



Tuscany Revealed

Highlights and hidden treasures of Cosimo de Medici's Grand Duchy

2–11 April 2025 (ML 655)

10 days • £4,160

Lecturer: Dr Flavio Boggi

Ten-day immersion in a region which is of exceptional artistic and architectural richness.

Major centres include Pisa, Lucca and Siena, but many smaller places are included.

Led by Dr Flavio Boggi, an art historian specialising in medieval and renaissance Italian art, who has published widely on the artistic culture of Tuscany.

Were Florence to tumble into the Arno and disappear forever, Tuscany would continue to be one of Europe's most alluring destinations for the culture-seeking traveller. Such is the profusion of great art and architecture in the surrounding region.

Present-day Tuscany is more or less the territory put together by Duke Cosimo I, who achieved absolute power in 1537 and ruled for the next 37 years. Under him and his successors the territory became one of the most significant of the second-tier states in Europe, though despite relentless canvassing of pope and emperor Cosimo failed to be awarded the status of king and had to make do with the title of Grand Duke.

The Renaissance is brilliantly represented, with major works by leading *quattrocento* artists – Masaccio, Donatello, Ghiberti, Filippo Lippi, Michelozzo, Gozzoli, Ghirlandaio, Pinturicchio and others. But in terms of quantity, spectacularity and variety, the Middle Ages predominate – unsurprisingly, as the term encompasses many hundreds of years of creative ferment. Buildings of magnificence and beauty and astonishing immensity abound, while in the field of painting Siennese artists such as Duccio and the Lorenzetti brothers have no equals. Sculpture is particularly important here, with the Pisani family creating some of the greatest works of the Gothic era.

The region is also famous for its landscape, which is among the most beautiful in Europe. Richly textured, consistently undulating, subtly various though invariably punctuated by the black-green uprights of cypress trees, the grey-green bobbles of olive trees and the gold-green striations of vineyards.

There are two bases for this tour, both utterly lovely and characteristic. Lucca is a small valley-floor city of Roman origin hemmed in by hills, girded by red-brick



Montepulciano, aquatint c. 1830.

ramparts and consisting of a succession of enchanting streets and squares. Colle di Val d'Elsa, between Siena and San Gimignano, is one of the many beautiful hilltop towns in the countryside around Siena, which contains perhaps the most extensive spread of medieval townscape in Europe.

Itinerary

Day 1: Pisa, San Piero a Grado. Fly at c. 8.00am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Pisa. Isolated on the coastal plain, the Romanesque basilica of San Piero a Grado has one of the finest sets of medieval frescoes to be found anywhere. Continue to Lucca. Within the perfectly preserved circuit of Renaissance ramparts lies one of the loveliest stretches of urban scene in Italy. First of four nights in Lucca.

Day 2: Lucca. The morning walk takes in enchanting streets and major buildings, including the Romanesque cathedral of S. Martino, home of the extraordinarily beautiful Gothic tomb of Ilaria del Carretto. Walk out to the Villa Guinigi, a rare survival of a 14th-century villa and now a museum housing a choice collection of medieval paintings.

Day 3: Pistoia, Collodi. The exceptionally attractive town of Pistoia has important art and architecture including an octagonal baptistry, a Renaissance hospital with a ceramic frieze by the della Robbia workshop and a pulpit crowded with expressive figures carved by Giovanni Pisano. In the cathedral there is a unique silver altarpiece which took 150 years to

complete. Villa Garzoni at Collodi has one of the finest surviving examples of 17th-century gardens, with terraces excavated out of a steep hillside.

Day 4: Pisa. In the Middle Ages Pisa was one of the most powerful maritime city-states in the Mediterranean, the rival of Venice and Genoa, deriving great wealth from its trade with the Levant. The 'Campo dei Miracoli' is a magnificent ensemble of cathedral, burial ground, campanile ('Leaning Tower') and baptistry, all of gleaming white marble.

Day 5: Volterra. A wonderful drive through Tuscan hills leads to Volterra, a rugged medieval hilltop town with an art gallery and a Romanesque cathedral, which again has fine Renaissance sculpture. Continue to Colle di Val d'Elsa, where the next five nights are spent.

Day 6: San Gimignano. With its fourteen 13th-century, hundred-foot tower houses is an amazing sight. Visit the collegiate church which contains two great cycles of trecento frescoes depicting scenes from the Old and New Testaments. The town hall also has 14th-century frescoes and houses a small art gallery. Study the development of the city in the streets, alleys and squares, and walk along a stretch of the walls.

Day 7: Siena. The largest of the hilltop towns of Tuscany, distinguished by architecture and art of exquisite elegance. The scallop-shaped piazza is one of the most beautiful urban spaces in the world; Duccio's Maestà, housed in the cathedral museum, is the finest of all medieval altarpieces. The cathedral is an imposing

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continued

construction of white and green marble with medieval and Renaissance artworks of the highest quality.

Day 8: Certaldo, Monteriggioni. In little towns such as these, alongside seeing fascinating buildings and pictures, there is the opportunity to relish the picturesque delights of ancient, and still thriving, hilltop communities. Certaldo, birthplace of the 14th-century writer Boccaccio, has a redoubtable little governor's palace and a small art gallery; Monteriggioni has an exceptionally intact circuit of walls and towers.

Day 9: Montepulciano, Pienza. Montepulciano is distinguished among hill towns for its number of grand buildings of the 16th century, including the cathedral, though excellent works of art inside survive from its predecessor. The Tempio di S. Biagio (Antonio da Sangallo, 1518) is a major work of the High Renaissance. Pienza provides wonderful views of inimitable rolling countryside; its centre – piazza, palace, town hall, cathedral – was built in the 1460s in accordance with Renaissance principles at the behest of a local boy who made good: Pope Pius II.

Day 10: Prato. Prato built its wealth on cloth-working. The cathedral has outstanding Renaissance sculpture and painting, notably Donatello's pulpit with dancing putti and frescoes by Filippo Lippi. Visit also the 13th-century Hohenstaufen castle and the Museo di Palazzo Pretorio, reopened in 2014 after restoration, housing works by Filippo and Filippini Lippi among others. Fly from Pisa to London Heathrow, arriving c. 9.00pm.

Lecturer

Dr Flavio Boggi. Art historian specialising in medieval and Renaissance Italian art. He trained both in Scotland and Italy and is now head of the department of Art History at University College Cork, Ireland. He has published widely on the artistic culture of Tuscany. He is also interested in Emilian painting and has co-written two books on the Bolognese artist Lippo di Dalmasio.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £4,160, or £3,670, without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,670 or £4,180 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (E90); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 1 lunch, 6 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer.

Accommodation. Hotel Ilaria, Lucca (hotelilaria.com): excellently situated 4-star, within the city walls; friendly staff. **Palazzo San Lorenzo Hotel & Spa, Colle di Val d'Elsa** (www.palazzosanlorenzo.it): 4-star hotel set in a XVII-century palace. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? There is a lot of walking, much of it on steep ground and roughly paved streets, as well as standing around in churches and galleries. The tour is not suitable for anyone who has difficulties with everyday walking and stair climbing. Average distance by coach per day: 52 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.