Frommer's

Florence, Tuscany & Umbria

With Foldout Map

TELEPHONE TIPS

To call Italy from another country: *Dial international access code (U.S. or Canada **011**, UK or New Zealand **00**, Australia **0011**) plus country code (**39**), then the local number, which includes the former city code (you must dial the zero).*

To make a direct international call from Italy: *Dial **00**, then the country code (U.S. or Canada **1**, UK **44**, Ireland **353**, Australia **61**, New Zealand **64**, South Africa **27**), the area code, and the local number.*

To charge international calls: *Dial **AT&T USA Direct** 172-1011; **Sprint** 172-1877; **MCI** 172-1022; **Teleglobe (Canada)** 172-1001; **British Telecom** 172-0004. You can reach an international operator by dialing **170.***

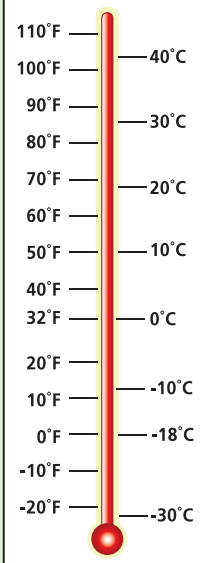
To call long distance within Italy: *Dial the entire phone number (from 6 to 12 digits) including the former city code (you must dial the initial zero).*

For directory assistance in English: *Dial **12** (national), **176** (Europe), or **1790** (beyond Europe).*

International Operator in English: *170.*

METRIC CONVERSIONS

TEMPERATURE



To convert F to C:
subtract 32 and multiply by $^{5}/_{9}$ (.555)

To convert C to F:
multiply by 1.8 and add 32

32˚F = 0˚C

LIQUID VOLUME

To convert	*multiply by*
U.S. gallons to liters	*3.8*
Liters to U.S. gallons	*.26*
U.S. gallons to imperial gallons	*.83*
Imperial gallons to U.S. gallons	*1.20*
Imperial gallons to liters	*4.55*
Liters to imperial gallons	*.22*

1 liter = .26 U.S. gallon
1 U.S. gallon = 3.8 liters

DISTANCE

To convert	*multiply by*
inches to centimeters	*2.54*
centimeters to inches	*.39*
feet to meters	*.30*
meters to feet	*3.28*
yards to meters	*.91*
meters to yards	*1.09*
miles to kilometers	*1.61*
kilometers to miles	*.62*

1 ft. = .30m ***1 mile = 1.6km***
1m = 3.3 ft. ***1km = .62 mile***

WEIGHT

To convert	*multiply by*
Ounces to grams	*28.35*
Grams to ounces	*.035*
Pounds to kilograms	*.45*
Kilograms to pounds	*2.20*

1 ounce = 28 grams
1 pound = .4555 kilogram
1 gram = .04 ounce
1 kilogram = 2.2 pounds

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by John Moretti

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Moretti is a freelance writer whose musings about Italy have appeared in the *International Herald Tribune, The Independent on Sunday,* and the *New York Sun,* among others. He is the author of a book for aspiring expatriates, *Living Abroad in Italy*, and can usually be found barbecuing in the Maremma, cycling the hills near Siena, or lingering over a Negroni cocktail in Piazza della Repubblica.

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HOW TO CONTACT US

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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AN ADDITIONAL NOTE

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

FROMMER'S STAR RATINGS, ICONS & ABBREVIATIONS

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system.** In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

Finds	Special finds—those places only insiders know about
Fun Facts	Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
Kids	Best bets for kids and advice for the whole family
Moments	Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
Overrated	Places or experiences not worth your time or money
Tips	Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
Value	Great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE American Express
DC Diners Club
DISC Discover
MC MasterCard
V Visa

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Frommer's travel resources don't end with this guide. Frommer's website, **www.frommers.com,** has travel information on more than 4,000 destinations. We update features regularly, giving you access to the most current trip-planning information and the best airfare, lodging, and car-rental bargains. You can also listen to podcasts, connect with other Frommers.com members through our active-reader forums, share your travel photos, read blogs from guidebook editors and fellow travelers, and much more.

1

The Best of Florence, Tuscany & Umbria

This book will provide you with countless insider tips, show you places as yet undiscovered by most tourists, and tell you where to find a comfortable room and a great meal in an out-of-the-way town. Get ready to discover some of the best of both known and hidden Tuscany and Umbria.

1 THE BEST TUSCAN & UMBRIAN EXPERIENCES

- **Exploring the Back Roads:** Rural Tuscany and Umbria just beg to be explored by car, and your own set of wheels really is the only way to discover the hidden side of these often overtouristed regions. Just picture yourself winding your way among olive groves and forests on back roads, cruising past vineyards and waving fields of emerald grass dotted with sheep. You'll find tiny medieval villages that don't appear in any guidebook, and you'll turn off at every VENDITA DIRETTA (direct sales) sign to meet the vintner or farmer and sample his wine, herb-scented honey, or home-pressed olive oil. Buy the best regional map you can find, fill the tank, and get ready to put your rental car to the test on dirt roads, steep mountain switchbacks, and the occasional manic Italian highway.
- **Enjoying a 3-Hour Dinner:** A simple pleasure, but one that can make for a most memorable evening. Good friends, good conversation, and good wine can easily extend a meal for hours, and the Italian dinner is a perfect excuse and vehicle, what with four or five major courses, big pauses in between, and cheese, dessert, coffee, and *digestivo* liqueur all lined up at the end.
- **Catching Festival Fever:** Italians will throw a *festa* at any excuse—the local saint's day, the harvest, boar-hunting season, or sometimes just because it's the second Tuesday in May. Flower-strewn streets, fountains spewing wine, solemn religious processions, people in Renaissance garb shooting crossbows, horse and footraces through medieval streets, big roasting spits of wild birds, mass blessings of sheep and Fiats, violent Renaissance soccer, jousting matches, High Masses, and vats bubbling with polenta—you never know what you'll be in for, but it's bound to be memorable. See the "Calendar of Events," in chapter 3, and each town's "Essentials" section.
- **Haggling in Florence's San Lorenzo Street Market:** Every day, the streets around the Mercato Centrale and San Lorenzo are filled with proprietors hawking marbleized paper, knockoff Gucci silk scarves, T-shirts emblazoned with Michelangelo's *David,* and wallets, purses, jackets, and other leather products galore. All the stall keepers promise "the lowest prices in Florence." That so-called lowest price is usually far from it, and the best part of shopping here is

using every bargaining trick in the book to drive the "lowest price" even lower. See "Shopping," in chapter 6.

- **Hiking the Hills of Florence:** The walk from Florence up to Fiesole is famous enough to earn a scene in the movie adaptation of E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View* (even if they cheated and took carriages). But don't neglect the hills of San Miniato and Bellosguardo that rise south of the Arno; the views over the city here are closer at hand, and the land is less developed. See chapter 6.
- **Biking Lucca's City Walls:** The elegant Republic of Lucca is still snuggled comfortably behind its 16th-century walls, ramparts so thick they were able to be converted into a narrow city park—a tree-lined promenade running a 4.9km (3-mile) loop around the city rooftops. The bicycle is the preferred mode of transportation in Lucca, and you'll be in good company as you tool under the shade past parents pushing strollers, businessmen walking their dogs, and old men at picnic tables in their 40th year of a never-ending card game. See "Walking the Walls," on p. 275.
- **Picnicking Under the Leaning Tower:** Pisa is home to the most felicitously gorgeous piazza in all of Italy, the Campo dei Miracoli. Even if you're in town for just half a day, grab a sandwich or a slice of pizza and picnic on the small triangle of grass in front of the famous leaning tower—the campanile with the world's worst posture. Afterward, saunter down to the patch of green surrounding the baptistery and take a nap on the grass with the sun warming your face. And, oh yeah: You can climb the tower, too. See "Pisa & Its Tipsy Tower" in chapter 9.
- **Taking an Evening Stroll in Perugia:** Perugia's wide Corso Vannucci is perfect for the early-evening stroll Italians everywhere turn out for—the *passeggiata.* It's the time to see and be seen, to promenade arm in arm with your best friend dressed in your best duds. The crowd flows up the street to one piazza and then turns around and saunters back down to the other end. When you tire of meandering, take a break to sip cappuccino and nibble Perugia's fine chocolates in one of the classy cafes lining the street. See "Perugia: Capital of Umbria & Quaint Hill Town," in chapter 12.
- **Going Off the Beaten Path in Assisi:** Who would've thought you could find a primal Umbrian country experience in overtouristed Assisi? Save the basilica's frescoes for the afternoon and get up early to hike into the wooded mountains of Monte Subasio to St. Francis's old hermitage. After a morning spent in contemplation with the monks and wandering the state parkland, head back to Assisi, but be sure to stop a mile outside town for a big lunch at **La Stalla,** one of the last die-hard countryside *trattorie* in central Italy (see "The Best Countryside *Trattorie,*" later in this chapter). See "Assisi: An Artistic Pilgrimage," in chapter 12.

2 THE BEST HILL TOWNS

- **San Gimignano:** The "Medieval Manhattan" bristles with more than a dozen tall stone towers, all slightly askew. It wins the "Most Densely Decorated Church" award for its old Duomo, whose interior walls are slathered with 15th-century frescoes. San Gimignano's skyline and back alleys, especially when moonlit, make it one of Italy's most romantic hill towns. Stay until all the tour buses have left, when you'll have the gardens and small *piazze* all to yourself.

See "San Gimignano: The Medieval Manhattan," in chapter 7.

- **Volterra:** Proud Volterra has been important in western Tuscany since the Etruscan Age. From its magnificent rocky promontory, the city surveys the sometimes wild, vast countryside surrounding it. Volterra is full of workshops where artisans craft the native alabaster into translucent souvenirs. And from a windswept terrace road you can look over some of Tuscany's best-preserved Roman ruins. See "Volterra: City of Alabaster," in chapter 7.
- **Montalcino:** Impressive from a distance with its broken-toothed fortress on a high hill, Montalcino turns out to be surprisingly tiny when you get close. It has a few sights and churches and a good small museum, but what you really come for is to sip the town's beefy Brunello wine, take a *passeggiata* with the locals in the evening, and watch the shadows fill the valley far below your hotel window as the sun goes down. See "Montalcino: Home of the Mighty Brunello," in chapter 10.
- **Montepulciano:** Although Montepulciano has medieval side streets galore, its main attractions are the deep red Vino Nobile wine and one of Italy's finest centrally planned Renaissance temples, a church set in its own little green park below the ancient walls of the town. See "Montepulciano & Its Noble Wine," in chapter 10.
- **Cortona:** This stony hill town is no longer big enough to fill its medieval walls, but it still has its museums of paintings by Fra' Angelico and local boys Luca Signorelli and Pietro da Cortona. The restaurants serve steak from the famed Chiana cattle, raised in the valley below, where Etruscan tombs hint at the city's importance in a pre-Caesar Tuscany. See "Cortona: Land of the Tuscan Sun," in chapter 11.
- **Gubbio:** This ancient Umbrian stronghold and renowned ceramics center is like the last outpost of civilization before the wilderness of the high Apennines. The central piazza cantilevers over the lower town like a huge terrace. The square is bounded on one end by a mighty palace, all sharp stone lines and squared-off battlements. Inside is a cluttered archaeological museum and the same echoey medieval atmosphere that pervades the entire town. Gubbio is unique among hill towns—an antique center unto itself, to which surprisingly few visitors venture. See "Gubbio: Town of Festivals," in chapter 12.
- **Todi:** When they were handing out quaintness to Italian hill towns, Todi took far more than its share. Many of its streets are so steep they've been chipped with shallow staircases down the middle. Vistas across the valley open up unexpectedly, and on the perfectly medieval main piazza is a town hall sprouting a staircase perfect for an Errol Flynn sword-fight scene. The church on the outskirts of town is perhaps Italy's most beautiful High Renaissance construction. See "Todi: A Taste of the Middle Ages," in chapter 13.

3 THE BEST FESTIVALS

- **Florence's Gioco di Calcio:** First, divide the city into its traditional neighborhoods for teams, cover Piazza Santa Croce with dirt, and don Renaissance costumes. Next, combine two parts soccer, one part rugby, one part football, and a heaping helping of ice-hockey attitude. This game, in which a few dozen men forget all the rules while they do anything they can to score

goals, is like soccer-cum-croquet on quaaludes. Give the winners a whole calf to roast in the streets and write it all off in honor of St. John the Baptist. See the "Calendar of Events," in chapter 3.

- **Siena's Palio:** Anything goes at this bareback, breakneck horse race around the dirt-packed Il Campo, and the competitive *contrade* (traditional neighborhood wards) usually make sure everything does. The square is filled with costumed pageantry before the race, and massive feasts are set up on long outdoor tables that can stretch for blocks on the medieval side streets. See "Siena: A Taste of the Tuscan Middle Ages," in chapter 7.
- **Prato's Display of the Virgin's Girdle:** Prato keeps the Madonna's girdle under heavy lock and key year-round, but takes it out occasionally, amid much religious pomp and some medieval drum rolling, to show it to the crowds massed on the piazza. See "Prato & the Virgin Mary's Girdle," in chapter 8.
- **Arezzo's Giostra del Saracino:** Arezzo really comes alive for this Renaissance titling tournament where the target at which the mounted jousters aim their lances swivels around and can actually hit back. See "Arezzo: Where Life Is Beautiful," in chapter 11.
- **Perugia's Umbria Jazz:** Umbria's capital gets mellow and funky every summer in one of Europe's biggest jazz fests. Headliner acts and little-known maestros fill the squares, streets, and bars with some of the smoothest music around. See "Perugia: Capital of Umbria & Quaint Hill Town," in chapter 12.
- **Assisi's Calendimaggio:** This pagan rite-of-spring fest is held in Italy's holiest hill town. The town's almost-forgotten factions revive to wage medieval competitions and display feats of strength, and the entire town spends the week in courtly Renaissance dress. After a singing competition on the main square, the winner gets to crown his own fair damsel Lady Spring. The town returns to Christianity the next day. See "Assisi: An Artistic Pilgrimage," in chapter 12.
- **Gubbio's Corso dei Ceri:** In one of Italy's most ancient festivals, teams of burly, costumed men trot about town all day carrying three huge towers topped with statues of saints. After a wild invocation ceremony in the piazza, they shoulder the towers and tear up the mountainside as fast as they can. The town's patron saint invariably wins. See "Gubbio: Town of Festivals," in chapter 12.
- **Spoleto & the Spoleto Festival:** Gian Carlo Menotti's annual bash brings some of the biggest names in orchestral music, dance, and theater to this ancient hill town. Many of the events are staged outside in the Piazza del Duomo or the remains of a Roman theater. See "Spoleto & the Spoleto Festival," in chapter 13.

4 THE GREATEST ARTISTIC MASTERPIECES

- **Michelangelo's *David*** (Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence): The Big Guy himself, the perfect Renaissance nude, masterpiece of sculpture, icon of homosexual camp, and symbol of Italy itself. See p. 160.
- **Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*** (Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence): Venus on the half shell. The goddess of love is born from the sea, a beauty drawn in the flowing lines and limpid grace of one of the most elegant masters of the early Renaissance. See p. 148.

- **Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation*** (Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence): A young Leonardo had already figured it all out in this painting, with classical details, graceful figures, and his patented *sfumato* technique of blurring all edges and fuzzing the background to achieve a remarkably realistic illusion of depth and perspective. See p. 147.
- **Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Gates of Paradise*** (Battistero, Florence): In 1401, young Ghiberti won a sculpture competition to craft the doors of Florence's Baptistery. Fifty-one years later, he completed his second and final set, boosting the Gothic language of three dimensions into a Renaissance reality of invented space and narrative line. Art historians consider that 1401 competition to be the founding point of the Renaissance. Michelangelo looked at the doors and simply declared them "so beautiful they would grace the entrance to Paradise." See p. 144.
- **Filippo Brunelleschi's Dome** (Duomo, Florence): Florence's noble orangey-russet cupola reigns over the town in perfectly engineered immensity. When the cathedral was built, all the learned architects in town agreed the space was far too large to support a dome. Brunelleschi revived the secrets of Rome's ancient Pantheon to prove everyone wrong. See p. 137.
- **Masaccio's *Trinità* and the Cappella Brancacci** (Santa Maria Novella and Santa Maria della Carmine, Florence): The greatest thing since Giotto. Masaccio not only redefined figure painting with his strongly modeled characters of intense emotion and vital energy but also managed to be the first painter to pinpoint precise mathematical perspective and create the illusion of depth on a flat surface. The world's first perfecter of virtual reality. See p. 158 and 172.
- **Fra' Angelico's *Annunciation*** (San Marco, Florence): This is the summation of the devout friar's exacting early Renaissance style—a graceful Mary, a deep cloistered space, and a carpet of wildflowers behind the rainbow wings of the angel Gabriel, communing intensely with the Madonna. See p. 162.
- **Pisano Pulpits** (Duomo, Siena; Sant'Andrea, Pistoia; Baptistery and Duomo, Pisa): Between father Nicola and son Giovanni, Gothic sculpture was first invented and then refined, bringing a new emotional language and volume to sculpture and turning hard stone into fluid grace. See p. 213 in chapter 7, p. 264 in chapter 8, and p. 294 in chapter 9.
- **Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good and Bad Government*** (Museo Civico, Siena): This is the single greatest piece of secular art to survive from the Middle Ages. Ambrogio's depiction of the effects of good government on the town is a detailed encyclopedia of a medieval urban utopia. See p. 211.
- **Duccio's *Maestà*** (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Siena): This is the painting on which the Sienese school was founded—ranks of angels on glittering gold and a masterful Gothic comic book on the life of Christ in square-foot panels. See p. 214.
- **Rossellino's Pienza:** Many Renaissance artists painted their idea of the perfect city; Rossellino was the only architect who actually got the funding to build one. Pope Pius II used his money and power to remake the central square of his home village in the image of Renaissance order, proportion, and grace. A papal bull has ensured that not a whit has changed over the centuries. See "Pienza: The Ideal Renaissance City," in chapter 10.
- **Piero della Francesca's *Resurrection of Christ*** (Museo Civico, Sansepolcro): Piero's dead-on geometric perspective and exquisitely modeled figures helped make this haunting work the model for

all later depictions of the risen Christ. This is quite possibly the only fresco whose reputation as the "best painting in the world" actually saved it from Nazi bombs during World War II. See p. 356.

- **Giotto's *Life of St. Francis*** (Basilica di San Francesco, Assisi): This fresco cycle shocked the painting world out of its Byzantine stupor and thrust it full tilt on the road to the Renaissance. Giotto perhaps did more groundbreaking work in this one church than any other single painter in history, bringing a realism, classicism, a concept of space and bulk, and pure human emotion that parlayed humanist philosophy into paint. These frescoes were damaged in the 1997 earthquakes that destroyed other works in the church, but restoration was completed in November 1999. See p. 391.
- **Luca Signorelli's *Last Judgment*** (Duomo, Orvieto): Signorelli's signature piece uses the separation of the blessed from the damned as an excuse to display his mastery of the human nude. Michelangelo studied this seminal work before having his own go at the subject in the Sistine Chapel. See p. 428.

5 THE BEST OFFBEAT SIGHTS & EXPERIENCES

- **Ballooning over Tuscany:** What better way to see Europe's most famous countryside than floating lazily over the olive- and vine-covered hillsides in a hot-air balloon while having a champagne breakfast? Many outfits offer this indulgent pastime. Rates start around 200€ for a sunrise 1½-hour flight (champagne included). Contact **Ballooning in Tuscany** at ✆ **0577-725-517** (fax 0577-725-519; www.ballooningintuscany.com).
- **Cantiere delle Navi Antiche di Pisa** (Pisa): If you've already been to the Leaning Tower, here's a much more educational alternative: an excavation of a fleet of Roman ships, buried in the silt of what was once a maritime power. The jugs of olives and wine are perfectly preserved and on display while the rest of the ancient haul is unearthed and cleaned. See p. 296.
- **Museo Stibbert** (Florence): This former private museum of an eccentric Scottish-Italian is made up of the general clutter of more than 50,000 random items and a huge collection of armor from all eras and world cultures, including an entire regiment of armored mannequins. See p. 175.
- **Prehistoric Lunigiana Statue-Stele** (Pontrémoli): These mysterious tombstone-shaped statues were carved over a 3,000-year period starting about 3000 B.C. by an extraordinarily long-lived cult isolated in the Lunigiana. Some of the abstracted figures bear a suggestive resemblance to how ancient Roman historians described Celtic warriors from Gaul. See "North of Lucca: The Garfagnana & the Lunigiana," in chapter 8.
- **Etruscan "Sunken Roads"** (Maremma): No one is quite sure why the Etruscans of the Maremma carved a network of passages, some more than 20m (66 ft.) deep, into the tufa surrounding Pitigliano, Sorano, and Sovana. Many stretches of the Via Cave have survived the millennia, and you can follow them (sometimes up to 1km/⅔ mile) in what are kind of open-air cave tunnels. See "The Maremma: Tuscany's Cowboy Country," in chapter 9.

6 THE BEST WINES & VINEYARDS

See "What to Drink," in chapter 2, for information on Italian wines.

- **Sassicaia:** Whether this is the best Tuscan wine is surely open to debate, but it is almost always the most expensive, mostly because this DOCG appellation that traces its roots to French vines is reserved for just a single estate: the **Tenuta San Guido.** The area around Bolgheri (p. 304) is indeed the land of the **Supertuscans,** but it receives little other interest in terms of tourism, as the vineyards are the only attraction, and, with a few exceptions, even they are not so open to visitors.
- **Chianti Classico:** This is Italy's most famous product of Bacchus. Chianti is as variable as it is versatile, and while there's plenty of mass-produced cheap wine out there, the vintners of the Chianti Classico Zone, in the hills between Florence and Siena, craft excellent wines of the highest quality. Premier estates abound, and the top, most accessible ones are highlighted in chapter 7.
- **Vernaccia di San Gimignano:** In his *Divine Comedy,* Dante wrote of this dry, peppery, straw-colored white that deepens to gold with age. Tuscany's best white is available all over the Town of Towers. It was the first DOC wine in Italy and is one of the few DOCG whites in Italy. The consortium of Vernaccia producers dates back at least to 1276; you can contact them in town at the **Villa della Rocca** (✆ **0577-940-108**). See "San Gimignano: The Medieval Manhattan," in chapter 7.
- **Morellino di Scansano:** This is a popular Maremman riff on the chianti formula smoothed out and juiced up with Spanish Alicante (Grenache). The top producers are **Le Pupille** (✆ **0564-505-129**), **Mantellassi** (✆ **0564-592-037**), and **Erik Banti** (✆ **0564-602-956**).
- **Brunello di Montalcino:** Brunello has the smell of mossy, damp earth and musky berries. It tastes of dark, jamlike fruits and dry vanilla. This is Tuscany's most powerful red, and perhaps the top wine in all of Italy. Break out this complex elixir to accompany the mighty *bistecca alla fiorentina* (Florentine-style steak). Visit American-owned **Banfi** (✆ **0577-816-001**) for the wine museum in its medieval castle or **Poggio Antico** (✆ **0577-848-044**) for the direct sales of its award-winning Brunello. See "Sampling the *Vino,*" on p. 320.
- **Vino Nobile di Montepulciano:** This purple-garnet wine smells of violets and tastes of juicy red berries, dark fruits, and a hint of musty, mossy earth. Of the traditional wines (no French grape intrusions), it plays second banana to Brunello, but many people find this Noble Wine a far more forgiving *vino,* and much more versatile. Although it's powerful and complex, you can drink it with just about anything but fish. The best producers are all represented by **Maddalena Mazzeschi** (✆ **0578-758-465**), and if you must choose just one bottle, make it an **Avignonesi** (✆ **0578-757-872**). See "Underground Tunnels & Noble Wine," on p. 334.
- **Rubesco Riserva:** This unique and elegant Umbrian wine made by a single estate was so deliciously demanding of attention the authorities had to create a tiny DOCG zone just to incorporate the vineyard. The vintner responsible was Giorgio Lungarotti, experimenting with his grapes in Torgiano south of Perugia. Although all the **Cantine Lungarotti** (✆ **075-988-0294**) wines are excellent, the best is the Rubesco Riserva label. The estate also runs a fascinating wine museum in Torgiano itself. See "Perugia: Capital of Umbria & Quaint Hill Town," in chapter 12.

- **Orvieto Classico:** Orvieto's white is an ancient wine, made at least since the days of the Etruscans. In Orvieto itself, you can get the traditional *abboccato* variety, a juicy, semisweet version hard to find elsewhere in this age that demands gallons of dry white table wines. Although Ruffino is a perfectly fine vineyard, you can usually pick up a bottle of its Orvieto Classico *secco* at your local U.S. wine shop. As long as you're in the actual neighborhood, try such smaller producers as **Decugnano dei Barbi** (✆ **0763-308-255**) and **Barberani** (✆ **0744-950-113**). See "Orvieto's Liquid Gold," on p. 429.
- **Sagrantino di Montefalco:** This dark wine with a rounded mouth feel and tannic bite—about the biggest and most complex wine you'll get in Umbria—has finally been recognized by the new DOCG classifications. You can get a taste at top producers **Antonelli** (✆ **0742-791-5852**) and **Cantina A. Fongoli** (✆ **0742-350-359**) in San Marco di Montefalco, **Il Girasole** in Montefalco (✆ **0742-379-280**), **Rocca di Fabbri** in Fraz, and **Fabbri** (✆ **0742-399-379**) and **Cantina Paolo Bea** (✆ **0742-379-668**) in Cerreto di Montefalco.
- **Vin Santo:** Grapes that have begun to turn to raisins on the vine and become sun-dried are fermented in oak *barriques* to produce Tuscany's powerful sweet dessert "holy wine." The amber drink is fine on its own, but the real way to enjoy it is to use *cantucci* (twice-baked hard almond cookies) as sponges. Every winemaker sets aside a few barrels of vin santo, but some of the best is made by the chianti-inventing **Cantina di Brolio** (✆ **0577-73-01** or 0577-749-066). Umbria's resounding answer to Tuscany's vin santo is **Sagrantino Passito,** from the Montefalco region, a red dessert wine of high refinement. For more information on it, contact the **Centro Nazionale di Studi sui Vini Passiti** in Montefalco on weekday mornings (✆ **074-79-122**).

7 THE BEST MUSEUMS

- **Gallerie degli Uffizi** (Florence): One of the world's top museums, the Uffizi houses some of the seminal works of the Renaissance, including Giotto's *Maestà,* Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Allegory of Spring,* Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation,* and Michelangelo's only panel painting, the *Holy Family.* Few rooms go by without three or four masterpieces. Thoroughly brain-draining . . . but worth it. See p. 146.
- **Museo Nazionale del Bargello** (Florence): Past early Michelangelo marbles and Giambologna bronzes, the main attraction at the primary sculpture museum of the Renaissance is a room full of famous works that survey the entire career of Donatello, the greatest sculptor since antiquity. See p. 153.
- **Palazzo Pitti** (Florence): The Pitti, with thousands of paintings hung thickly in the dozens of rooms of the Medici's old palace, all sumptuously frescoed and decorated, makes the Uffizi look like a preamble. Not only is room after room full of works by Raphael, Rubens, Titian, Caravaggio, Andrea del Sarto, and countless others, but once you get through the paintings, you've got the lavish Medici apartments, a costume gallery, a decorative arts collection, a modern art museum, and the baroque Boboli Gardens to see. You could spend a week here and still not be done. See p. 169.

- **Galleria dell'Accademia** (Florence): The line stretches for blocks from the door, everyone waiting to get in and see Michelangelo's *David,* easily the most famous sculpture in the world. Once inside, you're also treated to his unfinished and powerful *Slaves,* along with works by Perugino, Giambologna, and Botticelli. See p. 160.
- **Palazzo Pubblico** (Siena): The Museo Civico portion of Siena's medieval town hall preserves the masterpieces of the late Gothic Sienese school. See p. 210.
- **Museo Etrusco Guarnacci** (Volterra): A staggering 600 Etruscan cinerary urns—playing out, in stony relief, the Etruscans' views on death, art, and life—fill dozens of rooms here. The tiny sarcophagi are topped with the enduring image of the Etruscan: bare-chested and comfortably pot-bellied, half reclining at a feast laid out in his or her honor. See p. 243.
- **Museo Civico** (Sansepolcro): The hometown of Piero della Francesca, one of the geniuses of the early Renaissance, retains four of the master's works, including the *Madonna della Misericordia* and his masterpiece *Resurrection of Christ* (see above). The rest of the collections are padded with works by his student Luca Signorelli, and Mannerist and baroque paintings by the likes of Il Passignano and Santi di Tito, the latter also a native of the city. See p. 356.
- **Galleria Nazionale** (Perugia): Umbria's National Gallery boasts more Peruginos than it knows what to do with. It also has one of the masterpieces of his teacher, Piero della Francesca, the *Polyptych of Sant'Antonio,* with its Annunciation scene of remarkable depth. Duccio, Arnolfo di Cambio, Fra' Angelico, and Gentile da Fabriano add to the collections. See p. 375.

8 THE BEST ETRUSCAN SIGHTS

- **Volterra:** One of Dodecapolis's ancient centers, Volterra has a medieval core still surrounded in places by the old Etruscan city walls. The best section encompasses the 4th-century-B.C. Porta all'Arco gate, from which worn basalt gods' heads gaze mutely but protectively over the valley. The Museo Etrusco Guarnacci here houses hundreds of funerary caskets and the *Shade of the Evening,* a tiny bronze youth of elongated grace (also above under "The Best Museums"). See chapter 7.
- **Populonia** (Tuscany's Coast): Once an important Etruscan center, the seaside town of Populonia today retains little more than bits of its predecessor's walls. Outside the walls, however, are some excellent *tumuli* and other tombs in several necropolises dotting either side of the road leading to Populonia's promontory. Though most of the best portable pieces were carried off to Florence, the town was able to scrape together enough to fill a small museum. See "Livorno: A Busy Port City with Great Seafood," in chapter 9.
- **Grosseto:** The modern capital of the Maremma has the region's best museum of Etruscan artifacts, collected from many sites across Tuscany's deep south. See "The Maremma: Tuscany's Cowboy Country," in chapter 9.
- **Chiusi:** The small but well-regarded archaeological museum here contains just some of the many finds from the dozens of tombs littering the valley floor between the town and small Lake Chiusi. Although the best tombs, including one with frescoes, have been indefinitely closed for restorations, you can arrange through the museum to

visit a few, and there are others just lying open to you and your trusty flashlight. A few hundred yards of the old underground aqueduct systems carved into the rocky hillside by the Etruscans have been opened. Tours through it lead to a wide and deep cistern, atop which now sits the cathedral bell tower. See "Chiusi: In the Footsteps of the Etruscans," in chapter 10.

- **Arezzo:** Though little remains of the Etruscan city *Arretium*—the town's best artifact, the bronze chimera, got shipped to Florence long ago—some of the Roman city it became peeks out at its museum. The collection of Etruscan ceramics sets you up for the *corallino* pottery display, which showcases the vast Arretium industry that eventually opened branches and workshops all across Roman Italy and France to mass produce the famous waxy red earthenware. See "Arezzo: Where Life Is Beautiful," in chapter 11.
- **Cortona:** Three significant tombs lie along the slope and valley of Cortona's mount, including the one where the biggest find in Etruria of the past century was only recently discovered: a sophisticated altar with a sphinx-flaked stairway jutting out of the "Melone II" tumulus. Up in town, a museum houses a bronze Etruscan oil-lamp chandelier, as well as documented findings and displays about the ongoing excavations of "Melone II." See "Cortona: Land of the Tuscan Sun," in chapter 11.
- **Perugia:** Umbria's capital still preserves its 3rd-century-B.C. Porta Marzia (Mars Gate), the only structure that compares to Volterra's mighty city gate. An Etruscan well still supported by its massive travertine trusses was discovered in the heart of town, and just outside of town is a tomb where the funerary urns have been left in place just as they were discovered. See "Perugia: Capital of Umbria & Quaint Hill Town," in chapter 12.
- **Orvieto:** Orvieto, Etruria's ancient religious center, contains three archaeological museums. Taken together, they make up one of the best collections of Etruscan artifacts outside Florence and include Umbria's only accessible tomb paintings, now detached, and works from the Etrusco-Roman period. The town has also started running tours of some of the tunnels and caverns under the city, parts of which, including wells and a possible temple, were carved by the Etruscans. On the edge of town are the grassy remains of an Etruscan temple, and around the edge of the city's walls is a tidy suburban-like necropolis of tombs, some still with inscriptions on the door lintels. See "Orvieto: Etruscan Ruins & Fine White Wine," in chapter 13.

9 THE BEST LUXURY HOTELS

Not all the hotels below are officially rated as luxury hotels, but all offer luxurious accommodations and amenities. See also **Relais Il Falconiere,** the **Locanda dell'Amorosa,** and **Hotel La Badia** under "The Best Countryside Retreats," below.

- **Hotel Helvetia & Bristol** (Florence; ✆ **888/770-0447** in the U.S.): This most central of Florence's luxury addresses was the city's leading hotel in the 19th century, and guest rooms and lounges still exude an opulent turn-of-the-20th-century air. The bright and refreshing small Winter Garden bar, with trailing ivy and a splashing fountain, doubles as the breakfast room. See p. 107.

- **Hotel Regency** (Florence; ✆ **055-245-247**): The cozy wood reading rooms, crowded with antique furnishings, feel like a bit of old England. The service is some of the best and most discreet in the city, and the restaurant is the justifiably famous Relais le Jardin—Tuscan food from the kitchen of a master chef. Guest rooms are somewhat modernized, but marble-clad bathrooms and daily fresh fruit and newspapers in your room add to the prevailing quiet comfort. See p. 111.
- **Villa Vignamaggio** (Chianti; ✆ **055-854-661**): Leonardo da Vinci might have approved of the saturated color schemes in the minisuites of this *agriturismo* (working farm) high in the hills of the Chianti. In fact, the Mona Lisa who sat for his famous portrait grew up in the villa. Most suites are in the peasant stone outbuildings scattered across the property and come outfitted with minibars, satellite TVs, and complimentary bottles of the estate's award-winning vintage. It's the best base for a wine-buying trip. See p. 196.
- **Grand Hotel & La Pace** (Montecatini Terme; ✆ **0572-9240**): The most elegant old-world hotel in a town full of 19th-century bastions of grandeur, the Grand has coffee lounges as big as ballrooms and dripping with stuccoes and chandeliers. In the 2-hectare (5-acre) private park are clay tennis courts, several pools, and jogging paths. It offers the full array of services, amenities, and facilities you'd expect from the leading inn of a famed spa town. See p. 268.
- **Hotel Il Chiostro di Pienza** (Pienza; ✆ **0578-748-400**): This former 15th-century Franciscan convent in the middle of tiny Pienza has been the best hotel in southern Tuscany since it opened in 1993. Some rooms have 19th-century frescoes; in another wing, rooms feature exposed stonework and big ol' peasant wood furnishings. The restaurant, which is located on a panoramic gravel terrace in summer, is highly recommendable as well. See p. 329.
- **Hotel Gattapone** (Spoleto; ✆ **0743-223-447**): This hotel comprises a cluster of tiny 17th-century buildings huddled on the brink of a sheer ilex-covered slope. The secluded Gattapone, just a short stroll from Spoleto's Duomo, is completely surrounded by nature. The stone-silled picture windows of the spacious guest rooms open onto the monumental green of a wooded mountain that's been sacred since Roman times. See p. 418.
- **Fonte Cesia** (Todi; ✆ **075-894-3737**): This hotel melds 13th-century *palazzo* and modern lines. The public rooms are filled with brick vaulting, and the huge terrace, planted with palms, is for taking breakfast. The suites are each themed and decorated with fine antique pieces or modern design, such as Empire-style desks and dressers or Wassily chairs. See p. 423.

10 THE BEST MODERATELY PRICED HOTELS

- **Pensione Maria Luisa de' Medici** (Florence; ✆ **055-280-048**): This hotel's owner collects both baroque art and modern design, so the halls are hung with museum-quality Vignale and Van Dyck, and the rooms are furnished with classics of 1950s design. You also get a full breakfast served in bed. Did I mention it's as central as you can get in Florence? See p. 105.
- **Hotel Torre Guelfa** (Florence; ✆ **055-239-6338**): The name is apt for a hotel that incorporates the tallest privately owned tower in the city and is set in the

medieval streets near the Ponte Vecchio. When you tire of sipping *aperitivi* on top of the 13th-century tower, with its 360-degree panorama of the city, you can retire to your canopied bed or follow the wafting classical music to the long Renaissance-style lounge. See p. 108.

- **Morandi alla Crocetta** (Florence; ✆ **055-234-4747**): One of the most genteel and hospitable of Florence's hotels, the Morandi is set in a 1511 convent. You feel as if you're guests in the *palazzo* of some absentee well-off Florentine family from the 1800s. Each room is decorated with a shrewd eye to keeping the late Renaissance alive, with exposed brickwork and the occasional 16th-century fresco. Most hotels like this charge up to three times as much. Book early. See p. 111.
- **Antica Torre** (Siena; ✆ **0577-222-255**): The rooms here are small but soothing, with light-gray stone accents and hand-hewn wood ceilings that hearken back to the building's history as a tower house in the 1500s. The tiny brick breakfast room is actually a potter's workshop from the 14th century. The friendly family that runs the hotel only adds to the atmosphere. See p. 224.
- **L'Antico Pozzo** (San Gimignano; ✆ **0577-942-014**): This is San Gimignano's premier hotel, set in a restored 15th-century palace built into the *palazzo* where Dante stayed during his diplomatic visit to town. Inquisition trials are no longer held here, but you can get an enormous junior suite with a canopied bed or 17th-century frescoed ceilings, or a top-floor double with views of the city's towers. See p. 235.
- **Royal Victoria Hotel** (Pisa; ✆ **050-940-111**): Pisa's first hotel is still run by the same family that founded it in 1839—now in its sixth generation. The rooms of this rambling *palazzo* are romantically worn, but many have 19th-century frescoes or look out over the Arno. See p. 298.

11 FLORENCE'S BEST ROOMS WITH A VIEW

"Camera con vista, per piacere." That's what you need to ask to guarantee a vista out your window, whether it's a view of the Arno, the Duomo, or the hills you crave.

- **Hotel Bigallo** (✆ **055-216-086**): If you get a room along the front, you can practically lean out your window and poke Giotto's campanile with a stick. The view from these rooms is a living postcard—a foreshortened shot with the Duomo facade and campanile 15m (49 ft.) away and Brunelleschi's dome rising above them. See p. 101.
- **Hotel Hermitage** (✆ **055-287-216**): Several good vistas await you at this old favorite. Room no. 602 has a balcony and view of the Palazzo Vecchio, while other rooms look down on the tiny Romanesque facade of Santo Stefano. Several overlook the Corridoio Vasariano to the Arno and the Ponte Vecchio. See p. 106.
- **Hotel Bellettini** (✆ **055-213-561**): Ask the friendliest sisters in Florence to give you either room no. 28, with its view of the Duomo, or room no. 45, featuring one of the most unique panoramas in Florence: a close-up sweep from the Medici Chapel dome of San Lorenzo over to a full view of the Duomo, facade and all. See p. 106.
- **Hotel Loggiato dei Serviti** (✆ **055-289-592**): It isn't often you can wake up and throw open your shutters to a view of the most beautiful square in Florence and get an art-history lesson in the bargain. Below your window in Piazza Santissima Annunziata are

bronze statues by Giambologna and Pietro Tacca, and across the square is a Brunelleschi-designed loggia studded with Andrea della Robbia terra cottas. See p. 111.

- **Torre di Bellosguardo** (✆ **055-229-8145**): Set on the hill where Hawthorne wrote *The Marble Faun,* the Bellosguardo's gardens and most of its guest rooms offer the closest-range vista of the Florentine skyline available. This 14th-century castle is the most Renaissance-feeling hotel in the city, with echoey vaulted chambers, beautiful antique beds, intricately carved and inlaid wood pieces, and stone staircases. The most spectacular view is from the tower suite. See p. 113.
- **Pensione Bencistà** (✆ **055-59-163**): The small lounges and smoking rooms scattered throughout this early Renaissance mansion, located halfway up the hill to Fiesole, have picture windows opening onto Brunelleschi's dome and the whole of the Florentine skyline. Breakfast in summer is on a panoramic terrace. See p. 114.

12 THE BEST COUNTRYSIDE RETREATS

Though there are plenty of regular hotels in the countryside, don't overlook *agriturismo* options (see "Tips on Accommodations," in chapter 3), which offer travelers the opportunity to stay on a working farm. Besides the following best bets, a mix of both countryside hotels and *agriturismo* establishments, don't forget the **Torre di Bellosguardo** and **Pensione Bencistà,** both just outside Florence and listed above under "Florence's Best Rooms with a View."

- **Villa Vignamaggio** (near Greve in Chianti; ✆ **055-854-661**): Your home here is a luxurious suite in one of the peasant houses dotting the vine-covered property of a 15th-century villa. Take a dip in the pool or wander the manicured gardens. Kenneth Branagh's 1993 film adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing* was filmed at the villa. (See also "The Best Luxury Hotels," above.) See p. 196.
- **Castagneto Hotel** (outside Siena; ✆ **0577-45-103**): This simple brick farmhouse from the 1780s contentedly watches over its olive groves on a ridge outside Siena. The guest rooms are large and plain, filled with country air and Tuscan sun. Some have terraces, and all enjoy views over farmland, even though just a few feet from the gate you can catch a city bus into Siena. See p. 225.
- **Fattoria Maionchi** (near Lucca; ✆ **0583-978-194**): This *agriturismo* estate, lost in a tangle of olive-lined country roads in the foothills 13km (8 miles) east of Lucca, produces some of the province's finest red Colline Lucchese wine. The apartments are pretty standard but very large, and there's an outdoor pool where you can refresh yourself just yards from the vineyards. Signora Maionchi and her husband are two of the friendliest hosts around; they'll be glad to show you the gardens in back of their 17th-century villa. See p. 280.
- **Relais Il Falconiere** (near Cortona; ✆ **0575-612-616**): At the end of a long, winding dirt road in the foothills behind Cortona lies this early-17th-century farm, an oasis of fine dining and countryside quiet. The main villa has country-simple doubles, some with frescoes. But the best rooms are the suites flanking the tiny chapel, with big beds on ancient terra-cotta floors, wood-beam ceilings, and windows opening onto the olive trees and stone structures of the property. In the old

building where lemon trees were once kept in winter is Cortona's best restaurant and some of the finest dining in Tuscany. See p. 365.

- **Castello di Gargonza** (Valdichiana; ✆ **0575-847-021**): The 13th-century walled village of Gargonza offers one of the most unique hotel experiences in Italy—the chance to live in a real medieval *borgo.* The ancient central piazza, with its well, is your open-air living room, and an old olive press is your den. Each of the stone peasant houses has been converted into an efficiency apartment, and the hamlet is isolated on all sides by wooded mountains. See p. 368.
- **Locanda dell'Amorosa** (Valdichiana; ✆ **0577-677-211**): The central buildings of this 14th-century farming estate are situated around a triangular gravel courtyard like a Spanish hacienda. The guest rooms behind the second-story brick loggia either look onto this piazza or out over vineyards and fields. The spacious country-style loft accommodations have large beds and are very quiet. The restaurant, though mind-bogglingly expensive, is one of Tuscany's best. See p. 368.
- **Hotel La Badia** (outside Orvieto; ✆ **0763-301-959**): A disused abbey built between the 8th and 14th centuries, La Badia is just far enough away from it all to offer an oasis of peace and quiet. You can relax in the richly appointed and medievally atmospheric rooms or just wander around the property. The city glows across the valley, and in just minutes you can be in town enjoying frescoes, dinner, and Orvieto's perfect white wine. See p. 433.

13 THE BEST RESTAURANTS IN TOWN

- **Cibrèo** (Florence; ✆ **055-234-1100**): The amalgamated country-style decor of this restaurant belies its status as one of the city's finest kitchens. The dishes are Tuscan at heart—though they buck the standard by serving no pasta and little grilled meat—with innovative touches and plenty of peperoncino for spice. You may have to wait for an hour even with a reservation, but the wait is invariably worth it. See p. 126.
- **La Giostra** (Florence; ✆ **055-241-341**): A closet prince and double Ph.D. decided in retirement to indulge his love of cooking and open this little-known fine restaurant a few blocks east of the Duomo. He doesn't stick strictly to Tuscan dishes, but rather lets his culinary imagination and half-Habsburg heritage marry Italian and Austrian cooking, with occasionally spectacular results. He also makes the best Sachertorte this side of Vienna. See p. 127.
- **Osteria le Logge** (Siena; ✆ **0577-48-013**): In a room that looks a bit like an 18th-century apothecary shop, Siena's most accommodating staff serves some of the city's finest food. They take pride in their die-hard Tuscan dishes and urge you to try their traditional specialties. There's a reason the Sienese come here when they want to celebrate—taste for yourself. See p. 227.
- **Il Piraña** (Prato; ✆ **0574-25-746**): One of the best seafood restaurants in Italy is stuck in the modern outskirts of landlocked Prato. The atmosphere is refined but thoroughly modern, and the chef really knows what he's doing with any kind of fresh fish (flown in daily from both of Italy's seas), crustacean, or mollusk. A meal will set you back, but for any lover of *frutti di mare* (fruits of the sea), it's worth the side trip from nearby Florence. See p. 258.

- **La Buca di Sant'Antonio** (Lucca; ✆ **0583-55-881**): This maze of a restaurant, hidden in the maze of Lucca's central alleys, has been pleasing palates since 1782. The decor is hodgepodge trattoria style, but the service is professional and the food is high-toned Tuscan. The stuffed pastas are excellent and the sauces light and delicate. The spit-roasted kid is the knockdown second course. See p. 282.
- **Ristorante Zaira** (Chiusi; ✆ **0578-20-260**): Chiusi has several fine-dining spots, but this one just edges out the others for its *pasta del lucumone*—ziti, ham, and three cheeses baked in a ceramic bowl until a crunchy brown crust forms—and for the moldy ancient wine cellars you can tour after your meal. See p. 343.
- **Il Falchetto** (Perugia; ✆ **075-573-1775**): Years of success and a location on the edge of the town's main square haven't encouraged Perugia's most popular restaurant to lower its standards or to stop making some of the best Umbrian food in town. The homemade pastas are great, but the specialty is a melt-in-your-mouth casserole of spinach-and-ricotta gnocchi. See p. 382.
- **La Taverna** (Perugia; ✆ **075-572-4128**): It's rare that inventive cuisine can come off as filling food that warms the soul, but that's just what Claudio Brugalossi has brought to La Taverna, as well as to the number of restaurants in the U.S. that he has run over the years. His gorgonzola-soaked ravioli filled with beets dance like sugarplums in your head weeks after your trip. See p. 383.
- **Il Tartufo** (Spoleto; ✆ **0743-40-236**): The floor of the lower dining room actually dates to the Roman Imperial era, but it's open only during the festival season. People really come here to taste some of the most refined and successful culinary uses of truffles in Italy. They work all seasons of the truffle here, and the chef is a master at coaxing out the tuber's delicate flavor in both Umbrian and international dishes. See p. 419.

14 THE BEST TRATTORIE IN TOWN

When you're not in the mood for a formal restaurant, head instead to a homey trattoria, where locals and families go for filling and tasty simple fare at great prices.

- **I' Cche' c'è c'è** (Florence; ✆ **055-216-589**): Tuscan standbys, such as tagliatelle with wild mushrooms and beef cooked in chianti wine, get a refined touch here. This place is far from undiscovered, but being crowded at the long central table (much more fun than the private reservable ones ringing the room) with diners from across the globe has its own charm. See p. 120.
- **Il Latini** (Florence; ✆ **055-210-916**): Squadrons of prosciutto ham hocks hang from the ceiling, and the waiters scamper around cracking jokes as they fit new arrivals into spaces at long communal tables like a jigsaw puzzle and lay huge platters of grilled meats and bowls of steaming *ribollita* (vegetable soup) in front of hungry diners. Although tourists have known about this place for decades, it remains a fun-loving locals'-style trattoria, concerned above all with showing you a noisy good time and stuffing you with hearty Florentine fare. See p. 125.
- **Il Pizzaiuolo** (Florence; ✆ **055-241-171**): Florentines can't make a decent pizza. But owner Carmine emigrated from Naples and brought with him that city's ancient trade secrets and the plans for a huge brick oven. This place is like

a bit of old Napoli, with long tables, loud conversations, historic Naples photos lining the walls, incredible bubbling pizzas being passed to and fro, and basil leaves as table centerpieces. Come early, stay late, eat hearty. See p. 128=.

- **Il Cantinone** (Florence; ✆ **055-218-898**): Under the brick barrel vault of an old chianti cellar stretch long wooden tables where students, intellectuals, and extended families crowd nightly. The wine list is outstanding, as are the piping hot *crostoni* (pizzalike slabs of peasant bread slathered with such toppings as prosciutto, gooey mozzarella, spinach, and tomatoes). This is the perfect place to head for a noisy, cheap, but tasty meal. See p. 129.
- **Trattoria S. Omobono** (Pisa; ✆ **050-540-847**): This tiny, no-nonsense room behind Pisa's daily food market serves real Pisan food the way *Mamma* used to make it. The place fills up early at every meal, but note that lunch is no longer served. See p. 300.
- **Cittino** (Montepulciano; ✆ **0578-757-335**): Marcella will bustle you upstairs to her expanded den-*cum*-dining room and serve you heaping portions of pasta—she spends the morning whipping up batches of homemade gnocchi and *pici*—smothered in ragout or spicy tomato sauce. It's a no-frills place with excellent food and maybe dirty table cloths, but it has ridiculously low prices and the biggest smiles in town. See p. 337.
- **Ristorante Fiorentino** (Sansepolcro; ✆ **0575-742-033**): In Sansepolcro's old inn for visiting Piero fans, you'll get the best fundamental Tuscan food in the city. If you're lucky, the burly owner may pull over a chair to explain the finer points of Piero della Francesca's art or jab his thumb at tables and rattle off lists of famous people who've eaten his humble but tasty cooking in that chair right over there. See p. 358.
- **Umbria** (Todi; ✆ **075-894-2737**): The traditional dishes of southern Umbria are at their best here, with such fresh ingredients as wild asparagus tips, wood mushrooms, wild duck and boar, fresh river trout, truffles, and handmade pastas. In summer, the vine-shaded back terrace offers sweeping views across hilly farmscape. In winter, you can warm by the open fire where they grill your second course. See p. 424.

15 THE BEST COUNTRYSIDE TRATTORIE

- **Trattoria le Cave di Maiano** (near Florence; ✆ **055-59-133**): This is many a Florentine's not-so-secret culinary escape, in the cool hills above the city. You can dine inside the rustic farmhouse or out on the famous tree-shaded terrace, with its distant view of Florence. The food is classic, well-prepared Florentine. See p. 132.
- **La Cantinetta di Rignana** (Chianti; ✆ **055-852-601**): After an eternity of potholes and twisting dirt roads, you'll come upon a group of houses lost in the hills between Greve and Badia a Passignano. Curing meats hang in the doorway, and the cloth-covered tables are amusingly lit by end-table lamps. The homemade pasta is first-rate, as are the grilled meats. Settle back after a hearty lunch on the glassed-in porch with some hard biscotti and a glass of vin santo to soften them; then drink in the vista spilling across the vine-covered hills of the Rignana estate. See p. 197.
- **Rafanelli** (outside Pistoia; ✆ **0573-532-046**): Though Pistoia's miniature

tree-nursery industrial zone has grown up around this one-time countryside trattoria over the past 60 years or so, the Rafanelli family hasn't changed its commitment to the fundamentals of Tuscan cooking: wide homemade noodles in hare sauce, wild boar cooked in red wine, and risotto with porcini mushrooms, all served in abundant portions. See p. 265.

- **Ristorante di Poggio Antico** (near Montalcino; ✆ **0577-849-200**): The cheap, old trattoria on this famous wine estate shocked many when it reopened with a new minimalist interior and a talented *nuova cucina* chef spearheading the kitchen. Surrounded by vines that produce some of the silkiest Brunello wines in the region, you can dine on the most refined food in this part of Tuscany, where everything from the breadsticks to the dessert is homemade. See p. 324.
- **Fattoria Pulcino** (outside Montepulciano; ✆ **0578-758-711**): If you've been to a tourist-trap rib joint in the American South and walked away with a smile, you'll love this rib-sticking food once dished out to the farm hands. Plates of homemade *pici* pasta, platters of grilled meats, along with the owner's famous honeyed fruitcake for dessert, make it a fun and filling if tacky pit stop. See p. 338.
- **Relais Il Falconiere** (outside Cortona; ✆ **0575-612-679**): The food and service are impeccable, and the atmosphere sophisticated. Classical music floats across your table; when it's warm and the tables are set on the lawn, crickets take over for Vivaldi. The chefs marry the best fresh ingredients, many cultivated by the owners themselves, with Tuscan recipes to make this one of the most popular restaurants in Tuscany. Follow the foodies who know which turnoff leads to this culinary hideaway. See p. 365.
- **La Stalla** (outside Assisi; ✆ **075-812-317**): This is the quintessential countryside trattoria, the sort of place where scattered Italian families get together for monthly reunions. The low ceilings are black with centuries of wood smoke that has poured from the open fire over which grilled meats sizzle. At the long wooden communal tables, you can wash down a platter of homemade pasta and another of grilled lamb with copious quantities of the house red. See p. 399.

2

Florence, Tuscany & Umbria in Depth

As the cradle of the Renaissance, Florence has an abundance of significant architecture and artistic masterpieces—as do most of the smaller cities that dot the Tuscan and Umbrian countryside, such as Arezzo, Pisa, Lucca, and Perugia. This profusion of art and architecture is the direct result of historic rivalries between the inhabitants of various medieval cities. The nobility in each of these Tuscan and Umbrian cities spent centuries outdoing each other with shows of artistic wealth; they often competed to see who could procure the most elaborate and grandest artistic masterpieces. Today we are left with vivid reminders of those historic rivalries: an artistic treasure trove in nearly every city and hamlet in the region.

While historically this intercity rivalry boiled over into countless wars, today it persists in other forms: frequent clashes between soccer fans, graffiti sprayed on *palazzo* walls (*"Pisa merda"* is a favorite vulgar phrase of vandals from Livorno), and throughout the tourism sector at every level. Ask a hotel owner in Lucca how long a drive it is to Pistoia, and you'll get the response, "What do you want to go to Pistoia for?"

What would Tuscany and Umbria be today had these rivalries never existed? Brunelleschi might have continued to work as a goldsmith, instead of building his revolutionary dome in Florence's Duomo. Donatello might have eked out an existence as a stonemason and Michelangelo might have chiseled away in anonymity on his father's marble quarries, instead of becoming the legendary artists that produced some of Italy's most extraordinary works of art.

People flock to Tuscany and Umbria from all over the world to view the plethora of art that these rivalries produced, and as a result the region has become a prime tourist destination. These rivalries—and the art they produced—have permanently shaped the regions' identities and economies. Nowhere else in the world will you find as many architects and art historians who are charged with preserving and promoting this heritage. Schoolchildren are drilled from an early age about the historical significance of their region, and when you ask one of them what he or she wants to do as a grown-up, the response may well be art restoration.

Italians are acutely aware of their past because it is very much a part of their present. It's difficult not to be curious about history when you confront it everyday, whether you're walking on 12th-century paving stones, ambling though ancient ruins, or eating in a restaurant that is housed in a medieval building.

1 FLORENCE, TUSCANY & UMBRIA TODAY

In the past, a visitor strolling around downtown Florence on a weekday evening would have encountered students carousing on their way to the clubs, couples strolling arm-in-arm, and possibly even an impromptu recital by a choral group in front of the Duomo. These days, downtown Florence seems eerily empty.

Mass tourism loves Tuscany and always will. Florence is an essential stop on almost every package tour, and the region is by far Italy's most famous—sometimes the only one foreigners know by name. But it is also a precarious economy. The financial crisis, a strong euro, and lingering worldwide fears of terrorism have combined to keep tourist numbers much lower than in years past.

The good news is that this drop in tourism means lots of discounts and deals. Almost across the board, prices have leveled off, and in some instances—especially in the larger cities like Florence—they have come down. Admission to some museums and sites has dropped. The average price of hotel rooms has also dropped, as "special offers" are advertised nearly every day, sometimes during peak season.

Tuscany and Umbria primarily rely on two economic resources: tourism and the land—both of which are inextricably linked. Visitors flock to the region to sample the local wines, indulge in the bountiful harvests, and take in the beautiful landscapes.

These financial motivations have helped fuel a strong environmental movement in Tuscany and Umbria. Italy's most powerful environmentalist organization, **Legambiente** (league for the environment; www.legambiente.eu) plays the role of watchdog, protecting the environment from abuse. It also offers outings and projects that are designed to safeguard the environment by teaching the public about the environment and sustainability.

There has been a greater emphasis on sustainability, and as a result the government has generated tough traffic laws, reinforced strict zoning standards, and built bicycle paths. On Sundays, some Tuscan and Umbrian cities even close their city centers to motorized traffic, leaving the public spaces open for pedestrians and cyclists.

Italians are also very protective of their beaches—and their efforts have been rewarded with several Blue Flags. Each year, a **Blue Flag** (www.blueflag.org), a voluntary eco-label that honors high water quality and environmental management, is awarded to beaches throughout the world. Recently, 33 beaches on Tuscany's coast received Blue Flags, including two beaches in Pisa: Tirrenia and Calambrone beaches.

Ironically, tourism can have detrimental effects on the environment and vitality of the cities and regions that vie for it. For example, today Florence's historic core caters almost entirely to tourists, driving locals to move to the suburbs and rent out their historic homes. And although the region strives for sustainability, sometimes those well-meaning efforts backfire. For example, when pedestrian-only zones started being erected across Italy's city centers over a decade ago, the plans were met with cheers. Yet today, those pedestrian-only zones have interrupted traffic flow, and have unwittingly exacerbated an already horrible traffic problem, with parking lots taking over central *piazze* that were once important communal gathering places. Some Umbrian cities have successfully solved this issue. By creating large parking lots underground and in the valleys below the hilltop cities and connecting them to town via elevators, escalators, and cog railways, cities such as Orvieto, Perugia, and Assisi have actually managed to make themselves blessedly traffic-free.

Immigration is a very sensitive and divisive issue in Tuscany and Umbria. There are a lot of non-Italians here: There is a huge community of Chinese textile laborers in Prato and Florence, Albanians and other Eastern Europeans all around Central Italy, and African immigrants spread throughout the country, as well as thousands of North American expats.

Tuscany and Umbria are home to Dante Alighieri, the poet credited with

bringing a common language to the peninsula; in many ways, this region is the heart of Italian culture. More than a few of the natives worry about what they see as the watering down of a sacred identity. The irony is that Italy depends on laborers coming from other countries, since it is simply not producing enough workers of its own. Without outsiders, the aging workforce would shrivel to a fraction of its size, since very few Italian couples are having children.

Although the region is diverse, there are traces of racism and intolerance—a recent example is the 2007 murder of a British student known as the "Perugia incident." When Meredith Kercher, a 21-year-old British student, was found with her throat slit in her Perugia apartment, the police suspected her American roommate Amanda Knox, Knox's Italian boyfriend, and two African immigrants: one from the Congo, the other from the Cote d'Ivoire. In cases like these, the public generally acquits the Italian immediately, while the African immigrants tend to be considered guilty until proven otherwise. In this case, one of the African immigrants, Rudy Guede, was convicted of conspiracy to murder Kercher and is currently in prison. In December 2009, American Knox and her Italian boyfriend Raffaele Sollecito were convicted of sexually assaulting and murdering Kercher.

2 LOOKING BACK AT FLORENCE, TUSCANY & UMBRIA

TUSCAN ROOTS: FROM PREHISTORY TO THE ETRUSCANS (9TH C. B.C.–3RD C. B.C.)

Although Neanderthals, ancient *Homo sapiens,* and Paleolithic and Bronze Age humans left some of their bones and tools lying about, and the 9th-century-B.C. **Villanovan** Iron Age culture (possibly immigrants from the north) has helped fill museums with pot shards, things really didn't start getting lively in central Italy until the Etruscans rose to power.

The most widely accepted theory is that the Etruscans came from modern-day Turkey in Asia Minor—at least, that's what the ancient Romans believed—and arrived in central Italy in the late 9th or early 8th century B.C. The fact that their language isn't Indo-European but appears similar to some Aegean dialects helps confirm this theory, but there are others who now feel the Etruscans may have risen from native peoples in central Italy, perhaps a combination of the Villanovans, local tribes, and travelers from Asia Minor. Whatever the case, these Etruschi or Tuschi formed the basic cultural/political force in the region that's now named for them, Tuscany.

Much of what little remains to tell us of the Etruscans—that which hasn't been corrupted by later Roman influence—consists of tombs and their contents, and it's difficult to reconstruct an entire culture simply by looking at its graveyards. Etruscan society may have been more egalitarian than later Western cultures, or at least women appear to have had more of an active role and a higher status in daily life. Historians say they loved to throw parties, have banquets, go on the hunt, and the like—but that may just be what they chose to celebrate in the few paintings and many carvings they left us. While we can read their language, what script we have goes into little beyond death, divination, and the divine.

What historians are surer of is that Etruscans became enamored of the Attic culture of Greece and adopted many of the

Greek gods and myths, as well as many Greek vases, in the 6th century B.C. This era coincided with the height of their considerable power. In fact, from the late 7th century until 510 B.C., Rome was ruled by Etruscan kings of the Tarquin dynasty. Although the Etruscan empire spread south almost to Naples, east to the Adriatic, and west onto Corsica, the heart and core called Etruria covered an area from the Arno east to the Apennines and south to the Tiber, encompassing most of Tuscany, half of Umbria, and northern Lazio.

