

Secrets of San Gimignano

Hotel-to-hotel upper independent cycling

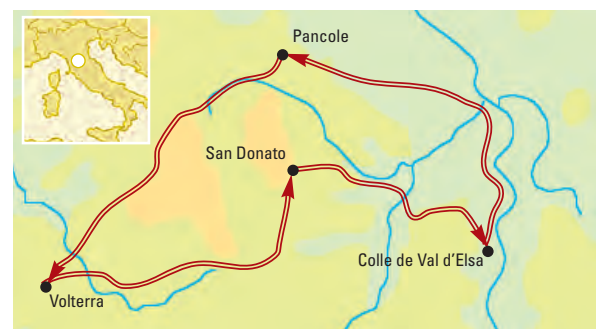
- Exhilarating cycling through fabulously open and totally unspoiled countryside: breathtaking balcony views!
- Cypress-studded rolling hills, sun-drenched olives, famous Chianti vineyards with lots of tasting opportunities
- Fabulous ★★★ and ★★★★★ hotels – all with panoramic pools – superb cuisine, world-class wines
- San Gimignano's soaring towers, Volterra's Etruscan treasures; great art cities of Florence, Pisa and Siena
- Choose from 8 or 10 night holiday



This 8-night cycling holiday is, quite simply, outstanding in every way: the rich scenery, the fantastic hotels, the local cuisine, the exceptional wines... the list goes on!

You'll start off in Volterra, a beautifully preserved hilltop gem whose eclectic mix of Etruscan, Roman and Renaissance art and architecture has inspired artists and writers for centuries. From here, you pedal east through a timeless and kaleidoscopic landscape of ochre-colored hills, verdant vineyards and stunning rolling countryside towards San Donato, a sleepy wine hamlet overlooking San Gimignano. The cycling is truly glorious as you continue via mediaeval Colle – optional day trips to Florence and Siena – and coast on towards honey-colored Pancole, nestled in the Tuscan hills. It's then on along quiet, undulating country lanes giving you a real sense of achievement as you loop back to Volterra for your final night.

Superb ★★★ and ★★★★★ hotels – all with sparkling swimming pools – are an added highlight throughout this holiday. In Colle di Val d'Elsa, you stay in a fabulously restored C14 Benedictine abbey, complete with original frescoes, while Alessandro's friendly hotel in Pancole is renowned for its regional cuisine – see if you can spot the photo of Tony Blair eating here a few summers ago! Of course, you are in the heart of some of Europe's finest wine country too, so you'll never be short of tasting opportunities.



SECRETS OF SAN GIMIGNANO | DAY BY DAY



Day 1 Arrive in Volterra

We meet you at Pisa airport and take you to Volterra (75 mins) where you've time for a dip in the pool and a wander round its tangle of cobbled alleys and hidden squares before dinner.

Day 2 Volterra to San Donato 39km/24mi

Spectacular views sweep infinitely across the open countryside as you leave Volterra and pedal along the pretty Era Valley. It's a haven for wildlife and offers fantastic bird spotting opportunities. The landscape softens with vines, olives and crumbling farmhouses as you enjoy a gentle downhill whizz towards San Gimignano and up to San Donato where dinner is served in the flower-bedecked courtyard.

Day 3 At San Donato

It's just 5km to San Gimignano (walk, cycle, or local bus), the medieval hilltop town with distinctive Manhattan-style skyline! Explore its soaring towers before lunch in one of the many hidden cobbled squares. If you prefer to stay put for the day, our tranquil hotel has a fabulous pool and extensive gardens.

Day 4 San Donato to Colle di Val d'Elsa 39km/24mi

Heading south past fields ablaze with sunflowers, and with the inimitable towers of San Gimignano forming a breathtaking backdrop to your route, you arrive in Casole d'Elsa, a beautiful village characterised by ancient vermilion-hued buildings and blessed with stunning balcony views from its hilltop position. Take time to explore its C12 church (frescoes by Gano da Siena), piazza and impressive fortress. Perhaps have lunch here – there are a couple of decent *trattorie* – safe in the knowledge it's easy, flat pedalling for the rest of the day! It's then on to your ★★★★★ hotel, a beautifully converted C12 Benedictine Abbey with lovely pool and gardens.

