

MONICA'S OCTOBER 2012 TUSCAN/UMBRIAN FOOD & WINE TRIP

Day 1 - The Tuscan Countryside of Cortona, Wednesday October 17

This morning we meet in the hillside town of Cortona and our home for the next week. Poggio al Sole, www.poggiosole.it is an ancient village high in the hills and just 3 km from Cortona, a hill-town made famous by Francis Mayes, author of "Under the Tuscan Sun". With a swimming pool, outdoor dining, and an outdoor wood-fired oven, this is our own private paradise.

We begin our Tuscan adventure within the ancient stone walls of Cortona with our illustrious guide Giovanni, who will take us on a most informative tour of this magical town, share the treasures of ancient Etruscan sites, and take us to visit the monastery where St. Francis lived. This evening a dinner of the traditional meat of the region, 'Bistecca alla Fiorentina', will be prepared in the wood-fire oven, by our host Benedetta, well-known locally for her talents as a chef with a flair for Florentine. (L,D)

Day 2 - Pienza and Perazetta, Thursday October 18

A typical daily breakfast at our Agriturismo includes everything from fresh fruit, yogurt and homemade pastries, to eggs from the hens outside, and Benedetta's own olive oil and hearth-fired breads.

Our first stop: the picture perfect hill town of Pienza. The views from the city walls show us the sheep that dot the valley floor, and Pecorino, the local cheese that is made from their milk, spills from the shops. You will enjoy a unique Balsamic Vinegar tasting like nothing your palate has experienced before! You will also taste the typical cheese of the area.

Next we will take you to the vineyard of Perazzeta, where Alessandro Bocci makes award winning olive oil and wine. You will learn about this passionate farmer's pursuit of the most perfect wine, and how he will throw away twice as many grapes as he presses.

After a tour and wine tasting we are treated to a splendid lunch in the cellar, or if the sun is shining, on the terrace overlooking the valleys. Either way, the meal is impressive as Alessandro's daughter Sara shows us her talents as an accomplished chef and winemaker, and the wine flows to match the delicious food.

The countryside here is glorious, and we enjoy more of it on our way back home, via The Abbey of Sant'Antimo (Abbazia di Sant'Antimo). It is a beautiful Romanesque church, in a picture-perfect setting just south of Montalcino in southern Tuscany. It sits in a large valley with views of the hill town Castelnuovo dell'Abate, rolling hills covered in olive groves and vineyards, and wild forests.

If you are hungry for it, dinner is on your own tonight either out, or something delicious from Benedetta. (B,L)

Day 3 - Making whoopie, I mean Gnocchi!! Friday October 19

Our digs are so fabulous that it is really difficult to leave, so today, we are only venturing out briefly to Avignonesi, a beautiful and famous vineyard in the countryside not far from our inn. They make the dessert wine Vin Santo, and every May, when they open the 10 year old barrels, journalists from all over the world come to write about it. We will be there at just the right time to see the gorgeous grapes drying in a special air-controlled room, take a tour and taste some of these wines.

After this delightful experience, we head back to plant ourselves right in Benedetta's kitchen for a cooking lesson and lunch. Benedetta grows and makes her own wine, olive oil, and will teach us how to make gnocchi, and a variety of other things, including her desserts, in a wonderfully relaxed and fun atmosphere.

At the end of the evening, we sit down to a feast that is fit for the royalty that we are! (B,L,D)

Day 4 - Orvieto , Saturday October 20

This morning, driver Fabio takes us to the hill town of Orvieto. The magnificent Duomo (cathedral) is gorgeous thanks to architect Lorenzo Maitani with a mass of mosaics, stained glass, frescoes and sculpture. We will visit the former palace holding a fine Etruscan collection, and Orvieto's underground, which is honeycombed with Etruscan and medieval caves, and our guide will weave for you a fascinating tale of archeological history.

Afterward, we are off to the beautiful estate of Emiliano Sirchia at the foot of the town, where we will visit the estate and cantina Altarocca for a wine tour, tasting and lunch in the restaurant. Tonight, dinner is on your own, and Cantina Napoli is Monica's favorite, if you want to go out. (B,L)

Day 5 - Truffle Hunting in the countryside, Sunday October 21

While Tuscan truffles lack the brand-name recognition of those from Alba, the hill town of San Giovanni d'Asso also lacks the circus atmosphere that can result in overpricing and over-hunting. And the quality, some say, is just as fragrant. San Giovanni d'Asso has luscious wheat fields, crumpled clay hills and the ribboned vineyards of the Sangiovese grape, which is used to make some of Italy's finest wines including Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. There are no touristy stores, just a butcher shop that keeps irregular hours, a tobacco shop and a

rustic café that offers half-day truffle excursions. Last November, in a bid to elevate its truffle stature, the village of 940 opened the country's first museum dedicated to the food.