The Etruscans surrounded their cities with massive defensive walls, were adept bridge builders, and developed sophisticated canal, sewer, and irrigation systems for their cities and fields, draining marshy lands for farming and sinking wells and cisterns and carving plumbing systems in the rock beneath their cities. (The famous Roman plumbing network was started by the Etruscan kings of Rome.)

Well before this time, around 1200 B.C., Indo-European Italic peoples had wandered into Italy from the north. The Samnites and Latins continued south, but the **Umbri** tribes decided to settle in the Apennines and valleys east of the Tiber, which flows through the middle of modern-day Umbria. Their loosely defined zone of cultural hegemony encompassed what is now northern and eastern Umbria and the Marches over to the sea, as well as corners of Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna. (Modern city descendants include Gubbio and Città di Castello, as well as Assisi and Todi, both of which later became Etruscan and then Roman.) All we really know about the Umbri is they had a highly developed religion based on reading prophecies in animal sacrifices and the flights of birds—Gubbio's famous Eugubine Tables bronze plaques tell us this much. When the Roman influence spread north in the 3rd century B.C., the Umbrian cities for the most part allied themselves to the Latins, were awarded Roman citizenship early, and enjoyed a large degree of autonomy from authorities in Rome. Aside from the usual city rivalries and moderate clashes between expanding empires, the Umbrians appear to have lived more or less amicably with their Etruscan neighbors.

ENTER THE ROMANS: THE FOUNDING OF FLORENCE (3RD C. B.C.–5TH C. A.D.)

In the 3rd century B.C., that Latin city on the Tiber called **Rome** began its expansion, and some of the first neighboring peoples to fall were the Etruscans. Some cities, such as Perugia and Arezzo, allied themselves with Rome and were merely absorbed, while others, including Volterra and Orvieto, were conquered outright. The Romans brought with them the combination of a highly conservative (some say stagnant) culture coupled with a certain degree of adaptability to local religious beliefs and social modes that allowed their empire to stay solvent for so long. As the Romans gained power over the entire peninsula, the removal of political barriers and the construction of roads allowed trade to develop and flow relatively uninhibited.

Many of the old cities flourished, and the general prosperity led to the founding of new cities throughout the region, especially as retirement camps for Roman soldiers. While the Etruscans were keen on building cities on hilltops—both for easy defensibility and to leave more valley land free for farming—the Romans preferred flat ground along rivers, which allowed them to lay out exacting street-plan grids oriented precisely to the points of the compass. They were fanatically single-minded about city planning, rarely wavering from this model.

During the lull of the later Roman Empire, **Christianity** quickly spread throughout much of central Italy—Lucca even claims to have converted in the 1st century A.D. through the efforts of one of

St. Peter's own followers, though Pisa tries to one-up its neighbors by claiming a church first built by St. Peter.

GOTHS, LOMBARDS & FRANKS: THE DARK AGES (6TH C.–9TH C.)

As the Roman Empire collapsed in the 5th century A.D., Germanic tribes swept down from the north and wreaked mayhem on central Italian cities as group after group fought their way down to Rome in a sacking free-for-all, pillaging all the way south and often on the way back north as well. The **Goths** swept down in the 6th century A.D., and one of their leaders, **Totila,** conquered Florence in A.D. 552.

Perhaps the strongest force in the Dark Ages was the **Lombards** who established two major duchies in central Italy, one based at Lucca, which governed most of Tuscany, and the other at Spoleto, which took care of most of Umbria. When their ambitions threatened Rome (now a church stronghold) in the 8th century, the pope invited the Frankish king Pepin the Short to come clear the Lombards out. Under Pepin, and, more important, his son **Charlemagne,** the Lombards were ousted from Tuscany and Umbria.

The Lombard duchy at Lucca was merely replaced by a Frankish margrave, with Tuscany ruled by powerful figures like the **Margrave Matilda.** Charlemagne gave the lands he took from the duchy of Spoleto directly to the pope, but the pontiffs gradually lost control over the region as they busied themselves with other concerns.

With the breakup of Charlemagne's empire in the 9th century, the German emperors started pressing claims over the Italian peninsula. The thorny question of who should wield temporal power, the pope in Rome or the German emperor, embroiled European politics on the larger scale for several centuries. (The effects of this struggle on Tuscany and Umbria are discussed under "Guelphs & Ghibellines: A Medieval Mess," below.) On the smaller scale, central Italy was plunged into political chaos out of which emerged for the first time the independent city-state republic known as the *comune.*

THE MEDIEVAL *COMUNE:* AN IMPERFECT DEMOCRACY

In the late 11th century, merchants became wealthier and more important to the daily economic life of the small Italian cities, just as the old landed aristocracy was becoming obsolete with the collapse of the feudal system. Many of these merchants were minor gentry who began to get involved in trade and in big business like the textile industry and banking. They organized themselves into **guilds** and gradually became the bourgeois oligarchic leaders of the cities. The self-governing *comuni* they established weren't the perfect democracies they've often been made out to be. While many were ruled by popularly elected **councils,** usually only the

Looking for Etruscan Remains

If you want to check out some Etruscan remains, head to the following towns: **Volterra** (a museum, a city gate, and walls), **Chiusi** (underground aqueducts to tour and many tombs in the area), **Arezzo** (a museum), **Cortona** (a museum and tombs), **Perugia** (a city gate and a well), and **Orvieto** (tombs, museums, underground tunnels to tour, and a well). There are also major Tuscan finds collected at the archaeological museum in **Florence.**

Guelph or Ghibelline?

Though it's admittedly not the perfect measure, you can sometimes tell which a city was, at least at any given time, by looking at the battlements of the medieval town hall: The **Guelphs** favored squared-off crenellations and the **Ghibellines** swallowtail ones.

Exceptions to this are Siena's **Palazzo Pubblico,** which was built with blocky battlements during the briefly Guelph period of the Council of Nine, and Florence's **Palazzo Vecchio,** which confusingly sports both kinds.

guild members of the middle class were enfranchised. The majority of city laborers, as well as the rural farmers, remained powerless.

As the *comuni* stabilized their infrastructures—after dealing with blows like the 1348 Black Death, a plague that swept through Europe and left well over half of central Italy's population dead—they also set about roughing up their neighbors and traditional rivals. Battles were fought both to increase the city-states' trading power and to acquire more towns under their control (or at least secure subservient allies). To this end, instead of raising militia armies, they hired ***condottieri,*** professional soldiers of fortune who controlled forces of armed mercenaries. These soldiers came from all over and from all walks of life.

Many of these trade wars and ancient rivalries were fought between cities that used Europe's big power struggle of the age—the Holy Roman Emperor versus the Pope—as an excuse to attack their traditional antagonists. Although in the end the terms *Guelph* and *Ghibelline* meant little to the parties involved (even if they did have overriding and longer-term effects on the towns that defined themselves as one or the other), the conflict between these factions comes up constantly in medieval Tuscany and Umbria, so the history behind it bears a brief overview.

GUELPHS & GHIBELLINES: A MEDIEVAL MESS

At this time in Europe, two entities competed for absolute power over the continent, the emperor and the pope, who used the argument over who got to appoint parish priests as an excuse to vie for control of Europe. The terms that came to describe Italian supporters of the emperor and Italian supporters of the pope actually stemmed from a German conflict over imperial succession.

In the 12th century, the German throne of the Holy Roman Emperor sat empty. Otto IV's family, the Welf dynasty of Bavaria, fought for it against the lords of Waiblingen, where the house of Swabia ruled under the Hohenstaufen dynasty. The names were corrupted in Italian to **Guelph** and **Ghibelline,** respectively, and when the Hohenstaufens came out winners with Frederick Barbarossa being crowned emperor, the Ghibellines stuck as the supporters of the emperor while the Guelphs became the party that backed the pope.

In Italy, the issue was all about who got to be in charge: the old nobility, who as Ghibellines favored the imperial promise of a return to feudalism and hence their own power, or the Guelph merchant-and-banking middle class, who supported the pope and his free-trade attitudes. While these terms did mean something regarding

Florentine Wisdom

Guelfa non son, ne' Ghibellin m'apello, chi mi da' da mangiar tengo per quello. (I'm no Guelph, and not a Ghibelline either, whoever butters my bread has my allegiance.)

which faction, nobles or merchants, controlled any one city, they were used mainly to define one city in terms of its opposition to rival cities. So if your rivals were Ghibelline, you'd go Guelph, and if they turned Guelph for some reason, you usually swung around to Ghibelline pretty quickly. Although they all flip-flopped to some degree, Florence (plus Lucca, Arezzo, and Perugia) turned out Guelph, which made rivals Pisa, Pistoia, and Siena Ghibelline.

The Guelph-Ghibelline conflict not only spawned intercity warfare but also sparked intracity strife between rival factions. The most famous intracity conflict occurred in Florence in the 13th century, when powerful warring clans each took up arms and called in alliances, and the city split into Guelph and Ghibelline parties, under which names the parties waged a decades-long struggle over who'd control the city government. In Florence, when the Guelphs finally won in the late 13th century, they further divided into two factions, the **Blacks** (Guelphs) and the **Whites** (Ghibellines, but only because they hated Pope Boniface VIII). When the Blacks came out on top, they exiled the Whites, among whom was a Florentine White Guelph ambassador named Dante who lived the rest of his life in exile, perfecting his poetry.

At the turn of the 14th century, when the Black Guelphs finally came out victorious, Florence began to enjoy a fairly stable republican rule—still of the old assembly system called now the **Signoria,** a ruling council elected from the major guilds. Florence slowly expanded its power, first allying with Prato, then conquering Pistoia, and by 1406 adding Volterra, Arezzo, and Pisa to the cities under its rule.

As the major guilds accrued more and more power, and the top merchants seized control of Florence, the minor guilds and lesser merchants looked to one of the few renegade merchant families sympathetic to their plight. It was an upstart family that, with a bit of luck, had recently risen from virtual anonymity to become one of the most successful banking houses in the city. It was a clan without a particularly distinguished pedigree, a fact that kept them from being fully accepted by the major guild leaders who came from old Florentine families. They called themselves the Medici.

THE RENAISSANCE: CUE THE MEDICI

The Medici came from the hills of the Mugello in the early Middle Ages, quite possibly charcoal burners looking for the good life of the city. The family found moderate success and even had a few members elected to public office in the *comune* government.

At the turn of the 15th century, **Giovanni de' Bicci de' Medici** made the family fortune through a series of shrewd moves establishing the Medici as bankers to the papal curia in Rome. His son, Cosimo de' Medici, called **Cosimo il Vecchio,** orchestrated a number of important alliances and treaties for the Florentine Signoria, gaining him prestige and respect. He was a humanist leader who believed in the power of the emerging new art forms of the early Renaissance, and he commissioned

works from the greatest painters, sculptors, and architects of the day.

Cosimo grew so attached to the sculptor Donatello that, as Cosimo lay dying, he made sure his son, **Piero the Gouty,** promised to care for the also aging artist and to see that he never lacked for work. Cosimo, as a properly modest ruler, was so beloved by the people that they buried him under the inscription *pater patirae* (father of the homeland). Piero's rule was short and relatively undistinguished, quickly superseded by the brilliant career of his son, Lorenzo de' Medici, called **Lorenzo the Magnificent.**

Under the late-15th-century rule of Lorenzo, Florence entered its golden era, during which time it became Europe's cultural and artistic focal point. It was Lorenzo who encouraged the young Michelangelo to sculpt, and he and Medici cousins commissioned paintings from Botticelli and poetry from Poliziano. Lorenzo founded a Platonic academy to further the study of the classical world and was himself an accomplished poet.

Although Lorenzo fought to maintain the precious balance of power between Italian city-states, in doing so he incurred the wrath of the pope and the Pazzi family, Florentine rivals of the Medici. The young Medici leader's troubles came to a head in the infamous 1478 Pazzi Conspiracy, in which Lorenzo and his brother were attacked during High Mass. The coup failed, and the Pazzi were expelled from the city, which in the end helped solidify Medici power over Florence. Lorenzo, however, was less adept than his grandfather at managing the family bank (losing the papal account had something to do with it, along with well-meaning mismanagement by assistants). His son and successor, **Piero de' Medici,** was almost immediately forced to flee the invading armies of Charles VIII in 1494 (although Charles quickly withdrew from the Italian field).

Into the power vacuum stepped puritanical preacher **Girolamo Savonarola.** This theocrat's apocalyptic visions and book-burning (the original Bonfire of the Vanities) held the public's fancy for about 4 years, until the pope excommunicated the entire city for following him, and the Florentines called it quits, putting the torch to Savonarola as a heretic.

A free republic took Savonarola's place, happily governing itself and commissioning artworks from the likes of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, and placing Machiavelli in charge of organizing a citizen's militia. In 1512, however, papal armies set another of Lorenzo's sons, the boring young **Giuliano de' Medici,** duke of Nemours, on the vacant Medici throne. Giuliano, and later **Lorenzo de' Medici** (Lorenzo the Magnificent's grandson via the ousted Piero) were merely mouthpieces for the real brains of the family, Giuliano's brother, **Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici,** who in 1513 became **Pope Leo X** and uttered the immortal words "God has given us the papacy, now let us enjoy it."

Pope Leo's successor as leader of the Medici was his natural cousin, **Giulio de' Medici,** illegitimate son of Lorenzo's brother Giuliano. Although blackguards such as Ippolito and **Alessandro de' Medici** held sway in Florence, they really took their orders from Giulio, who from 1523 to 1534 continued to run the family from Rome as **Pope Clement VII.**

Florentine Wisdom

Meglio un morto in casa che un Pisano all'uscio. (A dead person in the house is better than a Pisan at the gate.)

The Dignity of the Last Medici Grand Duke

Grand Duke Gian Gastone barely showed his face outside the Pitti Palace—except on one memorable carriage ride through town to prove he was alive, during which he occupied himself by vomiting out the window.

Charles V's imperial armies sacked Rome in 1527, sending Clement VII scurrying to Orvieto for safety and giving the Florentines the excuse to boot Alessandro from town and set up a republican government again. In 1530, however, the pope and Charles reconciled and sent a combined army to lay siege to Florence, which hired Michelangelo to design part of the defenses, and eventually Alessandro was reinstated. This time he had an official title: **Duke of Florence.**

After decadently amusing himself as a tyrant in Florence for 7 years, during which time Clement VII died and Alessandro inherited full power, Alessandro was murdered in bed while awaiting what he thought was a secret tryst with a virtuous woman but in reality was a setup by his distant cousin Lorenzaccio de' Medici, who plunged a dagger into the duke's belly and fled to Venice (where he was later assassinated).

The man chosen to take Alessandro's place was a Medici of a different branch, a descendant of Cosimo il Vecchio's brother and the son of the virtuous and valorous warrior, Giovanni delle Bande Nere. All the hidden powers of Florence thought young **Cosimo de' Medici** would be easily controlled when they named him duke of Florence. They were wrong.

Contrary to his immediate Medici predecessors, Cosimo I actually devoted himself to attending to matters of state. He built up a navy, created a seaport for Florence called Livorno, ruled firmly but judiciously (he never was very popular, though), and even conquered age-old rival Siena after a brutal war from 1555 to 1557. His greatest personal moment came in 1569 when his—and through him, Florence's—authority over Tuscany was recognized by the pope, who declared him **Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany.** Except for the tiny Republic of Lucca, which happily trundled along independently until Napoleon gave it to his sister in 1806, the history of Tuscany was now firmly intertwined with that of Florence, and soon, the rest of Italy.

THE RISORGIMENTO: ITALY BECOMES A COUNTRY (LATE 19TH C.)

The Savoy kings of the northwestern Italian region of Piedmont decided to create a kingdom of Italy in the late 1800s. In 1859, the last Lorraine grand duke, Leopold II, abdicated and in 1860, Florence and Tuscany became part of the newly declared Italian state. From 1865 to 1870, Florence was the capital of Italy, and it enjoyed a frenzied building boom—the medieval walls were torn down and the Jewish ghetto demolished and replaced with the cafe-lined Piazza della Repubblica, and the city quickly gentrified.

The army that was conquering recalcitrant states on the peninsula for **Vittorio Emanuele II,** first king of Italy, was commanded by **Gen. Giuseppe Garibaldi,** who spent much of the end of the war slowly subjugating the papal states—the pope was the last holdout against the new regime. This meant defeating the papal authorities in Umbria, whose armies, however, quickly retreated, leaving cities like

Perugia to cheer on Garibaldi's troops as they freed the region from hundreds of years of papal oppression.

FASCISM: GETTING ROPED INTO WORLD WAR II

The demagogue **Benito Mussolini** came to power after World War I and did much to improve Italy's infrastructure—at least on the surface—and in the process won the respect of many Italians. His Fascist regime accomplished the improbable: drumming up national sentiment in a country where most people, far from normally feeling any sort of patriotism, still looked on the folk in the village 5km (3 miles) down the road as foreigners. Then Mussolini got caught up with Hitler's World War II egomania, believing that Italy should have a second empire as great as the ancient Roman one.

Although the Tuscans certainly had their share of collaborators and die-hard Fascists, many Italians never bought into the war or the Axis alliance. Partisan movement was always strong, with resistance fighters holed up, especially in the hills south of Siena. Tuscany became a battlefield as the occupying Nazi troops slowly withdrew across the landscape in the face of American and Allied advancement.

POSTWAR TUSCANY & UMBRIA

Florence was hit with disaster when a massive **flooding of the Arno** in 1966 covered much of the city with up to 6m (20 ft.) of sludge and water, destroying or severely damaging countless thousands of works of art and literature (8,000 paintings in the Uffizi basement alone, and 1.5 million volumes in the National Library). Along with an army of experts and trained restorers, hundreds of volunteers nicknamed "Mud Angels" descended on the city, many of them foreign students, to pitch in and help dig out all the mud and salvage what they could of one of the greatest artistic heritages of any city on earth.

The fortunes of Tuscany and Umbria have in the past 60 years mainly followed those of Italy at large. After the multiple dissolutions of parliament and resignations of prime ministers amid rampant scandal from 1993 to 1996, Romano Prodi and the center-left **Olive Tree coalition** managed to hold power for more than 3 years—a record of sorts in Italy, which since World War II had averaged a new government every 9 months. The Prodi government eased nicely into the similarly left-leaning coalition headed by Prime Minster Massimo D'Alema. But local elections began swinging back to the right of center, and in 2001, media magnate (and the world's 29th richest man) Silvio Berlusconi—briefly prime minister in 1993 but brought down by professional and political scandals—gained control once again of the Italian government as part of a center-right coalition including the neo-Fascist Alleanza Nazionale party and the anti-immigrant Lega del Nord. Prodi returned to the fore in 2006, defeating Berlusconi by the slimmest of margins and with a very shaky coalition. His triumphant return was short-lived. Berlusconi, also known as The Knight, came galloping back to power in the elections of 2008. The scandals surrounding the 74-year-old's business dealings and conflicts of interest gave way to scandals surrounding his private life, in particular, a penchant for partying with 18-year-old girls at his Sardinian villa. Considering the political hurdles he has cleared in the past, it is unlikely these peccadilloes will loosen his grip on power.

3 FLORENCE, TUSCANY & UMBRIA'S ART & ARCHITECTURE

FROM CLASSICAL TO ROMANESQUE: THE 8TH CENTURY B.C. TO THE 12TH CENTURY A.D.

ANCIENT ART The pre-Etruscan **Villanovans** have left us little more than pottery shards, and the Etruscans' neighbors, the Umbri, even less. The prehistoric art remnants of greatest note in Tuscany are the **Lunigiana** cult's statue-stele in Pontrémoli, which is part of Tuscany only on political maps; the culture and the art really belongs to the Ligurian peoples of the nearby coastal province.

The **Etruscans** were prodigious town planners (see "Looking Back at Florence, Tuscany & Umbria," earlier in this chapter). In architecture, they used the load-bearing arch, raised rectangular temples approached by steps as the Romans later adopted, and built houses with open atrium courtyards surrounded by colonnaded porticos on the inner face.

Though precious little Etruscan painting survives, the Etruscans were masters of this art form. They painted—in fresco, to boot—scenes rich in the pleasures of everyday life, especially banqueting. What we have most of is their sculpture, which went through an idiosyncratic archaic period (with some Oriental influences), through an Attic period influenced by the art of ancient Greece, and was finally subsumed under the Hellenistic Roman style. They cranked out thousands of votive bronzes—small representations of warriors, washerwomen, and farmers plowing—occasionally producing works of singular expressive beauty, such as Volterra's famed *Shadow of the Evening*.

The Etruscans' most famous forms of sculpture are their **funerary urns,** each of which was capped with a lid carved into a likeness of the deceased, half-reclining as if at an eternal banquet. Most of these have intense expressions and enigmatic smiles that have made them a popular modern image to represent Etruria in general. As Greek culture began to seep in during the 6th century B.C., the cinerary urns under these lids were increasingly carved with reliefs depicting scenes from Greek mythology, often having to do with the movement to the underworld (riding in carts, boats, chariots, and the like).

As **Rome** gained ascendancy in the 3rd century B.C., its conservative and static style of carving, architecture, and painting supplanted the more naturalized and dynamic nature of the Etruscan arts. The Romans have left us many of their Hellenistic bronze and marble statues, innumerable fragments of decorative friezes and other reliefs, and several theaters and baths in varying stages of decay (at Fiesole, Volterra, Gubbio, and Spoleto).

PALEO-CHRISTIAN ART The Germanic and later the Frankish invaders who swept down from the north brought with them a meager building and decorative statuary style. Nonetheless, their influence on native primitive modes, as well as late Imperial Roman holdovers like the basilican plan for a church (basilicas started out as Roman law courts), filled the 4th to 11th centuries with what's often referred to as the **paleo-Christian** style. This period was marked by very simple structures; the few that survive—including churches in Spoleto, Pienza, and Perugia, and the later and much more unified Sant'Antimo—strike most moderns as hauntingly beautiful and elegant, if architecturally inharmonious. In the north of Tuscany, the architecture quickly developed into the style known as Romanesque (see below).

BYZANTINE PAINTING The political influence of the Byzantine Empire, based in Constantinople, was confined to Italy's northeastern Adriatic coast. But the artistic influence of Byzantium's stylized iconographic tradition in mosaics and panel paintings spread throughout Italy, starting from the Adriatic city of Ravenna in the 5th century.

Byzantine painting is characterized in individual works by gold-leaf backgrounds, stylized gold crosshatching in the blue and red robes of the Madonna, oval faces with large almond eyes and spoonlike depressions at the tops of sloping noses, a flattened look (due to an almost complete lack of perspective or foreshortening), and, above all, conservatism.

Byzantine art had an Oriental decorativeness and severely static rule ensuring the reproduction of icons that wavered little from past models. It kept Italian painting moribund for over 800 years. Painting didn't break out of the conservative funk until the late 13th century, when the International Gothic style finally shook things up (see below).

ROMANESQUE ARCHITECTURE When Pisa became a major medieval power, it did so as a huge shipping empire, and with this trade came contact with Eastern and Islamic cultures. Pisa poured its 11th-century prosperity into building a new religious core and cathedral, adapting many of the decorative elements from these Eastern contacts. The style that was developed in **Buschetto**'s Duomo and the associated baptistery and bell tower (yes, the one that leans) came to define the Romanesque and quickly spread across northern Tuscany.

The purest, earliest form that arose in Pisa and Lucca—known, sensibly, as the **Pisan-Luccan Romanesque**—was characterized most strikingly by horizontal stripes of marbles on the facades and eventually in some interiors as well (at first they used green and white; later, in Siena, it became black and white; and in Umbria the available local stone made it pink and white). The other key elements were curving semicircular arches; blind arcades of these arches often set with diamond-shaped decorative inlays (or coffered depressions) called lozenges; open galleries supported by thin mismatched columns and often stacked three or four rows high on facades; lots of tiny detail in marble inlay; and often a nave flanked by two colonnaded aisles inside.

The later form of the movement that was adapted in Florence (the Baptistery, San Miniato al Monte, and Badia Fiesolana) and Pistoia (San Giovanni Fuoricivitas and, though later altered, the Duomo) was called the **Florentine Romanesque.** On the surface it was very similar to the Pisan-Lucchese school, but it was practiced along much stricter lines of a geometry gleaned from classical architecture, a predecessor to the mathematically proportional architecture of the Renaissance. Before that could come to pass, however, in the late 12th century a strong northern styling came into vogue called, after its supposed association with the emperors (whether German or Frankish), the Gothic.

INTERNATIONAL GOTHIC: THE 13TH & 14TH CENTURIES

The **Gothic** first started infiltrating Italy as architecture. It was originally imported by French Cistercian monks, who in 1218 created the huge San Galgano abbey church, now roofless (and terribly romantic). Although this French style of the Gothic never caught on, the church was still at the time revolutionary in introducing some of the new forms, which were adopted when **Giovanni Pisano** overhauled Siena's cathedral and "Gothicized" it.

Thin-columned windows, along with lacelike stone tracery that the Gothic style

used to fill up arch points and the crenellations it strewed across the tops of buildings, caught the Tuscan fancy and were incorporated into many palaces, especially in Siena, where the architectural forms otherwise pretty much stayed the same old solid, reliable medieval masonry. Out of this marriage were born the civic palaces of Siena and, more important, Volterra, which served as the model for Florence's own famous Palazzo Vecchio (and similar buildings across the region).

The Palazzo Vecchio's architect was **Arnolfo di Cambio,** the Gothic master of Florence's 1290s building boom. Arnolfo was also responsible for the Franciscan church of Santa Croce and the original plans for the Duomo. The kind of Frankish Gothic building most people associate the term "Gothic," with lots of spires and stony frills, really showed up only in the tiny carved stone jewel of Santa Maria alla Spina along the banks of the Arno in Pisa. **Andrea Orcagna,** who was also a painter, gave us another bit of this sort of Gothic in miniature with his elaborate marble-inlaid tabernacle in Florence's Orsanmichele (the church is also a Gothic structure itself, but an odd one). But Orcagna was really already moving toward the Renaissance when he designed the wide-arched and proportioned space of the Loggia dei Lanzi on Florence's Piazza della Signoria.

The Gothic style was perhaps at its most advanced in sculpture. **Nicola Pisano** probably emigrated from southern Apulia to work in Pisa, where he crowned that city's great Romanesque building project with a Gothic finale in 1260. He created for the baptistery a great pulpit, the panels of which were carved in high relief with a new kind of figurative emotion displayed in the sway of the figures and a degree of activeness in their positioning and apparent movement. By the time Nicola carved the panels on his second pulpit in Siena, along with his son **Giovanni Pisano,** the figures were moving into a radically new sort of interaction, with a multitude of squirming bodies and pronounced stylized curves to add a graceful rhythm and emotion to the characters. Giovanni went on to carve two more pulpits (in Pistoia and back to Pisa for the Duomo) and numerous individual large statues for niches on the facade of Siena's Duomo, on which he was working as an architect, furthering his father's innovations in descriptive storytelling. **Andrea Pisano** (no relation) picked up the thread in Florence when in 1330 he cast the first set of bronze baptistery doors in the now-established Gothic style.

Byzantine tradition kept its hold over painting for quite a while, and the Gothic didn't catch on in this medium until the end of the 13th century. When it did, humanist philosophy was also starting to catch on. Humanism was reviving academic interest in the classical world and its philosophy and architecture, and it was encouraging a closer examination and contemplation of the natural world and everyday life—as opposed to the medieval habit of chaining all intellectual pursuits to theology and religious pondering.

True, in the 1280s Florentine master painter **Cimabue** was beginning to infuse his religious art with more human pathos than Byzantine custom had ever seen, and his Sienese compatriot (some say student) **Duccio** was beginning to adapt a narrative naturalism to his decorative Byzantine style (see "The Sienese School," below). But when the Gothic style finally did catch up to painting, it did so with a vengeance and almost vaulted over the Gothic mind-set to land squarely in the Renaissance. When the Gothic style entered the realm of painting, its avatar was Giotto.

THE TRECENTO: SEEDS OF RENAISSANCE PAINTING In the 1290s, **Giotto di Bondone**—best known as a frescoist who left us masterpiece cycles in Assisi's Basilica di San Francesco, Florence's Santa Croce, and Padua's Cappella

Scrovegni—completely broke away from the styling of his teacher, Cimabue, and invented his own method of painting, steeped in the ideas of humanism and grounded in an earthy realism (see "The Genius of Giotto," in chapter 12, for more information). What he did was to give his characters real human faces displaying fundamental emotions; to use light and shadow to mold his figures, giving them bulk under their robes; to employ foreshortened architecture not only to provide a stage-set backdrop but also, and this was key, to give the paintings depth and real space (he let you see through painted windows to heighten the illusion); and to use simple but strong lines of composition and imbue the figures with movement to create dynamic scenes.

The Giottesque school that grew out of his workshop, and later his fame, kept some of the naturalistic elements and realistic foreshortened backdrops, but Giotto's innovations, and especially his spirit, seemed to stagnate at first. Most trecento works remained fundamentally Gothic, especially as practiced by Giotto's pupil and faithful adherent **Taddeo Gaddi,** his son **Agnolo Gaddi,** and **Andrea Orcagna.**

THE SIENESE SCHOOL Siena adapted some of the humanist elements of realism and naturalism into its Gothic painting but left by the wayside the philosophical hang-ups and quest for perfect perspective the Florentine Renaissance soon embarked on. The Sienese school ended up with a distinctive, highly decorative art form rich in colors, patterns, and gold leaf. It was often as expressive as Giotto's work, but this was achieved more through the sinuous lines of its figures and compositional interplay.

Painters like **Duccio di Buoninsegna** and **Sano di Pietro** gave the Sienese school a focus in the late 1200s, starting to adapt Gothic elements but still working in a Byzantine tradition, and **Jacopo della Quercia** became a towering figure in Sienese Gothic sculpture. One of the first great painters to come out of Duccio's workshop was **Simone Martini,** who developed a much more refined style of the International Gothic flavor and quickly eclipsed the fame of Duccio with his elegant lines and richly patterned fabrics. Two more of Duccio's students were **Ambrogio** and **Pietro Lorenzetti,** both masters of color and composition who infused their art with the naturalness of common life.

The Black Death of 1348 nipped the emergent Sienese school of painting in the bud. The Lorenzetti brothers perished, and the handful of citizens who lived through the plague were more intent on simple survival than on commissioning artworks, leaving Florence's version of the Renaissance to develop and eventually reign supreme.

THE EARLY RENAISSANCE: THE 15TH CENTURY

Tradition holds that the Renaissance began in 1401 when **Lorenzo Ghiberti** won a competition to cast Florence's new set of baptistery doors. Though confined to Gothic frames, Ghiberti still managed to infuse his figures with an entirely new kind of fluid dynamism and emotional naturalism that earned him accolades when the doors were finished more than 20 years later. (He was immediately commissioned to do another set, which became known as the Gates of Paradise, one of the cornerstone pieces of the early Renaissance.)

One of the men Ghiberti competed against for the first commission was **Filippo Brunelleschi,** who decided to study architecture after he lost the sculpture competition. When he came back from a learning trip to Rome, where he examined the classical construction of the ancients, he was full of groundbreaking ideas. These led to his ingenious red-tiled dome over Florence's Duomo as well as to

a new kind of architecture based on the classical orders and mathematical proportions with which he filled Florentine church interiors—all done in smooth white plaster and soft gray stone.

One of his buddies was a sculptor named **Donatello,** who traveled with him to Rome and who on his return cast the first free-standing nude since antiquity (a *David,* now in Florence's Bargello) in an anatomically exacting style of naturalness. Donatello also developed the *schiacciato* technique of carving in very low relief, using the mathematical perspective trick his architect friend Brunelleschi taught him to achieve the illusion of great depth in shallow marble. Another architect friend of Donatello who helped shape Renaissance architecture was **Michelozzo,** Cosimo il Vecchio's favorite builder.

Brunelleschi also passed this concept of perspective along to a young painter named **Masaccio,** who was working with Gothic artist Masolino. Masaccio added it to his experimental bag of tricks, which included using a harsh light to model his figures in light and shadow, bold brushstrokes and foreshortened limbs to imply movement and depth, and an unrelenting realism. He used all of these to create the unprecedented frescoes in Florence's Cappella Brancacci. Part of his secret for creating figures of realistic bulk and volume he learned from studying the sculptures of Donatello and of another friend, **Luca della Robbia,** who besides working on marble and bronze developed a new way to fuse colored enamel to terra cotta and went on to found a popular workshop in the medium that he handed down first to his nephew Andrea, and then his son Giovanni. Masaccio finally got the precision perspective down to a science when painting Santa Maria Novella's *Trinità* (1428), thereby inaugurating the full-blown Renaissance in painting. He died at age 27.

Where Masaccio tried to achieve a new level of clarity and illusionistic reality with his perspective, **Paolo Uccello** became obsessed about experimenting with it, working out the math of perfect perspective and spatial geometry in some paintings and then warping it in others to see how far he could push the tenets for narrative and symbolic ends rather than making his work sheerly representative (at its best in the *Noah* fresco in Santa Maria Novella's Green Cloister).

Though at first it was secondary to the Florentine school, color continued to be of some importance. This is best exemplified by the still somewhat Gothic **Domenico Veneziano** (Venetian artists always were and would remain supreme colorists), who is most important for teaching **Piero della Francesca,** a Sansepolcro artist whose quiet, dramatic style and exploration of the geometry of perspective created crystalline-clear, spacious, haunting paintings with an unfathomable psychology in his figures' expressions.

Lorenzo Monaco imparted what he knew of the Gothic to **Fra' Angelico,** who continued to paint beautiful religious works in the bright colors and intimate detail of a miniaturist or illuminator of Bibles. But Angelico's tiny racks of saints are fully Renaissance if you look closely enough; they're well modeled and lifelike, set in a plane of perspective with a strong single light source.

Fra' Filippo Lippi started a long trend toward tall, thin Madonnas and mischievous angels. His sure lines, realistic depictions, and suffused color palette made him popular and brought into his *bottega* (workshop) apprentices like **Sandro Botticelli,** who would continue to paint exceedingly graceful scenes and flowing drapery that helped make his compositions some of the most fluid of the Renaissance. The son of Botticelli's teacher became Botticelli's own pupil, and **Filippino Lippi** carried on the

workshop's tradition. But Filippino also seemed to add back some of the earthiness seen in the works being turned out by the high-production workshop of **Domenico Ghirlandaio.** Ghirlandaio stayed popular by producing scenes of architectural unity and firmness, figurative grace, and complex coloring—and by adding in plenty of portraits of the commissioner's family members. In 1488, one of the apprentices in his workshop was a young Michelangelo Buonarroti.

That year also saw the death of one of the more innovative sculptor/painters, **Andrea del Verrocchio,** whose quest for hyperrealism and detailing in his carefully created bronzes and marbles and his few surviving exactingly painted panels were to greatly influence a young pupil of his studio, Leonardo da Vinci. The stage was set for new artists, masters on the scale of Giotto and Masaccio, to emerge and define the High Renaissance.

THE HIGH RENAISSANCE: THE LATE 15TH TO MID–16TH CENTURY

One of Piero della Francesca's students was **Luca Signorelli,** a Cortonan whose mastery of the male nude in such works as his Cappella San Brizio in Orvieto had a great effect on the painting of Michelangelo. His highly modeled figures of colorful and incisive geometry shared many similarities with the works of the nearby Umbrian school being developed by another of Piero's protégés, **Perugino,** who also studied alongside Leonardo da Vinci in Verrocchio's *bottega* and whose ethereal blues and greens, beautiful landscapes, and limpid lighting would be further refined by his student **Pinturicchio.**

Back in Florence, **Leonardo da Vinci** was developing a highly realistic style in the 1480s. His patented sfumato technique revolutionized perspective by softly blurring the lines of figures and creating different planes of distance basically by throwing far-off objects out of focus. Leonardo also studied anatomy with a frightening intensity, drawing exacting models of human and animal bodies in various degrees of dissection just to find out exactly how to paint joints bending and muscles rippling in a realistic manner. He sketched swirls of water flowing and horses rearing, always trying to catch the essential inner motion of the world. In his spare time, he designed scientific inventions (usually on paper) such as parachutes, machine guns, water screws, and a few helicopters.

Michelangelo Buonarroti left Ghirlandaio's fresco studio to study sculpture under the tutelage of Donatello's protégé, **Bertoldo,** and by age 23, following his first success in Rome with the *Pietà* in St. Peter's, had established himself as the foremost sculptor of his age with the gargantuan *David.* He's considered by many to be the first artist ever to surpass the ancients in terms of creating muscular bodies that (besides being naturally accurate) were proportioned for the greatest symbolic impact of grace and power. Michelangelo also revolutionized painting with his frescoes on the ceiling of Rome's Sistine Chapel (also evident in Florence's *Doni Tondo,* his only panel painting), where his twisting, muscularly modeled figures, limpid light, bold brush strokes, and revolutionary color palette of oranges, turquoises, yellows, and greens flabbergasted an entire generation of artists and established him as one of the greatest painters of his age. Before his death at the ripe old age of 89 in 1564, he went on to design innovative architecture (the Laurentian Library in Florence and St. Peter's Dome in Rome) and write some pretty good Renaissance sonnets, too.

Perugino's star pupil, **Raphael,** melded the clarity and grace he learned from the Umbrian school with the sfumato of

The Best of Michelangelo

Il Gigante, better known as ***David,*** was the summation of Michelangelo's greatest obsession: the perfect nude male body.

Leonardo and the sweeping earthy realism of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel paintings. He created paintings that carried the picture-perfect grace and penetrating emotion to new heights, but his career was cut short with an early death in 1520 at age 37.

THE MANNERIST EXPERIMENT

Eventually the High Renaissance began to feed off itself, producing vapid works of technical perfection but little substance, perhaps best exemplified by the painting of **Giorgio Vasari.** As Florentine art stagnated, several artists sought ways out of the downward spiral.

Mannerism was the most interesting attempt, a movement within the High Renaissance that found its muse in the extreme torsion of Michelangelo's figures—in sculpture and painting—and his unusual use of oranges, greens, and other nontraditional colors, most especially in the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Other artists took these ideas and ran them to their logical limits, with such painters as **Andrea del Sarto, Rosso Fiorentino, Pontormo,** Sienese **Domenico Beccafumi,** and **il Parmigianino** elongating their figures, twisting the bodies in muscularly improbable ways—waifish women with grotesquely long necks and pointy heads ran rampant—and mixing increasingly garish color palettes.

The sculptors fared perhaps better with the idea, producing for the first time statues that needed to be looked at from multiple angles to be fully appreciated, such as **Giambologna**'s *Rape of the Sabines* under Florence's Loggia dei Lanzi and the *Fountain of the Moors* at Livorno's harbor by his student, **Pietro Tacca.**

THE BAROQUE: THE MID–16TH TO 18TH CENTURIES

The experiments of the Mannerists soon gave way to the excesses of the baroque. Architecturally, the baroque era rehashed and reinterpreted yet again the neoclassical forms of the Renaissance, introducing ellipses and more radically complicated geometric lines, curves, and mathematics to replace the right angles and simple arches of traditional buildings. **Bernardo Buontalenti** was the main Tuscan architect of note in the period, and he worked extensively for the Medici, building them villas and sumptuous fanciful gardens. His more accessible works in Florence include the Tribune in the Uffizi, the facade of Santa Trinita, grottoes in the Giardino Boboli, and the Medici Forte di Belvedere. His greatest single achievement, however, was the city of Livorno, a beautiful bit of city planning he performed for the Medici in 1576. But the best of baroque architecture was raised in Rome on the blueprints of masters Bernini and Borromini.

The baroque artists achieved some success in the field of church facades and altar frames. At their most restrained, they produced facades like those on Florence's Ognissanti and half a dozen churches in Siena, interiors like that of Florence's Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi, and successful chapel ensembles in the cathedrals of Volterra and Siena (the latter one of master **Gian Lorenzo Bernini**'s few works in Tuscany). But mainly they acted more like interior decorators with extremely bad taste—in the era of the Medici grand dukes and other over-rich princelings, the

more different types of expensive marbles you could piece together to decorate a chapel, the better. The Medici Cappella dei Principi (Chapel of the Princes) in Florence is the perfect nauseating example.

Rococo was the baroque gone awry, a world of dripping stuccoes and cotton-candy love scenes on canvas, of which you can be thankful very little has survived in Tuscany or Umbria.

FROM THE NEOCLASSICAL TO THE PRESENT

Italy didn't have a major hand in developing many new styles after the baroque, though 19th-century works by Italy's master **neoclassical** sculptor Canova are scattered around Tuscany and Umbria, and Tuscany had one great neoclassical sculptor, **Giovanni Duprè,** born in Siena in 1817. The late 19th century also saw many of the faceless churches clad with fanciful "neo-Gothic" facades designed in admiring imitation of the time period in which the buildings were originally raised, but the prevailing tastes also led the romantic refurbishers to set most of these with glittering Venetian mosaics.

Tuscany had a brief moment in a very localized limelight again from the 1860s to around 1900 when the **Macchiaioli,** a group of artists in Florence and Livorno, junked the old styles and concentrated on exploring the structure of light and color in painting, concerned with the effect of the individual *macchie,* or marks of paint on the canvas. In effect, it was kind of a Tuscan Impressionism.

Some 20th-century Tuscan talents are Livorno's **Modigliani,** who garnered fame in France for his innovative oblong portraits; the futurist **Gino Severini** from Cortona; and **Marino Marini,** a Pistoian crafter of stylized bronze horses. In architecture, Tuscany had the privilege of hosting the only major new movement in Italy, its own variant on Art Deco (Art Nouveau in France) called the **Liberty Style.**

As the focus of Western painting and sculpture migrated to countries like France and the United States in the 20th century, Italy turned its artistic energies mainly to the cinema, fashion (Armani, Gucci, Versace, Pucci, and the like)—an industry in which Florence shines—and the manufacture of sleek, fun, and often mind-bogglingly useful industrial design objects like Alessi teakettles, Pavoni coffee machines, Olivetti typewriters, and Ferraris.

THE MODERN CONUNDRUM

Although some towns (such as San Gimignano, Spoleto, and Pistoia) actively encourage the development of contemporary art, most Tuscan and Umbrian cities are firmly fixed in, and fixated on, their greatest era. Choosing which artistic epoch to preserve is a tough judgment call to make in a country so steeped in multiple layers of artistic and cultural history, and it's an issue constantly debated across Italy.

Each city chooses differently, motivated by economic tourist pressures, local academic preferences, and deeply instilled senses of pride about certain periods. Florence, for one, is firmly entrenched in the Renaissance and refuses to look forward or backward. Florentines could care less about the Roman ruins lying under their streets, and over the past century have in many churches stripped off baroque and later accretions to return buildings to their "pure" Renaissance (or late Gothic, if there's a Giotto involved) state.

And so, Volterra touts the Etruscan urns in its archaeological museum but not the 15th-century frescoes in San Francesco, and Siena shows you its medieval streets and Gothic palaces but never calls much attention to the baroque church facades. Heaven forbid the much-maligned baroque ever becomes fashionable again or our descendants will detest us for clearing away fanciful baroque altars to reveal the medieval bricks beneath as much as we revile the 18th-century gentlemen who calmly whitewashed over Giotto's frescoes in Santa Croce.

4 TUSCANY & UMBRIA IN POPULAR CULTURE

LITERATURE

NONFICTION Aside from the more scholarly texts, the cornerstone of any traveler's education on this part of the world is Mary McCarthy's *The Stones of Florence.* It is less of a political treatise along the lines of Paul Ginsborg's seminal work, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988,* and more along the lines of Luigi Barzini's brilliant social commentary *The Italians,* but with a focus on Tuscany alone. When you have finished with McCarthy's book, you should at least leaf through the other two. Don't be put off by the academic sound of Ginsborg's work. It is extremely readable, comical at times, and is probably the most oft-quoted history of modern Italy in the English-speaking world. Few other countries have suffered or enjoyed the same foreign examination of their national character and culture, from the works of Shelly, Keats, and D. H. Lawrence, to more pop-culture musings, a la Frances Mayes. If you haven't done so already, you should familiarize yourself with Mayes' *Under the Tuscan Sun* if only to comprehend the admiration of those who come to Cortona to re-live her bucolic lifestyle, or to understand the disbelief of locals who marvel that the seemingly mundane effort of hiring a plumber can be so fascinating. (The only book with a bigger payout for Tuscany these days has been Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code,* which spawned a cottage industry of mini-museums dedicated to the Leonardo local lore.) The U.K.-born novelist Tim Parks is a little more seasoned in his assessment, and his range of nonfiction topics now extends south of the Po with the 2005 publication of *Medici Money.* It is a fascinating tale about the rise of the family's wealth through pioneer banking methods, their struggle with religious norms, and the way they cleverly amassed power by generating loyalty.

FICTION You will miss most of the references and inside jokes in Florence if you haven't brushed up on Dante. Butchers quote it at will, the names of the people and places in the *Divine Comedy* are everywhere from paintings to dessert menus, and, aside from all this, this is the literature that gave a diverse country a language. But because the language of Dante's lyric poetry was only sparingly spoken and understood by the masses until the last century, the written Italian word never had the same reach as, say, English, French, or Russian in the 18th and 19th centuries. There are few Italian novelists as well-known as literary figures from those countries. After the days of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio and beyond the Aretine artist and writer Giorgio Vasari in the 16th century, you need to dig pretty deep to find any Tuscan literary giants. One exception might be Carlo Collodi, who gave the world a brilliant tale of a wooden boy with a very long nose. The other name you might recognize when traveling there is that of Nobel Prize–winning poet Giosuè Carducci, for whom the town Castagneto Carducci, near Bolgheri, is named. While its long list of writers might have been known only locally, Tuscany was content to delight the rest of world with its art and its music.

FILM

When asked to think of famous Tuscan filmmakers, two come to mind: Franco Zeffirelli and the inimitable Roberto Benigni. Zeffirelli profiles his native Florence in *Tea With Mussolini* (1999). It is a story of a group of expat British women during the Fascist era, who take their tea

every afternoon at the Uffizi until they are driven off to San Gimignano. Note that some of the Florence scenes are shot in a *pensione* reviewed in this book, the Sorelle Bandini (p. 113). For his part, Benigni will be remembered mostly for *Life Is Beautiful* (1998), a tale of a Tuscan family during the Holocaust. The first half is set in Arezzo, and visitors to the city today can pick out the window on Piazza Grande where the character played by Benigni famously shouts up to Maria for the key. Two other of his pictures are unmistakably Tuscan: *Pinocchio* (2002), based of course on the mythical marionette born in the town of Collodi (p. 270, and *Il Mostro* (1994), a hysterical story of mistaken identity, and a near-parody on the real-life saga of the so-called Monster of Florence. That is the Tuscany of popular Italian film, at least. Countless foreign films use the Central Italian countryside as a backdrop, including *Hannibal* (2001), the sequel to the classic horror film *The Silence of the Lambs,* and most notably, a film version of Frances Mayes' book *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003), shot mainly around Cortona and Lake Trasimeno in Umbria. The most famous Florentine backdrop is probably the 1985 classic *A Room with a View,* based on the E. M. Forster novel. The views of the Arno come from the window of room No. 414 in the Hotel degli Orafi.

TUSCAN & UMBRIAN MUSIC

Florence and Tuscany contributed greatly to the transformation and progress of music in Europe, starting in the 11th century with **Guido d'Arezzo,** widely regarded as the man who gave the world the musical staff. As a Benedictine monk, he was exposed to his share of Gregorian chants, and devised a way for other monks to learn them quickly; thus it is Guido whom the world can thank for first teaching aspiring musicians their *do re mi*s. Four centuries later, Tuscany produced another pioneer in musical theory, a Pisan named **Vincenzo Galilei.** While his son Galileo garnered wider fame for his outlandish theories, Vincenzo advanced some heretical notions himself, notably his tolerance of dissonance throughout his pieces and his advancing of the recitative in opera, a simple delivery of the verses nearer to ordinary speech. These and other late Renaissance movements were fostered in a circle of artists and philosophers in Count Giovanni de' Bardi's court, known as the **Florentine Camerata.** Galilei concerned himself principally with madrigals, a form of singing not in Latin, but in the vernacular, which came into vogue soon after Dante started writing in the local tongue.

Over the years, northern Italian cities such as Cremona, Parma, and Venice punched above their weight in producing highly touted composers, but in 1858 Tuscany put out one of the best of all time: **Giacomo Puccini.** Born in Lucca, Puccini studied in Milan but returned to a villa in northwestern Tuscany to produce his seminal works: *La Bohème, Tosca, Madama Butterfly,* and his final composition, *Turandot.* How many sopranos have pleaded their case in his aria *O mio babbino caro* (Oh my dear papa) from his opera *Gianni Schicchi?* How many tenors have brought audiences to tears with *Nessun dorma* (None shall sleep), an aria from his opera *Turandot?* (Among them is **Andrea Bocelli,** the world-renowned Italian tenor who is from Pisa, a short carriage ride away from Puccini's hometown.) The maestro's operas can be heard nightly in Lucca, at a concert series known as **Puccini e la sua Lucca,** one of a myriad of festivals here dedicated to Italian music (p. 272). Nearly every city in Tuscany and Umbria has its own international music festival, most notably the Spoleto Festival ("Festival dei Due Mondi"; p. 412), Estate Fiesolana (p. 187), and Umbria Jazz (p. 373).

5 EATING & DRINKING IN FLORENCE, TUSCANY & UMBRIA

WHAT TO EAT

Let's set the record straight on one thing: It was the Tuscans who taught the French how to cook. French cuisine as we know it was founded in the court of Henry II, whose kitchen was staffed by Tuscan cooks imported by his Florentine wife, Catherine de' Medici.

The genius of Tuscan cooking is in its simplicity. Fancy sauces aren't needed to hide the food because Tuscans use pure, strong flavors and the freshest of ingredients. The great dishes are in fact very basic: homemade ribbons of egg pasta in hare sauce, game or free-range domestic animal meats grilled over wood coals, and beans simmered in earthenware pots.

Tuscans and Umbrians alike make only a sparing use of seasonings: salt, pepper, and their library of herbs (basil, rosemary, tarragon, sage, oregano, and the like). The most prominent cooking additives are **wine** and **olive oil.** Tuscan oil is some of the finest in the world, especially oil produced around Lucca, and comes in several gradients depending on the level of acidity. The more the olives are bruised before being pressed, the higher the acidity will be, which is why most olive picking is still done by delicate hands and not brutish machines. I don't know why they bother classifying some oils as *vergine, fino vergine,* or *soprafino vergine,* because no self-respecting Italian would use anything but *extra vergine* (extra virgin), some of which is rated DOC and DOCG, just like wine. Olives are harvested and pressed in October, and the oil is best fresh.

Another popular, and expensive, Tuscan and Umbrian garnish is the *tartufo,* or **truffle.** It's a fungal tuber (read: mushroom) that grows inexplicably around the roots of certain trees in certain soils under certain conditions that have for centuries baffled the food industry desperate to farm these lucrative little buggers.

Natural truffles come in both black (rare) and white (exceedingly rare) varieties, and they turn up in only very few areas of the world. Tuscany and Umbria are blessed to have both kinds growing underfoot, the black in many areas, especially Spoleto, and the white around San Miniato in Tuscany and Gubbio in Umbria. Fall is truffle season.

Some of the ingredients in Tuscan cooking may seem suspiciously trendy, but Tuscans have been eating *caprino* goat cheese, sun-dried tomatoes, arugula, and focaccia sandwiches for generations. And Tuscans have a Goldilocks complex whereby they undercook their meat, overcook their vegetables, but make their pasta just right—by which I mean *al dente* ("to the teeth"), softened enough for eating but with a stiff bite to the very core and never, ever soggy.

For a more complete **list of menu items and cooking terms,** turn to "Italian Menu Terms," in chapter 15.

Tuscan & Umbrian Cuisine

ANTIPASTO The classic Tuscan appetizer is an ***antipasto misto,*** which simply means "mixed." It usually entails *affettati misti* and *crostini misti,* both of which can be ordered alone as well. The former is a plate of sliced cured meats and salami, like *prosciutto* (salt-cured ham), *capocollo* (meaty pork salami), *finocchiata* (capocollo with fennel seeds), and *sopressata* (gelatinous headcheese—better than it sounds). ***Crostini*** are little rounds of toast spread with various pâtés, the most popular being *di fegatini* (chicken liver flavored with anchovy paste and capers) and *di milza* (spleen), though you'll also often get

mushrooms, tomatoes, a cheesy sauce, or (especially in Umbria) a truffle paste.

Another popular appetizer is simple ***bruschetta*** (in Tuscany often called *fettunta*), a slab of peasant bread toasted on the grill, rubbed with a garlic clove, drizzled with extra-virgin olive oil, and sprinkled with coarse salt—order it *al pomodoro* for a pile of cubed tomatoes and torn basil leaves added on top. In summer, you'll also be offered ***panzanella,*** a kind of cold salad made of stale bread soaked in cold water and vinegar mixed with diced tomatoes, onions, and basil, all sprinkled with olive oil. A ***pinzimonio*** is a selection of raw vegetables (celery, fennel, peppers, and the like) with olive oil in which to dip them.

PRIMI Tuscan first courses come in three types. Of the ***zuppa*** or ***minestra*** (soup), the top dog is ***ribollita,*** literally "reboiled," because it's made the day before and reboiled before serving. It's a chunky soup closer to stew than anything else. The prime ingredients are black cabbage, bean purée, and whatever vegetables *Mamma* taught you to add in poured over stale peasant bread. ***Zuppa di fagioli*** (bean soup) can mean either this or a soupier breadless alternative.

Pasta is the most famous Italian primo, and in Tuscany the king is ***pappardelle alla lepre*** (very wide egg noodles in a strong-flavored sauce of wild hare). From somewhere around Siena and south, every town has its own name for the simple homemade pasta that's basically durum wheat mixed with water and rolled between the hands into chewy fat spaghetti. In Siena province, it's called ***pici*** or ***pinci;*** around Orvieto, order ***umbrichelli;*** and in Assisi or Spoleto, call it ***stringozzi*** (or some variant there of). It's usually served in a basic tomato sauce or ***alla carrettiera*** (a tomato sauce spiked with peperoncini hot peppers).

Other typical pasta dishes are ***penne strascicate*** (a tomato-and-cream ragù) and ***strozzapreti,*** "priest stranglers," because clerics would supposedly choke on these rich ricotta-and-spinach dumplings (sometimes called *gnudi*—nude since they're basically ravioli filling without the clothing of a pasta pocket).

Risotto is a thick, sticky rice dish made with boiled-down soup stock, popular in the north of Italy. Tuscans and Umbrians often serve up a few versions, usually *ai funghi* (with mushrooms) or *ai asparagi* (with wild asparagus).

SECONDI Tuscans are unabashed carnivores, and the main course is almost always meat, usually grilled. Italians like their grilled meat as close to raw as rare can get, so if you prefer it a bit more brown, order your bistecca *ben cotta* (well done, which just might get you something close to medium).

The king is the mighty ***bistecca alla fiorentina,*** traditionally made from thick T-bone steak cut from the sirloin and enveloping the tenderloin of the snow-white muscular cattle raised in the Chiana valley, although lately the meat is just as often imported. This is grilled over glowing wood coals, then brushed with extra-virgin olive oil and sprinkled with cracked black pepper. So simple, so good. The steaks average 1 to 2 inches thick and weigh about 3 to 4 pounds. Order a powerhouse red wine (this is the time for Brunello) and a plate of *fagioli* (white beans) on the side, and then cancel all meal plans for the next few days.

More everyday secondi are ***grigliata mista*** (mixed grill that may include lamb, sausage, chicken, or steak), ***arista*** (they usually leave off the *di maiale* because this dish invariably consists of slices of roast pork loin), ***fritto misto*** (mix of chicken, lamb, sweetbreads, artichokes, and zucchini dipped in bready egg batter and deep-fried in olive oil), and any wild game, especially ***cinghiale*** (wild boar), which is often cooked *in umido* (stewed with tomatoes), as well as domesticated gamelike

coniglio (rabbit) and ***anatra*** (duck). They cook ***pollo*** (chicken) *arrosto* (roasted), *alla diavola* (with hot spices), or *al mattone* (cooked under the weight of a hot brick), but usually tend to dry it out in doing so. A ***lombatina di vitello*** is a simple veal chop, prepared in myriad ways.

Tuscans and Umbrians are very fond of the ***spiedino*** (shish-kebob grill) and seem to like spitting small fowl, such as the tiny ***tordo*** (thrush) and hapless ***piccione*** (pigeon), along with the same mix of meats in a ***grigliata mista*** with maybe an onion added in. One Tuscan specialty to which Florentines are particularly beholden is ***trippa*** (tripe, the stomach lining of a cow), most popularly served as ***trippa alla fiorentina,*** tripe strips or cubes casseroled with vegetables and topped with tomato sauce and *parmigiano.* ***Cibrèo*** is another local Florentine dish against which you might want to be vigilant—it's a mix of cockscombs and chicken livers mixed with beans and egg yolks and served on toast.

Aside from **fresh fish,** both Tuscans and Umbrians make widespread use of ***baccalà,*** salt-cured cod they soften in water before cooking and often serve *alla livornese* (cooked with tomatoes and other veggies in white wine and olive oil, occasionally with some tripe thrown in for good measure).

CONTORNI Tuscans are called the *mangiafagioli* (bean-eaters) by other Italians. And ***fagioli*** here, the Italian word for beans in general, almost invariably means white cannellini beans (sometimes red kidney beans or green broad beans will show up, increasingly as you get into Umbria). However, a simple plate filled with nothing but *fagioli* or ***fagioli in fiasco,*** cooked al dente with a liberal supply of olive oil poured on and ground black pepper for taste, is somehow divine within Tuscany's borders. For something zestier, order ***fagioli all'uccelletto,*** in which the beans are stewed with tomatoes and sage.

In Umbria, you can get a plate of ***lenticchie di Castellúccio,*** some of the world's best midget lentil beans. It's a good thing Tuscans and Umbrians cook their beans right, because they tend to boil their other favorite veggie, ***spinaci*** (spinach) until it's dead, and you end up with a pile of green on your plate with very little molecular cohesion left.

Any other vegetable—***melanzane*** (eggplant), ***pomodoro*** (tomato), or ***peperone*** (bell pepper)—is usually sliced thin, grilled, and served swimming in olive oil. About the only other side dish central Italians turn to is ***patate*** (potatoes), either *arrosto* (roasted and covered with olive oil and rosemary) or *fritte* (the increasingly popular french fries).

DOLCI Tuscany's best sweet is the dreamy ***gelato,*** a dense Italian version of ice cream (see the box "A Big Step above Ice Cream: Florentine Gelato," in chapter 5, for details), which you should ideally get at a proper gelateria and not in a restaurant. The main dish to have after dinner, however, is ***cantucci con vin santo.*** *Cantucci,* or *biscotti di Prato* in that town most famed for them, are the Tuscan variant on the twice-baked hard almond crescent cookies called *biscotti,* usually eaten by dunking them in a small glass of the sweet dessert wine vin santo.

Florentine Wisdom

Chi beve vino prima della minestra, saluta il medico dalla finestra. (He who drinks wine before his soup, waves to the doctor from his own window.)

Good Year or Bad?

Because most producers in Tuscany and Umbria are subject to the same basic weather patterns, the generally good and bad years for most labels are, by and large, the same: 1990 and 1993 to 1995 are excellent years. 1997 is what they call a 1-year-in-50, which means you shouldn't hesitate to scoop up any '97 bottles (if you can still find any) even at what seem to be inflated prices—it'll be half a century before stuff this good comes around again. Steer clear of 1991, 1992, and 2003. In this decade, 2001, 2004, and 2007 are the most remarkable years for wine.

Panforte is a very dense fruitcake. (One of Siena's specialties, *pan pepato,* is its medieval predecessor, with more exotic spices added into the sweetness.) A ***castagnaccio*** is a dense cake made of chestnut flour and topped with pine nuts; ***necci*** are chestnut-flour crepes; and a ***zuccotto*** is a concentration of calories in the form of sponge cake filled with *semifreddo* moussed chocolate, cream, candied fruit, and nuts. Other cookies are ***ricciarelli*** of honeyed marzipan (a sugar/honey almond paste), ***brutti ma buoni*** (ugly but good chewy almond-sugar cookies), and ***ossi dei morti*** (bones of the dead—light, crumble-in-your-mouth matrices of sugar).

WHAT TO DRINK

Tuscany and Umbria have been wine country for thousands of years, ever since the Etruscans shipped their popular brews south to thirsty Romans and up to the Gauls of France. Since the days they were praised by Pliny the Elder, Tuscan wines have been keenly sought after, and the region is by far the most famous wine zone in Italy, which as a country is the largest producer of wine in the world.

To Italians, wine is the obvious only choice of beverage with dinner, so in most restaurants your only decision will be ***rosso o bianco*** (red or white). Unless you want to celebrate some special occasion or are in the mood to expand your connoisseurship, the ***vino della casa*** (house wine) will almost invariably do wonderfully. Sparkling wine, which you'll usually find imported from other Italian zones (the most famous of which is Asti), is called ***spumante.*** (Those refraining from alcohol for personal or health reasons needn't worry—you won't be met with scowls or discouragement if all you order is a bottle of mineral water; wine consumption is expected at meals but certainly not required.)

To test out a few glasses without the full meal, drop by an **enoteca,** a wine shop or wine bar, where you can often sample before you buy (any regular bar will also pour you a glass of house wine for 2€ to 3€). When tooling around the wine-heavy countryside of Tuscany or Umbria, any sign that touts ***vendita diretta*** means the owner of those vines will sell to you direct. I've recommended individual producers for the major wines in each relevant chapter, and for a wine-by-wine overview of the best *vini* and their producers, see "The Best Wines & Vineyards," in chapter 1.

