Italy: Tuscany, Lucca to Siena

Bike Vacation + Air Package

This is the Tuscany bike tour that independent-minded cyclists dream of. On this Self-Guided Bicycling Vacation, you'll ride from Lucca to Siena inn to inn at your own pace, traversing the rolling vineyard-draped hills and cypress-lined lanes that have long inspired travelers. Much of your route follows the ancient pilgrim's way of Via Francigena, delivering you to enchanting hill towns brimming with medieval treasures. Visit Leonardo's hometown of Vinci. Marvel at sprawling manses along the elite Villa Way. Ride into the renowned wine region of Chianti. Along the way, indulge in welcoming lodgings that place you at the heart of the famed towns of Lucca, San Gimignano, and Siena, and savor the rustic charms of an authentic country *agriturismo* far from the crowds.

Cultural Highlights

Stay in the heart of San Gimignano and Siena, two of Tuscany's most beloved UNESCO World Heritage sites.
Cycle the Via Francigena, the ancient pilgrimage route to Rome, admiring Tuscany's rolling hills, vineyards, cypress-lined byways and hilltop towns.
Settle in at an authentic *agriturismo* and savor a true Tuscan feast of dishes prepared with ingredients from its gardens.
Explore Lucca as you wish, strolling its cobbled pedestrian streets and riding the ramparts of its wide Renaissance walls.
Discover the charms and the castle museum of the small town of Vinci, birthplace of Leonardi da Vinci.
Marvel at the 13 medieval towers of San Gimignano, standing since the days of the Renaissance.
Stroll the cobbled lanes of historic Siena, lingering in its scallop-shaped Piazza del Campo, visiting its striking cathedral and browsing priceless collections of medieval art.

What to Expect

This tour is rated moderate for riders of analog bikes and easy-to-moderate for riders of E-bikes. It offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills and is ideal for beginning and experienced cyclists. Rides are on designated bike routes along quiet country roads; you spend a small percentage of time on dedicated bike paths. The traffic will be somewhat busier when entering and exiting larger towns such as Lucca and Siena. Routes often follow flat river valleys and then ascend to rolling hills. Please verify your bike selection for this tour as it is not always possible to change bikes once you arrive on tour. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7

support system is available as needed.

Tour Duration: 9 Days
Average Daily Mileage: 3 - 38
Average Cycling Time: 00:30 - 04:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)
Apr 68º/46º, May 75º/53º, Jun 84º/58º, Jul 89º/63º, Aug 88º/63º, Sep 81º/58º, Oct 69º/51º
Average Rainfall (in.)
Apr 2.2, May 2.9, Jun 2.2, Jul 1.6, Aug 3.0, Sep 3.0, Oct 3.5

DAY 1: Depart home / Fly overnight to Pisa

Depart home for Italy. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

DAY 2: Arrive in Pisa

Upon arrival at the Pisa Airport, make your own independent travel arrangements to the nearby city of Lucca. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook.

VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations for what to see and do in Lucca. Enjoy the rest of the day relaxing or roaming the atmospheric old-world warrens. Perhaps stroll to Piazza dell'Anfiteatro, a scenic square where an ancient amphitheater once stood. Visit one of the beautiful "101 Churches." Or stroll along the medieval walls, restored into a lovely pedestrian park overlooking the red roofs of the Old City. Lucca's pedestrian-friendly streets make exploring a pleasure.

Enjoy dinner tonight on your own in one of Lucca's many excellent restaurants or intimate trattorias.

Accommodation: Hotel Ilaria & Residenza dell'Alba, Lucca
Included Meals: None

DAY 3: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation Begins / Welcome orientation / Lucca city walls or Lucca to Lake Massaciuccoli loop

Meet your VBT local host at 1:00 p.m., along with any other VBT guests departing on the same day, for your Welcome orientation in the lobby of the Hotel Ilaria & Residenza dell'Alba (Via Del Fosso, 26, 55100 Lucca, Italy, Tel +39 0583 47615). Your local host will be carrying a VBT sign and/or wearing a VBT garment.

The Welcome orientation with your VBT local host includes:
• An overview of the itinerary
• Bike fitting and equipment familiarization
• Review of the Ride with GPS navigation app
• Important contact information in case you need to reach your VBT local host
• Safety briefing
• Local suggestions (restaurants, things to do, etc.)