If we find truffles (and just like with all hunting, there is no guarantee) you might be able to sell them for \$100 Euros per lb! A fresh and extravagant truffle lunch will taste fantastico, especially after our walk in the countryside looking for the elusive truffle. We will also enjoy a visit to the Etruscan Museum on our way home. (B,L)

Day 6 - Assisi, Monday October 22

We leave Tuscany for the day and visit Assisi in the region of Umbria for a guided tour and a spectacular church visit. Assisi is best known as the birthplace of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of Italy, founder of the Franciscan order, and one of the most popular Catholic saints. We will experience Roman ruins, winding medieval streets, sacred shrines, and the main attraction: the 13th-century Basilica di San Francesco. The basilica contains the sacred relics of Francis and beautiful frescoes of his life. Marco, our guide, tells us the story of St. Francis in a way you will never forget. After we can shop and everyone can grab a lite lunch on their own, before heading to our cooking class. We will spend this evening with Jennifer Bidi. Jennifer is an American married to Italian winemaker and Olive oil producer Federico Bidi. Monica uses their organic olive oil to finish her delicious soups, salads and other dishes at the restaurant. We will have the pleasure of spending the evening with them, eating in their kitchen and making pasta. We will then dine on our creation of an authentic Etruscan dinner with the wines from the estate. (B,D)

Day 7 - Just Say Cheese! Tuesday October 23

After another wonderful breakfast in our Agriturismo, we will make a short drive over to San Martino. Here we will meet Silvia and Riccardo, at their beautiful Relais Chateau, Il Falconiere, and their chef Riccard will teach us the art of cheese making. From local sheep and cow's milk we will make ricotta, mozzarella, and the pecorino that is so famous from these verdant valleys. Along with our cheese making we make and feast on Pici pasta and a fabulous sauce of fresh tomatoes for our hand-made pasta, along with a tasting of their award winning wines and champagne. Afterward, there will be some time to spend as you choose, where you can wander the cobblestone streets of Cortona, visit the museums or the Duomo, enjoy gelato and shopping, catch up at the internet café, or take in the magnificent valley views.

Back at Poggio al Sole this early evening we will get our hands in some dough with a pizza making class! Our farewell dinner consists of many different toppings to choose from, a wood-fired oven to cook them in, and a mix of organic salads and fresh and seasonal antipasti, as well as a Small Vineyard Wine Sampling with Monica as our educator of Small Production wines. (B,L,D)

Day 8 - We say our farewells, Wednesday October 24

This morning we can pack up, enjoy an authentic Italian breakfast, and maybe even a hike in the countryside before we say our farewells. With last minute photos and promises to stay in touch, it is always difficult to leave the Italian countryside!

Transfer to train station is provided.

In the unlikely event that some outings may change, replacement outings will be of equal or greater quality.

Includes:

- *Everything listed in the itinerary with Doumina
- *Lodging: fabulous accommodations w/private bath.
- *Ground transportation
- *Guided tours
- *Every breakfast and at least one main meal, every day, plus the foods involved in the various tastings.
- *Wine tastings
- *Vinegar tasting
- *Olive oil tasting
- *Admission fees
- *Cooking classes

*Doumina's priceless expertise and carefully nurtured relationships

*Precious company and entertainment provided by the people of Italy, who will stay in your hearts and minds forever.

Does not include:

- *Airfare
- *Single Supplement Fee (If requested, 675.00)
- *Occasional supplemental meals
- *Travel for personal errands/ meals/ shopping while on the tour.

Doumina can help arrange All other transportation and Ideas for other destinations

Price: 3295.00 per person

Deposit required upon booking: USD 1,200.00

Final payment due 120 days prior to departure. **(June 18)**

Cancellation refund policy: 100% 115 days prior to departure; 50% 90 days prior; 25% 60-89 days prior

Travel insurance recommended, but not obligatory, with each booking

Airfare not included

CONTACT Doumina at www.TheEnthusiasticTraveler.com or whyman1@aol.com