CLASSIFICATIONS In 1963, Italy's wine fell into two classifications, table wine and DOC. **DOC *(Denominazione di Origine Controllata)*** wines are merely those that a government board guarantees have come from an official wine-producing area and that meet the standard for carrying a certain name on the label. A

Florentine Wisdom

Il buon vino non ha bisogno di frasca. (A good wine doesn't need to be served in a bottle.)

vino di tavola (table wine) classification merely means a bottle doesn't fit the pre-established standards and is no reflection of the wine's quality (see below).

In 1980, a new category was added. **DOCG** (the *G* stands for *Garantita*) is granted to wines with a certain subjective high quality. Traditionally, DOCG labels were merely the highest-profile wines that lobbied for the status (getting DOC or DOCG vastly improves reputations and therefore sales, though the costs of putting up the wine annually for testing are high). In 1992, the laws were rewritten and Italy's original list of six DOCG wines (three of which were Tuscan) jumped to 15. Six of these are Tuscans (Brunello di Montalcino, Carmignano, Chianti, Chianti Classico, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, and Vernaccia di San Gimignano) and two are Umbrian (Sagrantino di Montefalco and Torgiano Rosso Riserva).

Though ***vino di tavola*** usually connotes a quaffable house wine from some indeterminate local producer, in recent years this classification of table wine was the only outlet for estates that wanted to experiment with nontraditional mixtures. Many respectable producers started mixing varietals with French grapes, such as cabernet and chardonnay, to produce wines that, though complex and of high quality, don't fall into the conservative DOC system. Such a wine could, by law, only be called a lowly *vino di tavola.* These highbred wines became known as **Supertuscans** or ***super vini di tavola.*** There's no guaranteeing the quality of these experimental wines, yet most self-respecting producers won't put on the market a failure or something undrinkable. If you come across a 23€ bottle with a fanciful name marked "table wine," it's probably a Supertuscan.

Even the venerable chianti-based wine empire of the Antinori came up with a sangiovese-cabernet mix they call **Tignanello;** they also put out a recommendable full-fledged cabernet sauvignon under the name **Solaia.** Perhaps the highest-profile Supertuscan is **Sassicaia di Bolgheri,** a huge and complex cabernet blend that lives for decades and is priced accordingly. It's produced by a single estate near the coast south of Livorno and, despite the popular status of more well-known wines such as Brunello, is perhaps Italy's finest red wine. The cabernet grapevines used here were transplanted from the Château Lafite in the 1940s.

Wine classification in Italy is changing slowly, as 1992 laws, which also created the **IGT** ***(Indicazione Geografica Tipica),*** are being applied gradually to regional wine styles.

The practical upshot of all this is that DOC and DOCG wines represent the best of traditional wine formulas. IGT wines are for unique wines from even smaller specific areas or single vintners, and this is one of the fastest growing categories among the better wines. *Vino da tavola,* while still sometimes slapped on $100 bottles of vineyard one-offs, is increasingly just used for what it was originally intended to mean: simple, hearty, tasty table wines that go well with any meal but probably won't send wine snobs into ecstasies of flowery poetic description.

TUSCAN WINES Undoubtedly, Italy's most famous wine is the easygoing and

versatile **chianti,** traditionally produced all around central Tuscany. The **Chianti Classico** zone of the tall hills between Florence and Siena produces the oldest, most balanced blends; it was the world's first officially established wine area in 1716. In the 19th century, a more exacting formula for chianti was worked out in the hills between Siena and Florence by Baron Ricasoli, with 75% to 90% sangiovese with other local grapes thrown in to mellow it out and make it more drinkable. Only recently were the DOCG laws controlling chianti relaxed to allow fully sangioveto chiantis to be produced, and today, a Chianti Classico can have anywhere from 70% to 100% sangiovese, often rounded out with an imported cru such as cabernet, merlot, or pinot nero. This has led to a surge in the quality and full-bodiedness of chianti, moving most of it from being a knockabout good table wine to a complex, structured, heavyweight contender in annual wine fairs. Though quality still varies, it's usually thoroughly reliable and is one of the best everyday wines produced anywhere.

Other chianti zones are **Chianti Colli Fiorentini,** Florence's table wine; **Chianti Colli Senesi,** the largest zone, filling in gaps around Siena where yield regulations keep them from growing Brunello, Vino Nobile, or Vernaccia (the chianti can be very good but is unreliable); **Chianti Colli Aretine,** a mellow edition; **Chianti Colli Pisane,** the featherweight contender; **Chianti Montalbano,** the juicy-fruits of the gang; and **Chianti Rúfina**—not to be confused with Ruffino, one of the biggest Chianti Classico houses—which flexes its muscle east of Florence to make chiantis of some complexity and style.

Tuscany's powerhouse red wine—and, depending on whom you ask, the number-one or number-two wine in all of Italy—is **Brunello di Montalcino.** It was developed in the 18th century when the Biondi-Santi vineyards were hit with a fungus that left only the dusty slate-blue *sangiovese grosso* grapes alive. It was the first wine to be granted DOCG status. Brunello is 100% *sangiovese grosso,* aged for 4 years (5 for the *riserva* labels), most of it in oak barrels. It's a deep-ruby elixir of remarkable complexity, a full mouth feel, long flavors, and usually a good deal of tannins. It needs steak or game dishes to let it shine; for a lighter-weight adventure try the **Rosso di Montalcino,** a younger, fruitier version.

Vino Nobile di Montepulciano is Tuscany's other long-respected red, a deep-garnet liquid that rolls around the tongue with a lasting flavor of fruits, violets, and damp soil. It's good paired with meats but also with fruit, bread, and cheese on a picnic. Significantly cheaper than Brunello, it's a less complex but more versatile wine.

Two of the oldest wine zones, also founded in 1716, border Florence, and both have made use of French grapes since the 18th century. The tiny DOC **Pomino** zone to the east of Florence (abutting Chianti Rúfina territory) mixes cabernet, merlot, and sometimes pinot noir into its sangiovese for a pleasant red. DOCG **Carmignano,** near Prato between Florence and Lucca, tosses cabernet into the chianti-like brew to make some of Tuscany's freshest, yet still refined and interesting, wines. Although they age well and keep forever, these wines can also be drunk practically straight out of the barrel.

More recent phenomena, pioneered by the Antinori family in the 1970s, are the so-called Supertuscans, made predominantly of cabernet and merlot along with just a smattering of the local Sangiovese grapes. The two most famous of these are Sassicaia and Ornellaia, produced near the town of Bolgheri in southwest Tuscany. Ornellaia produces wines in the **Bolgheri** DOC zone, while **Sassicaia** has its own DOC status—it's a sort of subdivision of

Bolgheri and the only Italian estate occupying its own, exclusive denomination. Consequently, Sassicaia is one of Italy's most prestigious and expensive labels.

Tuscany produces many other fine DOC reds in zones throughout the region, such as the smooth **Rosso delle Colline Lucchesi** around Lucca. One of the best is a Maremma wine, rather trendy in Italy, called **Morellino di Scansano.** Like chianti—to which it's similar but silkier—it's about 80% sangiovese, with some other Tuscan grapes thrown in the mix along with Alicante (a Spanish grape known among the French as grenache).

Tuscany's only white wine of note is **Vernaccia di San Gimignano,** a dry wine of variable quality, but it enjoys the status of being one of Italy's few DOCG whites. Few other whites stand out in Tuscany, though the area around **Pitigliano** and the **Valdichiana** both produce drinkable *vino bianco,* and the Chianti zone is making some headway with its lightweight **Galestro.** Perhaps the finest little-known white is the dry **Montecarlo,** from the hills east of Lucca.

UMBRIAN WINES **Torgiano Rosso Riserva** was made DOCG mainly through the efforts of the Lungarotti vineyards and their **Rubesco** label, a blood-red wine making a strong first impression with a musky tannic bite that fades quickly through black fruit flavors. **Sagrantino di Montefalco** is the heavyweight contender DOCG of Umbrian reds, a purple-dark liquid of long flavors with a rounded mouth feel and a strong, lasting tannic hold. Other good local DOC reds are **Colli Altoberini, Colli del Trasimeno,** and **Colli Perugini** (a young zone; also produces rosé and white).

Umbria's mighty white is the **Orvieto Classico,** an ancient wine that was once an *abboccato* semisweet wine until prevailing tastes led to the mass production of Orvieto Classico *secco,* a dry white that fills wine-store shelves across the world. Interestingly, in Orvieto you can still find the old varieties, a straw-colored wine that not only goes well with food, but actually holds its own as a treat to savor. Another good white made in many zones across Umbria is **Grechetto.**

3

Planning Your Trip to Tuscany & Umbria

The hardest part about planning a trip to Tuscany & Umbria is deciding what *not* to see or do. The two regions are only about the size of New Jersey and Delaware, respectively, but together they contain more than a handful of the most significant monuments on earth and more can't-miss attractions and experiences than we could ever fit in this book. The number one regret I hear from returning tourists is that they just didn't have time to see everything.

With such a variety on offer, Tuscany demands that you know what your interests are and plan accordingly. This is especially true when it comes to timing your trip. If you love the idea of seeing the Palio, driving through fields of sunflowers and lounging by a pool in the vineyards, then obviously summer is the right choice for you. But that would be a bad time to visit for those who, say, prefer to spend time admiring Renaissance masterpieces and strolling through romantic alleyways. They would walk away with a much more fulfilling experience in February, rather than battling the crowds and the heat in July. Food buffs and wine connoisseurs should aim for the fall, when the grapes are on the vine, the truffle season is underway, and the harvest is in full swing. Most importantly, by scanning the list of festivals that follows, the choice might be made for you, and you won't have that horrible sensation of flying home one day before the start of an event you've always wanted to see.

Fortunately, a trip to Italy in this day and age does not require the advance planning it once did. By all means, if you intend to come in high season, book your hotel and rental car well ahead of time, and particularly your tickets to major attractions. (I mentioned the Palio, for example. The best seats sell out more than a year in advance.) From flights to hotels and train tickets, you'll always save money by booking ahead. But things like currency, communications, and transportation are truly a breeze compared to what they were even 10 years ago. There's very little to plan out in advance.

That said, you can never plan too much for your health. While Italian pharmacies are generally similar to American ones and the hospitals are even excellent in many cases, it's always a good idea to have a good supply of prescription drugs, and make sure all of your insurance ducks are in a row.

For additional help in planning your trip and for more on-the-ground resources in Tuscany & Umbria, please turn to chapter 14, "Fast Facts."

1 WHEN TO GO

The best times to visit Tuscany and Umbria are in the spring and fall. Starting in late May, the summer tourist rush really picks up, and from July to mid-September the country is teeming with visitors. August is the worst month to visit. Not only does it get uncomfortably hot, muggy, and crowded (the lines for the Uffizi and the Accademia can stretch for blocks), but the entire country goes on

Hot Tickets

For major events where tickets should be procured well before arriving on the spot, check out **Box Office** at ✆ **055-210-804** or www.boxol.it. They will only deliver tickets to an Italian address, but you can buy ahead of time and pick them up at the booth when you arrive.

vacation at least from August 15 until the end of the month, and many Italians take off the entire month. Many hotels, restaurants, and shops are closed—except at the spas, beaches, and islands, which are where 70% of the Italians are headed. In winter (late Oct to Easter), most sights go to shorter winter hours or are closed for restoration and rearrangement, many hotels and restaurants take a month or two off between November and February, spa and beach destinations become padlocked ghost towns, and it can get much colder than most people expect—it may even snow on occasion.

WEATHER

Tuscany and Umbria cover some pretty diverse terrain and climate areas. Tuscany has lowlands along the coast with the most moderate of climes, but there are also snowcapped Apennine mountains in the north of Tuscany and eastern Umbria that stay cooler throughout the year and can get downright frigid in winter. Both regions are made up primarily of hills, however, and the climate varies with the seasons and the landscape. It can get uncomfortably hot at the height of August in valley cities such as Florence, but the breeze-cooled hill towns are usually eminently livable in summer. The long spring is temperate and very comfortable, with occasional showers. Fall is also fairly mild, with lots of rainfall being the only drawback. Winter, though mild for most months, can get quite cold in late December or January; it can drizzle a great deal, and snowfall isn't impossible.

HOLIDAYS

Official state holidays include January 1, January 6 (Epiphany), Easter Sunday and Monday, April 25 (Liberation Day), May 1 (Labor Day), August 15 (Ferragosto and Assumption Day), November 1 (All Saints' Day), December 8 (Day of the Immaculate Conception), December 25, and December 26 (Santo Stefano). Florence also shuts down to honor its patron, St. John the Baptist, on June 24.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

No Italian village can let the year run its course without a handful of celebrations of church, history, local talent, or just good food and wine. And no visit to Italy is complete without taking part in at least one of them. Those listed below represent merely the biggest and most spectacular Tuscany and Umbria have to offer. Under the introduction to each city throughout this book, you'll find these events described in greater detail, along with dates for smaller *feste* and weekly markets.

For an exhaustive list of events beyond those listed here, check http://events.frommers.com, where you'll find a searchable, up-to-the-minute roster of what's happening in cities all over the world.

JANUARY

Regatta on the Arno, Florence. The city of the Renaissance kicks off the new year with a boat race. Call ✆ **055-23-320** for details. January 1.

Befana (the Christmas Witch) Caroling, Maremma, Tuscany. In the countryside of Tuscany's deep south, carolers costumed as the Christmas witch go from farm to farm and house to house, singing both traditional tunes and modern melodies in honor of the Epiphany. After dark on January 5.

FEBRUARY

Olive and Bruschetta Festival, Spello, Umbria. The town celebrates the olive harvest by drizzling the new oil over toast in a bruschetta fest accompanied by traditional music. Call the tourist office at ✆ **0742-354-459** for more information. February 5.

Carnevale, throughout Italy. Carnival was originally a pagan festival that looked forward to the bounty of spring, but in modern times it has been conveniently grafted onto the last 5 to 10 days before Ash Wednesday, which on the Christian calendar signals the start of the sober Lenten period. Every Italian town celebrates in some way—Venice is famous for it. *Martedì Grasso* is Fat Tuesday, the final day of Carnevale before Lent, and the best of the fest is saved for this time, with parades, fireworks, and the like. The most outstanding Tuscan Rite of Spring occurs in the coastal town of **Viareggio** ★★ (for details, contact the Fondazione Carnevale di Viareggio, Casella Postale, Viareggio; ✆ **0584-1840750;** www.viareggio.ilcarnevale.com), with a colorful and sophisticated parade of mechanized floats subtly lampooning political figures and celebrities. (If you take the train from Florence, your rail ticket will get you a discount on admission to the event.) Other Carnevale festivities worth dropping in on are the costume parade in **San Gimignano** (call ✆ **0577-940-008** for details) and a similar masked procession at **Vinci** (call ✆ **0571-568-012** for details). The week before Ash Wednesday (Feb/early Mar).

MARCH

Torchlit Procession and Pagan Feast, Pitigliano, Tuscany. After the locals set fire to a giant human-shaped straw effigy of winter, they break out the sweets, song, and dance, and party all night on the piazza. For details, call ✆ **0564-614-433.** March 19.

Easter is always a big event. Some of the most colorful yet solemn celebrations are held in St. Francis's Umbrian hometown, **Assisi** (call ✆ **075-812-534** for details), and in **Florence** (see below). Easter Sunday.

***Scoppio del Carro* (Explosion of the Cart),** Florence. Florentines celebrate Easter with Renaissance pyrotechnics. When the bishop inside the cathedral gets to the "Gloria" part of High Mass, a mechanical dove is let loose from high over the altar, and it slides down a wire toward the front doors. Waiting for it on Piazza del Duomo outside is a tall 18th-century cart—pulled there by two snowy white oxen and loaded with fireworks—which the dove ignites (it's hoped). (No one seems at all concerned that this occurs within spitting distance of the Baptistery's *Gates of Paradise.*) Contact the tourist office at ✆ **055-290-832** for details. Easter Sunday.

National Kite-Flying Championship, San Miniato, Tuscany. Italians fly kites in a competitive manner. Call ✆ **0571-42-745** or 0571-42-233 for details. The weekend after Easter.

APRIL

Festival of Sacred Music, Lucca, Tuscany. For 3 months, Lucca's churches put on various concerts and choir recitals. Call ✆ **0583-419-689** or fax

0583-442-505 for details. April through June.

May

Calendimaggio, Assisi, Umbria. This pagan spring festival is held in Umbria's holiest of cities. There are lots of singing, dancing, feats of prowess, and medieval costumes as Assisi's Romeos vie for the right to call their own fair damsel Lady Spring. Call ✆ **075-812-534** for details. First weekend (starting Thurs) after May 1.

Maggio Musicale (Musical May), Florence. Florence's rather chichi concert series, which now stretches May through June, has become one of the finer musical events in Europe. The concerts and dance recitals take place in the more atmospheric *palazzi* and churches about town, and tickets don't come cheap. Contact the **Maggio Musicale Fiorentino** (✆ **0935-564-767**), or visit the box office at Teatro Comunale, Corso Italia 12, Firenze (✆ **055-213-535;** fax 055-277-222; www.maggiofiorentino.com), for details and tickets. May to late June.

Festa del Grillo (Cricket Festival), Florence. In the Cascine Park, vendors sell crickets in decorated cages, and, after a parade of floats on the Arno, everybody releases the bugs into the grass. Contact the tourist office at Via Cavour 1r (✆ **055-290-832**) for details. First Sunday after Ascension Day (mid- to late May).

Corso dei Ceri (Candle Race), Gubbio, Umbria. One of Italy's most spectacular and oldest festivals, this one has to be seen to be believed. Color-coded teams of burly men from the city's three districts run about town all day long carrying 9m-high (30-ft.) wooden "candles" (read: phallic symbols) topped with statues of saints. After a seafood dinner, they carry the things at a dead trot more than 300m (984 ft.) up a mountain. Perhaps the tourist office can explain it: Call ✆ **075-922-0693.** May 15.

Giostra dell'Archidado (Crossbow Competition), Cortona, Tuscany. This crossbow competition is held in late-14th-century costume. Contact the tourist office at ✆ **0575-630-353** or 0575-630-352 for details. May 18.

Balestro del Girifalco (Crossbow Competition), Massa Marittima, Tuscany. Massan crossbow sharpshooters in 13th-century costume fire bolts into impossibly small targets, following all the requisite processions and flag tossing. Contact **Amatur** at ✆ **0566-902-756** for details. May 20 or the following Sunday and again the second Sunday in August.

Palio della Balestra (Crossbow Competition), Gubbio, Umbria. 'Tis the season to fire crossbows. Eugubines, all dudded up medieval-style, test their crossbow skills against teams from historical rival Sansepolcro. In September, Sansepolcro gets to host the annual rematch. Call ✆ **075-922-0693** for details. Last Sunday in May.

June

Corpus Christi Procession, Orvieto, Umbria. In the town where this religious holiday was first proclaimed, the holy liturgical cloth onto which a communion wafer once miraculously dripped blood is carried through town in a procession of hundreds dressed in medieval costume. Contact the tourist office at ✆ **0763-341-772** for details. Corpus Christi, early June.

Festa di San Ranieri, Pisa, Tuscany. The city celebrates its patron saint by lining the Arno River with flickering torches. Call ✆ **050-42-291** for details. June 16 and 17.

Regatta del Palio (Boat Race), Florence. This is the first and most important of several regattas held on the Arno

on this day. Spectators line the quays between the Uffizi and Santa Trinita Bridge as teams from Florence's four traditional neighborhoods compete to win a painted banner. Later in the day, united Florentine teams duke it out with rowers from Pisa and Livorno for titles and trophies. Contact the tourist office at Via Cavour 1r (✆ **055-290-832**) for details. June 23.

Gioco di Calcio (Historic Soccer), Florence. St. John is Florence's patron, and what better way to celebrate his holy day than with a violent Renaissance version of soccer played in 16th-century costume? Two teams of 26 men battle each other tooth and nail on dirt-packed Piazza di Santa Croce (the first June match) and Piazza della Signoria. The teams hail from each of Florence's four historic quarters—San Giovanni in green, Santa Maria Novella in red, Santa Croce in blue, and Santo Spirito in white. The season opens on June 16, but the big game is on June 24, after which fireworks explode over the Arno at 10pm. The teams also butt heads on December 24 in the full Christmas Eve spirit. Contact the tourist office at Via Cavour 1r (✆ **055-290-832**) for details. June 24 and 28.

Gioco del Ponte (War on the Bridge), Pisa, Tuscany. Pisan teams from opposite banks of the river get into Renaissance garb, stand on the city's oldest bridge, and have a push-of-war with a 7-ton cart. For details, call ✆ **050-42-291.** Last Sunday in June.

Spoleto Festival, Spoleto, Umbria. This world-renowned festival of music and the performing arts (formerly called the Festival of Two Worlds) was started by Italian-American composer Gian Carlo Menotti in 1958—the "two worlds" were originally Spoleto and Charleston, South Carolina, but Melbourne, Australia, has also joined the family of cities putting on a month-long series of concerts, opera, ballet, film, and theater (see chapter 13 for more information on the festival). Tickets usually sell out by March. For details, contact the **Associazione Festival dei Due Mondi,** Piazza Duomo 8, Spoleto (✆ **800-565-600** in Italy, or 0743-220-032; fax 0743-220-321; www.spoletofestival.it). Also try the **Teatro Nuovo** at ✆ **0743-40-265.** Mid-June to mid-July.

Estate Fiesolana (Fiesolean Summer), Fiesole, near Florence. This summertime festival of music, ballet, film, and theater is held above the oppressive Florentine heat in the ancient hill town of Fiesole. Most of the performances are staged in the remains of the 1st-century-A.D. Roman theater. You can get information and tickets in advance through the **Agenzia Box Office,** Via Alamanni 39 Firenze (✆ **055-210-804;** www.estatefiesolana.it), or at the Roman Theater on the day of performance after 4:30pm. Late June to August.

July

Palio delle Contrade (Horse Race), Siena, Tuscany. The Palio between Siena's traditional neighborhoods vies with Venice's Carnevale as Italy's premier festival. It's a breakneck bareback horse race around the dirt-packed main square prefaced by 3 days of parades, trial runs, and heavy partying. The night before the race is a regular bacchanal to which visitors are often welcome. The best 80€-to-200€ grandstand seats sell out years in advance, but some are always available a few months before. Standing in the center of the piazza is free. Afterward, winners and losers alike celebrate with the aid of much chianti. Hotel rooms in the entire city are booked more than a year in advance of the July 2 event. And they

do it all over again on August 16. For more information, see chapter 7, or contact Siena's **Ufficio Informazione Turistico,** Piazza del Campo 56 (✆ **0577-280-551;** fax 0577-270-676). July 2.

Umbria Jazz, Perugia, Umbria. This has been one of Europe's top jazz events for more than 30 years—2 weeks of performances, concerts, and jams from top names and bands that cool out Umbria's capital during the summer heat. For more information, contact the **Associazione Umbria Jazz-Perugia,** Piazza Danti 28 (✆ **075-573-2432;** www.umbriajazz.com). Mid-July.

Wine Festival, Portoferraio, Elba. This *festa* to toast the island's excellent but seldom exported white and red wines takes place at Le Ghiaie beach behind Elba's main town. Call ✆ **0565-914-671** for details. Last week of July.

Giostra del Orso (Joust of the Bear), Pistoia, Tuscany. This medieval-costumed jousting match pits mounted knights against targets shaped like bears. Not nearly as death-defying as in the olden days when they used real bears, but still a rousing good time. Call ✆ **0573-34-326** for details. July 25.

Sangimignanese Summer, San Gimignano, Tuscany. This nearly 80-year-old cultural festival of moderate note offers open-air concerts, opera, and film in the Town of Towers. For details, contact the tourist office at Piazza del Duomo, San Gimignano (✆ **0577-940-008;** fax 0577-940-903; www.sangimignano.com). Last weekend in July.

Settimana Musicale Senese (Sienese Music Week), Siena, Tuscany. This festival brings a week of the best concerts and opera Siena's prestigious music center can muster. Contact the **Accademia Musicale Chigiana,** Via di Città 89 (✆ **0577-46-152**). One week in July or August.

Classical Concerts in the Roman Theater, Gubbio, Umbria. In the valley below town, you get the Roman experience by attending concerts in the overgrown ruins of a 1st-century-A.D. theater. Meanwhile, up in town, the **Gubbio Festival** brings in international performers for more of the same in less scenic settings. The tourist office (✆ **075-575-951**) can fill you in on both. Late July to early August.

August

La Palombella (The Unlucky Dove), Orvieto, Umbria. A live white dove surrounded by flares ignites a pile of fireworks outside the Duomo. Great fun, unless you're the bird. Call ✆ **0763-341-772** for details. Pentecost Sunday.

Ferragosto, throughout Italy. This isn't an event; it's an exodus. The feast of the Assumption marks the beginning of the August holiday, when everything in Italy closes, hotels and restaurants included. Everyone goes on vacation. Unless you're at the beach, you might not see more than 10 Italians all day. Some things will reopen on the 16th, but most of Italy takes the rest of the month off. August 15.

Cowboy Parade and Rodeo, Albarese, Tuscany. The gateway town to the Maremma's best natural park hosts a rodeo of the top *butteri* stars of Tuscany's deep south. *Butteri* are the old-fashioned Italian cowboys who've watched over the white Maremma cattle herds for generations. The **Monti dell'Uccellina** park information office may have details at ✆ **0564-407-098.** August 15.

Feast of the Hams, Sorano, Tuscany. Local pig population plummets. Prosciutto and sausage consumption rises dramatically. Butchers prosper. Pork enthusiasts can call ✆ **0564-633-023** for details. Mid-August.

Palio delle Contrade (Horse Race), Siena, Tuscany. An encore of Siena's famous horse race. This edition is more popular and even more crowded. August 16.

Palio Marinaro (Boat Race), Livorno, Tuscany. This annual neighborhood boat race is held at Tuscany's major port. For details, call ✆ **0586-899-111** or fax 0586-896-173. August 17.

Bravio delle Botti (Barrel Race), Montepulciano, Tuscany. This is something akin to a medieval fraternity stunt. Teams of *poliziani* (the name for local residents) dress like their 14th-century ancestors in order to pull various important muscles trying to be the first to roll a 79kg (175-lb.) barrel uphill to the top of town. Come for the pageantry and feasting afterward. Contact the tourist office at ✆ **0578-758-687** for details. Late August.

September

Giostra del Saracino (Saracen Joust), Arezzo, Tuscany. This jousting tournament is between mounted knights in 13th-century armor and the effigy of a Saracen warrior. It's held on Arezzo's main square and is one of the few versions of this sport in which the target, which swivels and is armed with a whip, actually hits back. Contact the tourist office at ✆ **0575-377-678** (fax 0575-20-839) for details. First Sunday in September.

Flag Tossing, Volterra, Tuscany. Townies in 14th-century get-ups practice the ancient art of juggling silken banners on one of Tuscany's most medieval of *piazze.* The tourist office (✆ **0588-86-150**) can tell you more. First Sunday in September.

Todi Arte Festival, Todi, Umbria. This annual bash started in the 1980s brings theater, music, ballet, and opera to the medieval hill town for 10 days in late summer. Contact www.todiartefestival.com or ✆ **075-894-2526** for details. Early September (some years in July or Aug).

Festa della Rificolona (Candlelit Procession), Florence. Children carry paper lanterns around town, especially up to Piazza Santissima Annunziata. It's a dim memory of the sheerly practical lanterns peasants from the surrounding countryside carried as they filed into town on this night, the eve of the birth of the Virgin, to pay their respects at the church. The farmers usually stuck around the next day to throw a produce market, which is now held the weekend before the event. Contact the tourist office at Via Cavour 1r (✆ **055-290-832**) for details. September 7.

Palio dei Balestrieri (Crossbow Competition), Sansepolcro, Tuscany. Sansepolcro gets the home-turf advantage in part two of the medieval crossbow competition with Umbrian rival Gubbio. Call ✆ **0575-75-827** for details. Second Sunday in September.

Rassegna del Chianti Classico (Wine Festival), Greve in Chianti, Tuscany. Greve's annual wine fair showcases the newest vintages from both the top and the smaller vineyards in the Chianti Classico zone. Call ✆ **055-854-5243** for details. September 12 to September 15.

Candlelit Procession, Lucca, Tuscany. In honor of their highly revered Volto Santo statue of Christ, an image blackened with age (they hold that Nicodemus himself, present at the crucifixion, carved it from a Lebanon cedar), the Lucchesi hold a solemn parade through the streets at 8pm. Call ✆ **0583-419-689** or fax 0583-442-505 for details. September 13.

Sagra Musicale Umbra (Festival of Sacred Music), Perugia, Umbria. This over-60-year-old festival of sacred music

draws important composers and groups from around the world. Contact the **Associazione Sagra Musical Umbra-Perugia,** Via Podianai 11 (✆ **075-572-1374;** fax 075-572-7614; www.perugiamusicaclassica.com/festival.cfm). Second and third weeks of September.

Perugia Classico (Festival of Classical Music), Perugia, Umbria. As the sacred musicians are packing up, the secular ones ride into town to finish off Perugia's music-filled summer with a week of classical and chamber music. Details are available from the **Comitato Promotore Perugia Classico,** c/o Comune di Perugia, Ripartizione XVI Economia e Lavoro, Via Eburnea 9 (✆ **075-577-2253;** fax 075-572-4252). Last week in September.

International Festival of Choral Singing, Volterra, Tuscany. Saintly music fills the air in this Etruscan city. Contact the tourist office at ✆/fax **0588-86-150.** Last Saturday of September.

Biennale di Firenze (Fashion Exhibits), Florence. This new biannual (held in even years) fashion exhibit is installed all around town in museums, galleries, and public buildings to juxtapose fashion with art. Prato gets its share as well. Call ✆ **055-234-0742** or fax 055-244-145 for details. Late September to mid-December.

October

Sagra del Tordo (Feast of the Thrush), Montalcino, Tuscany. Montalcini wander around all weekend in medieval costume throwing archery tournaments and parades, mainly for an excuse to roast hundreds of tiny thrushes, whose passing they toast with plenty of Brunello wine. Call ✆/fax **0577-849-331** for details. Last weekend in October.

White Truffle Fair, Gubbio, Umbria. The world's most expensive form of edible fungus, highly prized by food connoisseurs, is the centerpiece of Gubbio's annual agricultural fair. Call ✆ **075-922-0693** for details. October 29 to November 2.

November

Concert and Theater Season Begins, Prato, Tuscany. The season begins at Prato's premier Teatro Metastasio. November through March.

Opera, Concert, and Ballet Seasons Open, Florence. The season at the Teatro Comunale (✆ **055-211-158**) and the Teatro Verdi (✆ **055-212-320**) runs November through April.

Vino Novello (New Wine) Festivals, various towns. By law, New Wine can't be released before November 4, and several towns have become centers for small street festivals celebrating the coming-out weekend of these light, short-lived red wines. The main event is a weekend of tastings, along with the usual stands lining the streets during any festival (offering everything from traditional candy to underwear). A big dinner night is arranged in the better restaurants in town, where you sample *vini novelli* with your meal. Two of the larger and more easily accessible from Florence are the festival in Montespertoli (✆ **0571-609-412** for details), for which you can take a SITA bus, and the festival in Pontassieve (✆ **055-83-601** for details), for which you can take a train. First weekend after November 4.

December

World's Largest Christmas Tree, Gubbio, Umbria. According to the *Guinness Book of World Records,* said "tree" is what disfigures the slope of Gubbio's mountain every Christmas in all its illuminated-bulb glory. December 7 to January 10.

Olive Oil and Wine Festival, Pitigliano, Tuscany. You can enjoy heaps of bruschetta garlic toast and gallons of wine. Call ✆ **0564-616-039** for details. December 15.

Live Nativity Procession, Barga (in the Garfagnana north of Lucca), Tuscany. Just before Christmas, a live procession of locals dressed as the Holy Family passes through town, where other inhabitants are costumed as traditional tradespeople. The procession starts sometime after 7pm and arrives at the Duomo around 11pm. For details, call ✆ **0583-723-499.** Usually held December 23.

Display of the Virgin's Girdle, Prato, Tuscany. This is the final and most sumptuous of the five yearly occasions on which the bishop releases Mary's Sacred Girdle—the belt she handed to Thomas upon her Assumption—from its jewel-encrusted treasure chest and shows it to the people massed inside the Duomo and crowding the piazza outside. Plenty of Renaissance-styled drummers and fifers are in attendance. The pomp is repeated at Easter, May 1, August 15, and September 8. Call ✆/fax **0574-24-112** for details. December 25.

Umbria Jazz Winter, Orvieto, Umbria. Wine tasting and internationally renowned jazz artists come to Orvieto for part two of Umbria's premier jazz festival. Call ✆ **075-572-1653** or check **www.umbriajazz.com** for details. December 27 to January 1.

2 ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

PASSPORTS

Anyone traveling to Italy from outside the 15 Schengen agreement countries (which essentially comprises all of Western Europe except the U.K. and Ireland) will need a passport to enter. You technically do not need a passport to travel between these countries, although you are required to present one to authorities upon request, as they are commonly looking for fugitives from justice or illegal immigrants. You are required to present a passport at hotel desks in Italy for the same reason. Citizens of the United States, Canada, the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand are allowed to stay in Italy for 90 days; after that period, they are required to have a residence visa.

VISAS

U.S., Canadian, U.K., Irish, Australian, and New Zealand citizens with a **valid passport** don't need a visa to enter Italy if they don't expect to stay more than 90 days and don't expect to work there. If, after entering Italy, you find you want to stay more than 90 days, you can apply for a permit for an extra 90 days, which, as a rule, is granted immediately. Go to the nearest *questura* (police headquarters) or your home country's consulate.

For information on obtaining a visa, please visit chapter 14 (p. 440).

CUSTOMS

What You Can Bring into Italy

Foreign visitors can bring along most items for personal use duty-free, including merchandise up to $800, such as fishing tackle, a pair of skis, two tennis rackets, a baby carriage, two hand cameras with 10 rolls of film or a digital camera, computer, CD player with 10 CDs, tape recorder, binoculars, personal jewelry, portable radio set (subject to a small license fee), and 400 cigarettes and a quantity of cigars or pipe tobacco not exceeding 500 grams (1 lb.). There are strict limits on importing alcoholic beverages. However, for alcohol bought tax-paid, limits are much more liberal than in other countries of the European Union.

If you are planning to mail items to Italy, you can only mail merchandise costing up to $200. That means that if you are having your laptop or your skis shipped to you, make sure they do not appear to be straight from the shop. Otherwise, you could face either providing a receipt that you may have discarded years ago, or paying the 20 percent **Value Added Tax (IVA)**.

What You Can Take Home from Italy

For information on what you're allowed to bring home, contact one of the following agencies:

U.S. Citizens: U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP), 1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20229 (✆ **877/287-8667;** www.cbp.gov).

Canadian Citizens: Canada Border Services Agency (✆ **800/461-9999** in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca).

U.K. Citizens: HM Customs & Excise at ✆ **0845/010-9000** (from outside the U.K., 020/8929-0152), or consult their website at www.hmce.gov.uk.

Australian Citizens: Australian Customs Service at ✆ **1300/363-263,** or log on to www.customs.gov.au.

New Zealand Citizens: New Zealand Customs, The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (✆ **04/473-6099** or 0800/428-786; www.customs.govt.nz).

MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS

There are no special medical requirements for entering Italy. For more information on staying healthy while over there, please see "Health" later in this chapter.

3 GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND

GETTING TO FLORENCE, TUSCANY & UMBRIA

By Plane

Many visitors choose to fly into Rome's **Fiumicino Airport (FCO)** (✆ **06-65951;** www.adr.it) or Milan's **Linate Airport (LIN)** (✆ **02-7485-2200;** www.sea-aeroportimilano.it) or **Malpensa Airport (MXP)** (✆ **02-2680-0613;** www.sea-aeroportimilano.it), and then transfer to Florence, Tuscany, or Umbria either via another flight or by train or car.

Flying directly to Tuscany is obviously the most convenient option, but often the most expensive. It's nearly impossible if you want to fly non-stop from another continent. One exception to this rule, however, is the non-stop New York to Pisa flight on **Delta,** which runs from JFK to Galileo Galilei, otherwise known as **Pisa International Airport (PSA)** (✆ **800-018-849;** www.pisa-airport.com). Flying directly to Pisa is much more convenient than arriving in Rome or Milan and then taking a car or train.

You might consider flying to another Italian or European hub, and then transferring to a flight to Pisa. **Iberia, British Airways, Air France,** and **Lufthansa** service Pisa airport. Pisa airport is also serviced by budget airlines such as **easyJet** and **Ryan Air.**

The other major airport in Tuscany is Florence's airport, known as **Amerigo Vespucci Airport,** but best known locally as **Peretola (FLR)** (www.aeroporto.firenze.it), after the neighborhood where it resides. There are only a dozen airlines that fly into it, none of them international budget carriers, but it might make sense for you to arrive somewhere else in Europe and transfer to Florence on **Air France, Alitalia,** or **Lufthansa.** While it might be more expensive to fly directly to Florence, you will most likely save money on the trains or taxis you would have taken to get there.

To find out which airlines travel to Florence, Tuscany & Umbria, please see "Airline, Hotel & Car-Rental Websites," p. 441.

Getting to Tuscany or Umbria from Rome's Airports

Most international flights to Rome will arrive at **Fiumicino Airport (FCO)** (officially named **Leonardo da Vinci International Airport,** but few, including the airlines themselves, call it that). Some inter-European and transatlantic charter flights may land at **Ciampino Airport (CIA),** which is closer to the center, but not connected by an express train. You can connect to a plane at either to take you to Pisa's or Florence's airport, but it's often simpler, almost as fast in the long run, and cheaper to take the train.

Fiumicino (✆ **06-659-51;** www.adr.it) is 30km (19 miles) from Rome's center. You can take the **Leonardo Express train** (11€) from Fiumicino to Rome's central train station, Termini. A taxi to the station costs about 50€. From Termini, you can grab one of many daily trains to Florence, Pisa, and most other destinations. If you happen to fly into **Ciampino Airport** (✆ **06-7934-0297**), 15km (9¼ miles) south of the city, a none-too-frequent COTRAL bus will take you to the Anagnina Metro station, where you can take the Metro to Termini, the whole trip costing around 3€. A taxi to Rome's center from Ciampino is about 30€.

Information on getting to most major Tuscan and Umbrian cities and towns from Rome **by train** is included under each destination throughout this book.

Getting to Tuscany or Umbria from Milan's Airport

Your flight may land at either **Linate Airport (LIN)** (✆ **02-7485-2200;** www.sea-aeroportimilano.it), about 8km (5 miles) southeast of the city, or **Malpensa Airport (MXP)** (✆ **02-2680-0613**), 45km (28 miles) from downtown—closer to Como than to Milan itself.

From **Malpensa,** a 40-minute express train heads half-hourly to the Cadorna train station in western Milan rather than to the larger and more central Stazione Centrale from which most trains onward to Tuscany will leave (you'll have to take the Metro to get there). The Malpensa Express train costs 11€. To grab a bus instead, which will take you directly to the central downtown rail station, take the **Malpensa Shuttle** (✆ **02-5858-3185**) for 7€, which leaves two or three times per hour for the 50-minute ride to the east side of Milan's Stazione Centrale. A taxi to the city center runs about 70€.

From **Linate, STAM buses** (✆ **02-717-100**) make the 25-minute trip to Milan's Stazione Centrale every 20 to 30 minutes daily from 7am to 11pm for 2€. The slightly slower city bus no. 73 leaves hourly for the S. Babila Metro stop downtown (1€ for a regular bus ticket bought from any newsagent inside the airport, but not onboard).

From Milan's Stazione Centrale, you can get trains to Florence (see "Getting There," in chapter 5).

By Car

Tuscany and Umbria are most accessible by car. In fact, one of the most common and convenient ways to take a tour of this area is to fly or take a train into Florence, see the city, then pick up a rental car to wind your way through Tuscany and Umbria toward Rome, where you can drop off the car and fly home.

Getting to Tuscany and Umbria by car isn't hard from either Milan or Rome. The A1 Autostrada (also known as the *autostrada del sole* or highway of the sun) runs straight down the peninsula, connecting Milan, Bologna, Florence, Rome, and Naples in a straight shot. The trick is getting to it. Both city beltways (in Rome it is the *Grande Raccordo Anulare;* in Milan, the *tangenziale*) feed right onto it, but getting onto the GRA or the *tangenziale* can

be nightmarish procedures for an out-of-towner. Insist on specific, detailed directions from the car-rental agencies and make use of a co-pilot; otherwise just do it the Italian way and feel your way onto it by intuition. If you're calm and patient, seemingly ridiculous road signs really do make sense.

That said, driving in Italy is also notoriously nerve-racking—for both the winding roads and the Italian penchant for driving a Fiat like a Ferrari. (Or driving a Ferrari like one, for that matter.) And both rental-car and gas prices are as high as they get in all of Europe. Before leaving home, apply for an **International Driver's Permit** from the American Automobile Association (AAA; ✆ **800/222-1134** or 407/444-4300; www.aaa.com). In Canada, the permit is available from the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA; ✆ **613/247-0117;** www.caa.ca). In the U.K., contact the British **Automobile Association** (**AA;** ✆ **0800/26-20-50;** www.theaa.com). Technically, you need this permit, your actual driver's license, and an Italian translation of the latter (also available from AAA and CAA) to drive in Italy, though in practice the license itself often suffices. (Take all three along to be safe.)

Italy's equivalent of AAA is the **Automobile Club d'Italia (ACI),** a branch of the Touring Club Italiano. They're the people who respond when you place an emergency call to ✆ **803-116** for road breakdowns, though they do charge for this service if you're not a member. If you wish, you may join at the border as you're driving into Italy or at one of the club's regional offices (in Florence, Viale Amendola 36, ✆ **055-24-861;** in Rome, Via C. Colombo 261, ✆ **06-514-971**). You can also join online at **www.aci.it**.

By Train

Traveling around Tuscany by train may not be the most convenient option, but getting there on a train from Rome or Milan couldn't be easier. The high-speed Eurostar stops in Florence (some stop in Arezzo as well), and the slower trains make stops in the smaller cities. It is the best route to Florence from airports in Milan (3.5 hr./56€) and Rome (1.5 hr./40€).

There are three major train routes in Tuscany. One is the Milan-Florence-Arezzo-Orvieto-Rome line, mentioned above, that parallels the A1 highway and more or less follows the ancient Salaria. The other is the coastal Genoa-Lucca-Pisa-Livorno-Rome line that parallels the ancient Aurelia. The third is the Florence-Pisa route that connects the two lines, stopping in Prato, Pistoia, and Lucca. Again, the slower the train, the smaller the towns where it will stop.

For more information about train travel in Tuscany and Umbria, see "Getting Around" below.

GETTING AROUND

By Car

Italian drivers aren't maniacs; they only appear to be. Actually, they tend to be very safe and alert drivers—if much more aggressive than Americans are used to. If someone races up behind you and flashes his lights, that's the signal for you to slow down so he can pass you quickly and safely. Stay in the right lane on highways; the left is only for passing and for cars with large engines and the pedal to the metal. If you see someone in your rearview mirror speeding up with his hazard lights blinking, get out of the way because it means his Mercedes is opened up full throttle. On a two-lane road, the idiot passing someone in the opposing traffic who has swerved into your lane expects you to veer obligingly over into the shoulder so three lanes of traffic can fit—he would do the same for you. (Plus, the alternative is not pretty.)

Autostrade are superhighways, denoted by green signs and a number prefaced with an A, like the A1 from Rome to Florence. A few aren't numbered and are simply

called *raccordo,* a connecting road between two cities (such as Florence-Siena and Florence-Pisa). On longer stretches, *autostrade* often become toll roads. ***Strade Statale*** are state roads, usually two lanes wide, indicated by blue signs. Their route numbers are prefaced with an SS or an S, as in the SS222 from Florence to Siena. On signs, however, these official route numbers are used infrequently. Usually, you'll just see blue signs listing destinations by name with arrows pointing off in the appropriate directions. Even if it's just a few kilometers down on the road, often the town you're looking for won't be mentioned on the sign at the appropriate turnoff. It's impossible to predict which of all the towns that lie along a road will be the ones chosen to list on a particular sign. Sometimes, the sign gives only the first minuscule village that lies past the turnoff; at other times it lists the first major town down that road; and some signs mention only the major city the road eventually leads to, even if it's hundreds of kilometers away. It pays to study the map before coming to an intersection.

The **speed limit** on roads in built-up areas around towns and cities is 50kmph (31 mph). On rural roads and the highway it's 110kmph (68 mph), except on weekends when it's upped to 130kmph (81 mph), as it is on the highway. Italians have an astounding disregard for these limits, mostly because the limits are only enforced if the offense is egregious. However, police can ticket you and collect the fine on the spot. The blood-alcohol limit in Italy is 0.05%, often achieved with just two drinks, but this too is not enforced as often as it is in Northern Europe or North America. Clearly drunk drivers, however, can expect to be arrested.

As far as ***parcheggio*** (parking) is concerned, on **streets** white lines indicate free public spaces and blue lines pay public spaces. Meters don't line the sidewalk; rather, there's one machine on the block where you punch in how long you want to park. The machine spits out a ticket that you leave on your dashboard. Sometimes streets will have an attendant who'll come around and give you your time ticket (pay him or her when you get ready to leave). If you park in an area marked **Parcheggio Disco Orario,** root around in your rental car's glove compartment for a cardboard parking disc (or buy one at a gas station). With this device, you dial up the hour of your arrival (it's the honor system) and display it on your dashboard. You're allowed *un ora* (1 hr.) or *due ore* (2 hr.), according to the sign. **Parking lots** have ticket dispensers, but booths are not usually manned as you exit. Take your ticket with you when you park; when you return to the lot to get your car and leave, first visit the office or automated payment machine to exchange your ticket for a paid receipt that you then use to get through the automated exit.

ROAD SIGNS Here's a brief rundown of the road signs you'll most frequently encounter. A **speed limit** sign is a black number inside a red circle on a white background. The **end of a speed zone** is just black and white, with a black slash through the number. A red circle with a white background, a black arrow pointing down, and a red arrow pointing up means **yield to oncoming traffic,** while a point-down red-and-white triangle means **yield ahead.** In town, a simple white circle with a red border, or the words *zona pedonale* or *zona traffico limitato,* denotes a **pedestrian zone** (you can drive through only to drop off baggage at your hotel); a white arrow on a blue background is used for Italy's many **one-way streets;** a mostly red circle with a horizontal white slash means **do not enter.** Any image in black on a white background surrounded by a red circle means that image is **not allowed** (for instance, if the image is two cars next to each other: no passing; a motorcycle means no Harleys permitted, and so on).

A circular sign in blue with a red circle-slash means **no parking.**

GASOLINE *Benzina* (gas or petrol) is even more expensive in Italy than in the rest of Europe. Even a small rental car guzzles 40€ to 60€ for a fill-up. There are many pull-in gas stations along major roads and on the outskirts of town, as well as 24-hour rest stops along the autostrada highways, but in towns most stations are small sidewalk gas stands where you parallel park to fill up. Almost all stations are closed for *riposo* and on Sundays, but the majority of them now have a pump fitted with a machine that accepts bills so you can self-service your tank at 3am. Unleaded gas is *senza piombo.*

By Train

Italy has one of the best train systems in Europe, and even traveling on a regional level through Tuscany and Umbria, you'll find many destinations connected. Most lines are administered by the state-run **Ferrovie dello Stato** or **FS** (✆ **892-021** for national train info, or 199-166-177 to buy tickets; www.trenitalia.com), but servicing the Casentino and western Valdichiana in Tuscany is a private line called **LFI,** and northern Umbria is serviced by the private **FCU.** About the only difference you'll notice is that these private lines don't honor special discount cards or passes (see "Special Passes & Discounts," below).

Italian trains are about as clean and comfortable as commuter trains in the United States. Though increasingly trains are of the boring straight-through commuter variety, on long-haul runs especially you'll still be blessed with those old-fashioned cars made up of *couchette* compartments that seat only six or occasionally eight. (Try to find one full of nuns for a fighting chance at a smoke-free trip.) First class *(prima classe)* is usually only a shade better than second class *(seconda classe),* with four to six seats per *couchette* instead of six to eight. The only real benefit of first class comes if you're traveling overnight, in which case four berths per compartment are a lot more comfortable than six.

Few visitors are prepared for how **crowded** Italian trains can sometimes get, though with the increase in automobile travel, they're not as crowded as they were in decades past. An Italian train is only full when the corridors are packed solid and there are more than eight people sitting on their luggage in the little vestibules by the doors. Overcrowding is usually only a problem on Friday evenings and weekends, especially in and out of big cities, and just after a strike. In summer the crowding escalates, and any train going toward a beach in August all but bulges like an overstuffed sausage.

Italian trains come in six varieties based on how often they stop. The **Eurostar (ES)** is the "pendulum" train that zips back and forth between Rome and Milan, stopping at Florence and Bologna along the way. It's the fastest but most expensive option (first class only, a meal included); it has its own ticket window at the stations and *requires* a seat reservation. Other **Eurostar/Eurocity** (**ES/EC, EN** if it runs overnight) trains connect Italian cities with cities outside the country; these are the speediest of the standard trains, offering both first and second class and always requiring a supplement (except for Eurail Pass holders, though the conductors won't always believe you on this one); **Intercity (IC)** trains are similar to Eurocity trains in that they offer both first and second class and require a supplement, but they never cross an international border.

Of the regular trains that don't require supplements—often called *Regionale* (R) if they stay within a region (Tuscany) or *Interregionale* (IR) if they don't (Tuscany to Umbria)—the **Espresso** stops at all the major and most of the secondary stations, the **Diretto** stops at virtually every station, and the snail-paced **Locale** (sometimes

laughingly called *accelerato*) frequently stops between stations in the middle of the countryside for no apparent reason.

When buying a **regular ticket,** ask for either *andata* (one-way) or *andata e ritorno* (round-trip). If the train you plan to take is an ES/EC or IC, ask for the ticket *con supplemento rapido* (with speed supplement) to avoid on-train penalty charges. On a trip under 200km (124 miles), your ticket is good to leave within the next 6 hours; over 200km (124 miles) you have a full day. (This code isn't rigorously upheld by conductors, but don't push your luck.) On round-trip journeys of less than 250km (155 miles), the return ticket is valid only for 3 days. This distance-time correlation continues, with an extra day added to your limit for each 200km (124 miles) above 250km (155 miles) (the maximum is 6 days). If you board a regular train without a ticket (or board an IC/EC without the supplement), you'll have to pay a hefty "tax" on top of the ticket or supplement, which the conductor will sell you. Most conductors also get extremely crabby if you forget to **stamp your ticket in the little yellow box** on the platform before boarding the train.

Schedules for all lines running through a given station are printed on posters tacked up on the station wall. *Binario (bin.)* means track. You can also get official schedules (and more train information, some even in English) on the Web at **www.trenitalia.com**.

Stations tend to be well run, with luggage storage facilities at all but the smallest and usually a good bar attached that serves surprisingly palatable food. If you pull into a dinky town with a shed-size or nonexistent station, find the nearest bar or *tabacchi,* and the man behind the counter will most likely sell you tickets.

SPECIAL PASSES & DISCOUNTS To buy the **Eurail Italy Pass,** available only outside Italy, contact **Rail Europe** (www.raileurope.com). You have 2 months in which to use the train a set number of days; the base number of days is 3, and you can add up to 7 more. For adults, the first-class pass costs $239, second class is $211. Additional days cost roughly $30 more for first class, $25 for second class. For Youth tickets (under 26 years old), a 3-day pass is $171 and additional days about $20 each. Saver passes are available for groups of two to five people traveling together at all times, extending a discount of about $20 off an adult pass.

There are also Italy-Greece, Italy-Spain and Italy-France combinations, in addition to a **rail-and-drive** pass. This is valid for 2 months during which you can use 3 rail days and 2 car days (and add more car or rail days cheaply.) Prices start at $398 for second-class tickets and an economy car. Fares vary depending on type of car.

When it comes to regular tickets, if you're **under 26,** you can buy at any Italian train station a 40€ **Carta Verde (Green Card)** that gets you a 10% discount for domestic trips and 25% on international connections on all FS tickets for 1 year. Present it each time you go to buy a ticket. A similar deal is available for anyone **over 75** with the **Carta d'Argento (Silver Card):** 15% off domestic and 25% off international, for 30€. Children 11 and under always ride half price (and can get the passes mentioned above at half price), and kids under 4 ride free.

By Bus

Regional intertown buses are called *pullman,* though *autobus,* the term for a city bus, is also sometimes used. When you're getting down to the kind of small-town travel this guide describes, you'll probably need to use regional buses at some point. You can get just about anywhere through a network of dozens of local, provincial, and regional lines (see below), but schedules aren't always easy to come by or to figure out—the local tourist office usually has a photocopy of the schedule, and in cities

some companies have offices. Buses exist mainly to shuttle workers and schoolchildren, so the most runs are on weekdays, early in the morning and usually again around lunchtime. All too often, though, the only run of the day will be at 6am.

A town's bus stop is usually either the main piazza or, more often, a large square on the edge of town or the bend in the road just outside the main city gate. You should always try to find the local ticket vendor—if there's no office, it's invariably the nearest newsstand or *tabacchi* (signaled by a sign with a white T), or occasionally a bar—but you can usually also buy tickets on the bus. You can also flag a bus down as it passes on a country road, but try to find an official stop (a small sign tacked onto a telephone pole). Tell the driver where you're going and ask him courteously if he'll let you know when you need to get off. When he says *"E la prossima fermata,"* that means yours is the next stop. *"Posso scendere?"* (*Poh*-so *shen*-dair-ay?) is "May I please get off?"

TUSCAN & UMBRIAN BUS LINES

The ticketing offices and depots of most Tuscan bus lines based in Florence are very near the main train station, Santa Maria Novella.

Lazzi, Via Mercadante 2, Florence (✆ **055-363-041;** www.lazzi.it), and **SITA,** Viale dei Cadorna 105, Florence (✆ **055-478-21** or 800-373-760 in Italy; www.sitabus.it), have service to all of Italy.

The following companies service northern Tuscany: **CAP,** Largo Alinari 11, Florence (✆ **055-214-637** or 055-292-268); **CLAP,** Via Luporini 895, Lucca (✆ **0583-5411;** www.clapspa.it); and **COPIT,** Via XX Settembre 71/Stazione FS in Pistoia (✆ **0573-363-243;** www.copitspa.it). **CAT,** Via G. Pietro 2, Carrara (✆ **0585-85-211**), and Via Fiume 5a, Florence (✆ **055-283-400**), services central and southern Tuscany and some of Arezzo province. **CPT,** Via Nino Bixio, Pisa (✆ **050-505-511** or 800-012-773 in Italy; www.cpt.pisa.it), services Pisa province. **LFI,** Via Guido Monaco 37, Arezzo (✆ **0575-324-294** or 0575-39-881; www.lfi.it), services Arezzo province and the Valdichiana. **RAMA,** Via Topazio 12, Grosseto (✆ **0564-475-111;** www.griforama.it), services the Maremma and southern Tuscany. **TRA-IN,** Piazza San Domenico, Siena (✆ **0577-204-111** or 0577-204-246; www.trainspa.it), services Siena province.

In Umbria, **ATC,** Piazzale della Rivoluzione Francese, Terni (✆ **0744-492-711;** www.atcterni.it), services southern Umbria and Orvieto. **APM,** Pian di Massiano, Perugia (✆ **075-506-781;** www.apmperugia.it), services Perugia, Assisi, Todi, and northern Umbria. **SSIT,** Piazza della Vittoria, Spoleto (✆ **0743-212-208;** www.spoletina.com), services the Spoleto area. And **SULGA/ACAP,** Pian di Massimo, Perugia (✆ **075-500-9641** or 075-74-641; www.sulga.it), has service to Perugia, Assisi, Todi, and northern Umbria.

4 MONEY & COSTS

Although prices have declined in Tuscany's tourism sector in the wake of the recent financial crisis, Central Italy remains a relatively expensive destination. In Florence, you can expect to find roughly the same prices for services as you would in Rome and Milan, which are generally lower than London, New York, and Paris, but higher than the rest of Southern Europe. Like anywhere else, prices for everyday goods and services like groceries and haircuts will always be greater in a high-rent city like Florence than in the countryside. Still travelers from North America and the U.K. will be giddy about the savings on what they might consider

The Value of the Euro vs. Other Popular Currencies

€	US$	C$	£	A$	NZ$
1	1.40	1.62	0.86	1.75	2.22

luxuries but are basic staples in Italy—fine wine, cheese, cold cuts, and an impeccable cappuccino that costs less than two euros.

Frommer's lists exact prices in the local currency. The currency conversions quoted above were correct at press time. However, rates fluctuate, so before departing consult a currency exchange website such as **www.oanda.com/convert/classic** to check up-to-the-minute rates.

CURRENCY

Euro coins are issued in denominations of .01€, .02€, .05€, .10€, .20€, and .50€ as well as 1€ and 2€; bills come in denominations of 5€, 10€, 20€, 50€, 100€, 200€, and 500€.

Traveler's checks, while still the safest way to carry money, are going the way of the dinosaurs. The aggressive evolution of international computerized banking and consolidated ATM networks has led to the triumph of plastic throughout the Italian peninsula—even if cold cash is still the most trusted currency, especially in smaller towns or cheaper mom-and-pop joints, where credit cards may not be accepted.

You'll get the best rate if you **exchange money** at a bank or one of its ATMs. The rates at "Cambio/change/wechsel" exchange booths are invariably less favorable but still a good deal better than what you'd get exchanging money at a hotel or shop (a last-resort tactic only). The bill-to-bill changers you'll see in some touristy places exist solely to rip you off.

ATMS

The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated teller machine), referred to in Italy as a "Bancomat." ATMs are easily found in the cities of Tuscany and Umbria, but are not as common in smaller towns and villages. While every town usually has one, it's good practice to fuel up on cash in urban centers, ideally during business hours. (International circuits seem to go off-line on occasion late at night and on weekends.) The **Cirrus** (✆ **800/424-7787;** www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (✆ **800/843-7587;** www.visa.com) networks span the globe. Go to your bank card's website to find ATM locations in Florence, Tuscany, or Umbria.

Be sure to check with your bank that your card is valid for international withdrawal, and that you have a four-digit PIN. (Most ATMs in Italy will not accept any other number of digits.) Also, be sure you know your daily withdrawal limit before you depart. ***Note:*** Many banks impose a fee every time you use a card at another bank's ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions (up to $5 or more) than for domestic ones (where they're rarely more than $2). In addition, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee, although this is not common practice in Italy. For international withdrawal fees, ask your bank.

If at the ATM you get a message saying your card isn't valid for international transactions, don't panic: It's most likely the bank just can't make the phone connection to check it (occasionally this can be a citywide epidemic) or else simply doesn't have the cash. Try another ATM or another town.

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are widely accepted in Tuscany & Umbria these days, especially in

What Things Cost in Florence	€
Taxi (from the train station to Ponte Vecchio)	7.00
Public bus (to any destination)	1.00
Double room at Hotel Savoy (very expensive)	520.00
Double room at Il Guelfo Bianco (moderate)	170.00
Double room at Pensione Maria Luisa de' Medici (inexpensive)	95.00
Continental breakfast (cappuccino and croissant standing at a bar)	3.00
Lunch for one at Nerbone (inexpensive)	7.00
Dinner for one, with table wine, at La Giostra (expensive)	75.00
Dinner for one, with table wine, at Vecchia Firenze (moderate)	30.00
Dinner for one, with table wine, at Le Mossacce (inexpensive)	20.00
Glass of wine	2.00–7.00
Coca-Cola (standing/sitting in a bar)	2.00/3.50
Cup of espresso (standing/sitting in a bar)	.50/.75
Admission to the Uffizi Galleries	6.50
Movie ticket	8.00

hotels and larger establishments. However, it is always a good idea to carry some cash since some small businesses may only accept cash or may claim that their credit card machine is broken to avoid paying fees to the credit card companies.

Visa and **MasterCard** are almost universally accepted at hotels, plus most restaurants and shops; the majority of them also accept **American Express. Diners Club** is gaining some ground, especially in Florence and in more expensive establishments throughout the region. ***Note:*** It is an unfortunately common practice among many restaurants in Italy to claim that the credit card machine is down when, in fact, it is more often the case that the owner simply doesn't want to pay the merchant fees. On more than one occasion I've insisted that they try it just in case, as I had no cash, and—surprise—it's been instantly fixed! The best way to avoid this chicanery is to inform the waitstaff upfront that you intend to use a credit card. If they tell you it's broken, you have the option of finding a restaurant where the machine "works."

Chip and PIN represent a change in the way that credit and debit cards are used. The program is designed to cut down on the fraudulent use of credit cards. More and more banks—especially in Europe—are issuing customers Chip and PIN versions of their debit or credit cards. In the future, more and more vendors will be asking for a four-digit personal identification number or PIN, which will be entered into a keypad near the cash register. For now, traditional "swipe" cards are commonly accepted in Central Italy even though they are being phased out elsewhere, and "chip" cards are also commonly accepted.

Finally, be sure to let your bank know that you'll be traveling abroad to avoid having your card blocked after a few days of big purchases far from home. Note that many banks now assess a 1% to 3% "transaction fee" on **all** charges you incur abroad (whether you're using the local currency or your native currency).

5 HEALTH

STAYING HEALTHY

There are no special health risks you'll encounter in Italy. The tap water is safe—excellent even—and medical resources are high quality.

General Availability of Healthcare

With Italy's partially socialized medicine, you can usually stop by any hospital emergency room with an ailment, get swift and courteous service, receive a diagnosis and a prescription, and be sent on your way with a wave and a smile—without filling out a single sheet of paperwork. However, the benefits of Italy's partially socialized medicine really only apply to Italians, so foreigners should be prepared to pay medical bills upfront.

