Nestled on the central-western Tyrrhenian Sea border, Tuscany, or Toscana as the natives call it, boasts nearly 9,000 square miles and approximately 4 million residents. Tuscany is known for the seemingly boundless rolling hills, and mountainous region of the Apuan Alps.

Tuscany is a region with an all-season appeal, with a variety of things to enjoy year-round. In the summer, Tuscany offers warm sun and fine sandy beaches. If you’re interested in experiencing one of the best moments in the Tuscan lifestyle, visit during September to October for the grape harvest, or November for the olive harvest.

Considered ‘the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance,’ and the once breadbasket of the Roman Empire, Tuscany has a rich culture filled with art, food, and of course, wine. Tuscany is the ideal vacation destination for many reasons. Many come in search of fine art, others to explore the extraordinary countryside. Gourmets and wine buffs descend on Tuscany to enjoy the simple yet wonderful cuisine and wine. Walkers enjoy the mountain paths, cyclists the rolling hills, summer vacationers the sea coast and islands. Students come to learn the
WHAT TO DO

Boasting some of the world’s most beautiful landscapes, Tuscany is the perfect place to take in the proverbial, ‘breath of fresh air.’ There are many tours and activities that can help you enjoy everything Tuscany has to offer, including:

**Bicycle Tours:** Bike the Tuscan countryside, and take in sites like the Chianti, Lunigiana, and Maremma Valleys, or Orcia, Lucca, and Pisa. Don’t forget to stop along the way to savor the rustic Tuscan cuisine, the Chianti wines, and most favorably the awe-inspiring sunsets.

**Walking Tours:** Slow down and take a walk. Explore centuries-old Tuscan cities and villages, they have plenty to offer. From the Etruscan tombs of Sarteano, the Uffizi Gallery featuring works from Michelangelo, Botticelli, and Leonardo Da Vinci, to the famous terracotta façade of Il Duomo, and medieval castles, there is a piece of history for every vacationer.

**Horseback Riding Tours:** Always wanted to explore the stunning countryside of Italy on horseback, but don’t know how to ride? Take a day-long, guided riding tour and navigate the hills of Chianti, Siena, Florence, Lucca, and the Tuscan coast with no riding experience necessary.

**Hiking Paths:** Feeling a little more adventurous? Trek your way through the hillsides of Fiesole and Settignano, or the National Park (Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi) for starters. Or, take your hike to the next level and trail the Apuan Alps of north Tuscany.

**Wine Routes:** Known as the ‘Wine Trails of Tuscany’ join an intimate wine tour of some of the oldest castles and vineyards in the world, including Barone Ricasoli, a vineyard known most for their wine, Castello di Brolio. Then, continue along to taste all the full-body and floral flavors of the Tuscan countryside by visiting the wine regions of Chianti, Montalcino, Montepulciano, and

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**Food Specialities**

**Panzanella:** Enjoy this summer salad classically made of soaked and drained stale bread, tomatoes, vinegar, olive oil, and topped off with salt and pepper. Onions and basil are often optional additions.

**Panforte:** Akin to the fruit cake, this Sienese cake has a strong flavor of candied fruit and spices and it is rather thick. Made with honey, sugar, flour, and candied fruits, it is an ideal accompaniment for coffee, or dessert wine after a meal.

**Cantuccino:** A variation on the classic biscotti this biscuit exemplifies Tuscan tradition. Often made with almonds, cantuccino are served with Vin Santo dessert wine.

**Chianti Classico, Brunello di Montalcino, Rosso di Montepulciano:** These are only some of the highly appreciated Tuscan wines known throughout the world.
Bolgheri.

**Chianti Wine Route Tour:** Enjoy the charm of the Chianti countryside, one of the most suggestive areas of Tuscany, renowned all over the world not only for its famous wine, but even for its landscapes and vineyards, olive trees, and cypresses surrounding churches, parishes, castles and villages hidden among the hills.

