnels. See “The Maremma: Tuscany’s Cowboy Country,” in chapter 8.

6 The Best Wines & Vineyards

See “A Taste of Tuscany & Umbria,” in appendix A, for a primer on Italian wines.

- **Chianti Classico:** This is Italy’s most famous product of Bacchus. Chianti is as variable as it is versatile, and while there’s plenty of mass-produced cheap wine out there, the vintners of the Chianti Classico Zone, in the hills between Florence and Siena, craft excellent wines of the highest quality. Premier estates abound, and the top, most accessible ones are highlighted in chapter 6.
- **Vernaccia di San Gimignano:** In his *Divine Comedy*, Dante wrote of this dry, peppery, straw-colored white that deepens to gold with age. Tuscany’s best white is available all over the Town of Towers. It was the first DOC wine in Italy and is one of the few DOCG whites in Italy. The consortium of Vernaccia producers dates back at least to 1276; you can contact them in town at the **Villa della Rocca** (☎ 0577-940-108). See “San Gimignano: The Medieval Manhattan,” in chapter 6.
- **Morellino di Scansano:** This is a popular Maremman riff on the chianti formula smoothed out and juiced up with Spanish Alicante (Grenache). The top producers are **Le Pupille** (☎ 0564-505-129), **Mantellassi** (☎ 0564-592-037), and **Erik Banti** (☎ 0564-602-956).
- **Brunello di Montalcino:** Brunello has the smell of mossy, damp earth and musky berries. It tastes of dark, jamlike fruits and dry vanilla. This is

Tuscany’s most powerful red, and perhaps the top wine in all of Italy. Break out this complex elixir to accompany the mighty *bistecca alla fiorentina* (Florentine-style steak). Visit American-owned **Banfi** (☎ 0577-816-001) for the wine museum in its medieval castle or **Poggio Antico** (☎ 0577-848-044) for the direct sales of its award-winning Brunello. See “Sampling the *Vino*,” on p. 324.

- **Vino Nobile di Montepulciano:** This purple-garnet wine smells of violets and tastes of juicy red berries, dark fruits, and a hint of musty, mossy earth. Of the traditional wines (no French grape intrusions), it plays second banana to Brunello, but many people find this Noble Wine a far more forgiving *vino*, and much more versatile. Although it’s powerful and complex, you can drink it with just about anything but fish. The best producers are all represented by **Maddalena Mazzeschi** (☎ 0578-758-465), and if you must choose just one bottle, make it an **Avignonesi** (☎ 0578-757-872). See “Underground Tunnels & Noble Wine,” on p. 337.
- **Rubesco Riserva:** This unique and elegant Umbrian wine made by a single estate was so deliciously demanding of attention the authorities had to create a tiny DOCG zone just to incorporate the vineyard. The vintner responsible was Giorgio Lungarotti, experimenting with his grapes in Torgiano south of Perugia. Although all

the **Cantine Lungarotti** (☎ 075-988-0294) wines are excellent, the best is the Rubesco Riserva label. The estate also runs a fascinating wine museum in Torgiano itself. See “Perugia: Capital of Umbria & Quaint Hill Town,” in chapter 11.

- **Orvieto Classico:** Orvieto’s white is an ancient wine, made at least since the days of the Etruscans. In Orvieto itself, you can get the traditional *abboccato* variety, a juicy, semisweet version hard to find elsewhere in this age that demands gallons of dry white table wines. Although Ruffino is a perfectly fine vineyard, you can usually pick up a bottle of its Orvieto Classico *secco* at your local U.S. wine shop. As long as you’re in the actual neighborhood, try such smaller producers as **Decugnano dei Barbi** (☎ 0763-308-255) and **Barberani** (☎ 0744-950-113). See “Orvieto’s Liquid Gold,” on p. 435.
- **Sagrantino di Montefalco:** This dark wine with a rounded mouth feel and tannic bite—about the biggest and most complex wine you’ll get in Umbria—has finally been recognized by the new DOCG classifications. You can get a taste at top producers **Antonelli** (☎ 0742-791-5852) and **Cantina A. Fongoli** (☎ 0742-350-359) in San Marco di Montefalco, **Il Girasole** in Montefalco (☎ 0742-379-280), **Rocca di Fabbri** in Fraz, and **Fabbri** (☎ 0742-399-379) and **Cantina Paolo Bea** (☎ 0742-379-668) in Cerrete di Montefalco.
- **Tignanello:** One of the most successful blends of native Sangiovese and cabernet grapes, this complex “table wine” is made by the **Antinori**

vineyards near San Casciano, just southwest of Florence (☎ 055-23-595).

