

## SAN QUIRICO, PIENZA AND MONTELPULCIANO: THE HILL TOWNS OF THE VAL D'ORCIA



One of the most picturesque areas in this fabled region is the Val d'Orcia. This is the idyllic Tuscany, studded with pleasant medieval towns of brick and stone, carefully ordered vineyards and olive groves, cypresses, and pastures of grazing sheep. Add to that a wealth of historical and artistic sites, vibrant cultural events, and some of the finest food and wine in the region, and the richness can astound.

This recommended itinerary is designed to take in parts of San Quirico, Pienza, and Montepulciano, giving a rounded picture of the Val d'Orcia.

### San Quirico / 15 km from the Borgo

Begin the day by taking the SR2 south out of Buonconvento to San Quirico (18 km.) In San Quirico, park outside the walls and take a quick stroll around its quaint streets, perhaps pausing for a cappuccino. San Quirico was an important stop on the pilgrimage route to Rome and its Collegiata church shows special artistic care, even for masterpiece-rich Italy. Take time to pause in the **Orte Lionini** sculpture gardens. A favorite spot for lunch is **Antica Trattoria Toscana Al Vecchio Forno** (<http://www.palazzodelcapitano.com/en/vecchio-forno.html>). Set in the ancient bakery of San Quirico, the restaurant has an extensive wine cellar and offers outdoor seating under a thatched pergola, weather permitting.



From San Quirico, the SP146 heads east to Pienza (10 km) and next Montepulciano (24 km.) As you approach Pienza pause to notice the tiny chapel flanked by equal height cypresses on your right, in a perfectly picturesque setting. There are several good spots to pull over to take a memorable photo.

### Pienza / 25 km from the Borgo

In Pienza, park outside the walls and wander at random down streets with names like via del bacio, "way of the kiss." The tourist office (on the Corso Rossellino) offers headsets with an hour-long tour of the town. Pause to note the Renaissance perfection of Rossellino's orderly **Piazza Pio II**. Here, the historians and artists of the group may wish to tour the **Cathedral** and the **Palazzo Piccolomini** with its hanging gardens. Others may prefer to shop the town's many pottery and local product boutiques. Regardless, all should



take in the fabulous view of the Val d'Orcia along the Via del Casello and nobody should leave Pienza without sampling Pecorino di Pienza, both young and aged. You may want to purchase a little for the road

**Lunch:** If you want to stop for lunch while visiting Pienza, there are several good options. For something quick, you can't go wrong with a fresh panino of local pecorino or perhaps porchetta – slow roasted, aromatic pork – available in many a shop on the main road. Take it to the south-facing wall of town and take in the view while you eat. For great food in a modern trendy Tuscan atmosphere we can make an advance booking at the restaurant of **La Bandita Townhouse**. (<http://www.la-bandita.com/townhouse/the-restaurant>; closed Monday; 0578 749 005) Another spot is **Latte di Luna** for its sunny patio at the eastern end of the main Corso Rossellino (Closed Tuesday; 0578748606). **Dal Falco** on the Piazza Dante isn't in the historic center of town, but is just outside and has good, high quality food (<http://www.ristorantedalfalco.it/restaurant.html>; closed Friday; 0578748551)

**Italian Craftsmanship in Pienza:** After shopping in Pienza, and perhaps visiting the Biagotti ironworks showroom, you may be inspired to see craftsmen in action. If this is the case, consider stopping at the Biagiotti workshop and showroom (<http://www.biagiottipienza.com/eng/famiglia-biagiotti.html>), just 2km outside of Pienza on the SP146 toward Montepulciano.

**Local Flavor in Pienza:** After sampling the famed pecorino di Pienza, you may wish to stop at a producer of the local delicacy. Sheep farms dot the road between Pienza and Montepulciano and often advertise with signs on the road, "Produzione Propria" indicating that they sell their hand-made cheeses on site. Try **Caseificio Cugusi**, (Via della Boccia 8), on the road between Pienza and Montepulciano; <http://www.caseificiocugusi.it/index.php/it/>; 0578757558) The Sardinian Cugusi family sells Pecorino of all ages and styles along with fresh ricotta and ravaggiolo.