Lucca (meaning “marsh”) was named for the wetlands on which it was built in the 1300s. The city prospered from silk production and trade. Women once dyed the fabrics in the canal that still today runs along the modern-day Via del Fosso. Later, bankers took over and wealthy families erected their lavish villas in the surrounding countryside. Today, about 10,000 Lucchesi live within the ancient city walls while about 80,000 live outside.

If you would like ample time to browse Lucca’s numerous beautiful churches, fascinating museums and café-lined piazzas, you can enjoy a short riding option. Pedaling along the ramparts of the Renaissance-era walls—refashioned for pedestrians and leisure cyclists with wide pathways—you enjoy marvelous views over the city’s red roofs and bell towers.

Your longer option follows an easy and unpaved bike path along the scenic Serchio River. You trace part of an ancient pilgrimage route that will reappear on your map throughout the week. In medieval days, devout followers walked this path from Canterbury, England, to the Holy See in Rome—though it was known more commonly as the Via Francigena, “the road that comes from France.” After a few miles, you join the gentle rolling *piedemontana* route at the foothills of the Apuan Alps. Not far from here, Michelangelo personally chose the blocks of marble from which he carved his most iconic sculptures.

Later, arrive at Lake Massaciuccoli, a shallow lagoon hosting more than 100 species of permanent and migrating birds. Over millennia, this unspoiled lake and wetlands have been shaped by shifting rivers and sediments and, more recently, human reclamation. While here, you might visit the remains of an ancient Roman villa and perhaps hear the echoes of a Puccini opera in the breeze—the great composer lived nearby and frequently hunted on the lake’s shores. You return to Lucca on a slightly different route.

Today’s Rides:
Lucca’s city walls: 5.4 km (3.3 miles)

What to Expect: This very easy and scenic ride follows the top of Lucca’s Renaissance city walls, built by

the Medici family over the span of 100 years. You can ride it as many times as you'd like, seeing something new each time in the city below or the surrounding countryside. (Ride it once according to our directions, and the second time in the opposite direction. Repeat as you wish!). On a clear day, the peaks of the Apuan Alps are visible in the far north/northwest.

Lucca to Oasi Lipu Nature Preserve and Oasi Lipu Nature Preserve to Lucca: 46.4 km (28.8 miles)

What to Expect: This easy ride departs Lucca on bike lanes until you reach the outskirts of town. Then you join a flat, well-packed gravel path for about 5 km (3 miles) and country roads lead to the eastern side of Lake Massaciuccoli. Return on the same route, but you follow a road instead of a bike path for the last 5 km (3 miles). Expect some traffic as you ride in and out of Lucca.

Accommodation: Hotel Ilaria & Residenza dell'Alba, Lucca
Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Lucca to Vinci / Move on Day

Today you cycle east out of Lucca along the Via Francigena bike path. The ancient way is marked by big iron crosses that pointed pilgrims toward Rome in medieval times. It was Archbishop Sigeric who first walked from Canterbury to Rome, in the year 990. But he only documented his return journey to Canterbury. Today's pilgrims typically follow in his footsteps toward Rome—as you do today.

Your scenic ride traces stunning vineyards and olive groves, passing by the Via delle Ville, or Villa Way. If you'd like, you may leave today's main route to detour down this scenic byway and visit the magnificent Villa Torrigiani, one of many stately mansions built by wealthy families in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Continue on winding, gently rolling roads past olive groves and through the charming towns of the Valdinievole Valley. Soon, you cycle into the scenic Fucecchio Marsh, the largest inland marsh in Italy, stretching almost 4,500 acres. More than 200 bird species nest in this World Wildlife Fund region, such as herons, egrets, cranes and black storks. The area also boasts a rich human history, with its canals and port systems built by the Medicis and other powerful families.

Ride's end delivers you into the bucolic countryside surrounding the town of Vinci, the birthplace of renowned artist Leonardo. Your hotel—an authentic *agriturismo* estate—is just one mile from the town center and its Castello dei Guidi, a former castle that now hosts a museum dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci. Settle in and enjoy your *agriturismo*'s pool and grounds or stroll or cycle into Vinci on a signed walking path. Dinner is included this evening at your *agriturismo*, a true Tuscan feast of home-grown

products with olive oil, fresh vegetables and wine.

