

ITALY - TUSCANY & THE CASENTINO 8-DAY ITINERARY:-

As with all N.E.H.H. trips, the guides offer hiking options which may vary according to the weather and season, local conditions and the particular needs of the group.

In this description we are specific about many of the places we visit, but do not attempt to describe each hike in detail.

THE BEGINNING AND END OF THE TRIP:-

You will see from the notes that the Hotel Villa Aurora is situated close to Florence and the airport. Many of our hikers will wish to add Florence to their itinerary before or after the trip. For those who wish to do this, there is a city bus that stops right by the hotel - a real bonus, because driving and parking in the city are NOT recommended!

SOME OF THE HIKES IN CHIANTI:-

Hiking days one through five:

In Chianti we stay at the Villa Casalecchi in the small town of Castellina. Our first full day, we drive south of Florence, and are quickly in the distinctive and beautiful Chianti countryside. Within an hour we arrive at Greve, the historic, small unofficial capital of Chianti, the focus for our day's hiking. One option is a circular walk from the little village of Lamole, climbing up to a wooded summit from the lower elevation of vineyards and olive groves, with wonderful views of large areas of Tuscany from the Apennines down to the coastal plain. Another half-day possibility is the long but almost entirely downhill walk on an old dirt road from the mountain top back to Greve, keeping the views almost all of the way. At the end of the afternoon an easy drive to the southwest takes us to Castellina.

For the following two and a half days we will explore some of the most famous places in the region. Often the choice of longer or shorter hikes will allow for more or less time exploring the great cultural centers towards the end of the day.

On one day we shall also visit the glorious city of Siena, second only to Florence in Tuscany and preferred by many because its spectacular treasures are easily visited in a small center which never feels as swamped with tourists as Florence can. We take a walk into the city center together to orientate ourselves, then time is allowed for individuals exploring before we meet up again in the Campo, the celebrated square where the famous Palio horse race is run twice a year.

In contrast, the day can be completed with a walk in the peaceful fields and woods close to the city in a neighborhood of the picturesque and ancient fortified

village of Monteriggione. We may hike in part along a route used by pilgrims in the Middle Ages, and even before them by salt carriers in Roman times, and even before them!

On another day we visit and hike in the country around the deservedly world-famous town of San Gimignano, the “medieval Manhattan of Tuscany.” Hikers may choose to spend more or less time in this extraordinary town, according to the length of the hike taken through the beautiful surrounding landscape.

Our last morning in Chianti we hike in the neighborhood of Radda, a few miles from the Hotel Casalecchi. The longer option involves ascending the continuous but mostly gentle hill towards Monte San Michele, the other side from our first day’s walk.

After enjoying new, long and splendid views from the height of the land, we will walk down to Volpaia, a jewel of a fortified hamlet on the hillside opposite Radda. That afternoon we drive across Chianti and into the Apennines, and over the Passa della Calla to Campigna and our inn in the mountains, the converted hunting lodge, the Granduca.

THE CASENTINO:-

Some of our hikes from The Grand Duca on Day six and seven:-

For the next two and a half days we will be hiking in the Casentino National Park, an area famous for its beautiful woods and monasteries, hugging the ridges and peaks of the highest mountains in this part of Italy, along the backbone of the country.

One of the most enjoyable in the area, one day’s walk begins with a fairly steep climb through fir and beech woods from Camaldoli to the Eremo and then climbs again just beyond the Eremo, though this second climb is alleviated in summer by more raspberry bushes growing along the side of the trail than most people will have seen in their lives. After this climb, the path is simply one delight after another, an easy amble through high mountain meadows and mixed woods (predominantly turkey oak but also black and white hornbeams, maples and other oaks), culminating at Poggio Scala, one of the best panoramic points of the park.

Another day’s walk leads over the principal peaks of the Parco Nazionale di Monte Falterona, Campigna e Foreste Casentinesi, down through chestnut glades and meadows full of wild flowers (poppies, broom, gentians, irises, etc.) to the small town of Castagno d’Andrea. The Monte Falterona massif divides the plains of the Mugello and Casentino. In reality Monte Falco, at 1658 m, is the highest peak, but because of its fame as the source of the river Arno, it is Monte Falterona’s name which has been given to this group of peaks. The slopes are covered with dense fir groves and beech woods. Anemone, narcissus, black

myrtle and the extremely rare red myrtle grow in the clearings near the summit. In spring it can be foggy up here, but on clear days the summit offers spectacular views over a large part of Tuscany. The cliff of La Verna and the Chianti Valley beyond are visible to the south, to the north the mountains of San Benedetto, and to the west the peaks of Albetone and the Garfagnana.

An easier option is an almost level forest road which runs for miles above the steep slopes running down to the river which flows through Campigna into the province of Emilia-Romagna.

On our last afternoon we drive down from the mountains through the pretty area of the Mugello back towards Florence and The Hotel Villa Aurora in Fiesole.

ITALY - THE INNS:-

(FOR ITALY DIAL: 011 39 FOLLOWED BY THE NUMBER)

DAY ONE & EIGHT

HOTEL VILLA AURORA
P.ZZA MINO. 39
50014, FIESOLE, FLORENCE
TEL: 055 59363 OR 59368
FAX: 055 59587

DAYS TWO, THREE, & FOUR

VILLA CASALECCHI
CASTELLINA IN CHIANTI,
53011, (SIENA)
TEL: 0577-740240 OR 740294
FAX: 0577-741111
www.villacasalecchi.it

DAY FIVE, SIX & SEVEN

ALBERGO GRAND DUCA
CAMPIGNA
SANTA SOFIA (FORLI)
TEL: 0543-980051
FAX: 0543-980016

If you would like additional information about the inns/hotels, we invite you to visit their web sites, or call and request a brochure.

