

Holiday: Secrets of Siena Cycling

Rating:  level

Holiday type: Independent Cycling

Tuscany

Italy

- Traffic-free *strade bianche* – ideal for relaxed cycling
- Swimming pools at 4 out of 5 hotels
- Great art cities of Perugia and Siena; a wealth of antiquarian sites
- Varied hotels, including a C17 villa and an olive oil farm
- Enchanting Lake Trasimeno; scenery from “The English Patient”
- Exquisite Tuscan cuisine; fantastic local wines



If you have 10 days to spend in Tuscany, then we think this holiday has it all - mediaeval villages, hilltop towns, Renaissance churches and Roman remains. Taking in the lush, verdant plains of the Val di Chiana on the shore of Lake Trasimeno, and the gently rolling ochre-coloured hills and vineyards of the Val d'Orcia, you mostly follow small traffic-free *strade bianche* through two of Italy's most beautiful and culturally rich regions: Tuscany and Umbria. There's Hannibal's battlefield by the shores of Trasimeno, the idealised Renaissance Pienza, and hilltop Montalcino and Montepulciano with their mediaeval fortresses. Hidden gems include sleepy Castelmuzio in the heart of the *Creti Senesi*, and the Medicis' thermal baths at Bagno Vignoni. The art treasures of Siena and Perugia are easily reached on “free” days by bus or train.

This is serious wine country, too. *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano* and *Brunello di Montalcino* come from here, as well as the less well-known *Chianti Colli Senesi* and *Colli del Trasimeno*.

“Tuscany is quintessential and timeless Italy, with a greater density of antiquarian sites than anywhere else on earth.”



Secrets of Siena Cycling: Day by day



Day 1 Arrive in Montepulciano

You arrive at Sig. Pagliai's friendly hotel - with indoor pool - overlooking the magnificent church of San Biagio. Dinner is taken in one of our favourite local restaurants.

Day 2 Montepulciano/San Quirico d'Orcia 30km/17mi

A perfect start through archetypal Tuscan countryside towards the charming mediaeval walled hamlet of Monticchiello, for balcony views over Pienza where you have lunch. A freewheel down through cypress trees before climbing into the old town. Time to explore this "Vatican city in miniature" before you visit Bagno Vignoni (thermal baths once owned by the Medici) then head off for our hotel in San Quirico d'Orcia for a refreshing dip in the pool.

Day 3 At San Quirico d'Orcia

Montalcino, another famous Tuscan wine cellar, is just next door. You can ride up here for stunning views over the Val di Chiana and the Val d'Orcia. The last rebel outpost of the Siena republic, Montalcino's fortress now houses the Enoteca - where you can taste (and buy) lots of fine regional wines. Or you can take a local bus to mediaeval Siena (75 mins).

Day 4 San Quirico/Montisi 28km/15mi

Today you cycle through the classic Sienese countryside - which formed the backdrop to The English Patient. The first highlight of the day is the beautiful monastery at Sant'Anna di Camprena. Then lunch in charming 13C Castelmuzio where time seems to have stood still, before heading off to Signor Bindi's farm hotel where he makes his own olive oil.

Day 5 At Montisi

Headwater guests love this traditional Tuscan village, and the villagers are certainly entertained by their foreign visitors! If you tire of relaxing by the pool, strike out to Monte Oliveto Maggiore Abbey nestling among the stark hills, burnt orange meadows and green pastures of the Creti Senesi. Quattrocento masterpieces in the cloister and the monks' excellent honey is available to buy and take home.

Day 6 Montisi/Farneta 37km/20mi

A forest trail takes you to walled, mediaeval Montefollonico for lunch. The road winds down through olive groves with stunning views over Montepulciano, and soon you are cycling past pink-roofed houses and cornfields to reach our 17C villa hotel, encircled by a cluster of cypress trees.

Day 7 At Farneta

It's a 10 km cycle to Camucia, where you can get a bus or taxi up the steep hill to Cortona. There's lots to see: quaint old streets, the Renaissance church of Santa Maria del Calcinaio, the 13C Palazzo Casali which also houses a fine Etruscan museum, and the Museo Diocesano with works by Fra Angelico. Or you could just laze at the pool with balcony views across the gentle Chiana valley.

Day 8 Farneta/Castiglione del Lago 27km/15mi or 39km/22mi

First stop Farneta, (16C abbey here was built over a Roman temple, and has a fascinating 9C crypt) and then either freewheel through the Trerose vineyards or take in Tuoro, the site where in 217 BC Hannibal massacred 15,000 Roman soldiers on his march to Rome, to reach our friendly hotel in the heart of Castiglione del Lago (great views over the lake).

Day 9 At Castiglione del Lago

The warm shallow Lake Trasimeno offers swimming from sandy beaches, sailing and canoeing. Or take a boat to Isola Maggiore, or the local bus to Perugia. Castiglione old town where you stay, dominating the lake on a steep-sided promontory, is fantastically pretty and charming in an intimate small-scale way.

Day 10 Castiglione /Montepulciano 33km/18mi

An easy cycle across wheat-fields scattered with tiny villages brings you to the wetlands bird sanctuary at the Lake of Montepulciano. It's home to several species of heron, terns, warblers and the endangered Ferruginous Duck. After lunch a climb through vineyards in the shadow of the old town of Montepulciano takes you back to your hotel in time for a well deserved swim.

Day 11 Leave Montepulciano



For departure dates,
prices and travel
options please visit
our website at:
www.headwater.com