

EXPLORING SIENA & SOUTHERN TUSCANY

with Freya Middleton



Discover centuries of art and history in Siena and southern Tuscany's quiet centres, enjoying gentle guided walks through landscapes of outstanding beauty and significance

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover fascinating sites far from the crowds, from atmospheric San Galgano Abbey to picturesque Pienza
- Admire outstanding Gothic and Renaissance art, including Piero della Francesca's frescoes in Arezzo
- Survey the rolling hills of Chianti on a guided walk, tasting storied wines and visiting a contemporary art site
- Enjoy the varied landscapes of southern Tuscany, on the untouched Maremma coast and at Iris Origo's La Foce
- Encounter the Etruscans at Rusellae and Volterra
- Appreciate Siena's distinctive identity, on a Palio-themed walking tour
- Travel with an expert, specialist local guide Freya Middleton, as well as with an Australian tour manager

IN A NUTSHELL

DATES: 12-21 October 2024

ITINERARY: Siena (9 nights)

PRICE: \$8,900pp twinshare

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT: \$1,460 for sole use of a double room

FITNESS: Above moderate; see final page of brochure

GROUP SIZE: max. 16 places



Limelight Arts Travel Pty Ltd
Level 6, 84 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
(02) 8599 4201
www.limelight-arts-travel.com.au

LIMELIGHT
ARTS — TRAVEL

OVERVIEW

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Siena was one of the most prominent cities in Western Europe, with thriving local industries, financial networks that encompassed popes and kings, and a local artistic culture that ensured an enduring legacy of luxurious and taste-making Gothic art. Its influence spread far beyond its city walls, to the wild Maremma coast with its Etruscan ruins and Cistercian abbeys, as well as closer to home, in the gentle hills of Chianti that would become the centre of a prestigious modern wine region.

This new 10-day tour takes an in-depth look at this extraordinary history and heritage, from a comfortable base in Siena. A carefully designed program of talks, excursions and guided walks allows for an active exploration of archaeological sites, outstanding Gothic and Renaissance art and architecture, and celebrated food and wine – all in locations of great natural beauty.

The tour is timed to take advantage of the quieter autumn months, particularly beautiful in wine regions such as Chianti. Your enjoyment is enhanced by the expertise of tour leader Freya Middleton, a well-known Australian art historian and qualified local guide who has lived in Tuscany for over twenty years. The group will be accompanied by an Australian tour manager, and there is an **optional 5-day extension in central Florence**.

TOUR LEADER

Freya Middleton is an Australian art historian and qualified local guide, who has lived in Tuscany for over twenty years.

She has a Bachelor of Arts, with a major in Art History, from the University of Sydney and a Masters in Renaissance Studies from Warwick University, an acknowledge leader in the field. Freya received generous scholarships to enable her to undertake in-country study in Florence, and was the recipient of a prestigious internship at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice.

Freya is a passionate communicator of her knowledge of all things Italian. She speaks fluent Italian and French.

On this tour, Freya is accompanied by an Australian tour manager.



Top to bottom: Bagno Vignoni, an ancient spa town in the Val d'Orcia, not far from Iris Origo's La Foce; view over the rolling hills towards Siena; Siena cathedral, an outstanding medieval monument and simultaneous reminder of the devastating 1348 Black Death; below, your tour leader, Freya Middleton



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DETAILED ITINERARY

SATURDAY 12 OCTOBER 2024 – ARRIVAL (D)

We meet at 3.00pm at a location to be confirmed inside Firenze Santa Maria Novella railway station, before travelling together to Siena. After checking in to our hotel, we enjoy welcome drinks with our tour leader Freya Middleton and Australian tour manager, before dinner together in a local restaurant. Overnight Siena.

SUNDAY 13 OCTOBER – SIENA & THE MIDDLE AGES (B)

