

Travel

TUSCAN TREASURES

Journeying through Central Tuscany

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Let me take you on a journey through Central Tuscany, an agricultural area of great scenic beauty, driving from Rome up the S2 highway through the Chianti Classico wine region, past Siena and Poggibonsi to the small medieval town of Certaldo. I'm staying at Villa la Fonte, a quiet oasis tucked into the Tuscan hills along an avenue of tall cypress trees. The house dates back to the 1800s and originally formed part of the farming estate belonging to the Bourbon family.

The next morning, I'm off to Siena, taking a pleasant drive through the countryside, dotted with castles and rolling vineyards, past San Gimignano to Monteriggioni, a fortified village whose encircling walls extend for 570 metres. Perched on a hill, it was originally built as a lookout post for the defence of the Val d'Elsa Valley. The walk



Central Tuscany is an agricultural area of great scenic beauty.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

up from the car park brings me into a pedestrianized piazza, its restaurants brimming with tourists, and I come across a small restaurant in a side street where I stop for lunch.

In Siena, I meet my guide, Alessia, outside the Basilica Santa Caterina, and we embark on a three-

hour tour of the city. We explore the church and I learn about St. Catherine, whose preserved head sits in an ornate shrine. We walk through the winding streets towards the central Duomo, heralded as one of the most beautiful cathedrals in Italy.

The tall, striped columns of its interior reflect

the Moorish influence while the walls are painted in Renaissance-style and the ceilings in true Gothic mode. The stunning marble, hand-painted floors are uncovered today as we admire our way to the altar with its trompe l'oeil wooden chorister benches. There are altars of pure marble

- white, yellow and gold - and a statue of Michael d'Angelo's John the Baptist stands at the entrance to a room resplendent with preserved, hand-painted manuscripts and huge, brightly coloured murals depicting ancient scenes from equestrian events to Papal visits.

Outside, we walk along The Corso past chocolate fountains and wild boar meats until we arrive at the main square or Campo. Shaped like a fan with its medieval municipal buildings and Mangia tower, it offers a truly lovely sight. Here, the Palio, Tuscany's most celebrated festival, takes place on July 2 and Aug. 16 every year. The jockeys represent the 17 contrade or districts. Horse races are preceded by heavy betting and pageantry. Over 5,000 spectators gather to watch the many races and the winner is awarded a Palio or banner.


After a suitable siesta the following afternoon, I drive the 20 minutes into San Gimignano, hoping to beat the crowds and heat. The City of Beautiful Towers is one of the best preserved medieval towns in Tuscany. Its stunning skyline bristles with tall towers dating from the 13th century: 14 of the original 76 have survived. I enter through the south gate onto Via San Giovanni, lined with shops, galleries and jewelers. In the main piazza children sit on the cobblestones mesmerized by a puppet show. Others savour ice cream from the world-famous gelato shops nearby and old men line the stone loggia outside the Duomo, chatting animatedly. Suddenly, loud trumpets and drums sound as a parade approaches, its marchers sporting bright yellow and red costumes and holding up large banners. The Collegiate in the Piazza del Duomo is one of the most frescoed churches in Italy, but my favourite discovery is the church of Sant'Agostino, consecrated in 1298 with its simple facade that contrasts the heavily decorated Rococo interior.

My next adventure takes me to Lucca, west of Florence, a two-hour drive north past the towns of Empoli, San Miniato and Fucecchia. Lucca's Roman legacy is still evident in the regular grid patterns of its streets. I park inside the massive red brick walls that protect the city. Built from 1504 to 1645, these walls are among the best-preserved Renaissance defences in Europe. I locate the nearest

bike rental at Piazza San Maria. A leisurely ride along the ramparts takes about an hour and offers the sight-seer perfect vistas while enjoying easy exercise under the shade of the tall trees. Below, I spy botanical gardens, picturesque terraces, churches and medieval towers, including Torre dei Guinigi, a familiar landmark of Lucca with its holm oak trees growing at the top. Cycling the peaceful narrow lanes, I pass Piazza Napoleone named after Napoleon, whose sister Elisa Baciocchi was ruler of Lucca (1805-15). The statue in the square is of her successor, Marie Louise de Bourbon. I visit the cathedral of San Martino, which dates from the 11th century, its stunning marble facade and richly decorated columns an outstanding example of the exuberant Pisan-Romanesque style.

