

MONTALCINO & ABBEY OF SANT' ANTIMO

DISTANCE FROM THE BORGO: 17KM



A mecca for Italian wine lovers, Montalcino's territory will astound with the quality, beauty, and character of its two hundred vineyards, all arranged in sixteen square kilometers around a hill, at the top of which sits the town of Montalcino (<http://www.prolocomontalcino.com/en/>). The pristine streets and astounding views make Montalcino a worthy stop on any tour of Tuscany. A perfect way to complete the trip is with a visit to the austere Romanesque Abbey Sant'Antimo, just ten kilometers downhill from Montalcino.

Begin your approach from Buonconvento. After traveling south on the SR2 for a few kilometers, bear to the right where the sign points to Montalcino atop the hill, onto the Strada Provinciale del Brunello. The Borgo is within sight to your right as you turn and begin the ascent to Montalcino.



WINERIES EN ROUTE TO MONTALCINO

Soon after turning toward Montalcino, you may wish to stop at some of the first major vineyards you will pass on your left, Altesino, Caparzo and Il Paradiso di Frassina. The quality of these vineyards, in combination with their friendly relationships with Borgo Finocchieto, makes them a good place to start any tour of Montalcino. It is always best to have a reservation, so please contact our hosting staff in advance of your trip.

ALTESINO

Altesino (<http://www.altesino.it/eng/azienda.php>) is one of the larger estates on our side of the mountain and a well-respected brand internationally.

Altesino combines a modernist estate with the old charm of ancient cypresses and fragrant climbing roses. Its Brunello is aged in enormous barrels of Slovenian oak from Croatia in its beautiful cellars. Its atmospheric cellars are well worth touring and the vineyard always keeps at least one English speaker on hand for English-speaking visitors. Follow your tour with a tasting of wine, olive oil, and even spirits produced on the premises.

CAPARZO

Next door to Altesino is Caparzo (<http://www.caparzo.it/mobile.html#>) which shares the same owner in Elisabetta Gnudi Angelini. This large estate is well appointed for tastings and tours.



IL PARADISO DI FRASSINA

Less than one kilometer up the road, you'll encounter **Il Paradiso di Frassina** (<http://www.alparadisodifrassina.it/en/sito>). The home of the Mozart Vineyard, Il Paradiso is especially interesting for its exploration into the effect of music on vines. Stepping from the car, your ears are met with the peaceful harmonies of the music of Mozart, pumped throughout the vineyard on all-weather speakers. This vineyard is truly a pleasure to visit. Make arrangements ahead with our hosting staff.

PROCEEDING ON TO MONTALCINO:

If a morning of wine touring has left you starving, you might want to stop at **Boccon di Vino** (<http://www.boccondivinomontalcino.it/>), on the road from Buonconvento, after the roundabout at Costanti vineyard. Boccon di Vino offers an excellent view and classic, slightly upscale food.

ARRIVING AND PARKING AT MONTALCINO:

The road from Buonconvento leads through several roundabouts and sharp turns, in which you should follow the bull's eye symbol for Montalcino's "centro." There is a large parking lot just below the Fortezza, the fortress at the highest point in the city. Pay in the machine for how many hours you plan to stay, then leave the ticket on the dashboard. There is a second, much smaller lot in front of the Fortezza that is worth a shot if you wish to keep walking to a minimum.

LUNCH IN MONTALCINO

Because all stores and many vineyards close for the afternoon between 1 and 3:30, it is best to take a late, leisurely lunch in Montalcino, allowing time for exploration a bit later when things are reopening.

The Enoteca della Fortezza (<http://www.enotecalafortezza.com/GB/Home>) is an excellent way to begin your visit to Montalcino. In addition to an enormous array of local wines for tastings, the Fortezza keeps a good supply of local meats like Cinta Senese pork, cheeses, and oils. Lunch on soup, pinzimonio (crudités dipped in olive oil), cured meats, pecorino, and fresh bread. When you finish, climb to the top of the fortress for a walk around its walls where the view from the top is astounding, stretching all along the Val d'Orcia to Montepulciano on clear days.