Siena was a powerhouse of central Italy in the Middle Ages, with a flourishing financial sector, a prominent position on the Via Francigena to Rome, a reasonable local interest in wool processing and a uniquely stable form of self-government. Before the devastating Black Death of 1348, its population was booming and proud new civic buildings – from the Palazzo Pubblico to a cathedral that would have been one of Europe's largest – began to rise up on its distinctive skyline. We start the day with a talk, before commencing our exploration of these medieval monuments with our tour leader Freya. At the **Palazzo Pubblico**, we appreciate how medieval town councillors lived and worked – and the principles by which they ruled, exemplified in outstanding frescoes such as Simone Martini's *Madonna in Majesty* and a wonderful portrait of *Guidoriccio da Fogliano on horseback*. (*Note: at the time of writing, the Cycle of Good and Bad Government in the Sala della Pace is closed for restoration.*) After time to admire the elegant design of **the Campo**, the shell-shaped square around which Siena's horses race twice a year in the Palio, there is time for lunch at leisure. Afterwards, we continue with Freya to the vast site of **Siena's cathedral**. From sculptures by the Pisano workshop, Donatello and Michelangelo, to the superlative manuscripts and frescoes in the new 'grotesque' style in the **Piccolomini Library**, we survey Siena's greatest achievements in art. In the **Museo dell'Opera del Duomo**, there is the opportunity to come face-to-face with Siennese masterworks, such as Duccio di Buoninsegna's *Madonna in Majesty*, and works by the Lorenzetti family. The late afternoon and evening are at leisure. Overnight Siena.

MONDAY 14 OCTOBER – IN THE MAREMMA WITH THE ROMANS, WALK #1 (B, L)

Today we have the first of our guided walks, travelling to the Tuscan coast. **The Maremma** region has long lain beyond the well-travelled Tuscan tourist path, but its harbours and ports were of vital strategic interest to Siena, particularly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Today, the scenery is among Tuscany's most attractive, with ruined watch towers, sand beaches and pristine sea waters, and the perfume of the dearly loved Mediterranean *macchia* or scrub. We make an **easy loop walk in the Alberese area** (approx. 2.5 hours) before continuing to a coastal restaurant for our welcome lunch, a typical seafood feast popular with Tuscans who flock here in the summer for their own holidays. After lunch, we travel to nearby Grosseto to visit the intriguing site of **Rusellae** (present-day Roselle). While it is not as impressive as Italy's best-known archaeological sites, our tour with a site guide gives us an indication of how Etruscan settlements were occupied by the Romans, with Etruscan tombs, a Roman amphitheatre and even simple floor mosaics unearthed here. We return to Siena for an evening at leisure. Overnight Siena.



TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER – RACES & THE RENAISSANCE IN SIENA (B)

One of the great attractions of spending time in Siena is discovering how proudly local it remains. From the local accent and dialect – thought by some language scholars to be the most ‘authentic’ of Italy – to unique styles in art and, of course, the madness of the hyper-local Palio, Siena has preserved many of its traditions despite its political occupation by rival Florence in the sixteenth century. Today, we meet a local guide for a day focused on Siena’s unique culture. We commence at a small and little-visited museum that showcases the preservation of a Gothic style in **Siene** painting, long after the naturalism of the Florentine Renaissance had taken sway throughout the peninsula. We then continue to the neighbourhood heartlands (or *contrade*) of the **Palio**, visiting the small chapels, meeting houses and museums of the fiercely proud neighbourhood organisations to which each native Siene

WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER – ART, WINE & LANDSCAPE, WALK #2 (B, L)

Tuscany has many small wine regions, and a number of them produce wines boasting the highest appellations in all of Italy. But when many of us think of Tuscany and wine, we think immediately of the **Chianti region**. With a wine-making tradition that can be documented as far back as the Middle Ages, and a prominent position for centuries as the frontier territory between the republics of Florence and Siena, in more recent decades the area has become popular with foreign residents. At one point, it even earned the nickname of “Chiantishire”. Today we get to know Chianti in the best way, taking a **walk through its heritage-listed landscape** (approx. 3 hours, with some gentle hills) together with our local walking guide. He introduces us to its historic villages and, as a winemaker, to its gastronomic traditions, before we arrive on foot at a country restaurant for lunch together. Afterwards, we continue by private transfer to the **Castello di Ama**. Located on a hill in the Chianti Classico wine district, it is a medieval town-turned-winery. In addition to its highly regarded wines, which we sample together on a **wine tasting**, the winery is known for its collection of **contemporary art**. There are works by Louise Bourgeois, Anish Kapoor, Michelangelo Pistoletto and Lee Ufan, several of which were created specifically for this site. After our introduction to the winery and to its wines, we return to Siena. Overnight Siena.

THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER – VOLTERRA & ROSSO FIORENTINO (B)

Today we travel from Siena to **Volterra**, a fascinating town with ancient origins that became of interest to the Florentine state during the Renaissance. Founded before the eighth century BCE, Volterra was a significant Etruscan centre, and maintains one of the most important museums of Etruscan archaeology in Italy. In the Middle Ages, it dabbled in self-rule and its tiny baptistery and toy-sized town hall make this one of Tuscany’s most beautiful streetscapes. As we discover with Freya at the local Pinacoteca or art gallery, Volterra also preserves one of the Renaissance’s most significant artworks: **Rosso Fiorentino’s *Deposition from the Cross***, a dynamic, colourful, highly



emotive and almost wild painting of the early sixteenth century. It is one of the most moving works of the entire Italian Renaissance. We return to Siena for an evening at leisure. Overnight Siena.

FRIDAY 18 OCTOBER – A RUINED ABBEY & THE VIA FRANCIGENA, WALK #3 (B, L)

One of the reasons for Siena's medieval prominence was its strategic position on an Italian superhighway: the Via Francigena, or Frankish route. Every year, it carried medieval pilgrims from Canterbury all the way to Rome, and in Italy it was used to transport goods and merchants between the major cities and towns of central Italy. Today, not far from Siena and together with our walking guide, we too become pilgrims with a **series of short easy walks on the Via Francigena**. Here, tiny medieval towns were entirely walled and almost functioned as caravanserais: Monteriggioni is perhaps the best known and preserved, but the nearby fortified abbey of Abbadia a Isola epitomises the possible dangers and threats for the villagers and clerics who offered hospitality to medieval travellers. The focus of our day, however, is the atmospheric **Abbey of San Galgano**, a large Cistercian monastery constructed where a local hermit, Galgano Guidotti, had lived a life of saintly renunciation. From 1220, the abbey's monks served as the Republic of Siena's financial administrators, and the complex grew as a result. But its exposed position in the countryside laid it open to depredations by mercenary captains such as John Hawkwood, and successive abandonment meant that by the eighteenth century it was in ruins. It is today one of Tuscany's most evocative sites. After a picnic lunch, we visit the nearby **Chapel of Montesiepi**, where we discover the miracle of St Galgano's sword in the stone in addition to frescoes by the great Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Returning to the hotel, there is a talk before an evening at leisure. Overnight Siena.

SATURDAY 19 OCTOBER – PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA & MONTE OLIVETO MAGGIORE (B)

Today we travel to **Arezzo**, a pleasant hillside town that has given birth to some of Tuscany's greatest figures, from the poet Petrarch to the artist and art historian Giorgio Vasari. It was also the location for much of Roberto Benigni's film, *Life is Beautiful*. We begin the day with a visit to the **Church of San Francesco**, where the main chapel is decorated with the best-preserved frescoes of **Piero della Francesca**. Telling the Legend of the True Cross, the fresco cycle bears the hallmarks of a mature Piero's style, with a naturalistic treatment of light and shade, and strict geometrical construction of visual perspective offering a sober backdrop for the impassive faces of elegant kings and queens, fierce warriors and pious saints. The frescoes have been an endless source of inspiration, both for contemporary artists and for later figures such as the Australian painter Jeffrey Smart and novelist Michael Ondaatje. Afterwards, we continue on a **walking tour of Arezzo** and enjoy lunch at leisure. In the afternoon, we return to Siena via the **Abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore**. Set in woods in the centre of southern Tuscany's iconic Crete region, this large and self-sufficient monastery was the motherhouse for the Olivetan Order, founded in 1313 by a



prominent jurist from Siena. It is still a functioning abbey today, and a tour of its graceful library and quiet cloisters, with their colourful – and humorous – **Renaissance frescoes by Signorelli and Il Sodoma**, is just as fascinating as seeing the refectory where the monks still eat and the shop where they sell tinctures and herbal remedies made on site. (*Note*: there is a short but steep hill to descend/ascend on foot when visiting the abbey; coaches cannot pass this point.) Returning to Siena, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Siena.

