



Independent walking tour (VF5)

Via Francigena

Lucca to Siena

Along the Via Francigena through the enchanting Tuscan landscape – with a visit to San Gimignano



TRIP NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

This tour is perfect as an introduction to the Via Francigena and as well to this beautiful region, a full immersion in the stunning Tuscan landscape! And, for people who love museums, galleries and Gothic and Romanesque architecture, there is more than enough to see and do. You have plenty of time to visit attractions on most of the days.

You will also have time to visit all the beautiful medieval villages and historic towns along the Via Francigena. You'll start from beautiful Lucca (which can easily be reached from both Pisa and Florence), known for its perfectly preserved town walls and its square which still has the forms of the Roman amphitheatre. You'll pass through Fucecchio, San Miniato, Gambassi Terme, the stunning San Gimignano with its medieval skyscrapers and beautiful medieval town centre.

You'll enjoy beautiful Colle Val d'Elsa, you'll walk through the 'crown in the Tuscan Landscape', Monteriggioni, already mentioned by admired by Dante in his Divine Comedy. The tour ends in Siena, arguably the most perfectly preserved medieval town in Tuscany. This tour threads together some of the most attractive towns and villages in Tuscany in an eloquent procession.

However the emphasis of the tour is to enjoy the countryside, the rolling vineyards, the poppies in Spring and the wild cyclamen in autumn. Most of all, many of the views have barely changed for hundreds of years. The area north of Siena is an amazing landscape of rolling hills, alternating vineyards and forests, while cypresses line the way leading to the distant farmhouses. Walking here is an unforgettable experience!

You can opt to spend a night in one of the best agriturismo's in Tuscany, and the final night in the heart of Siena, in one of the most characteristic little hotels.

This is a moderately easy tour which is suitable for those who have some experience of walking and a good general physical condition. Through the extensive footpath network of the area, roughly following the traces of the Via Francigena, one of Europe's most important 'highways' in medieval times, you walk from village to village, a full immersion in the world-famous Tuscan landscape.



Please note: this is a moderately difficult tour which is suitable for experienced walkers with a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are along good paths and small rural roads, sometimes on steep terrain. Average walking times: approx. 4 to 7 hours each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in Lucca

Arrival in Lucca, where you settle in at your hotel in the old town, known for its perfectly preserved city walls and the famous 'Amphitheatre' square. Depending on your arrival time, you can go for a short visit to the town centre.

N.B. Lucca is a beautiful small town, worth an extensive visit. We therefore strongly recommend an extra night here.

Accommodation: Lucca – Hotel ***

Approx. walking time: 1 h. + sightseeing time.

Day 2 – From Lucca to Altopascio

The first day walk takes you from the historical town of Lucca to the nice medieval town of Altopascio. This first stretch is a good warm-up hike, through a pretty flat landscape. The route brings you through the plain, densely populated, but also with a large number of interesting historical and religious buildings, such as the 'Pieve' (rural chapel) of Capannori and the Abbey of Pozzeveri. Of course, you should take your time to visit the historical town of Lucca (and perhaps make a roundwalk over its town walls), and you could even consider to pay a more extensive visit and then take an afternoon train to Altopascio. Also the old city centre of Altopascio is beautiful and worth a visit.

N.B. The walk from Lucca to Altopascio is the least interesting. It is possible to take a morning train from Lucca to Altopascio, visit the town and then start walking directly to San Miniato, without staying overnight in Altopascio.

Accommodation: Altopascio - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 19 km. Approx. walking time: 4-5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 20 m.

Day 3 – Through the Tuscan hills to San Miniato

After an early breakfast you begin your long walk to San Miniato. After another flat initial stretch you'll finally tackle the first Tuscan hills, the area of the Cerbaie Nature Reserve, wild and deserted. Then you walk over the ancient Medici bridge in Ponte a Cappiano (*for those who want a shorter walk it's possible to stay overnight here*). Follows another flat section, through the plain of the reclaimed Fucecchio swamp (parts of which are still wetlands – an interesting area for birdwatching). By lunchtime you'll enter the beautiful historic town of Fucecchio. Shortly after you'll cross the River Arno, and follow it for a while, heading to the small medieval town of San Miniato, beautifully located on the hilltop.

