

BEYOND FLORENCE: EXPLORING THE TUSCAN COUNTRYSIDE



Florence is without doubt a highlight on any Italian holiday. The city's rich Renaissance heritage makes it a must-see for anyone interested in Italian art and culture. Sometimes, however, Florence can start to feel ever-so-slightly like an open-air museum. Once you've ticked off the imposing David, the beautiful Santa Maria Novella and the historic Ponte Vecchio, you might want to get out of the city to appreciate one of Italy's most beautiful regions: Tuscany. With a holiday apartment in Florence as your base, you can explore the surrounding country to your heart's content.

Fiesole

Escape to: Fresh air and great views

This pretty little town is the perfect place to escape to when the heat and crowds of Florence get too much to bear. Located in the hills looking down on the city, the views from Fiesole are best appreciated with a rustic picnic and a good bottle of Tuscan wine. If you can stir yourself, go for a wander around the archaeology park, where you can appreciate ruins from the Etruscan, Roman and Lombard civilisations. Otherwise, take a short bus ride from Florence and simply indulge in a day of pure relaxation al fresco.

Greve in Chianti

Escape to: A gastronomic paradise

It doesn't take a great Italophile to recognise the name of one of the world's most celebrated wine-producing regions. Greve's situation in the region of Chianti means that you can explore some gorgeous vineyards, where the juicy grapes that go to make many of Tuscany's famous wines grow. As if that weren't enough, Greve is also famed for its olives, from which the delicate Tuscan oils are extracted. Add this to the truffle harvest and the multitude of delicious game - pigeon, rabbit, venison, wild boar - and you should be prepared to leave Greve a little heavier than when you arrived.

Viareggio

Escape to: Sea, sand and sole

Viareggio is a resort town on the Tuscan Riviera, well-connected to Florence by road and by train. It has ten kilometres of excellent sandy beaches where you can while away the afternoon under the Tuscan sun. Known in its glorious heyday as 'The Pearl of the Tyrrhenian Sea,' the town's architecture features Art Nouveau buildings in the style of the early 20th century. A stroll along the promenade, or passeggiata a mare, takes you past a multitude of impressive hotels.

Vinci

Escape to: An idyllic piece of history

Vinci's greatest claim to fame is that the small town was the birthplace of the great Renaissance

man Leonardo da Vinci. Well over 500 years after his birth, this jack-of-all-trades continues to be renowned for his groundbreaking artwork, scientific genius and mysterious personal life. You can visit the farmhouse where he was born, and wander the rustic streets of this attractive town, where he spent his childhood. The pace of life is almost as slow now as it must have been then, so take your time: drop into a sleepy inn for some delicious country fare washed down with the local vintage.

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