

# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MEDIEVAL PILGRIMS: THE VIA FRANCIGENA (THE ROAD TO FRANCE)

## 1° DAY: ARRIVAL

Check-in in the hotel, near Lucca. Meeting with our assistant and accommodation in the rooms. Dinner and overnight in hotel.

## 2° DAY: FROM PIETRASANTA TO LUCCA

Breakfast in Hotel. The pleasant tour in the footsteps of the medieval pilgrims along the Via Francigena, the ancient medieval pilgrimage route from Rome to France, will start from **Pietrasanta**, “the small Athens” of the Versilia region, the capital of the artistic working of marble, rock and bronze. Founded in the XIII century, the town is known for the numerous works of modern art exposed in the old center. Thanks to the generosity of artists of international reputation, like Igor Mitoraj and Fernando Botero, Pietrasanta has become a sort of open air museum.

Free lunch. Possibility of having lunch in a restaurant by the sea in Marina di Pietrasanta, tasting delicious seafood dishes (not included).

In the afternoon the tour will go on following the ancient Via Francigena up to **Lucca**, fascinating town which has exceptionally preserved its city walls complete. Guided tour in the old town, visiting the Church of San Frediano, with its magnificent thirteenth-century mosaic representing *Christ in Majesty*, the nearby Piazza Anfiteatro, the most beautiful square of Lucca, the ancient Duomo dedicated to San Martino and finally the important Piazza San Michele, the central civic square of Lucca since Roman times.

Dinner and overnight in hotel.

## 3° DAY: FROM SAN MINIATO TO SAN GIMIGNANO

Breakfast and check-out from the hotel. The interesting tour along the Via Francigena will continue up to **San Miniato**, medieval town strategically located to control important medieval crossways and laid at the foot of three green hills overlooking the Arno river. You'll be able to visit the Church of San Domenico, with its interesting frescoes, the Cathedral, the Sanctuary of the Santissimo Crocifisso and the famous Federico II's Tower, from where you'll enjoy an amazing view over the surrounding hills.

Free lunch. Possibility of having lunch in a typical Tuscan tavern in San Miniato, tasting savory dishes with truffles, famous local gastronomic specialty (not included).

Afternoon dedicated to the visit of **San Gimignano**, a completely preserved charming medieval town which reveals an unexpected richness of art treasures. You'll see Piazza della Cisterna, with its impressing medieval tower-houses, the Church of Santa Maria Assunta, adorned with fine frescoes, the Church of Sant'Agostino and finally the wonderful Rocca di Montestaffoli, the old fortress with a tower from where you'll enjoy a magnificent view on the surrounding Tuscan landscape.

Transfer to the hotel near San Gimignano. Check-in and accommodation in the hotel. Dinner and overnight in hotel.

## 4° DAY: FROM CERTALDO TO POGGIBONSI, AMONG GREEN HILLS AND ANCIENT ABBEYS

Breakfast and check-out from the hotel. The tour will go on up to the beautiful Valdelsa region, visiting **Certaldo**, interesting arts town along the Via Francigena that produced the famous Italian poet and writer Giovanni Boccaccio, and **Poggibonsi**, charming village rich in art, culture and old traditions. You'll visit the Gothic Franciscan Church of San Lucchese, one of the biggest places of worship of the Valdelsa region, and the Fonte delle Fate (Source of the Fairies), the only great archeological find of the ancient town of Poggio Bonizio.

Free lunch. Possibility of having lunch in a wonderful farm immersed into the green hills around Poggibonsi, tasting typical Tuscan viands (not included).

In the afternoon, you'll follow the Via Francigena up to *Monteriggioni*, a perfectly preserved typical medieval walled village, passing through the little town of *Abbadia a Isola*, with its beautiful Benedictine abbey. You'll be able to wander the tiny streets of Monteriggioni: the medieval towers, the central Piazza Roma, the Gothic parish church of Santa Maria Assunta, the beautiful gardens and orchards and the typical workshops for local products.

Tasting-dinner in a beautiful country-farm between Monteriggioni and Siena. Transfer to the wonderful hills surrounding Siena. Check-in in the country-hotel. Overnight in hotel.

## **5° DAY: MYSTERIOUS ABBEYS IN THE GREEN LANDS OF SIENA... THE SWORD IN THE STONE**

Breakfast in hotel. All morning long dedicated to the visit of *Siena*, one of the leading art cities in Tuscany, which has completely preserved its medieval character. You'll visit the Church of San Domenico, much visited for its venerated relics of Saint Catherine, patron saint of Italy and Europe. You'll see the magnificent Palace of Monte dei Paschi bank, the oldest bank in Europe, founded in 1472. You'll reach the nearby Piazza del Campo, the unrivaled center of vivid city life, where your guide will explain you the rules - and tricks!- of the famous Palio, Siena's breathtaking bareback horse race. With a stop at the Chigi-Saracini Palace, you'll finally visit the Duomo, with its special pavement made with a startling sequence of 56 marble panels. Free lunch. Possibility of having lunch in a typical Tuscan tavern in Siena (not included).