- **Sassicaia di Bolgheri:** This is a huge and complex cabernet sauvignon; the vines originally came from Château Lafite. The estates around Bolgheri on Livorno’s coast all make wine from a mix of cabernet, merlot, and/or Cab Franc varietals—no Sangiovese in these parts. The actual Sassicaia wine with the DOCG label is astronomically priced, and the lone estate that produces it (**Tenuta San Guido**) is unapproachable, as is the neighboring and similar **Tenuta dell’Ornelaia**. But the nearby **Grattamacco** vineyards at Podere Santa Maria, near Castagneto Carducci (☎ 0565-763-933), will welcome you, and their drinkable Frenchified wines are much more affordable.
- **Vin Santo:** Grapes that have begun to turn to raisins on the vine and become sun-dried are fermented in oak *barriques* to produce Tuscany’s powerful sweet dessert “holy wine.” The amber drink is fine on its own, but the real way to enjoy it is to use *cantucci* (twice-baked hard almond cookies) as sponges. Every winemaker sets aside a few barrels of vin santo, but some of the best is made by the chianti-inventing **Cantina di Brolio** (☎ 0577-73-01 or 0577-749-066). Umbria’s resounding answer to Tuscany’s vin santo is **Sagrantino Passito**, from the Montefalco region, a red dessert wine of high refinement. For more information on it, contact the **Centro Nazionale di Studi sui Vini Passiti** in Montefalco on weekday mornings (☎ 074-79-122).

7 The Best Museums

- **Gallerie degli Uffizi** (Florence): One of the world’s top museums, the Uffizi houses some of the seminal

works of the Renaissance, including Giotto’s *Maestà*, Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* and *Allegory of Spring*,

- Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation*, and Michelangelo's only panel painting, the *Holy Family*. Few rooms go by without three or four masterpieces. Thoroughly brain-draining . . . but worth it. See p. 146.
- **Museo Nazionale del Bargello** (Florence): Past early Michelangelo marbles and Giambologna bronzes, the main attraction at the primary sculpture museum of the Renaissance is a room full of famous works that survey the entire career of Donatello, the greatest sculptor since antiquity. See p. 158.
 - **Palazzo Pitti** (Florence): The Pitti, with thousands of paintings hung thickly in the dozens of rooms of the Medici's old palace, all sumptuously frescoed and decorated, makes the Uffizi look like a preamble. Not only is room after room full of works by Raphael, Rubens, Titian, Caravaggio, Andrea del Sarto, and countless others, but once you get through the paintings, you've got the lavish Medici apartments, a costume gallery, a decorative arts collection, a modern art museum, and the baroque Boboli Gardens to see. You could spend a week here and still not be done. See p. 174.
 - **Galleria dell'Accademia** (Florence): The line stretches for blocks from the door, everyone waiting to get in and see Michelangelo's *David*, easily the most famous sculpture in the world. Once inside, you're also treated to his unfinished and powerful *Slaves*, along with works by Perugino, Giambologna, and Boticelli. See p. 164.
 - **Palazzo Pubblico** (Siena): The Museo Civico portion of Siena's medieval town hall preserves the masterpieces of the late Gothic Siennese school. See p. 214.
 - **Museo Etrusco Guarnacci** (Volterra): A staggering 600 Etruscan cinerary urns—playing out, in stony relief, the Etruscans' views on death, art, and life—fill dozens of rooms here. The tiny sarcophagi are topped with the enduring image of the Etruscan: bare-chested and comfortably pot-bellied, half reclining at a feast laid out in his or her honor. See p. 248.
 - **Museo Civico** (Sansepolcro): The hometown of Piero della Francesca, one of the geniuses of the early Renaissance, retains four of the master's works, including the *Madonna della Misericordia* and his masterpiece *Resurrection of Christ* (see above). The rest of the collections are padded with works by his student Luca Signorelli, and Mannerist and baroque paintings by the likes of Il Passignano and Santi di Tito, the latter also a native of the city. See p. 359.
 - **Galleria Nazionale** (Perugia): Umbria's National Gallery boasts more Peruginos than it knows what to do with. It also has one of the masterpieces of his teacher, Piero della Francesca, the *Polyptych of Sant'Antonio*, with its Annunciation scene of remarkable depth. Duccio, Arnolfo di Cambio, Fra' Angelico, and Gentile da Fabriano add to the collections. See p. 380.