Pharmacies offer essentially the same range of generic drugs available in the United States, plus a lot of them that haven't been approved yet by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Pharmacies are also the only place you'll find simple stuff such as aspirin and run-of-the-mill cold medicines: You won't find Tylenol at any old corner store (even if there were such a thing as a corner store).

Strangely, though, I have found it very hard to locate decongestants in Italy the way you can in other countries. If you regularly suffer from a stuffy nose, it is best to pack a good supply of Sudafed with you before you leave.

COMMON AILMENTS

In general, Tuscany and Umbria are extraordinarily healthy places, and as a result, travelers to Central Italy will encounter very few health risks. The greatest health risks in Tuscany and Umbria are exposure to too much sun or too much wine—both of which can be avoided with some caution and common sense. Every few years there is a new outbreak that makes headlines: mad cow disease, meningitis, or swine flu—but these ailments are no more endemic to Central Italy than they are to North America or Britain.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET SICK AWAY FROM HOME

For travel abroad, you may have to pay all medical costs upfront and be reimbursed later. Before leaving home, find out what medical services your **health insurance** covers. Your health insurance in your home country may not cover any extended treatment abroad. However, even if you don't have insurance, you will be seen and treated in an emergency room, just as you would at home.

Tuscany and Umbria have good **hospitals** (see p. 438 in chapter 14), and Italy's public health-care system is generally well regarded.

Pharmacies in Italy are ubiquitous (look for the green cross) and they serve almost like mini-clinics, where pharmacists diagnose and treat minor ailments, like flu symptoms and general aches and pains, with over-the-counter drugs. In Italy, most over-the-counter drugs are available in either generic form or a local brand. You may want to pack a simple decongestant, which is oddly rare in Italy. Pack prescription medications in your carry-on luggage, and carry them in their original containers, with pharmacy labels—otherwise they won't make it through airport security. Carry the generic name of prescription medicines, in case a local pharmacist is unfamiliar with the brand name.

Pharmacies in Florence and other cities take turns doing the night shift. Normally there is a list posted at the entrance of each pharmacy, telling customers which pharmacy is open which night of the week.

If you experience an emergency, dial ✆ **113,** Italy's general emergency number. For an ambulance, call ✆ **118.** We list additional emergency numbers in chapter 14 (p. 438).

6 SAFETY

Italy is a remarkably safe country. The worst threats you'll likely face are the pickpockets that sometimes frequent touristy areas and public buses, mostly in Rome and Naples; just keep your valuables in an under-the-clothes money belt there and you should be fine. There are, of course, thieves in Central Italy, as there are everywhere, so be smart; don't leave anything valuable in your rental car overnight, and leave nothing visible in it at any time to avoid tempting a would-be thief. The fact that there is so little overt crime in Italy is a good thing, as police enforcement is notoriously lax. If you do happen to be robbed, you can fill out paperwork at the nearest police station, but this is mostly for insurance purposes—don't expect them to actually hunt down the perpetrator or find your lost valuables. In general, avoid public parks at night and public squares in the wee hours of the morning, situations that attract the seediest elements looking to prey on late-night partiers.

7 SPECIALIZED TRAVEL RESOURCES

In addition to the destination-specific resources listed below, please visit Frommers.com for additional specialized travel resources.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Italy as a whole, and Northern and Central Italy in particular, are gay-friendly. Homosexuality is legal, and the age of consent is 16. Luckily, Italians are already more affectionate and physical than Americans in their general friendships, and even straight men occasionally walk down the street with their arms around each other—however, kissing anywhere other than on the cheeks at greetings and goodbyes will certainly draw attention. As you might expect, smaller towns tend to be less permissive and accepting than cities. Florence has the largest and most visible homosexual population (not that that's saying much), though university cities such as Pisa also take gayness in stride. Elba's beaches are Tuscany's big gay-vacation destination.

Italy's national association and support network for gays and lesbians is **ARCI-Gay/ARCI-Lesbica.** The national website is www.arcigay.it, but they also have a Tuscany-specific one at www.gaytoscana.it, and the new head regional office is in **Siena** at Via Massetana Romana 18, Siena (✆ **0577-288-977;** fax 0577-271-538; www.gaysiena.it). There are other offices in **Pisa (Arcigay Pride!),** Via San Lorenzo 38 (✆ **050-555-618;** fax 050-831-0605; www.gay.it/pride); in **Livorno** (✆ **320-817-1758;** www.arcigaylivorno.it); and in **Grosseto,** Via Ravel 7 (✆ **339-440-9049** or 347-078-8972; www.grossetogay.it). Their cousin association in **Florence** is called Ireos (www.ireos.org), in the Oltrarno at Via dei Serragli 3, Firenze (✆/fax **055-216-907**).

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

In Italy, a few of the top museums and churches have installed ramps at the entrances, and a few hotels have converted

first-floor rooms into accessible units by widening the doors and bathrooms. Other than that, don't expect to find much of Tuscany and Umbria easy to tackle. Builders in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance didn't have wheelchairs or mobility impairments in mind when they built narrow doorways and spiral staircases, and preservation laws keep modern Italians from being able to do much about this. Buses and trains can cause problems as well, with high, narrow doors and steep steps at entrances. There are, however, seats reserved on public transportation for travelers with disabilities.

One organization that helps travelers with disabilities in Tuscany is **Accessible Italy** (✆ **378-0549-9411;** www.accessibleitaly.com). It provides travelers with information about accessible tourist sites and places to rent wheelchairs, as well as offering organized "Accessible Tours" around Italy. Additionally, this non-profit organization invests its proceeds in Italy's infrastructure, to make the country more accessible.

FAMILY TRAVEL

Italy is still a family-oriented society, and kids have free rein just about anywhere they go. A crying baby at a dinner table is greeted with a knowing smile rather than with a stern look. Children under a certain age almost always receive discounts, and maybe a special treat from the waiter, but the availability of such North American accouterments as child seats for cars and dinner tables is more the exception to the rule than the norm.

To locate accommodations, restaurants, and attractions that are particularly kid-friendly, refer to the "Kids" icon throughout this guide.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

It is hard not to notice that, on the streets of Florence, young foreign women far outnumber any other category of people. Women feel remarkably welcome in Italy—sometimes a bit too welcome, actually. It seems every young Italian male is out to prove himself the most irresistible lover on the planet; remember, this is the land of Romeo and Casanova, so they have a lot to live up to. And with most every Italian woman playing the especially hard-to-get Juliet, well, you see what's coming next for attractive foreign women.

The more exotic you look—statuesque blondes, ebony-skinned beauties, or simply an American accent—the more irresistible you become to these suitors. And, as everyone around the world knows from watching Hollywood movies, American women are uninhibited and passionate sex kittens. That this isn't always true doesn't make much of a dent in Italian boys' fantasies.

Flirting back at these would-be Romeos, even mildly, only convinces them that you're ready to jump into bed. Heck, mere eye contact encourages them to redouble their efforts. Unless you want all this attention, take your cue from Italian women, who may wear tight skirts and fishnets but, you'll notice, usually ignore the men around them entirely unless it's someone they're already walking with.

Note that much of the attention is kept to verbal flirtation and that occasional inappropriate touching deserves a slap in the face. These men want to conquer you with their charm, not their muscles. Rape is much rarer in Italy than in the United States—but it does happen, mostly by non-Italian men, if you believe the newspapers. Though most foreign women report feeling far safer wandering the deserted streets of an Italian city to their hotels at 2am than they do in their own neighborhoods back home, use some common sense. You'll probably get tons of ride offers, mostly from would-be chivalrous knights atop their Vespa or Fiat steeds, but remind yourself that criminals do exist in this romantic part of the world, just as anywhere else.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN TRAVELERS

Italy for centuries was and, to a large degree, still is a homogenous culture. Add to that the fact that issues of race here are discussed so frankly and openly—there's apparently no taboo to saying, in a loud voice, "That black guy over there . . ." Moreover, the reality is that most people of African descent in Italy are working as street vendors, not bankers. All this may make travelers with darker skin feel—correctly at times—as if they're being singled out.

Pockets of racism do exist in Italy (primarily in the Northeast) just like anywhere else in the world, but on the whole, it is an extremely warm and racially tolerant country. As one Pakistani friend of mine put it, "They're just curious, that's all."

SENIOR TRAVEL

Italy is a multigenerational culture that doesn't tend to marginalize its seniors, and older people are treated with a great deal of respect and deference throughout Italy. But there are few specific programs, associations, or concessions made for them. The one exception is on admission prices for museums and sights, where those ages 60 or 65 and older will often get in at a reduced rate or even free. There are also special train passes and reductions on bus tickets and the like in various towns (see "Getting Around," earlier in this chapter). As a senior in Italy, you're *un anziano* (*una anziana* if you're a woman), or "ancient one"—consider it a term of respect and let people know you're one if you think a discount may be in order.

STUDENT TRAVEL

The **International Student Travel Confederation** (**ISTC;** www.istc.org) was formed in 1949 to make travel around the world more affordable for students. Check out its website for comprehensive travel services information and details on how to get an **International Student Identity Card (ISIC),** which qualifies students for substantial savings on rail passes, plane tickets, entrance fees, and more. It also provides students with basic health and life insurance and a 24-hour help line. The card is valid for a maximum of 18 months. You can apply for the card online or in person at **STA Travel** (**www.statravel.com**), the biggest student travel agency in the world; check out the website to locate STA Travel offices worldwide. If you're no longer a student but are still under 26, you can get an **International Youth Travel Card (IYTC)** from the same agency, which entitles you to some discounts. **Travel CUTS** (✆ **800/592-2887;** www.travelcuts.com) offers similar services for both Canadians and U.S. residents. Irish students may prefer to turn to **USIT** (✆ **01/602-1904;** www.usit.ie), an Ireland-based specialist in student, youth, and independent travel.

The **Florence Student Point** (Via San Gallo 25; ✆ **055-282-770;** www.studentpointfirenze.it) is like a junior tourist office that caters to students; its staff can help you find a reasonable place to stay and can assist you with any other tourism-related dilemma you might be facing. The best reason to stop by, though, is the free Student Card, available to students of any age with some proof of their academic status; it offers discounts on museums, trains, restaurants, bars, and more.

8 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Environmentalism in Italy has always been an area of stark contrasts. Italians conserve fuel and energy like most Europeans do, they go to great lengths to limit air

General Resources for Green Travel

The following websites provide valuable wide-ranging information on sustainable travel. For a list of even more sustainable resources, as well as tips and explanations on how to travel greener, visit www.frommers.com/planning.

- **Responsible Travel** (www.responsibletravel.com) is a great source of sustainable travel ideas; the site is run by a spokesperson for ethical tourism in the travel industry. **Sustainable Travel International** (www.sustainabletravelinternational.org) promotes ethical tourism practices, and manages an extensive directory of sustainable properties and tour operators around the world.
- In the U.K., **Tourism Concern** (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) works to reduce social and environmental problems connected to tourism. The **Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO)** (www.aito.co.uk) is a group of specialist operators leading the field in making holidays sustainable.
- In Canada, **www.greenlivingonline.com** offers extensive content on how to travel sustainably, including a travel and transport section and profiles of the best green shops and services in Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary.
- In Australia, the national body which sets guidelines and standards for ecotourism is **Ecotourism Australia** (www.ecotourism.org.au). **The Green Directory** (www.thegreendirectory.com.au), **Green Pages** (www.thegreenpages.com.au), and **Eco Directory** (www.ecodirectory.com.au) offer sustainable travel tips and directories of green businesses.
- **Carbonfund** (www.carbonfund.org), **TerraPass** (www.terrapass.org), and **Carbon Neutral** (www.carbonneutral.org) provide info on "carbon offsetting," or offsetting the greenhouse gas emitted during flights.
- **Greenhotels** (www.greenhotels.com) recommends green-rated member hotels around the world that fulfill the company's stringent environmental requirements. **Environmentally Friendly Hotels** (www.environmentallyfriendlyhotels.com) offers more green accommodations ratings.
- For information on animal-friendly issues throughout the world, visit **Tread Lightly** (www.treadlightly.org).
- **Volunteer International** (www.volunteerinternational.org) has a list of questions to help you determine the intentions and the nature of a volunteer program. For general info on volunteer travel, visit **www.volunteerabroad.org** and **www.idealist.org**.

pollution, and their shopping habits of consuming locally grown vegetables and bringing a bag to the store would put a smile on just about any environmentalist's face. Meanwhile, local entities' recycling efforts are dubious (investigative journalism reveals that most of the recyclables and trash in Rome, for example, ended up in the same place anyway) and, incredibly, sewage treatment plants have only begun to spring up around Milan in the past decade

or so. Previously, it simply was flushed into the Po.

That aside, the tourism industry here leads the charge in protecting the resources of a country where visitor spending accounts for a whole lot of the nation's income. Rural Tuscany might very well be the capital of the green movement in Italy, and the region is regularly credited with leading the charge for sustainable tourism. Most hotels in Florence, Siena, and other Tuscan cities, as well as higher-end *agriturismi* in the countryside, have implemented green practices, like encouraging patrons to re-use towels rather than throw them immediately in the wash. Organic agriculture is widespread, especially on smaller farms around Central Italy that host visitors, so when you eat in a restaurant in Tuscany, chances are that the food didn't travel very far to get to your table. (The insistence on bottled water, however, is one blemish on an otherwise good record.)

Towns and provinces push for more intercity cycling paths to connect tourist sites, and public transportation is generally reliable. However, there is no escaping the fact that most often a family with luggage will need a car to get around the Tuscan and Umbrian countryside.

Overall, as a nation that needs to import the great majority of its energy from far away, and with 60 million people living in relatively close proximity, Italians have always been a culture to live and consume at a sustainable rate and a very human scale.

You can do your part by reusing towels, taking public transportation whenever possible, discarding trash and recyclables in the appropriate white and blue bins around the region, and eating locally grown produce. And don't shy away from Central Italy's tap water; it's very good.

9 SPECIAL-INTEREST TRIPS AND ESCORTED GENERAL-INTEREST TOURS

SPECIAL-INTEREST TRIPS

Academic Trips & Language Classes

Florence holds more foreign student programs than almost any other city in the world. The list of universities and programs operating there is endless. For adults interested in studying in Florence, the list narrows a bit. One good place to start looking is **Education First** (✆ **800/665-5364;** www.ef.com), as they run a number of educational programs in Italy, including Italian language classes in Florence. Another private group with a Florence program is **Academic Studies Abroad** (✆ **888/845-4272;** www.academicstudies.com), which works through the Institute at Palazzo Rucellai. (Keep in mind that students on these sorts of programs are traditionally in their early twenties.)

Food & Wine Trips

Most tourist boards offer guided tours of the vineyards in their province, as will a number of local tourist agencies; see individual chapters for more information about vineyard tours in a specific region. They're often sponsored by the vintners themselves. The producers at **Donatella Cinelli Colombini** (✆ **0577/662-108;** www.cinellicolombini.it) even offer a "wine safari," in which they take visitors out in four-wheel-drive vehicles across dirt tracks to undiscovered corners of the region where small shops turn out top-shelf Tuscan art, wine, and cuisine.

Cooking Schools

It seems everywhere you turn these days someone is offering a cooking class. The most serious cooking courses in Tuscany

(and there are a lot of them these days) in my opinion are at **La Petraia** ★★ (✆ **0577/738-582;** www.lapetraia.com), for a simple reason: the simplicity of it all. The ingredients you use: the eggs, the chestnuts, the peas, the ham, the spices, almost without exception come from the very property where you are staying. And what a property it is (p. 131). A few times a year, hostess and chef Susan McKenna Grant invites a well-known international chef or food author to the Chianti farmhouse in a weeklong series of discussions and cooking jams called the "Petraia Sessions." At press time, she was hosting food writer Michael Pollan.

One of Italy's most respected cookbook authors, and former TV cooking show star, **Giuliano Bugialli** ★★ shares his secrets in summertime weeklong classes, with lodging in Florence and classes conducted in a kitchen in the Chianti. One-week courses can run $4,500 per person, including first-class accommodations and most meals. For more info, contact "Foods of Italy" at 105 S. 12th St. Apt. 205/206, The White Building, Philadelphia, PA 19107 (✆ **215/922-2086;** fax 215/923-3502; www.bugialli.com).

Another high profile school is the one started by **Lorenza de' Medici** ★, author of 30 kitchen tomes (including the coffee-table favorite *Tuscany: The Beautiful Cookbook*) and star of her own PBS cooking series. Unfortunately, she's hung up her apron and now leaves the lessons to an acolyte. May through October, her 1-week "The Villa Table"–brand courses take place in the 12th-century abbey and wine estate **Badia a Coltibuono** (see chapter 7 for more information). The courses aren't cheap—similar to Bugialli's prices—but room and board in the late medieval abbey complex are included. The courses book up quickly. Another option is the half-day cooking course offered Wednesdays and Fridays from 10am to 3:30pm, which must be booked at least 36 hours in advance at ✆ **0577-744-832** or www.coltibuono.com. For more info, contact Louise Owens, 3128 Purdue, Dallas, TX 75225 (✆ **214/739-2846;** fax 214/691-7996).

April through October, **Inland Services,** 708 Third Ave., 13th floor, New York, NY 10017 (✆ **212/687-9898;** www.cookeuro.com), offers a weeklong course, "Love of Italian Cooking," with visits to wine estates and cultural day trips, for about $3,200 per person based on double occupancy.

If a week's time or a $4,000 investment are too rich for your cooking-lesson tastes, check out Judy Witts Francini's **La Divina Cucina** ★★★ (✆/fax **055-292-578;** www.divinacucina.com) for 1-, 2-, and 3-day courses designed to teach you to cook as the Florentines do. You start off each class by shopping in Florence's large central market at 11am, and by 4pm you've put together a meal based on the freshest ingredients available that day. A single Monday at the market costs 125€ per person, or a 3-day Chianti and Florence program costs 770€.

The **Castello Vicchiomaggio** (✆ **055-854-079;** fax 055-853-911; www.vicchiomaggio.it) may also be good for dabblers, offering a 1-day course for 155€ per person (minimum six people).

For more local cooking classes, see "Cook Like a True Tuscan," p. 131.

Bike Tours

The best way to experience Tuscany and Umbria just may be by bicycle. Bike-it-yourselfers should arm themselves with a good map (see "Getting Around," earlier in this chapter) and make use of the resources of the **Club Alpino Italiano,** Via E. Fonseca Pimentel 7, Milan 20127 (✆ **02-2614-1378;** fax 02-2614-1395; www.cai.it). You can rent a bike by the week or longer at outlets in most cities.

Several operators specialize in setting up itineraries and making some of the

arrangements for you or in leading fully guided tours. **Ciclismo Classico** ★★ (✆ **800/866-7314** in the U.S., or 781/646-3377; fax 781/641-1512; www.ciclismoclassico.com) is one of the best operators and has been leading bike and walking tours in Italy since 1988. A weeklong tour of Tuscany runs about 2,173€ per person. April through November, the outfit runs several guided tours through Tuscany and Umbria, always van-supported, and will help you arrange a do-it-yourself tour as well. Six- to 15-day trips usually include Italian-language and cooking lessons along with wine tasting and cultural itineraries. Groups average 10 to 18 people, with all ages and ability levels welcome.

Experience Plus (✆ **800/685-4565** in the U.S., or 970/484-8489; www.experienceplus.com) offers both guided (Sept–Oct) and self-guided (Apr–Oct) biking and walking tours through Tuscany lasting 8 or 9 days. Florence-based **I Bike Italy** ★ (✆ **561/388-0783** in the U.S.; www.ibikeitaly.com) offers guided 1- and 2-day rides in the Tuscan countryside. The 2-day tour requires a minimum of four participants and ends in Siena. They provide a shuttle service in and out of the city, the bike, and a bilingual guide. The 1-day tour returns to Florence around 5pm. Tours cost around 70€ per person, lunch included. The same company leads less extensive walking tours in Tuscany.

Walking Tours

If you don't feel the need to cover so much territory, you can appreciate even more of the countryside by walking or hiking (called *trekking* in Italian). Italy's resource for everything from countryside ambles to serious mountain trekking is the **Club Alpino Italiano** (see "Bike Tours," above). Many outfits run walking tours in Tuscany and Umbria. Besides **Ciclismo Classico** (see above), you might want to try **Butterfield & Robinson,** 70 Bond St., Ste. 300, Toronto, ON M5B 1X3 (✆ **800/678-1147** or 416/864-1354; fax 416/864-0541; www.butterfield.com); or **Country Walkers** ★ (✆ **800/464-9255** in the U.S., or 802/244-1387; www.countrywalkers.com), which has a rather refined, romantic outlook on Italy and offers several Tuscan tours, one of which divides your time between exploring hill towns on foot and taking cooking and wine appreciation lessons.

For walking tours in Florence, one of the better resources is **Context Travel** (✆ **215/609-4888;** www.contexttravel.com), whose graduate students and other experts in their respective fields lead tours and seminars on everything from Renaissance art to ceramics to cuisine.

ESCORTED GENERAL-INTEREST TOURS

From the priciest pampered tours to the most inexpensive bare-bones trips, you'll find no shortage of tour operators who offer tours to Tuscany. Many travelers opt for escorted tours because they let you sit back and enjoy the trip without having to drive or worry about details. They take you to the maximum number of sights in the minimum amount of time with the least amount of hassle. They're particularly convenient for people with limited mobility and they can be a great way to make new friends. On the downside, you'll have little opportunity for serendipitous interactions with locals. While these escorted trips are hassle-free and often cost-efficient, there really is no substitute for exploring the back roads of Tuscany in small numbers, making spur-of-the-moment decisions and finding unexpected gems.

Some tour operators who offer downright cheap deals to Tuscany and Umbria are **Globus Escorted Tours** (✆ **866/755-8581;** www.globusjourneys.com); **Insight Vacations** (✆ **866/680-1241;** www.insightvacations.com); and **Trafalgar Tours** (✆ **866/544-4434;** www.trafalgar.com), which is especially popular in Tuscany. It's hard to book your own hotels,

transportation, and food for anything near the prices offered by these companies, but you likely won't stay or eat at top-notch establishments.

One higher quality—and more expensive—tour operator is **Go Ahead Tours** (✆ **800/590-1170;** www.goaheadtours.com). They offer refined trips that focus heavily on food and wine, rather than just the standard tourist sites. For example, they offer a 10-day tour called "Taste of Tuscany & Umbria Tour," which brings visitors to the Eurochocolate Festival in Perugia.

For more information on escorted general-interest tours, including questions to ask before booking your trip, see www.frommers.com/planning.

10 STAYING CONNECTED

If you want to be in touch, it is a good idea to rent a cellphone on your visit to Tuscany and Umbria. Pay phones have not entirely gone by the wayside, but these days there are very few pay phones in Central Italy—a place where there are far more cellular numbers than landline numbers.

Alternatively, you can buy phone cards with special fixed rates to the United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries *(una carta telefonica prepagata per chiamare gli Stati Uniti, Canada . . .).* The rates on these phone cards are heavily discounted from what you would pay from a landline and far less expensive than calling abroad from a cellphone. Newsstands and tobacconists in cities carry these cards.

To call Tuscany/Umbria:

1. Dial the international access code: 011 from the U.S.; 00 from the U.K., Ireland, or New Zealand; or 0011 from Australia.
2. Dial the country code: 39.
3. Dial the city code (for Florence: 055) and then the number. (Do not drop the initial 0 as you might in other European countries.) Even when calling within Italy, you always need to dial the city code first.

To make international calls: To make international calls from Italy, first dial 00 and then the country code (U.S. or Canada 1, U.K. 44, Ireland 353, Australia 61, New Zealand 64). Next you dial the area code and number. For example, if you wanted to call the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., you would dial 00-1-202-588-7800.

For directory assistance: Each cellphone carrier has its own directory assistance number, which is listed automatically in the address book of your SIM card. For Telecom Italia, and its mobile carrier, TIM, the directory assistance number is ✆ **412.**

For operator assistance: For operator assistance in making either a domestic or international call from a Telecom Italia landline, call ✆ **170.**

Toll-free numbers: Numbers in Italy beginning with 800 or 877, and a few others beginning with 8, are toll-free, but calling a 1-800 number in the States from Italy is not toll-free. In fact, it costs the same as an overseas call.

CELLPHONES

The three letters that define much of the world's wireless capabilities are **GSM** (Global System for Mobile communications), a big, seamless network that makes for easy cross-border cellphone use throughout Europe and dozens of other countries worldwide. GSM phones function with a removable plastic SIM card, encoded with your phone number and account information. If your cellphone is on a GSM system, and you have a world-capable multiband

phone such as many Sony Ericsson, Motorola, or Samsung models, you can make and receive calls across civilized areas around much of the globe, including Tuscany and Umbria. Just call your wireless operator and ask for "international roaming" to be activated on your account. Unfortunately, per-minute charges can be high—usually $1 to $1.50 in Italy. Coverage with major carriers is excellent in Tuscan and Umbrian cities, like Florence, but can be spotty sometimes in the region's less populated countryside.

For many, **renting** a phone is a good idea. While you can rent a phone from any number of overseas sites, including kiosks at airports and at car-rental agencies, we suggest renting the phone before you leave home. There are a number of places in Rome and Florence where you can rent cellphones, but it is generally expensive.

Buying a phone can be economically attractive, as Italy has relatively cheap prepaid phone programs. Once you arrive at your destination, stop by a local cellphone shop and get the cheapest package; you'll pay less than 70€ for a phone and a starter calling card. The best deals will probably be in Rome and Milan, if you're flying into one of those cities. Both cities' principal train stations, Stazione Centrale in Milan and Termini in Rome, in the lower level shopping center, have cellular stores. Local calls may be as low as 10¢ per minute, and incoming calls are free.

INTERNET & E-MAIL

More and more hotels, resorts, airports, cafes, and retailers are going **Wi-Fi** (wireless fidelity), becoming "hotspots" that offer free high-speed Wi-Fi access or charge a small fee for usage. Most hotels and lots of wine bars and Irish pubs in Florence have wireless Internet access, as do many hotels throughout Tuscany and Umbria. When my Internet wasn't working in Florence, I usually relied on the **Old Stove** pub on Via Pellicceria 2r (✆ **055-284-640;** www.theoldstovepub.com; p. 185), near the Ponte Vecchio, which was also a good excuse for a midday Guinness.

Most major airports have **Internet kiosks** that provide basic Web access for a per-minute fee that's usually higher than cybercafe prices. Florence and Pisa do not have major airports. I once spent a very frustrating afternoon waiting at an Internet-less Peretola airport, trying to contact a friend who was supposed to arrive on a certain flight but didn't. (I ended up begging to use the computer of a very friendly woman at the information desk.)

If you are bringing your own computer, keep in mind the outlets are 220V in Italy, and you will need an adapter for a U.K. or North American plug—the same one used for France and most of the rest of the Continent.

11 TIPS ON ACCOMMODATIONS

Italy ceased to be the country of the cheap *pensione* a long time ago. In fact it takes some searching these days to find a hotel room with a shared bathroom.

Hotels are **rated** by regional boards on a system of one to five stars. Prices aren't directly tied to the star system, but for the most part, the more stars a hotel has, the more expensive it'll be—but a four-star in a small town may be cheaper than a two-star in Florence. The number of stars awarded a hotel is based strictly on the amenities offered—not how clean, comfortable, or friendly a place is.

A few of the four- and five-star hotels have their own private **garages,** but most city inns have an agreement with a local garage. In many small towns, a garage is unnecessary because public parking, both free and pay, is widely available and never

too far from your hotel. Parking costs and procedures are indicated under each hotel, and the rates quoted are per day (overnight).

The **high season** throughout most of Tuscany and Umbria runs from Easter to early September or October—peaking June through August—and from December 24 to January 6. You can almost always bargain for a cheaper rate if you're traveling in the shoulder season (early spring and late fall) or winter off season (not including Christmas). In hotel reviews, I usually quote a range of prices. If there is one figure only, that represents the maximum. Prices vary so wildly these days depending entirely on availability, that sometimes the only dependable figure is the highest the hotel is allowed to charge. The moral of the story: If it seems like availability is high, you should be getting a discount.

Supposedly, Italian hotels must quote the price for **breakfast** separately from the room and can't force it on you if you don't want it. However, most hotels include breakfast automatically in the room rate hoping you won't notice. Breakfast is rarely worth the 3€ to 15€ charged for it, since you can get the same breakfast—and freshly made instead of packaged—for around 2€ at the bar down the block. Ask for your room quote with a *prezzo senza colazione* (*pretz*-zoh *sen*-zah coal-lat-zee-*oh*-nay), or price without breakfast.

AGRITURISMO (STAYING ON A FARM)

Tuscany and Umbria are at the forefront of the *agriturismo* movement in Italy, whereby a working farm or agricultural estate makes available accommodations for visitors who want to stay out in the countryside. The supply of such places has exploded perhaps even more quickly than demand. The rural atmosphere is ensured by the fact that an operation can call itself *"agriturismo"* only if (a) it offers fewer than 30 beds total and (b) the agricultural component of the property brings in a larger economic share of profits than the hospitality part—in other words, the property has to remain a farm and not become just a rural hotel. That's why you'll almost always be offered homemade sausages, home-pressed olive oil, and so on.

Agriturismi are generally a crapshoot. The types of accommodations can vary dramatically. Most, though, are mini-apartments, usually rented out with a minimum stay of 3 days or a week. Sometimes you're invited to eat big country dinners at the table with the family; other times you cook for yourself. Rates can vary from 60€ for two per day to 250€ and beyond—as much as a board-rated four-star hotel in town. I've reviewed a few choice ones throughout this book, but there are hundreds more.

Probably the best resource in English is **www.turismo.intoscana.it**, with databases of hundreds of farmstays, searchable both by text or by clickable map down to the locality level, with info about each property, a photo or two, and a direct link to each *agriturismo*'s own website.

Otherwise, if you feel handy enough with Italian, you can avail yourself of the three independent national organizations that together represent all *agriturismi* (or, at least, all the reputable ones).

Go to the website of **Terranostra** (www.terranostra.it) and click on *"La tua vacanza,"* then *"ricerche."* This will pop you up a map of Italy. Mouse over Toscana or Umbria, click, and you'll get 524 choices in Tuscany and 127 in Umbria, arranged, unfortunately, alphabetically by name of the actual property (not by, say, town, which would make selecting one so much easier), with price categories of *basso* (low), *medio* (medium), and *alto* (high). Click on the property name and you get a review with pictures and symbols (in Italian, but understandable enough) plus contact info and a link to the place's own website, if available. In Tuscany, you can contact **Terranostra Toscana,** Via Magazzini 2, 50122,

Firenze (✆ **055-280-539** or 055-20-022; fax 055-292-161); in Umbria, contact **Terranostra Umbria,** Via Campo di Marte 10, 06124 Perugia (✆ **075-500-9559;** fax 075-509-2032).

At the site of **Turismo Verde** (www.turismoverde.it), click on *"La guida agrituristica on-line."* In Tuscany, contact the organization directly at **Turismo Verde Toscana,** Via Verdi 5, 50122, Firenze (✆ **055-200-2216;** fax 055-234-5039); in Umbria, contact **Turismo Verde Umbria,** Via Mario Angeloni 1, 06124 Perugia (✆ **075-500-2953;** fax 075-500-2956).

The easiest to navigate—since you click on a region (Tuscany or Umbria) on the map or text list, and the next page gives you the option of continuing in English—is **Agriturist** (www.agriturist.it), but the site fails after that. You can indeed find hundreds upon hundreds of individual properties via a search engine. In Tuscany, you can contact them at **Agriturist Toscana,** Piazza San Firenze 3, 50122, Firenze (✆ **055-287-838**); in Umbria, contact **Agriturist Umbria** c/o Federumbria Agricoltori, Via Savonarola 38, 06121 Perugia (✆/fax **075-32-028**).

In the States, a few agencies are popping up to help you track down a perfect *agriturismo* in Italy, including Ralph Levey's **Italy Farm Holidays,** 547 Martling Ave., Tarrytown, NY 10591 (✆ **914/631-7880;** fax 914/631-8831; www.italyfarmholidays.com), which represents many of the more upscale *agriturismo* properties in Tuscany and Umbria.

For apartment, farmhouse, or cottage stays of 2 weeks or more, **Idyll Untours** (✆ **888/868-6871;** www.untours.com) provides exceptional vacation rentals for a reasonable price—which includes air/ground transportation, cooking facilities, and on-call support from a local resident. Best of all: Untours—named the "Most Generous Company in America" by Newman's Own—donates most profits to provide low-interest loans to underprivileged entrepreneurs around the world (see website for details).

VILLA RENTALS

Each summer, thousands of visitors become temporary Tuscans by renting an old farmhouse or "villa," a marketing term used to inspire romantic images of manicured gardens, a Renaissance mansion, and glasses of chianti, but in reality guaranteeing no more than four walls and most of a roof.

Actually, finding your countryside Eden isn't that simple, and if you want to ensure a romantic and memorable experience, brace yourself for a lot of research and legwork. Occasionally you can go through the property owners themselves, but the vast majority of villas are rented out via agencies (see below).

Shop around for a trustworthy agent or representative. Often several outfits will list the same property but charge radically different prices. At some, you sign away any right to refunds if the place doesn't live up to your expectations. Make sure the agency is willing to work with you to find the right property. Try to work with someone who has personally visited the properties you're considering, and always ask to see lots of photos: Get the exterior from several angles to make sure the railroad doesn't pass by the back door, as well as pictures of the bedrooms, kitchen, and bathrooms, and photos of the views out each side of the house.

If you're traveling with other couples, ask to see a floor plan to make sure access to the bathroom isn't through one couple's bedroom. Find out if this is the only villa on the property—some people who rent the villa for the isolation find themselves living in a small enclave of foreigners all sharing the same small pool. Ask whether the villa is purely a rental unit or if, say, the owning family lives there during winter but lets it out during summer. Renting a lived-in place offers pretty good insurance

that the lights, plumbing, heat, and so on will all be working.

One of the best agencies to call is **Rentvillas.com** (formerly Rentals in Italy), 700 E. Main St., Ventura, CA 93001 (✆ **800/726-6702** or 805/641-1650; fax 805/641-1630; www.rentvillas.com). Its agents are very helpful in tracking down the perfect place to suit your needs. A United Kingdom agency—and one of the best all-around agents in Britain—is **International Chapters,** a division of Abercrombie & Kent, Sloane Square House, Holbein Place, London SW1W 8NS (✆ **08450/700-618**). Marjorie Shaw's **Insider's Italy,** 41 Schermerhorn St., Brooklyn, NY 11201 (✆ **718/855-3878;** fax 718/855-3687; www.insidersitaly.com), is a small, upscale outfit run by a very personable agent who's thoroughly familiar with all of her properties and with Italy in general.

Also in the United States is **Parker Company Ltd.,** Seaport Landing, 152 Lynnway, Lynn, MA 01902 (✆ **800/280-2811** or 781/596-8282; fax 781/596-3125; www.theparkercompany.com), which handles overseas villa rentals.

For some of the top properties, call the local representative of the **Cottages to Castles** group. In the United Kingdom, contact **Cottages to Castles,** Tuscany House, 10 Tonbridge Rd., Maidstone, Kent ME16 8RP (✆ **1622/775-217;** fax 1622/775-278; www.cottagestocastles.com). In Australia and New Zealand, call **Italian Villa Holidays,** P.O. Box 2293, Wellington, 6015, New Zealand (✆ **800/125-555** in Australia, 800/4-TUSCANY [4-8772269] in New Zealand; fax 644/479-0021).

One of the most reasonably priced agencies is **Villas and Apartments Abroad, Ltd.,** 370 Lexington Ave., Ste. 1401, New York, NY 10017 (✆ **212/897-5045;** fax 212/897-5039; www.vaanyc.com). **Homeabroad.com,** formerly Vacanze in Italia, 22 Railroad St., Great Barrington, MA 02130 (✆ **413/528-6610;** www.homeabroad.com), handles hundreds of rather upscale properties. A popular but *very* pricey agency is **Villas International,** 4340 Redwood Hwy., Ste. D309, San Rafael, CA 94903 (✆ **800/221-2260** or 415/499-9490; fax 415/499-9491; www.villasintl.com).

4 Suggested Itineraries

Tuscany is densely populated with tourist attractions, perhaps more so than any other region in Europe. It could take months to experience all of its art, architecture, food, and wine. Admirers of Michelangelo and Piero della Francesca could spend 2 weeks in Florence and Arezzo. Wine buffs could sip and sniff their way through 2 weeks in Chianti and Montalcino. Romantics could dream away that time in Lucca alone. I've designed the 1-week and 2-week itineraries for first-time tourists to discover the best of Tuscany and Umbria. Then there is a tour for families, and one for food-and-wine enthusiasts as well.

A car will be indispensable in every case, because public transport leaves a lot to be desired. And the soul of Central Italy is found in its countryside, through its sunflower fields and sloping vineyards, spotted with storied castles.

It is not a large place—you could drive from the top of Tuscany to the bottom on the highway in *about* 3 hours—but the roads of the hinterland are windy, narrow, and slow. Don't be daunted by the idea of spending much of your time in the car. Getting there, in this case, is half the fun.

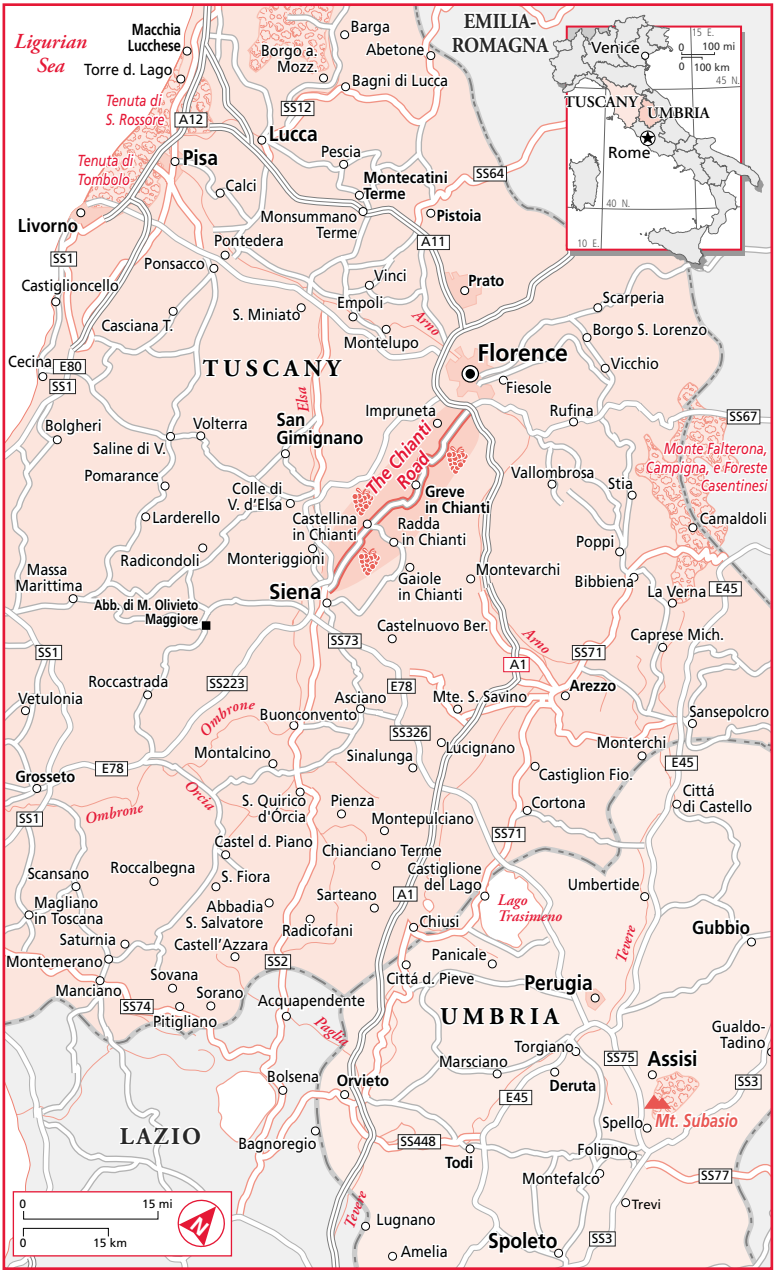
The following itineraries all start in Florence—the lion's share of travelers from North America arrive there via train, from airports in Milan or Rome. You might, however, consider flying into Pisa, a destination for many low-cost airlines, and begin your itinerary there.

As is the case on any vacation, timing is everything. Avoid peak season if at all possible. So many foreigners, especially Americans, descend on Florence in July and early August that they are literally corralled through the streets. Iron railings on the most populated sidewalks keep the herds from spilling into traffic. Spring and early fall are the ideal times to visit. Families should keep an eye on festival schedules to give children a chance to smash walnuts with mallets in Cortona, for example, or to watch "knights" joust in Arezzo. Enotourists will get the most out of a vineyard visit just before harvest, when the grapes are still on the vine.

1 THE REGIONS IN BRIEF

Tuscany and Umbria are divided into administrative provinces based around major cities. These official designations aren't perfect for organizing a travel guide, so the following "regions" into which this book is divided group towns and sights based on similarities, with most chapters focused on a major city. Keep in mind that none of these "regions" is very large—Tuscany is, at 23,728 sq. km (9,161 sq. miles), a bit smaller than New Hampshire, and Umbria, at 8,725 sq. km (3,369 sq. miles), makes about two Rhode Islands.

FLORENCE The capital of Tuscany is **Florence,** one of Italy's most famous cities. It was once the home of the colorful Medici dynasty, which actively encouraged the development of the Renaissance by sponsoring masters such as Donatello, Leonardo, and Michelangelo. Art treasures such as those found at the Accademia (Michelangelo's


Ligurian Sea
Macchia Lucchese
Torre d. Lago
Tenuta di S. Rossore
A12
Tenuta di Tombolo
Pisa
Livorno
SS1
Castiglioncello
Cecina
E80
Casciana T.
Ponsacco
Pontedera
Borgo a. Mozz.
Barga
Abetone
Bagni di Lucca
SS12
Lucca
Pescia
Montecatini Terme
SS64
Calci
Monsummano Terme
Pistoia
A11
Vinci
Prato
Empoli
S. Miniato
Montelupo
Arno
Scarperia
Borgo S. Lorenzo
Florence
Vicchio
Fiesole
TUSCANY
Elsa
Impruneta
Rufina
SS67
Bolgheri
Volterra
San Gimignano
Saline di V.
The Chianti Road
Monte Falterona, Campigna, e Foreste Casentinesi
Pomarance
Colle di V. d'Elsa
Greve in Chianti
Vallombrosa
Stia
Larderello
Castellina in Chianti
Radda in Chianti
Camaldoli
Radicondoli
Monteriggioni
Poppi
Massa Marittima
Gaiole in Chianti
Montevarchi
Bibbiena
La Verna
E45
Siena
Abb. di M. Olivieto Maggiore
Castelnuovo Ber.
SS73
Caprese Mich.
SS71
A1
Roccastrada
SS223
E78
Arezzo
Vetulonia
Asciano
Mte. S. Savino
Ombrone
Buonconvento
Sansepolcro
SS326
Lucignano
Monterchi
Montalcino
Sinalunga
Castiglion Fio.
Grosseto
Orcia
S. Quirico d'Orcia
Pienza
Cortona
Città di Castello
Montepulciano
Castel d. Piano
Chianciano Terme
Scansano
Roccalbegna
S. Fiora
Castiglione del Lago
Umbertide
Magliano in Toscana
Abbadia S. Salvatore
Sarteano
Lago Trasimeno
Chiusi
Gubbio
Saturnia
Castell'Azzara
Radicofani
Tevere
Montemerano
SS2
Panicale
Sovana
Città d. Pieve
Perugia
Manciano
Sorano
SS74
Acquapendente
Pitigliano
Paglia
UMBRIA
Gualdo-Tadino
Torgiano
SS75
Assisi
Marsciano
Bolsena
Orvieto
Deruta
SS3
Spello
Mt. Subasio
LAZIO
Bagnoregio
SS448
Todi
Foligno
Montefalco
SS77
Trevi
Lugnano
Amelia
Spoleto
0 15 mi
0 15 km
EMILIA-ROMAGNA
Venice
15 E.
0 100 mi
0 100 km
45 N.
TUSCANY
UMBRIA
Rome
40 N.
10 E.

David), the Uffizi Galleries (Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*), and the Pitti Palace (Raphael's *La Velata*) draw millions of visitors every year. Throw into the mix fabulous architecture (the Duomo with Brunelleschi's dome, Giotto's campanile, Santa Croce), fine restaurants and earthy *trattorie,* and leading designer boutiques and bustling outdoor markets, and the city of the Renaissance becomes quite simply one of the world's must-see sights.

THE CHIANTI, SIENA & THE WESTERN HILL TOWNS The land of high hills stretching from Florence south to Siena is among the most famous countrysides on Earth, the vine-covered Arcadia of **Chianti.** Here you can drive along the Chiantigiana roadway, stopping to soak up the scenery and sample the *vino.* **Siena** is Tuscany's medieval foil to the Renaissance of Florence. It's a city built of brick, with Gothic palaces, excellent pastries, and its own stylized school of Gothic painting. With steep back streets and a mammoth art-packed cathedral, it's the region's second most popular city. The hill towns west of it—medieval tangles of roads perched atop small mountains—are almost as famous: **San Gimignano,** with its medieval stone skyscrapers; Etruscan **Volterra,** with its alabaster workshops; and the undervisited **Massa Marittima,** a medieval mining town with a gorgeous cathedral.

LUCCA & NORTHWESTERN TUSCANY The Apuan Alps, along the shore of the Tyrrhenian Sea, kick off a series of mountain chains that rides across the northern edge of Tuscany, separating it from Emilia-Romagna to the north. In the valley below this string of mountains sit several worthy towns little visited by most travelers rushing from Florence to Lucca or Pisa. The medieval textile center of **Prato** is Italy's fastest-growing city and about the friendliest town in Tuscany. Its historic core is filled with Renaissance art treasures overlooked by many who don't realize a city just 16km (10 miles) from Florence can be so different and rewarding. Its neighbor **Pistoia,** an old Roman town, is more firmly stamped with the art stylings of the Romanesque Middle Ages. Farther along in the Valdinievole (Valley of Mists) you'll find relaxation at **Montecatini Terme,** Italy's most famous spa, and **Monsummano Terme,** a Dantean underworld of natural "steam room" caverns hidden beneath a luxury hotel.

The elegant old republican city of **Lucca** is packed with Romanesque churches, livened by the music of native sons Puccini and Boccherini, and teeming with grandmothers on bicycles going shopping. Along the coast north of Lucca are Tuscany's most developed resort beaches, **Viareggio** and **Forte di Marmi.** Farther inland are the old mining towns of **Massa** and **Carrara,** from whose mountainside comes the world's most brilliant white marble, favored by Michelangelo and Henry Moore.

PISA, TUSCANY'S COAST & THE MAREMMA This region consists of much of Tuscany's coast, from the ancient maritime republic of **Pisa** and its tilting tower to **Livorno,** a Medici-built port city and seafood mecca, and, farther down the coastline, the **Maremma,** Tuscany's deep south. Once a stronghold of the Etruscans, the Maremma was a swamp from the Dark Ages to the 1600s and is still a highly undeveloped region. Also covered is the old iron-mining island of **Elba,** once Napoleon's reign in exile and now one of Italy's more proletarian resorts.

SOUTHERN TUSCANY "Southern Tuscany" is a bit of a misnomer here, because the Maremma is technically the most southerly region. But the province of Siena stretches south to abut Umbria in a landscape of soft green hills, lone farmhouses, stands of cypress, patches of cultivated fields, and the occasional weird erosion formations known as the *Crete Senesi* and *biancane.* This area is postcard-perfect Tuscany. The medieval hill towns of **Montalcino** and **Montepulciano** craft some of Italy's finest red wines, and

Pienza, prodigious producer of pecorino sheep's cheese, is the only perfectly designed town center of the Renaissance. If the spa waters of **Chianciano Terme** don't catch your fancy, perhaps you'll enjoy the ancient Etruscan center of **Chiusi,** with its tombs, archaeological museum, and excellent restaurants.

AREZZO & NORTHEASTERN TUSCANY **Arezzo** may once have been an important Etruscan city, but it's not much more than a hill town today, with some Piero della Francesca frescoes and a world-class monthly antiques market. East of Arezzo, near the Umbrian border, is Piero's hometown of **Sansepolcro,** a modest industrial city with an old core devoted to preserving Piero's great works. South of Arezzo stretches the **Chiana Valley,** where the cattle for Florence's famous steaks are raised, and the thriving art city of **Cortona,** which contains some of Tuscany's finest small museums.

PERUGIA, ASSISI & NORTHERN UMBRIA **Perugia,** the capital of Umbria, is a refined city of soft jazz, velvety chocolates, medieval alleys, and one of Italy's top painting galleries, featuring the works of Perugino, master of the modeled figure and teacher of Raphael. Just east is one of Italy's spiritual centers, the hill town of **Assisi,** birthplace of St. Francis. The basilica raised in his honor is the nerve center of the vast Franciscan monastic movement and home to some of the greatest fresco cycles of the early Renaissance. Umbria gets even wilder to the north, where the rocky border city of **Gubbio** is home to one of Italy's wildest pagan festivals and its own quirky early Renaissance school of art.

SPOLETO & SOUTHERN UMBRIA **Spoleto** was once seat of the Lombard duchy that controlled most of Umbria in the Dark Ages, but it's most famous these days for its world-class music-and-dance Spoleto Festival. Spoleto's beautiful Duomo and the odd reliefs on its early Romanesque churches draw a small but select crowd of admirers. Moving west we hit **Todi,** a quintessential Italian hill town that just oozes medieval charm, and **Orvieto,** an implacable city of tufa rising above the valley on its volcanic outcropping, with a giant gem of a cathedral and the best white wine in Italy.

2 TUSCANY IN 1 WEEK

This route brings you to Italy's must-see destinations: Florence, Siena, Pisa, Lucca, and the Chianti. This driving loop starts in the capital, since most travelers arrive there via train from airports in Milan or Rome.

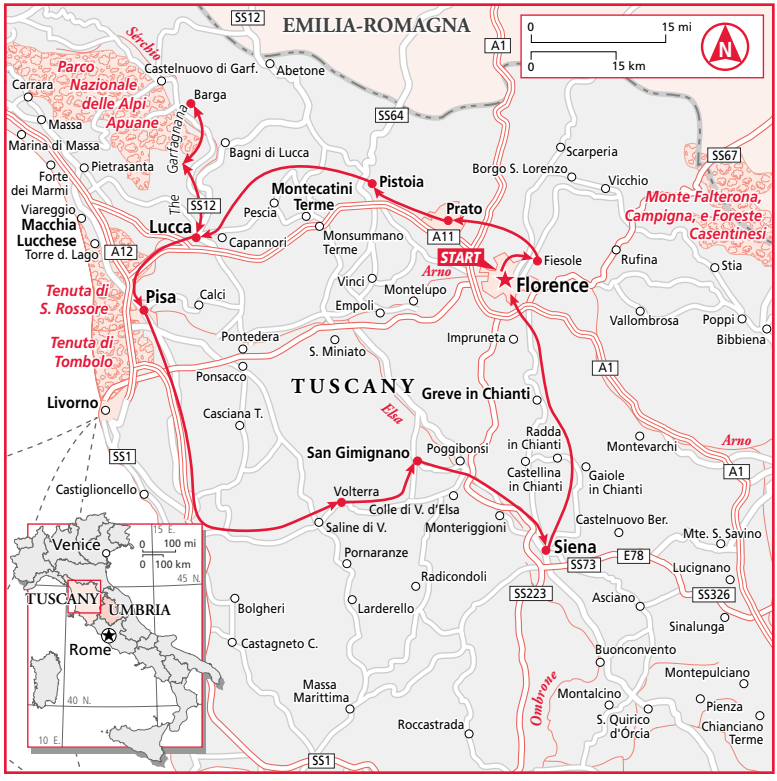
Days ❶–❷: Florence ★★★

The best-known and most easily viewed sights to tackle early are the **Cathedral,** the **Baptistery, Giotto's bell tower,** and **Santa Maria Novella.** Except on Sundays, these are open until early evening, making them suitable opening-day attractions. Make sure you have made reservations at some of the top visited sights, such as the Accademia, to avoid the long lines. Then, unwind with some comfort food at the casual **Il Latini,** and top it off with a treat at the **Festival del Gelato.**

After waking up early with a frothy cappuccino, the second day is best suited for the more stimulating and rewarding sights. Not to be missed are the monastery of **San Marco;** Michelangelo's remains in **Santa Croce;** the **Boboli Gardens;** the **Accademia,** to view *David;* and at least a brief tour of the **Uffizi.** For details on Florence attractions, see chapter 6.

Be sure to check the opening hours of all museums before planning your itinerary and, when possible, make reservations. Many museums are closed on Monday

Tuscany in 1 Week



and most are closed during the lunch break. For a list, see "The Best Times to Sightsee," on p. 137. Because the rest of the itinerary requires a car, you should book one well ahead of time since reservations fill up quickly (especially in summer), and pick it up at the airport.

Day 3: Fiesole, Prato & Pistoia; Lucca & the Garfagnana ★

Art and architecture buffs would be remiss to skip **Pistoia** (p. 259), **Prato** (p. 252), and **Fiesole** (p. 186). Continue on to **Lucca** (p. 270) and plan to overnight here. Stroll along its walls and savor a romantic dinner of *tortelli lucchesi* in its alleyways, most notably at La Buca di Sant'Antonio.

The next day, you have a choice of getting some more exercise in the **Garfagnana** (p. 283), one of Tuscany's most pleasant natural preserves, or more sightseeing in some of the region's lesser-known cities. The road to the caves and hiking trails of the Garfagnana is short and very scenic, but the excursion realistically will take most of the day.

Day 4: Pisa ★★

Consider getting up for a morning bicycle ride along Lucca's **medieval walls** before making the short drive to **Pisa** (p. 288). Climb the **Leaning Tower,** snap the de rigueur photo, then visit the rest of the **Campo dei Miracoli.**

Day 5: Volterra & San Gimignano ★

Visit the Alabaster City of **Volterra** (p. 238), an excellent example of Etruscan culture and one of the lesser-known gems in Tuscany. After lunch, head for **San Gimignano;** make a very brief stop in **Monteriggioni** to tour the fortress. The best time to approach San Gimignano is in the late afternoon, when the hilltop city is bathed in the setting sun. See p. 229.

Day 6: Siena ★★

Unless you're there during the **Palio** (p. 325), the top sights in **Siena** (p. 205) can feasibly be visited in about 1 full day. The **cathedral** is one of Italy's most interesting, especially with its recently discovered new room, the so-called **"crypt"** underneath, containing a cycle of 13th-century frescoes. Be sure to indulge in a feast in Siena, as its food is one of its greatest draws.

Day 7: Chianti ★★

Spend the day on state road 222, which takes you through the big-name towns in Chianti, and all the way back to Florence. The three most worthy stops are **Greve, Radda,** and **Castellina in Chianti,** all important winemaking areas topped by medieval villages. Although there are a number of great restaurants along the way, those on a tight budget might want instead to pick up picnic supplies in **Panzano,** and pay a visit to the "poet butcher," Dario Cecchini, who can recite Dante's *Inferno* in its entirety while chopping away at a rack of ribs. Be aware that many vineyards are family-run and therefore close on Sundays. See p. 195.

3 TUSCANY & UMBRIA IN 2 WEEKS

Two weeks will give you enough time to see Tuscany's top destinations with some additional time to sample the treasures of Umbria and the pleasures of the countryside. For the first 7 days, refer to "Tuscany in 1 Week" (see above) and then move on to Arezzo.

Day 8: Cortona & Arezzo ★

Aside from the marvels of **Piero della Francesca** in Arezzo and the bucolic setting around Cortona, the adopted home of *Under the Tuscan Sun* author Frances Mayes, one of the nicest parts of this day will be the ride between the two. The SS71 is studded with castles, vineyards, and sunflower fields. In fact, finding a nice bed-and-breakfast outside one of the towns will make for one of the trip's most memorable nights. See p. 359 and 346.

Day 9: Perugia ★

The city's **National Gallery** is a must-see on any visit to Umbria, but just hanging around the cafes of this animated medieval village makes it worth the trip. Central Italy can be rather short on nightlife for young people, but Perugia's **university** scene makes the city a welcome exception. See p. 370.

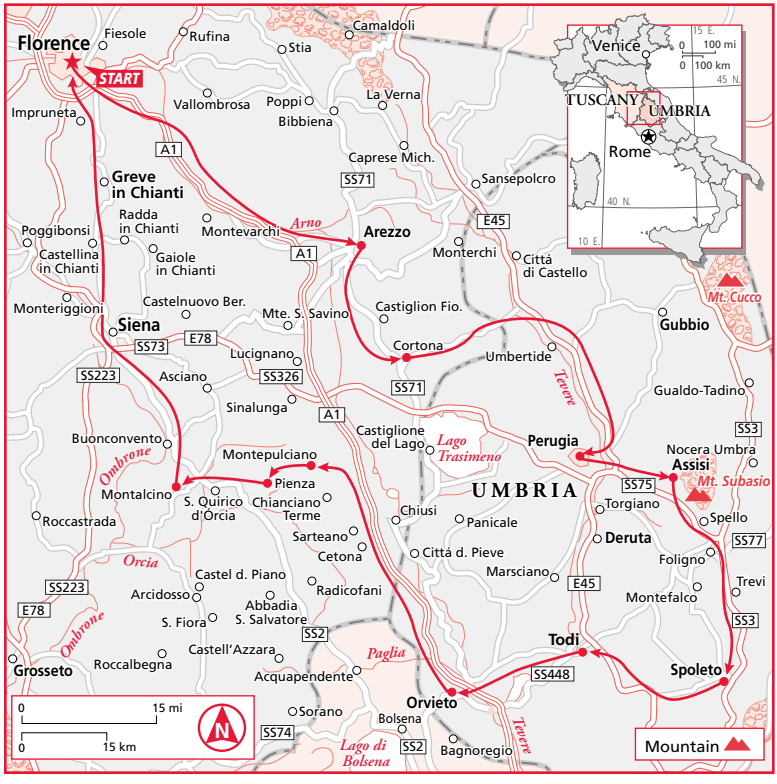
Day 10: Assisi ★★

This is the most revered shrine in all of Italy, with the **Basilica di San Francesco** second in importance only to St. Peter's. It will take the entire day to explore all the city's art, from Giotto's paintings to the recently restored Rocca Maggiore fortress. See p. 385.

Day 11: Todi & Spoleto

Prospective real-estate buyers will be tempted along the vineyard-lined road to **Todi,** where myriad Americans and Britons have made a second home. The town is one of the most quaint in all of Central Italy, and is worth a quick visit. End the day in **Spoleto,** home of the country's most famous outdoor **festival** of the performing arts. By all means, check your calendar to see if you will be there during that time. See p. 420 and 410.

Tuscany & Umbria in 2 Weeks: Week 2



Day ⑫: Orvieto ★

Two great stops on the road to **Orvieto: Chianciano Terme,** where you can do like the Roman soldiers and take the "cure" at its thermal springs (p. 338), and **Chiusi,** a bonanza of Etruscan urns, tombs, and other impressive remains. Approaching Orvieto in the evening offers you a gorgeous view of the city illuminated by sunset, or spotlights at night, and is an ideal stop for dinner and some of its "liquid gold." See p. 339.

Day ⑬: Montepulciano & Montalcino ★★

Make your way south along the ancient Via Cassia to Montalcino, and then to nearby Montepulciano. These two wine-producing giants are worthy stops in their own right, even for those uninterested in wine. Nearby is the model Renaissance city, **Pienza,** surrounded by the kind of captivating Tuscan landscape you see in promotional photos. See p. 325.

Day ⑭: Depart Florence

Reserve this day for last-minute leather shopping in the **San Lorenzo market** (p. 180) and to catch whatever sights you missed on the first 2 days.

4 TUSCANY & UMBRIA FOR FAMILIES

This 10-day itinerary brings you to Tuscany's best family-oriented attractions. It's rather light on churches and art, and heavier on outdoor fun, often with parts of the day devoted to children and parts that will please the parents. In general, Italy is a family-oriented society, so kids should have fun wherever they go. Things to reserve ahead of time are Florence museum tickets, Pisa's tower, the car ferry to Elba, and possibly horseback riding in the Maremma.

Days ❶–❷: Florence ★★

Making reservations beforehand for the top-selling attractions, such as Michelangelo's *David,* will help avoid the hassle of waiting in line for hours with the little ones. But there are a number of diversions better-suited to kids. See Galileo's telescope lens at the **Science Museum.** The **Specola** zoological museum is packed with an array of stuffed animals ranging from crabs to a rhinoceros. Be aware that both museums have some pretty gruesome displays on medicine, though teens will probably get a kick out of them. On a sad note, the soccer stadium is not always the safest place to bring families, as hooliganism can get out of control. See chapter 6.

Day ❸: Pinocchio Park, Spas & Lucca ★★★

Pinocchio Park (p. 270), the **theme park** in Collodi devoted to Pinocchio's creator, isn't exactly Disneyland, but it is still a great stop for kids. The wooden dolls on sale around town are unique souvenirs. Afterward, Mom and Dad can unwind at the nearby **spas of Montecatini Terme** (p. 266). Don't waste time on dinner here. In the late afternoon, make your way to Lucca for an evening stroll along its ramparts before sitting down to some orzo soup.