Tour castles, where Chianti - Classico is stored, gardens, and town squares. After spending a pleasant afternoon in the heart of the Chianti region, the best way to complete your tasting experience is by indulging in a Tuscan specialty, bisteca alla fiorentina (T-bone steak Florentine style). Delight your palate with a 36 oz T-bone serving for two, washing it down with smooth Chianti-Classico.

**WHAT TO SEE**

**Florence:** The capital of Tuscany, Florence (or Firenze) is the mecca of art, history, and culture for not only the region, but also all of Europe. Known as, 'the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance,' Florence possesses some of the greatest works of art of all time, from artists like Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Giotto, and Dante Alighieri, to name a few. For more information, see our guide to Florence.

**Siena:** A medieval hillside town, Siena is famous for its shell-shaped piazza (or town square) known as Piazza del Campo. Piazza del Campo is the heart of this town, housing the palace, Palazzo Pubblico and its tower, Torre del Mangia. It is also home to the twice-annual summer horse racing event, Il Palio. And if you’re fit enough to brave the 400 stair climb, you’ll be rewarded at the tower with a picturesque view of the cathedral and architectural treasure, Duomo di Siena.

For more information on Il Palio, check out our special events listings below.

**Pisa:** Home to the 14th century bell tower, The Leaning Tower of Pisa, Pisa has many other artistic and architectural marvels to see. Home to approximately 60,000 students, Pisa has a rich and vibrant nightlife of parties, cultural events, and shows. The best way to visit Pisa is walking the streets, and enjoying the sights and the atmosphere.

**Lucca:** Most noted for its intact Renaissance walls that surround the city, Lucca has many medieval sites to behold. The Basilica di San Frediano, Church of St. Michele, Tomb of Ilaria del Carretto, and the ‘Holy Face’ of The Cathedral of St. Martino, are but a few of the many attractions in this small city.

**Versilia:** If miles of fine sandy beaches are your forte, Versilia is the perfect place to visit. Comprised of four areas: Viareggio and Torre del Lago Puccini, Lido di Camaiore, Marina di Pietrasanta and Forte dei Marmi.

**Viareggio:** Apart of Versilia, Viareggio has a history of tourism dating back to the 19th century. Known for the shopping promenade, the beaches, and the most incredible Carnival floats parade in Italy, Viareggio is a great choice if shopping and beaches are what you’re looking for.
**Lido di Camaiore and Marina di Pietrasanta:**
Lido di Camaiore and Marina di Pietrasanta are two seaside resorts known for their opulent secluded villas, parks, and gardens. Camaiore has many historical relics and artistic features, while Pietrasanta is the old capital of Versilia and an epicenter for artistic marble work.

**Massarosa:**
Massarosa is famous for its splendid natural environment in each of its 16 tiny hamlets that surround the center. Well-known since prehistoric times, Massarosa was inhabited during the Roman period and was so important that we still today find evidence of the ancient Roman Baths at Massaciuccoli.

**Seravezza and Stazzema:** At the base of the Apuan Alps, these two towns have plenty of history to offer any tourist. Seravezza has a Medici palace, and Stazzema is known for its historical roots in WW II.

**San Gimignano:**
San Gimignano is a small medieval hill town known as the, ‘City of Beautiful Towers.’ It has 14 remaining towers that comprise its beautiful skyline, and the town itself has both Gothic and Romanesque influences a must see for any architectural buff. The town also known for its white wine, Vernaccia di San Gimignano, produced from the ancient variety of Vernaccia grape, grown on the sandstone hillsides of the surrounding area.

**Montepulciano:**
Montepulciano is a walled city most often visited on the ‘Wine Trails of Tuscany is known for its wine called Vino Nobile, and its remarkable main square and picturesque Renaissance buildings.

**Montalcino:**
Not far from Montepulciano is Montalcino. Montalcino is one of the oldest cities in Tuscany, famous for its great wine, Brunello di Montalcino. This is a place to visit if you’re in search of relaxation, fine wine, and incredible hillside views of neighboring vineyards, olive orchards, and villages.

