

# TUSCANY & UMBRIA

## Sample Wine Tour

### 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.

### Day 2

Today we depart from Trevignano for Orvieto by way of 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.

A half-hour's drive brings us to Orvieto. We approach Orvieto from the west offering us a stunning view of the city atop its high outcropping with sheer cliffs on all sides. Orvieto is a gracious medieval town with a past reaching back to Etruscan times. It was the Etruscan Velzna, called Volsinii by the Romans, before they destroyed it in the 3rd century B.C. Orvieto extends right to the edge of the plateau & the cliffs that dominate the surrounding valleys on all sides. Light Lunch.

Of particular interest is the cathedral begun in 1290 following a miracle that occurred in nearby Bolsena. In a side chapel we will admire the breathtaking frescoes painted by Luca Signorelli of the Last Judgment, an exquisite work which provided the inspiration for Michelangelo's Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel. This chapel has just been re-opened to the public after a 9-year restoration of these frescoes.

Free time for shopping & individual sightseeing. Dinner at a local restaurant. Our two-night stay in Orvieto will be at an *agriturismo* located on a hill outside Orvieto and built of stately Umbrian stone. The tree-shaded garden offers a superb view of the Duomo of Orvieto in the distance rising tall above the rest of the town.

### Day 3

Today we will make a visit to a pottery workshop to see the phases of pottery-making & the various medieval and Renaissance motifs used in pottery decoration, which are being revived after years of careful research. This will be followed by a tour of "Underground Orvieto." Orvieto's table-like plateau, made of soft tuff stone is riddled with underground chambers & drainage channels carved out by the Etruscans. Visit to a vintner producing **Orvieto Classico**, a white wine that comes in 3 grades, from sweet to dry. We shall tour the vineyard and wine cellar to see the wine-making process from beginning to end

After lunch we shall walk through the old streets to the east end of town to a park placed amidst the ruins of the medieval fortress, now a public park offering a stunning view of the valley below. Next to the park is a deep well with double spiral ramp, built by the Renaissance Pope Clement VII in 1527 to supply the city with water during a siege he feared would be laid by the Holy Roman Emperor. The Emperor had just sacked Rome and driven out the Pope, who then took refuge in Orvieto. A walk down the ramp to the bottom 58-meters (over 190 feet) below illustrates how far below the surface they had to dig to reach the water table. The well is equipped with 2 separate spiral ramps, one going down and one going up to permit mules to transport water without creating a traffic jam.

Just a short drive from the well is an Etruscan necropolis with a number of inscriptions in the Etruscan language, identifying the names of the occupants the tombs. The rest of the afternoon will be devoted to rest, shopping & individual sightseeing.

### Day 4

Departure for Montalcino, a medieval town located in the heart of the Tuscan wine-making country & known for its prestigious red wine, Brunello. On the way we shall pay brief visits to several medieval *borghi* & fortresses. 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. Dinner at the *agriturismo*.

### Day 5

Visit to the town of Montalcino, its *rocca* (medieval fortress) and lunch in 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. Free time to wander & shop. Light lunch.

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. Free time in Montalcino and at the inn before dinner. Dinner & evening of relaxation in the lounge of the inn.

### **Day 6**

Departure for Castellina in Chianti to sample the famous Chianti wine where it is produced. Within view of the spires of Siena, we shall make a brief stop at Cuna, a fortified medieval farm, later turned into a hospital by the sisters of Santa Maria della Scala, an order of Siennese nuns and at the tiny walled town of Monteriggioni. Tour of vineyard and lunch accompanied by Chianti wine.

Visit after lunch to the castle of Brolio on the edge of Chianti, the well-known wine-making region. The castle is extraordinarily well preserved complete with towers & battlements. Return to our inn. Free time, dinner and choice between seeing the *Rocca* illuminated at night & an evening's relaxation in the inn.

### **Day 7**

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.

Our brief optional sightseeing will be centered 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.

### **Day 8**

Leisurely tour of Pienza with lunch in one of its charming restaurants. Pienza is a Renaissance town named after Pope Pius II, a native son, who, through a major building program, gave the town its present monumental Renaissance appearance. Lunch in Pienza. Late afternoon return to Rome and dinner and overnight in a hotel near the airport.

### **Day 9**

Day of rest and shopping in downtown Rome.

### **Day 10**

Return flight to the U.S.