Accommodation: San Miniato - Hotel****

Total walking distance: 29 km. Approx. walking time: 6-7 h. Ascent & descent: + 250 m./- 115 m.

Day 4 – From San Miniato to Gambassi Terme

Today you leave San Miniato, heading for Gambassi Terme. After a stretch along a small asphalt road, you finally reach the typical Tuscan landscape of rolling hills, cypress lined lanes and isolated farmhouses. Here the Via Francigena enters the area of the Val d'Elsa. This area has been inhabited since pre-historic times, but became an important trading area in the Etruscan era. The medieval Via Francigena here basically followed the old Etruscan trading routes and the Roman 'Via Clodia' between Siena and Lucca. You'll walk past a number of old 'pievi' (countryside churches), like the Pieve of Coiano and the Pieve in Chianti. In the Early Middle Ages many travellers passed through here, and it is testified that the Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury stayed overnight in Gambassi Terme, a charming little town with thermal baths. If you arrive on time here, perhaps you have the time for some 'wellness', otherwise you can visit the nice town centre with the beautiful Church of Santa Maria Assunta in Chianti, a fascinating and significant example of Romanesque architecture (with a bit of luck, you can even attend one of the frequent concerts here).

Accommodation: Gambassi Terme - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 24 km. Approx. walking time: 6-7 h. Ascent & descent: + 400 m./- 220 m.



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Day 5 – Exploring San Gimignano & its countryside

Today's route is one of the best-known parts of the Via Francigena, as it passes right through one of the most scenic medieval Tuscan towns, San Gimignano. From Gambassi Terme you first walk a stretch through the hills, up to the Sanctuary of Pancole. Soon after, walking past several old 'pieve' and villas, with picturesque vineyards and olive and cypress groves on either side, you will already have the first views of the famous San Gimignano skyline. This wonderful medieval town – with its famous 'skyscrapers' – is an absolute must! You have some time to explore this little romantic town with its medieval towers, of which there were once 52 (there are now less than a dozen) – wealthy, prominent families would use the height of these towers to distinguish themselves, but the towers also had a practical use in alerting the inhabitants of this walled town of approaching friends and foes. Do make a nice stroll around its impressive town walls. Then you continue along the Via Francigena to your accommodation for the night: either in the beautiful small town of Colle Val d'Elsa, or in a stunningly beautiful agriturismo (*upgrade*). You'll have two options to walk there: either along the convent of Monte Oliveto, located on a wide ridge, then down to a small stream, which you have to cross, before climbing up to your agriturismo, or along a beautiful route through the rolling vineyards. Make sure you get there on time to fully enjoy its fabulous setting and surroundings, and perhaps its library or swimming pool too. Dinner at the private restaurant is included tonight.

Accommodation: Colle Val d'Elsa - Hotel* or San Gimignano – Agriturismo (*upgrade*)**

Total walking distance: 20-25 km. Approx. walking time: 5-7 h. + sightseeing time. Ascent & descent: + 125 m./- 100 m.

Day 6 – From San Gimignano to Monteriggioni

Today you head for Monteriggioni, described as a crown in the landscape by Dante. In case you stay at the agriturismo, the walk first brings you down into the river valley, and then, more or less following the Foci, you reach one of the most wonderful Romanesque churches in Tuscany, la Badia a Conèo. The next stop is the village of Quartaia, followed by the larger town of Gracciano, once one of the most important wheat towns in Tuscany. In case you stay in Colle Val d'Elsa, you have several options for a direct or longer walk. From Gracciano another short stretch brings you to the Badia ad Isola, once an important stop on the medieval Via Francigena, and a very intriguing building. The final destination for today is Monteriggioni, where you'll have time for a drink in the square, before settling in at your centrally located hotel. In the evening you can take a nice stroll into town to have dinner in one of the nice restaurants.

Accommodation: Monteriggioni - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 17-25 km. Approx. walking time: 5-7 h. + sightseeing time. Ascent & descent: +/- 100 m.

