

OTHER HILL TOWNS AND DESTINATIONS



Elsewhere in this “Experience Tuscany” section of our website, we have highlighted many of the more famous of the Tuscan destinations including Florence, Siena and Montalcino. Here we describe “other” towns, though they are no less worthy of your consideration. Depending on your particular interests (e.g., visiting an Etruscan excavation site, wine tasting, shopping at antique fairs, or visiting the center for the production of saffron) a number of these destinations may well be worth a visit. They are listed in the order of their distance from the Borgo. You may want to combine visits to one of more of these destinations with trips to some of our other recommended sites. If so, below we recommend several “combination-visit” possibilities, or you can ask the advice of our staff who will be happy to help.



Murlo / 10 km from the Borgo

Tiny, perfectly kept Murlo is a quick drive from the Borgo and a nice outing for a dinner of pizza in a charmingly pristine, walled town that is really only one circle of buildings. It is also the home of a major Etruscan excavation site that has become a source of intense pride to its natives. Here, the people claim DNA proof that they are in fact of Etruscan heritage.



San Galgano / 40 km from the Borgo

Locally referred to as “**La Chiesa Scoperchiata**” or “Beheaded Church,” San Galgano is at the same time one of the best Gothic works in Italy and Tuscany’s answer to Arthurian legend. This site makes for a nice several-hour excursion from the Borgo, or can be combined with a tour of southern Montalcino and Sant’Antimo for a longer day. Plot a route from San Galgano through Roccastrada and Paganico to arrive at Sant’Antimo and finish by driving through Montalcino and back to Buonconvento.

Monteriggioni / 50 km from the Borgo

Certainly the most distinct silhouette in Italy, Monteriggioni’s thirteenth-century walls with fourteen towers were first immortalized by Dante who described them in the *Divine Comedy* as “giants in an abyss.” The town inside is little more than a handful of shops and cafes. Stop here to break up the trip north to San Gimignano, Volterra, or even Florence, or combine it with a day in Chianti. Set aside a few minutes to take in the views over the wall as you circle this truly charming town.

San Gimignano / 65 km from the Borgo

Coined “the medieval Manhattan,” San Gimignano’s distinct skyline comprises fifteen towers built by noble families in the 12th and 13th centuries as signs of power. The town is known for Vernaccia, Tuscany’s only white wine to earn DOCG appellation. It is also a center for the production of saffron, the world’s most expensive spice and an early source of wealth for the town that once boasted a population of 15,000, twice its present size.



Volterra / 75 km from the Borgo

Volterra’s austere look – on a windswept perch atop gray volcanic hills – lends itself naturally to its ancient roots. Here are the best Etruscan ruins in the area. An ideal half-day in Volterra involves exploring some of the town’s many ruins before strolling town in search of alabaster souvenirs and a picnic lunch to take to the surprisingly lush garden that sits overlooking rooftops, next to the Medici citadel.



Cortona / 75 km from the Borgo

It is not difficult to surmise why Frances Mayes (*Under the Tuscan Sun*, among many books about Tuscany) captured the imaginations of so many in her bestselling accounts of life in Cortona. The town, a series of terraced roads and sharp uphill alleyways surrounded by medieval walls, abounds in Tuscan charm. Cortona is a good spot for restaurants, antique and linen shops, and people watching from its busy piazzas. A day trip could be combined with Arezzo or an Umbrian excursion.



Arezzo / 85 km from the Borgo

Rich in history with origins in the second millennium BC and growing to be an important Etruscan center, present day Arezzo is experiencing a new revival as a tourist destination and as the center for the design and manufacture of gold jewelry. According to Forbes Magazine, Arezzo is “arguably the most creative and innovative of all jewelry manufacturing centers where jewelry for the masses melds with the artistry and craftsmanship that are the hallmarks of Italian jewelry design.” The city also positively bursts with antique shops year round, and once a month, vendors from everywhere travel to Arezzo for its famous **Fiera Antiquaria**, or antique fair. The art lover should be sure to visit Piero della Francesca’s famous frescoes.

