

# GIRLFRIEND TUSCAN RETREAT!

12-19 September 2020



**Saturday, 12 Sept**

**Arrival at Farmhouse at 4:00 pm.**

## **Welcome Dinner**



This will be your home during your stay in Cortona. The farmhouse is a 450- year-old treasure, and is an exquisite example of the art of blending ancient aesthetics with modern comfort. Its newest addition, on the right side of the structure, dates to the 1870s. You will be at home in comfort, with a wonderful breakfast and dinner here each day. One of the highlights of Tuscany is the time spent at the table, enjoying Tuscan specialties, regional wines and new friends. The property has a beautiful pool, and wonderful views of the surrounding countryside of Cortona. Cortona itself is an unforgettable destination, dating back to the Etruscans, approximately 900 b.c. It is a perfectly preserved town, with warm

people and a history that pre-dates ancient Rome. Cortona is one of the 12 original Etruscan towns, and therefore one of the oldest in Italy. You will be learning much more about this hill town, which was the location of the book and film *Under the Tuscan Sun* on Monday, during your Cortona tour.

Our Welcome Dinner will be served under the stars.

**Sunday, 13 Sept**

**Cortona/Cooking Class**

**Driving and Guided Tours**



Today you will begin with a morning yoga class by the pool, followed by a beautiful breakfast. After breakfast, you will have the pleasure of touring Cortona with Louise, your lovely and knowledgeable guide. She will show you the highlights of this ancient town, your home for the week. She holds a degree in Art History, and a Master's in Etruscan architecture, and



happens to have the answers to almost any question about this magical place. Cortona is located in the province of Arezzo, and is the main cultural and artistic center of the Val di Chiana, after the city of Arezzo. Following lunch at one of my favorite trattorias, you will have free time to explore and shop in town. Afterward, you will be driven just 3 miles from the town walls to Le Celle, where St. Francis was imprisoned. It is truly an unforgettable stop, with some of the most beautiful scenery in Cortona. Along with Assisi, it is one of the most spiritual places that you will visit. Here the monks have taken a vow of silence, and it lends to the reverence of this very special place. To end our special day in Cortona, you will have the opportunity to drive by Bramasole, the home of Frances Mayes, author of *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

*A fun, informative cooking class, taught by our chef, will be waiting for you when you return home to the farmhouse that afternoon, and dinner will follow.*



**Monday, 14 Sept**

**Montepulciano and Pienza**

After a lovely breakfast, you will be driven through the beautiful countryside to Montepulciano, home of the *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano* and one of the most famous wine destinations in Tuscany. Here we will visit one of its cellars, Talosa, <https://www.talosa.it/en/>, where the wine is just a small part of the fascination here. The cellar houses a wine of superior quality, and

some of the most memorable history of Montepulciano. We will have a tasting and learn about the Sangiovese grape that made this region a destination for wine lovers the world over.

Aside from the glorious wine that is produced there, Montepulciano is renowned for its walkable nature, and incredible views.

After our tasting in one of the most incredible wine cellars anywhere, we will ride a short distance to our lunch stop just outside of Pienza, a small town in the landscape of the Val d'Orcia in south Tuscany. The region was declared a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#) in 2004. Podere il Casale, our spot for lunch, is a farm and vineyard that is renowned for its commitment to food, cheese and authentic organic farming. Our tour of their dairy and farm will be yet another glimpse of authentic Tuscan life, with one of the most beautiful views of the Val d'Orcia a beautiful scenic setting for our meal. You can find out more about this memorable stop at <http://podereilcasale.com/en/organic-farm>

Dinner al fresco, whenever possible!



**Tuesday, 15 Sept**

**Truffle Day and Medieval Dinner**



Today we begin the day with sunrise yoga, followed by breakfast. Later in the morning, we will head over the mountain into the Val di Pierle, where we will hunt for the famous tartufo. The truffles of the Tuscan region are world- famous, and searching for them adds so much to the experience of tasting dishes made with them. Today, in and around Mercatale, we will do both. Our hunt with the dogs will start in the woods, and with a little luck and a dog with a good nose, we will have truffles to take back for our wonderful pranzo at the home of our guide. This day will be a lasting memory of authentic Tuscan life, and will highlight one of the region's most sought- after products.