8 The Best Etruscan Sights

- **Volterra:** One of Dodecapolis's ancient centers, Volterra has a medieval core still surrounded in places by the old Etruscan city walls.

The best section encompasses the 4th-century-B.C. Porta all'Arco gate, from which worn basalt gods' heads gaze mutely but protectively over the

valley. The Museo Etrusco Guarnacci here houses hundreds of funerary caskets and the *Shade of the Evening*, a tiny bronze youth of elongated grace (also above under “The Best Museums”). See chapter 6.

- **Populonia** (Tuscany’s Coast): Once an important Etruscan center, the seaside town of Populonia today retains little more than bits of its predecessor’s walls. Outside the walls, however, are some excellent *tumuli* and other tombs in several necropolises dotting either side of the road leading to Populonia’s promontory. Though most of the best portable pieces were carried off to Florence, the town was able to scrape together enough to fill a small museum. See “Livorno: A Busy Port City with Great Seafood,” in chapter 8.
- **Grosseto**: The modern capital of the Maremma has the region’s best museum of Etruscan artifacts, collected from many sites across Tuscany’s deep south. See “The Maremma: Tuscany’s Cowboy Country,” in chapter 8.
- **Chiusi**: The small but well-regarded archaeological museum here contains just some of the many finds from the dozens of tombs littering the valley floor between the town and small Lake Chiusi. Although the best tombs, including one with frescoes, have been indefinitely closed for restorations, you can arrange through the museum to visit a few, and there are others just lying open to you and your trusty flashlight. A few hundred yards of the old underground aqueduct systems carved into the rocky hillside by the Etruscans have been opened. Tours through it lead to a wide and deep cistern, atop which now sits the cathedral bell tower. See “Chiusi: In the Footsteps of the Etruscans,” in chapter 9.
- **Arezzo**: Though little remains of the Etruscan city *Arretium*—the town’s best artifact, the bronze chimera, got shipped to Florence long ago—some of the Roman city it became peeks out at its museum. The collection of Etruscan ceramics sets you up for the *corallino* pottery display, which showcases the vast Arretium industry that eventually opened branches and workshops all across Roman Italy and France to mass produce the famous waxy red earthenware. See “Arezzo: Where Life Is Beautiful,” in chapter 10.
- **Cortona**: Three significant tombs lie along the slope and valley of Cortona’s mount, including the one where the biggest find in Etruria of the past century was only recently discovered: a sophisticated altar with a sphinx-flaked stairway jutting out of the “Melone II” tumulus. Up in town, a museum houses a bronze Etruscan oil-lamp chandelier, as well as documented findings and displays about the ongoing excavations of “Melone II.” See “Cortona: ‘City of Art,’” in chapter 10.
- **Perugia**: Umbria’s capital still preserves its 3rd-century-B.C. Porta Marzia (Mars Gate), the only structure that compares to Volterra’s mighty city gate. An Etruscan well still supported by its massive travertine trusses was discovered in the heart of town, and just outside of town is a tomb where the funerary urns have been left in place just as they were discovered. See “Perugia: Capital of Umbria & Quaint Hill Town,” in chapter 11.
- **Orvieto**: Orvieto, Etruria’s ancient religious center, contains three archaeological museums. Taken together, they make up one of the best collections of Etruscan artifacts outside Florence and include Umbria’s only

accessible tomb paintings, now detached, and works from the Etrusco-Roman period. The town has also started running tours of some of the tunnels and caverns under the city, parts of which, including wells and a possible temple, were carved by the Etruscans. On the edge of town

are the grassy remains of an Etruscan temple, and around the edge of the city's walls is a tidy suburban-like necropolis of tombs, some still with inscriptions on the door lintels. See "Orvieto: Etruscan Ruins & Fine White Wine," in chapter 12.