Today's Ride:
Lucca to Vinci: 61 km (38 miles)

What to Expect: Depart Lucca in a northeasterly direction on the flat Via Francigena bike path. You again join the packed gravel bike path for about 6 km (4 miles), passing the Via della Ville (the Villa Road), a scenic byway lined with historic villas, olive groves and vineyards. Turning due east, you enter rolling Tuscan countryside for the next 25 km (15 miles). The last 20 km (12 miles) delivers you into the World Wildlife Fund area of the Fucecchio Marsh, the largest inland marsh in Italy. Then pedal down a country lane to your *agriturismo*.

Accommodation: Agriturismo Il Piastrino, Vinci
Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5: Vinci to San Gimignano / Move on Day

Ride out of Vinci and head south on tranquil country roads into the spectacular Arno River Valley. You cross the river into historic San Miniato, a lovely village straddling three hills with spectacular views of the valley. The Tower of Frederick II that dominates the town was originally built in the 13th century, and was rebuilt in 1958 after it was bombed by the Germans during World War II.

Today's rewarding route leads you deep into the Tuscan countryside. Some of Italy's most stunning hilltop medieval towns here have mysteriously been left off the mainstream tourist map, leaving you free to explore them free of crowds. You pass through the hamlet of Corazzano, then start climbing a ridge flanked by the hill towns of Castelfafi and Montaione, a pair of lovely villages that were down on their luck until German investors invested in them. Continue a gradual climb to the 15th-century San Vivaldo Monastery, a Franciscan complex renowned for its 18 chapels containing splendid statuary depicting the Passion of Christ. Take advantage of the serenity here to enjoy a break.

Soon, you reach the highest point of the day, then enjoy a thrilling descent toward San Gimignano, passing through the rustic village of Castagno Val d'Elsa along the way. You may see San Gimignano long before you arrive; its soaring towers are visible from miles away. Its small medieval center—a UNESCO World Heritage site—once brimmed with 76 towers, erected in a 14th-century building frenzy by competing families. Today, only 13 remain.

Today's Rides:
Vinci to San Gimignano short option (with shuttle assistance): 40 km (25 miles)

What to Expect: Today's short option starts with a private van shuttle from Vinci to San Miniato. You need to arrange the shuttle and departure time the day before with your local host (your hotel can assist). The biking starts in San Miniato with a long gradual uphill to the highest point, and then a rolling continual descent through rolling terrain as the towers of San Gimignano appear before you. Pedal up to the hilltop town on winding streets and ride carefully or walk the last few hundred feet to your hotel, located on the cobbled pedestrian main street.

Vinci to San Gimignano long option: 65 km (40 miles)

What to Expect: Today's long option takes you mostly downhill to the Arno River Valley. You cross the river with some traffic through a slightly industrial area. Remaining relatively flat with a few ascents and descents after San Miniato, the route has less traffic. Later, you begin a long gradual climb of about 13 km (8 miles) to the highest point of about 1,600 feet. After, a rolling then continual descent winds through stunning scenery of forest and wide-open distant views to the south until you arrive at the base of San Gimignano, its 13 towers soaring above. Pedal up to the hilltop town on winding streets and ride carefully or walk the last few hundred feet to your hotel, located on the cobbled pedestrian main street.

Accommodation: Hotel l'Antico Pozzo, San Gimignano
Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: San Gimignano to Siena / Move on Day

Immerse yourself more deeply into the rich and storied Tuscan landscape today as you trace the historic route between San Gimignano and Siena, two of Tuscany's seven UNESCO World Heritage sites. On this magnificent ride, you experience the Tuscany of your dreams, winding through rolling emerald hills with sweeping vistas of distant hilltop towns, olive groves and lines of cypress trees.

Along the way, you may pause as you wish to fulfill your curiosity and follow your inspiration. It's worth your while, however, to visit two particular sites. The Cistercian Abbey of Abbadia a Isola, in the village of the same name, was mentioned in the travel diary of Sigeric, that erstwhile pilgrim from Canterbury. During medieval times, it enjoyed protection from Siena and served as an inn for the devout making their way to Rome. Today, it is an austere and magnificent version of its former self. Its 11th-century Lombard-style church houses a 15th-century marble baptismal font and a 16th-century fresco.