SUNDAY 20 OCTOBER – THE VAL D’ORCIA & IRIS ORIGO (B, L, *APERITIVI*)

We spend the final full day of our tour in the beautiful **Val d’Orcia**, a UNESCO World Heritage-listed landscape of bare hills, medieval hill towns and thermal hot springs against the backdrop of Monte Amiata. In the morning, we call in at **Bagno Vignoni** for coffee and a stroll, admiring a tiny village entirely oriented around its distinctive “*piazza*”: a giant pool of thermal waters, whose health benefits were enjoyed by Tuscans from St Catherine of Siena to Lorenzo the Magnificent of the Medici family. It is one of the region’s prettiest villages. We continue to **Pienza**, once the insignificant hilltop village of Corsignano, transformed in the fifteenth century by the ambitions of hometown boy Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, known to history as Pope Pius II. Designating it the site of a papal court, he induced his cardinals to construct small Renaissance palaces here, and invested himself in a fine Renaissance palace complete with cathedral in miniature. These were executed by Florentine architect Bernardo Rossellino, thought to be working to the designs of Leon Battista Alberti, making Pienza the most perfect Renaissance toy town in the country. It is also famous for its gastronomy, particularly the local cheese, and we enjoy our farewell lunch here. In the afternoon, we travel to nearby **La Foce**. Now a splendid garden, designed by Cecil Pinsent for the writer Iris Origo, it was once a dusty agricultural estate that was transformed by the efforts of Iris and her agronomist husband. La Foce is the site of one of Tuscany’s most famous views – a winding hillside road ascending among pencil pines – and the garden remains an outstanding legacy to Origo, a fascinating figure and important writer of Italian histories and biographies. Returning to Siena, we discuss our experiences over *aperitivi* in our hotel. Overnight Siena.

MONDAY 21 OCTOBER – DEPARTURE (B)

We check out of our hotel this morning and travel to Florence. The coach makes a stop at Firenze Santa Maria Novella railway station circa 11.30am, for those travelling onwards by train. From the railway station, it is also an easy journey to Florence airport at Peretola.

After making a stop at Firenze Santa Maria Novella railway station, the coach continues to the Hotel Pendini for those who are undertaking the **optional Florence extension**, as described on the following pages. The optional Florence extension can run as outlined with a **minimum of six participants**.



MONDAY 21 OCTOBER – OPTIONAL FLORENCE EXTENSION, DAY 1 (D)

After the coach departs Firenze Santa Maria Novella railway station, it continues to our hotel. We leave our bags, freshen up and enjoy lunch at leisure in Piazza della Repubblica. Afterwards, we meet Freya for an **orientation walking tour**, appreciating how Florence's urban fabric developed from its foundation as Roman Florentia, and the way in which its great religious and civic building projects in the Middle Ages changed its face forever. We admire the exteriors of the **Florence cathedral, baptistery and town hall**, or Palazzo Vecchio, and take a tour with Freya of one of the city's many art-filled churches. Afterwards, we check into the hotel and there is time at leisure. Our tour manager accompanies us to dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Florence.

TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER – OPTIONAL FLORENCE EXTENSION, DAY 2 (B)

Today we understand how a medieval boom in population, wool processing and finishing, and international banking changed the arts of sculpture and painting in Florence. We begin at the **Bargello sculpture museum**, where Freya introduces us to the transformative work of Donatello, including his bronze *David*, and its logical extension in the ground-breaking sculptures of Michelangelo. Afterwards, we continue to **Santa Croce**, a vast Franciscan church that exemplifies the power and prestige of the medieval wool merchants and bankers who commissioned two fresco cycles from the great Giotto. We also discover how fifteenth-century artists and architects, from Donatello to Brunelleschi and the Della Robbia workshop, looked to Italy's classical past for the inspiration of a new style. After time at leisure for lunch, we meet Freya at **Orsanmichele**, an intriguing fourteenth-century loggia-turned-granary-turned church. The need to protect and venerate a miraculous image found on site transformed this building into one of the city's most prominent civic landmarks, and into a laboratory of Renaissance sculpture. The later afternoon is at leisure, with your tour manager at hand to provide any assistance. Overnight Florence.

WEDNESDAY 23 OCTOBER – OPTIONAL FLORENCE EXTENSION, DAY 3 (B)

We begin with a visit to the **Brancacci Chapel**, one of the most important sites for Florentine, Italian and indeed Western art. Here, in the first decades of the fifteenth century, artists Masolino and Masaccio finessed an approach to visual perspective, creating a scale backdrop against which biblical characters act as convincing human figures of drama and great emotion. (*Note:* restoration work on the Brancacci Chapel is scheduled to have finished by the time of our visit; if it is delayed, we will visit another museum this morning.) Afterwards, we continue with Freya on a **walking tour of the Oltrarno**, the once working-class district now marked by great monuments such as Santo Spirito – with a youthful crucifix probably carved by Michelangelo – and the Pitti Palace. After time for an early, light lunch, we tour the **Uffizi** with Freya. This vast set of granducal 'offices' now houses a superlative collection of art, with great works from Giotto to Botticelli, Leonardo, Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi and many others. There is time to continue your visit independently after Freya's introductory tour. The evening is at leisure, with a number of the city's museums open late tonight. Overnight Florence.



THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER – OPTIONAL FLORENCE EXTENSION, DAY 4 (B, D)

On our final day, we make an early start to admire one of the world's great works before the majority of visitors arrive. Michelangelo's *David*, a sixteenth-century triumph of the **Galleria dell'Accademia**, is complex: part civic icon, part biblical hero, a portrait of thought in action, and a work of sheer technical mastery. Freya contextualises *David* for us by comparison with other works here by Michelangelo. After coffee, we continue to the neighbourhood associated with Michelangelo's great patrons, the Medici. At the **Palazzo Medici**, we visit the exquisite **Chapel of the Magi**, frescoed in the mid-fifteenth century by Benozzo Gozzoli. After lunch, we discover the Medici family church of **San Lorenzo**, from its sober Old Sacristy, designed by Brunelleschi with Donatello, to Michelangelo's incomplete but outstanding **New Sacristy**, with his *Dawn and Dusk, Day and Night*. We farewell Freya this afternoon, before time at leisure to pack and make any final visits. Our tour manager accompanies us to our farewell dinner this evening. Overnight Florence.

FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER – DEPARTURE (B)

The tour concludes after breakfast. Your tour manager is at hand to assist with departures. Note that the optional Florence extension can run as described, with a **minimum of six participants**.

HOTEL, OPTIONAL FLORENCE EXTENSION ONLY

Hotel Pendini 3* Superior, Florence, 4 nights

<https://www.hotelpendini.it/en/index>

All the old-world charm of *A Room With a View*, but updated and with a perfect location in the heart of Florence. The hotel is family-owned and the staff is warm and helpful. Rooms are well-sized for a city centre, and decorated in a style in keeping with their nineteenth-century origins. Despite its 3* rating, the hotel offers the experience and services of a 4* hotel.

NB A hotel of the same category may be substituted.

INCLUSIONS, OPTIONAL FLORENCE EXTENSION ONLY

- 4 nights' accommodation at a centrally-located 3* Superior hotel
- 4 breakfasts and 2 dinners
- All ground transport, guided tours, entrance fees to sites as per the itinerary, and tipping
- Expertise of and commentary by licensed local guide, Freya Middleton
- Assistance of an Australian tour manager

PRICE, OPTIONAL FLORENCE EXTENSION ONLY

\$3,850pp twinshare

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT, OPTIONAL FLORENCE EXTENSION ONLY

\$550 for sole use of a double room



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LIMELIGHT
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INCLUSIONS, EXPLORING SIENA TOUR

- 9 nights' accommodation in a 4* hotel
- All breakfasts and 5 lunches or dinners, with drinks
- All ground transport, guided tours and entrance fees to sites as mentioned in the itinerary, and tipping
- Expertise and commentary of an Australian tour leader throughout
- Expertise and commentary of a professional walking guide on three walking excursions
- Assistance of an Australian tour manager throughout

HOTEL, EXPLORING SIENA TOUR ONLY

Hotel Athena 4*, Siena, 9 nights

<https://www.hotelathena.com/en/>

An elegant hotel, well-located for our itinerary: within walking distance of Siena's central historic sites, but with quick access to the roads out of town for our excursions. A short walk brings you to the university district, with its restaurants and supermarket.

We have selected Superior rooms for our stay, which are bright and simple and average 18sqm in size. The hotel has a restaurant and bar.

A hotel of a similar standard may be substituted.

TOUR DETAILS

DATES

12-21 October 2024

(Exploring Siena & southern Tuscany tour dates only)

TOUR LEADER

Freya Middleton

ITINERARY

Siena (9 nights)

PRICE

\$8,900pp twinshare

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT

\$1,460 for sole use of a double room

FITNESS

Above moderate: 3 x countryside walks over graded but unsealed paths; tours of hill towns; uneven ground at archaeological sites

GROUP SIZE

Max. 16 places

DEPOSIT

\$1,000pp at the time of booking

FINAL PAYMENT DUE

29 July 2024

TERMS & CONDITIONS

By booking on this tour you accept our terms and conditions, which can be found on our website:

<http://www.limelight-arts-travel.com.au/terms-and-conditions-tours>