9 The Best Luxury Hotels

Not all the hotels below are officially rated as luxury hotels, but all offer luxurious accommodations and amenities. See also **Relais Il Falconiere**, the **Locanda dell'Amorosa**, and **Hotel La Badia** under "The Best Countryside Retreats," below.

- **Hotel Helvetia & Bristol** (Florence; ☎ 888/770-0447 in the U.S.): This most central of Florence's luxury addresses was the city's leading hotel in the 19th century, and an award-winning restoration a decade ago returned the guest rooms and lounges to their opulent turn-of-the-20th-century look. The bright and refreshing small Winter Garden bar, with trailing ivy and a splashing fountain, doubles as the breakfast room. See p. 109.
- **Hotel Regency** (Florence; ☎ 055-245-247): The cozy wood reading rooms, crowded with antique furnishings, feel like a bit of old England. The service is some of the best and most discreet in the city, and the restaurant is the justifiably famous *Relais le Jardin*—Tuscan food from the kitchen of a master chef. Guest rooms are somewhat modernized, but marble-clad bathrooms and daily fresh fruit and newspapers in your room add to the prevailing quiet comfort. See p. 113.
- **Villa Vignamaggio** (Chianti; ☎ 055-854-661): Leonardo da Vinci might have approved of the saturated color schemes in the minisuites of this

agriturismo (working farm) high in the hills of the Chianti. In fact, the Mona Lisa who sat for his famous portrait grew up in the villa. Most suites are in the peasant stone outbuildings scattered across the property and come outfitted with minibars, satellite TVs, and complimentary bottles of the estate's award-winning vintage. It's the best base for a wine-buying trip. See p. 200.

- **Grand Hotel & La Pace** (Montecatini Terme; ☎ 0572-9240): The most elegant old-world hotel in a town full of 19th-century bastions of grandeur, the Grand has coffee lounges as big as ballrooms and dripping with stuccoes and chandeliers. In the 2-hectare (5-acre) private park are clay tennis courts, several pools, and jogging paths. It offers the full array of services, amenities, and facilities you'd expect from the leading inn of a famed spa town. See p. 272.
- **Hotel Il Chiostro di Pienza** (Pienza; ☎ 0578-748-400): This former 15th-century Franciscan convent in the middle of tiny Pienza has been the best hotel in southern Tuscany since it opened in 1993. Some rooms have 19th-century frescoes; in another wing, rooms feature exposed stonework and big ol' peasant wood furnishings. The restaurant, which moved onto a panoramic gravel terrace in summer, is highly recommendable as well. See p. 333.

- **Hotel Gattapone** (Spoleto; ☎ 0743-223-447): This hotel comprises a cluster of tiny 17th-century buildings huddled on the brink of a sheer ilex-covered slope. The secluded Gattapone, just a short stroll from Spoleto's Duomo, is completely surrounded by nature. The stone-silled picture windows of the spacious guest rooms open onto the monumental green of a wooded mountain that's been sacred since Roman times. See p. 424.
- **Fonte Cesia** (Todi; ☎ 075-894-3737): This meld of 13th-century *palazzo* and modern lines opened in 1994 as the first hotel in Todi's historic center. The public rooms are filled with brick vaulting, and the huge terrace, planted with palms, is for taking breakfast. The suites are each themed and decorated with fine antique pieces or modern design, such as Empire-style desks and dressers or Wassily chairs. See p. 429.