Day ❹: Caving in the Garfagnana & Beachcombing in Forte dei Marmi ★

Take a sunrise drive to the Garfagnana and start the day with a 1-hour tour of the caves and tunnels of the **Grotta del Vento.** In the morning, be sure to also visit the prehistoric statues in the **Piagnaro castle.** Have a seafood lunch and a sunny afternoon at the **beaches of Viareggio** and **Forte dei Marmi.** Keep in mind that in the height of summer, many of them can be extremely crowded. Vacancy will be difficult to find in the beach hotels, so prepare to find a hotel in Pisa, or, preferably, spend another night in enchanting Lucca. See chapter 8.

Day ❺: Pisa ★★

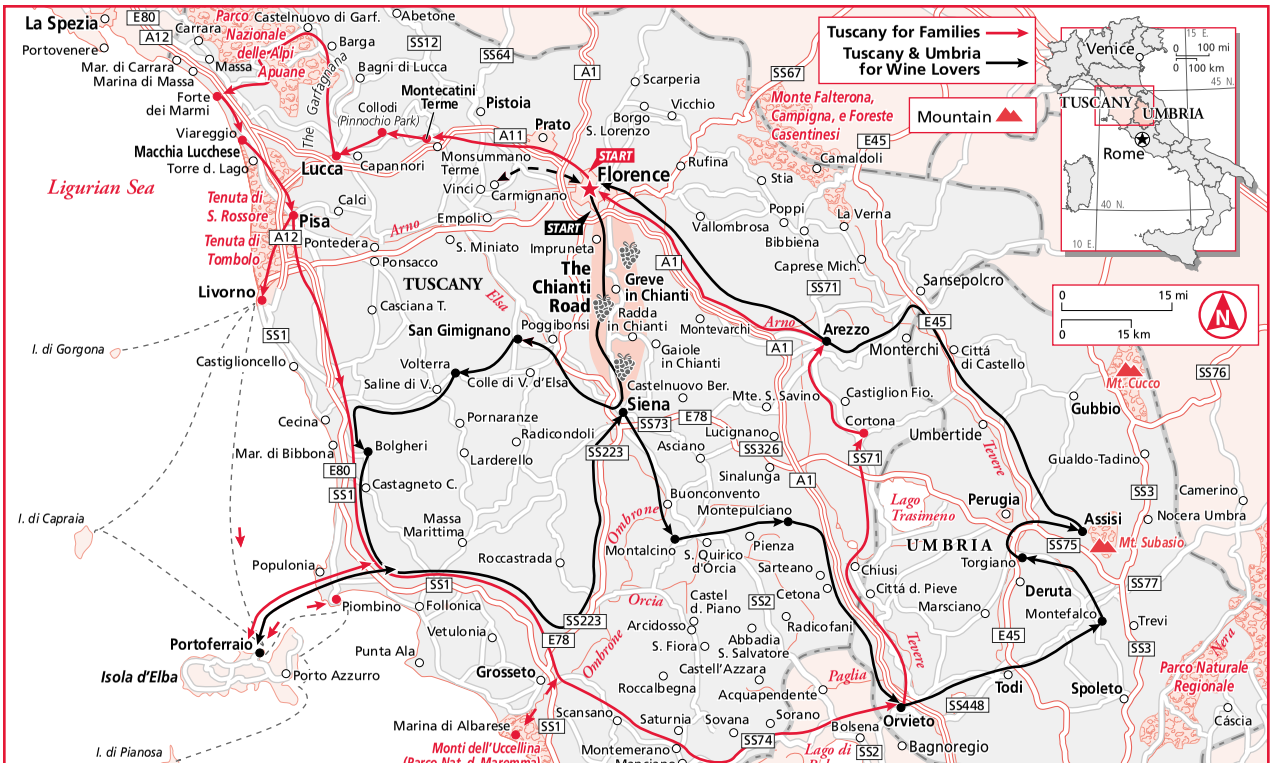
The best of **Pisa** (p. 288) can easily be visited in half a day. Kids of all ages will want to see the famous **Leaning Tower** and climb up it, but *note that the minimum age to go up is 8 years old.* For something a little more intriguing, check out the excavation of the **ancient Roman ships,** easily one of the more fascinating sites in Tuscany and something even the little ones can appreciate. Continue rolling south along the coast to catch the ferry to your next stop, the island of Elba.

Day ❻: Elba ★

Catch a ferry from Livorno or Piombino and spend the day touring **Napoleon's old haunts** and doing some snorkeling at the beach. Especially because you will have a car, you will need to reserve the ferry tickets well in advance. See p. 305.

Day ❼: Hiking & Horseback Riding in the Maremma ★

The southern edge of Tuscany is cowboy country. Spend the morning hiking in the **Parco Naturale della Maremma** (p. 314) and see wild horses, white cattle, and hopefully a wild boar (at a distance). Contact the park's headquarters or the local


Tuscany for Families
Tuscany & Umbria for Wine Lovers
Mountain
Venice
TUSCANY
UMBRIA
Rome
15 E.
0 100 mi
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45 N.
40 N.
10 E.
0 15 mi
0 15 km
La Spezia
Portovenere
Mar. di Carrara
Marina di Massa
Carrara
Massa
Parco Nazionale delle Alpi Apuane
Castelnuovo di Garf.
Abetone
Barga
Bagni di Lucca
Montecatini Terme
Collodi (Pinocchio Park)
Pistoia
Prato
Forte dei Marmi
Viareggio
Macchia Lucchese
Torre d. Lago
Lucca
Capannori
Monsummano Terme
Vinci
Carmignano
Ligurian Sea
Tenuta di S. Rossore
Tenuta di Tombolo
Pisa
Calci
Pontedera
Ponsacco
Empoli
Arno
Livorno
TUSCANY
Casciana T.
Elsa
San Gimignano
Poggibonsi
Volterra
Saline di V.
Colle di V. d'Elsa
Castiglioncello
I. di Gorgona
Cecina
Mar. di Bibbona
Bolgheri
Castagneto C.
Larderello
Pornaranze
Radicondoli
Siena
Castelnuovo Ber.
Mte. S. Savino
Castiglion Fio.
Cortona
Lucignano
Asciano
Sinalunga
Buonconvento
Montepulciano
Montalcino
S. Quirico d'Orcia
Pienza
Sarteano
Chiusi
Città d. Pieve
Cetona
Castel d. Piano
Arcidosso
Radicofani
Abbadia S. Salvatore
S. Fiora
Castell'Azzara
Roccalbegna
Acquapendente
Sorano
Sovana
Saturnia
Scansano
Marina di Albarese
Monti dell'Uccellina (Parco Nat. d. Maremma)
Montemerano
Manciano
Grosseto
Roccastrada
Massa Marittima
Populonia
I. di Capraia
Piombino
Follonica
Vetulonia
Punta Ala
Portoferraio
Isola d'Elba
Porto Azzurro
I. di Pianosa
Ombrone
Orcia
Paglia
Lago di Bolsena
Bolsena
Orvieto
Bagnoregio
Todi
Spoleto
Deruta
Torgiano
Perugia
Lago Trasimeno
Assisi
Mt. Subasio
Gualdo-Tadino
Gubbio
Mt. Cucco
Camerino
Nocera Umbra
Montefalco
Trevi
Cáscia
Parco Naturale Regionale
Nera
Tevere
Marsciano
Umbertide
Città di Castello
Monterchi
Sansepolcro
Caprese Mich.
Arezzo
Monte Falterona, Campigna, e Foreste Casentinesi
Camaldoli
Stia
Poppi
La Verna
Bibbiena
Vallombrosa
Rufina
Scarperia
Vicchio
Borgo S. Lorenzo
Impruneta
Greve in Chianti
Radda in Chianti
Gaiole in Chianti
Montevarchi
The Chianti Road
START
Florence
Greve in Chianti
Garfagnana
Mugello
Valdarno
Valdichiana
Valdelsa
Valdinievole
Versilia
Lunigiana
Maremma
Casentino
Valtiberina
Alpe di Catenaia
Alpe di Poti
Alpe della Luna
Monte Amiata
Monte Cetona
Monte Peglia
Monte Subasio
Monte Cucco
Monte Nerone
Monte Catria
Monte Acuto
Monte Fumaiolo
Monte Penna
Monte Fiorito
Monte Castelli
Monte Nero
Monte Maggio
Monte Pisano
Monte Serra
Monte Altissimo
Monte Corchia
Monte Pania
Monte Forato
Monte Prato
Monte Rondinaio
Monte Cimone
Monte Giovo
Monte Falco
Monte Fumaiolo
Monte Penna
Monte Fiorito
Monte Castelli
Monte Nero
Monte Maggio
Monte Pisano
Monte Serra
Monte Altissimo
Monte Corchia
Monte Pania
Monte Forato
Monte Prato
Monte Rondinaio
Monte Cimone
Monte Giovo
Monte Falco

tourist office (www.gol.grosseto.it) ahead of time about horseback riding in the area. In the evening, drive to **Orvieto** and arrive at night to see the hilltop city awash with spotlights. It is a great place for a late dinner of so-called "Etruscan specialties" and the town's namesake white wine.

Day ❽: Orvieto's Tunnels, Etruscan Tombs & Cortona ★★

Scramble down Orvieto's ancient **tunnels in the tufa rock** (p. 431) and have a look through some of the puppets in toy stores around town before lunch. Afterward, make your way up to Cortona for a hike through the **Etruscan tombs** (p. 360) outside town. Cortona's reputation for hotels is slightly better than nearby Arezzo's, though neither town has Tuscany's best accommodations. Try to spend at least 1 night in a nearby *agriturismo* or bed-and-breakfast. For a truly memorable experience, Cortona has a number of fantastic medieval festivals, so try to plan your visit accordingly.

Day ❾: Cortona & Arezzo ★

Spend a lazy morning wandering through the sights of Cortona, the inspiration for *Under the Tuscan Sun,* which will only take a couple of hours. Then drive north to Arezzo. The SS71 is a quiet, curvy road through quintessential Tuscany. Arezzo is a great place to spend any afternoon, seeing the famous **fresco cycles of Piero della Francesca,** and the backdrop for Roberto Benigni's Oscar-winning film, *Life Is Beautiful.* Try to time your visit to coincide with the **Giostra del Saracino,** a medieval joust (and a real kid-pleaser) or with one of the spectacular antiques fairs, which take place the first Sunday of every month. See p. 359 and 346.

Day ❿: Depart Florence

Take the autostrada to Florence in the morning to catch whatever sights you missed the first time around and, of course, finish up with some shopping. See p. 176.

5 TUSCANY & UMBRIA FOR WINE LOVERS

This 2-week loop includes some of the best-known of Italy's winegrowing regions, a few oenological surprises, and some major artistic sights, too, as man does not live on wine alone. To customize your tour, see the details describing local varietals in "What to Drink," in chapter 2 (p. 41).

Day ❶: Florence ★★

A good start for this tasting trip would be in Piazza Antinori, named after the vineyard barons who own the city's most refined wine bar there, the **Cantinetta Antinori.** For something more down-to-earth, try **La Fiaschetteria** in Oltrarno. (See "Pubs, Bars & Wine Bars," p. 184.) Note that most of the bottles you will find at less expensive restaurants tend to be chianti, while highbrow places have labels from farther afield. Also, beware of cheap wine bars slinging so-called "Supertuscans," when in fact they are nothing of the sort.

Day ❷: Carmignano ★

Carmignano, just outside Prato, can boast one of Tuscany's oldest winemaking traditions, and yet it is barely touched by foreign tourists. This is even more surprising considering its proximity to Florence and the potential for day trips. It produces excellent reds but is best known for its **vin santo,** enjoyed with the local *cantucci* cookies.

Days ❸–❹: Chianti ★★

These vineyards need no introduction to wine enthusiasts, and many of them can be freely visited. Only some, however,

have accommodations for tourists. One of the finest places to stay is **Rocca delle Macìe** (www.roccadellemacie.com), just south of Castellina, a large producer with excellent villas and apartments. For obvious reasons, it's wise to savor wine nearest where you plan to sleep. See "Wine Tasting in the Chianti," in chapter 7 for a complete guide.

Day ❺: San Gimignano & Volterra ★

This can almost be considered a third day in Chianti because it is so close, but this is a day for white wine: **Vernaccia di San Gimignano.** Take a respite from cork sniffing in the afternoon and visit the impressive Etruscan city of Volterra. See chapter 7.

Day ❻: Bolgheri ★★

Home to the prestigious "Supertuscan" labels **Sassicaia** and **Ornellaia (Bolgheri DOC),** this out-of-the way venue is worth the trip for those who are serious about wine. Book well in advance for a vineyard tour and to stay at a bed-and-breakfast or *agriturismo* (www.bolgheridoc.com). There are few hotels in the immediate vicinity.

Days ❼–❽: Elba & Siena

Take a break on the island's beaches—enjoy its seafood and try a glass of its sweet red **Aleatico.** You will need to organize your ferry in advance in high season, as space for cars is rather limited. Plan to spend the second afternoon driving to Siena. Resist the temptation to explore one of the back roads as it will take much longer than you think. Instead, do as the locals do and use the highway via Grosseto. (Even if you plan to make a side-trip to Massa Marittima, you'd be well-advised to return to the highway afterward.) See chapters 7 and 9.

Days ❾–❿: Montalcino & Montepulciano ★★

Brunello di Montalcino and **Vino Nobile di Montepulciano** are two of the country's most prized reds, and the countryside that yields them is spectacular. Note that the largest Montalcino producer, **Banfi,** has a series of guest apartments adjacent to the castle. But wine enthusiasts may even prefer to stay in one of the historic hill towns, since each of them is essentially built around the wine industry. See "Sampling the *Vino,*" p. 320.

Day ⓫: Orvieto

Vintners around this hilltop Umbrian city have been cultivating their famous whites since Roman times (see "Orvieto's Liquid Gold," p. 429), but the city itself has its own treasures, gastronomic and otherwise. Explore the ancient **tunnels in the tufa rock,** and admire its precious cathedral.

Day ⓬: Torgiano & Montefalco ★★★

One of the highlights of any tasting trip to Italy is the **Wine Museum** in Torgiano, near Perugia (p. 384). It is the only one of its kind, owned and operated by the area's largest producer, Lungarotti. The family also runs a tasting room just next door. Plan your meals in Perugia, or, even better, in Montefalco, which is where **Sagrantino,** the true gem of Umbrian wine, is to be found.

Day ⓭: Assisi ★★

No special claims to oenological fame here, but a trip to Umbria must include this spectacular shrine of Christianity. You could spend an entire morning in the **Basilica di San Francesco,** and then head back to Florence in the afternoon, stopping off in Citta' di Castello, Sansepolcro, and Arezzo along the way. See chapter 12.

Day ⓮: Depart Florence

Visit whichever sights and restaurants you missed the first time around and finish up with some shopping at the city's wine stores, most notably **Enoteca Alessi** (see "Wine & Liquors," p. 182).

5

Settling into Florence: Birthplace of the Renaissance

Mary McCarthy famously described Florence (Firenze) as a "City of Stone." This assessment digs deeper than merely the fact that the buildings, streets, doorjambs, sidewalks, windowsills, towers, and bridges are all cobbled together in shades of gray, stern rock hewn by generations of the stonecutters Michelangelo grew up with. Florence's stoniness is evident in both its countenance and its character. Florentines often seem more serious and slower to warm to strangers than other Italians. The city's fundamental rhythms are medieval, and it's fiendishly difficult to get beyond the touristy surface and see what really makes Florence tick. Although the historic center is compact, it takes time and effort to get to know it, get the hang of its alleys, and understand the deep history of its palace-lined streets.

This chapter will equip you with the basic tools (the hammer and chisel, so to speak) you'll need to get under the stony skin of Florence. It breaks down the city layout and neighborhoods and provides useful facts and service information. It also reviews the best hotels and restaurants the city has to offer; you're sure to find something to fit your tastes and your budget.

1 ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE For flights into Florence, see "Getting There & Getting Around" in chapter 3. Several European airlines service Florence's expanded **Amerigo Vespucci Airport** (✆ **055-30-615** for the switchboard, or 055-373-498 for flight updates; 055-306-1700 for national flight info, 055-306-1702 for international flight info; www.aeroporto.firenze.it), also called **Peretola,** just 5km (3 miles) northwest of town. There are no direct flights to or from the United States, but you can make easy connections through London, Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, and other major European cities. The regularly scheduled **city bus no. 62** connects the airport with Piazza della Stazione downtown, taking about 30 minutes and costing 1€. Rather more expensive (4€), but without the local stops, is the half-hourly **SITA bus** to and from downtown's bus station at Via Santa Caterina 15r (✆ **055-214-721,** 800-424-500, or 800-373-760), behind the train station. Metered **taxis** line up outside the airport's arrival terminal and charge a flat, official rate of 15€ to the city center.

The closest major international airport is Pisa's **Galileo Galilei Airport** (✆ **050-500-707;** www.pisa-airport.com), 97km (60 miles) west of Florence. Two to three **trains** per hour leave the airport for Florence (70–100 min.; 5.60€). If your flight leaves from this

airport and you'll be going there by train from Florence, you can check in your baggage and receive your boarding pass at the Air Terminal on Track 5 in Florence's Stazione Santa Maria Novella; show up 30 minutes before your train departure. Early-morning flights might make train connections from Florence to the airport difficult; the solution is the regular train from Florence into downtown Pisa, with a 10-minute taxi ride 5€ from the Pisa train station to the nearby Pisa airport; the no. 7 bus makes the same hop in twice the time for 1€.

BY TRAIN Florence is Tuscany's rail hub, with connections to all the region's major cities. To get here from Rome, you can take the Pendolino (four daily; 1¾ hr.; make sure it's going to Santa Maria Novella station, not Rifredi; you must reserve tickets ahead), an EC or IC train (24 daily; just under 2 hr.), or an *interregionale* (seven daily, around 3 hr.). There are also about 16 trains daily from Milan (3 hr.) through Bologna (1 hr.).

Most Florence-bound trains roll into the **Stazione Santa Maria Novella,** Piazza della Stazione (✆ **800-888-088** toll-free in Italy, or 055-288-765; www.trenitalia.it), which you'll often see abbreviated as **S.M.N.** The station is on the northwestern edge of the city's compact historic center, a 10-minute walk from the Duomo and a 15-minute walk from Piazza della Signoria and the Uffizi. There are loads of budget hotels immediately east of there around Via Faenza and Via Fiume.

With your back to the tracks, toward the station's left exit (across from Track 16) and next to a 24-hour pharmacy you'll find a tiny **tourist info office,** open daily from 8:30am to 9pm, with a hotel-booking service (charging 2.30€–8€). The **train information office** is near the opposite exit to your right, across from Track 5. The yellow posters on the wall inside the anteroom list all train times and routes for this and other major Italian stations. Another copy of the Florence poster is just inside the sliding glass doors of the second, main room. For personalized help, you have to take a number from the color-coded machine (pink is for train information) and wait your turn—often for more than an hour.

Back at the head of the tracks, the **ticketing room** (Salone Biglietti) is located through the central doors; at *sportelli* (windows) 9 to 18 you can buy ordinary, unreserved train tickets (see the "By Train" section under "Getting There & Getting Around," in chapter 3, for details on which trains need supplements or reservations). The automatic ticket machines have taken some pressure off the ticket windows, but still attract long lines (when they aren't out of order). Around the corner from this bank of ticket windows is a smaller room where you can buy **international tickets** (window 7), make **reservations** for high-speed and overnight trains (windows 1–4), or pay for a spot on the **Pendolino/ETR express** to Milan, Bologna, or Rome (window 5).

At the head of Track 16 is a 24-hour luggage depot where you can drop your bags (3€ per piece for 12 hr.) while you search for a hotel.

Exit out to the left coming off the tracks and you'll find many bus lines as well as stairs down to the underground **pedestrian underpass** which leads directly to Piazza dell'Unità Italiana and saves you from the traffic of the station's piazza.

Tips Stamp Your Ticket

Remember, if you're leaving Florence on the train, stamp your ticket in the yellow box at the start of the track before getting on the train.

Venice
ITALY
Florence
Rome
Sicily
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N
Pza. P. Leopoldo
Via A. Vannucci
Via G. Fabroni
Via Vittorio Emanuele II
Via Stibbert
Via R. Lambruschini
Via F. Bovaini
Viale G. Lami
Via Trento
Viuzzo dei Bruni
Via Bolognese
GIARDINO DELL'ORTICOLTURA
Viale dei Cadorna
Via Della Cernaia
Via F. Puccinotti
Via del Romito
Viale F. Redi
Via Venti Settembre
Viale G. Milton
Via Lorenzo Il Magnifico
Viale Spartaco Lavagnini
Pza. della Libertà
Viale Don G. Minzoni
Via A. Giacomini
Via L. Da Vinci
Via P. Capponi
Viale F. Strozzi
Via B. Marcello
Fortezza da Basso
Viale Belfiore
Via Cittadella
Viale F.lli Rosselli
Via della Scala
Stazione Santa Maria Novella
Via Faenza
Via Guelfa
Via Nazionale
Via S. C. d'Alessandria
Via S. Zanobi
Via Zara
Via Venezia
Via P.A. Micheli
Viale G. Matteotti
Capponi
SAN MARCO
Via San Gallo
Via Cavour
Pza. S. Marco
Santissima Annunziata
Via G.
Via Giuseppe Giusti
Il Prato
Borgo Ognissanti
Via Montebello
Via Palazzuolo
Pza. della Stazione
Cappelle Medicee
Via Cavour
Via A. Lamarmora
Accademia
Via C. Battisti
della Colonna
Via degli Alfani
Pinti
Pza. d'Azeglio
SANTA MARIA NOVELLA
DUOMO
Pza. del Duomo
Via S. Egidio
Borgo
Via di Mezzo
Via dell'Oriuolo
V. de' Pecori
Corsi Campidoglio
Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci
PONTE A VESPUCCI
Arno
Lungarno Guicciardini
Pza. della Repubblica
Via del Corso
Via de' Pandolfini
Via Porta Rossa
Borgo San Frediano
Via dell'Agnolo
Via Ghibellina
Pza. della Signoria
SIGNORIA
Palazzo Vecchio
Uffizi
Pza. S. Croce
SANTA CROCE
Via di S. Giuseppe
Via dell'Orto
Pza. del Carmine
PONTE VECCHIO
Santa Croce
Via della Chiesa
Pza. S. Spirito
Via Maggio
Via de' Bardi
PONTE ALLE GRAZIE
Via Tripoli
Lungarno della Zecca Vecchia
Via del Campuccio
OLTRARNO
Piazza dei Pitti
Arno
GIARDINO TORRIGIANI
Pitti Palace
Forte di Belvedere
Pza. Demidoff
Pza. G. Poggi
Viale Francesco Petrarca
Via Romana
Via di Belvedere
Via del Monte alle Croci
GIARDINO BOBOLI (BOBOLI GARDENS)
Piazzale Michelangelo
P. Le di Porta Romana
V. d. Fra Canina
Via di S. Leonardo
Monte alle Croci
Viale Niccolo Machiavelli
V. di Poggio Imperiale
Via Senese
BOBOLINO
S. Miniato Al Monte

Note that some trains stop at the outlying **Stazione Campo di Marte** or **Stazione Rifredi,** both of which are worth avoiding. Although there's 24-hour bus service between these satellite stations and S.M.N., departures aren't always frequent and taxi service is erratic and expensive.

BY BUS Because Florence is such a well-connected train hub, there's little reason to take the longer, less comfortable intercity coaches. Dozens of companies make dozens of runs here daily from all of Tuscany, much of Umbria, and the major cities in Italy (the express bus from Rome's Tiburtina Station takes 4½ hr.). Most bus stations are near the train station; see "Getting There & Getting Around," in chapter 3, for more details.

BY CAR The **A1 autostrada** runs north from Rome past Arezzo to Florence and continues to Bologna. The **A11** connects Florence with Lucca, and **unnumbered superhighways** run to Siena and Pisa.

Driving to Florence is easy; the problems begin once you arrive. Almost all cars are banned from the historic center—only residents or merchants with special permits are allowed in. You'll likely be stopped at some point by the traffic police, who'll assume from your rental plates that you're a visitor heading to your hotel. Have the name and address of the hotel ready and they'll wave you through. You can drop off baggage there (the hotel will give you a sign for your car advising traffic police you're unloading); then you must relocate to a parking lot. Ask your hotel which is most convenient: Special rates are available through most of the hotels and their nearest lot.

Standard rates for parking in private lots near the center are at least 3€ per hour; many lots offer a daily rate of 18€ to 30€. However, it's difficult to find open spots, and private lots often keep weird hours, so your best bet is one of the city-run garages, which are also less pricey. Although the parking lot under Santa Maria Novella (2€ per hour) is closer to the city center, the best deal if you're staying the night (better than most hotels' garage rates) is at the **Parterre parking lot** under Piazza Libertà, north of Fortezza del Basso. If you're staying at least 1 night at a hotel in Florence, you can park here, are welcome to a free bike, and (on presentation of your hotel receipt as you leave or the hotel's stamp on your parking receipt) pay only 10€ per night.

Don't park your car overnight on the streets in Florence; if you're towed and ticketed, it will set you back substantially—and the headaches to retrieve your car are beyond description. (To get some idea of the severity of the law, the city has even begun towing bicycles that are parked illegally on busy streets.)

VISITOR INFORMATION

TOURIST OFFICES The city's **largest tourist office** is at Via Cavour 1r, 50129 Firenze (✆ **055-290-832;** fax 055-276-0383; www.firenzeturismo.it), about 3 blocks north of the Duomo. Outrageously, they now charge for basic, useful info: .50€ for a city map (though there's still a free one that differs only in lacking relatively inane brief descriptions of the museums and sights), 2€ for a little guide to museums, and 1€ each for pamphlets on the bridges and the *piazze* of Florence. The monthly *Informacittà* pamphlet on events, exhibits, and concerts is still free. The tourist office is open Monday through Saturday from 8:30am to 6:30pm and Sunday from 8:30am to 1:30pm.

At the head of the tracks in Stazione Santa Maria Novella is a **tiny info office** with some maps and a hotel-booking service (see "Where to Stay," later in this chapter), open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 9pm (to 8pm Nov–Mar), but the station's **main tourist office** (✆ **055-212-245**) is outside at Piazza della Stazione 4. With your back to

Tips Florence's "City Code"

What used to be Florence's city code—**055**—is now an integral part of every phone number. Always dial it (including the initial zero), even when calling to another number from within Florence itself. Soon, new numbers in Florence may be issued starting with something other than 055.

the tracks, take the left exit, cross onto the concrete median, and turn right; it's about 30m (100 ft.) ahead. The office is usually open Monday through Saturday from 8:30am to 7pm (often to 1:30pm in winter) and Sunday 8:30am to 1:30pm.

Another office sits on an obscure side street south of Piazza Santa Croce, Borgo Santa Croce 29r (✆ **055-234-0444**), open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 7pm and Sunday 9am to 2pm.

PUBLICATIONS At the tourist offices, pick up the free monthly ***Informacittà.*** The bilingual ***Concierge Information*** (www.florence-concierge.it) magazine, free from the front desks of top hotels, contains a monthly calendar of events and details on attractions. ***Firenze Spettacolo,*** a 1.55€ Italian-language monthly sold at most newsstands, is the most detailed and up-to-date listing of nightlife, arts, and entertainment. As for English-language publications, ***The Florentine*** has sort of picked up where the now-defunct ***Italy Daily*** left off.

WEBSITES The official Florence information website, **www.firenzeturismo.it**, contains a wealth of up-to-date information on Florence and its province, including a searchable hotels form that allows you to specify amenities, categories, and the like.

Firenze By Net (www.mega.it/florence), **Firenze.Net** (http://english.firenze.net), and **Florence OnLine** (www.fol.it) are all Italy-based websites with English translations and good general information on Florence. The site for **Concierge Information** (www.florence-concierge.it) is an excellent little guide to the current month's events, exhibits, concerts, and theater.

CITY LAYOUT

Florence is a smallish city, sitting on the Arno River and petering out to olive-planted hills rather quickly to the north and south but extending farther west and, to a lesser extent, east along the Arno valley with suburbs and light industry. It is a compact city best negotiated on foot. No two sights are more than a 20- or 25-minute walk apart, and all the hotels and restaurants in this chapter are in the relatively small ***centro storico*** **(historic center),** a compact tangle of medieval streets and *piazze* (squares) where visitors spend most of their time. The bulk of Florence, including most of the tourist sights, lies north of the river, with the Oltrarno, an old artisans' working-class neighborhood, hemmed in between the Arno and the hills on the south side.

MAIN STREETS & PIAZZE The center is encircled by a traffic ring of wide boulevards, the Viale, that were created in the late 1800s by tearing down the city's medieval defensive walls. From Piazza Santa Maria Novella, south of the train station, Via de' Panzani angles into Via de' Cerretani to Piazza del Duomo and the connected Piazza San Giovanni, the city's religious heart around the cathedral. From Piazza del Duomo, Via dei Calzaiuoli, the wide road popular during the *passeggiata* (evening stroll), leads south

The Red & the Black

The address system in Florence and some other Tuscan cities has a split personality. Private homes, some offices, and hotels are numbered in black (or blue), while businesses, shops, and restaurants are numbered independently in red. This means that 1, 2, 3 (black) addresses march up the block numerically oblivious to their 1r, 2r, 3r (red) neighbors. You might find the doorways on one side of a street numbered: 1r, 2r, 3r, 1, 4r, 2, 3, 5r . . .

The color codes occur only in the *centro storico* and other older sections of town; outlying districts didn't bother with the codes and use the international standard system common in the United States.

to Piazza della Signoria, Florence's civic heart near the river, home to the Palazzo Vecchio and the Uffizi Galleries. Traffic winds its way from the back of the Duomo to behind the Uffizi along Via del Proconsolo.

Another route south from the Duomo takes you down Via Roma, through cafe-lined Piazza della Repubblica, and continues down Via Calimala and Via Por Santa Maria to the Ponte Vecchio, the most popular and oldest bridge over the Arno, lined with overhanging jewelry shops. Via degli Strozzi leads east of Piazza della Repubblica to intersect Florence's main shopping drag, Via de' Tornabuoni, running north toward Piazza Santa Maria Novella and south to Piazza Santa Trínita on the river. Borgo de' Greci connects Piazza della Signoria with Piazza Santa Croce on the city center's western edge.

North from the Duomo, Via dei Servi leads to Florence's prettiest square, Piazza Santissima Annunziata. Via Ricasoli leads from the Duomo past the Accademia Gallery (containing Michelangelo's *David*) to Piazza San Marco, where many city buses stop. Via de' Martelli/Via Cavour is a wide traffic-laden road also connecting the Duomo and Piazza San Marco. From the Duomo, Borgo San Lorenzo leads to Piazza San Lorenzo, the old neighborhood of the Medici that's these days filled with the stalls of the outdoor leather market.

On the Oltrarno side of the river, shop-lined Via Guicciardini runs toward Piazza dei Pitti and its museum-filled Pitti Palace. From here, Via Mazzetta/Via Sant'Agostino takes you past Piazza Santo Spirito to Piazza della Carmine; these two squares are the Oltrarno's main centers.

STREET MAPS The tourist offices hand out two versions of a Florence *pianta* (city plan) free: Ask for the one *con un stradario* (with a street index), which shows all the roads and is better for navigation. The white pamphlet-size version they offer you first is okay for basic orientation and Uffizi-finding, but it leaves out many streets and has giant icons of major sights that cover up Florence's complicated back-alley systems.

If you want to buy a more complete city plan, your best bets are at the newsstand in the ticketing area of the train station and at **Feltrinelli International** and **Libreria Il Viaggio** bookstores (see "Shopping," in chapter 6, for more information). Falk puts out a good pocket-size version, but my favorite is the palm-size 1:9,000 **Litografia Artistica Cartografica** map with the yellow and blue cover. It covers the city in three overlapping indexed sections that fold out like a pop-up book. If you need to find a tiny street not

on your map, ask your hotel concierge to glance at his or her ***TuttoCittà,*** a very complete magazine of fully indexed streets that you can't buy but residents (and hotels and bars) receive along with their phone books.

THE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

I've used the designations below to group hotels, restaurants, and (in chapter 6) sights in Florence. Although the city does contain six "neighborhoods" centered on the major churches (Santa Maria Novella, Il Duomo, Santa Croce, San Lorenzo, and Santo Spirito and San Frediano in the Oltrarno), these are a bit too broad to be useful here. I've divided the city up into more visitor-oriented sections (none much more than a dozen square blocks) focused around major sights and points of reference. The designations and descriptions are drawn to give you a flavor of each area and to help you choose a zone in which to base yourself.

The Duomo The area surrounding Florence's gargantuan cathedral is about as central as you can get. The Duomo is halfway between the two great churches of Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce as well as at the midpoint between the Uffizi Galleries and the Ponte Vecchio to the south and San Marco and the Accademia Gallery with Michelangelo's *David* to the north. The streets north of the Duomo are long and often traffic-ridden, but those to the south make up a wonderful medieval tangle of alleys and tiny squares heading toward Piazza della Signoria.

This is one of the most historic parts of town, and the streets still vaguely follow the grid laid down when the city began as a Roman colony. Via degli Strozzi/Via degli Speziali/Via del Corso was the *decumanus maximus,* the main east-west axis; Via Roma/Via Calimala was the key north-south *cardo maximus.* The site of the Roman city's forum is today's Piazza della Repubblica. The current incarnation of this square, lined with glitzy cafes, was laid out by demolishing the Jewish ghetto in a rash of nationalism during Italian unification in the late 19th century, and (until the majority of neon signs were removed in the early 1990s) it was by and large the ugliest piazza in town. The area surrounding it, though, is one of Florence's main shopping zones. The Duomo neighborhood is, understandably, one of the most hotel-heavy parts of town, offering a range from luxury inns to student dives and everything in between.

Piazza Della Signoria This is the city's civic heart and perhaps the best base for museum hounds—the Uffizi Galleries, Bargello sculpture collection, and Ponte Vecchio leading toward the Pitti Palace are all nearby. It's a well-polished part of the tourist zone but still retains the narrow medieval streets where Dante grew up—back alleys where tour-bus crowds running from the Uffizi to the Accademia rarely set foot. The few blocks just north of the Ponte Vecchio have good shopping, but unappealing modern buildings were planted here to replace the district destroyed during World War II. (A Nazi commander with a romantic soul couldn't bring himself to blow up the Ponte Vecchio during the German army's retreat, as they had every other bridge over the Arno, so he blew up the buildings at either end of it to impede the progress of Allied tanks pushing north.) The entire neighborhood can be stiflingly crowded in summer, but in those moments when you catch it off-guard and empty of tour groups, it remains the most romantic heart of pre-Renaissance Florence.

San Lorenzo and the Mercato Centrale This small wedge of streets between the train station and the Duomo, centered on the Medici's old church of San Lorenzo and its Michelangelo-designed tombs, is market territory. The vast indoor food market is here, and most of the streets are filled daily with hundreds of stalls hawking leather jackets and other wares. It's a colorful neighborhood, if not the quietest.

Piazza Santa Trinita This piazza sits just off the river at the end of Florence's shopping mecca, Via de' Tornabuoni, home to Gucci, Armani, Ferragamo, Versace, and more. Even the ancient narrow streets running out either side of the square are lined with the biggest names in high fashion. It's a very pleasant, well-to-do (but still medieval) neighborhood in which to stay, even if you don't care about haute couture. But if you're a shopping fiend, there's no better place to be.

Santa Maria Novella This neighborhood, bounding the western edge of the *centro storico,* really has two characters: the run-down unpleasant zone around Santa Maria Novella train station and the much nicer area south of it between the church of Santa Maria Novella and the river.

In general, the train-station area is the least attractive part of town in which to base yourself. The streets, most of which lie outside the pedestrian zone, are heavily trafficked, noisy, and dirty, and you're removed from the major sights and the action. This area does, however, have more budget options than any other quarter. Some streets, such as Via Faenza and its tributaries, contain a glut of budget joints, with dozens of choices every block and often two, three, or even six bottom-scraping dives crammed into a single building. It's the best place to go if you can't seem to find a room anywhere else; just walk up the street and try each place you pass. And while many hotels simply pander uninspiredly to tourists, a few (those recommended later) seem to try twice as hard as central inns to cater to their guests and are among the friendliest hotels in town. ***Tip:*** Just avoid anything on traffic-clogged Via Nazionale.

The situation improves dramatically as you move into the San Lorenzo area and pass Santa Maria Novella church and head toward the river. Piazza Santa Maria Novella and its tributary streets are attracting something of a bohemian nightlife scene (but parts of it can be seedy). One of Florence's premier inns, the Grand, is on the Arno at Piazza Ognissanti—just a bit south of the station but miles away in atmosphere.

San Marco and Santissima Annunziata These two churches are fronted by *piazze*—Piazza San Marco, now a busy traffic center, and Piazza Santissima Annunziata, the most beautiful in the city—that together define the northern limits of the *centro storico.* The neighborhood is home to the university, Michelangelo's *David* at the Accademia, the San Marco monastery, and long, quiet streets with some real hotel gems. The daily walk back from the heart of town up here may tire some, but others welcome being removed from the worst of the high-season tourist crush.

Santa Croce This eastern edge of the *centro storico* runs along the Arno. The bulky Santa Croce church is full of famous Florentine art and famous dead Florentines. The church is also the focal point of one of the most genuine neighborhoods left in the old center. While the area's western edge abuts the medieval district around Piazza della Signoria—Via de' Bentaccordi/Via Torta actually traces the outline of the old Roman amphitheater—much of the district

was rebuilt after World War II in long blocks of creamy yellow plaster buildings with residential shops and homes. Few tourists roam off Piazza Santa Croce, so if you want to feel like a city resident, stay here. This neighborhood also boasts some of the best restaurants in the city.

The Oltrarno "Across the Arno" is the artisans' neighborhood, still packed with workshops where craftspeople hand-carve furniture and hand-stitch leather gloves. It began as a working-class neighborhood to catch the overflow from the expanding medieval city on the Arno's opposite bank, but it also became a rather chic area for aristocrats to build palaces on the edge of the countryside. The largest of these, the Pitti Palace, later became the home of the grand dukes and today houses a set of museums second only to the Uffizi. Behind it spreads the landscaped baroque fantasies of the Boboli Gardens, Florence's best park. Masaccio's frescoes in Santa Maria della Carmine here were some of the most influential of the early Renaissance.

Florence tacitly accepted the Oltrarno when the 14th-century circuit of walls was built to include it, but the alleys and squares across the river continued to retain that edge of distinctness. It has always attracted a slightly bohemian crowd—the Brownings lived here from just after their secret marriage in 1847 until Elizabeth died in 1861. The Oltrarno's lively tree-shaded center, Piazza Santo Spirito, is a world unto itself, lined with bars and trendy salad-oriented restaurants (good nightlife, though young druggies have recently been encroaching on it); and its Brunelleschi-designed church faces pointedly away from the river and the rest of Florence.

In the Hills From just about any vantage point in the center of Florence, you can see that the city ends abruptly to the north and south, replaced by green hills spotted with villas, small farms, and the expensive modern homes of the upper-middle class. To the north rises Monte Ceceri, mined for the soft gray *pietra serena* that accented so much of Renaissance architecture and home to the hamlet of Settignano, where Michelangelo was wet-nursed by a stonecutter's wife. The high reaches harbor the Etruscan village of Fiesole, which was here long before the Romans built Florence in the valley below.

Across the Arno, the hills hemming in the Oltrarno—with such names as Bellosguardo (Beautiful Glimpse) and Monte Uliveto (Olive Grove Hill)—are blanketed in farmland. With panoramic lookouts like Piazzale Michelangiolo and the Romanesque church of San Miniato al Monte, these hills offer some of the best walks around the city, as Elizabeth Browning, Henry James, and Florence Nightingale could tell you. They're criss-crossed by snaking country roads and bordered by high walls over which wave the silvery-green leaves of olive trees.

Owing to the lack of public transportation, first-time visitors who plan a strenuous sightseeing agenda probably will not want to choose accommodations in the hills. But for those who don't need to be in town every day and want a cooler, calmer, and altogether more relaxing vacation, the hills can be heaven.

GETTING AROUND

Florence is a walking city. You can leisurely stroll between the two top sights, the Duomo and the Uffizi, in less than 5 minutes. The hike from the most northerly sights, San Marco

with its Fra' Angelico frescoes and the Accademia with Michelangelo's *David,* to the most southerly, the Pitti Palace across the Arno, should take no more than 30 minutes. From Santa Maria Novella across town to Santa Croce is an easy 20- to 30-minute walk.

Most of the streets, however, were designed to handle the moderate pedestrian traffic and occasional horse-drawn cart of a medieval city. Sidewalks, where they exist, are narrow—often less than .5m (2 ft.) wide. Though much of the *centro storico* is closed to traffic, this doesn't include taxis, residents with parking permits, people without permits who drive there anyway, and the endless swarm of noisy Vespas and *motorini* (scooters).

In high season, especially July and August, the cars and their pollution (catalytic converters aren't yet standard), massive pedestrian and tourist traffic, maniac moped drivers, and stifling heat can wear you down. On some days Florence can feel like a minor circle of Dante's Inferno. Evenings tend to be cool year-round, bringing residents and visitors alike out for the traditional before-dinner *passeggiata* (stroll) up and down Via Calzaiuoli and down Via Roma and its continuations across the Ponte Vecchio.

BY BUS You'll rarely need to use Florence's efficient **ATAF bus system** (✆ **055-565-0222;** www.ataf.net) since the city is so wonderfully compact. Many visitors accustomed to such big cities as Rome step off their arriving train and onto a city bus out of habit, thinking to reach the center; within 5 minutes they find themselves in the suburbs. The cathedral is a mere 5- to 7-minute walk from the train station.

Bus tickets cost 1€ and are good for an hour. A four-pack *(biglietto multiplo)* is 3.90€, a 24-hour pass 4.50€, a 2-day pass 7.60€, a 3-day pass 9.60€, and a 7-day pass 16€. Tickets are sold at *tabacchi* (tobacconists), bars, and most newsstands. Once on board, validate your ticket in the box near the rear door to avoid a steep fine. If you intend to use the bus system, you should pick up a bus map at a tourist office. Since traffic is limited in most of the historic center, buses make runs on principal streets only, save four tiny electric buses that trundle about the *centro storico.*

BY TAXI Taxis aren't cheap, and with the city so small and the one-way system forcing drivers to take convoluted routes, they aren't an economical way to get about town. Taxis are most useful to get you and your bags between the train station and your hotel in the virtually busless *centro storico.* The standard rate is .80€ per kilometer (slightly more than a half-mile), with a whopping minimum fare of 2.40€ to start the meter (that rises to 4.05€ on Sun; 5.15€ 10pm–6am), plus .60€ per bag. There's a taxi stand outside the train station; otherwise, you have to call **Radio Taxi** at ✆ **055-4242,** 055-4798, 055-4390, or 055-4499.

BY BICYCLE & SCOOTER Most of the bike-rental shops in town are located just north of Piazza San Marco, such as **Alinari,** Via San Zanobi 38r (✆ **055-280-500;** www.alinarirental.com), which rents bikes (2.50€ per hr.; 12€ per day) and mountain bikes

Tips A Walking Warning

Florentine streets are mainly cobbled or flagstone, as are the sidewalks, and thus they can be rough on soles, feet, and joints after a while. Florence may be one of the world's greatest shoe-shopping cities, but a sensible pair of quality walking shoes or sneakers is highly recommended over loafers or pumps. In dress shoes or heels, forget it—unless you are an experienced stone walker.

(3€ per hr.; 18€ per day). It also rents 50cc and 100cc scooters (15€ per hr.; 55€ per day). Another renter with the same basic prices is **Florence by Bike,** Via San Zanobi 120–122r (✆ **055-488-992;** www.florencebybike.it).

Illegally parked bicycles and scooters have become such an issue in Florence that authorities have begun "towing" them—that is, breaking the locks and impounding them. Make sure you park your scooter in a marked spot (there will be dozens of others there) or your bike at a rack where it won't interfere with pedestrian traffic, which is heavy in the tourist season.

BY CAR Trying to drive in the *centro storico* is a frustrating, useless exercise, and moreover, unauthorized traffic is not allowed past signs marked "TZL." Florence is a maze of one-way streets and pedestrian zones, and it takes an old hand to know which laws to break in order to get where you need to go—plus you need a permit to do anything beyond dropping off and picking up bags at your hotel. Park your vehicle in one of the huge underground lots on the center's periphery and pound the pavement. (See "By Car" under "Getting There," earlier in this chapter.) For car-rental firms in town, see chapter 14.

BY GUIDED TOUR **CAF Tours,** Via Roma 4 (✆ **055-283-200;** www.caftours.com), offers two half-day bus tours of town (45€), including visits to the Uffizi, the Medici Chapels, and Piazzale Michelangiolo, as well as offer several walking tours and cooking classes from 25€ to 60€. Another very interesting entry in the world of walking tours is **Context Travel** (www.contexttravel.com), which offers tours led by academics and other experts in their field in a variety of specialties, from the gastronomical to the archeological. Tours are limited to six people and cost between 40€ and 70€ per person. Lastly, **Walking Tours of Florence** (✆ **055-264-5033;** www.italy.artviva.com) has a huge array of walking tours and museum guides and swims at villas for every budget, starting at 25€.

Call **I Bike Italy** (✆ **347-638-3976;** www.ibikeitaly.com) to sign up for 1-day rides to Chianti and Fiesole for 70€, or 2 days to Siena for 300€. (This is a Florida-based company, and prearranged trips can be paid by checks made out in U.S. dollars. They do not accept credit cards.)

Fast Facts Florence

Business Hours Hours mainly follow the Italian norm (see chapter 14). In Florence, however, many of the larger and more central shops stay open through the midday *riposo* (note the sign *orario no-stop*).

Consulates See "Embassies & Consulates," in chapter 14.

Doctors & Dentists A **walk-in clinic** (✆ **055-483-363** or 0330-774-731) is run by Dr. Giorgio Scappini; Tuesday and Thursday office hours are brief, 5:30 to 6:30pm or by appointment at Via Bonifacio Lupi 32 (just south of the Tourist Medical Service; see "Hospitals," below); Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, go to Via Guasti 2 from 3 to 4pm (north of the Fortezza del Basso). **Dr. Stephen Kerr** keeps an office at Via Porta Rossa 1 (✆ **0335-836-1682** or 055-288-055 at home), with office hours Monday through Friday from 3 to 5pm without an appointment (home visits or clinic appointments available 24 hr.).

For general dentistry, try **Dr. Camis de Fonseca,** Via Nino Bixio 9, northeast of the city center off Viale dei Mille (✆ **055-587-632**), open Monday through Friday

from 3 to 7pm; he's also available for emergency weekend calls. The U.S. consulate can provide a list of other English-speaking doctors, dentists, and specialists. See also "Hospitals," below, for medical translator service.

Emergencies Dial ✆ **113** for an emergency of any kind. You can also call the **carabinieri** (the national police force; more useful than local branches) at ✆ **112.** Dial an **ambulance** at ✆ **118,** and report a **fire** at ✆ **115.** All these calls are free from any phone. For **car breakdowns,** call ACI (Automobile Club of Italy) at ✆ **116.**

Hospitals The **ambulance number** is ✆ **118.** There's a special **Tourist Medical Service,** Via Lorenzo il Magnifico 59, north of the city center between the Fortezza del Basso and Piazza della Libertà (✆ **055-475-411**), open 24 hours; take bus no. 8 or 80 to Viale Lavagnini, or bus no. 12 or night bus no. 91 to Via Poliziano.

You can walk into most any Italian hospital when ill and get taken care of with no insurance questions asked, no forms to fill out, and no fee charged. They'll just give you a prescription and send you on your way. The most central hospitals are the **Arcispedale di Santa Maria Nuova,** a block northeast of the Duomo on Piazza Santa Maria Nuova (✆ **055-27-581**), and the **Misericordia Ambulance Service,** on Piazza del Duomo across from Giotto's bell tower (✆ **055-212-222** for ambulance).

For a **free translator** to help you describe your symptoms, explain the doctor's instructions, and aid in medical issues in general, call the volunteers at the **Associazione Volontari Ospedalieri** (**AVO;** ✆ **055-425-0126** or 055-234-4567) Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 4 to 6pm and Tuesday and Thursday from 10am to noon.

Internet Access Most hotels in the city center now offer either wireless connections or an Internet point to their customers. Otherwise, head to the now-massive **Internet Train** (www.internettrain.it), with 15 locations in Florence, including their very first shop at Via dell'Oriuolo 40r, a few blocks from the Duomo (✆ **055-263-8968**); Via Guelfa 54r, near the train station (✆ **055-214-794**); Borgo San Jacopo 30r, in the Oltrarno (✆ **055-265-7935**); and in the underground tunnel from the train station toward town (✆ **055-239-9720**). Actually, there are now 126 offices across Italy (36 in Tuscany, 4 in Umbria—in Perugia and Orvieto), and the magnetic access card you buy is good at all of them, making plugging in throughout your journey that much easier. Access is 4€ per hour, or 1€ for 10 minutes; they also provide printing, scanning, webcam, and fax services, plus others (bike rental, international shipping, 24-hr. film developing) at some offices. Open hours vary, but run at least daily from 9am to 8:30pm, often later.

Laundry & Dry Cleaning Though there are several coin-op shops (mostly of the Ondablu chain), you can get your wash done for you even more cheaply at a pay-by-weight *lavanderia*—and you don't have to waste a morning sitting there watching it go in circles. The cheapest are around the university (east of San Marco), and one of the best is a nameless joint at **Via Alfani 44r** (✆ **055-247-9313**), where they'll do an entire load for 6€, have it ready by afternoon, and even deliver it free to your hotel. It's closed Saturday afternoon. At other, non-self-service shops, check the price *before* leaving your clothes—some places charge by the item. Dry cleaning *(lavasecco)* is much more costly and available at *lavanderie* throughout the city (ask your hotel for the closest).

Mail You can buy *francobolli* (stamps) from any *tabacchi* or from the central post office. Florence's **main post office** (✆ **160** for general info, or 055-211-147) is on Via Pellicceria 3, 50103, Firenze, off the southwest corner of Piazza della Repubblica. You can pick up letters sent ***Fermo Posta*** (Italian for held mail) by showing ID; see below. The post office is open Monday through Friday from 8:15am to 7pm and Saturday 8:15am to 12:30pm. All packages heavier than 2 kilograms (4 1/3 lb.) must be properly wrapped and brought around to the parcel office at the back of the building (enter at Via dei Sassetti 4, also known as Piazza Davanzati).

Drop postcards and letters into the boxes outside. To mail larger packages, drop them at *sportello* (window) 9/10, but first head across the room to window 21/22 for stamps. If that window is closed, as it often is, you buy your stamps at the next window, 23/24, which is also the pickup for *Fermo Posta*. You can also send packages via **UPS,** Via di Pratignone 56a in Calenzano (✆ **055-882-5501**).

To receive mail at the central post office, have it sent to [your name], Fermo Posta Centrale, 50103 Firenze, Italia/ITALY. They'll charge you the awkward figure of .26€ per letter when you come to pick it up at window 23/24; bring your passport for ID.

Newspapers & Magazines You can pick up the *International Herald Tribune* and *USA Today* from almost any newsstand, and you'll find the *Wall Street Journal Europe* and the *London Times,* along with *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines, at most larger kiosks. There's a 24-hour newsstand in the train station. For publications about upcoming events, theater, and shows, see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter.

Pharmacies For pharmacy information, dial ✆ **110.** There are 24-hour pharmacies (also open Sun and state holidays) in **Stazione Santa Maria Novella** (✆ **055-216-761;** ring the bell btw. 1 and 4am); at **Piazza San Giovanni 20r,** just behind the baptistery at the corner of Borgo San Lorenzo (✆ **055-211-343**); and at **Via dei Calzaiuoli 7r,** just off Piazza della Signoria (✆ **055-289-490**). On holidays and at night, look for the sign in any pharmacy windows telling you which ones are open.

Police For emergencies, dial ✆ **112** for the carabinieri. To report lost property or passport problems, call the *questura* (urban police headquarters) at ✆ **055-49-771.**

Post Offices See "Mail," above.

Safety Central Italy is an exceedingly safe area with practically no random violent crime. As in any city, plenty of pickpockets are out to ruin your vacation, and in Florence you'll find light-fingered children (especially around the train station), but otherwise you're safe. Do steer clear of the Cascine Park after dark, when it becomes somewhat seedy and you may run the risk of being mugged; and you probably won't want to hang out with the late-night heroin addicts shooting up on the Arno mud flats below the Lungarno embankments on the edges of town. See chapter 14 for more safety tips.

2 WHERE TO STAY

In the past few years, thanks to growing competition from countryside hospitality, the recent financial crisis, and the high euro-dollar exchange rate, the trusty forces of supply and demand have brought hotel prices in Florence down for the first time in memory, but it is still nearly impossible to find a double you'd want to stay in for less than 100€. Because hotel prices had previously outpaced inflation, the hoteliers stockpiled some surplus cash, and over the last decade reinvested in their properties. In many hotels, the amenity levels are now at or above what Americans expect to find at home, and the days of the bathroom-down-the-hall cheap *pensioni* are fading—or at least those properties are now mostly student dives. Almost everyone seems to have put in new bathrooms and some sort of Internet access. Extras such as heated towel racks, whirlpool tubs, satellite TVs with CNN and the BBC, Wi-Fi, and direct-dial phones that once only the top few inns boasted are now in four-fifths of the properties listed here. In the past few years, the trend has been to trade quantity of rooms for quality, eliminating small doubles to create larger suites and attract a higher-rolling clientele. I've tried to balance the selections to suit all tastes and budgets.

For help finding a room, visit the Santa Maria Novella train station for the **Consorzio Informazioni Turistiche Alberghiere (ITA)** office, near Track 9 (✆ **055-282-893**), and the tiny tourist office, near Track 16, both of which will find you a room in your price range (for a small commission). Or go to the official tourist office's website subsection on accommodations at **www.toscanaeturismo.net,** a site sponsored by the provincial tourist boards that lists virtually every hotel and other type of accommodations in the region.

Many budget hotels are concentrated in the area around the Stazione Santa Maria Novella. You'll find most of the hotels in this convenient and relatively safe (if charmless) area on noisy Via Nazionale and its first two side streets, Via Fiume and Via Faenza; an adjunct is the area surrounding the Mercato San Lorenzo. The area between the Duomo and Piazza della Signoria, particularly along and near Via dei Calzaiuoli, is a good though invariably more expensive place to look.

Peak season is mid-March through mid-July, September through early November, and December 23 through January 6. May and September are particularly popular in the city as well as in the outlying Tuscan hills.

To help you decide in which area you'd like to base yourself for exploring the city, consult "The Neighborhoods in Brief," earlier in this chapter. Note that I've included parking information only for those hotels or *pensioni* that offer it.

NEAR THE DUOMO

Very Expensive

Hotel Savoy ★★ This 1893 hotel underwent a complete transformation in 2000 by Sir Rocco Forte and his sister, who designed the warm, stylishly minimalist modern interiors. Rooms are standardized, with walk-in closets, dark brown marble bathrooms, and mosaics over the tubs. The different room "styles"—classic, executive, and deluxe—really just refer to size. Four suites (two rooms, two TVs, leather easy chairs, white marble bathrooms) are on the back, four on the piazza. Two of them include a Turkish bath. Rooms on the fifth floor, added in 1958, just peep over the surrounding buildings for spectacular views, especially those on the Duomo (back) side. You're just a few steps in

any direction from all the sights and the best shopping. The building actually belongs to Ferragamo, as do many of the other buildings in this square.

Piazza della Repubblica 7, 50123 Firenze. ✆ **800/223-6800** in the U.S., or 055-27-351 in Italy. Fax 055-273-5888. www.roccofortehotels.com. 102 units. 520€ double; 600€ executive double; 850€ studio; 1,300€–2,600€ suite. Breakfast 29€. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 29€. Bus: A, 22, 6, 11, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; concierge; small gym w/view; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, VCR on request, fax on request, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Expensive

Hotel Brunelleschi ★ The mishmash of historical structures making up this hotel—including a Roman *caldarium* in the foundations—was so confusing they installed a small museum in the basement to explain it all. The property rambles through the remains of various medieval houses, a deconsecrated church, and a 6th-century Byzantine tower. Most of the interiors mix curving modern lines with the salvaged vestiges of the medieval buildings. The rooms are spacious and very comfortable, with large bathrooms, but are disappointingly modern. A few, especially on the upper floors, share with the panoramic roof terrace a view of the Duomo. The location is prime, but the price a bit steep for those who don't get a thrill from sleeping near the fossilized remnants of the Middle Ages.

Piazza Sant'Elisabetta 3 (off Via de' Calzaiuoli), 50122 Firenze. ✆ **055-27-370.** Fax 055-219-653. www.hotelbrunelleschi.it. 96 units. 400€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking in garage 30€. Bus: B, 14, 23, or 71. **Amenities:** Intimate restaurant; bar (in the tower); babysitting; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Moderate

Grand Hotel Cavour ★ The Cavour is an address of some refinement in Dante's old neighborhood, and about as central as you can get. The plush chairs in the large vaulted lobby focus around an antique stone pillar, and the roof terrace has a positively spectacular view of the Duomo, the Palazzo Vecchio, and other Florentine landmarks. The rooms, carpeted and furnished with contemporary good taste, tend to be on the small side, though a few enjoy brick arches and other 10th-century holdovers. Accommodations along the front and side get a view of the towers sprouting from the Bargello and the Badia, but be warned: The double-glazed windows are no match for the clamorous buses that grumble down the busy street in front.

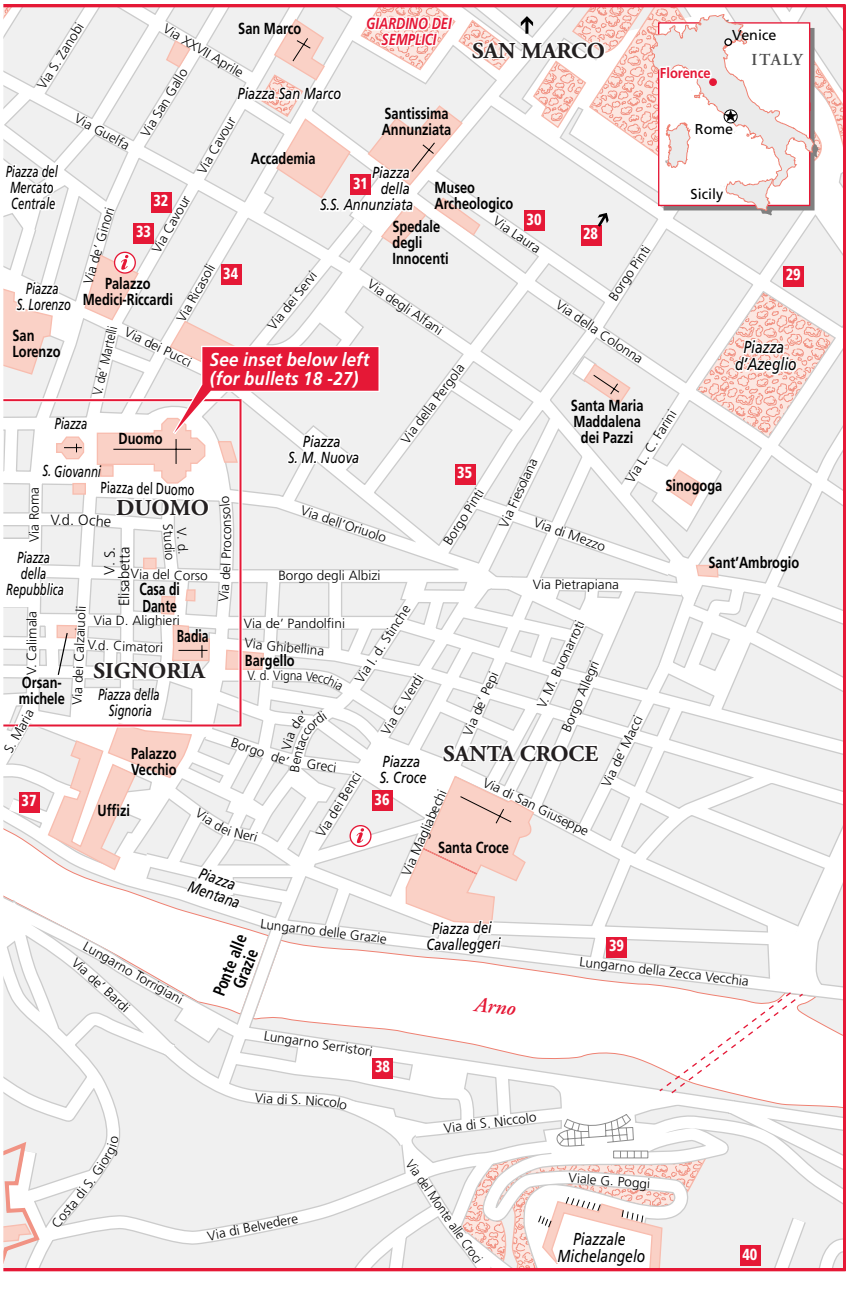
Via del Proconsolo 3 (next to the Badia), 50122 Firenze. ✆ **055-266-271.** Fax 055-218-955. www.hotelcavour.com. 103 units. 245€–500€ double (3 types). Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking in garage 28€. Bus: 14, 23, or 71. **Amenities:** Babysitting; bike rental; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Bigallo ★ Finds In the competition for best location, the Bigallo is hard to beat, sitting on the corner of Piazza del Duomo. If you get one of the few rooms facing the Duomo, you'll have a view like no other, within poking distance of Giotto's bell tower. The traffic-free zone doesn't mean you won't have significant pedestrian noise that drifts up from the cobbled street below, as this is the city's most tourist-trammeled intersection.

The owners renovated this place to bring it in line with their other three hotels, including, a few blocks away on Via delle Oche and with side views of this living postcard, the quieter de' Lanzi (see below).