Nearby, the walled medieval jewel of Monteriggioni rests on the plateau of a low hill. With its remarkably preserved wall and 14 watchtowers, it resembles a regal crown sitting astride the Tuscan hills. Built in 1213 by Siena as a fortress to face down the Florentines, it too was an important stage for pilgrims walking the Via Francigena. Merchants laid their heads here as well, and as you roam its atmospheric streets, it's easy to imagine the bustle of commerce and transit during centuries past.

Later, you pedal into Siena, the sublime embodiment of a medieval city. Its inhabitants pursued their rivalry with Florence right into the area of urban planning. The entire city, built around the Piazza del Campo, was created with an eye toward aesthetics, so as to complement the surrounding landscape. Throughout the centuries, the Sienese have vigilantly preserved their city's Gothic appearance.

Your hotel is located in the quietest part of the city, the *contrada della Pantera* (the Panther district)—only a few steps from a typical *chiesa del cavallo* (horse church). You can find these unique places of worship only here: churches where horses are received and blessed before the city's famous Palio race. This evening, enjoy stunning sunset views over Tuscany from the hotel's lovely west-facing gardens. Dinner is on your own in one of the many local *trattorias* in the heart of the city.

Today's Ride:
San Gimignano to Siena: 60 km (37 miles)

What to Expect: Roll out of San Gimignano on a beautiful country road with rolling terrain past the Abbey of Abbadia a Isola to the small hilltop town Monteriggioni, a good lunch stop. You will find some traffic entering and exiting Monteriggioni. Exiting the way you came, you continue on parts of the Via Francigena through mixed countryside of oak forest and open agricultural land and into the outskirts of Siena, where traffic will become more frequent. A last ascent brings you to the western side of the city. You enter Siena through the Porta San Marco.

Accommodation: Palazzo Ravizza, Siena
Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7: Siena to Castellina in Chianti / Stay Put Day

Follow your desires today, perhaps visiting the magnificent Gothic cathedral, the Duomo of Santa Maria Assunta. Be sure also to marvel at the 13th and 14th-century palazzos surrounding the Piazza del Campo and ascend the 500 steps of the bell tower of the Palazzo Pubblico for breathtaking views of Tuscany's broad and beautiful landscapes.

If you would like to explore more of those landscapes on two wheels, grab your bike and head out into the famed Chianti region. You follow the Via Chiantigiana, a panoramic road that runs north-to-south across vineyards and through hilltop villages such as Castellina. Chianti is most beloved for its namesake wine. Its complex hilly territory comprises a collection of valleys—the Pesa, Greve, Elsa and Arbia—reaching out in different directions. This spectacular region was the subject of lengthy disputes between Florence and Siena until 1555, which explains the numerous castles, towers and fortified villages you ride past today.

Back in Siena, discover the city at your own pace. Siena's Gothic appearance was developed between the 12th and 15th -centuries. During this period, the work of Duccio, the Lorenzetti brothers and Simone Martini set the stage for developments in Italian and, more broadly, European art. And even as the Renaissance of art, architecture, science and ideas swept the rest of Europe, the people of Siena clung to many of their medieval Gothic structures.

This evening, after day-trippers have gone, take a stroll through the various *rioni* (the territories within each *contrada*, or district) or through the quiet Duomo district. There is nothing quite like roaming these hushed medieval streets under the soft glow of lamplight.

Siena's famous Palio horse race takes place every year on July 2 and August 16. A celebration of a miraculous apparition of the Virgin Mary, it first took place in 1656. From 1701, it was run in honor of the Madonna dell'Assunta, the patroness of Siena. The race's history is strictly connected with the origins of Siena's *contrade*, or districts. Each *contrada* is an institution in itself, with its own government, coat of arms, emblems and colors, festivities, patron saints and more. Today only 17 *contrade* exist, 10 of which participate in the race. During the month of July, you are likely to witness some of the festivities and decorations.