Your tour along the Via Francigena will continue in the afternoon up to the famous *Abbey of San Galgano*, a wonderful Cistercian abbey, now in ruins, built in honor of San Galgano: a 12th-century Tuscan nobleman named Galgano Guidotti, who renounced a life of "arrogance, lust and violence" to become a hermit after seeing a vision of the Archangel Michael. San Galgano lived as a hermit on the hill called *Montesiepi*: the small round chapel of Montesiepi preserves the sword in the stone which San Galgano himself plunged in 1180 into a rock to have an altar to pray at... A fascinating mystery that mingles with the Celtic legend of King Arthur and his sword Excalibur. Discover with our guide this charming Italian legend, visiting the fascinating ruined abbey and the mysterious hermitage of Montesiepi.

Dinner and overnight in hotel.

## **6° DAY: IN THE LAND OF RED WINE AND MEDIEVAL TREASURES- Possibility to match this itinerary to the scheduled dates of STEAM TRAIN during the year.**

Breakfast and check-out from the hotel. The tour along the Via Francigena will continue in the rolling hills of Siena up to Montalcino, charming untouched medieval village, passing through the beautiful *Buonconvento*, medieval village surrounded by walls of red bricks in the middle of the ocean floor of the Crete Senesi. *Montalcino* is the home of the excellent red wine *Brunello di Montalcino*, full-bodied wine whose bottles are exported all over the world. You'll go for a stroll through the small streets of the old characteristic medieval town center, admiring the Cathedral in neoclassic style, the ancient porticos of Piazza del Popolo and the huge medieval castle overlooking the village.

Free lunch. Possibility of having lunch in a typical Tuscan restaurant in Montalcino (not included).

Afternoon dedicated to the visit of the famous *Abbey of Sant'Antimo*, stopping point for the faithfuls on a pilgrimage along the Via Francigena, one of the most important and fascinating abbeys in Italy. Impressing-looking and silent Romanesque parish church, according to the legend it was founded in an ancient votive chapel erected by Charlemagne in 781 and was later rebuilt between 1000 and 1118. This extraordinary example of Lombard-French Romanesque architecture made in onyx and alabaster reveals its exceptional in its apse externally formed by radial chapels along an internal deambulatory and in its capitals decorated with interesting geometrical floral motifs and animal figures.

At the end of the visit, transfer in a beautiful country-hotel near Montalcino. Check-in and accommodation in hotel. Tasting-dinner sampling the famous *Brunello di Montalcino* red wine. Overnight in hotel.

## **7° DAY: WANDER THROUGH THE GREEN VAL D'ORCIA Possibility to match this itinerary to the scheduled dates of STEAM TRAIN during the year**

Breakfast in hotel. You'll continue to follow the fascinating path along the Via Francigena reaching an essential, perfect landscape, placed right in the heart of the Sienese lands: the green Val d'Orcia (Orcia Valley), beautiful valley cut by the river Orcia, declared UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004 for the excellent state of preservation of the landscape, characterized by a succession of rolling hills covered with woods and beech forests. You'll pass through **San Quirico d'Orcia**, small hillside village surrounded by ancient walls placed in the most evocative corner of the Val d'Orcia. You'll see the Romanesque Collegiate Church and the wonderful Horti Leonini (Leonini Gardens), beautiful formal gardens which are now suggestive stage for outdoor performances. You'll travel along the Val d'Orcia, passing through the tiny medieval thermal village of Bagno Vignoni, up to **Abbadia San Salvatore**, medieval village born around the famous Abbey of San Salvatore, the most powerful Tuscan abbey during the Middle Ages. The Romanesque abbey, which holds one of the most monumental medieval crypts, was one of the most powerful Benedictine foundations to control the way Francigena, backbone of the international connections within the Italian peninsula.

Free lunch. Possibility of having lunch in a typical Tuscan farm in the Val d'Orcia (not included).

Afternoon dedicated to the visit of **Pienza**, nice Renaissance village in the heart of the Val d'Orcia, famous all over the world for its fine *Pecorino* cheese. You'll visit the old center, with the beautiful Franciscans Church and the central Piazza dedicated to Pope Pius II Piccolomini, who wanted to transform his birthplace into an ideal city of the Renaissance. In the Piazza Pio II you'll be able to see the Cathedral, the Town Hall and the beautiful Palace of the Piccolomini family. Walking through small streets with singular names (like, for example, "Love's Street"), you'll reach a vantage point from where you'll enjoy a wonderful view over a landscape of harsh beauty.

Dinner and overnight in hotel.

## **8° DAY: DEPARTURE**

Breakfast in hotel. End of our services

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