



ACADEMY
TRAVEL

TAILORED
SMALL GROUP
JOURNEYS

FLORENCE & TUSCANY

A CULTURAL JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORIED HILLS OF TUSCANY

Monteriggioni

OVERVIEW

Exploring the stunning Tuscan landscape from Florence through Chianti to Siena, San Gimignano, Pisa and Lucca, this 16-day tour, led by cultural historian and Florence resident Kate Bolton-Porciatti, traces the origins of the cities and hill towns of the region and explores their artistic, musical and cultural legacy.

Our first week is spent in Florence and the surrounding hills where the Etruscan town of Vipsul (now Fiesole) first emerged in the 9th century BCE. Tracing the area's cultural roots will help us understand their 're-birth' in medieval and Renaissance Florence, which we explore with city walks and in-depth tours of the major galleries, museums and monuments.

In our second week we head into the magnificent countryside of Chianti, visiting medieval abbeys, castles and villages, and sampling wine-making and culinary traditions. From here we make our way to the great medieval towns and cities of Siena, San Gimignano, Certaldo, Pisa and Lucca, tracing their rivalries and alliances with Florence, as well as their glorious art works and monuments.



TOUR LEADER

Kate Bolton-Porciatti is a professor of Italian cultural history and music in Florence, and a former producer and broadcaster for BBC radio. Kate will be accompanied by a trained tour manager for the duration of the tour.

TOUR DATES

May 22 - June 6, 2025 | 16 Days

TOUR PRICE

\$13,920 per person, twin share
\$3,370 single supplement

TOUR DEPOSIT

A **\$1,000** non-refundable deposit is required per person to confirm your booking on tour.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum number of **16** in group

ITINERARY

Florence (7 nights), Chianti Hills (4 nights), Lucca (4 nights)

INCLUSIONS

15 nights' accommodation in centrally located 4-star hotels. All breakfasts, 7 lunches and 5 dinners. Best available tickets to **1** performance in Florence. Services of an expert tour leader and an experienced tour manager throughout. All ground transport, entrance fees and tipping.

DETAILED ITINERARY



Start & Finish

The tour starts at 3.00pm on Thursday 22 May, at the Hotel Antica Torre Tornabuoni, Florence. The tour ends at 12.00pm on Friday 6 June, following a transfer to Florence Airport for onward flights.

Included meals are indicated with B, L, D.

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Art Cities

Immerse yourself in the incomparable art and architecture of Tuscany's beautiful cities, conceived and created by some of the greatest names of the Italian Renaissance.

Palazzi, Villas & Gardens

Explore the splendid city 'palaces' of Tuscany's prestigious families and idyllic country villas whose Italian landscaped gardens were devised as expressions of Renaissance ideologies.

Chianti Hills

Enjoy the 'sweet hills' of Chianti, an idyllic refuge since the ancient Etruscans first started producing wine, ceramics and sculptures here around 2.5 millennia ago.

Medieval Hill Towns and *Borghi*

Experience the legendary beauty of Tuscany's fortified hill towns, built around defensive towers and girdled with robust stone walls reflecting their turbulent past.

Birth Place of Opera

Trace the story of Italian opera from its origins in Renaissance Florence to its heyday in the late 19th century, visiting the birthplace and lakeside home of Giacomo Puccini.

Thursday 22 May

Arrival & Orientation

Meeting at the hotel, we have an early evening orientation stroll followed by a welcome dinner of traditional Tuscan food and wines. Overnight Florence (D)

Friday 23 May

The Foundations of Florence

Setting the stage for the week ahead we make our way up to the "Mons Regis", one of the highest points in Florence, offering panoramic views across the city and surrounding countryside. We visit the church of San Miniato al Monte, a 1000-year-old showcase for local craftsmanship and a glorious introduction to the Florentine artisan guilds, whose members both patronized and crafted the city's art and devotional works. After lunch in a local restaurant, we stroll through the bohemian Oltrarno area, visiting local workshops where sculptors, stone-inlay workers, goldsmiths, etchers, book and paper makers continue Florence's celebrated artisan skills. Overnight Florence (B, L)

Saturday 24 May

Florentine Palazzi & Gardens | Performance

Today, we visit some of Florence's grand palaces and gardens, beginning with the fortress-like medieval structure of Palazzo della Signoria. After lunch in a local trattoria, we visit the Pitti Palace: home to the Grand Dukes of Tuscany and later the Italian royal family, the palace is filled with an extraordinary collection of fine and decorative art from the Medici collections. Our day ends with a leisurely stroll through the Boboli Gardens, created by the Medici in the 16th century as a harmonious fusion of greenery, statuary, lakes and fountains. In the evening we make our way to one of Florence's magnificent theatres for an opera performance (schedule permitting). Overnight Florence (B, L)