### Montepulciano / 38 km from the Borgo

From Pienza, Montepulciano ([www.montepulciano.net/about-montepulciano.htm](http://www.montepulciano.net/about-montepulciano.htm)) is 13 km due east on the SP146. In the past, Montepulciano winemakers would roll finished barrels uphill to their estates in town for ageing. A few producers who still use their historic cellars in town are open for visitors. For a major dose of history, visit the Contucci cellar (Via del Teatro 1; <http://www.contucci.it/en/>), where guides explain the wine and







offer tastings. You would also do well to do your wine tasting in one of Montepulciano's many cantinas and enotecas. The renowned Avignonesi producer operates a cantina in town (Via Gracciano del Corso 91; <https://avignonesi.it/>). For more general information on Montepulciano's wines, the **Consorzio Tutela del Vino Nobile di Montepulciano** is in the Piazza Grande (#7; <http://www.consorziovinonobile.it/>).

Besides the natural draw of its wine, Montepulciano will be of particular interest to those with an historical interest in the style and format of the various arts that line its streets. Spend the afternoon on a "passeggiata" (a traditional, leisurely stroll), around 5:00 - 6:00, wandering the main street or taking an afternoon drink in a café in the Piazza Grande from which you will have the perfect vantage point to watch the crowd.

To end your day in Montepulciano, make the ten-minute walk down the Via S. Biagio on the western side of town down a cypress-lined road that leads to the **Chiesa della Madonna di San Biagio**. This distinctly Renaissance piece by Sangallo the Elder is remarkable for its harmonic elegance and beautifully sited on a grassy stretch of terrace just below town. The late afternoon sun hitting the church, with Montepulciano in the background, will allow a perfect photo opportunity and a memorable end to a day in the Val d'Orcia.

**Montepulciano Vineyards:** The heart of the Montepulciano wine district is to the east of town. Take the SP146 toward Chianciano then turn left at Sant' Albino. Or, head to the northeast on the SP17 and SP10/B through a wealth of vineyards in the Gracciano sub-zone for some 18 km to reach Avignonesi, just past the A1 Autostrada. There are a number of vineyards worth a visit:

**Avignonesi** (Le Capezzine estate). Leaders in Montepulciano's renaissance, the Avignonesi brothers maintain a beautiful vineyard and produce distinguished wine, olive oil, and remarkable vin santo (15 km on NE road out of Mont.; <https://avignonesi.it/>).

**Le Casalte.** Small and meticulous, upholding and exalting Vino Nobile, great views of Cortona (SE, Localita Sant' Albino, via del Termine 2; <https://www.vinonostrum.com/wineries/le-casalte>).





**Salcheto.** Small producer with recent success, expert handling (3 km SE, Localita Sant'Albano, Via di Villa Bianca 15; <http://www.salcheto.it/>).

**Valdipiatta.** Well known and respected, now run by owner Giulio Caporali's welcoming daughter Miriam, Vigna d'Alfiero cru (3 km NE; Localita Graciano, Via della Ciarliana 25/A; <http://www.valdipiatta.it/>).

#### Possible side trips

There are several natural and very rewarding diversions on your route from Pienza to Montepulciano or, alternatively, as you return to the Borgo from Montepulciano.

**A perfect Tuscan Village:** The tiny town of Monticchiello sits just to the southwest of Pienza and the beautiful road starting outside Pienza's Porta al Prato makes the 7 km journey nearly as worthy as the destination. In fact, the cypress-lined, ribbon-curved road climbing to the town itself is one of the most photographed roads in all of Tuscany. The quaint flawlessness of the town offers the perfect counterpoint to one of Italy's more avant-garde attractions, the Teatro Povero, a grassroots theater company that performs in July (10 min drive). **Taverna di Moranda** (closed Friday; 0578755050; <http://www.tavernadimoranda.it/en/>) on the Via di Mezzo in Monticchiello is a wonderful alternative to lunch in Pienza.



**An impressive villa and gardens:** You may also wish to use this day to visit **La Foce**, the villa and gardens of American writer, Iris Origo (<http://www.lafoce.com/>). We suggest that you work with our hosting staff to find a time to visit La Foce. (A separate itinerary for La Foce can be found elsewhere on this "Experience Tuscany" website page.) La Foce is slightly further afield than Monticchiello, but takes you through a lovely swath of the Val d'Orcia. From Monticchiello, take the southeastern road and follow the signs for La Foce. You will pass the zigzag road immortalized in "*The English Patient*" shortly before reaching the villa. (10 km)



**TIMING IN BRIEF:**

- 25 min drive to San Quirico
- 15 min drive to Pienza
- 90 min lunch in San Quirico, Pienza or Montepulciano
- 15 min drive to Montepulciano
- 45 min—1 hour return to the Borgo
- Approx. 7 hours to tour all 3 towns with lunch and driving
- Add approximately 30 min for farm visits, 1 hour for vineyards.