Vicolo degli Adimari 2 (off the Via Calzaiuoli near the Piazza Duomo), 50122 Firenze. ✆/fax **055-216-086.** www.hotelbigallo.it. 17 units. 199€ double. Prices can drop more than 50% in low season. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking in garage 21€. Bus: A, 1, 6, 11, 14, 17, 22, 23, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Albergo Azzi **1**
Albergo Merlini **2**
Campeggio Michelangelo **40**
Grand Hotel Cavour **19**
Hotel Abaco **9**
Hotel Alessandra **13**
Hotel Aprile **6**
Hotel Bellettini **8**
Hotel Bigallo **24**
Hotel Brunelleschi **22**
Hotel Burchianti **7**
Hotel California **34**
Hotel Calzaiuoli **21**
Hotel Casci **33**
Hotel de' Lanzi **23**
Hotel Firenze **20**
Hotel Helvetia & Bristol **10**
Hotel Hermitage **37**
Hotel Il Guelfo Bianco **32**
Hotel La Scaletta **14**
Hotel Loggiato dei Serviti **31**
Hotel Mario's **3**
Hotel Medici **25**
Hotel Monna Lisa **35**
Hotel Nuova Italia **4**
Hotel Pensione Pendini **27**
Hotel Regency **29**
Hotel Ritz **39**
Hotel Savoy **26**
Hotel Silla **38**
Hotel Tornabuoni Beacci **11**
Hotel Torre Guelfa **12**
Instituto Gould **15**
Mia Cara/Archi Rossi Hostel **1**
Morandi alla Crocetta **30**
Palazzo Antellesi **36**
Pensione Benescistà **28**
Pensione Maria Luisa de' Medici **18**
Pensione Sorelle Bandini **16**
Torre di Bellosguardo **17**
Villa Azalee **5**
Villa Camerata (Ostello della Gioventù) **28**
Villa San Michele **28**



San Marco
GIARDINO DEI SEMPLICI
SAN MARCO
Venice
ITALY
Florence
Rome
Sicily
Via S. Zanobi
Via XXVII Aprile
Piazza San Marco
Via San Gallo
Via Guelfa
Via Cavour
Santissima Annunziata
Accademia
Piazza della S.S. Annunziata
Museo Archeologico
Piazza del Mercato Centrale
Spedale degli Innocenti
Via Laura
Via de' Ginori
Palazzo Medici-Riccardi
Via Ricasoli
Via dei Servi
Via degli Alfani
Borgo Pinti
Piazza S. Lorenzo
San Lorenzo
V. de' Martelli
Via dei Pucci
Via della Colonna
Piazza d'Azeglio
See inset below left (for bullets 18 -27)
Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi
Via della Pergola
Piazza S. M. Nuova
Via L. C. Farini
Piazza S. Giovanni
Duomo
Piazza del Duomo
DUOMO
Sinogoga
Via Roma
V.d. Oche
Via dell'Oriuolo
Borgo Pinti
Via Fiesolana
Via di Mezzo
Piazza della Repubblica
V. S. Elisabetta
V. d. Studio
Via del Proconsolo
Via del Corso
Casa di Dante
Borgo degli Albizi
Sant'Ambrogio
Via Pietrapiana
Via D. Alighieri
Via de' Pandolfini
V. Calimala
Via dei Calzaiuoli
V.d. Cimatori
Badia
Via Ghibellina
Bargello
V. d. Vigna Vecchia
Via I. d. Stinche
V. M. Buonarroti
Orsan-michele
SIGNORIA
Piazza della Signoria
Via G. Verdi
Via de' Pepi
Borgo Allegri
S. Maria
Via de' Bentaccordi
Via de' Macci
Palazzo Vecchio
Borgo de' Greci
Piazza S. Croce
SANTA CROCE
Uffizi
Via dei Benci
Via di San Giuseppe
Via dei Neri
Via Magliabechi
Santa Croce
Piazza Mentana
Lungarno delle Grazie
Piazza dei Cavalleggeri
Lungarno della Zecca Vecchia
Lungarno Torrigiani
Via de' Bardi
Ponte alle Grazie
Arno
Lungarno Serristori
Via di S. Niccolo
Via di S. Niccolo
Costa di S. Giorgio
Via del Monte alle Croci
Viale G. Poggi
Via di Belvedere
Piazzale Michelangelo
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Hotel Burchianti ★★ (Finds) In 2002, rising rents forced the kindly owner of this venerable inn (established in the 19th c.) to move up the block into the *piano nobile* of a neighboring 15th-century *palazzo.* She definitely traded up. Incredible frescoes dating from 17th century and later decorate virtually every ceiling. This is one of the most sought-after little hotels in Florence, so be sure to book well in advance.

Via del Giglio 8 (off Via Panzani), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-212-796.** Fax 055-272-9727. www.hotelburchianti.com. 10 units. 100€–120€ double; 130€–180€ suite. Ask for a Frommer's discount of 5%. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking in garage next door about 25€. Bus: A, 1, 6, 14, 17, 22, 23, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service (breakfast). *In room:* A/C, TV on request, hair dryer, high-speed Internet, minibar in suites.

Hotel Calzaiuoli ★ As central as you can get, the Calzaiuoli offers comfortable, well-appointed rooms on the main strolling drag halfway between the Uffizi and the Duomo. The halls' rich runners lead up a *pietra serena* staircase to the midsize and largish rooms decorated with painted friezes and framed etchings. The firm beds rest on patterned carpets; the bathrooms range from huge to cramped, but all have fluffy towels (and a few have Jacuzzis). The rooms overlook the street, with its pedestrian carnival and some of the associated noise, or out the back—either over the rooftops to the Bargello and Badia towers or up to the Duomo's cupola.

Via Calzaiuoli 6 (near Orsanmichele), 50122 Firenze. ✆ **055-212-456.** Fax 055-268-310. www.calzaiuoli.it. 45 units. 130€–250€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 26€ in garage. Bus: 22, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Hotel de' Lanzi ★ A much quieter alternative to the Hotel Bigallo, its sister hotel around the corner (see above), the Lanzi is just as centrally located and more comfortable; it just doesn't have those drop-dead views of the Duomo and bell tower, and the entrance is not particularly photogenic. Still, the beds have firm mattresses and spreads embroidered in an antique Florentine pattern. The accommodations, in fact, are all done very tastefully for a hotel of this price. Many rooms on the front get a magnificent window-filling side view of the Duomo, but even if you don't get the vista, you can be assured of cozy, relaxing accommodations just steps from the city's major sights and shopping.

Via delle Oche 11 (off Via Calzaiuoli around the corner from the Duomo), 50122 Firenze. ✆/fax **055-288-043.** www.hoteldelanziflorence.com. 44 units. 199€ double; 271€ triple. Prices can drop more than 50% in low season; also ask for Frommer's discounts. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 18€. Bus: 22, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, high-speed Internet.

Hotel Pensione Pendini ★ Built during the heyday of the 1880s, when Florence was briefly the capital of the newly unified Italy, the Pendini rises above the storefronts of Piazza della Repubblica. The entrance is not very welcoming and the furniture has seen better days, but it is clean and a great value for the location, poised next to the top shops in the city. The rather large accommodations on the piazza have the best views, over the bustle of the cafe-lined square, but they also pose a real risk of a noisy night.

Via Strozzi 2 (Piazza della Repubblica), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-211-170.** Fax 055-281-807. www.hotelpendini.net. 42 units, all with bathroom. 79€–155€ double; 110€–210€ triple; 170€–250€ quad. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet garage parking 25€–35€. Bus: A, 6, 11, 22, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; room service (breakfast and bar); free Wi-Fi in lobby. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer on request.

Inexpensive

Hotel Abaco ★★ (Value) Owner Bruno continues to please his guests with a clean, efficient little hotel in a prime location, albeit short on creature comforts. The Abaco has inherited a few nice touches from its 15th-century *palazzo,* including high wood ceilings, stone floors (some are parquet), and in tiny no. 5 a carved *pietra serena* fireplace. Each room is themed after a Renaissance artist, with framed reproductions of the painter's works; this hotel is more beatnik, less Bulgari. Bruno has done it up with quirky antique-style pieces such as gilded frame mirrors and rich half-testers over the beds. It's at a busy intersection, but the double-paned windows help. Those who are not okay with lugging suitcases up stairs should look elsewhere.

Via dei Banchi 1 (halfway btw. the station and the Duomo, off Via de' Panzani), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-238-1919.** Fax 055-282-2289. www.abaco-hotel.it. 7 units, 3 with shower and sink, 4 with full bathroom. 75€ double with shower only; 90€ double with bathroom. Breakfast 5€ or free if you pay for the room with cash. AE, MC, V (they prefer cash). Valet parking 25€ in garage. Bus: 1, 6, 11, 14, 17, 22, 23, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Bike rental; concierge; Internet terminal. *In room:* A/C (costs an extra 5€ to turn on), TV, hair dryer.

Hotel Firenze This former student hangout and now board-rated two-star hotel is still partly used as a study-abroad dorm, although its clientele ranges from college juniors to young adults to retirees. Guests are attracted by the excellent price-to-location ratio: It is tucked away on its own little piazza at the heart of the *centro storico*'s pedestrian zone. If you're more interested in spending your time in the heart of Florence's action, this is your choice, as the rooms are bright but bland. This is a large operation without any of the warmth or ambience of a small, family-run hotel, and the concierge and management are efficient but generally indifferent.

Piazza de Donati 4 (on Via del Corso, off Via dei Calzaiuoli), 50122 Firenze. ✆ **055-268-301** or 055-214-203. Fax 055-212-370. www.hotelfirenzeflorence.com. 57 units. 83€–114€ double; 111€–147€ triple. Breakfast 7€. MC, V. Parking 26€ in nearby garage. Bus: A, 14, or 23. **Amenities:** Concierge; Internet point in lobby. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

Hotel Medici ★ (Value) In the heart of town, with killer views, this place is more than worth it for budgeteers who can secure a room on the fifth or (better yet) sixth floor. All rooms are a good size but plain, with functional furniture, tile floors, tiny bathrooms, and firm beds. But who looks at the room when your window is filled with a vista of Florence's Duomo—facade, campanile, dome, and all? Only the top two levels of rooms get the full effect, but the sixth floor has a wraparound terrace everyone can enjoy. If you're lucky, you might happen in at a moment when one of the many regulars haven't booked one of the sixth-floor rooms with French windows opening directly onto the terrace. The price is excellent for this kind of location and panorama.

Via de' Medici 6 (btw. Piazza della Repubblica and Via de' Calzaiuoli), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-284-818.** Fax 055-216-202. www.hotelmedici.it. 39 units, 26 with bathroom (shower only). 80€–180€ double with bathroom. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. Valet parking 22€ in nearby garage. Bus: A, 22, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; room service (breakfast). *In room:* Hair dryer.

Pensione Maria Luisa de' Medici ★★★ (Kids) (Finds) Wales-born Evelyn Morris runs this quiet *pensione,* which is studded with old paintings and modern furniture. Most rooms are large enough to accommodate four to five people comfortably, and the firm beds are set on carpeted or tiled floors scattered with thick rugs. There are four shared bathrooms, so you usually don't have to wait in the morning. Two drawbacks: You have

to walk up three flights, and there is a curfew, which varies with the season. However, if elevators and late nights are obligatory, the owners offer a *pensione* across the street, **Hotel Ferdinando II de' Medici** (Via del Presto 2; ✆ **055-210-947;** www.ferdinandodemedici.com) that will suit your tastes, and possibly your budget as well. Doubles there are priced at 95€ per night.

Via del Corso 1 (2nd floor; btw. Via dei Calzaiuoli and Via del Proconsolo), 50122 Firenze. ✆ **055-280-048.** 9 units, 2 with private bathroom. 80€ double without bathroom; 95€ double with bathroom; 110€ triple without bathroom; 125€ triple with bathroom; 130€ quad without bathroom; 145€ quad with bathroom. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Nearby parking about 24€–28€. Bus: A, 14, or 23. **Amenities:** Concierge. *In room:* Hair dryer, no phone.

NEAR PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA

Expensive

Hotel Hermitage ★ This ever-popular hotel is located right at the foot of the Ponte Vecchio. The rooms are of moderate size, occasionally a bit dark, but they're full of 17th- to 19th-century antiques and boast double-glazed windows to cut down on noise. Rooms have either wood floors or thick rugs, and most bathrooms have Jacuzzis. Those that don't face the Ponte Vecchio are on side alleys and quieter. Their famous roof terrace is covered in bright flowers that frame postcard views of the Arno, Duomo, and Palazzo Vecchio. The charming breakfast room full of picture windows gets the full effect of the morning sun. The owners and staff excel in doing the little things that help make your vacation go smoothly—but prices are a bit inflated.

Vicolo Marzio 1/Piazza del Pesce (to the left of the Ponte Vecchio as you're facing it), 50122 Firenze. ✆ **055-287-216.** Fax 055-212-208. www.hermitagehotel.com. 28 units. 245€ double. Rates up to 40% lower in off season. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. Parking 25€ in nearby garage. Bus: 23 or 71. **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service; Wi-Fi in public lounge. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

NEAR SAN LORENZO & THE MERCATO CENTRALE

Moderate

Hotel Bellettini ★ (Value) A hotel has existed in this Renaissance *palazzo* since the 1600s. Gina and Marzia, sisters and third-generation hoteliers, run this gem of terra-cotta tiles, wrought-iron or carved wood beds, antiques, and stained-glass windows. Room no. 44 offers a tiny balcony that, blooming with jasmine and geraniums by late spring, makes it second best only to room no. 45 with its view of the Medici chapels and the Duomo's dome. In 2000, they added a lovely six-room annex with frescoes, marble bathrooms, minibars, and coffeemakers.

Via dei Conti 7 (off Via dei Cerretani), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-213-561.** Fax 055-283-551. www.hotelbellettini.com. 28 units. 60€–105€ double without bathroom; 75€–140€ double with bathroom; 95€–180€ triple with bathroom. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Nearby parking 24€. Bus: A, 1, 6, 14, 17, 22, 23, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Concierge; Internet; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Hotel Il Guelfo Bianco ★★ Once you enter this refined hotel you'll forget it's on busy Via Cavour. Its windows are triple-paned, blocking out nearly all traffic noise, and many rooms overlook quiet courtyards and gardens out back. The interior successfully combines modern comforts with antique details. Some rooms have retained such 17th-century features as frescoed or painted wood ceilings, carved wooden doorways, and the occasional parquet floor. The friendly staff is full of advice.

Via Cavour 29 (near the corner of Via Guelfa), 50129 Firenze. ✆ **055-288-330.** Fax 055-295-203. www.ilguelfobianco.it. 40 units. 170€ executive double; 215€ deluxe double; 225€ junior suite. Rates include

breakfast. AE, MC, V. Valet parking 24€ in garage. Bus: 1, 6, 7, 11, 17, 33, 67, or 68. **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms; Wi-Fi in lobby. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV, VCR in some units, hair dryer, minibar.

Inexpensive

Hotel California ★ (Value) The California is a good budget option on a lightly trafficked street near the Duomo. Rooms have stylish modern furnishings, richly colored bedspreads, and bathrooms have spacious marble sink counters—a few have Jacuzzi tubs. There are 18th-century fresco fragments and stuccoes on many of the ceilings, and breakfast is served on a flower-covered terrace in nice weather. A few of the rooms have balconies and views of the Duomo's cupola, and they offer good deals for families.

Via Ricasoli 30 (1½ blocks north of the Duomo), 50122 Firenze. ✆ **055-282-753.** Fax 055-216-268. www.californiaflorence.it. 22 units. 90€–195€ double; 120€–240€ triple. Ask about special promotions that can lower rates up to 40%. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking around 25€. Bus: 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 17, 20, 25, 31, 32, 33, 67, 68, or 91. **Amenities:** Concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar in 10 units.

Hotel Casci ★ (Kids) (Value) This clean hotel in a 15th-century *palazzo* is run by the Lombardis, one of Florence's most accommodating and energetic families. It's patronized by a host of regulars who know a good value when they find it. The Lombardis even offer a free museum ticket to everyone who stays at least 3 nights (and with admissions running at about 8€ for most major museums, that's saying something). The frescoed bar room was, from 1851 to 1855, part of an apartment inhabited by Gioacchino Rossini, legendary composer of *The Barber of Seville* and *The William Tell Overture*. The rooms ramble on toward the back forever, overlooking the gardens and Florentine rooftops, and are mouse-quiet except for the birdsong. A few large family suites in back sleep four to five. The central location means some rooms (with double-paned windows) overlook busy Via Cavour, so if you're seeking quiet ask for a room facing the inner courtyard. The hotel serves an ample breakfast buffet in a frescoed dining room.

Via Cavour 13 (btw. Via dei Ginori and Via Guelfa), 50129 Firenze. ✆ **055-211-686.** Fax 055-239-6461. www.hotelcasci.com. 25 units. 80€–150€ double; 100€–190€ triple; 120€–230€ quad. Rates include buffet breakfast. 10%–15% discount for cash payment; check website for special offers, especially Nov–Feb. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 23€ or in nearby garage (no valet) for 15€. Bus: 1, 6, 11, or 17. **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; concierge; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, flatscreen TV, fridge, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

NEAR PIAZZA SANTA TRINITA

Very Expensive

Hotel Helvetia & Bristol ★★ This Belle Epoque hotel is the most central of the top luxury properties in town, host in the past to the Tuscan Macchiaioli painters as well as De Chirico, playwright Pirandello, and atom-splitting Enrico Fermi. The attentive staff oversees the rather cushy accommodations outfitted with marble bathrooms, large, firm beds, and heavy curtains. Most rooms have at least one antique work of art on the fabric-covered walls, and all are well insulated from the sounds of the outside world. The large 17th-century canvases add an air of dignity.

Via dei Pescioni 2 (near the Palazzo Strozzi), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **888/770-0447** in the U.S., 800-505-050 toll-free in Italy, or 055-287-814. Fax 055-288-353. http://helvetiabristol.warwickhotels.com. 67 units. 420€ double; 490€ superior double; 670€ suite. Breakfast 26€. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking in garage 35€. Bus: 6, 11, 36, 37, or 68. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bike rental; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, VCR in deluxe rooms, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Expensive

Hotel Tornabuoni Beacci ★★ From the Renaissance until the 19th century this was the sumptuous guesthouse of the Strozzi family. It later became a sort of luxury *pensione,* and then a grand hotel. The staff greets return guests and new friends alike with genuine warmth. Everything is a bit worn, but there's a concerted effort to furnish the rooms with period pieces. The dining room is sunny, and the lunches and dinners are well prepared, but the real treasure is the roof deck. In summer, you can take breakfast on this terrace bursting with flowers and a view of the Bellosguardo hills. Off the terrace is a bar, and there's an atmospheric reading room with a 17th-century tapestry and a large fireplace that roars to life in winter.

Via Tornabuoni 3 (off the north corner of Piazza Santa Trínita), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-212-645.** Fax 055-283-594. www.tornabuonihotels.com. 28 units. 315€ double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 25€ in garage. Bus: 6, 11, 36, 37, or 68. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; concierge; room service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Moderate

Hotel Alessandra ★ (Value) This old-fashioned *pensione* in a 1507 *palazzo* just off the river charges little for its simple comfort and kind hospitality. The rooms differ greatly in size and style, and while they won't win any awards from *Architectural Digest,* there are a few antique pieces and parquet floors to add to the charm. The bathrooms are outfitted with fluffy white towels, and the shared bathrooms are ample, clean, and numerous enough that you won't have to wait in line in the morning. They also rent out an apartment in a quiet section of the Oltrarno (across the bridge from the Santa Croce neighborhood) for 775€ per week for two people; check it out at **www.florenceflat.com**.

Borgo SS. Apostoli 17 (btw. Via dei Tornabuoni and Via Por Santa Maria), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-283-438.** Fax 055-210-619. www.hotelalessandra.com. 27 units, 20 with private bathroom. 110€ double without bathroom; 150€ double with bathroom; 160€ double (with bathroom) overlooking river; 150€ triple without bathroom; 195€ triple with bathroom; 160€ quad without bathroom; 215€ quad with bathroom; 185€ junior suite; 300€ Baccio suite. Rates include breakfast. Ask about low-season rates. AE, MC, V. Parking in nearby garage 20€. Bus: B, 6, 11, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service (breakfast); smoke-free rooms (doubles overlooking river and suites). *In room:* A/C, TV (PlayStation on request), hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Torre Guelfa ★ The Avuri family runs one of the most atmospheric hotels in Florence. The major reason to stay here is to drink in the breathtaking 360-degree view from the 13th-century tower, Florence's tallest privately owned tower. Although you're just steps from the Ponte Vecchio (and, unfortunately, the noise that comes along with it) you'll want to put sightseeing on hold and linger in your canopied iron bed. So many people request room no. 15, with a huge private terrace and a view similar to the tower's, that they've had to raise the price for that room. Follow the strains of classical music to the salon, whose vaulted ceilings and lofty proportions hark back to the *palazzo*'s 14th-century origins. Also ask them about their Tuscan hideaway, the **Villa Rosa di Boscorotondo** outside Panzano (p. 196).

Borgo SS. Apostoli 8 (btw. Via dei Tornabuoni and Via Por Santa Maria), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-239-6338.** Fax 055-239-8577. www.hoteltorreguelfa.com. 22 units. 150€–210€ double; 210€–260€ room with private terrace; 180€–255€ triple or junior suite. Rates include continental breakfast. Parking in nearby garage 30€. AE, MC, V. Bus: B, 6, 11, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV (in all but six 1st-floor doubles), hair dryer, minibar.

SOUTH OF SANTA MARIA NOVELLA

Moderate

Hotel Aprile The Aprile fills a semi-restored 15th-century palace on this busy hotel-laden street near the station. Aside from their antique touches, the simple guest rooms are nothing to write home about. The street noise gets through even the double glazing, so light sleepers will want to request a room off the road—besides, some of the back rooms have a breathtaking view of Santa Maria Novella. The frescoes and relative quiet of no. 16 make it an excellent choice. Historical footnote: Cavernous room no. 3 has had a bathroom attached to it since the 15th century, one of the first "rooms with bathroom" ever!

Via della Scala 6 (1½ blocks from the train station), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-216-237.** Fax 055-280-947. www.hotelaprile.it. 34 units. 310€ double; 330€ triple. Rates include breakfast, and drop by about 50% in off season. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 26€ in nearby garage. Bus: 1, 2, 12, 16, 17, 22, 29, or 30. **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; concierge; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer.

Villa Azalee ★ (Finds) The atmosphere of this 1870 villa on the historic center's edge, with its prizewinning flowers, soundproof rooms, and comfortable beds, makes you forget the eight lanes of traffic flowing a few dozen feet away along Florence's inner ring road. You'll find a sunroom in the main villa, tapestries on the walls, and a very friendly staff. The rooms are floral print–oriented—perfect for Laura Ashley buffs, but for others the pink taffeta and gauzy canopies might seem over-the-top. The old *scuderia* (stables) out back were reconstructed in a hybrid Italian-English style, and many of the rooms there evoke a cozy Cotswolds cottage. The best accommodations are on the *scuderia*'s ground floor, with heavy beamed ceilings, and on the villa's first (upper) floor, with wood floors, sleigh beds, and Empire bathrooms. I'd give it another star if only it weren't so far from the action.

Viale Fratelli Rosselli 44 (at the end of Via della Scala, btw. the station and Cascine Park), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-214-242.** Fax 055-268-264. www.villa-azalee.it. 25 units. 60€–100€ double; 100€–185€ superior double; 90€–130€ triple; 140€–250€ superior triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 30€ in nearby garage. Bus: 1, 2, 9, 13, 16, 17, 26, 27, 29, 30, or 35. **Amenities:** Bike rental (3€ a day); concierge; Internet connection in lobby; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

BETWEEN SANTA MARIA NOVELLA & MERCATO CENTRALE

Moderate

Hotel Mario's ★★ In a traditional Old Florence atmosphere, the Masieri and Benelli families run a first-rate ship. Your room might have a wrought-iron headboard and massive reproduction antique armoire, and look out onto a peaceful garden; the amenities include fresh flowers and fruit. The beamed ceilings in the common areas date from the 17th century, although the building became a hotel only in 1872. I'd award Mario's three stars if not for its location—it's a bit far from the Duomo nerve center. Hefty discounts during off-season months (as low as the lowest rates listed below) "de-splurge" this lovely choice.

Via Faenza 89 (1st floor; near Via Cennini), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-216-801.** Fax 055-212-039. www.hotelmarios.com. 16 units. 70€–165€ double; 100€–200€ triple. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 23€–28€. Bus: 7, 10, 11, 12, 25, 31, 32, or 33. **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service (breakfast); smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Hotel Nuova Italia ★★ (Kids) A Frommer's fairy tale: With her trusty Arthur Frommer's *Europe on $5 a Day* in hand, the fair Eileen left the kingdom of Canada on a journey to faraway Florence. At her hotel, Eileen met Luciano, her baggage boy in shining armor.

They fell in love, got married, bought a castle (er, hotel) of their own called the Nuova Italia, and their clients live happily ever after . . . The staff here really puts itself out for guests, recommending restaurants, shops, day trips—they gave me tips the tourist office didn't know about. The rooms are board-rated two-star standard, medium to small, but the attention to detail makes the Nuova Italia stand out. Every room has triple-paned windows, though some morning rumble from the San Lorenzo market street carts still gets through. It's also one of a handful of hotels in all Tuscany with mosquito screens in the windows. The family's love of art is manifested in framed posters and paintings, and Eileen is a great source about local exhibits.

Via Faenza 26 (off Via Nazionale), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-268-430** or 055-287-508. Fax 055-210-941. www.hotel-nuovaitalia.com. 20 units. 79€–129€ double; Rates include continental breakfast. There are frequent discounts, so ask when booking. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 25€ in nearby garage. Bus: 7, 10, 11, 12, 25, 31, 32, or 33. **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; concierge; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer on request.

Inexpensive

Albergo Azzi Musicians Sandro and Valentino, the owners of this ex-*pensione* (also known as the Locanda degli Artisti/Artists' Inn), have created here a haven for artists, artist *manqués,* and students. It exudes a relaxed bohemian feel—not all the doors hang straight and not all the bedspreads match, though strides are being made (and they've even recently discovered some old frescoes in room nos. 3 and 4). You'll love the open terrace with a view where breakfast is served in warm weather, as well as the small library of art books and guidebooks so you can enjoy a deeper understanding of Florence's treasures.

Via Faenza 88r (1st floor), 50123 Firenze. ✆/fax **055-213-806.** www.hotelazzi.com. 16 units, 1 with shared bathroom. 80€–130€ double; 85€–140€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking in nearby garage 16€. Bus: 7, 10, 11, 12, 25, 31, 32, or 33. **Amenities:** Concierge; Internet. *In room:* Hair dryer on request, no phone.

Albergo Merlini ★ Value Run by the Sicilian Gabriella family, this cozy third-floor walk-up is a notch above your average board-rated one-star place, the best in a building full of tiny *pensioni.* The optional breakfast is served on a sunny glassed-in terrace decorated in the 1950s with frescoes by talented American art students and overlooking a leafy large courtyard. Room nos. 1, 4 (with a balcony), and 6 through 8 all have views of the domes topping the Duomo and the Medici Chapels across the city's terra-cotta roofscape. Note that there's a 1am curfew.

Via Faenza 56 (3rd floor), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-212-848.** Fax 055-283-939. www.hotelmerlini.it. 10 units, 6 with private bathroom. 55€–80€ double without bathroom; 60€–100€ double with bathroom; 75€–150€ triple without bathroom; 85€–180€ quad with bathroom. Breakfast 6€. MC, V. Bus: 7, 10, 11, 12, 25, 31, 32, or 33. **Amenities:** Concierge; Internet in lobby. *In room:* Hair dryer on request, no phone.

Mia Cara/Archi Rossi Hostel Value The only way you'll pay less than at the Mia Cara is at the Noto family's hostel on the ground floor. At the hotel you'll find double-paned windows and spacious no-frills rooms, which are sort of dimly lit. The rooms overlooking the small garden out back are more peaceful than those on the street side. Downstairs at the **Archi Rossi Hostel** (www.hostelarchirossi.com), units sleep four to six, for about 26€ per person. The hotel is closed 11am to 2:30pm, with a 1am curfew. Both the hotel and the hostel have wireless Internet throughout.

Via Faenza 90–94 (2nd floor), 50123 Firenze. ✆ **055-216-053.** Fax 055-230-2601. www.hotelmiacara.com. 22 units, 14 with private bathroom. 60€ double without bathroom; 70€ double with bathroom. Extra bed 35% more. Ask about off-season discounts. No breakfast offered in hotel (only in hostel). No credit cards. 4 parking spots; sometimes free, sometimes up to 8€. Bus: 7, 10, 11, 12, 25, 31, 32, or 33. **Amenities:** Concierge; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, no phone, Wi-Fi.

NEAR SAN MARCO & SANTISSIMA ANNUNZIATA

Very Expensive

Hotel Regency ★★ The Regency, converted from two 19th-century mansions, is set on a wooded piazza at the edge of town that looks remarkably like a giant London residential square. The posh old England feel continues into the salon and bar lounge, furnished with worn antiques and darkly patterned carpets and wall fabrics. This decoration scheme dominates in the comfortable rooms as well, with a liberal use of mirrored wall panels in the smaller rooms (though none are tiny by any stretch). The marble-clad bathrooms feature heated towel racks, and the discreet service includes fresh fruit, sparkling wine, and candies left in your room, and a complimentary *Herald Tribune* each morning.

Piazza Massimo d'Azeglio 3, 50121 Firenze. ✆ **055-245-247.** Fax 055-234-6735. www.regency-hotel.com. 35 units. 330€–440€ classic double; 398€–500€ deluxe double; 480€–615€ junior suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 26€. Bus: 6, 31, or 32. **Amenities:** Justifiably famous Relais le Jardin restaurant; cozy bar; babysitting; bike rental; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Expensive

Hotel Loggiato dei Serviti ★★ The Loggiato is installed in the building designed by Antonio da Sangallo the Elder in 1527 to mirror the Ospedale degli Innocenti across the piazza, forming part of one of Italy's most beautiful squares. As recently as the 1990s, this was a student *pensione,* but a renovation converted it into a board-rated three-star hotel and has restored the Renaissance aura. High vaulted ceilings in soft creams abound throughout and are supported by the gray columns of the bar/lounge. The wood or brick-tiled floors in the rooms are covered with rugs, and most of the beds have wood frames and fabric canopies for an antique feel. The rooms along the front can be a bit noisy in the evenings because traffic is routed through the edges of the piazza, but I usually reserve one anyway, just for the magical view.

Piazza Santissima Annunziata 3, 50122 Firenze. ✆ **055-289-592.** Fax 055-289-595. www.loggiatodeiservitihotel.it. 38 units. 120€–205€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 22€. Bus: 6, 31, or 32. **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

Moderate

Morandi alla Crocetta ★★ Finds This subtly elegant *pensione* belongs to a different era, when travelers stayed in private homes filled with family heirlooms and well-kept antiques. Though the setting is indeed historic (it was a 1511 Dominican nuns' convent), many of the old-fashioned effects, such as the wood-beam ceilings, 1500s artwork, and antique furnishings, are the result of a recent redecoration. It has all been done in good taste, however, and there are still plenty of echoes of the original structure, from exposed brick arches to one room's 16th-century fresco fragments.

Via Laura 50 (a block east of Piazza Santissima Annunziata), 50121 Firenze. ✆ **055-234-4747.** Fax 055-248-0954. www.hotelmorandi.it. 10 units. 110€–220€ double; 130€–295€ triple; 150€–370€ quad. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 16€ in garage. Bus: 6, 31, or 32. **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

NEAR SANTA CROCE

Expensive

Hotel Monna Lisa ★★ There's a certain old-world elegance to the richly decorated sitting and breakfast rooms and the gravel-strewn garden of this 14th-century *palazzo.* Among the potted plants and framed oils, the hotel has Giambologna's original rough

competition piece for the *Rape of the Sabines,* along with many pieces by neoclassical sculptor Giovanni Duprè, whose family's descendants own the hotel. They try their best to keep the entire place looking like a private home, and many rooms have the original painted wood ceilings, as well as antique furniture and richly textured wallpaper or fabrics. In 2002, they restructured 15 additional rooms in another, recently acquired building bordering the courtyard and dubbed it "La Limonaia," with rooms overlooking the garden.

Borgo Pinti 27, 50121 Firenze. ✆ **055-247-9751.** Fax 055-247-9755. www.monnalisa.it. 45 units. 149€–370€ double; 199€–460€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking (11€) is very limited, so reserve ahead. Bus: B, 14, 23, or 71. **Amenities:** American bar; babysitting; concierge; small gym; room service; smoke-free rooms; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Moderate

Hotel Ritz One of the more intimate hotels along the Arno, the Ritz's walls are hung with reproductions of Italian art from the Renaissance to Modigliani, and the reading room and bar are cozy. The room decor varies—some floors have wood or marble, others are carpeted, although in general most rooms are definitely showing their age. The redeeming value is the hotel's unmatched location. Two rooms on the front have balconies to better enjoy the Arno view, and two on the back (nos. 37 and 38) have small private terraces, and there's a roof terrace with its view of Fiesole.

Lungarno della Zecca Vecchia 24, 50122 Firenze. ✆ **055-234-0650.** Fax 055-240-863. www.florenceitaly.net/ritz. 30 units. 70€–180€ double; 90€–230€ triple; 110€–280€ quad; 170€–330€ family suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking in garage 25€. Bus: B, 13, 14, or 23. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; Internet; room service (breakfast and bar). *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

IN THE OLTRARNO

Moderate

Hotel La Scaletta ★ Kids Three partners, Andrea, Paolo, and Fabrizi, took over this well-worn old shoe of a place in 2005, one of the only remaining *palazzi* on this block between the Pitti Palace and Ponte Vecchio. The inn's star is the flower-bedecked, sunkissed terrace offering a 360-degree vista over the Boboli Gardens, the Oltrarno rooftops, and (beyond a sea of antennas) the monumental heart of Florence. Return visitors book months in advance for the homey rooms that have tiny bathrooms and old tiled floors. Street-side accommodations have double-paned windows that really do block the noise, and the worn, dark wood lacquer furniture is pleasantly unassuming.

Via Guicciardini 13 (2nd floor; near Piazza de Pitti), 50125 Firenze. ✆ **055-283-028.** Fax 055-289-562. www.hotellascaletta.it. 13 units. 79€–140€ double; 109€–160€ triple. Rates include continental breakfast. Ask about off-season discounts. AE, MC, V. Nearby parking 28€. Bus: D, 11, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer on request, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Silla ★ On a shaded riverside piazza, this 15th-century *palazzo*'s second-floor patio terrace is one of the city's nicest breakfast settings (in winter, there's a breakfast salon with chandeliers and oil paintings). Many rooms overlook the Arno and, when winter strips the leaves off the front trees, the spire of Santa Croce on the opposite bank. The friendly, skilled staff should make this hotel better known; word-of-mouth keeps it regularly full in pricey Florence despite its refreshing low profile.

Via dei Renai 5 (on Piazza Demidoff, east of Ponte delle Grazie), 50125 Firenze. ✆ **055-234-2888.** Fax 055-234-1437. www.hotelsilla.it. 35 units. 75€–200€ double; 105€–250€ triple. Rates include buffet breakfast. Ask about off-season discounts. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking in hotel garage 16€ or on street. Often closes late Nov to late Dec. Bus: C, D, 12, 13, or 23. **Amenities:** Concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Pensione Sorelle Bandini ★ (Value) This *pensione* occupies a landmark Renaissance *palazzo* on one of the city's great squares. While you can live like the nobles of yore in rooms with 4.6m (15-ft.) ceilings whose 3m (10-ft.) windows and oversize antique furniture are proportionately appropriate, the placement on the square makes for a boisterous evening and service is reflective of its denomination as a *pensione.* Room no. 9 sleeps five people and offers a Duomo view from its bathroom window; room B is a double with a fantastic cityscape out the window. On closer inspection, you'll see that the resident cats have left their mark on common-area sofas, and everything seems a bit ramshackle and musty. But that seems to be the point. The highlight is the monumental roofed veranda where Mimmo, the English-speaking manager, oversees breakfast and encourages brown-bag lunches and the chance to relax and drink in the views.

Piazza Santo Spirito 9, 50125 Firenze. ✆ **055-215-308.** Fax 055-282-761. pensionebandini@tiscali.it. 13 units, 5 with private bathroom. 112€ double without bathroom; 135€ double with bathroom. Ask for low-season discounts. Single rate on request. Extra person 35% more. Rates include continental breakfast (subtract about 9€ per person if you opt out). No credit cards. Bus: D, 11, 36, or 37. **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service. *In room:* No phone.

IN THE HILLS

Very Expensive

Villa San Michele ★ The peaceful ambience of this place recalls its origins in the 15th century as a Franciscan monastery, but I doubt the good friars had a heated outdoor pool or Jacuzzis in their cells. The facade was reputedly designed by Michelangelo, and everything is in shades of creamy yellow with soft gray *pietra serena* accents. The antique furnishings are the epitome of simple elegance, and some rooms come with canopied beds and linen sheets; others are fitted with wrought-iron headboards and antiques. The regular rooms are all in the main buildings, with modern junior suites dug into the hillside behind it, snuggled into the slopes between the terraces that host the swimming pool and formal gardens (several junior suites enjoy their own minigardens or terraces). They've converted the tiny hillside chapel into a cozy honeymoon suite with sweeping views, and the *limonaia* (where potted citrus trees once spent the frosty winters) into a grander suite. The monks never had it this good.

Via Doccia 4 (just below Fiesole off Via Fra' Giovanni Angelico), 50014 Fiesole (FI). ✆ **800/237-1236** in the U.S., or 055-567-8200 in Italy. Fax 055-567-8250. www.villasanmichele.com. 46 units. 860€–1,070€ double; 1,350€–1,720€ junior suite; 2,450€–3,400€ suite. Rates include breakfast. For half pension add 82€, full pension add 156€. AE, DC, MC, V. Closed mid-Nov to mid-Mar. Free parking. Bus: 7 (ask driver for stop, because you get off before Fiesole); free hourly shuttle bus from Piazza del Duomo. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 3 bars, including a piano bar; babysitting; bike rental; concierge; massage; extensive park w/ nature trails and jogging track; heated outdoor pool; shuttle bus to/from town center; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR (front desk has free movies), hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Expensive

Torre di Bellosguardo ★★★ (Finds) This castle was built around a 13th-century tower sprouting from a hillside on the southern edge of Florence. Spend a few days here above the city heat and noise, lazing by the pool, hiking the olive orchard roads, or sitting on a garden bench to enjoy the intimate close-range vista of the city. Don't come expecting another climate-controlled and carpeted bastion of luxury. With its echoey halls, airy loggias, and imposing stone staircases, the Bellosguardo feels just a few flickering torches shy of the Middle Ages—exactly its attraction. It's packed with antiques, and the beds from various eras are particularly gorgeous. Some rooms have intricately carved wood

ceilings, others sport fading frescoes, and many have views, including a 360-degree panorama in the romantic tower suite. It's a 15-minute stroll down the hill to Alla Vecchia Bettola (reviewed on p. 129).

Via Roti Michelozzi 2, 50124 Firenze. ✆ **055-229-8145.** Fax 055-229-008. www.torrebellosguardo.com. 16 units. 290€ double; 340€ suite. Continental breakfast 20€; American breakfast 25€. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 12 or 13 to Piazza Tasso (then taxi up hill). **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; concierge; small exercise room; Jacuzzi; massage; outdoor pool (June–Sept); small indoor pool; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C in 3 suites, TV, hair dryer.

Moderate

Pensione Bencistà ★★ (Kids) This comfortable and quiet family-run *pensione* in a rambling 14th-century villa gets you the same view and escape from the city as the Villa San Michele above it at one-fifth the price. Antiques abound, and the elegantly cluttered salons are straight out of an E. M. Forster novel. Many accommodations have big old chests of drawers, and some open onto the pretty little garden. The dining room has a view of Florence, but in summer take in the vista by breakfasting on the terrace. Although service from the staff is occasionally offhanded, the owners are friendly and truly consider you a guest in their home. They also expect to be treated as hosts and would prefer you to stay for most dinners. (If you choose the half-board option, I recommend trading at least one dinner for a lunch to try the nearby Trattoria le Cave di Maiano; p. 132.)

Via Benedetto da Maiano 4 (just below Fiesole off the main road), 50014 Fiesole (FI). ✆/fax **055-59-163.** www.bencista.com. 40 units. 158€ double; 184€ half-board double; 210€ full-board double; 210€–250€ suite. Additional 30€ for children 11 and under. MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 7 to Villa San Michele, then backtrack onto side road following signs. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; room service (breakfast only); Wi-Fi in lobby (free). *In room:* Hair dryer.

HOSTELS & CAMPING

Both hostels below are immensely popular, especially in summer. If you aren't able to write or fax to reserve a space—months ahead, if possible—show up when they open. Also check out the private hostel Archi Rossi, listed above (along with its sister hotel Mia Cara) under the Santa Maria Novella/Mercato Centrale neighborhood.

Campeggio Michelangelo Here you can sleep with a select 1,000 of your fellow campers and have almost the same vista that the tour buses get up above on Piazzale Michelangiolo. (Sadly, a stand of trees blocks the Duomo.) Of course, you're packed in like sardines on this small plateau with very little shade (in Aug, arrive early to fight for a spot along the tree-lined fringe), but you get a bar, a minimart, a laundromat, and that killer view.

Viale Michelangelo 80 (about ²/₃ of the way up to Piazzale Michelangiolo), 50125 Firenze. ✆ **055-681-1977.** Fax 055-689-348. www.ecvacanze.it/en/elite_family/tuscany/camping-michelangelo. Open camping (sleeps 1,000). 9.50€ per person, plus 6€ per tent. Campers 12€–14€. Rented tents 15€. No credit cards. Closed Nov to 1 week before Easter. Bus: 12 or 13. **Amenities:** Bar.

Istituto Gould (Kids) These are the best hostel-like accommodations in Florence, without a curfew, lockout period, or shower charge but with brand-new furnishings in plain but immaculate rooms—like a college dorm that's never seen a frat party. It's technically not a hostel, though it looks and operates like one. Most rooms are doubles or triples and unless you opt for a five-person room, you're unlikely to bunk with strangers.

The institute's real work is caring for needy or troubled youth, and the proceeds from your room fee go to help them. Reception is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm, Saturday from 9am to 1pm (you can stay over and prepay in order to check out during the weekend, but you can't check in).

Via dei Serragli 49 (near Santo Spirito), 50124 Firenze. ✆ **055-212-576.** Fax 055-280-274. www.istituto gould.it. 39 units, 37 with private bathroom. 44€ single; 56€–66€ double; 75€ triple; 92€ quad. No credit cards. Bus: 11, 36, or 37. *In room:* No phone.

Villa Camerata (Ostello della Gioventù) Florence's IYH hostel is a way outside the city center but worth it for the budget-minded. The name doesn't lie—this really is a countryside villa, with an outdoor loggia, and it's surrounded by greenery. The rooms are bland but livable. You can check in after the lockout (9am–2pm in summer, 9am–3pm in winter), and curfew is midnight. They also offer 180 tent sites for cool camping amid their wooded acres for 5€ per person plus 4€ to 6€ per tent.

Viale Augusto Righi 2–4 (3.5km/2 miles northwest of the city center; above Campo di Marte), 50137 Firenze. ✆ **055-601-451.** Fax 055-610-300. www.ostellionline.org. 322 beds. 16€ per person; 17€ per person in 3-person family room; 19€ per person in 2-person family room. Lunch/dinner 8€. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Bus: 17B (30-min. ride; 17A and 17C take longer). **Amenities:** Restaurant. *In room:* No phone.

LONG-TERM STAYS

Many of the agencies listed under "Tips on Accommodations," in chapter 3, also handle villas in Florence's hills and apartments in town. One of the most reputable specialists in Florence is **Florence and Abroad,** Via San Zanobi 58 (✆ **055-487-004;** fax 055-490-143; www.florenceandabroad.com), which matches different tastes and budgets to a wide range of apartments starting at about 500€ per week—though note they take a commission (10% for 1-month rentals, less for longer periods). Another reputable agency for short-term apartment and house rentals (weekly and monthly) is **Windows on Tuscany,** Via Tornabuoni 2 or Via della Vigna Vecchia 2 (✆ **055-268-510;** fax 055-238-1524; www.windowsontuscany.com). To go it alone, check out the classifieds in the biweekly ***La Pulce,*** available at newsstands.

Palazzo Antellesi Many people passing through Piazza Santa Croce notice Giovanni di Ser Giovanni's 1620 graffiti frescoes on the overhanging facade of no. 21, but few realize they can actually stay there. The 16th-century *palazzo* is owned by Signora Piccolomini, who rents out truly extravagant apartments to anyone who has dreamed of lying in bed next to a roaring fire under a 17th-century frescoed ceiling (the Granduca, which sleeps two or three) or sipping tea in a living room surrounded by *trompe l'oeil* Roman ruins with a 16th-century wood ceiling above (the Donatello, which sleeps six to eight). Even in the more standard rooms the furnishings are tasteful, with wicker, wood, or wrought-iron bed frames; potted plants; and the occasional 18th-century inlaid wood dresser to go with the plush couches and chairs. Author R. W. B. Lewis wrote about the Antellesi in the final chapter of *The City of Florence.*

Piazza Santa Croce 21–22, 50122 Firenze. ✆ **212/932-3480** in the U.S., or 055-244-456 in Italy. Fax 212/932-9039 in the U.S., or 055-234-5552 in Italy. www.palazzoantellesi.com. 13 apts, sleeping 2–6. $3,900–$5,200 per week (all priced in U.S. dollars). Heating included in some, but most utilities extra. No credit cards. Parking 16€ in garage per day. Bus: B, 13, 23, or 71. **Amenities:** Babysitting; exercise room; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, VCR on request, fridge, hair dryer, kitchen, Wi-Fi.

3 WHERE TO DINE

Florence is thick with restaurants, though many in the most touristy areas (around the Duomo and Piazza della Signoria) are of low quality, charge high prices, or both. I'll point out the few that aren't. The highest concentrations of excellent *ristoranti* and *trattorie* are around Santa Croce and across the river in the Oltrarno. For a more complete Florentine dining primer, see "Eating & Drinking in Florence, Tuscany & Umbria," in chapter 2, and "Italian Menu Terms," in chapter 15. Bear in mind that menus at restaurants in Tuscany can change frequently: weekly, or even daily. Note, too, that reservations at the following restaurants are not required unless otherwise indicated.

NEAR THE DUOMO

Moderate

Osteria Ganino FLORENTINE The tiny family-run Ganino continues its tradition of friendly service and good food, from the big ol' chunk of mortadella that accompanies your bread basket through the tasty *ribollita* or *gnocchi al pomodoro* (ricotta-and-spinach gnocchi in tomato sauce) to the *filetto all'aceto balsamico* (veal filet cooked in balsamic vinegar) or *coniglio in umido* (rabbit with boiled potatoes on the side) that rounds out your meal.

Piazza de' Cimatori 4r (near the Casa di Dante). ✆ **055-214-125.** Reservations recommended. Primi 8€–12€; secondi 12€–20€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 12:30–3pm and 7:30–10pm. Closed Aug. Bus: 14.

Ristorante il Pennello ★ TUSCAN/ITALIAN This is one of Florence's oldest restaurants, housed here since the late 1400s. Its claim to fame is the antipasto table, groaning under the day's changing array of two dozen appetizers. The best of the primi are under the handwritten *lo chef consiglia* (the chef recommends) and *pasta fresca* (handmade pasta) sections of the menu. They do a perfectly grilled pork chop and, if the antipasti and pasta have done you in, several light omelets for secondo.

Via Dante Alighieri 4r (btw. Via dei Calzaiuoli and Via del Proconsolo). ✆ **055-294-848.** www.ristoranteilpennello.it. Reservations suggested. Primi 7€–10€; secondi 10€–15€. AE, DC, V. Tues–Sat noon–3pm and 7–10:30pm. Closed Aug. Bus: 14.

Ristorante Paoli TUSCAN Paoli has one of the most *suggestivo* (oft-used Italian word for "evocative") settings in town, with tables under a 14th-century vaulted ceiling whose ribs and lunettes are covered with fading 18th-century frescoes. The *ravioli verdi alla casalinga* (spinach ravioli in tomato sauce) may not be inspiringly prepared, but it's freshly made and tasty. In mushroom season you can order *risotto ai funghi,* and year-round the scrumptious secondo *entrecôte di manzo arlecchino* (a thick steak in cognac-spiked cream sauce with peppercorns and sided with mashed potatoes).

Via dei Tavolini 12r. ✆ **055-216-215.** www.casatrattoria.com. Reservations highly recommended. Primi 8€–12€; secondi 14€–18€. AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight. Bus: A.

Inexpensive

Cantinetta dei Verrazzano ★ Value WINE BAR Owned by the Castello di Verrazzano, one of Chianti's best-known wine-producing estates, this wood-paneled *cantinetta* with a full-service bar/*pasticceria* and seating area helped spawn a revival of stylish wine bars as convenient spots for fast-food breaks. It promises a delicious self-service lunch or snack of focaccia, plain or studded with peas, rosemary, onions, or olives; buy

it hot by the slice or as *farcite* (sandwiches filled with prosciutto, arugula, cheese, or tuna). Platters of Tuscan cold cuts and aged cheeses are also available.

Via dei Tavolini 18–20r (off Via dei Calzaiuoli). ✆ **055-268-590.** www.verrazzano.com. Antipasti 3€–6€; glass of wine 4€–8€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–9pm. Bus: 14.

I Fratellini ★ LIGHT FARE/WINE BAR Just off the busiest tourist thoroughfare lies one of the last of a dying breed: a *fiaschetteria* (derived from the word for a flask of wine). It's the proverbial hole in the wall, a doorway about 1.5m (5 ft.) deep with rows of wine bottles against the back wall and the cheapest lunch in town. You stand, munching and sipping, on the cobblestones of the narrow street surrounded by Florentines on their lunch break and a few bemused tourists. The *cinghiale piccante con caprino* (spicy raw wild boar sausage with creamy goat cheese) is excellent.

Via dei Cimatori 38r (2 blocks from Piazza della Signoria, off Via Calzaiuoli). ✆ **055-239-6096.** www.iduefratellini.com. Sandwiches from 3€; wine from 2€ a glass. No credit cards. Daily 8am–8:30pm (July–Aug closed Sat–Sun). Closed 2 weeks in Aug and 2 weeks in Mar. Bus: 14, 23, or 71.

Trattoria Le Mossacce FLORENTINE Delicious, cheap, abundant, fast home cooking: This tiny *osteria,* filled with lunching businesspeople, farmers in from the hills, locals who've been coming since 1942, and a few knowledgeable tourists, is authentic to the bone. The waiters hate breaking out the printed menu, preferring to rattle off a list of Florentine faves like *ribollita, spaghetti alle vongole, crespelle,* and *lasagne al forno.* Unlike in many cheap joints catering to locals, the secondi are pretty good. You could try the *spezzatino* (goulashy beef stew) or a well-cooked, and for once cheap, *bistecca alla fiorentina,* but I put my money on the excellent *involtini* (thin slices of beef wrapped tightly around a bread stuffing and artichoke hearts, then cooked to juiciness in tomato sauce).

Via del Proconsolo 55r (a block south of the Duomo). ✆ **055-294-361.** www.trattorialemossacce.it. Reservations suggested for dinner. Primi 4.20€–4.70€; secondi 4.70€–14€. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 7–9:30pm. Bus: 14.

NEAR PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA

Moderate

Acqua al 2 ITALIAN Under a barrel-vaulted ceiling and dim sconce lights, diners sit elbow-to-elbow at tightly packed tables to sample this innovative restaurant's *assaggi* (tastings) courses. Acqua al 2 is proud of its almost cultish status, attained through the success of its *assaggio di primi,* which offers you a sampling of five flavorful pastas or *risotti.* If you order the *assaggio* for two, you both just may have room left over for a grilled portobello mushroom "steak," one of the many veal dishes, or something more cross-cultural, like *couscous d'agnello* (lamb). They also offer *assaggi* of salads, cheese, and desserts. Tour companies have started bringing in tourists by the busload on occasion, but the crowd still remains a good mix of locals and travelers.

Via della Vigna Vecchia 40r (at Via dell'Acqua). ✆ **055-284-170.** www.acquaal2.it. Reservations required. Primi 7€–10€; secondi 7€–17€; *assaggio* 8€ for pasta; 5€ for dessert. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30pm–1am. Closed 1 week in Aug. Bus: 14.

Antico Fattore FLORENTINE The Antico Fattore was a literary watering hole early in the 20th century and remained a favorite trattoria just a few steps from the city's premier museum until the 1993 Uffizi bomb went off a few feet from its doors. The interior has been rebuilt and the restaurant reopened, but many claim it isn't what it used to be. You can't deny they still make a tantalizing *lombatina all'aceto balsamico* (one of the thickest and most tender veal chops you'll ever find, cooked in balsamic vinegar). You

Acqua al 2 **36**
Alla Vecchia Bettola **16**
Antico Fattore **40**
Buca dell'Orafo **10**
Buca Lapi **3**
Cantinetta Antinori **4**
Cantinetta dei Verrazzano **23**
Carabé **30**
Cibrèo/Trattoria Cibrèo **34**
Coco Lezzone **9**
EnotecaBar Fuori Porta **44**
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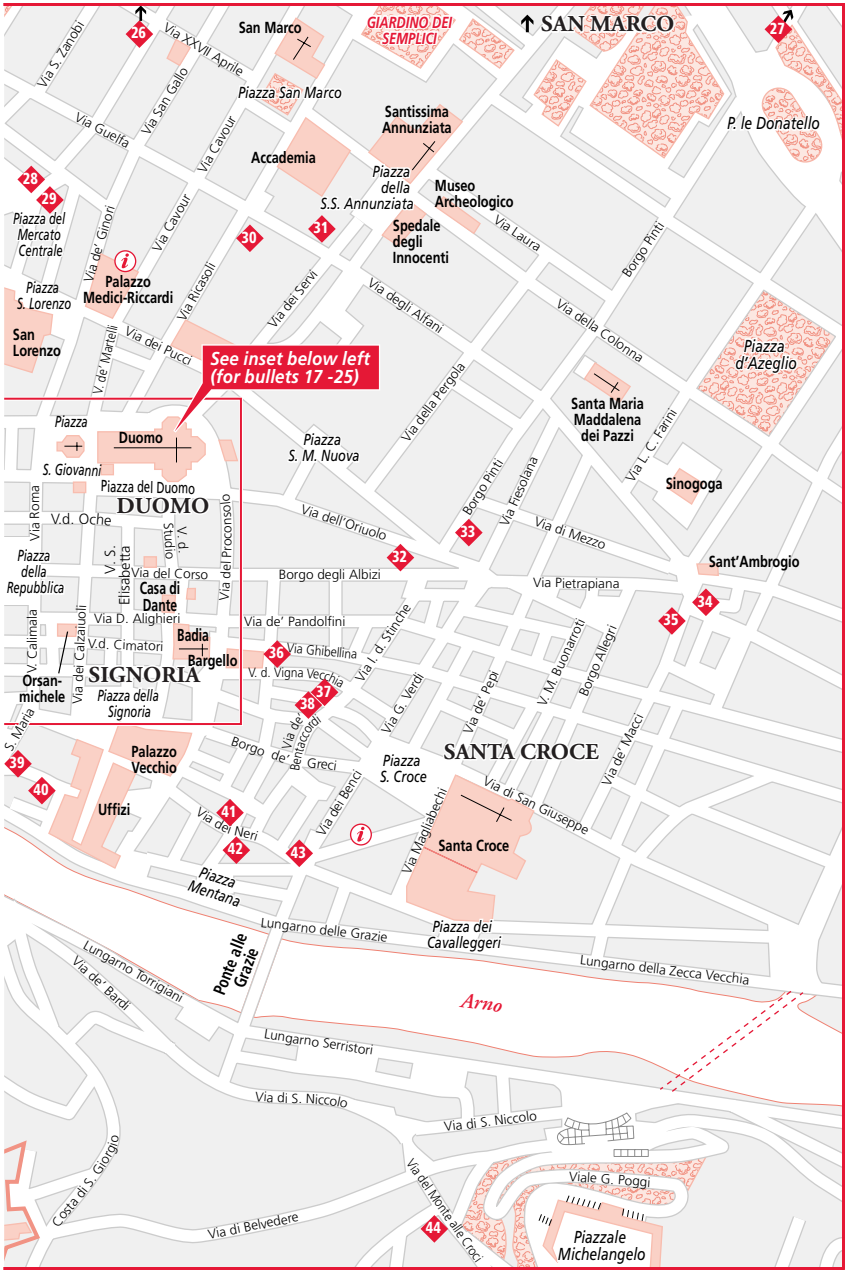
I' Cche' c'è c'è **41**
I Fratellini **25**
Il Cantinone **12**
Il Latini **7**
Il Pizzaiuolo **35**
Il Vegetariano **26**
I Raddi **13**
La Giostra **33**
La Mescita **31**
Le Fonticine **1**
L'Osteria di Giovanni **8**
Nerbone **2**
Osteria de' Benci **43**
Osteria del Belle Donne **6**
Osteria del Cinghiale Bianco **11**
Osteria Ganino **21**
Osteria Santo Spirito **14**
Osteria Vini e Vecchi Sapori **19**
Perche No? **24**
Ristorante il Pennello **20**
Ristorante Paoli **22**
Ristorante Vecchia Firenze **32**
Taverna del Bronzino **26**
Trattoria da Benvenuto **42**
Trattoria La Casalinga **15**
Trattoria le Cave di Maiano **27**
Trattoria Le Mossacce **17**
Trattoria Mario **28**
Trattoria Pallottino **38**
Trattoria Sostanza **5**
Trattoria ZàZà **29**
Yellow Bar **18**
Vivoli **37**

ⓘ Information


↑ SAN MARCO
GIARDINO DEI SEMPLICI
San Marco
Piazza San Marco
Santissima Annunziata
Accademia
Piazza della S.S. Annunziata
Museo Archeologico
Spedale degli Innocenti
P. le Donatello
Via S. Zanobi
Via XXVII Aprile
Via San Gallo
Via Guelfa
Via Cavour
Via de' Ginori
Piazza del Mercato Centrale
Piazza S. Lorenzo
San Lorenzo
Palazzo Medici-Riccardi
Via Ricasoli
Via dei Servi
Via degli Alfani
Via della Colonna
Via Laura
Borgo Pinti
Piazza d'Azeglio
V. de' Martelli
Via dei Pucci
See inset below left (for bullets 17 -25)
Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi
Via L. C. Farini
Sinogoga
Piazza S. M. Nuova
Via della Pergola
Via dell'Oriuolo
Via Fresolana
Via di Mezzo
Sant'Ambrogio
Via Pietrapiana
Borgo degli Albizi
Piazza S. Giovanni
Piazza del Duomo
DUOMO
Duomo
Via Roma
V.d. Oche
Via del Proconsolo
Via del Corso
Casa di Dante
Via D. Alighieri
Piazza della Repubblica
Via dei Calzaiuoli
V.d. Cimatori
Badia
Bargello
Via de' Pandolfini
Via Ghibellina
V. d. Vigna Vecchia
Via I. d. Stinche
Via G. Verdi
Via de' Pepi
V. M. Buonarroti
Borgo Allegri
Via de' Marci
SIGNORIA
Orsan-michele
Piazza della Signoria
Via de' Benci
Borgo de' Greci
Palazzo Vecchio
Uffizi
Piazza S. Croce
SANTA CROCE
Via di San Giuseppe
Via dei Neri
Via dei Benci
Via Magliabechi
Santa Croce
Piazza Mentana
Lungarno delle Grazie
Piazza dei Cavalleggeri
Lungarno della Zecca Vecchia
Lungarno Torrigiani
Via de' Bardi
Ponte alle Grazie
Arno
Lungarno Serristori
Via di S. Niccolo
Via di S. Niccolo
Costa di S. Giorgio
Via di Belvedere
Via del Monte alle Croci
Viale G. Poggi
Piazzale Michelangelo

can precede this with a *ribollita* (more souplike than usual) or a traditional Tuscan *pappardelle sul cinghiale* (wide noodles in wild boar sauce). If veal's not your style, try their specialty *piccione* (grilled pigeon).

Via Lambertesca 1–3r (btw. the Uffizi and the Ponte Vecchio). ✆ **055-288-975.** www.anticofattore.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 5.70€–8€; secondi 8.80€–14€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 12:15–3pm and 7:15–10:30pm. Bus: 23 or 71.

Buca dell'Orafo FLORENTINE A *buca* is a cellar joint with half a dozen crowded tables serving good, basic Florentine fare. A few locals come here every night, but Orafo's years in the guidebooks have made Americans its primary customers—Florentines aren't willing to give this place up yet, though, and you can still find it packed with locals if you reserve a late seating. However, the heavy tourism has jacked its prices above what you'd expect for peasant food. That food is still very well prepared, however, and the location can't be beat. You can't go wrong with the thick *ribollita.* If it's on the menu, go for the *paglia e fieno alla boscaiola* (a "hay and straw" mix of both egg and spinach fettuccine in mushroom-meat sauce). Orafo's best secondo is *arista di maiale con patate* (roast pork loin with potatoes), while candied stewed pears round out the meal nicely.

Volta dei Girolami 28r (under the arched alley left of the Ponte Vecchio). ✆ **055-213-619.** Reservations strongly recommended (or show up early for a spot at a communal table). Primi 6€–10€; secondi 11€–20€. No credit cards. Tues–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7:30–9:45pm. Bus: 23 or 71.

