

Villas and Vines
presents

The Treasures of Tuscany *An Italian Food and Wine Adventure*



October 19th – 25th, 2008

Sunday, October 19th

Florence - Siena

The Florence airport is where you will meet David Geen and Bill Underdown from Villas and Vines, then we are off to the magical city of Siena.

En-route from Florence to Siena, we will pause for lunch at a charming restaurant in the hills south of Florence for our first taste of Tuscan fare.

In Siena, check in and get settled into our new home, the *Palazzo Ravizza*, a 17th century palazzo in the center of the city. Make sure to take a look at the picturesque garden. The Palazzo Ravizza is one of the very few hotels that boasts such conveniences and being located within the city walls, and within easy walking distance to all the major attractions, including the best shopping in Siena.

A warm welcome dinner awaits us this evening at one of Siena's fine restaurants. L, D



Monday, October 20th

Siena

Ochre in color, gothic in construction, Siena serpentine its majestic way around and on top of three hills in the heart of Tuscany. Palaces abound, cathedral bells ring, and tiny cobble-stoned streets all lead their way to the unforgettable Il Campo, praised as Italy's most remarkable piazza. Siena is a medley of romance, gastronomy, and mystery painted on a backdrop of Medieval mastery. There will be plenty of free time to wander and explore this splendid city on your own.

Today we are privileged to have our own local guide lead us through an adventurous walking tour of this captivating university city. Make sure to have plenty of film on hand!

Lunch will be a welcome break from our explorations, where we enjoy delicious Tuscan specialties and Chianti wines in an easy-going, colorful ambiance.



Are you ready for wine? It's time to enjoy enlightening instruction from an expert in Chianti wines at the *Cantina in Piazza*. Taste four of the region's finest selections, including a Chianti Classico, a Nobile from Montepulciano, a Brunello from Montalcino, and a Super-Tuscan surprise. This tasting promises to set the stage for our week together.

Dinner tonight is on your own, with so many choices just steps from our hotel, including a vast array of charming local osterias, warm and friendly trattorias, delectable osterias, and refined ristoranti.

B, L

Tuesday, October 21st

Il Colle – Pienza - Montepulciano

This morning we are in for a regal treat at a *fattoria*, or working farm, whose pride in production is a fruity extra-virgin olive oil and wonderfully heady Brunello wines. Built in 1592, the *Fattoria del Colle* now offers bed and breakfast to visitors wise to farm vacations in Tuscany. Il Colle also has an excellent table reserved exclusively for its guests with a top chef from nearby Montalcino attending to the traditional cuisine. This morning the chef will guide us through the kitchen and hands-on creations like *bruschetta* and hand-rolled local pasta called *pici*.



Lunch will be a delight as we feast upon the fruits of our culinary labors together at the farm.

Pienza is the birthplace of Pope Pius II (1458) but the real star in town is the Florentine Bernardo Rossellino who gave the world the first example of planned Renaissance urbanization, as seen in its center square or piazza.

Pienza might also be considered the capital of Tuscan cheese for its oldest traditional cheese, *pecorino*, a pungent low-fat ewe's milk cheese that ages wonderfully, is produced locally. As we witness from the abundant shops selling pecorino, this savory cheese can be enhanced with any number of natural herbs, spices, or funghi, including truffles. This afternoon we enjoy a leisurely stroll through this wonderful Renaissance village ripe with sights and smells.

What a better compliment for cheese is there than a glass of wine? And what about not just any wine in just any old setting? By private invitation we discover the *Cantine del Redi* winery near Montepulciano, over 600 years old, and still producing some of the best *Nobile* wines to be found anywhere in Tuscany.

Back in Siena, enjoy free time on your own to take advantage of our time here to explore its hidden charms and mysteries or to write a postcard, glass of wine in hand, from the scenic Piazza del Campo. If you are looking for a culinary mission, why not check out a well-stocked kitchen shop that offers good presents to take home like individual espresso makers, olive-wood cutting boards or cheese graters, wedges for dividing Parmesan, or any of the modern design objects the Italians are so brilliant at producing.

Dinner tonight is a Sienese dining adventure to discover on your own.

B,

L



Wednesday, October 22nd

San Gimignano – Castellina-in-Chianti

*I*n the heart of the rolling Tuscan countryside, studded with vines and olive trees, is the crowning glory of San Gimignano with its numerous medieval towers that have earned the nickname, "*San Gimignano dalle belle tori*". This remarkable city had been something of an independent state since the 12th century and for two centuries following, it prospered considerably. The numerous feudal towers have long been interpreted as a sign of the city's two most powerful noble families divided in opposing factions, the *Gibelins* (for the emperor) and the *Guelphs* (for the Pope).

*E*njoy a guided stroll through this fascinating page in Tuscan history.