Tonight, we will enjoy the most memorable dinner in a tiny 14<sup>th</sup> c. borgo, tucked into the mountain, over a Roman road. We will meet 2 very special women who will create some of the best food of your week with us. The flavors, history and vistas of this evening will stay with you forever.

**Wednesday, 16 Sept**

**LaBraccessa Lunch**



After breakfast we will have a olive oil and balsamic vinegar tasting at the property. We will enjoy meeting the owners of L'Arte dell'Olivo, <http://www.larte.us/>, and we will learn what the best oil tastes like, and how to determine what is the best when looking for oil on our own. Their balsamic vinegars are incomparable, and we will see just how diverse the flavors and uses are. After our tasting, we will ride to a tour of the vineyards of LaBraccessa, <https://www.antinori.it/it/tenuta/tenute-italia/la-braccessa>, an Antinori property. Afterward, we will be lead in a tasting of the wines of this wonderful, important Tuscan producer, followed by lunch.

The remainder of your day will be free to relax by the pool, hike, or bike near the property.

Dinner will be served under the stars at 7.30.

**Thursday, 17 Sept**

**Assisi and Tili Winery**

Driving and Guided tours



You will meet Marco, your gifted guide, for an extremely informative tour of this spiritual town. Assisi is a hill town in central Italy's Umbria region on the western flank of Monte Subasio. It was the birthplace of St. Francis (1181-1226), one of Italy's patron saints, and St. Clare.

The Basilica of St. Francis is a massive, 2-level church, consecrated in 1253. Its 13th-century frescoes portraying the life of St. Francis have been attributed to Giotto and Cimabue, among others. The crypt houses the saint's stone sarcophagus. Assisi is now the site of many pilgrimages, and is linked in legend with its native son, St. Francis. The gentle saint founded the Franciscan order and shares honors with St. Catherine of Siena as the patron saints of Italy. He is remembered by many, even non-Christians, as a lover of nature (his preaching to an audience of birds is one of the legends of his life). UNESCO collectively designated the Franciscan structures of Assisi as a World Heritage Site in 2000.

After the tour, you will be driven to Tili Vini, <http://www.tilivini.com/it/>, a small, organic family winery just outside of Assisi for a wonderful lunch and wine tasting. You will count this family as some of the nicest people you will meet in Tuscany, and are incredibly passionate about their vineyard, farm and their process of winemaking. Theirs is truly a labor of love, and it shows in all that they do.

Dinner will be served at home, al fresco, at 7:00 pm.

**Friday, 18 Sept**

**Siena and the Crete Senesi     Driving and Guided Tours**



Morning yoga starts your day, and following our breakfast we have the privilege of seeing one of the most incredible buildings ever created, the Duomo of Siena. Inside and out, it is without a doubt a place that you will never forget. Works of art by every great master of the Renaissance are within its walls. Every inch of space has been filled with art, and you will leave amazed by its beauty. We will have a guided tour with your Live Tuscan guide, and she will weave a story about the artists and history of this city, and tell how Siena had a major role in shaping the Italian political scene in its early days. The city of Siena is one of the highlights of the week not only because of its historical importance, but for the variety of shops, restaurants and culture that you'll find all around the city. The historic center of Siena has been declared by UNESCO a World Heritage Site.

After the tour, we will enjoy lunch at our host's favorite authentic local restaurant, and afterwards have free time to explore and shop in this incredible city on our own.



Returning home to Cortona, we will pass through the Crete Senesi, some of the most beautiful scenery in Tuscany. As you enter into the landscape of the Crete Senesi, southeast of Siena and the Val d'Orcia, you appear to be stepping into another world, one which can only be described as *olunarö* with its soft sloping hills that are gray in autumn, but gloriously green in spring and summer. It is a very memorable way to end our day in and around Siena.

***Our Party Night will begin at 7:30, and will be a culmination of the weeks's fun, excitement and community. It is the perfect way to end our time together as we toast to friendships made and memories that will last a lifetime.***

**Saturday, 19 Sept**

**Departure Day**

Our final, beautiful breakfast will be served before departure.

We will be departing the farmhouse by 9:30 am. Those of us taking the train to Florence to either the airport or a hotel can travel together. Those who have arranged for a driver should have them at the farmhouse by 9:30 am.

Ciao Amici!



Ciao Amici!