I' Cche' c'è c'è ★★ TUSCAN The name is a dialect variant on "What you see is what you get." What you see is a room with modern art prints and shelves of ancient wine bottles on the walls. What you get is good Tuscan cooking from Gino Noci, who trained in the kitchens of London before returning here to open a traditional trattoria. There's no telling what he might come up with for an appetizer: The most recent treat was a *sformatino* with pears, while for a first dish, the scrumptious *ravioli rosée* (in creamy tomato sauce) faces serious competition from the *tagliatelle alla boscaiola* (same sauce with giant slices of forest mushrooms added). *Topini* are Florentine potato gnocchi (potato-dumpling pasta), topped with spinach and cream or four cheeses. Follow up with the grilled salmon or one of their specialties, *stracotto al chianti* (beef stuffed with celery and carrot and smothered in a chianti gravy served with fried polenta and an artichoke heart).

Via de' Magalotti 11r (just east of Via Proconsolo, 2 blocks from the Arno). ✆ **055-216-589.** Reservations recommended (not available for set-price menu at lunch). Primi 6€–10€; secondi 8€–15€; fixed-price menu without wine 11€. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Closed a week in late Jan and a week in Aug.

Osteria Vini e Vecchi Sapori FLORENTINE/TUSCAN Within a block of the Palazzo Vecchio is an authentic *osteria* with a wood-beamed ceiling, brick floor, the end of a giant chianti barrel embedded in one wall, and a handwritten menu that starts *Oggi C'è* ("Today we got . . ."). As the sign proudly proclaims, this one-room joint is devoted to "wine and old flavors," which means lunch could consist of anything from a rib-sticking stewlike *ribollita* and a *frittata rustica* (a darkly fried omelet thick with potatoes and vegetables) to an excellent crostini assortment and *scamorza e speck al forno* (smoked mozzarella melted with ham in a bowl, to scoop out and slather onto bread). The paunchy owner will continue pacing back and forth, passing around the lone menu, and welcoming people in off the street until he feels like going home.

Via dei Magazzini 3r (the alley off Piazza della Signoria to the left of the Palazzo Vecchio). ✆ **055-293-045.** Primi 6€–8€; secondi 10€–14€. No credit cards. Tues–Sat 9am–11pm; Sun noon–2:30pm. Bus: 14, 23, or 71.

Kids Family-Friendly Restaurants

It'd be a sin for any family to visit Florence and not drop by one of its premier gelato parlors to sample the rich Italian equivalent of ice cream. See "A Big Step above Ice Cream: Florentine Gelato," on p. 124. If the kids mutiny and absolutely insist on a hamburger, try the slightly American-style restaurant **Yellow Bar,** Via del Proconsolo 39r (✆ **055-211-766**). But be warned: The hamburger doesn't come with a bun (a form of blasphemy among certain preteens). The Yellow Bar also serves pizzas.

Il Cantinone (p. 383) This noisy old wine cellar is popular with students and has long tables where your family can spread out and bite deep into *crostone* (slabs of peasant bread piled with your choice of toppings, like a pizza).

Il Latini (p. 125) This can be one of the most fun places to eat in Florence—you're seated at communal tables under battalions of hanging ham hocks and treated to huge portions of the Tuscan bounty. No food is too fancy or oddball to offend suspicious young palates, the waiters love to ham it up, and a festive atmosphere prevails.

Il Pizzaiuolo (p. 128) When the kids are hankering for a pizza, turn it into a learning experience by visiting the only pizza parlor in Florence run by a Neapolitan. The "plain pizza," called *pizza margherita* in Italy, was invented about 100 years ago by a Naples chef who wanted to honor Italy's Queen Margherita with a pizza done in patriotic colors. For the newly created Kingdom of Italy, this meant red (tomatoes), white (mozzarella), and green (fresh basil)—the colors of the new flag. If someone at the table prefers pepperoni, order the pizza with *salame piccante* (hot salami slices); *pepperoni* in Italian are bell peppers.

Ristorante Vecchia Firenze (p. 128) This roomy restaurant has a long menu sure to satisfy everyone's appetites. They love children here, and the back room is noisy enough that no one will notice a few yelps from the kids.

Trattoria da Benvenuto (p. 121) The dishes here are simple and homey—they're sure to have a plate of plain spaghetti and tomato sauce to please finicky youngsters.

Trattoria da Benvenuto ★ Kids TUSCAN HOME COOKING This is a no-nonsense place, simple and good, and Gabriella is a no-nonsense lady who'll get exasperated if you're not ready with your order when she's ready to take it. Da Benvenuto's is basically a neighborhood hangout that somehow found its way into every guidebook over the years. Yet it continues to serve adequate helpings of tasty Florentine home cooking to travelers and locals seated together at long tables in two brightly lit rooms. This is always my first stop on any trip to Florence, where I usually order ravioli or *gnocchi*—both served in tomato sauce—and follow with a *scaloppa di vitello alla Livornese* or a *frittata* (an omelet filled at the whim of Loriano, Gabriella's husband and cook).

Via della Mosca 16r (at the corner of Via dei Neri; walk around the right of the Palazzo Vecchio, under the arch, and it's in front of you after 4 short blocks). ✆ **055-214-833.** www.trattoriadabenvenuto.it. Primi 4.50€–9.50€; secondi 5.50€–15€. AE, MC, V. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Sat 12:30–3pm and 7–10:30pm. Bus: 23 or 71.

NEAR SAN LORENZO & THE MERCATO CENTRALE

Moderate

Le Fonticine BOLOGNESE/TUSCAN Modern paintings carpet the walls like a jigsaw puzzle here. Over the past 4 decades, Silvano Bruci has taken as much care in selecting the works of art as his Bologna-born wife, Gianna, has in teaching these Tuscans the finer points of Emilia-Romagna cuisine. Even with the art, this place still feels a bit like a country trattoria. Ask to sit in the back, if only so you get to walk past the open kitchen and grill. There are so many good primi it's hard to choose, but you can't go wrong with *tagliatelle al prosciutto punte di asparagi* (with diced prosciutto and wild asparagus tips), or *tagliatelle al radicchio rosso e groviera* (with radicchio and gruyere cheese). Afterward, you just might change your mind about liver if you try their *fegato di vitella alla salvia.*

Via Nazionale 79r (at Via dell'Ariento, north end of the Mercato San Lorenzo). ✆ **055-282-106.** www.lefonticine.com. Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–12€; secondi 8€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7–10pm. Closed July 25–Aug 25. Bus: 12, 25, 31, or 32.

Trattoria Mario ★ Value FLORENTINE This is down-and-dirty Florentine lunchtime at its best, an *osteria* so basic the little stools don't have backs and a communal spirit so entrenched the waitresses will scold you if you try to take a table all to yourself. Since 1953, their stock in trade has been feeding market workers, and you can watch the kitchen through the glass as they whip out a wipe-board menu of simple dishes at lightning speed. Hearty primi include *tortelli di patate al ragù* (ravioli stuffed with potato in ragù), *minestra di farro e riso* (emmer-and-rice soup), and *penne al pomodoro* (pasta quills in fresh tomato sauce). The secondi are basic but good; try the *coniglio arrosto* (roast rabbit) or go straight for the Fiorentina steak, often priced to be the best deal in town.

Via Rosina 2r (at the north corner of Piazza Mercato Centrale). ✆ **055-218-550.** www.trattoria-mario.com. Reservations not accepted. Primi 4.50€; secondi 5€–12€. No credit cards. Mon–Sat noon–3:30pm. Closed Aug. Bus: 10, 12, 25, 31, 32, or 91.

Trattoria ZàZà TUSCAN Like so many Florentine institutions, this place might be beginning to suffer from its rapid rise to fame and fortune. While this once-favorite among locals on the corner of the Mercato Centrale continues to expand (it bought out the osteria and tobacconist next door in 2008 and turned them into baroque dining rooms), its prices have escalated and the service has tailed off. That said, the *ribollita* is still great, and there are few experiences like enjoying one at an outdoor table with a plate of *crostini* and a glass of chianti after a hard morning of haggling at the markets.

Piazza Mercato Centrale 26r. ✆ **055-215-411.** www.trattoriazaza.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 8€–10€; secondi 10€–20€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm. Closed Aug. Bus: 10, 12, 25, 31, 32, or 91.

Inexpensive

Nerbone ★ Moments FLORENTINE Nerbone has been stuffing stall owners and market patrons with excellent Florentine *cucina povera* ("poor people's food") since the Mercato Centrale opened in 1874. You can try *trippa alla fiorentina, pappa al pomodoro,* or a plate piled with boiled potatoes and a single fat sausage. But the mainstay here is a

panino con bollito, a boiled beef sandwich that's *bagnato* (dipped in the meat juices). Eat standing with the crowd of old men at the side counter, sipping glasses of wine or beer, or fight for one of the few tables against the wall.

In the Mercato Centrale, entrance on Via dell'Ariento, stand no. 292 (ground floor). ✆ **055-219-949.** All dishes 3.50€–7€. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 7am–2pm. Bus: 10, 12, 25, 31, 32, or 91.

NEAR PIAZZA SANTA TRINITA

Very Expensive

Cantinetta Antinori FLORENTINE/TUSCAN The Antinori *marchesi* started their wine empire 26 generations ago, and, taking their cue from an ancient vintner tradition, installed a wine bar in their 15th-century *palazzo* 30 years ago. Most ingredients come fresh from the Antinori farms, as does all the fine wine. Start with the *fettuccine all'anatra* (noodles in duck sauce) and round out the meal with the *trippa alla fiorentina* or the mighty *gran pezzo* (thick slab of oven-roasted Chianina beef). If you choose this worthy splurge as a secondo, skip the first course and instead follow your steak with *formaggi misti,* which may include pecorino made fresh that morning. Their *cantucci* (Tuscan biscotti) come from Prato's premier producer.

Palazzo Antinori, Piazza Antinori 3 (at the top of Via Tornabuoni). ✆ **055-292-234.** www.cantinetta-antinori.com. Reservations strongly recommended. Primi 10€–16€; secondi 14€–24€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 12:30–2:30pm and 7–10:30pm. Closed Aug and Dec 24–Jan 6. Bus: 6, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

Expensive

Buca Lapi TUSCAN The vaulted ceiling is carpeted with travel posters, the cuisine is carefully prepared, and the wine comes from the Antinori vineyards (this was once part of their cellars). This place's prices have risen astronomically, and for no apparent reason, but the quality is still spot-on. An interesting start is the *filetto di cinghiale all'olio di rosmarino* (wild boar slices cured like prosciutto and served with rosemary-scented olive oil). One specialty is the *cannelloni gratinati alla Buca Lapi* (pasta canapés stuffed with ricotta and spinach served in a cream sauce of boar and mushrooms). A light secondo could be *coniglio disossato ripieno* (stuffed rabbit), or you can go all out on a masterful *bistecca chianina* (grilled steak, for two only). The desserts are homemade, including a firm and delicate *latte portugese* (a kind of crème caramel) and a richly dense chocolate torte.

Via del Trebbio 1r (just off Piazza Antinori at the top of Via Tornabuoni). ✆ **055-213-768.** www.bucalapi.com. Reservations essential. Primi 10€–15€; secondi 20€–25€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7–10:30pm. Bus: 6, 11, 14, 17, 22, 36, 37, or 68.

Coco Lezzone FLORENTINE This tiny trattoria hidden in a tangle of alleys near the Arno consists of long communal tables in a couple of pocket-size rooms wrapped around a cubbyhole of a kitchen whose chef, according to the restaurant's dialect name, is a bit off his rocker. The place is popular with local intellectuals, journalists, and the city soccer team. While enjoying your *ribollita* (known here as a "triumph of humility") or *rigatoni al sugo* (in a chunky ragù), look at where the yellow paint on the lower half of the wall gives way to white: That's how high the Arno flooded the joint in 1966. If you want a *bistecca alla fiorentina,* call ahead first. Friday is *baccalà* (salt cod) day, and every day their *involtini* (thin veal slice wrapped around vegetables) and *crocchette di filetto* (veal-and-basil meatloaf smothered in tomato sauce) are good.

Via del Parioncino 26r (at the corner of Via Purgatorio). ✆ **055-287-178.** Reservations recommended. Primi 8€–12€; secondi 10€–15€. No credit cards. Mon and Wed–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7–10pm; Tues noon–2:30pm. Closed late July to Aug and Dec 23–Jan 7. Bus: C, 6, 11, 14, or 17.

A Big Step Above Ice Cream: Florentine Gelato

Gelato is a Florentine institution—a creamy, sweet, flavorful food item on a different level entirely from what Americans call "ice cream." Making fine Florentine gelato is a craft taken seriously by all except the tourist-pandering spots around major attractions that serve air-fluffed bland "vanilla" and nuclear-waste pistachio so artificially green it glows.

Of all the centrally located gelaterie, **Festival del Gelato,** Via del Corso 75r, just off Via dei Calzaiuoli (✆ **055-239-4386**), is one of the few serious contenders to the premier Vivoli (see below), offering about 50 flavors along with pounding pop music and colorful neon. It's open Tuesday through Sunday, in summer 8am to 1am and in winter 11am to 1am.

Vivoli, Via Isole delle Stinche 7r, a block west of Piazza Santa Croce (✆ **055-239-2334**), is still the city's institution. Exactly how renowned is this bright gelateria? Taped to the wall is a postcard bearing only "Vivoli, Europa" for the address, yet it was successfully delivered to this world capital of ice cream. It's open Tuesday through Sunday 9am to 1am (closed Aug and Jan to early Feb).

One of the major advantages of the always crowded **Gelateria delle Carrozze,** Piazza del Pesce 3–5r (✆ **055-239-6810**), is its location at the foot of the Ponte Vecchio. In summer, it's open daily 11am to 1am; in winter, hours are Thursday through Tuesday 11am to 8pm.

A block south of the Accademia (pick up a cone after you've gazed upon *David*'s glory) is what some local purists insist is Vivoli's only deserving contender to the throne as gelato king: **Carabé,** Via Ricasoli 60r (✆ **055-289-476**). It offers genuine homemade Sicilian gelato in the heart of Florence, with ingredients shipped in from Sicily by the hardworking Sicilian owners. May 16 through September, it's open daily 10am to midnight; February 15 through May 15 and October through November 15, hours are Tuesday through Sunday 10am to 8pm.

In 1946, the first ice-cream parlor in the city's heart, **Perchè No!** ★, Via dei Tavolini 19r, off Via del Calzaiuoli (✆ **055-239-8969;** www.percheno.firenze.it; bus: 14, 23, or 71), introduced a novelty: the glass display case filled with tubs of flavors that have become standard in ice-cream stores the world over. Try their *cioccolato bianco* (white chocolate studded with chunks of the main ingredient) or one of the *semifreddi,* a moussing process they helped invent. It's open Wednesday through Monday from 10am to midnight.

L'Osteria di Giovanni ★★★ TUSCAN Giovanni Latini comes from one of Florence's best-known culinary clans, whose eponymous eatery on Via del Palchetti is a household name in Florence, but he and his daughters Caterina and Chiara have made quite a name for themselves in the same neighborhood. Their osteria is a sophisticated but social atmosphere, with well-dressed Italians and tourists sharing either the quiet front room or the more communal back room. If they are in season, you may be offered some fresh, garden-raised fava beans with pecorino, followed by sautéed squid with

asparagus and cherry tomatoes. Don't miss the *involtini di vitello con pecorino fresco, melanzane e funghi* (sliced veal wrapped around fresh pecorino, eggplant, and mushrooms). Even if you're on a diet, allow yourself just this once the pleasure of the *tortelli ripieni di radicchio e ricotta con melanzane ed olive* (radicchio-stuffed tortelli, with eggplant and olives), or else save room for chocolate mousse.

Via del Moro 22 (near the Ponte alla Carraia). ✆ **055-284-897.** www.osteriadigiovanni.com. Reservations recommended. Primi 9€–12€; secondi 15€–25€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7–11pm; Mon 7pm–12:30am. Closed Aug. Bus: A, C, 6, 9, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

Moderate

Il Latini ★★ Kids FLORENTINE Arrive here at 7:30pm to join the crowd massed at the door, for even with a reservation you'll have to wait as they skillfully fit parties together at the communal tables. In fact, sharing a common meal with complete strangers is part of the fun here. Under hundreds of hanging prosciutto ham hocks, the waiters try their hardest to keep a menu away from you and suggest something themselves. This usually kicks off with *ribollita* and *pappa al pomodoro* or *penne strascicate* (in a ragù mixed with cream). If everyone agrees on the *arrosto misto,* you can get a table-filling platter heaped high with assorted roast meats. Finish off with a round of *cantucci con vin santo* for everyone.

Via del Palchetti 6r (off Via della Vigna Nuova). ✆ **055-210-916.** www.illatini.com. Reservations strongly recommended. Primi 6€; secondi 8€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Closed 15 days in Aug and Dec 24–Jan 6. Bus: C, 6, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

Osteria del Belle Donne TUSCAN Tucked away on a narrow street (whose name refers to the women of the night who once worked this then-shady neighborhood) parallel to exclusive Via dei Tornabuoni, this packed-to-the-gills lunch spot (with no identifying sign) immediately drew the area's chic boutique owners and sales staff. It now tries to accommodate them and countless others in a rather brusque style—no lingering over lunch; dinner isn't as rushed. Tuscan cuisine gets reinterpreted and updated by the talented young chef, who placates the local palate without alienating it: Traditional dishes appear in the company of innovative alternatives such as cream of zucchini and chestnut soup or lemon-flavored chicken.

Via delle Belle Donne 16r (north off Via della Vigna Nuova). ✆ **055-238-2609.** www.casatrattoria.com. Reservations not accepted. Primi 7€; secondi 9€–14€. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7–10:30pm. Closed most of Aug.

NEAR SANTA MARIA NOVELLA

Moderate

Trattoria Sostanza FLORENTINE Sostanza is popularly called "Il Troia" (the trough) because people have been lining up at the long communal tables since 1869 to enjoy huge amounts of some of the best traditional food in the city. The primi are very simple: pasta in sauce, *tortellini in brodo* (meat-stuffed pasta in chicken broth), and *zuppa alla paesana* (peasant soup *ribollita*). The secondi don't steer far from Florentine traditions either, with *trippa alla fiorentina* or their mighty specialty *petti di pollo al burro* (thick chicken breasts fried in butter). I've never seen an empty seat in the place while walking by at dinnertime, so it's certainly worth calling ahead.

Via Porcellana 25r (near the Borgo Ognissanti end). ✆ **055-212-691.** Reservations strongly recommended. Primi 9€; secondi 10€–16€. No credit cards. Mon–Fri noon–2:15pm and 7:30–9:45pm. Closed Aug. Bus: A, C, 6, 9, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

Moderate

Il Vegetariano VEGETARIAN Come early to one of Florence's only vegetarian restaurants and use your coat to save a spot at one of the communal wood tables before heading to the back to get your food. You pay at the start of the meal, after choosing from the daily selections penned on the wipe board, and take your dishes self-service style from the workers behind the counter. The menu changes constantly but includes such dishes as risotto with yellow squash and black cabbage; a quichelike *pizza rustica* of ricotta, olives, tomatoes, and mushrooms; or a plate with *farro* (emmer) and a hot salad of spinach, onions, sprouts, and bean-curd chunks sautéed in soy sauce. There's also a nice patio in back, where, if nothing else, you can sip something from the large selection of beers, ciders, and liquors from around the world.

Via delle Ruote 30r (off Via Santa Reparata near Piazza Indipendenza). ✆ **055-475-030.** www.il-vegetariano.it. Reservations not accepted. Primi 5€–6€; secondi 7.50€–9€. No credit cards. Tues–Fri 12:30–3:30pm; Tues–Sun 7:30pm–midnight. Closed part of Aug and Dec 24–Jan 2. Bus: 12, 91, or anything to San Marco.

La Mescita TRATTORIA/LIGHT FARE This tiny *fiaschetteria* is immensely popular with local businesspeople and students from the nearby university. Lunch can be a crushing affair, and they have signs admonishing you to eat quickly to give others a chance to sit. You'll be eating with Italians, and it's not for the timid because you have to take charge yourself: securing a seat, collecting your own place setting, and getting someone's attention to give your order before going to sit down. They offer mainly sandwiches, though there are always a few simple meat and pasta dishes ready as well. *Melanzana* (eggplant) is overwhelmingly the side dish of choice, and you can look to the cardboard lists behind the counter to select your wine, although the house wine is very good, and a quarter liter of it is cheaper than a can of soda.

Via degli Alfani 70r (near the corner of Via dei Servi). ✆ **347-795-1604.** All sandwiches and dishes 4€–7€. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11am–4pm. Closed Aug. Bus: 6, 31, or 32.

Taverna del Bronzino TUSCAN This 1580 house is now inhabited by Umberto Rabotti and a team of very accommodating waiters who will be your personal guides to some of Italy's most prestigious cold cuts. Among the Slow Food recommended antipasti are *bazzone* (prosciutto from the Garfagnana region) and *petto d'oca affumicato e carciofi* (thin slices of smoked goose breast on a bed of sliced artichokes drowned in olive oil). Next, try the excellent *ravioli alla Senese* (ricotta and spinach–stuffed pasta in creamy tomato sauce) or *tagliolini ai pesci* (noodles with fish). To stick with the sea, order the *branzino* (sea bass simmered in white wine) or select the *paillard di vitella all'ortolana* (a grilled veal steak wrapped around cooked vegetables).

Via delle Ruote 27r (btw. Piazza Indipendenza and San Marco). ✆ **055-495-220.** Reservations strongly recommended. Primi 12€–15€; secondi 21€–25€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Closed 3 weeks in Aug. Bus: 12, 91, or anything to San Marco.

NEAR SANTA CROCE

Very Expensive

Cibrèo ★★ TUSCAN There's no pasta and no grilled meat—can this be Tuscany? Rest assured that while Fabio Picchi's culinary creations are a bit out of the ordinary, most are based on antique recipes. Cibrèo actually has a split personality; this is a review not of the trattoria branch across the street, but of the fan-cooled main restaurant room, full

of intellectual babble, where the elegance is in the substance of the food and the service, not in surface appearances. Waiters pull up a chair to explain the list of daily specials, and those garlands of hot peppers hanging in the kitchen window are a hint at the cook's favorite spice. All the food is spectacular, and dishes change regularly, but if they're available try the yellow pepper soup drizzled with olive oil; the soufflé of potatoes and ricotta spiced and served with pecorino shavings and ragù; or the roasted duck stuffed with minced beef, raisins, and pinoli.

Via Andrea del Verrocchio 8r (at the San Ambrogio Market, off Via de' Macci). ✆ **055-234-1100.** www.fabiopicchi.it. Reservations required. Primi 18€; secondi 34€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–11:15pm. Closed July 26–Sept 6. Bus: B or 14.

Expensive

La Giostra ★★ TUSCAN The chef/owner is Dimitri d'Asburgo Lorena, a Habsburg prince (with some local Medici blood for good measure) who opened this restaurant merely to indulge his love of cooking. They start you off with a complimentary flute of *spumante* before you plunge into the tasty *crostini misti* and exquisite primi. Among the more enlightened are *ravioli di brie con carciofini Morelli* (ravioli stuffed with brie and dressed with artichokes), and homemade *taglierini* with white truffles. For an encore, try the *nodino di vitella ai tartufi bianchi* (veal slathered in eggy white truffle sauce with fresh truffle grated on top) or the lighter *spianata alle erbe aromatiche di Maremma* (a huge platter of spiced beef pounded flat and piled with a salad of rosemary sprigs, sage, and other herbs). Don't leave without sampling the sinfully rich Viennese Sachertorte, made from an old Habsburg family recipe. This place has become (justifiably) popular, and even with a reservation there's often a short wait—laudably, they don't rush anybody to empty up tables—but it's worth it.

Borgo Pinti 10r (off Piazza Salvemini). ✆ **055-241-341.** www.ristorantelagiostra.com. Reservations recommended. Primi 10€–18€; secondi 16€–24€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7pm–midnight. Bus: A, B, C, 6, 14, 23, 31, 32, or 71.

Panem et Cultura

Fabio Picchi was always something of a virtuoso in his restaurant, **Cibrèo,** where the kitchen was virtually his stage. So it came as little surprise when he actually did open a stage, just across Via de' Macci at the **Teatro del Sale** (✆ **055-200-1492;** www.teatrodelsale.com), where one virtuoso on stage accompanies another in his glassed-in kitchen. It is a members-only dinner club (membership costs just 5€) where the 25€ price of admission includes not only a dinner buffet of endless inventive Tuscan specialties but also a performance by an artist, often a jazz performer or dancer with the same disdain for rules and normalcy that pervades Picchi's persona. Under the guidance of artistic director Maria Cassi, Picchi's wife and a theatrical talent in Italy, the Teatro del Sale aims to bring contemporary culture to a city most often associated with the past. Each evening begins with Picchi leaning out the kitchen window and bellowing out the name of each of the dozen courses he has expertly prepared, and an eager public arrives at the serving table.

Moderate

Il Pizzaiuolo ★ (Kids) PIZZA/SEAFOOD Despite their considerable skill in the kitchen, Florentines just can't make a decent pizza. It takes a Neapolitan to do that, so business has been booming ever since Naples-born Carmine opened this pizzeria. Even with a reservation, you might have to wait for a spot at a long marble table. You've come to the right place for a pizza, but this is also one of the best places in the city for a good Southern seafood dish, like the *impepata di cozze,* a mussel stew, after a nice *antipasto vesuviano,* which comes with smoked tuna, mussels, prawns, and calamari.

Via de' Macci 113r (at the corner of Via Pietrapiana). ✆ **055-241-171.** Reservations required for dinner. Pizza 5€–10€; primi 6.50€–14€; secondi 9€–15€. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 12:30–3pm and 7:30pm–midnight. Closed Aug. Bus: B or 14.

Osteria de' Benci MODERN TUSCAN This popular trattoria serves enormous portions (especially of secondi) on beautiful hand-painted ceramics under high ceiling vaults echoing with the conversation of Florentine trendoids. The menu changes monthly, but you can always be assured of excellent *salumi*—they come from Falorni, the famed butcher of the Chianti (see "Wine Tasting in the Chianti," in chapter 7). The *eliche del profeta* are fusiloni tossed with ricotta, olive oil, oregano, and fresh tomatoes sprinkled with *parmigiano.* The unique *spaghetti dell'ubriacone* is bright crimson spaghetti that takes its color from being cooked in red wine, sauced with garlic, pepperoncino, and parsley sautéed in olive oil. And the *cibrèo delle regine* is a traditional rich Florentine dish of chopped chicken livers and gizzards served on toast.

Via de' Benci 13r (at the corner of Via de' Neri). ✆ **055-234-4923.** Reservations highly recommended. Primi 7€–9€; secondi 10€–17€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 1–2:45pm and 7:45–10:45pm. Bus: B, 23, or 71.

Ristorante Vecchia Firenze ★ (Kids) (Value) FLORENTINE/TUSCAN This place really lives up to the *vecchia* ("old") in its name—and not just because the building is old (15th c., to be exact). This is the old-school service your parents remember—friendly, casual, and unassuming, while the dishes are honest. The wine list, in particular, has very good labels at reasonable prices. Ask for a table in the more intimate back rooms or in the rowdier stone-lined *cantina* downstairs full of Florentine and American students. By all means try the *penne Vecchia Firenze* (penne in a subtle creamy mushroom sauce with tomatoes) but save space for anything grilled: a *bistecca fiorentina,* or *coniglio alla griglia* (grilled rabbit) or *branzino alla griglia* (grilled sea bass). Whatever you choose, you won't be disappointed.

Borgo degli Albizi 76–78r. ✆ **055-234-0361.** www.vecchiafirenze.eu. Primi 8€; secondi 9€–16€; fixed-price menus without wine 12€–15€; wine of the week 15€ per bottle. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–3pm and 7–10pm. Bus: 14, 23, or 71.

Trattoria Cibrèo ★ FLORENTINE This is the casual trattoria of celebrated chef-owner Fabio Picchi; its limited menu comes from the same creative kitchen that put on the map his premier and more than twice as expensive *ristorante* next door. Picchi takes his inspiration from traditional Tuscan recipes, and the first thing you'll note is the absence of pasta. After you taste the velvety *passata di peperoni gialli* (yellow bell-pepper soup), you won't care much. The stuffed roast rabbit demands the same admiration. But the best way to enjoy Picchi's creations is to see him perform in the kitchen while a musician performs on stage at the Teatro del Sale across the street (see "Panem et Cultura," above).

Via de' Macci 122r. ✆ **055-234-1100.** Primi 7€; secondi 13€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 1–2:30pm and 7–11:15pm. Closed July 26–Sept 6. Bus: B or 14.

Trattoria Pallottino FLORENTINE One long room with a few long tables on the cobblestone floor and a second room on the side are all there is to this local cafeteria-like setting, and don't expect anything too fancy on the menu either. The cook makes a mean *bruschetta al pomodoro* (toasted bread topped with tomatoes over which you are invited to drizzle the olive oil liberally). For a first course, look no further than the *spaghetti alla fiaccheraia,* with a tomato sauce mildly spiked with hot peppers. You might follow it with the *peposo* (beef stew loaded with black pepper). Skip dessert and pop next door for a Vivoli gelato (see the box, "A Big Step Above Ice Cream: Florentine Gelato," on p. 124).

Via Isola delle Stinche 1r. ✆ **055-289-573.** www.trattoriapallottino.com. Reservations required for dinner. Primi 5€–8€; secondi 7€–14€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Closed Aug 5–21.

IN THE OLTRARNO

Expensive

Osteria Santo Spirito Overrated MODERN TUSCAN It's hard to miss this hip place right on the square—funk and dance music pounds from the speakers and the tables are packed—but the staff might not notice you. Now bordering on becoming a tourist trap, the wait can be extraordinarily long here (I have waited a full 2 hours before anything arrived at the table), but the food is interesting at least. You can start with a salad such as *pollo pinoli e uvetta con dressing* (chicken, pine nut, and raisin), or for pasta try *orecchiette Santo Spirito* (pasta in spicy tomato sauce with ricotta) or *gnocchi di patate gratinati* (oven-baked gnocchi swimming in a bubbling-hot mix of soft cheeses flavored with truffle). Afterward, fill up on *filetto di manzo à tartufo* (beef filet with truffles) or the *cosce d'anatra con la panna* (very meaty roasted duck in cream sauce with carrots and bacon).

Piazza Santo Spirito 16r. ✆ **055-238-2383.** www.osteriasantospirito.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 9€–18€; secondi 18€–28€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 12:45–2:30pm and 8pm–midnight. Bus: B, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

Moderate

Alla Vecchia Bettola FLORENTINE Founded by the owners of Nerbone in the Mercato Centrale (see review on p. 122), this simple room right on the piazza may not look it, but it's one of the city's premier restaurants in town for ultratraditional Florentine food. It fills up very early with food-loving Florentines, who choose from an always-changing menu that may include *penne alla Bettola* in spicy cream tomato sauce, rigatoni dressed with crushed olives, or *riso sulle testicciole d'agnello* (a "local's" rice dish cooked in a halved sheep's head). Secondi range from *anatra ripiena tartufata* (stuffed duck in truffle sauce) to the superlative *carpaccio con rucola*—pounded disks of beef piled high with arugula and tissue-thin slices of pecorino cheese, but nearly everyone goes for the *bistecca.* As far as wine goes, you simply pay for however much you finish of the light and tangy house wine on the table.

Viale Vasco Pratolini 3/7 (on Piazza Tasso). ✆ **055-224-158.** Reservations required. Primi 6€–7€; secondi 8€–12€. No credit cards. Tues–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Closed 3 weeks in Aug, Dec 23–Jan 2, and Easter. Bus: 12 or 13.

Il Cantinone ★ Kids TUSCAN With tourists and large groups of locals all seated at long tables under the low arc of a brick ceiling, the convivial noise can sometimes get a bit overwhelming. But the feeling of having walked into a party is part of the charm of this place. The specialty is *crostini,* slabs of peasant bread that act as vehicles for toppings such as prosciutto, tomatoes, mozzarella, and sausage. You and your companion get an antipasto,

two primi (usually pasta dishes), and a secondo, which might be a tender and tasty wild boar stew. With each course you get a different wine, building from something like a light Orvieto *secco* through a well-chosen chianti to a brawny Brunello for the meat dish. The *ribollita* is great, but is usually only served in winter, when black cabbage is in season.

Via Santo Spirito 6r (off Piazza Santa Trinita). ✆ **055-218-898** or 055-225-955. www.ilcantinonedifirenze.it. Primi and *crostini* 5.50€–8€; secondi 6€–20€. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Bus: D, 8, 11, 36, or 37.

I Raddi ★ TUSCAN Luccio's trattoria, hidden in the heart of the Oltrarno, is a true find—excellent cooking at reasonable prices, which is unusual now in Florence. The beamed ceiling and Tuscan standbys on the menu give it a grounding in tradition while the young staff and light touch in the kitchen lend a fresh bohemian air. The specialty is *tagliolini ardiglione* (with sausage and aromatic herbs), but they also make a mean *crespelle alla fiorentina* (pasta crepes layered with cheese). They do a fine *cibrèo,* a tasty *peposo alla fornacina con spinaci* (beef baked in wine with lots of pepperoncino and served with spinach), and a spicy *fagioli all'uccelletto con salsiccia.*

Via Ardiglione 47r (off Via dei Serragli, near Piazza delle Carmine). ✆ **055-211-072.** Reservations recommended. Primi 7€; secondi 10€–15€. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3pm and 7–11pm. Closed 10 days in Feb and a week in mid-Aug. Bus: D, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

Osteria del Cinghiale Bianco TUSCAN Massimo Masselli will sooner turn people away at the door than rush you though your meal. The place does a good repeat business of locals (including cooks from other restaurants) and tourists alike who come for the delicious *taglierini* (wide noodles) with pesto or the famous *strozzapreti* ("priest-chokers" made of the spinach-and-ricotta mix normally found inside ravioli, served with melted butter). You can't go wrong ordering anything made of the restaurant's namesake *cinghiale* (wild boar)—from the cold boar slices as an appetizer to *cinghiale alla maremmana con polenta* (wild boar stew cozied up to creamy, firm polenta) as a main course. Set in the base of a 12th-century tower, this place milks its medieval look with exposed stone, odd iron implements hanging everywhere, and lights hidden in suspended cauldrons or the pigeonholed walls. Note that dishes with truffles in them might raise the maximum prices below by about 5€.

Borgo Sant' Jacopo 43r. ✆ **055-215-706.** www.cinghialebianco.it. Reservations required on weekends. Primi 5€–10€; secondi 9.50€–16€. MC, V. Thurs–Tues 6:30–10:30pm (Sat–Sun also noon–3pm). Closed July 10–Aug 1. Bus: D, 8, 11, 36, or 37.

Inexpensive

EnotecaBar Fuori Porta CROSTONI/ENOTECA You can dine out on the sidewalk in nice weather, or sit on the benches at tiny wooden tables inside to taste the excellent pizzalike crostini here. Start with the *pappa al pomodoro* or gnocchi with broccoli rabe and sausage. The *crostoni* are divided by cheese—mozzarella, sharp pecorino, creamy goat-cheese *caprino*—along with a list of the toppings to accompany them. My favorite is *caprino con prosciutto arrosto e pomodori secchi* (with goat cheese, roasted prosciutto, and sun-dried tomatoes). The wine is a key part of the meal; the list draws from the more interesting vineyards in Tuscany and beyond. This place is a bit out-of-the-way but worth the trip.

Via del Monte alle Croci 10r (near San Niccolò, through the gate at Via San Miniato). ✆ **055-234-2483.** www.fuoriporta.it. Sandwiches and appetizers 2€–7€. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 12:30–3:30pm and 7pm–1am. Bus: C, D, 12, 13, or 23.

Cook Like a True Tuscan

Take a walk down Via dei Velluti in the Oltrarno, peek into the furniture restoration studios, watch the artisans practicing their ancient craft, and soon you'll stumble upon another studio devoted to a time-honored art: cooking. For 63€ per person, for example, **"In Tavola,"** Via dei Velluti 18/20r (✆ **055-217-672;** www.intavola.org), will get you started on your culinary quest by showing you how to prepare such staples as *crostini, zuppa di faro,* and *cantucci,* while you work your way through a complimentary bottle of chianti.

In Tavola has taken to the city what *agriturismi* have been doing for a few years now in the countryside, especially in Chianti. Another good beginner's course is offered by the **Villa Rosa di Boscorotondo,** Via S. Leonino 59, Panzano Greve in Chianti (✆ **055-852-577;** www.resortvillarosa.it), near Radda-in-Chianti. For 90€ per person, Vincenzo Regoli shows you the ins and outs of bruschetta, panzanella, spezzatino del Chianti, and tiramisù.

At the high end of the spectrum are programs offered by **Villa San Michele,** Via Doccia 4, Fiesole (✆ **055-567-8200;** www.villasanmichele.com). These are weeklong seminars with famous chefs, incorporated in a package deal with the luxury villa: a 5-night stay and cooking class runs about 3,200€ per person.

For a full-immersion course in a place that raises its own meat and vegetables, check out **La Petraia,** 53017 Radda-in-Chianti (✆ **0577-738-582;** www.lapetraia.com), where award-winning chef Susan McKenna Grant will help you make an elegant Tuscan dish with whatever vegetables and herbs are in season. The price is 225€ for a cooking and foraging class that includes a multi-course lunch, an apron, and a copy of her book. The **"Petraia Sessions"** are internships with a famous international chef that amount to 5 days of education, fine dining, beautiful accommodations, and the top Tuscan wines.

Most farm resorts and luxury hotels throughout Tuscany and Umbria are affiliated with some sort of cooking class these days—be sure to inquire at the front desk.

Trattoria La Casalinga FLORENTINE The decor is as staid as a grandmother's living room, but the home cooking of its name is just as good. The *ribollita* is thick, the *ravioli al sugo di coniglio* (in a rabbit sauce) rich, and the *pasta della nonna* (short, hollow pasta in a sauce of tomatoes, sausage, and onions) excellent. Don't expect anything fancy in the secondi department, either—just solid favorites such as *bollito misto* (a mix of boiled meats with green sauce), *trippa alla fiorentina,* and *galletto ruspante al forno* (half a young oven-baked chicken). The starving artists and local artisans have been all but driven out by the tourist hordes, but if you want to stuff yourself on huge portions of Oltrarno workmen's food, this is the place to come.

Via Michelozzi 9r (btw. Via Maggio and Piazza Santo Spirito). ✆ **055-267-9243.** www.trattorialacasalinga.it. Primi 4€–5€; secondi 5€–10€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7–10pm. Bus: D, 8, 11, 36, or 37.

IN THE HILLS

Moderate

Trattoria le Cave di Maiano ★ TUSCAN This converted farmhouse is the countryside restaurant of choice for Florentines wishing to escape the city heat on a summer Sunday afternoon. You can enjoy warm-weather lunches on the tree-shaded stone terrace with a bucolic view. In cooler weather, you can dine inside several large, rustic rooms with haphazard paintings scattered on the walls. The *antipasto caldo* of varied *crostini* and fried polenta is a good way to kick off a meal, followed by a *misto della casa* (for two only) that gives you a sampling of primi. This may include *penne strascicate* (stubby pasta in cream sauce and tomato ragù) or *riso allo spazzacamino* (rice with beans and black cabbage). The best secondo is the *pollastro al mattone* (chicken roasted under a brick with pepper) or the *lombatina di vitello alla griglia* (grilled veal chop).

Via Cave di Maiano 16 (in Maiano, halfway btw. Florence and Fiesole east of the main road). ✆ **055-59-133.** www.trattoriacavedimaiano.it. Reservations required. Primi 7€–10€; secondi 10€–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 12:30–3:30pm and 7:30pm–midnight. Bus: 7 (get off at Villa San Michele, then turn around and take the road branching to the left of the winding one your bus took; continue on about 1.2km/¾ mile up this side road, past the Pensione Bencistà); a taxi is a better idea.

6

Exploring Florence

Florence is the Renaissance city—home to Michelangelo's *David,* Botticelli's *Birth of Venus,* and Raphael's Madonnas. It's where Fra' Angelico painted delicate *Annunciations* in bright primary colors and Giotto frescoed monks wailing over the *Death of St. Francis.* The city is so dense in art, history, and culture that even a short visit can wear out the best of us. Take a hint from that great pragmatist Mark Twain, who, after acknowledging the genius of Michelangelo, said "I do not want Michelangelo for breakfast—for luncheon—for dinner—for tea—for supper—for between meals. I like a change occasionally."

Don't necessarily pass up the Uffizi or take a rain check on *David* and the Accademia, but do take the time to enjoy the simple pleasures of Florence—wander the medieval streets in Dante's old neighborhood, sip a cappuccino on Piazza della Signoria and people-watch, haggle for a leather jacket at the street market around San Lorenzo, or immerse yourself in the greenery of the Boboli Gardens.

1 SEEING THE SIGHTS

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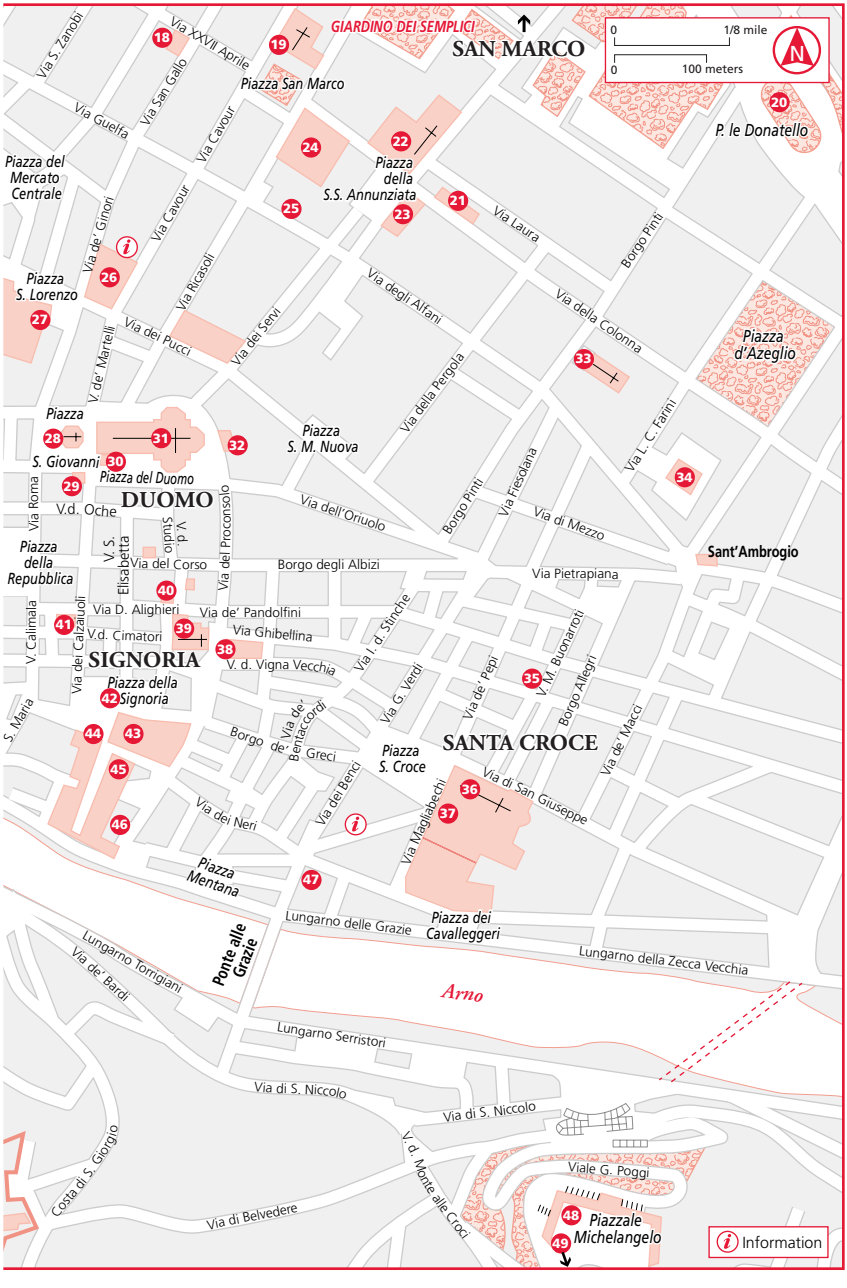
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Via San Gallo
Via Guelfa
Via Cavour
Piazza San Marco
Piazza del Mercato Centrale
Via de' Ginori
Piazza della S.S. Annunziata
P. le Donatello
Via Laura
Borgo Pinti
Piazza S. Lorenzo
Via Ricasoli
Via degli Alfani
Via della Colonna
Piazza d'Azeglio
Via dei Pucci
Via dei Servi
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Via della Pergola
Piazza
S. Giovanni
Piazza del Duomo
DUOMO
Piazza S. M. Nuova
Via L. C. Farini
V.d. Oche
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Sant'Ambrogio
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V. S. Elisabetta
Via del Corso
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V. Calimala
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V.d. Cimatori
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SIGNORIA
V. d. Vigna Vecchia
Via I. d. Stinche
Via G. Verdi
Via de' Pepi
V.M. Buonarroti
Borgo Allegri
Piazza della Signoria
S. Maria
Borgo de' Greci
Via de' Bentaccordi
SANTA CROCE
Piazza S. Croce
Via de' Macci
Via di San Giuseppe
Via dei Benci
Via dei Neri
Via Magliabechi
Piazza Mentana
Lungarno delle Grazie
Piazza dei Cavalleggeri
Lungarno della Zecca Vecchia
Ponte alle Grazie
Lungarno Torrigiani
Via de' Bardi
Arno
Lungarno Serristori
Via di S. Niccolo
Via di S. Niccolo
Viale G. Poggi
Costa di S. Giorgio
V. d. Monte alle Croci
Via di Belvedere
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ON PIAZZA DEL DUOMO

The cathedral square is filled with tourists and caricature artists during the day, strolling crowds in the early evening, and knots of students strumming guitars on the Duomo's steps at night. Though it's always crowded, the piazza's vivacity and the glittering facades of the cathedral and the baptistery doors keep it an eternal Florentine sight.

At the corner of the busy pedestrian main drag, Via Calzaiuoli, sits the pretty little **Loggia del Bigallo** (1351–58). Inside is a small museum of 14th-century works, which is unfortunately almost always closed. Call ✆ **055-215-440** if you're interested in trying to make an appointment to get in to see the 1342 *Madonna della Misericordia* by the school of Bernardo Daddi, which features the earliest known cityscape view of Florence.

Note that just south of the Duomo, hidden in the tangle of medieval streets toward Piazza della Signoria, is a 14th-century Florentine house restored and converted into the **Casa di Dante** (✆ **055-219-416**), a small museum chronicling the life and times of the great poet. But, this isn't likely the poet's actual house. The entrance is up the side alley of Via Santa Margherita, and it's open daily from 10am to 6pm. Admission is 4€.

Duomo (Cathedral of Santa Maria dei Fiori) ★★ For centuries, people have commented that Florence's cathedral is turned inside out, its exterior boasting Brunelleschi's famous dome, Giotto's bell tower, and a festive cladding of white, green, and pink marble, but its interior left spare, almost barren.

By the late 13th century, Florence was feeling peevish: Its archrivals Siena and Pisa sported huge new Duomos filled with art while it was saddled with the tiny 5th- or 6th-century Santa Reparata as a cathedral. So, in 1296, the city hired Arnolfo di Cambio to design a new Duomo, and he began raising the facade and the first few bays before his death in 1302. Work continued under the auspices of the Wool Guild and architects

Tips The Best Times to Sightsee

Museums Open on Mondays: Palazzo Vecchio, Museo Bardini, Museo di Firenze Com'Era, Museo di Santa Maria Novella, Casa Buonarroti, Casa di Dante, Opera di Santa Croce, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Campanile di Giotto, Duomo's cupola, Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Museo Stibbert, Instituto e Museo di Storia di Scienza, Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Museo Horne, Cappella Brancacci, Synagogue, Spedale degli Innocenti, Roman Amphitheater, and Museo Archeologico (Fiesole).

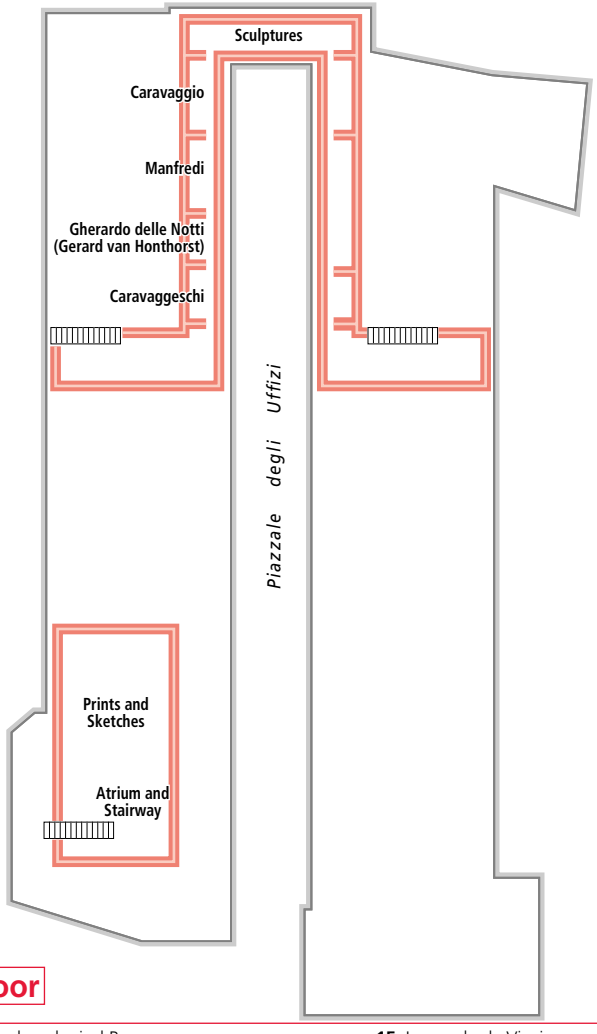
Sights Open During il Riposo (1–4pm): Uffizi, Accademia, Palazzo Vecchio, Duomo and its cupola, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Campanile di Giotto, Baptistery, Palazzo Vecchio, Santa Croce, Galleria Palatina (Pitti Palace), Forte di Belvedere and Boboli Gardens, Cappella Brancacci, Roman Amphitheater, and Museo Archeologico (Fiesole).

Giotto di Bondone (who concentrated on the bell tower) and Francesco Talenti (who finished up to the drum of the dome and in the process greatly enlarged Arnolfo's original plan). The facade we see today is a neo-Gothic composite designed by Emilio de Fabris and built from 1871 to 1887 (for its story, see the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo review, below).

The Duomo's most distinctive feature is its enormous **dome** ★★★, which dominates the skyline and is a symbol of Florence itself. The raising of this dome, the largest in the world in its time, was no mean architectural feat, tackled admirably by Filippo Brunelleschi between 1420 and 1436 (see "A Man & His Dome," below). You can climb up between the two shells of the cupola for one of the classic panoramas across the city. At the base of the dome, just above the drum, Baccio d'Agnolo began adding a balcony in 1507. One of the eight sides was finished by 1515, when someone asked Michelangelo—whose artistic opinion was by this time taken as cardinal law—what he thought of it. The master reportedly scoffed, "It looks like a cricket cage." Work was immediately halted, and to this day the other seven sides remain rough brick.

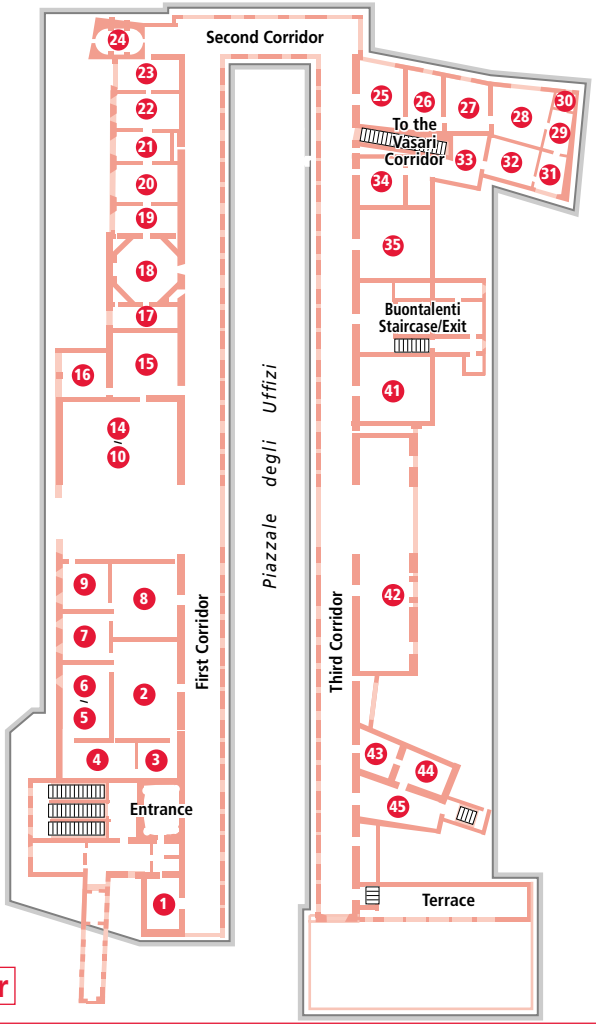
The Duomo was actually built around **Santa Reparata** so it could remain in business during construction. For more than 70 years, Florentines entered their old church through the free-standing facade of the new one, but in 1370 the original was torn down when the bulk of the Duomo—except the dome—was finished. Ever the fiscal conservatives, Florentines started clamoring to see some art as soon as the new facade's front door was completed in the early 1300s—to be sure their investment would be more beautiful than rival cathedrals. Gaddo Gaddi was commissioned to mosaic an *Enthronement of Mary* in the lunette above the inside of the main door, and the people were satisfied. The stained-glass windows set in the facade were designed by Lorenzo Ghiberti, and Paolo Uccello, a painter obsessed by the newly developed perspective, frescoed the huge *hora itálica* clock with its four heads of prophets in 1443.

At a right-aisle pier are steps leading down to the excavations of the old Santa Reparata. In 1972, a tomb slab inscribed with the name Filippo Brunelleschi was discovered there (visible through a gate). Unless you're interested in the remains of some ancient



1st Floor

1 Archaeological Room
2 Giotto & 13th-Century Paintings
3 Sienese Paintings (14th Century)
4 Florentine Paintings (14th Century)
5/6 International Gothic
7 Early Renaissance
8 Filippo Lippi
9 Antonio del Pollaiolo
10/14 Botticelli & Ghirlandaio
15 Leonardo da Vinci
16 Geographic Maps
17 Ermafrodito
18 The Tribune
19 Perugino & Signorelli
20 Dürer & German Artists
21 Giovanni Bellini & Giorgione
22 Flemish & German Paintings
23 Mantegna & Correggio



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26 Raphael & Andrea del Sarto
27 Pontormo & Rosso Fiorentino
28 Tiziano & Sebastiano del Piombo
29 Parmigianino & Dosso
30 Emilian Paintings
31 Veronese
32 Tintoretto
33 16th-Century Paintings
34 Lombard School
35 Barocci
41 Rubens & Flemish Paintings
42 Niobe
43 17th Century Painters
44 Rembrandt
45 18th-Century Paintings

A Man & His Dome

Filippo Brunelleschi, a diminutive man whose ego was as big as his talent, managed in his arrogant, quixotic, suspicious, and brilliant way to literally invent Renaissance architecture. Having been beaten by Lorenzo Ghiberti in the famous contest to cast the baptistery doors (see below), Brunelleschi resolved he'd rather be the top architect than the second-best sculptor and took off for Rome to study the buildings of the ancients. On returning to Florence, he combined subdued gray *pietra serena* stone with smooth white plaster to create airy arches, vaults, and arcades of classically perfect proportions in his own special variant on the ancient Roman orders of architecture. Apart from designing the serene San Lorenzo, Santo Spirito, and the elegant Ospedale degli Innocenti, his greatest achievement by far was erecting the dome over Florence's cathedral.

The Duomo, then the world's largest church, had already been built, but nobody had been able to figure out how to cover the daunting space over its center without spending a fortune and without filling the church with the necessary scaffolding—plus no one was sure whether they could create a dome that would hold up under its own weight. One of the many ridiculous solutions was making it of pumice (so it would be light) and filling the church with dirt studded with small coins. (After the work was done, the populace would be invited to dig for the money and thus remove the dirt.) Brunelleschi kept insisting he had the answer, but he wouldn't share it, fearful others would use his ideas and get the job over him.

After becoming so heated during several meetings of the Dome Erection Committee that he had to be carried out, he finally came in bearing an egg and issued a challenge (or so Vasari says). He bet he was the only one of the learned

Roman houses and parts of the paleo-Christian mosaics from Santa Reparata's floor, the 3€ admission isn't worth it.

Against the left-aisle wall are the only frescoes besides the dome in the Duomo. The earlier one to the right is the greenish ***Memorial to Sir John Hawkwood*** ★ (1436), an English *condottiere* (mercenary commander) whose name the Florentines mangled to Giovanni Acuto when they hired him to rough up their enemies. Before he died, or so the story goes, the mercenary asked to have a bronze statue of himself riding his charger to be raised in his honor. Florence solemnly promised to do so, but, in typical tightwad style, after Hawkwood's death the city hired the master of perspective and illusion, Paolo Uccello, to paint an equestrian monument instead—much cheaper than casting a statue in bronze. Andrea del Castagno copied this painting-as-equestrian-statue idea 20 years later when he frescoed a *Memorial to Niccolò da Tolentino* next to Uccello's work. Near the end of the left aisle is Domenico di Michelino's *Dante Explaining the Divine Comedy* (1465).

In the back left corner of the sanctuary is the **New Sacristy.** Lorenzo de' Medici was attending Mass in the Duomo one April day in 1478 with his brother Giuliano when they were attacked in the infamous Pazzi Conspiracy. The conspirators, egged on by the

architects and councilmen in the room who could make an egg stand on its end. A marble slab was procured for the balancing act but, try as they might, the others couldn't get the egg to stay vertical. Brunelleschi took the egg in his hand, and with one quick movement slammed it down on the marble, smashing its end—but leaving it standing. The others protested that they, too, could have easily done that, to which Brunelleschi replied they would say the same thing if he showed them his plans for the dome. He was granted the commission and revealed his ingenious plan—which may have been inspired by close study of Rome's Pantheon.

He built the dome in two shells, the inner one thicker than the outer, both shells thinning as they neared the top, thus leaving the center hollow and removing a good deal of the weight. He also planned to construct the dome of giant vaults with ribs crossing over them, with each of the stones making up the actual fabric of the dome being dovetailed. In this way, the walls of the dome would support themselves as they were erected. In the process of building, Brunelleschi found himself as much an engineer as architect, constantly designing remarkable new winches, cranes, and hoists to carry the materials faster and more efficiently up to the level of the workmen. He was even farsighted enough to build in drainage systems for the rain and iron hooks to support interior scaffolding for future cleanings or paint jobs.

His finished work speaks for itself, 45m (148 ft.) wide at the base and 90m (295 ft.) high from drum to lantern—Florentines proudly claim they've lived their whole lives within sight of the dome. For his achievement, Brunelleschi was accorded a singular honor: He's the only person ever buried in Florence's cathedral, under his ingenious and revolutionary dome.

pope and led by a member of the Pazzi family, old rivals of the Medici, fell on the brothers at the ringing of the sanctuary bell. Giuliano was murdered on the spot—his body rent with 19 wounds—but Lorenzo vaulted over the altar rail and sprinted for safety into the New Sacristy, slamming the bronze doors behind him. Those doors were cast from 1446 to 1467 by Luca della Robbia, his only significant work in the medium. Earlier, Luca had provided a lunette of the *Resurrection* (1442) in glazed terra cotta over the door, as well as the lunette *Ascension* over the south sacristy door. The interior of the New Sacristy is filled with beautifully inlaid wood cabinet doors.

The frescoes on the **interior of the dome** were designed by Giorgio Vasari but painted mostly by his less talented student Federico Zuccari by 1579. The frescoes were subjected to a thorough cleaning completed in 1996, which brought out Zuccari's only saving point—his innovative color palette.

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **055-230-2885.** www.operaduomo.firenze.it. Admission to church free; Santa Reparata excavations 3€; cupola 8€. Church Mon–Wed and Fri 10am–5pm; Thurs 10am–3:30pm; 1st Sat of month 10am–3:30pm, other Sat 10am–4:45pm; Sun 1:30–4:30pm. Free tours every 40 min. daily, 10:30am–noon and 3–4:20pm. Cupola Mon–Fri 8:30am–7pm; Sat 8:30am–5:40pm. Bus: 1, 6, 17, 14, 22, 23, 36, 37, or 71.

Around Piazza Della Signoria

When the medieval Guelph party finally came out on top of the Ghibellines, they razed part of the old city center to build a new palace for civic government. It's said the Guelphs ordered architect Arnolfo di Cambio to build what we now call the Palazzo Vecchio in the corner of this space, but to be careful that not 1 inch of the building sat on the cursed former Ghibelline land. This odd legend was probably fabricated to explain Arnolfo's quirky off-center architecture.

The space around the *palazzo* became the new civic center of town, the L-shaped **Piazza della Signoria** ★★, named after the oligarchic ruling body of the medieval city. Today, it's an outdoor sculpture gallery, teeming with tourists, postcard stands, horses and buggies, and outdoor cafes.

The statuary on the piazza is particularly beautiful, starting on the far left (as you're facing the Palazzo Vecchio) with Giambologna's equestrian statue of *Grand Duke Cosimo I* (1594). To its right is one of Florence's favorite sculptures to hate, the *Fontana del Nettuno* (*Neptune Fountain;* 1560–75), created by Bartolomeo Ammannati as a tribute to Cosimo I's naval ambitions but nicknamed by the Florentines *Il Biancone,* "Big Whitey." Michelangelo, to whom many a Renaissance quip is attributed, took one look at it and shook his head, moaning "Ammannato, Ammannato, what a beautiful piece of marble you've ruined." The highly Mannerist bronzes surrounding the basin are much better, probably because a young Giambologna had a hand in most of them.