Other lunch options in Montalcino abound. For a nice lunch in town on excellent homemade pasta, try **Taverna del Grappolo Blu** (Scale di Via Moglio 1; 0577847150; <http://www.grappoloblu.it/>) Set on an alleyway just off the main road with a steep but breathtaking view of the hills below, Il Grappolo Blu is a good bet for a simple and exceedingly friendly meal in Montalcino. Characteristic terracotta dishes and warmly colored walls convey a homey, inviting atmosphere, as does the proprietor, who is well versed in English.

Another good option in town is **Re di Macchia** (Via S. Saloni 21; 0577846116.) This friendly, slightly upscale little restaurant in the center of Montalcino is an excellent choice for personal service and authentic Tuscan food. The menu is short but has a good mix of light and hearty options, changing seasonally. For the most local of places, **Osteria di Porta al Cassero** (Via della Libertà 9; 0577847196) is a Montalcino institution and one of the only restaurants in town that maintains a hearty business in the off-season. Porta al Cassero's menu is as down-home and classic as a small town osteria can offer: basic Tuscan antipasta plates, several choices of seasonal soup and pinci (the Montalcino name for the doughy pici noodles) al aglione or al ragu. If you would prefer a sandwich or salad, try **Alle Logge di Piazza** in the Piazza del Popolo. This spot in the very center of town has a modern, stylish feel and a good selection of light lunches. Eat outside to drink in the sunshine and watch the crowd in the Piazza or choose a table near the back with a wonderful view of Montalcino's rooftops. Across the Piazza, **Caffè Fiaschetteria Italiana** is an atmospheric place with an interesting history (<http://www.caffefiaschetteriaitaliana.com/>). If it's definitely an inside day, the **Bar Mariuccia** (Via Matteotti 31) has the best view of the valley below through enormous windows.

AFTERNOON TOWN EXPLORATION

Spend the early part of the afternoon in leisurely exploration of this pristine town. Montalcino's importance is not limited to its more than one hundred years at the forefront of the wine world. It holds special historical significance as the last bulwark of Sienese power in the area. Many of the thirteenth century walls are still intact, as is the Fortezza, built in the second half of the fourteenth. Here the Sienese rulers found sanctuary from attacking Florence for four years before finally falling in 1559. As a token of appreciation, a Montalcino flag bearer takes pride of place in the Palio parade every year in Siena.





TOURING AND SHOPPING

Exiting the Fortezza (note the Medici crest, a remnant of when the town finally fell to Florence), take the Via Ricasoli north, which leads to the **Museo Civico e Diocesano**. The collection includes a twelfth century Crucifixion that is one of the earliest works of Sienese art. A *Sano di Pietro Madonna dell'Umilita* shows the Virgin kneeling austerely. There is also a collection of illuminated manuscripts. Continuing down the Via Ricasoli, detour left at the Palazzo Vescovile and head uphill toward the Duomo. Montalcino's cathedral, **San Salvatore**, is eleventh century Romanesque but is mostly notable for the quietly beautiful area atop its hill.

From the Duomo, backtrack a few streets or walk (feet pointing sideways) down the incredibly steep roads that lead to the Piazza del Popolo in the center of town. The Piazza is crowned with the **Palazzo dei Priori**, or town hall, which houses the most important group in Montalcino today, the Consorzio del Vino Brunello di Montalcino. The square is also home to two large loggias that offer a great respite from the sun and a perfect place to have an afternoon break.

The main road off of the Piazza del Popolo is the main shopping street. There are more enotecas than any town but Montalcino could support, but all seem to do a good business. Across from the Fortezza, the **Drogheria Franci** features its house-produced honey in a wide array of flavors. They also sell a good selection of local products, honey, oils, and Cinta Senese salami. Just off the Piazza del Popolo, a few steps up toward the Piazza Garibaldi, is a pretty little kitchenware store with a small, carefully chosen collection. It's a great place to find small gifts, like monogrammed espresso cups or linens. "**Handsome Mario's**" store in the Piazza is a wonderful place to find beautifully woven scarves. A bit further down the Via Mazzini, Angolo di Terracotta's artistic owner maintains a small store stuffed with beautiful hand-made bags and unusual jewelry.