Next I journey to Florence (Firenze to the Italians), the jewel in the crown. I catch the fast train from Certaldo to Firenze, arriving at Stazione Centrale di Santa Maria Novella in 50 minutes. I head straight to the Ponte Vecchio on the banks of the River Arno, the oldest bridge in Florence built in 1345. Indeed, it is the only bridge in the city to have escaped destruction during WWII. The bridge is now lined with goldsmiths and the bust of Cellini, the most famous of all Florentine goldsmiths, was placed in the middle of the bridge in 1900.

Along the street is the Mercato Nuovo (New Market), originally built in 1547-51, where today's stall holders sell leather bags, belts and purses. At the south end of the market is a little fountain called Il Porcellino, a 17th century bronze wild boar. Its snout gleams like gold, thanks to the superstition that any visitor who rubs it will return to Florence some day. I wander through the vast open Piazza della Signoria to see its impressive Neptune Fountain and open-air sculpture gallery of the Loggia dei Lanzi and walk the length of the notorious Uffizi gallery. I stop for a late lunch in the Piazza di San Firenze next to the Badia Fiorentina, one of the city's oldest churches. Afterwards, I continue up to the Piazza del Duomo to its magnificent cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore, with its distinctive marble cladding and into the adjoining Piazza di San Giovanni in the heart of religious Florence.



SCHEDULES

Horseshoe Bay (Vancouver) / Langdale (Sunshine Coast): Oct 11, 2016 - Dec 21, 2016
Earls Cove (Sechart Peninsula) / Saltery Bay (Powell River): Oct 11, 2016 - Dec 21, 2016

HORSESHOE BAY / LANGDALE		EARLS COVE / SALTERY BAY	
Leave Horseshoe Bay	Leave Langdale	Leave Earls Cove	Leave Saltery Bay
7:20 am Daily	6:20 am Daily	6:30 am Daily except Sun	5:35 am Daily except Sun
9:20 am Daily	8:20 am Daily	8:25 am Daily	7:25 am Daily
11:20 am Daily	10:20 am Daily	10:25 am Daily	9:25 am Daily
1:20 pm Daily	12:20 pm Daily	12:20 pm Daily	11:20 am Daily
3:30 pm Daily	2:30 pm Daily	4:30 pm Daily	3:25 pm Daily
5:30 pm Daily	4:30 pm Daily	6:30 pm Daily	5:30 pm Daily
7:25 pm Daily	6:30 pm Daily	10:05 pm Daily	9:00 pm Daily
9:15 pm Daily	8:20 pm Daily		

Sailing Time: 40 minutes
Horseshoe Bay: Ticket sales for vehicles & walk-on passengers end 10 minutes before sailing time.
Langdale: Ticket sales & loading end 5 minutes before sailing time for vehicles & walk-on passengers.

Sailing Time: 50 minutes
Earls Cove & Saltery Bay: Ticket sales & loading end 5 minutes before scheduled sailing time for vehicles & walk-on passengers.

Schedules are subject to change without notice
For up-to-the-minute schedules, fare info or to reserve:
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WEEKLY TIDE TABLE

Reference: Pt. Atkinson - PDT

DATE	TIME	(M)	(FT)
2016/10/28	05:17	3.9	12.8
	10:55	2.4	7.9
	16:50	4.3	14.1
	23:31	1.6	5.2
2016/10/29	06:01	4.1	13.5
	11:37	2.6	8.5
	17:17	4.2	13.8
2016/10/30	00:01	1.4	4.6
	06:42	4.2	13.8
	12:15	2.7	8.9
2016/10/31	17:43	4.2	13.8
	00:31	1.3	4.3
	07:21	4.3	14.1
	12:53	2.9	9.5
2016/11/01	18:08	4.1	13.5
	01:01	1.2	3.9
	08:01	4.4	14.4
	13:30	3	9.8
2016/11/02	18:33	4.1	13.5
	01:32	1.2	3.9
	08:41	4.4	14.4
	14:10	3.1	10.2
2016/11/03	19:00	4	13.1
	02:04	1.2	3.9
	09:23	4.5	14.8
	14:55	3.2	10.5
	19:29	3.9	12.8



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