10 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- **Pensione Maria Luisa de' Medici** (Florence; ☎ 055-280-048): This hotel's owner collects both baroque art and modern design, so the halls are hung with museum-quality Vignale and Van Dyck, and the rooms are furnished with classics of 1950s design. You also get a full breakfast served in bed. Did I mention it's as central as you can get in Florence? See p. 107.
- **Hotel Torre Guelfa** (Florence; ☎ 055-239-6338): The name is apt for a hotel that incorporates the tallest privately owned tower in the city and is set in the medieval streets near the Ponte Vecchio. When you tire of sipping *aperitivi* on top of the 13th-century tower, with its 360-degree panorama of the city, you can retire to your canopied bed or follow the wafting classical music to the long Renaissance-style lounge. See p. 110.
- **Morandi alla Crocetta** (Florence; ☎ 055-234-4747): One of the most genteel and hospitable of Florence's hotels, the Morandi is set in a 1511 convent. You feel as if you're guests in the *palazzo* of some absentee well-off Florentine family from the 1800s. Each room is decorated with a shrewd eye to keeping the late Renaissance alive, with exposed brickwork and the occasional 16th-century fresco. Most hotels like this charge up to three times as much. Book early. See p. 114.
- **Antica Torre** (Siena; ☎ 0577-222-255): The rooms here are small but soothing, with light-gray stone accents and hand-hewn wood ceilings that hearken back to the building's history as a tower house in the 1500s. The tiny brick breakfast room is actually a potter's workshop from the 14th century. The friendly family that runs the hotel only adds to the atmosphere. See p. 229.
- **L'Antico Pozzo** (San Gimignano; ☎ 0577-942-014): The Medieval Manhattan's newest hotel is also its best, set in a restored 15th-century palace built into the *palazzo* where Dante stayed during his diplomatic visit to town. Inquisition trials are no longer held here, but you can get an enormous junior suite with a canopied bed or 17th-century-frescoed ceilings, or a top-floor double with views of the city's towers. See p. 240.
- **Hotel Royal Victoria** (Pisa; ☎ 050-940-111): Pisa's first hotel is still run by the same family that founded it in 1839—now in its sixth generation.

The rooms of this rambling *palazzo* are romantically worn, but many

have 19th-century frescoes or look out over the Arno. See p. 303.

11 Florence's Best Rooms with a View

"Camera con vista, per piacere." That's what you need to ask to guarantee a vista out your window, whether it's a view of the Arno, the Duomo, or the hills you crave.

- **Hotel Chiari Bigallo** (☎ 055-216-086): If you get a room along the front, you can practically lean out your window and poke Giotto's campanile with a stick. The view from these rooms is a living postcard—a foreshortened shot with the Duomo facade and campanile 15m (50 ft.) away and Brunelleschi's dome rising above them. See p. 105.
- **Hotel Hermitage** (☎ 055-287-216): Several good vistas await you at this old favorite. Room no. 602 has a balcony and view of the Palazzo Vecchio, while other rooms look down on the tiny Romanesque facade of Santo Stefano. Several overlook the Corridorio Vasariano to the Arno and the Ponte Vecchio. See p. 107.
- **Hotel Bellettini** (☎ 055-213-561): Ask the friendliest sisters in Florence to give you either room no. 28, with its view of the Duomo, or room no. 45, featuring one of the most unique panoramas in Florence: a close-up sweep from the Medici Chapel dome of San Lorenzo over to a full view of the Duomo, facade and all. See p. 107.
- **Hotel Loggiato dei Serviti** (☎ 055-289-592): It isn't often you can wake

up and throw open your shutters to a view of the most beautiful square in Florence and get an art-history lesson in the bargain. Below your window in Piazza Santissima Annunziata are bronze statues by Giambologna and Pietro Tacca, and across the square is a Brunelleschi-designed loggia studied with Andrea della Robbia terracottas. See p. 113.

- **Torre di Bellosguardo** (☎ 055-229-8145): Set on the hill where Hawthorne wrote *The Marble Faun*, the Bellosguardo's gardens and most of its guest rooms offer the closest-range vista of the Florentine skyline available. This 14th-century castle is the most Renaissance-feeling hotel in the city, with echoey vaulted chambers, beautiful antique beds, intricately carved and inlaid wood pieces, and stone staircases. The most spectacular view is from the tower suite. See p. 116.
- **Pensione Benescistà** (☎ 055-59-163): The small lounges and smoking rooms scattered throughout this early Renaissance mansion, located halfway up the hill to Fiesole, have picture windows opening onto Brunelleschi's dome and the whole of the Florentine skyline. Breakfast in summer is on a panoramic terrace. See p. 116.

12 The Best Countryside Retreats

Though there are plenty of regular hotels in the countryside, don't overlook *agriturismo* options (see "Tips on Accommodations, Villa Rentals & Farm Stays," in chapter 2), which offer travelers the opportunity to stay on a working farm. Besides the following best bets, a mix of

both countryside hotels and *agriturismo* establishments, don't forget the **Torre di Bellosguardo** and **Pensione Benescistà**, both just outside Florence and listed above under "Florence's Best Rooms with a View."