*F*or souvenirs, take home beautiful hand-woven baskets used for drying figs or picking olives which are the specialty of the local craftsmen. An excellent address in town for *arte povera*, or poor art, is on the main street at "*Bottega D'Arte Povera*" on 83 Via San Matteo. Here you will find wonderful hand-made baskets, olive wood bowls and boards, terra-cotta cooking pots, and local chestnut baskets.

*L*unch is a destination on your own amongst the many cafes and trattorias in San Gimignano.

*A*fter lunch we transfer to the medieval hilltop village of Castellina-in-Chianti, and the *Palazzo Squarcialupi*, our home for the next three nights. The hotel is in the center of the village and offers fantastic views over the hills and vineyards, lovely pool, and new "relax center" with jacuzzi, sauna, and steam-room.

*L*ate this afternoon there is plenty of free time to explore our new home village.

*F*or many foreigners, Italy is synonymous with wonderful pastas, and of course...great pizza. Enjoy one of the best in Tuscany at *Il Fondaccio* pizzeria in Castellina-in-Chianti where we are part of a lively ambiance enjoying traditionally fire-baked pizza. **B, D**



Thursday, October 23rd

Volpaia - Radda-in-Chianti

Cooking Tuscan style is our theme this morning. Shuttle to the medieval hilltop village of Volpaia where we will meet our chef, Carla Vespulli, owner of the *Bottega Trattoria* in center village. It is an exciting moment as we learn to prepare delicious local specialties while enjoying the formidable company of our dynamic hostess. In no time we will see why Carla's trattoria is actor Richard Gere's professed favorite in Tuscany.

Just before lunch we discover what makes Volpaia such a famous landmark on Italy's culinary map. The answer is simple, and essential to the success of many typical recipes including great salad dressing: vinegar. Volpaia is the only community in Tuscany presently licensed to make vinegar. By law, winemaking facilities must be located some distance from those making vinegar. To make the best vinegar one must start with a great wine, and transform it slowly. That way its components, its perfumes, will remain in the vinegar. Volpaia's red and white vinegars are aged in barrels, just like the best wines. The vinegar absorbs noble tannins from these oak barrels that infuse the bouquet with extraordinary elegance. Then the vinegars are given a final treatment, they are infused with natural flavors. The final vinegars are numbered from one to five: 1 Herbs; 2 Spices; 3 Kitchen Garden; 4 Flowers; 5 Fresh. These vinegars are rarely found in America but we will have the chance to purchase them in easy-to-bring-back-home sizes.

Lunch is at the trattoria where we will enjoy the delectable fruits of our culinary labors amongst excellent company and wonderful local wines.

After lunch we visit Castellina's "sister" village, Radda-in-Chianti, a stunning medieval hilltop village with majestic views of the beautiful Chianti vineyards in all directions. Radda is home to several artists, ceramic producers, and specialty food shops, so you'll enjoy some time on your own to discover them!

Castellina-in-Chianti has many different dining options, including two Michelin-starred restaurants. The choice is yours; just report back to the group in the morning! **B, L**

Friday, October 24th *Panzano-in-Chianti - Vignamaggio*

Our destination this morning is the hilltop village of Panzano-in-Chianti, with its captivating views over the stunning *Val d'Oro*, or "Valley of Gold" offering a "patchwork" view of vineyards, olive groves, and cypresses.



Panzano is home to the most famous butcher in all of Italy, Dario Cecchini. Dario is a large vital young man with a ready smile and large, nimble hands. Among other things, Dario will guide us through the art of hand-kneaded *salsicce*, along with all the additional meats, pates, and herbs that comprise the authentic *cucina Toscana*. Of course, there are tastings and many photo opportunities.

There will be some time to explore Panzano on your own, with its interesting galleries, boutiques, and wine bars.

Lunch will be an adventure, as Dario himself takes us to his roof-top deck and teaches us the skills of perfect grilling, Tuscan style. What a treat!



After lunch we visit the nearby *Villa Vignamaggio* to discover a remarkable Renaissance villa that was the birthplace of Mona Lisa, or *La Gioconda* in Italian. This spectacular villa and its resplendent gardens were featured in Kenneth Branagh's 1992 film *Much Ado About Nothing*. Though the villa is private, we shall tour its gardens, then taste the estate's award-winning Riserva, Chianti Classico, Super-Tuscan wines, and olive oil.

Time to relax a bit before dinner this evening.



Our farewell dinner together will be at a special *agriturismo* just outside of Radda-in-Chianti. We are welcomed by the "locally famous" Gioia Milani, who will have prepared for us an authentic dinner comprised of ingredients produced directly on her farm! This will be a meal we're sure to remember, as we raise our glasses and toast to a wonderful week together!

B, L, D

Saturday, October 25th

Florence

After breakfast, we transfer back to Florence for the return trip back to America.

B