

Italy Tour October 2009

Day 1-Wednesday, October 7, 2009

The adventure begins

Meet Doumina in the city of Perugia where she will take you to your home for the first 4 nights, at Relais Parco Fiorito, a restored 16th century convent.

Relais Parco Fiorito is in Umbria, not far from the beautiful hillside town of Cortona, and you begin your adventure this afternoon within her walls of stone. Your illustrious guide Giovanni will share the treasures of Cortona's Etruscan sites, and its history, while taking you on a leisurely and informative tour of this beautiful city.

After the tour of Cortona you get to visit an olive-pressing farm, where Landi and Renato press the local olive oil in the old way. It is a wonderful gift to be able to experience this tradition that is becoming so seldom used in these modern times.

Next you are invited to visit the farm of Pucci Agostino. Here, he raises the famous Chianina, the white cow of Tuscany, from which Toscana's steak 'Bistecca alla Fiorentina' has been made famous. You will learn how his family proudly maintains the animal's excellent bloodlines and ancestry, and produces meat on a small scale rather than the mass production practices that we are used to.

Your wonderful dinner of 'Bistecca alla Fiorentina' will be prepared in the grand fireplace by our host Roberto Russo, who is well-known locally and abroad for his talents as a chef and cookbook author.

Dinner

Day 2 -Thursday, October 8

Bountiful Brunello Tour

Your typical breakfast will include everything from fresh fruit, yogurt and homemade pastries, to house-cured prosciutto, eggs from the hens outside, Roberto's olive oil with hearth-fired bread, and of course, espresso, tea and fresh juices.

Today you will visit two Small Vineyards Estates, and travel through Montecucco, Val d'Orcia, and Montalcino. You will taste wines along the way and learn of the land and the life of the Tuscans in this beautiful countryside.

Your first stop is the picture perfect city of Pienza. Pienza has been the idyllic site of films, such as the "English Patient", and "Romeo and Juliet". Sheep dot the valley floor and Pecorino, the local cheese that is made from their milk, spills from the shops. You can visit the church and see the tiny streets of this beautiful little hill town, taste the cheeses, and a variety of Balsamic Vinegars. You will be amazed by their flavors and variety!

Your next stop the vineyard Perazzeta, where Alessandro Bocci makes award winning olive oil and wine. A passionate man, he names his wines after those he loves most: his daughter Sara and his wife Rita. His latest great wine is called "Irio", after his father. You will learn about this farmer's pursuit of the most perfect wine, and how he will throw away twice as many grapes as he presses. Of course you will taste how delicious

his work is!

After a tasting and a tour, you will walk next door to experience a plate of Flavio's pasta while feasting your gaze upon the beautiful valleys.

The countryside here is glorious, and you will enjoy more of it on our way back home via La Magia, the vineyard where you will meet Antonio Sanguineti. Antonio is rightly famous for his Brunello di Montalcino, one of the finest wines there is. His wines and the man himself are both fabulous.

Breakfast/Lunch/2 small vineyards tastings

Day 3-Friday, October 9

Just Say Cheese!

Today, after another wonderful breakfast in our Agriturismo, we will make our way back into the Etruscan walls of Cortona. You will meet Romano and his lovely wife Agostina, at their typical Tuscan restaurant, La Bucaccia. Romano will quickly become one of your favorite characters in Italy, and he will teach you the art of cheese making. From local sheep's milk you will make Ricotta, Mozzarella, and the Pecorino that is so famous from these verdant valleys. Along with your cheese making instruction, you will enjoy a delicious lunch in his lovely restaurant.

The rest of the day is yours to spend as you choose. Leisurely wandering the cobblestone streets of Cortona, shopping, catching up at the internet café, and taking in the magnificent valley views. From Piazza Garibaldi you can see the Chiana Valley, Lake Trasimeno-Italy's largest non-alpine lake, and beyond. There are also museums to explore such as The Museum of the Etruscan Academy, and the Diocesan Museum, and you can visit the Duomo.

Breakfast/Lunch/Cooking Class

Day 4-Saturday, October 10

Assisi

You will enjoy a post-breakfast hike in the beautiful countryside of Piazzano, where our Agriturismo lies.

Then, off to Assisi for a guided day trip 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. You 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.

You will spend this evening with Roberto, who will impart his knowledge as chef and cookbook author, and transform your culinary thinking with a fun and informative cooking class. We will then dine on your creation of an authentic Etruscan "poor man's" dinner with Antonio Sanguineti, who will join us to provide a full Small Vineyards wine tasting!