- **Villa Vignamaggio** (near Greve in Chianti; ☎ 055-854-661): Your home here is a luxurious suite in one of the peasant houses dotting the vine-covered property of a 15th-century villa. Take a dip in the pool or wander the manicured gardens. Kenneth Branagh's 1993 film adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing* was filmed at the villa. (See also "The Best Luxury Hotels," above.) See p. 200.
- **Hotel Castagneto** (outside Siena; ☎ 0577-45-103): This simple brick farmhouse from the 1780s contentedly watches over its olive groves on a ridge outside Siena. The guest rooms are large and plain, filled with country air and Tuscan sun. Some have terraces and all enjoy views over farmland, even though just a few feet from the gate you can catch a city bus into Siena. See p. 229.
- **Fattoria Maionchi** (near Lucca; ☎ 0583-978-194): This *agriturismo* estate, lost in a tangle of olive-lined country roads in the foothills 13km (8 miles) east of Lucca, produces some of the province's finest red Colline Lucchese wine. The apartments are pretty standard but very large, and there's an outdoor pool where you can refresh yourself just yards from the vineyards. Signora Maionchi and her husband are two of the friendliest hosts around; they'll be glad to show you the gardens in back of their 17th-century villa. See p. 284.
- **Relais Il Falconiere** (near Cortona; ☎ 0575-612-616): At the end of a long winding dirt road in the foothills behind Cortona lies this early-17th-century farm, an oasis of fine dining and countryside quiet. The main villa has country-simple doubles, some with frescoes. But the best rooms are the suites flanking the tiny chapel, with big beds on ancient terra-cotta

floors, wood-beam ceilings, and windows opening onto the olive trees and stone structures of the property. In the old building where lemon trees were once kept in winter is Cortona's best restaurant and some of the finest dining in Tuscany. See p. 369.

- **Castello di Gargonza** (Valdichiana; ☎ 0575-847-021): The 13th-century walled village of Gargonza offers one of the most unique hotel experiences in Italy—the chance to live in a real medieval *borgo*. The ancient central piazza, with its well, is your open-air living room, and an old olive press is your den. Each of the stone peasant houses has been converted into an efficiency apartment, and the hamlet is isolated on all sides by wooded mountains. See p. 372.
- **Locanda dell'Amorosa** (Valdichiana; ☎ 0577-677-211): The central buildings of this 14th-century farming estate are situated around a triangular gravel courtyard like a Spanish hacienda. The guest rooms behind the second-story brick loggia either look onto this piazza or out over vineyards and fields. The spacious country-style loft accommodations have large beds and are very quiet. The restaurant, though mind-bogglingly expensive, is one of Tuscany's best. See p. 372.
- **Hotel La Badia** (outside Orvieto; ☎ 0763-301-959): A disused abbey built between the 8th and 14th centuries, La Badia is just far enough away from it all to offer an oasis of peace and quiet. You can relax in the richly appointed and mediievally atmospheric rooms or just wander around the property. The city glows across the valley, and in just minutes you can be in town enjoying frescoes, dinner, and Orvieto's perfect white wine. See p. 440.