SPECIAL EVENTS:

The first weekend in February may be the most important weekend in Montalcino, when the Consorzio hosts the Leccio d'Oro to sample the most recently opened Brunello vintage, celebrate with awards, and preview the most recent harvest. May 8 marks Montalcino's Festa della Madonna del Soccorso, rather like a trial run of the future Palio race in Siena, as it pits the same horses in competition. The town hosts both a Jazz and Teatro festival

in July. There are also summer concerts in Sant'Antimo, the Estate Musicale Santantimese.

The second Sunday in August is a major festival celebrating the opening of the hunting season, the Apertura della Caccia, with medieval costumes, parades, competitions, and feasting in the evening. The first week in September is Honey Week, in which many exhibitors set up stands in and around the Fortezza. Finally, Montalcino celebrates the closing of the hunt with more fanfare than the opening. The Sagra del Tordo on the last weekend in October is a huge, similarly-styled event with evening dancing. In addition to watching the parades and events, it is possible to take place in the feasts for most such events. Signs announcing the menus tell where to buy tickets. Tourist information office: Costa del Municipio 8 (0577849331; just above the Piazza del Popolo)

ABBEY OF SANT' ANTIMO

For a truly special experience take in the late afternoon Gregorian chant at the **Abbey of Sant'Antimo** (<http://www.antimo.it/>). From Montalcino town, the route to Sant'Antimo is always marked in brown on signs, as a historical landmark. The most direct is to take the road marked for Castelnuovo dell'Abate and Sant'Antimo on the roundabout just below the Fortezza. This road leads downhill about ten kilometers before opening into a wide valley with Sant'Antimo on the right. Veer right toward Castelnuovo and then turn right again into the driveway for the abbey, as marked.

Sant'Antimo (open daily: Mon-Sat: 10:15-12:30, 3-6:30, Sun: 9:15-10:45, 3-5) may be the most historically and spiritually evocative site in this part of Tuscany. One guest to the Borgo, a frequent traveler and a self-professed skeptic in such things confided that this was the first time he actually felt the history of a place. From inside this spare, echoing interior, he felt as if he could hear the hooves of Charlemagne's approaching horses. Indeed, Sant'Antimo has quite a romantic history. Although historians argue about its founding, lore states that Charlemagne stopped here in 781 on his way back from Rome to pray for his army which was besieged by plague. When the appearance of an angel answered his prayers, he swore to found a church on that site.





The present church has foundations that date to the late eighth century, although the main structure was last augmented in 1118, modeled after the French style of the Benedictine house in Cluny. The façade was left unfinished thanks to insufficient funding when the abbey lost power in the thirteenth century, but the church as it stands today is well cared-for and a good example of Romanesque building. Its basilican plan, the French influence, is the only one in Tuscany. Its stone walls support an enormous wooden vault and small clerestory windows allow shafts of light to illuminate the white stone interior. Note the intricate and individualistic carving on the alabaster column capitals that surround the apse, with artistic nods to Etruscan and Roman culture. Look for the Daniel in the Lion's Den capital on the right length of the church. The monks perform Gregorian chant several times every day. Numerous daily Masses are offered at the Abbey; please check with the Borgo staff for an updated schedule.

TIMING IN BRIEF:

- 20 min drive to north Montalcino vineyards
- 1 to 4 hours morning wine touring
- 10 min drive to Montalcino town center
- 90 min to 2 hours lunch in Montalcino
- 1-2 hours town exploration/shoppin
(must be 3:30 or later to avoid closures)
- 15 min drive to Sant'Antimo
- 30 min exploring Sant'Antimo
- 45 min return to Borgo