Performance

Venue: To be advised

Title: To be advised

Performers: To be advised



Palazzo Medici-Riccardi



Duomo, Florence

Sunday 25 May Fiesole & Settignano

The gentle slopes of the hills just north of Florence are scattered with Renaissance villas set amongst olive groves and vineyards. Today we make our way to the gracious town of Fiesole, exploring the Etruscan and Roman roots of this hill-top settlement. We'll also visit Fiesole's Duomo. After lunch at a local restaurant, we pay a visit to the lovely gardens of the 16th-century Villa Peyron, built on Etruscan ruins, fed by a 'miraculous' spring and surrounded by a wooded park. We return to Florence via Settignano, stopping at the Villa Gamberaia, whose magnificent gardens are a superb example of Italian Renaissance design. Overnight Florence (B, L)

Monday 26 May The Medici in Florence

Medici patronage encouraged some of the most glorious art and architecture of the Renaissance and today we trace the story of this extraordinary family from the early 15th century, when they first rose in prominence as bankers in the city-state of Florence, to the 18th century when the dynasty died out. We begin with Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, whose private chapel is adorned with vibrant frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli, and then we visit Michelangelo's Laurentian Library, built for the Medici's extraordinary collections of books and manuscripts. After a break for lunch, we visit the San Lorenzo complex which houses the impressive Medici chapels and tombs adorned with sculptures by Michelangelo. Overnight Florence (B)

Tuesday 27 May Sacred Monuments

We begin today with the serene convent of San Marco, commissioned by Cosimo 'the Elder' de' Medici in the 15th century, and exquisitely frescoed by Fra Angelico. After enjoying lunch together, our focus is Florence's extraordinary cathedral - the Duomo - crowned with Brunelleschi's innovative dome, completed in 1434. We'll also visit the 11th-century Baptistery and the archaeological remains of the original paleo-Christian church of Santa Reparata. In the Duomo Museum we enjoy Ghiberti's remarkable Gates of Paradise and Michelangelo's poignant and unfinished Pietà, sculpted for his own tomb. Overnight Florence (B, L)

Wednesday 28 May The Uffizi Gallery & Vasari Corridor

Today we visit Palazzo Davanzati, a 14th-century family home colourfully frescoed with chivalric motifs and narratives. We then visit the outstanding collection of the Uffizi Gallery. Here our in-depth tour traces the fascinating history of the building and examines works by artists including Cimabue, Giotto, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Bronzino, Caravaggio, Artemisa Gentileschi, Titian and Rembrandt, setting them in their broader cultural, religious and social contexts. After a refreshment break on the Uffizi's beautiful panoramic terrace there is an optional afternoon tour of the



Badia a Coltibuono



San Gimignano

Vasari Corridor (subject to its reopening after restoration), an astonishing aerial walkway nearly 800 metres long, built by Giorgio Vasari in the 1560s to connect two Medici palazzi. Overnight Florence (B)

Thursday 29 May
From Florence to the Chianti Hills

This morning, we visit the Accademia Gallery, home to Michelangelo's incomparable David and his epic-scaled, unfinished 'Prisoners', still captive in marble. Later, we leave Florence for the 'sweet hills' of Chianti, stopping en route at the Badia di Passignano - a Vallombrosan Abbey of 11th-century origin surrounded by a picturesque village overlooking the famous Antinori vineyards. Our guided visit of the monastery includes the cloisters, gardens, and refectory where Domenico Ghirlandaio frescoed a beautiful 'Last Supper' in the late 1470s. We'll enjoy a traditional lunch at a local trattoria before setting off for our winery-hotel, which is immersed in the Chianti hills and vineyards. Overnight Chianti (B, L)

Friday 30 May
Siena

The pink-hued city of Siena was built to reflect the concept that an earthly city should be a mirror of the heavenly city of Jerusalem. Our visit here will explore the philosophical and religious ideas of the 'civitas terrena' and the 'civitas Dei', which informed the creation of Siena's civic and sacred buildings. We'll visit the Duomo, Crypt and Baptistery, the Palazzo Pubblico, including Ambrogio Lorenzetti's frescoed Allegories of Good and Bad Government, and the majestic Piazza del Campo. After an afternoon break at our estate we meet again at the hotel's restaurant for dinner. Overnight Chianti (B, D)

Saturday 31 May
Abbeys, Castles & Villages

Today we start with a wander round the fortified medieval borgo of Volpaia, high in the Chianti hills. We'll tour the labyrinth of wine cellars in the church crypts, as well as the drying attics where Vin Santo ('Holy Wine') is produced. Then we head to the Badia a Coltibuono, an abbey founded in the 11th century offering incomparable views over the Arno valley. After lunch on the restaurant's panoramic terrace (weather permitting), we'll visit the Abbey's Renaissance-style gardens and historic wine cellars. The day ends at the Castello di Brolio - a medieval castle set on an isolated hill and one of the oldest wine producing estates in Italy. We'll visit the estate and gardens, taking in some of the best views of the region before returning to our hotel. Overnight Chianti (B, L)

Sunday 1 June
San Gimignano

Our day trip to San Gimignano traces the town's history and the political factions that gave rise to its imposing towers, beginning at the hilltop castle that formed the original nucleus



