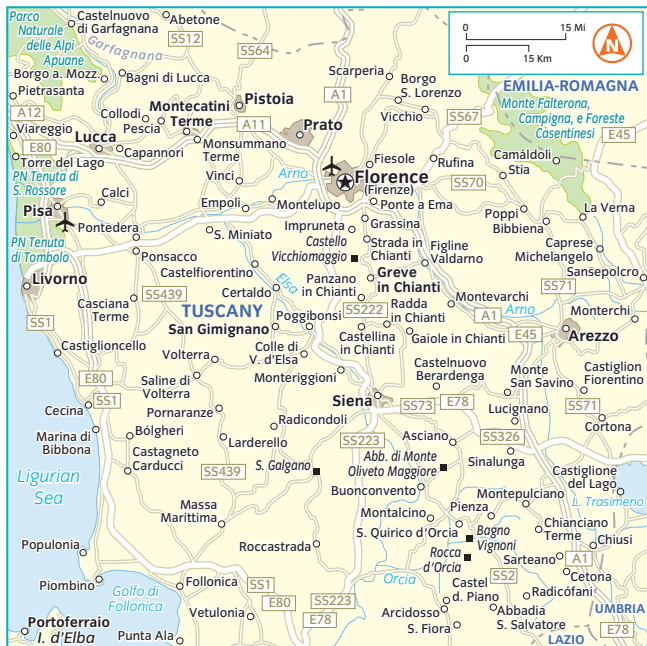


1

Strategies for Seeing **Tuscany**



Strategies for Seeing Tuscany



Tuscany isn't Tokyo or New York; racing around the region trying to "see" everything runs against the grain and the pace of the place, and may prevent you from *experiencing* it. It's tempting to want to make tracks, given that there is so much to see within a relatively small region easily traversed by car. But structuring a relaxed itinerary makes for a memorable trip. In this chapter we provide some suggestions for maximizing your time in Tuscany.

Rule #1: Keep your expectations reasonable.

Consider the experience of two couples we know who recently visited the region. One couple fashioned an aggressive itinerary that encompassed most of the major towns covered in chapter 6. And while they were able to say they saw town after town, church after church, and artwork after artwork, they spent 3 to 4 hours a day stuck in the car,

fighting traffic, the heat, and crazy truck drivers. The other couple decided to take on less turf and, naturally, didn't see as much; they even missed Cortona and some of our other favorite towns. Instead, they spent an entire afternoon in a Montepulciano cafe, splitting a chilled bottle of Orvieto Classico, staring over a wrought-iron balcony at a church in the distance. In hindsight, they considered that stop the



The countryside near Panzano, in Chianti Country.

pinnacle of their trip, writing, “We wouldn’t have traded that lazy Tuscan afternoon for the world.”

Rule #2: Remember, distances between towns are short.

Visiting Tuscany is as easy as traveling around a small state in the U.S. You can drive from Florence to San Gimignano or Siena in less than an hour. The entire Chianti wine country is only 48km (30 miles) from north to south, and 32km (20 miles) at its widest point. What’s more, it begins only 4km (½ mile) south of Florence. You can even drive from Florence west to Pisa in an hour. Once you veer off the autostrada, the roads become secondary, but unless you’re going to the most remote hamlet in Tuscany, they’re generally well maintained and sign-posted. The only problem in summer will be the heavy traffic caused by thousands of other visitors who also want to navigate the region by car.

Rule #3: Decide whether to hotel hop or stay in one place.

Checking in and out of hotels is often a boring hassle—involving luggage

transfers, packing and unpacking, registering and checking out, and other technicalities that can drain pleasure from a vacation. Because most Tuscan towns are within easy reach of one another, you can set up camp in the same hotel for 3 nights—in Siena, for example—and venture to smaller towns nearby on day trips. From Siena, you can easily visit San Gimignano, Volterra, or even the Chianti wine country

Tuscany is an ideal place to while away the hours in an outdoor cafe.



without wasting too much time in the car. You'll save a lot of wear and tear on your soul with this tack, reserving your energy for hotel changes required by longer hauls.

Rule #4: Plan your excursions around lunch.

If you're driving from town to town, plan to reach your destination by noon. Restaurants usually serve until 2 or 2:30pm, but you'll need time to park (which is often tricky in these overcrowded towns) and to locate the address of your restaurant. If you don't want to follow a schedule, pack a lunch before setting out and follow your bliss to the

ideal picnic spot somewhere under the Tuscan sun.

Rule #5: Don't follow these ideas to the letter; use them as building blocks for your trip.

This guide was designed to help you piece together your own dream getaway. You can plan your time in Florence using one section and then hop about Tuscany, in the next few days, using another. It's like an a la carte menu—select one item from column A and another from column B, according to your own tastes and interests, to make the most of our advice. ●

Pick Your Point of Entry

No direct flights run to Tuscany's two airports, in Florence or Pisa, from the United States or Canada. But Tuscany is easy to access from either Rome or Milan by plane, car, or train. Rome is the most hassle-free gateway and the best point of entry if you're starting your trip in Florence—about an hour away by plane and 3 hours by train. You can also rent a car in Rome and drive north to Florence 277km (172 miles) on the fast-moving A1 autostrada. (Milan is slightly farther—298km/183 miles northwest of Florence—but worth the extra distance if you find a cheaper flight there.) If you're beginning your trip in northwest Tuscany—in Pisa or Lucca—we suggest you fly into the airport at Pisa, which is larger than the airport at Florence. If your goal is to visit destinations in southern Tuscany, such as Montepulciano and Pienza, we'd abandon the plane option and plan to drive north from Rome. For complete details about reaching Tuscany by plane, or the different options for getting between airports and your final destination, see the "By Plane" section in "Getting There/Getting Around" in *Savvy Traveler* (p 184).