Today's Rides:
Siena to Castellina in Chianti through Porta Romana: 29.1 km (18 miles)
Castellina to Siena: 32 km (19.8 miles)

What to Expect: Depart Siena through the city center, skirting its main pedestrian thoroughfare. Exercise caution with the city traffic. After the town of Quercegrossa, begin a gradual climb of about 10 km (6 miles) through the small towns of Capanno and Fonterutoli.

Accommodation: Palazzo Ravizza, Siena
Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel. Check-out is at 10:00 a.m. After, you make your own way to Florence, the cultural capital of Renaissance Italy; for details, refer to your VBT Handbook.

VBT provides you with City Information and recommendations for what to see and do in Florence. Your hotel is perfectly situated to take advantage of all the city has to offer. Don't miss exploring the signature of the city, the Duomo, with its soaring Brunelleschi dome. Next door lies the Baptistery with its massive copper *Gates of Paradise* designed by Ghiberti. Nearby, at the Piazza della Signoria, you can admire more sculptures including a replica of Michelangelo's *David*. But the real thing awaits you a little farther north at the Galleria dell'Accademia. In the evening, relax in one of the city's many fine restaurants and sample the best of *la cucina fiorentina*.

Accommodation: Hotel De La Ville, Florence
Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 9: Depart for home

After breakfast* this morning, allow yourself a minimum of 3 hours prior to your flight departure to get to Florence Peretola Airport. This timeframe includes approximately 30 minutes (taxi) to maximum 1 hour of travel (on public transportation) and around 2 hours of recommended pre-flight check-in time.

* Please note: For guests with early-morning departures, breakfast at the hotel may not be available. Please check with the front desk to verify the times that breakfast is served.

Accommodation: N/A
Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel Ilaria & Residenza dell'Alba (Days: 2,3)

Located within the walls of historic Lucca, Hotel Ilaria & Residenza dell'Alba is an ideal starting point from which to discover the wonderful city center of Lucca. Renovated from Villa Bottini's historic stables and a 14th-century church, Hotel Ilaria provides a plush and welcoming atmosphere. Here you can find quiet, spacious, and elegantly furnished air-conditioned rooms with modern comforts. WiFi is available throughout the hotel.

Agriturismo Il Piastrino (Day: 4)

Situated across expansive grounds just outside the small town of Vinci—the birthplace of Leonardo—this authentic Tuscan property is operated by a welcoming family. The working farmhouse features many charming outbuildings, a swimming pool, gardens, vineyards and olive groves. Many of the ingredients on the agriturismo's menu, from olive oil and wine to honey, vegetables and grappa, are produced onsite. Air-conditioned rooms are either in the main farmhouse or in outlying buildings.

Hotel L'Antico Pozzo (Day: 5)

The family-run Hotel L'Antico Pozzo, meaning "the ancient well," is located in the heart of San Gimignano. Stroll a short way to the famed towers along pedestrian-only streets. This bike-friendly boutique hotel occupies a historic palazzo, skillfully restored to exude the charm and elegance of a stately home. Many of the house's original features, including important frescoes, have been given new life. Each of the air-conditioned rooms boasts its own character with terra cotta and pastel touches, some looking out over the private interior courtyard.

Palazzo Ravizza (Days: 6,7)

Located in the historic center of Siena, the elegant Hotel Palazzo Ravizza has been managed by the same family since 1924. Its owners welcome guests as if into their own private home, while providing the style and classic ambiance of a heritage hotel. Air-conditioned rooms are furnished in typical 1920s style and adorned with frescoes on the walls and ceilings. Its private gardens are right on the city walls and provide a front-row seat for stunning sunsets every evening. What's more, the Palazzo Ravizza hosts the only English bookstore in Siena.

Hotel Santa Maria Novella (Day: 8)

Located on one of the most beautiful squares of Florence, a few steps from the famous Duomo di Firenze and Baptistry, the Hotel Santa Maria Novella boasts elegantly decorated rooms in the classic Florentine style with fine lacquered paneling and wooden flooring. Each air-conditioned room has a different décor and drapery with in-room WiFi. The duo-tone inlays in the marble bathrooms recall the Church of Santa Maria Novella, just opposite the hotel on the same square. An American breakfast is included and may be served on the top roof terrace.