Lucca



Baptistry, Pisa

of medieval life here. Thanks to its natural resources and strategic location on the Via Francigena pilgrim route, the castle was transformed into a 'medieval Manhattan' whose soaring towers still dominate the skyline. We'll visit the Duomo, lavishly frescoed by Gozzoli, Ghirlandaio and others, and the medieval city hall. Finally, we'll climb the 'Torre Grossa', the great civic tower affording spectacular views across the countryside. Tonight we enjoy dinner together back at our estate. Overnight Chianti (B, D)

Monday 2 June **Monteriggioni, Certaldo & Lucca**

Departing Chianti today we travel to Lucca, via the medieval walled fortress of Monteriggioni, built to defend Siena from Florence and unforgettably described by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*. Our tour continues to the story-book medieval town of Certaldo, a feast of red-brick tower-houses, churches and palazzi. It was the birthplace of the 14th-century writer Giovanni Boccaccio who used his hometown as the inspiration for some of his short stories in *The Decameron*. After lunch at a local restaurant, we continue to the beautiful walled city of Lucca – rising from the green plains of the Serchio Valley. Overnight Lucca (B, L)

Tuesday 3 June

Lucca

Thanks to its strategic position on the Via Francigena, Lucca grew into one of the most prosperous and magnificent of all of Tuscany's medieval towns. It remains a jewel of a place, girdled by over 4km of Renaissance walls. On our walking tour, we'll learn about the city's growth from an ancient Roman castrum to a vital centre of pilgrimage and trade in the Middle Ages. We'll visit the Palazzo Pfanner (subject to restorations being complete) or the historic Palazzo Mansi, one of the most splendid noble residences in the city, hosting tapestries and art collections. After a break for lunch, we'll visit the Puccini Birth House Museum, childhood home of the great Italian opera composer. This evening we enjoy dinner in a local restaurant specialising in traditional Tuscan cuisine. Overnight Lucca (B, D)

Wednesday 4 June

Pisa

Lying near the Ligurian Sea on the mouth of the River Arno, Pisa grew in importance and splendour from the 11th century when it became one of Italy's four great maritime republics. Today we visit the aptly named 'Piazza of Miracles' whose remarkable sacred complex – the Duomo, Baptistery, the leaning campanile and the monumental Campo Santo cemetery – makes it one of the most breathtaking piazzas in Italy. After lunch, we'll stroll through the civic heart of the city and the Piazza dei Cavalieri where Vasari's dashing Palazzo della Carovana, adorned with ornate sgraffito and sculpted busts of the Medici grand dukes, testifies to Florence's conquest of Pisa in the 16th century. You may end the visit to

HOTELS

Hotels have been selected principally for their central location. All hotels are excellent four-star boutique properties.

Florence, Antica Torre di Via Tornabuoni 1

(7 nights)

www.tornabuoni1.com

Chianti Hills, Dievole Wine Resort

(4 nights)

www.dievole.it

Lucca, Palazzo Dipinto

(4 nights)

www.palazzodipinto.com

WEATHER

The weather in late May and early June is usually very pleasant in Florence and Tuscany. The average maximum daytime temperature is around 23.0°C (73.4°F) and one can usually enjoy sunshine and blue skies without excessive heat. The average night-time temperature is around 11.7°C (53.06°F). We recommend light clothing that you can layer, sun protection (hat/scarf, sunglasses and sunscreen), and a rain jacket and umbrella in case of showers.

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

Grade Two

Our tours have many active components, from walking tours, standing around for lengthy periods at sites or in museums, and negotiating stairs or slopes on uneven terrain. More usually, the day involves walking from one place to another, and getting on and off a coach several times a day. You should be able to comfortably participate in up to five hours of physical activity per day, including walking at an easy to regular pace, with only short breaks.

Pisa with a walk round the exotic Botanical Gardens, founded in 1543 and hosting plants from every continent in the world.
Overnight Lucca (B)

Thursday 5 June

Torre Del Lago

After a leisurely morning in Lucca, we head to the sleepy town of Torre del Lago on the shores of Lake Massacciucoli. Here, Giacomo Puccini lived and wrote his most beloved operas, including *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*. Puccini described the place as 'paradise, Eden', and the light and natural beauty of the area inspired a group of artists from the Macchiaioli school of painters, who befriended the composer. We trace Puccini's Bohemian circle at the composer's villa - now a house museum furnished much as it was when he lived there and visit the mausoleum, where the maestro and his family are buried. Our last day together will include a farewell dinner at a chalet-restaurant overlooking the water. Overnight Lucca (B, D)

Friday 6 June

Departure

Our tour concludes after breakfast with a transfer to Florence Airport, arriving at Midday. Please check individual travel plans for onward transfer arrangements. (B)



ENQUIRIES & BOOKINGS

For further information or to secure a place, please contact **Sharon Williams** on 9235 0023 (Sydney) or 1800 639 699 (outside Sydney) or email:

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