ITALY- TUSCANY & THE CASENTINO - NOTES:-

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

For guest arriving by air we pickup at the Florence Airport at 3 p.m. (International Arrival Bldg. in the Cafe') on the first day of the trip. Our guides will be wearing our N.E.H.H. t-shirts.

If you arrive earlier in the day and do not wish to wait for our pick up, it is not hard to get to our first hotel, the Hotel Villa Aurora in Fiesole. It is less than a 20 minute taxi ride from the airport. If you do arrive earlier in the day, however, you should be aware that you may not be able to check into your room before 3 p.m.

On the last day you can expect to be back at the Florence Airport by 9:30 a.m., though again you can pre-arrange an earlier taxi if need be.

FLIGHTS

The most reasonable fares are available if you purchase your ticket well in advance and do not change your dates. As there are penalties in changing dates it is a very good idea to take out travel insurance.

TRAVEL SERVICE

You may want to take advantage of our travel service to arrange your travel to the UK. They are: Better Travel and can be reached at (800) 331 6996.

TRAVELERS CHECKS & CURRENCY

It is preferable to carry larger amounts of money in the form of travelers checks rather than cash. However, when changing money into the local currency it is wiser to change larger amounts rather than lots of small amounts, as there is often a minimum commission charged for every transaction. Changing money in Chianti is easy, but not normally possible in the Casentino. The advent of the Euro has simplified prices for travelers. We recommend you always check recent exchange rates with your bank before traveling, as well as, calling your credit card company to see if any additional fees are incurred on transactions while traveling out of the states.

PASSPORTS

If you don't already have a current passport, remember to allow enough time to be processed for one.

PAYMENT

We do require full payment 60 days in advance of the trip departure date. After that time there can be no refund of monies paid unless we are able to fill the space, in which case we may be able to credit you for a future trip. Again, we recommend trip cancellation insurance.

CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR

This is a trip with a great variety of terrain and hiking conditions. We shall walk on dirt and tarmac roads, farm tracks, forest roads and paths and rougher trails - sometimes all of these in one hike! We recommend good hiking boots to cope with this range of footing.

In Chianti many hikes include open stretches with exposure to strong sunlight, though we are also often in shady woods. Temperatures are often in the 80s at the hottest time of the day, but may start much cooler, so layering is important as well as good sun protection. In the Casentino it is typically 10 - 20 degrees colder than in Chianti, and windy conditions are common: we have many days which start in the 40s and climb only into the 60s. Remember also that rain is not unknown in Italy!

For dinner, good European hotels can be rather formal in their dress expectations. Of our hotels, the Granduca is very informal, the Casalecchi has an elegant dining room with formal service and the Hotel Villa Aurora is somewhere in between. A jacket and long pants are recommended for men for some of the nights, but a tie is not required, while women need to know that in Europe all shorts, even very smart ones, are regarded as inappropriate for dinner.

FOOD AND DRINK

All our hotels offer excellent food, in differing styles from the sophisticated to the wonderful local cuisine at the Granduca. It is customary for many European hotels to serve a fixed menu with several courses but little choice. It is therefore very important that you inform us of any dietary allergies or restrictions you may have, so that we may let them know in advance.

Your guides will drink tap water, and regard it as safe. Unless you are directed to drink bottled water because of particular local conditions, buying water is at your discretion. In hotels and restaurants, coffee and tea are considered part of the meal; occasionally we will be given complimentary wine with our meal, but otherwise you will be asked to pay for your own alcoholic and bottled drinks.

ITALY - DESCRIPTION OF THE INNS:-

Hotel Villa Aurora

Set in the heart of Fiesole, a hill town overlooking Florence, The Villa Aurora has welcomed guest including kings and princes since 1860. Originally built as a theatre by an English Lord, the hotel now has 28 exquisitely furnished rooms and suites. A step away is a roman amphitheatre with a park, a wooded walk up to a Franciscan Monastery and a wonderful view of Florence. A City bus ride into Florence takes just 15 minutes.

Hotel Villa Casalecchi

A wonderful Villa situated in the heart of the Chianti Region between Florence and Siena. Immersed in a park of centuries-old trees and surrounded by vine-groves of the famous Chianti Classico wine, Villa Casalecchi is an oasis of peace and quiet. The hotel is the original main building of an eighteenth century stately home with sixteen rooms and an annex with three suites.

Albergo Granduca

Embedded in the picturesque natural background of the Campigna Woods, right in the heart of the National Park of The Casentinesi Forest, the hotel and restaurant Granduca presents itself as a point of reference. With its large stately rooms and amenities, the Granduca is the best way to enjoy the Tosco Romagnolo area.

A highlight of the Granduca restaurant is its menu based on porcini mushrooms gathered in the vast forests of the area - a traditional hunting reserve. Recipes include roe-buck, boar meat, porcini soup and homemade pasta all prepared by experienced culinary masters.

If you should need any help with your travel plans, please call our travel service Better Travel at 1-800-869-0949.