Breakfast/Dinner/Small Vineyards Tasting

Day 5-Sunday, October 11

Moving to the Chianti region

This morning after our fabulous breakfast you will bid farewell to Parco Fiorito and Roberto Russo. With last minute photos, hugs, and promises to keep in touch, we will travel to the heart of the Chianti region.

Our Agriturismo, Podere Ciona, is an 18th century farmhouse with acres of grape vines and a stunning view of Siena in the distance. Your senses will be satiated by this magical place combined with the foods that you will learn to prepare in a traditional cooking class with mama Franca. Her son, Lorenzo Gatteschi, played a large role in forming the concept of Small Vineyards Importers, and he will introduce you to the wonderful wines of this farm while you feast on the results of your cooking class! This extremely beautiful place is where you will spend the next 3 nights.

Breakfast/Dinner/Small Vineyards Tasting

Day 6-Monday, October 12

Maremma

This morning you will witness the beautiful morning sunlight on the Tuscan Vineyards and then start the day with a lovely breakfast. You will tour our host family's winery and taste their fabulous Super Tuscans, before starting a full day of travel. Rarely visited by Americans, the wineries are Terre del Marchesato and Rigoloccio, and they are in the "wild west" coastal region of Tuscany that is known as the Maremma. This is a rugged and beautiful area, and both estates welcome us with a tasting accompanied by meats and cheeses from the region.

At Terre del Marchesato you will breathe the salty sea air near Bolgheri, ground zero for Super Tuscans, where the soil is rich and the wine is delicious. Your hosts are modern winemakers, Maurizio and Giovanna Fuselli and they have invited you to enjoy a lunch of the meats, cheeses, and fabulous wines that this self-sustaining farm produces.

Next you visit Rigoloccio, a new addition to Small Vineyards estates. The grapes they grow are Fiano, Alicante, Cabernet, and Merlot, very close to an old silver mine. One wine is aptly named "Sorvegliante" which means "Guardian of the Mines". You will enjoy more fabulous wines and tantalizing morsels.

Breakfast/Lunch/2 Small Vineyards Tastings

Day 7-Tuesday, October 13

Volterra, Le Rote, Farewell

You will visit Volterra for some shopping and sight seeing in what is one of Italy's best preserved hill towns. Of particular interest is the 1st Century BC Roman Theater, Piazza dei Priori, one of Italy's most beautiful squares, and the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta.

Next, you will visit another Small Vineyards find, Le Rote. The Scotti family produces a tiny amount of exceptionally good wine, half of which is the historic white wine Vernaccia. They are one of the few producers in the area to also have a red wine, and the classic Sangiovese is their other focus.

Later you are invited to a private dinner in the home of Franca's sister Mimma. In this beautifully restored home which is nestled between Castellina and Radda, you will have the honor of tasting Mimma's special Olive Oil, as well as share a wonderful farewell dinner.

Breakfast/Dinner/Olive Oil Tasting/Small Vineyards Tasting

Day 8-Wednesday, October 14

Siena e Ciao

After your final breakfast you will arrive early in Siena to enjoy the fabulous Il Campo and one of the most beautiful Duomos in Italy.

Piazza del Campo, or "Il Campo", as the Sienese call it, is a unique place in the world, starting with the very particular conformation of the ground, which turns the square into a concave shell. The white marble of the fountain 'Fonte Gaia' stands out. There is also the Palazzo Comunale (town hall), and also the tall, slender Torre del Mangia that reaches out to the sky. This is where the famous horse race, Palio di Siena is held, and where you can shop for fantastic leather, shoes, and scarves, as well as taste some authentic Panforte di Siena.

Siena's cathedral is a great example of Italian Gothic architecture and is very dramatic with it's black and white striped campanile and baptistery. Here you will see the works of 13th century Gothic master Nicola Pisano, Matteo di Giovanni, as well as Donatello, Ghiberti, Jacopo della Quercia and other 15th-century sculptors.

We will gather at Nanini for a coffee and any last minute shopping, before going our own ways. Whatever destination you will continue on to, you can get there from here!

Breakfast

Price: \$2895 per person, based on 20 people total.

Includes:

- Everything listed in the itinerary while we are with Doumina
- Lodging
- Ground transportation
- Guided tours
- Listed meals
- Wine tasting
- Vinegar tasting
- Olive oil tastings
- Admission fees where applicable
- 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 (plus Monica & Mark!).

Does not include:

- Airfare
- Transportation to Perugia
- Transportation from Siena
- Occasional meals
- Travel for personal errands/meals/shopping while on the tour.

Doumina can help arrange:

- All other transportation
- Ideas for other destinations
- A package that would include round trip airfare from here to Roma and 2 nights' accommodations and guided tours in Roma, with group pricing based on how many of us want to add this on.