13 The Best Restaurants in Town

- **Cibrèo** (Florence; ☎ 055-234-1100): The amalgamated country-style decor of this restaurant belies its status as one of the city's finest kitchens. The dishes are Tuscan at heart—though they buck the standard by serving no pasta and little grilled meat—with innovative touches and plenty of peperoncino for spice. You may have to wait for an hour even with a reservation, but the wait is invariably worth it. See p. 131.
- **La Giostra** (Florence; ☎ 055-241-341): A closet prince and double Ph.D. decided in retirement to indulge his love of cooking and open this little-known fine restaurant a few blocks east of the Duomo. He doesn't stick strictly to Tuscan dishes, but rather lets his culinary imagination and half-Habsburg heritage marry Italian and Austrian cooking, with occasionally spectacular results. He also makes the best Sachertorte this side of Vienna. See p. 131.
- **Osteria le Logge** (Siena; ☎ 0577-48-013): In a room that looks a bit like an 18th-century apothecary shop, Siena's most accommodating staff serves some of the city's finest food. They take pride in their die-hard Tuscan dishes and urge you to try their traditional specialties. There's a reason the Sieneese come here when they want to celebrate—taste for yourself. See p. 232.
- **Il Piraña** (Prato; ☎ 0574-25-746): One of the best seafood restaurants in Italy is stuck in the modern outskirts of landlocked Prato. The atmosphere is refined but thoroughly modern, and the chef really knows what he's doing with any kind of fresh fish (flown in daily from both of Italy's seas), crustacean, or mollusk. A meal will set you back, but for any lover of *frutti di mare* (fruits of the sea), it's worth the side trip from nearby Florence. See p. 262.
- **La Buca di Sant'Antonio** (Lucca; ☎ 0583-55-881): This maze of a restaurant, hidden in the maze of Lucca's central alleys, has been pleasing palates since 1782. The decor is hodgepodge trattoria style, but the service is professional and the food is high-toned Tuscan. The stuffed pastas are excellent and the sauces light and delicate. The spit-roasted kid is the knockdown second course. See p. 287.
- **Ristorante Zaira** (Chiusi; ☎ 0578-20-260): Chiusi has several fine dining spots, but this one just edges out the others for its *pasta del lucumone*—ziti, ham, and three cheeses baked in a ceramic bowl until a crunchy brown crust forms—and for the moldy ancient wine cellars you can tour after your meal. See p. 346.
- **Il Falchetto** (Perugia; ☎ 075-573-1775): Years of success and a location on the edge of the town's main square haven't encouraged Perugia's most popular restaurant to lower its standards or to stop making some of the best Umbrian food in town. The homemade pastas are great, but the specialty is a melt-in-your-mouth casserole of spinach-and-ricotta gnocchi. See p. 387.
- **Osteria del Gambero (Ubu Re; Perugia; ☎ 075-573-5461)**: You could make a meal here just out of the delicious and seemingly bottomless assortment of fresh breads and rolls. Of course, that would entail ignoring the incredible pasta and meat courses. The intimate candlelit restaurant is up on the second floor on a side street, so few people even know it exists. Get here before Michelin starts strewing stars about the place. See p. 388.

- **Il Tartufo** (Spoleto; ☎ 0743-40-236): The floor of the lower dining room actually dates to the Roman Imperial era, but it's open only during the festival season. People really come here to taste some of the most

refined and successful culinary uses of truffles in Italy. They work all seasons of the truffle here, and the chef is a master at coaxing out the tuber's delicate flavor in both Umbrian and international dishes. See p. 425.

14 The Best *Trattorie* in Town

When you're not in the mood for a formal restaurant, head instead to a homey trattoria, where locals and families go for filling and tasty simple fare at great prices.

- **I' Cche' c'è c'è** (Florence; ☎ 055-216-589): Tuscan standbys, such as tagliatelle with wild mushrooms and beef cooked in chianti wine, get a refined touch here. This place is far from undiscovered, but being crowded at the long central table (much more fun than the private reservable ones ringing the room) with diners from across the globe has its own charm. See p. 124.
- **Il Latini** (Florence; ☎ 055-210-916): Squadrons of prosciutto ham hocks hang from the ceiling, and the waiters scamper around cracking jokes as they fit new arrivals into spaces at long communal tables like a jigsaw puzzle and lay huge platters of grilled meats and bowls of steaming *ribollita* (vegetable soup) in front of hungry diners. Although tourists have known about this place for decades, it remains a fun-loving locals'-style trattoria, concerned above all with showing you a noisy good time and stuffing you with hearty Florentine fare. See p. 127.
- **Il Pizzaiuolo** (Florence; ☎ 055-241-171): Florentines can't make a decent pizza. But owner Carmine emigrated from Naples and brought with him that city's ancient trade secrets and the plans for a huge brick oven. This place is like a bit of old Napoli, with long tables, loud conversations, historic Naples photos lining the walls,

incredible bubbling pizzas being passed to and fro, and basil leaves as table centerpieces. Come early, stay late, eat hearty. See p. 132.

