

Tuscany & Piemonte

Sample Wine Tour

Almost every region and area of Italy produces wine, much of it good, but the pinnacle of Italian wine production comes from the regions of Tuscany, in central Italy, Piemonte in the northwest and Friuli and Veneto in the northeast. This itinerary offers an introduction to the wines of Tuscany and Piemonte.

Tuscany

Day 1

Arrival & rest at our hotel outside Rome, a country inn beautifully converted from a farm near Trevignano, a charming lakeside town, popular among Italians for a Sunday meal and summer vacations. Our type of hotel, is called *agriturismo* in Italian (a combination of the words for agriculture & tourism) to reflect the rustic charm of farms as tourist accommodation. Our *agriturismo*, a charmingly renovated farmhouse & barn offers a warm, inviting sitting room with a large old-time fireplace & an equally charming dining room. The wholesome Italian cooking include meats & cheese produced right on the premises. Rooms are airy & comfortable with air-conditioning. Our *agriturismo* is aptly located for nature walks, situated as it is near the rims of 2 volcanic craters, which today contain lakes, among the cleanest in Italy. Horseback riding both in a corral or in the open countryside is offered, as is tennis & use of the swimming pool. However, both lakes have beaches, if you prefer fresh water swimming. Our *agriturismo* is also close to 2 lakeside towns of medieval flavor for leisurely walks into the past.

After dinner, we will meet the wine expert who will be our guide into the world

Day 2

Morning

Today we depart from Trevignano for Montalcino by way of Sutri, where we will see a Roman amphitheater carved out of the bedrock and a medieval church carved out into the cliff. Continuing on Montefiascone and a stupendous view of Lake Bolsena, the largest volcanic lake in Italy. A short drive along the lake takes us to the medieval town of the same name. We will savor the medieval flavor of the town, as we stroll through the town to the castle, which houses a small, but interesting archaeological museum, containing finds from prehistoric, Etruscan and Roman settlements around the lake, some of which have been submerged by the lake's rising waters.

Entering Tuscany, we make a brief visit to Radicofani, & the medieval fortress with its tall tower rising from the top of the steep conical hill from which it looms over the medieval *borgo* which lies on the slopes below. The hill towers over the surrounding countryside, and the tower is visible from 20 miles around on a clear day. Closer to Montalcino we encounter the picturesque medieval hamlets of Ripa d'Orcia, Vivo d'Orcia & Rocca d'Orcia. As their name implies, they are all located in the valley of the Orcia River, and are all very close to one another.

Arrival at Montalcino. Check in at our *agriturismo*. Free time for rest or a stroll about town and a late afternoon sip of wine at the bar in the *rocca* where we shall sip our drinks & bask in the medieval atmosphere to the strains of the music of Vivaldi, courtesy of the fine taste of the owner-barman.

Tour of the vineyard of the **Fattoria Barbi**, one of the well-known local vintners and a sampling of their **Brunello** and **Rosso di Montalcino** wines. After lunch we shall make

a visit nearby to the medieval monastery of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, set amidst its olive and cypress groves & view the frescoes in the cloister by Luca Signorelli, who did the stupendous frescoes in the Cathedral of Orvieto. Free time in Montalcino and at the inn before dinner. Dinner & evening of relaxation in the lounge of the inn.

Day 3

We shall spend the day touring the **Chianti**, home of the *Gallo Nero*, symbol of **Chianti Classico**. The region of Chianti is known not only for the splendid wines produced there, but for the beauty of the hills clad with vineyards and olive groves. We will visit two vineyards at Castellina and Radda in Chianti and have lunch at a country restaurant. In the afternoon we explore the enchanting hilltop village of Montefioralle. Return to the hotel, dinner.

Day 4

All day in the splendid city of Siena, beginning with a visit to the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena's town hall for centuries, & a view from the top of its 290-foot high tower, the Torre del Mangia, of all Siena laid out below. The Duomo is a short walk away through streets lined with Siena's characteristically elegant Gothic buildings. Lunch in the Campo, the square where the *Palio*, the 700-year old bareback horse race still rouses the passions of the Siennese, not once, but on two occasions during the summer.

After lunch, a brief optional sightseeing will center on the Pinacoteca, the painting gallery which is home to the finest works of the Siennese school of medieval painting. Free time for shopping & a late afternoon aperitif in Piazza del Campo. Return to Montalcino for dinner & an evening of relaxation at our inn.

Piemonte

Day 5

We will proceed by bus to the green area of Piemonte with its extensive vine-covered slopes that make this area one of the best-known wine-producing zones of Italy. Moving into the countryside of the Monferrato, a main wine-growing region. Along this route we will discover a host of villages and castles. First stop, the city of **Asti** where we will sample Asti's famous *spumante* at a local *enoteca*, followed by dinner at a restaurant. Overnight in the Asti area.

Day 6

Morning tour of the historic city of Asti, followed by a visit to a local vineyard to sample the fine Piemonte red **Dolcetto d'Alba**, as produced in Asti, which is different from that of Alba, but as valid. The wine-tasting will be accompanied by a light lunch. Free afternoon. Dinner and overnight.

Day 7

Full day excursion of wine-growing country. Our first stop is the town of **Barbaresco**. Barbaresco, one of the most famous wines of the Alba-Asti area, is produced here. The *Enoteca Regionale*, where we will sample some Barbaresco, is located in a deconsecrated church of 19th century. Beneath the frescoes that decorate the vault, we will hear about various stages of the growing and making of wine. Lunch in a restaurant in Barbaresco.

In the afternoon, we will visit a vineyard in the **Canelli** area. Canelli is a small town located between Monferrato and Langhe and considered to be an important wine center, including sparkling wine. Dominated by a charming castle overlooking a fascinating medieval village, this town dates back to ancient times. It lies in the province of Asti in the very heart of the region of Piemonte. The white **Muscat** grapes are the product of careful selection and loving devotion by master wine-growers of the area, who turn these precious grapes into fine dessert wines: Asti Muscat and Asti Spumante, well-known and appreciated throughout the world.

A less well-known, but nevertheless truly impressive feature of Canelli are its wine cellars, which, winding their way below ground on different levels, are veritable "underground cathedrals." These cellars, considered to be masterpieces of architecture, make a strong visual impact on the visitor. The *enoteca* is located in cellar of an ancient *palazzo* of the 18th century. Return to Asti for dinner and overnight.

Day 8

Tour of the town of Alba and visit a local vintner in nearby **Barolo**, home of the wine of the same name, one of the premier Italian red wines. Tour of vineyard and its cellar with an explanation of the process of making Barolo. Opportunity to sample this fine wine, as well as the excellent **Barbera** red, and the **Dolcetto d'Alba**. Return to Asti for dinner and overnight.

Day 9

Our last day will be in the town of **Vignale Monferrato**, where we will visit the regional *enoteca* located in the Palazzo Callori. The bottles are housed in a cellar of volcanic tuff stone which comes from the same hills on which the vines are grown. Lunch will be served in the same Restaurant of Palazzo Callori. In the early afternoon, transfer to Milan for overnight near Milan airport.

Day 10

Transfer to Milan's Malpensa Airport for flight home.