Day 5 At Colle di Val d'Elsa (optional 2-night extension, see below)

Take the local bus to Siena (30mins) or Florence (1hr) - two of the most beautiful cities in Italy. Or visit Colle di Val d'Elsa itself - it's a fascinating town of two halves with a lift linking the lovely new *piazza* with the medieval upper town.

Day 6 or 8 Colle di Val d'Elsa to Pancole 33km/21mi

It's gentle pedalling through poppy fields and olive groves before passing the lovely Basilica di San Lucchese (a C14 convent resplendent with original frescoes) and an exciting freewheel down into the old town of Poggibonsi. You then follow the official, and mainly off-road, Chianti Wine Route – lots of tasting opportunities (don't forget that we can collect any purchases for you) – virtually all the way to Pancole.

Day 7 or 9 At Pancole

If you fancy a day off from cycling today, then the pool here is simply gorgeous – nice lunches served on the geranium-scented terrace too! There's also a small *enoteca* where you can taste local cheeses, olive oils and wines. The more energetic might want to cycle (or taxi!) past orchards and vines to Boccaccio's birthplace, stunning Certaldo. Take the funicular to its mediaeval centre for spectacular views across the Val d'Elsa.

Day 8 or 10 Pancole to Volterra 35km/22mi

Lovely peaceful roads lead you out of Pancole, passing the Castelvecchio Nature Reserve - last time we were here, we spotted a pair of hoopoes circling overhead. After a gently undulating stretch, you then enjoy a beautiful freewheel whizz into the Era Valley giving great views of Volterra.

Day 9 or 11 Leave Volterra

Note: Please note that, from spring 2011, cycling helmets are compulsory in Italy for children under 16. As we cannot provide these, we strongly recommend that you bring your own.

Optional 2-night extension in Colle di Val d'Elsa

There's simply so much to see in and around Colle di Val d'Elsa that we are proposing two additional nights (making four in total) here in order that you can really get the most out of your stay - plus the hotel is pretty special too! Regular buses to Siena and Florence leave from just outside the hotel grounds so you can easily explore Il Campo, the Duomo, and the treasures of the world-famous Uffizi. The historic town of Colle di Val d'Elsa dates back to Etruscan times with cathedral, museums and fine Renaissance buildings. Back at the hotel, you can relax in the pleasant gardens surrounding the sparkling outdoor pool.



Dates and Prices

Departs every two days **Tour Only**

2012 departures

Oct 2-14	\$3,122
May 9-Jun 10	\$3,246
Jun 12-Jul 20, Sep 24-30	\$3,279
Jul 22-Sep 22	\$3,284
Child (any dates, see notes)	\$1,919

Singles: Add \$62 per night (4 nights will be in a single room; 4 nights will be sole occupancy of a double room).

Child: Over 2 and under 12, sharing with 2 adults.

Room upgrade: Prices from \$15 per person, per night, based on 2 sharing.

Holiday type: Independent cycling, hotel-to-hotel, no minimum group size.

Departs: Every two days from May 9 to Oct 14.

Duration: 9 days (8 nights). This holiday may be adapted into a 10 night version – just add \$627 per adult and \$423 per child to the above prices.

Meals: Continental breakfast and evening meals.

Other details: For "What your holiday price includes," see "Holiday Planning" section pp 48-51.

Tailor-made travel choices

Nearest Arrival Airport: Pisa Airport

Flights can be arranged from most US/CANADA airports, with connecting transfers as required, prices and details on request.

The above prices include our standard transfers: Pisa Airport at 12:20 (transfer to hotel, 75 mins, provided). **Return:** Pisa Airport by 11:15 (transfer provided).

Tour only: Transfers included from Pisa airport at 12:20, and back to Pisa airport departing hotel at 10:00.

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SECRETS OF SAN GIMIGNANO | WHERE YOU STAY



Park Hotel Le Fonti
★★★★
Volterra
Days 1+8



Hotel Casolare Le Terre Rosse ★★★★★
San Donato
Days 2+3



Relais della Rovere
★★★★★
Colle di Val d'Elsa
Days 4+5 (plus extension)



Hotel Le Renai
★★★★
Pancole
Days 6+7

For extra nights we recommend Volterra and optional 2-night extension in Colle di Val d'Elsa. City add-ons can be arranged in Florence and Siena.