**Pienza:**
Nestled between Montepulciano and Montalcino, we find the stunning Pienza. This city, often referred to as the, ‘touchstone of Renaissance urbanism,’ was rebuilt out of a village called Corsignano by Pope Pius II to be a retreat from Rome. This town was among the first to employ humanist urban planning concepts, and influenced many other European centers thereafter.

**Cortona:**
The setting of the famous book, Under the Tuscan Sun, Cortona is a hill town surrounded by a 3,000 year old foundation of Etruscan walls, with layers of history built into its culture and architecture from its Etruscan core. Cortona is a well rounded site to see art, architecture and scenic hillsides. Some historians claim interesting history linked the Noah’s Ark.
Chianti Region: Start your wine tour off with some of the best wine and scenery Tuscany has to offer. Known for inventing Chianti, a wine known for having notes of cherry, plum, and strawberry, to name a few, the Chianti region is an area located in the center of Tuscany, between Florence and Siena. Chianti has a landscape characterized by its rolling hills covered by vineyards, olive orchards, and lush valleys. Throughout the Chianti region, there are numerous ancient villages, churches and abbeys, castles and fortresses, farmhouses and villas, making this a great adventure for wine lovers.

Volterra: Another of Tuscany’s walled hill towns, Volterra has a rich medieval history seen throughout the city. This is a lesser traveled tourist spot, but still nothing short of a must see. From the yellow-grey panchino stone seen in most structures throughout the city, to one of the most impressive squares of Tuscany, Piazza dei Priori, this under-traveled site will be sure to impress.

Elba Island: One of seven and the largest islands of the Tuscan Archipelago islands, Elba Island is a favorite among tourists. Having over 50 sandy beaches, ranges of pine trees, coral reefs, archaeological ruins to explore, and Napoleon’s home during his first exile, this island is not short on things to see.

Montecatini Terme: If a little rest and relaxation is what you seek, then you’ve come to the right place. Dating back to having inhabitants during the Paleolithic Era, though most notably known more for it Mesolithic period, Montecatini Terme is notorious for its water’s properties since the 14th century. Relax at the many thermal establishments and mud baths while taking in the Liberty style architecture.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Palio di Siena: A two-time summer event, Siena’s Piazza del Campo hosts the famous horse race Palio di Siena. The race is comprised of 17 contrade (each representing a neighborhood in Siena), and each with a rider. 10 contrade take part in the first race, July 2nd. The other 7 contestants, plus 3 from the July race compete August 16th. Winning the Palio is a great honor and the race is highly competitive, with an element of danger— not uncommon to see a rider-less horse or two cross the finish line.

Carnevale di Viareggio: A carnival dating back to the 19th century, Carnivale di Viareggio is famously known for its parade floats from enormous colorful machineries where monsters, politicians, animals, and fantastic creatures move their tentacles, heads, arms, etc. The construction of the floats are taken very seriously, often employing various mediums to achieve the best float in the parade, most often the use of paper mache is prevalent among most floats.

Luminaria, Regatta and Battle of the Bridge: On June 16th, take part in the most magical night in Tuscany, as the skyline of Pisa is ablaze with over 70,000 burning candles to
kick-off the festivities honoring Saint Ranieri, the patron saint of Pisa and protector of all travelers.

Following the mystical night of lights, watch as four boats representing the most ancient districts of the city compete in the Regatta (boat race). Upon crossing the finish line it is up to the team’s climber to complete the victory, boarding an anchored boat to climb the mast and retrieve the blue silk banner. About a week later, Pisa reenacts the Battle of the Bridge. The event is structured into two different moments: a historical military in costume parade through the city center and the Battle of the Bridge. The battle is historically medieval taking place on the bridge of Pisa (Ponte di Mezzo). In a grueling ‘push of war’ combatants have to push a trolley placed on the bridge track in two opposite directions. The ones who remain on the bridge win the contest.

**Chianti Classico Wine Festival:** Rounding out the summer, enjoy the Chianti Classico Wine Festival (Rassegna del Chianti Classico) in Greve. Enjoy a glass of wine or three, fresh olive oil and cheese tastings, theatre, games, and entertainment. The festival takes place the second weekend of September and the preceding Friday.