- **Il Cantinone** (Florence; ☎ 055-218-898): Under the brick barrel vault of an old chianti cellar stretch long wooden tables where students, intellectuals, and extended families crowd nightly. The wine list is outstanding, as are the piping hot *crostini* (pizzalike slabs of peasant bread slathered with such toppings as prosciutto, gooey mozzarella, spinach, and tomatoes). This is the perfect place to head for a noisy, cheap, but tasty meal. See p. 134.
- **Trattoria S. Omobono** (Pisa; ☎ 050-540-847): This tiny, no-nonsense room behind Pisa's daily food market serves real Pisan food the way *Mamma* used to make it. The place fills up early at every meal. See p. 305.
- **Cittino** (Montepulciano; ☎ 0578-757-335): Marcella will bustle you upstairs to her expanded den-cum-dining room and serve you heaping portions of pasta—she spends the morning whipping up batches of homemade gnocchi and *pici*—smothered in ragout or spicy tomato sauce. It's a no-frills place with excellent food, ridiculously low prices, and the biggest smiles in town. See p. 341.
- **Ristorante Fiorentino** (Sansepolcro; ☎ 0575-742-033): In Sansepolcro's old inn for visiting Piero fans, you'll get the best fundamental Tuscan food

in the city. If you're lucky, the burly owner may pull over a chair to explain the finer points of Piero della Francesca's art or jab his thumb at tables and rattle off lists of famous people who've eaten his humble but tasty cooking in that chair right over there. See p. 361.

- **Umbria** (Todi; ☎ 075-894-2737): The traditional dishes of southern

Umbria are at their best here, with such fresh ingredients as wild asparagus tips, wood mushrooms, wild duck and boar, fresh river trout, truffles, and handmade pastas. In summer, the vine-shaded back terrace offers sweeping views across hilly farmscape. In winter, you can warm by the open fire where they grill your second course. See p. 430.

15 The Best Countryside *Trattorie*

- **Trattoria le Cave di Maiano** (near Florence; ☎ 055-59-133): This is many a Florentine's not-so-secret culinary escape, in the cool hills above the city. You can dine inside the rustic farmhouse or out on the famous tree-shaded terrace, with its distant view of Florence. The food is classic, well-prepared Florentine. See p. 136.
- **La Cantinetta di Rignana** (Chianti; ☎ 055-852-601): After an eternity of potholes and twisting dirt roads, you'll come upon a group of houses lost in the hills between Greve and Badia a Passignano. Curing meats hang in the doorway, and the cloth-covered tables are amusingly lit by end-table lamps. The homemade pasta is first-rate, as are the grilled meats. Settle back after a hearty lunch on the glassed-in porch with some hard biscotti and a glass of vin santo to soften them; then drink in the vista spilling across the vine-covered hills of the Rignana estate. See p. 201.
- **Rafanelli** (outside Pistoia; ☎ 0573-532-046): Though Pistoia's miniature tree-nursery industrial zone has grown up around this one-time countryside trattoria over the past 60 years or so, the Rafanelli family hasn't changed its commitment to the fundamentals of Tuscan cooking: wide homemade noodles in hare sauce, wild boar cooked in red wine, and risotto with

porcini mushrooms, all served in abundant portions. See p. 269.

- **Ristorante di Poggio Antico** (near Montalcino; ☎ 0577-849-200): The cheap, old trattoria on this famous wine estate shocked many when it reopened with a new minimalist interior and a talented *nuova cucina* chef spearheading the kitchen. Surrounded by vines that produce some of the silkiest Brunello wines in the region, you can dine on the most refined food in this part of Tuscany, where everything from the breadsticks to the dessert is homemade. See p. 327.
- **Fattoria Pulcino** (outside Montepulciano; ☎ 0578-758-711): If you're hankering for a country lunch on a working farm, come to this huge, sun-filled dining hall. You get the kind of rib-sticking food once dished out to the farm hands—plates of homemade *pici* pasta, platters of grilled meats—along with the owner's famous honeyed fruitcake for dessert. See p. 341.
- **Relais Il Falconiere** (outside Cortona; ☎ 0575/612-679): The food and service are impeccable, and the atmosphere sophisticated. Classical music floats across your table; when it's warm and the tables are set on the lawn, crickets take over for Vivaldi. The chefs marry the best fresh ingredients, many cultivated by the owners themselves, with Tuscan recipes to

make this one of the most popular restaurants in Tuscany. Follow the foodies who know which turnoff leads to this culinary hideaway. See p. 369.

- **La Stalla** (outside Assisi; ☎ 075-812-317): This is the quintessential countryside trattoria, the sort of place where scattered Italian families get

together for monthly reunions. The low ceilings are black with centuries of wood smoke that has poured from the open fire over which grilled meats sizzle. At the long wooden communal tables you can wash down a platter of homemade pasta and another of grilled lamb with copious quantities of the house red. See p. 404.