Day 7 – Heading to Siena

Today you leave Monteriggioni in southern direction, heading for Siena. After having crossed the Via Cassia you follow the so-called 'strade bianche' (gravel roads) through the hills and forests to the Northwest of Siena. There are several interesting sights along the way like the abandoned medieval village of Cerbaia, the castles of Chiocciola and the Convent of San Leonardo, just above the reclaimed plain of Pian del Lago. Then you'll walk through the forest of Renai and will approach Siena from the West. You'll enter the city through Porta Camollia, the traditional access to Siena from the North. Indeed, you will notice several medieval 'Hostels' along the road towards the centre of town. You settle in at your centrally located hotel, just a few minutes away from the famous 'Piazza del Campo'. In the evening you can have dinner in one of the many nice restaurants, and take a nice stroll into the 'Piazza del Campo'.

Accommodation: Siena - Hotel***

Total walking distance: 20 km. Approx. walking time: 5 h. + sightseeing time. Ascent & descent: + 300 m./- 250 m.

Day 8 – Departure

End of the tour. From Siena there are regular buses back to Florence (and also to Rome).



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TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in beautiful, characteristic family-run hotels (generally 3-star). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

Only the night in Colle Val d'Elsa (or at the agriturismo) is on a half-board (HB) basis, i.e. with dinner included; the other nights you will be free to make your own dinner arrangements. You can then choose from the wide choice of restaurants in the area. Your accommodation holder can give you good tips.

No picnic lunches are included in the tour price, but these can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages where you'll be staying. On some occasions you have the option to have your lunch in a restaurant along the way.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

It is possible to upgrade this tour, staying in more luxurious 4-star hotels (we strongly recommend the stay in the agriturismo in San Gimignano – a stunning accommodation, set in the quintessential Tuscan landscape). This also allows you more time in San Gimignano. It is strongly recommended to stay an extra night here in case you want to see something more of this stunning landscape.

INCLUDED

- 7 nights accommodation - RO/BB/HB
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Lucca – BB
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Altopascio – BB
- 1 night in Hotel**** in San Miniato – BB
- 1 night in Villa in Gambassi Terme – BB
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Colle Val d'Elsa – HB
- **(Upgrade on request: Agriturismo San Gimignano **** - HB)**
- 1 night in characteristic Tuscan-style accommodation in Monteriggioni – RO (room only)
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Siena – BB
- Luggage transfer *(on request discount for carrying your own luggage)*
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- GPS tracks for each walk
- Maps at 1 : 25.000 scale or better
- Pilgrim Passport
- 24/7 h assistance

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Tourist tax
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips
- Items of personal nature



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ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in LUCCA, linked to PISA and FLORENCE by a frequent train service. A taxi pick-up service can be arranged either from Florence (hotel, airport or train station), or from Pisa (airport).

Departure: The tour ends in SIENA. By bus you travel back to Florence. Upon request a taxi service is available.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderately easy (2-3): Mostly easy walks, though some involve uphill walking, partly paths with rough surfaces. On some days extensions or shortcuts are possible.

Fitness: High standard of fitness is not necessary but you should be able to walk for up to 5 hours a day in the hot sun on dusty or stony tracks.

N.B. During summer the difficulty of this tour definitely increases due to the heat. We therefore advise against booking this tour during the period between about 14th July and 20th August.

FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

Footpaths: Most paths are relatively well maintained; on many occasions you'll follow so-called *strade bianche* (unsurfaced roads), easy to follow and very unlikely to get overgrown (*we continuously check our routes – please help us by providing your feedback on the quality of the paths*).

Waymarking: A large part of the route is waymarked with the signage of the 'Via Francigena', but on some occasions we have found more interesting routes than those actually waymarked; therefore you should follow the **route descriptions** provided together with the maps. With these you will always be able to find your route!

TOUR VARIATIONS

In all tour accommodations extra nights are possible. For those who have never been to Lucca or Siena an extra day here is strongly recommended. Also an extra night in San Gimignano (with upgrade) is worth it!

At the beginning of the tour you can also visit Lucca, Pisa and Florence, either by making a daytrip or book a few extra days there. You can also spend some relaxing extra days at a beautiful agriturismo in the countryside. Superb accommodations available. Longer and shorter versions of this tour are also available. Prices & details on request. Check out our other Tuscany & Via Francigena tours as well!



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