Note the **porphyry plaque** set in the ground in front of the fountain. This marks the site where puritanical monk Savonarola held the Bonfire of the Vanities: With his fiery apocalyptic preaching, he whipped the Florentines into a reformist frenzy, and hundreds filed into this piazza, arms loaded with paintings, clothing, and other effects that represented their "decadence." They consigned it all to the flames of a roaring pile. However, after a few years the pope (not amused by Savonarola's criticisms) excommunicated first the monk and then the entire city for supporting him. On May 23, 1498, the Florentines decided they'd had enough of the rabid-dog monk, dragged him and two followers to the torture chamber, pronounced them heretics, and led them into the piazza for one last day of fire and brimstone. In the very spot where they

Battistero (Baptistery) ★★★ In choosing a date to mark the beginning of the Renaissance, art historians often seize on 1401, the year Florence's powerful wool merchants' guild held a contest to decide who would receive the commission to design the **North Doors** ★ of the Baptistery to match the Gothic **South Doors,** cast 65 years earlier by Andrea Pisano. The era's foremost Tuscan sculptors each designed and cast a bas-relief bronze panel depicting his own vision of the Sacrifice of Isaac. Twenty-two-year-old Lorenzo Ghiberti, competing against the likes of Donatello, Jacopo della Quercia, and Filippo Brunelleschi, won hands down. He spent the next 21 years casting 28 bronze panels and building his doors. Although limited by his contract to design the

once burned their luxurious belongings, they put the torch to Savonarola himself. The event is commemorated by an anonymous painting kept in Savonarola's old cell in San Marco and by the plaque here.

To the right of the Neptune Fountain is a long, raised platform fronting the Palazzo Vecchio known as the *arringheria,* from which soapbox speakers would lecture to crowds before them (we get our word "harangue" from this). On its far left corner is a copy (original in the Bargello) of Donatello's ***Marzocco,*** symbol of the city, with a Florentine lion resting his raised paw on a shield emblazoned with the city's emblem, the *giglio* (lily). To its right is another Donatello replica, ***Judith Beheading Holofernes.*** Farther down is a man who needs little introduction, Michelangelo's ***David,*** a 19th-century copy of the original now in the Accademia. Near enough to David to look truly ugly in comparison is Baccio Bandinelli's ***Heracles*** (1534). Poor Bandinelli was trying to copy Michelangelo's muscular male form but ended up making his Heracles merely lumpy.

At the piazza's south end, beyond the long U that opens down the Uffizi, is one of the square's earliest and prettiest embellishments, the **Loggia dei Lanzi** ★★ (1376–82), named after the Swiss guard of lancers *(lanzi)* Cosimo de' Medici stationed here. The airy loggia was probably built on a design by Andrea Orcagna—spawning another of its many names, the Loggia di Orcagna (another is the Loggia della Signoria). The three huge arches of its simple, harmonious form were way ahead of the times, an architectural style that really belongs to the Renaissance. At the front left corner stands Benvenuto Cellini's masterpiece in bronze, ***Perseus*** ★★ (1545), holding out the severed Medusa's head before him, restored from 1996 to 2000. On the far right of the loggia has stood Giambologna's ***Rape of the Sabines*** ★★, one of the most successful Mannerist sculptures in existence, and a piece you must walk all the way around to appreciate, catching the action and artistry from different angles. Sadly, once it was boxed up and examined for restoration, authorities determined that the outdoors had wreaked intolerable damage, and the original statue has been moved to the Accademia (taking the place of its plaster model long anchoring the museum's first room) with a marble copy to substitute for it here.

scenes within Gothic frames as on Pisano's doors, Ghiberti infused his figures and compositions with an unmatched realism and classical references that helped define Renaissance sculpture. (Ghiberti stuck a self-portrait in the left door, the fourth head from the bottom of the middle strip, wearing a turban.)

The result so impressed the merchants' guild—not to mention the public and Ghiberti's fellow artists—they asked him in 1425 to do the **East Doors** ★★★, facing the Duomo, this time giving him the artistic freedom to realize his Renaissance ambitions. Twenty-seven years later, just before his death, Ghiberti finished 10 dramatic lifelike Old Testament scenes in gilded bronze, each a masterpiece of Renaissance sculpture and some

of the finest examples of low-relief perspective in Italian art. The panels now mounted here are excellent copies; the originals are displayed in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (see below). Years later, Michelangelo was standing before these doors and someone asked his opinion. His response sums up Ghiberti's life accomplishment as no art historian ever could: "They are so beautiful that they would grace the entrance to Paradise." They've been called the Gates of Paradise ever since.

The Baptistery is one of Florence's oldest, most venerated buildings. Florentines long believed it was originally a Roman temple, but it most likely was raised somewhere between the 4th and 7th centuries on the site of a Roman palace. The octagonal drum was rebuilt in the 11th century, and by the 13th century it had been clad in its characteristic green-and-white Romanesque stripes of marble and capped with its odd pyramid-like dome.

The interior is ringed with columns pilfered from ancient Roman buildings and is a spectacle of mosaics above and below. The floor was inlaid in 1209, and the ceiling was covered between 1225 and the early 1300s with glittering **mosaics** ★★. Most were crafted by Venetian or Byzantine-style workshops, which worked off designs drawn by the era's best artists. Coppo di Marcovaldo drew sketches for the over 7.8m-high (26-ft.), ape-toed Christ in Judgment and the Last Judgment that fills over a third of the ceiling.

To the right of the altar is the 1425 wall **tomb of Antipope John XXIII,** designed by Michelozzo and Donatello, who cast the bronze effigy of the deceased, deposed pontiff.

Piazza di San Giovanni. ✆ **055-230-2885.** www.operaduomo.firenze.it. Admission 4€. Mon–Sat 12:15–7pm; Sun and 1st Sat of month 8:30am–2pm. Bus: 1, 6, 17, 14, 22, 23, 36, 37, or 71.

Campanile di Giotto (Giotto's Bell Tower) ★★ In 1334, Giotto started the cathedral bell tower (clad in the same three colors of marble gracing the Duomo) but completed only the first two levels before his death in 1337. He was out of his league with the engineering aspects of architecture, and the tower was saved from falling in on itself by Andrea Pisano, who doubled the thickness of the walls. Andrea, a master sculptor of the Pisan Gothic school, also changed the design to add statue niches—he even carved a few of the statues himself—before quitting the project in 1348. Francesco Talenti finished the job between 1350 and 1359—he exchanged the heavy solidness of the base for a lighter, airier effect.

The **reliefs** and **statues** in the lower levels—by Andrea Pisano, Donatello, and others—are all copies, the weatherworn originals now housed in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (see below). You can climb the 414 steps to the top of the tower. What makes the 84m-high (276-ft.) view different from what you get out of the more popular climb up the cathedral dome, besides a cityscape vista, are great views of the Baptistery as you ascend and the best close-up shot in the entire city of Brunelleschi's dome.

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **055-230-2885.** www.operaduomo.firenze.it. Admission 6€. Daily 8:30am–7:30pm. Bus: 1, 6, 17, 14, 22, 23, 36, 37, or 71.

Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (Duomo Works Museum) ★ This museum exists mainly to house the sculptures removed from the niches and doors of the Duomo group for restoration and preservation from the elements.

The courtyard is enclosed to show off—under natural daylight, as they should be seen—Lorenzo Ghiberti's original gilded bronze panels from the Baptistery's ***Gates of Paradise*** ★★★, which are being displayed as they're slowly restored. Ghiberti devoted 27 years to this project (1425–52), and you can now admire up close his masterpiece of *schiacciato* (squished) relief—using the Donatello technique of almost sketching in perspective to create the illusion of depth in low relief.

Tips Reserving Tickets for the Uffizi & Other Museums

You can bypass the hours-long ticket line at the **Uffizi Galleries** by reserving a ticket and an entry time in advance by calling **Firenze Musei** at ✆ **055-294-883** (Mon–Fri 8:30am–6:30pm; Sat until 12:30pm) or visiting www.firenzemusei.it. By March, entry times can be booked more than a week in advance. You can also reserve for the **Accademia Gallery** (another interminable line, to see *David*), as well as the **Galleria Palatina** in the Pitti Palace, the **Bargello,** and several others. There is a 3€ fee and you can pay by credit card.

On the way up the stairs, you pass **Michelangelo's *Pietà*** ★ (1548–55), his second and penultimate take on the subject, which the sculptor probably had in mind for his own tomb. The face of Nicodemus is a self-portrait, and Michelangelo most likely intended to leave much of the statue group only roughly carved, just as we see it. Art historians inform us that the polished figure of Mary Magdalene on the left was finished by one of Michelangelo's students, while storytellers relate that part of the considerable damage to the group was inflicted by the master himself when, in a moment of rage and frustration, he took a hammer to it.

The top floor of the museum houses the **Prophets** carved for the bell tower, the most noted of which are the remarkably expressive figures carved by Donatello: the drooping, aged face of the *Beardless Prophet;* the sad, fixed gaze of *Jeremiah;* and the misshapen ferocity of the bald ***Habakkuk*** ★ (known to Florentines as *Lo Zuccone*—pumpkin head). Mounted on the walls above are two putty-encrusted marble ***cantorie*** **(choir lofts).** The slightly earlier one (1431) on the entrance wall is by Luca della Robbia. His panels (the originals now displayed at eye level, with plaster casts set in the actual frame above) are in perfect early Renaissance harmony, both within themselves and with each other, and they show della Robbia's mastery of creating great depth within a shallow piece of stone. Across the room, Donatello's ***cantoria*** ★ (1433–38) takes off in a new artistic direction as his singing cherubs literally break through the boundaries of the "panels" to leap and race around the entire *cantoria* behind the mosaicked columnsThe room off the right stars one of Donatello's more morbidly fascinating sculptures, a late work in polychrome wood of ***The Magdalene*** ★ (1453–55), emaciated and veritably dripping with penitence.

The new exit corridor leading off from the Prophets room houses some of the **machines** used to build the cathedral dome, **Brunelleschi's death mask** as a grisly reminder of its architect, and the **wooden model proposals** for the cupola's drum and for the facade. The original Gothic facade was destroyed in 1587 to make room for one done in High Renaissance style, but the patron behind the work—Grand Duke Francesco de' Medici—died before he could choose from among the submissions by the likes of Giambologna and Bernardo Buontalenti. The Duomo remained faceless until purses of the 18th century, heavy with money and relentless bad taste, gave it the neo-Gothic facade we see today.

Piazza del Duomo 9 (directly behind the dome end of the cathedral). ✆ **055-230-2885.** www.operaduomo.firenze.it. Admission 6€. Mon–Sat 9am–7:30pm; Sun 9am–1:45pm; last admission 40 min. before close. Bus: 6, 11, 14, 17, or 23.

Gallerie degli Uffizi (Uffizi Galleries) ★★★ The Uffizi is one of the world's great museums, and the single best introduction to Renaissance painting, with works by Giotto, Masaccio, Paolo Uccello, Sandro Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Perugino, Michelangelo, Raphael Sanzio, Titian, Caravaggio, and the list goes on. The museum is deceptively small. What looks like a small stretch of gallery space can easily gobble up half a day—many rooms suffer the fate of containing nothing but masterpieces.

Know before you go that the Uffizi regularly shuts down rooms for crowd-control reasons—especially in summer, when the bulk of the annual 1.5 million visitors stampedes the place. Of the more than 3,100 artworks in the museum's archives, only about 1,700 are on exhibit.

The painting gallery is housed in the structure built to serve as the offices (*uffizi* is Florentine dialect for *uffici,* or "offices") of the Medici, commissioned by Cosimo I from Giorgio Vasari in 1560—perhaps his greatest architectural work. The painting gallery was started by Cosimo I as well and is now housed in the second-floor rooms that open off a long hall lined with ancient statues and frescoed with grotesques.

The first room off to your left after you climb Vasari's monumental stairs (**room 2;** room 1 is perennially closed) presents you with a crash course in the Renaissance's roots. It houses three huge altarpieces by Tuscany's greatest late-13th-century masters. On the right is Cimabue's *Santa Trínita Maestà* (1280), still very much rooted in the Byzantine traditions that governed painting in the early Middle Ages—gold-leaf crosshatching in the drapery, an Eastern-style inlaid throne, spoonlike depressions above the noses, highly posed figures, and cloned angels with identical faces stacked up along the sides. On the left is Duccio's *Rucellai Maestà* (1285), painted by the master who studied with Cimabue and eventually founded the Sienese school of painting. The style is still thoroughly medieval but introduces innovations into the rigid traditions. There's a little more weight to the Child Madonna and the Madonna's face has a more human, somewhat sad, expression.

In the center of the room is Giotto's incredible ***Ognissanti Maestà*** ★★★ (1310), by the man who's generally credited as the founding father of Renaissance painting. It's sometimes hard to appreciate just how much Giotto changed when he junked half the traditions of painting to go his own way. It's mainly in the very simple details, the sorts of things we take for granted in art today, such as the force of gravity, the display of basic

Tips How to See the Uffizi

If you have the time, make two trips to the museum. On your first, concentrate on the first dozen or so rooms and pop by the "Greatest Hits of the 16th Century," with works by Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Raphael, and Titian. Return later for a brief recap and continue with the rest of the gallery.

Be aware that the **gift shop** at the end of the galleries closes 20 minutes before the museum. You can visit it without reentering the museum at any time; if you plan to stay in the collections until closing, go down to the shop earlier during your visit and get the guards' attention before you pass through the exit turnstile, so they'll know you're just popping out to buy a few postcards and will recognize you when you ask to be let back in.

The "New" Uffizi

On May 27, 1993, a car bomb ripped through the west wing of the Uffizi, seriously damaging it and some 200 works of art and destroying three (thankfully lesser) Renaissance paintings. The bomb killed five people inside, including the museum curator and her family. While everything from a Mafia hit to a government conspiracy was blamed, the motive for the bombing, and the perpetrators, remain unknown to this day.

In December 1998, Italy unveiled what it called the New Uffizi, a $15-million renovation that repaired all damaged rooms, added more than 1,858 sq. m (20,000 sq. ft.) of new museum space, and displayed more than 100 works that had never been seen before—part of a larger project to triple exhibit space. That larger expansion continues to this day, and restoration of the **Vasari Corridor** has been mostly completed—periodic guided tours began in 2009.

emotions, the individual facial expressions, and the figures that look like they have an actual bulky body under their clothes. (See "The Genius of Giotto," on p. 392, for more on Giotto and his art.) Giotto's Madonna sways slightly to one side, the fabric of her off-white shirt pulling realistically against her breasts as she twists. Instead of floating in mysterious space, Giotto's saints and angels stand on solid ground.

Room 3 pays homage to the 14th-century Sienese school with several delicately crafted works by Simone Martini and the Lorenzetti brothers. Here is Martini's ***Annunciation*** ★ (1333). Note that Mary, who in so much art both before and after this period is depicted as meekly accepting her divine duty, looks reluctant, even disgusted, at the news of her imminent Immaculate Conception. Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti helped revolutionize Sienese art and the Sienese school before succumbing to the Black Death in 1348. Of their work here, Ambrogio's 1342 *Presentation at the Temple* is the finest, with a rich use of color and a vast architectural space created to open up the temple in the background.

Room 4 houses the works of the 14th-century Florentine school, where you can clearly see the influence Giotto had on his contemporaries. **Rooms 5 and 6** represent the dying gasps of International Gothic, still grounded in medievalism but admitting a bit of the emergent naturalism and humanist philosophy into their works. Lorenzo Monaco's *Coronation of the Virgin* (1413) is particularly beautiful, antiquated in its styling but with a delicate suffused coloring.

In **room 7,** the Renaissance proper starts taking shape, driven primarily by the quest of two artists, Paolo Uccello and Masaccio, for perfect perspective. On the left wall is Uccello's *Battle of San Romano* (1456), famously innovative but also rather ugly. This painting depicts one of Florence's great victories over rival Siena, but for Uccello it was more of an excuse to explore perspective—with which this painter was, by all accounts, positively obsessed.

In the far corner is the only example of Masaccio's art here (he died at 27), the *Madonna and Child with St. Anne,* which he helped his master, Masolino, paint in 1424. Masaccio's earthy realism and sharp light are evident in the figures of Mary and the

Child, as well as in the topmost angel peeking down. In the center of the room is Piero della Francesca's ***Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza*** ★★, painted around 1465 or 1470 and the only work by this remarkable Sansepolcran artist to survive in Florence. The fronts of the panels depict the famous duke of Urbino and his wife, while on the backs are horse-drawn carts symbolic of the pair's respective virtues. Piero's incredibly lucid style and modeling and the detailed Flemish-style backgrounds need no commentary, but do note that he purposefully painted the husband and wife in full profile—without diluting the realism of a hooked nose and moles on the duke—and mounted them face to face, so they'll always gaze into each other's eyes.

Room 8 is devoted to Filippo Lippi, with more than half a dozen works by the lecherous monk who turned out rich religious paintings with an earthy quality and a three-dimensionality that make them immediately accessible. His most famous painting here is the *Madonna and Child with Two Angels* (1455–66). Also here are a few works by Filippo's illegitimate son, Filippino. **Room 9** is an interlude of virtuoso paintings by Antonio del Pollaiolo, plus a number of large Virtues by his less-talented brother, Piero. These two masters of anatomical verisimilitude greatly influenced the young Botticelli, three of whose early works reside in the room. This introduction to Botticelli sets us up for the next room, invariably crowded with tour-bus groups.

The walls separating **rooms 10 to 14** were knocked down in the 20th century to create one large space to accommodate the resurgent popularity of Sandro Filipepi—better known by his nickname, Botticelli ("little barrels")—master of willowy women in flowing gowns. Fourteen of his paintings line the walls, along with works by his pupil (and illegitimate son of his former teacher) Filippino Lippi, and by Domenico Ghirlandaio, Michelangelo's first artistic master. But everybody flocks here for just two paintings, Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and his *Primavera (Allegory of Spring).* Though in later life Botticelli was influenced by the puritanical preachings of Savonarola and took to cranking out boring Madonnas, the young painter began in grand pagan style. Both paintings were commissioned between 1477 and 1483 by a Medici cousin for his private villa, and they celebrate not only Renaissance art's love of naturalism but also the humanist philosophy permeating 15th-century Florence, a neo-Platonism that united religious doctrine with ancient ideology and mythological stories.

In the ***Birth of Venus*** ★★, the love goddess is born of the sea on a half shell, blown to shore by the Zephyrs. Ores, a goddess of the seasons, rushes to clothe her. Some say the long-legged goddess was modeled on Simonetta Vespucci, a renowned Florentine beauty, cousin to Amerigo (the naval explorer after whom America is named) and not-so-secret lover of Giuliano de' Medici, Lorenzo the Magnificent's brother. The ***Primavera*** ★★ is harder to evaluate, since contemporary research indicates it may not actually be an allegory of spring influenced by the humanist poetry of Poliziano but rather a celebration of Venus, who stands in the center, surrounded by various complicated references to Virtues through mythological characters. Also check out Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi,* where the artist painted himself in the far right side, in a great yellow robe and golden curls.

Room 15 boasts Leonardo da Vinci's ***Annunciation*** ★★★, which the young artist painted in 1472 or 1475 while still in the workshop of his master, Andrea del Verrocchio; however, he was already fully developed as an artist. The solid yet light figures and sfumato airiness blurring the distance render remarkably lifelike figures somehow suspended in a surreal dreamscape. Leonardo helped Verrocchio on the *Baptism of Christ*—most credit the artist-in-training with the angel on the far left as well as the landscape, and a

few art historians think they see his hand in the figure of Jesus as well. The *Adoration of the Magi,* on which Leonardo didn't get much beyond the sketching stage, shows how he could retain powerful compositions even when creating a fantasy landscape of ruinous architecture and incongruous horse battles. The room also houses works by Lorenzo di Credi and Piero di Cosimo, fellow 15th-century maestros, and a *Pietà* that shows Perugino's solid plastic style of studied simplicity. (This Umbrian master would later pass it on to his pupil Raphael.) Uffizi officials use **room 18, the Tribune,** as a crowd-control pressure valve. You may find yourself stuck shuffling around it slowly, staring at the mother-of-pearl discs lining the domed ceiling; studying the antique statues, such as the famous *Medici Venus* (a 1st-c.-B.C. Roman copy of a Greek original); and scrutinizing the Medici portraits wallpapering the room. The latter include many by the talented early baroque artist Agnolo Bronzino, whose portrait of ***Eleonora of Toledo*** ★, wife of Cosimo I, with their son Giovanni de' Medici (1545), is particularly well worked. It shows her in a satin dress embroidered and sewn with velvet and pearls. When the Medici tombs were opened in 1857, her body was found buried in this same dress (it's now in the Pitti Palace's costume museum).

Also here are Raphael's late *St. John the Baptist in the Desert* (1518) and Mannerist Rosso Fiorentino's 1522 *Angel Musician,* where an insufferably cute little *putto* (cherub) plucks at an oversize lute—it's become quite the Renaissance icon in the recent spate of angel mania.

Room 19 is devoted to both Perugino, who did the luminous *Portrait of Francesco delle Opere* (1494), and Luca Signorelli, whose *Holy Family* (1490–95) was painted as a tondo set in a rectangle, with allegorical figures in the background and a torsion of the figures that were to influence Michelangelo's version (in a later room). **Room 20** is devoted to Dürer, Cranach, and other German artists who worked in Florence, while **room 21** takes care of 16th-century Venetians Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, and Carpaccio. In **room 22** are Flemish and German works by Hans Holbein the Younger, Hans Memling, and others, and **room 23** contains Andrea Mantegna's triptych of the *Adoration of the Magi, Circumcision, and Ascension* (1463–70), showing his excellent draftsmanship and fascination with classical architecture. Now we move into the west wing, still in the throes of restoration following the bombing (see "The 'New' Uffizi," above). **Room 25** is overpowered by Michelangelo's ***Holy Family*** ★★★ (1506–08), one of the few panel paintings by the great master. The glowing colors and shocking nudes in the background seem to pop off the surface, and the torsion of the figures was to be taken up as the banner of the Mannerist movement. Michelangelo also designed the elaborate frame.

Room 26 is devoted to Andrea del Sarto and High Renaissance darling Raphael. Of Raphael we have the *Madonna of the Goldfinch* (1505), a work he painted in a Leonardesque style for a friend's wedding, and several important portraits, including *Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi* and *Pope Julius II,* as well as a famous *Self-Portrait.* Del Sarto was the most important painter in Florence in the early 16th century, while Michelangelo and Raphael were off in Rome. His consciously developed Mannerist style is evident in his masterful *Madonna of the Harpies* (1515–17).

Room 27 is devoted to works by Del Sarto's star Mannerist pupils, Rosso Fiorentino and Pontormo, and by Pontormo's adopted son, Bronzino. Fiorentino's ***Moses Defends the Daughters of Jethro*** ★ (1523) owes much to Michelangesque nudes but is also wholly original in the use of harsh lighting that reduces the figures to basic shapes of color.

Room 28 honors the great Venetian Titian, of whose works you'll see a warm full-bodied ***Flora*** ★★ and a poetic ***Venus of Urbino*** ★ languishing on her bed; Sienese

High Renaissance painter Sebastiano del Piombo (his *Death of Adonis* and *Portrait of a Woman* are both strong works); and a few mediocre works by Palma il Vecchio.

Tiny **rooms 29 and 30,** ostensibly honoring works by several Emilian artists, are totally dominated by late Mannerist master Il Parmigianino, who carried the Mannerist movement to its logical extremes with the almost grotesquely elongated bodies of the ***Madonna of the Long Neck*** ★ (1534). **Room 31** continues to chart the fall of painting into decorative grace with Paolo Veronese's *Martyrdom of St. Justine* (1573), which is less about the saint being stabbed than it is a sartorial study in fashion design.

Room 32 is a nice break provided by the dramatic and visible brush strokes that boldly swirled rich, somber colors of several lesser works by Venetian master Tintoretto. All the better, as these must see you through the treacle and tripe of **rooms 33 to 34,** stuffed with substandard examples of 16th-century paintings by the likes of Vasari, Alessandro Allori, and other chaps who grew up in Michelangelo's shadow and desperately wished they could paint like him. (***Note:*** They couldn't.)

Popping back out in the main corridor again, you visit the last several rooms one at a time as each opens off the hall. **Room 35** features the taffeta, cotton-candy oeuvre of baroque weirdo Federico Barocci (whose works are currently coming into vogue—why, I've no idea). Continue right past that exit staircase, because they save a few eye-popping rooms for the very end.

Room 41 is all about Rubens and his famously ample nudes, along with some works by his Flemish cohorts (Van Dyck, Sustermans). **Room 42** is a lovely side hall flooded with sunlight and graced by more than a dozen Roman statues that are copies of Hellenic originals, most of them of the dying Niobids.

And so we come to **room 43,** previously home to Caravaggio before he and his students were moved to the expanded exhibition space downstairs. Now the room hosts a collection of 17th-century paintings by such artists as Il Guercino and Il Domenichino.

Duck through the end of this room to pay your respects to Rembrandt in **room 44,** where he immortalized himself in two *Self-Portraits,* one done as a youth and the other as an old man. Hang a right to exit back into the corridor again via **room 45,** a bit of a letdown after the last two rooms, but still engaging (if you've any art-appreciation energies left after all this) for its "Greatest Hits of the 18th Century" artists—Giuseppe Maria Crespi, Giovanni Paolo Pannini, Il Canaletto, Francesco Guardi, and Tiepolo—plus a Spanish twist to end it all with two paintings by Francisco Goya.

Now it's time to move downstairs toward the exit, but not before you visit five rooms on the ground floor, starting with the space devoted to Caravaggio in **room 5.** Caravaggio was the baroque master of *chiaroscuro*—painting with extreme harsh light and deep shadows. The Uffizi preserves his painting of the severed head of *Medusa,* a *Sacrifice of Isaac,* and his famous ***Bacchus*** ★★. Caravaggio's work influenced a generation of artists—the caravaggisti including Artemisia Gentileschi, the only female painter to make a name for herself in the late Renaissance/early baroque. Artemisia was eclipsed in fame by her slightly less talented father, Orazio, and she was the victim and central figure in a sensational rape trial brought against Orazio's one-time collaborator. It evidently had an effect on her professional life; the violent *Judith Slaying Holofernes* is featured here, in all its gruesome detail.

Rooms 6 and 7 are devoted to two followers of Caravaggio: respectively, Bartolomeo Manfredi and Gerrit von Honthorst, known in Italy as Gherardo delle Notti. Paintings by both artists were destroyed in the 1993 car bomb; the ones on display here were previously safeguarded in storage. Manfredi will be forever remembered for bringing

plebian life to the canvas, with scenes in taverns and featuring card-playing soldiers, although those in the Uffizi's collection focus on more religious and ancient Roman subjects. Gherardo delle Notti, as his nickname might suggest, was famous for his bright illumination of subjects by sources of light seen and unseen, and the paintings here, especially his adoration of the baby Jesus, will not disappoint.

Room 8 is dedicated to other European students of Caravaggio, including Matthias Stomer, Francesco Rustici, and Nicolas Regnier, while **room 9** is dedicated to Guido Reni, perhaps best known for his collaboration with Annibale Carracci on the Farnese Palace in Rome, but also noted for his paintings betraying the influence of Caravaggio. His rendering of a triumphant David admiring the slain head of Goliath, upon your exit, is a fitting tribute to your conquest of this overwhelming gallery—because that's it. The Uffizi is finished. Treat yourself to a cappuccino alfresco. You've earned it.

Piazzale degli Uffizi 6 (off Piazza della Signoria). ✆ **055-238-8651.** www.uffizi.firenze.it. (Reserve tickets at ✆ 055-294-883 or www.firenzemusei.it.) Admission 6.50€. Tues–Sun 8:15am–7pm. Ticket window closes 45 min. before museum. Bus: A, B, 23, or 71.

Palazzo Vecchio ★ Florence's imposing fortresslike town hall was built from 1299 to 1302 on the designs of Arnolfo di Cambio, Gothic master builder of the city. Arnolfo managed to make it solid and impregnable-looking yet still graceful, with thin-columned Gothic windows and two orders of crenellations—square for the main rampart and swallow-tailed on the 94m-high (308-ft.) bell tower.

The palace was once home to the various Florentine republican governments (and today to the municipal government). Cosimo I and his ducal Medici family moved to the *palazzo* in 1540 and engaged in massive redecoration. Michelozzo's 1453 **courtyard,** just through the door, was left architecturally intact but frescoed by Vasari with scenes of Austrian cities to celebrate the 1565 marriage of Francesco de' Medici and Joanna of Austria. The grand staircase leads up to the **Sala dei Cinquecento,** named for the 500-man assembly that met here in the pre-Medici days of the Florentine Republic and site of the greatest fresco cycle that ever wasn't. Leonardo da Vinci was commissioned in 1503 to paint one long wall with a battle scene celebrating a famous Florentine victory. He was always trying new methods and materials and decided to mix wax into his pigments. Leonardo had finished painting part of the wall, but it wasn't drying fast enough, so he brought in braziers stoked with hot coals to try to hurry the process. As others watched in horror, the wax in the fresco melted under the intense heat and the colors ran down the walls to puddle on the floor. Michelangelo never even got past making the preparatory drawings for the fresco he was supposed to paint on the opposite wall—Pope Julius II called him to Rome to paint the Sistine Chapel, and the master's sketches were destroyed by eager young artists who came to study them and took away scraps. Eventually, the bare walls were covered by Vasari and assistants from 1563 to 1565 with blatantly subservient frescoes exalting Cosimo I de' Medici and his dynasty.

Off the corner of the room (to the right as you enter) is the **Studiolo di Francesco I,** a claustrophobic study in which Cosimo's eldest son and heir performed his alchemy and science experiments and where baroque paintings hide secret cupboards. Against the wall of the Sala dei Cinquecento, opposite the door you enter, is Michelangelo's statue of ***Victory*** ★, carved from 1533 to 1534 for the Julius II tomb but later donated to the Medici. Its extreme torsion—the way the body twists and spirals upward—was to be a great influence on the Mannerist movement.

The first series of rooms on the second floor is the **Quartiere degli Elementi,** again frescoed by Vasari. The **Terrazza di Saturno,** in the corner, has a view over the Uffizi to

the hills across the Arno. Crossing the balcony overlooking the Sala dei Cinquecento, you enter the **Apartments of Eleonora di Toledo,** decorated for Cosimo's Spanish wife. Her small private chapel is a masterpiece of mid-16th-century painting by Bronzino. Farther on, under the sculpted ceiling of the **Sala dei Gigli,** are Domenico Ghirlandaio's fresco of *St. Zenobius Enthroned* with ancient Roman heroes and Donatello's original ***Judith and Holofernes*** ★ bronze (1455), one of his last works.

The outdoor **Balustrade** running around the roof behind the crenellations offers a unique panorama of the city and the piazza below.

Piazza della Signoria. ✆ **055-276-8465.** Admission 6€. Fri–Wed 9am–7pm; Thurs 9am–2pm. Bus: A, B, 23, or 71.

Ponte Vecchio (Old Bridge) ★★★ The oldest and most famous bridge across the Arno, the Ponte Vecchio we know today was built in 1345 by Taddeo Gaddi to replace an earlier version. The characteristic overhanging shops have lined the bridge since at least the 12th century. In the 16th century, it was home to butchers until Cosimo I moved into the Palazzo Pitti across the river. He couldn't stand the stench as he crossed the bridge from on high in the Corridoio Vasariano every day, so he evicted the meat cutters and moved in the classier gold- and silversmiths, tradesmen who occupy the bridge to this day.

A bust of the most famous Florentine goldsmith, the swashbuckling autobiographer and *Perseus* sculptor Benvenuto Cellini, stands off to the side of the bridge's center, in a small piazza overlooking the Arno. From this vantage point Mark Twain, spoiled by the mighty Mississippi, once wryly commented, "It is popular to admire the Arno. It is a great historical creek, with four feet in the channel and some scows floating about. It would be a very plausible river if they would pump some water into it. They call it a river, and they honestly think it is a river . . . They even help out the delusion by building bridges over it. I do not see why they are too good to wade."

The Ponte Vecchio's fame saved it in 1944 from the Nazis, who had orders to blow up all the bridges before retreating out of Florence as Allied forces advanced. They couldn't bring themselves to reduce this span to rubble—so they blew up the ancient buildings on either end instead to block it off. The Arno flood of 1966 wasn't so discriminating, however, and severely damaged the shops. Apparently, a private night watchman saw the waters rising alarmingly and called many of the goldsmiths at home, who rushed to remove their valuable stock before it was washed away.

Via Por Santa Maria/Via Guicciardini. Bus: B or D.

Museo di Storia della Scienza (Science Museum) ★ The mainframe computer and multifunction calculator don't hold a candle to this collection's beautifully engraved intricate mechanical instruments. Galileo and his ilk practiced a science that was an art form of the highest aesthetic order. The cases display such beauties as a mechanical calculator from 1664—a gleaming bronze sandwich of engraved disks and dials—and an architect's compass and plumb disguised as a dagger, complete with sheath.

In the field of astronomy, the museum has the lens with which Galileo discovered four of the moons of Jupiter (which he promptly and prudently named after his Medici patrons) and, alongside telescopes of all sizes and complexity, a tiny "lady's telescope" made of ivory that once came in a box of beauty products. There's also a somewhat grisly room devoted to medicine, with disturbingly realistic wax models of just about everything that can go wrong during childbirth. And what Italian institution would be complete without a holy relic? In this case, it's the middle finger of Galileo's right hand,

swiped while he was en route to reinterment in Santa Croce. He was allowed burial in a Christian church only in the 18th century, after he was posthumously vindicated against the Inquisition for supporting a heliocentric view of the universe.

Piazza dei Giudici 1 (next to the Uffizi at the Arno end of Via dei Castellani). ✆ **055-265-311.** www.imss.fi.it. Admission 4€; free for ages 6–14 and over 65. Mon and Wed–Fri 9:30am–5pm; Tues and Sat 9:30am–1pm. Closed major holidays. Bus: 23.

Orsanmichele ★★ This tall structure halfway down Via dei Calzaiuoli looks more like a Gothic warehouse than a church—which is exactly what it was, built as a granary/grain market in 1337. After a miraculous image of the Madonna appeared on a column inside, however, the lower level was turned into a chapel. The city's merchant guilds each undertook the task of decorating one of the outside nichelike Gothic tabernacles around the lower level with a statue of their guild's patron saint. Masters such as Ghiberti, Donatello, Verrocchio, and Giambologna all cast or carved masterpieces to set here. Since 1984, these have been removed and are being replaced by casts as the originals are slowly cleaned and exhibited up on the second story.

Unfortunately, the church now keeps erratic hours due to a lack of personnel, so there are no set opening hours; however, you may get lucky and find the doors thrown open when you pass by (or, though this may take even more luck, someone might actually answer the phone number below and give you details on when it will next open). Since it's pretty nifty, and there's a chance you'll be able to pop in, I'll go ahead and describe it all.

In the chapel's dark interior, the elaborate Gothic ***Tabernacle*** ★ (1349–59) by Andrea Orcagna looks something like a miniature church, covered with statuettes, enamels, inset colored marbles and glass, and reliefs. It protects a luminous 1348 *Madonna and Child* painted by Giotto's student Bernardo Daddi. The prominent statue of the *Madonna, Child, and St. Anne* to its left is by Francesco da Sangallo (1522).

Across Via dell'Arte della Lana from the Orsanmichele's main entrance is the 1308 Palazzo dell'Arte della Lana. This Gothic palace was home to medieval Florence's most powerful body, the guild of wool merchants, which employed about one-third of Florence in the 13th and 14th centuries. Up the stairs inside you can cross over the hanging walkway to the first floor (American second floor) of Orsanmichele. These are the old granary rooms, now housing a **museum of the statues** ★ that once surrounded the exterior. Eight of the original sculptures are here, well labeled, including Donatello's marble *St. Mark* (1411–13); Ghiberti's bronze *St. John the Baptist* (1413–16), the first life-size bronze of the Renaissance; and Verrocchio's *Incredulity of St. Thomas* (1473–83). This museum, too, does not always adhere to its posted hours, as those are dependent on someone being around to honor them. Still, it's at least worth a try.

Via Arte della Lana 1/Via de' Calzaiuoli. ✆ **055-284-944.** Free admission. Church open erratic hours (though never open during riposo). Museum daily 9–9:45am, 10–10:45am, and 11–11:45am (plus Sat–Sun 1–1:45pm); closed Mon. Bus: A.

Museo Nazionale del Bargello (Bargello Museum) ★★ Inside this 1255 Gothic *palazzo* is Florence's premier sculpture museum, with works by Michelangelo, the della Robbias, and Donatello.

In the *palazzo*'s old **armory** are 16th-century works, including some of Michelangelo's earliest sculptures. Carved by a 22-year-old Michelangelo while he was visiting Rome, ***Bacchus*** ★★ (1497) was obviously inspired by the classical antiquities he studied there but is also imbued with his own irrepressible Renaissance realism—here is a (young) God of Wine who's actually drunk, reeling back on unsteady knees and holding the cup aloft

with a distinctly tipsy wobble. Michelangelo polished and finished this marble in the traditional manner, but from 1503 to 1505, soon after finishing his famous *David* with a high polish, he carved the ***Pitti Tondo*** ★ here, a *schiacciato* Madonna and Child scene in which the artist began using the textures of the partially worked marble itself to convey his artistic message. In the bust of *Brutus* (ca. 1539), some people like to see an idealized portrait of Michelangelo himself; a more accurate and less contentious representation sits nearby, the famous and oft-cast bronze bust of *Michelangelo* by his pupil Daniele da Volterra. Also in this room is Giambologna's ***Flying Mercury*** ★ (ca. 1564), looking for all the world as if he's on the verge of taking off from the ground—justifiably one of this Mannerist's masterpieces.

The *palazzo*'s inner **courtyard**—one of the few medieval *cortile* in Florence to survive in more-or-less its original shape—is studded with the coats of arms of various past *podestà* (mayors) and other notables. The grand stairwell leads up to a second-story loggia filled with a flock of whimsical bronze birds cast by Giambologna for the Medici's gardens. The doorway leads into the old **Salone del Consiglio Generale (General Council Room)** ★★, a vast space with a high ceiling filled with glazed terra-cotta Madonnas by Luca della Robbia and his clan, and some of the most important sculptures of the early Renaissance.

Donatello dominates the room, starting with a mischievously smiling *Cupid* (ca. 1430–40). He sculpted the *Marzocco,* lion symbol of the Florentine Republic, out of *pietra serena* between 1418 and 1420. The marble *David* (1408) is an early Donatello, but the bronze ***David*** ★★ (1440–50) beyond it is a much more mature piece, the first freestanding nude since antiquity. The figure is an almost erotic youth, with a shy, detached air that has little to do with the giant severed head at his feet. Against the far wall is ***St. George*** ★, carved in 1416 for a niche of Orsanmichele. The relief below it of the saint slaying his dragon is an early example of the sculptor's patented *schiacciato* technique, using thinly etched lines and perspective to create great depth in a very shallow space.

In the back right corner of this room are two bronze relief panels by Brunelleschi and Ghiberti of the *Sacrifice of Isaac,* finalists in the famous 1401 competition for the commission to cast the Baptistery's doors (see the review on p. 142). Ghiberti's panel won for the greater dynamism and flowing action in his version.

Out the other end of the room is the **Islamic Collection,** a testament to Florence's wide and profitable trade network. Decorative arts from the Roman era through the 16th century fill the long corridor, at the end of which is the small **Cappella Maddalena,** where condemned prisoners spent their last moments praying for their souls; it was frescoed by Giotto's studio. A perpendicular corridor houses the largest collection of ivories in the world, from the 5th to 17th centuries.

Upstairs are rooms with glazed terra cottas by Andrea and Giovanni della Robbia and another room devoted to the sculptural production of Leonardo da Vinci's teacher Verrocchio, including yet another *David* (1465), a haughty youth with a tousle of hair inspired by the Donatello version downstairs.

Via del Proconsolo 4. ✆ **055-238-8606.** www.sbas.firenze.it. (Reserve tickets at ✆ 055-294-883 or www.firenzemusei.it.) Admission 4€. Daily 8:15am–2pm. Closed 2nd and 4th Mon and 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sun of each month. Bus: A, 14, or 23.

Badia Fiorentina The slender, pointed bell tower of this Benedictine abbey, founded in A.D. 978, is one of the landmarks of the Florentine skyline. Sadly, the bells Dante wrote of in his *Paradiso* no longer toll the hours. Serious structural problems have

silenced the tower. In the now-baroque interior, some say Dante first laid eyes on his beloved Beatrice, and Boccaccio, of *Decameron* fame, used to lecture on Dante's Divine Comedy here. The church's most arresting sight is a 1485 Filippino Lippi painting of the *Madonna Appearing to St. Bernard.* The box to shed light on it parcels out a measly 10 seconds for each coin, so feed it only the smallest pieces. For a nominal "donation," the sacristan will throw on the lights to the *trompe l'oeil* ceiling.

Via Dante Alighieri and Via del Proconsolo. ✆ **055-287-389.** Free admission. Thurs–Tues 5–7pm (sometimes also in the morning). Bus: A, 14, or 23.

Santa Trínita ★ Beyond Bernardo Buontalenti's late-16th-century **facade** lies a dark church, rebuilt in the 14th century but founded by the Vallombrosans before 1177. The third chapel on the right has what remains of the detached frescoes by Spinello Aretino (viewable by push-button light), which were found under Lorenzo Monaco's excellent 1422 frescoes covering the next chapel down.

In the right transept, Domenico Ghirlandaio frescoed the **Cappella Sassetti ★** in 1483 with a cycle on the *Life of St. Francis* (coin-op lights), but true to form he set all the scenes against Florentine backdrops and peopled them with portraits of the notables of the day. The most famous is *Francis Receiving the Order from Pope Honorius,* which in this version takes place under an arcade on the north side of Piazza della Signoria—the Loggia dei Lanzi is featured in the middle, and on the left is the Palazzo Vecchio. (The Uffizi between them hadn't been built yet.) It's also full of contemporary portraits: In the little group on the far right, the unhandsome man with the light red cloak is Lorenzo the Magnificent.

The chapel to the right of the main altar houses the miraculous ***Crucifix*** that once hung in San Miniato al Monte. One day the nobleman Giovanni Gualberto was storming up the hillside in a rage, on his way to wreak revenge on his brother's murderer. Gualberto paused at San Miniato and after some reflection decided to pardon the assassin, whereupon this crucifix bowed its head in approval. Gualberto went on to found the Vallombrosan order of monks, who later established this church.

The south end of the piazza leads to the **Ponte Santa Trínita,** one of Italy's most graceful bridges. In 1567, Ammannati built a span here that was set with four 16th-century statues of the seasons in honor of the marriage of Cosimo II. After the Nazis blew up the bridge in 1944, it was rebuilt, and all was set into place again—save the head on the statue of Spring, which remained lost until a team dredging the river in 1961 found it by accident. From the bridge you get a great view upriver of the Ponte Vecchio and downriver of the **Ponte alla Carraia** (another postwar reconstruction), where in 1304 so many people gathered to watch a floating production of Dante's *Inferno* that it collapsed and all were drowned. Florentine wits were quick to point out that all the people who went to see Hell that day found what they were looking for.

Piazza Santa Trínita. ✆ **055-216-912.** Free admission. Mon–Sat 8am–noon and 4–6pm; Sun 4–6pm. Bus: A, B, 6, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

AROUND SAN LORENZO & THE MERCATO CENTRALE

The church of San Lorenzo is practically lost behind the leather stalls and souvenir carts of Florence's vast **San Lorenzo street market** (see "Shopping," later in this chapter). In fact, the hawking of wares and bustle of commerce characterize all the streets of this neighborhood, centered on both the church and the nearby **Mercato Centrale food market.** This is a colorful scene, but one of the most pickpocket-happy in the city, so be wary.

San Lorenzo ★ A rough brick anti-facade and the undistinguished stony bulk of a building surrounded by the stalls of the leather market hide what is most likely the oldest church in Florence, founded in A.D. 393. San Lorenzo was the city's cathedral until the bishop's seat moved to Santa Reparata (later to become the Duomo) in the 7th century. More important, it was the Medici family's parish church, and as those famous bankers began to accumulate their vast fortune, they started a tradition of lavishing it on this church that lasted until the clan died out in the 18th century. Visiting the entire church complex at once is tricky: Though interconnected, the church proper, the Old Sacristy, and the Laurentian Library have different open hours. The Medici tombs, listed separately below, have a separate entrance around the back of the church and have still different hours.

The first thing Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, founder of the family fortune, did for the church was hire Brunelleschi to tune up the **interior,** rebuilding according to the architect's plans in 1426. At the end of the aisle is a Desiderio da Settignano marble tabernacle that's a mastery of *schiacciato* relief and carefully incised perspective. Across the aisle is one of the two bronze 1460 **pulpits ★★**—the other is across the nave—that were Donatello's last works. His patron and the first great consolidator of Medici power, which at this early stage still showed great concern for protecting the interests of the people, was Cosimo il Vecchio, Lorenzo the Magnificent's grandfather. Cosimo, whose wise behind-the-scenes rule made him popular with the Florentines, died in 1464 and is buried in front of the high altar. The plaque marking the spot is simply inscribed PATER PATRIE—father of his homeland.

Off the left transept is the **Sagrestia Vecchia (Old Sacristy) ★**, one of Brunelleschi's purest pieces of early Renaissance architecture. In the center of the chapel Cosimo il Vecchio's parents, Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici and his wife, Piccarda Bueri, rest in peace.

On the wall of the left aisle is Bronzino's huge fresco of the ***Martyrdom of San Lorenzo*** ★. The 3rd-century namesake saint of this church, San Lorenzo was a flinty early Christian and the treasurer of the Roman church. When commanded by the Romans to hand over the church's wealth, Lorenzo appeared before Emperor Valerian's prefect with "thousands" of sick, poor, and crippled people saying "Here is all the church's treasure." The Romans weren't amused and decided to martyr him on a gridiron over hot coals. Feisty to the last, at one point while Lorenzo lay there roasting he called out to his tormentors through gritted teeth, "Turn me over, I'm done on this side."

Near this fresco is an entrance to the cloister and just inside it a stairwell to the right leading up to the **Biblioteca Laurenziana (Laurentian Library) ★★**, which can also be entered admission-free without going through—and paying for—the church (the separate entrance is just to the left of the church's main doors). Michelangelo designed this library in 1524 to house the Medici's manuscript collection, and it stands as one of the most brilliant works of Mannerist architecture. The vestibule is a whacked-out riff on the Renaissance, all *pietra serena* and white plaster walls like a good Brunelleschi piece, but turned inside out.

Piazza San Lorenzo. ✆ **055-214-042.** Admission 3.50€. Church Mon–Sat 10am–5:30pm. Old Sacristy Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun Mar–Oct 1:30–5:30pm. Laurentian Library Mon–Sat 9am–1pm. Bus: 1, 6, 7, 11, 14, 17, 23, 67, 68, 70, or 71.

Cappelle Medicee (Medici Chapels) ★★ When Michelangelo built the New Sacristy between 1520 and 1533 (finished by Vasari in 1556), it was to be a tasteful monument to Lorenzo the Magnificent and his generation of fairly pleasant Medici. When work got underway on the Chapel of the Princes in 1604, it was to become one

The Master's Doodles

On the walls around the small altar in the Medici Chapels are some recently uncovered architectural graffiti that have been attributed to Michelangelo. Even more important are some 50 charcoal drawings and sketches the master left on the walls in the sepulchral chamber below. The drawings include a sketch of the legs of Duke Giuliano, Christ risen, and the Laocoön. Michelangelo found himself hiding out here after the Medici reconquered the city in 1530—he had helped the city keep the dukes out with his San Miniato defenses and, probably rightly, feared a reprisal. You need an appointment to see the sketches; ask at the ticket office.

of the world's most god-awful and arrogant memorials, dedicated to the grand dukes, some of Florence's most decrepit tyrants. The **Cappella dei Principi (Chapel of the Princes)** ★ is an exercise in bad taste, a mountain of cut marbles and semiprecious stones—jasper, alabaster, mother-of-pearl, agate, and the like—slathered onto the walls and ceiling with no regard for composition and still less for chromatic unity. The pouring of ducal funds into this monstrosity began in 1604 and lasted until the rarely conscious Gian Gastone de' Medici drank himself to death in 1737 without an heir—but teams kept doggedly at the thing, and they were still finishing the floor in 1962. The tombs of the grand dukes in this massive marble mistake were designed by Pietro Tacca in the 17th century, and off to the left and right of the altar are small treasuries full of gruesome holy relics in silver-bedecked cases. The dome of the structure, seen from the outside, is one of Florence's landmarks, a kind of infant version of the Duomo's.

Michelangelo's **Sagrestia Nuova (New Sacristy)** ★★, built to jibe with Brunelleschi's Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo proper, is much calmer. (An architectural tidbit: The windows in the dome taper as they get near the top to fool you into thinking the dome is higher.) Michelangelo was supposed to produce three tombs here (perhaps four) but ironically got only the two less important ones done. So Lorenzo de' Medici the Magnificent—wise ruler of his city, poet of note, grand patron of the arts, and moneybags behind much of the Renaissance—ended up with a mere inscription of his name next to his brother Giuliano's on a plain marble slab against the entrance wall. Admittedly, they did get one genuine Michelangelo sculpture to decorate their slab, a *Madonna and Child* that's perhaps the master's most beautiful version of the theme (the other two statues are later works by less talented sculptors).

On the left wall of the sacristy is Michelangelo's ***Tomb of Lorenzo*** ★, duke of Urbino (and Lorenzo the Magnificent's grandson), whose seated statue symbolizes the contemplative life. Below him on the elongated curves of the tomb stretch *Dawn* (female) and *Dusk* (male), a pair of Michelangelo's most famous sculptures, where he uses both high polish and rough cutting to impart strength, texture, and psychological suggestion to the allegorical works. This pair mirrors the similarly fashioned and equally important *Day* (male) and *Night* (female) across the way. One additional point *Dawn* and *Night* brings out is that Michelangelo really wasn't too adept at the female body—he just produced softer, less muscular men with slightly elongated midriffs and breasts sort of tacked on at funny angles.

Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini (behind San Lorenzo, where Via Faenza and Via del Giglio meet). ✆ **055-238-8602.** (Reserve tickets at ✆ 055-294-883 or www.firenzemusei.it.) Admission 6€. Daily 8:15am–5pm. Closed 1st, 3rd, and 5th Mon and 2nd and 4th Sun of each month. Bus: 1, 6, 7, 11, 14, 17, 23, 67, 68, 70, or 71.

Palazzo Medici-Riccardi ★ The Palazzo Medici-Riccardi was built by Michelozzo in 1444 for Cosimo de' Medici il Vecchio; it's the prototype Florentine *palazzo,* on which the more overbearing Strozzi and Pitti palaces were later modeled. It remained the Medici private home until Cosimo I more officially declared his power as duke by moving to the city's traditional civic brain center, the Palazzo Vecchio. A door off the right of the entrance courtyard leads up a staircase to the **Cappella dei Magi,** the oldest chapel to survive from a private Florentine palace; its walls are covered with gorgeously dense and colorful Benozzo Gozzoli **frescoes** (1459–63). Rich as tapestries, the walls depict an extended *Journey of the Magi* to see the Christ child, who's being adored by Mary in the altarpiece. Gozzoli is at his decorative best here, inheriting an attention to detail in plants and animals from his teacher Fra' Angelico.

Via Cavour 3. ✆ **055-276-0340.** Admission 4€. Thurs–Tues 9am–7pm. Number of visitors limited; arrive early or call to book a time to visit. Bus: 1, 6, 7, 11, 14, 17, 23, 67, 68, 70, or 71.

ON OR NEAR PIAZZA SANTA MARIA NOVELLA

Piazza Santa Maria Novella boasts patches of grass and a central fountain. The two squat obelisks, resting on the backs of Giambologna tortoises, once served as the turning posts for the "chariot" races held here from the 16th to the mid–19th century. However, these days the piazza sees more action as a roving ground for the few gypsies picking tourists' pockets in Florence and as the hangout for the city's economically depressed small immigrant population and even smaller cache of itinerants. Several bars and pubs have tried to infuse the area with some life, but the night still leans toward the seedy around here.

Santa Maria Novella ★★ Of all Florence's major churches, the home of the Dominicans is the only one with an original **facade ★** that matches its era of greatest importance. The lower Romanesque half was started in the 14th century by architect Fra' Jacopo Talenti, who had just finished building the church itself (started in 1246). Leon Battista Alberti finished the facade, adding a classically inspired Renaissance top that not only went seamlessly with the lower half but also created a Cartesian plane of perfect geometry.

The church's interior underwent a massive restoration in the late 1990s, returning Giotto's restored *Crucifix* to pride of place, hanging in the nave's center—and becoming the first church in Florence to charge admission. Against the second pillar on the left of the nave is the pulpit from which Galileo was denounced for his heretical theory that Earth revolved around the sun. Just past the pulpit, on the left wall, is **Masaccio's *Trinità* ★★★** (ca. 1428), the first painting ever to use perfect linear mathematical perspective. Florentine citizens and artists flooded in to see the fresco when it was unveiled, many remarking in awe that the coffered ceiling seemed to punch a hole back into space, creating a chapel out of a flat wall. The **transept** is filled with spectacularly frescoed chapels. The **sanctuary ★** behind the main altar was frescoed after 1485 by Domenico Ghirlandaio with the help of his assistants and apprentices, probably including a very young Michelangelo. The left wall is covered with a cycle on *The Life of the Virgin* and the right wall with the *Life of St. John the Baptist.* The works have a highly

polished decorative quality and are less biblical stories than snapshots of the era's fashions and personages, full of portraits of the Tornabuoni family who commissioned them.

The **Cappella Gondi** to the left of the high altar contains the *Crucifix* carved by Brunelleschi to show his buddy Donatello how it should be done (see the Santa Croce review, on p. 165, for the story). At the end of the left transept is a different **Cappella Strozzi,** covered with restored **frescoes** ★ (1357) by Nardo di Cione, early medieval casts of thousands where the saved mill about Paradise on the left and the damned stew in a Dantean inferno on the right.

Piazza Santa Maria Novella. ✆ **055-215-918.** http://giubileo.comune.fi.it/musei/smnovella/lingue/eng/welcome.html. Admission 2.50€ adults, 1.50€ ages 12–18. Mon–Thurs and Sat 9am–5pm; Fri and Sun 1–5pm. Bus: A, 6, 11, 12, 36, 37, or 68.

Museo di Santa Maria Novella ★ The cloisters of Santa Maria Novella's convent are open to the public as a museum. The **Chiostro Verde,** with a cypress-surrounded fountain and chirping birds, is named for the greenish tint in the pigment used by Paolo Uccello in his **frescoes** ★★. His works line the right wall of the first walkway; the most famous is the confusing, somewhat disturbing first scene you come to, where the *Flood and Recession of the Flood and the Drunkenness and Sacrifice of Noah* (1446) are all squeezed onto one panel as the story lines are piled atop one another and Noah appears several times. The two giant wooden walls on either side are meant to be the Ark, shown both before and after the Flood, seen in extreme, distorting perspective.

The **Cappella degli Spagnoli (Spanish Chapel)** ★ got its name when it became the private chapel of Eleonora of Toledo, recently arrived in Florence to be Cosimo de' Medici's bride. The pretty chapel was entirely frescoed by Andrea da Firenze and his assistants in a kind of half Florentine–half Sienese style around 1365.

Piazza Santa Maria Novella (entrance to the left of the church facade). ✆ **055-282-187.** http://giubileo.comune.fi.it/musei/smnovella/lingue/eng/welcome.html. Admission 5€ adults, 3.75€ ages 12–20 and 60 and over. Mon–Thurs and Sat–Sun 9am–2pm. Bus: A, 6, 11, 12, 36, 37, or 68.

Ognissanti ★ Founded in 1256 by the Umiliati, a wool-weaving sect of the Benedictines whose trade helped establish this area as a textile district, the present Ognissanti was rebuilt by its new Franciscan owners in the 17th century. It has the earliest baroque **facade** in Florence, designed by Matteo Nigetti in 1627 and rebuilt in travertine in 1872.

Ognissanti was the parish church of the Vespucci family, agents of the Medici bank in Seville. A young Domenico Ghirlandaio portrayed several of the family members in his *Madonna della Misericordia* (1470) on the second altar to the right. The lady under the Madonna's left hand may be Simonetta Vespucci, renowned beauty of her age, mistress of Giuliano de' Medici (Lorenzo's brother), and the possible model for Venus in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus.* The young man with black hair to the Madonna's right is said to be Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512), whose letters about exploring the New World in 1499 and again from 1501 to 1502 would become so popular that a cartographer used a corruption of Amerigo's name on an influential set of maps to describe the newly discovered continent. Sorry, Columbus. The family tombstone (America's namesake rests in peace underneath) is to the left of this altar.

Between the third and fourth altars is Botticelli's fresco of a pensive *St. Augustine in His Study* (1480), a much more intense work than its matching *St. Jerome in His Study* by Ghirlandaio across the nave. Botticelli, whose real name was Sandro Filipepi, is buried under a round marker in the second chapel in the right transept. In the left transept's second chapel is the habit St. Francis was wearing when he received the stigmata. You can

 enter the convent to the left of the church facade at Borgo Ognissanti 42. In the refectory here is Domenico Ghirlandaio's ***Last Supper*** ★, painted in 1480 with a background heavy on Christian symbols.

Piazza Ognissanti. ✆ **055-239-8700.** Free admission. Church daily 8am–noon and 4–6:30pm. Convent Mon, Tues, and Sat 9am–noon. Bus: B, D, or 12.

NEAR SAN MARCO & SANTISSIMA ANNUNZIATA

Galleria dell'Accademia (Academy Gallery) ★★ Though tour-bus crowds flock here just for Michelangelo's *David,* anyone with more than a day in Florence can take the time to peruse some of the Accademia's paintings as well.

The first long hall is devoted to Michelangelo and, though you pass his *Slaves* and the entrance to the painting gallery, most visitors are immediately drawn down to the far end, a tribune dominated by the most famous sculpture in the world: **Michelangelo's *David*** ★★★. A hot young sculptor fresh from his success with the *Pietà* in Rome, Michelangelo offered in 1501 to take on a slab of marble that had already been worked on by another sculptor (who had taken a chunk out of one side before declaring it too strangely shaped to use). The huge slab had been lying around the Duomo's work yards so long it earned a nickname, *Il Gigante* (the giant), so it was with a twist of humor that Michelangelo, only 29 years old, finished in 1504 a Goliath-size David for the city.

There was originally a vague idea that the statue would become part of the Duomo, but Florence's republican government soon wheeled it down to stand on Piazza della Signoria in front of the Palazzo Vecchio to symbolize the defeated tyranny of the Medici, who had been ousted a decade before (but would return with a vengeance). During a 1527 anti-Medicean siege on the *palazzo,* a bench thrown at the attackers from one of the windows hit David's left arm, which reportedly came crashing down on a farmer's toe. (A young Giorgio Vasari came scurrying out to gather all the pieces for safekeeping, despite the riot going on around him, and the arm was later reconstituted.) Even the sculpture's 1873 removal to the Accademia to save it from the elements (a copy stands in its place) hasn't kept it entirely safe—in 1991, a man threw himself on the statue and began hammering at the right foot, dislodging several toes. The foot was repaired, and *David*'s Plexiglas shield went up.

The hall leading up to *David* is lined with perhaps Michelangelo's most fascinating works, the four famous *nonfiniti* ("unfinished") ***Slaves,*** or ***Prisoners*** ★★★. Like no others, these statues symbolize Michelangelo's theory that sculpture is an "art that takes away superfluous material." The great master saw a true sculpture as something that was already inherent in the stone, and all it needed was a skilled chisel to free it from the extraneous rock. That certainly seems to be the case here, as we get a private glimpse into Michelangelo's working technique: how he began by carving the abdomen and torso, going for the gut of the sculpture and bringing that to life first so it could tell him how the rest should

Tips Seeing David

The wait to get in to see *David* can be up to an hour if you didn't reserve ahead. Try getting there before the museum opens in the morning or an hour or two before closing time.

Michelangelo: The Making of a Renaissance Master

Irascible, moody, and manic-depressive, Michelangelo was quite simply one of the greatest artists of all time. Many feel he represents the pinnacle of the Italian Renaissance, a genius at sculpture, painting, and architecture, and even a master poet.

In 1475, Michelangelo Buonarroti was born near Arezzo in the tiny town of Caprese, where his Florentine father was serving a term as a *podestà* (visiting mayor). He grew up on the family farm at Settignano, outside Florence, and was wet-nursed by the wife of a local stonecutter—he used to joke that he sucked his skill with the hammer and chisel along with the mother's milk. He was apprenticed early to the fresco studio of Domenico Ghirlandaio who, while watching the young apprentice sketching, once remarked in shock, "This boy knows more about it than I do." After just a year at the studio, Michelangelo was recruited by Lorenzo the Magnificent de' Medici to become part of his new school for sculptors.

Michelangelo learned quickly, and soon after his arrival at the school took a chunk of marble and carved it to copy the head of an old faun from an ancient statue in the garden. Lorenzo happened by and saw the skill with which the head was made, but when he saw that Michelangelo had departed from his model and carved the mouth open and laughing with teeth and a tongue, he commented only, "But you should have known that old people never have all their teeth and there are always some missing." The young artist reflected on this. When Lorenzo returned a while later, he found Michelangelo waiting anxiously, eager to show he had not only chipped out a few teeth but also gouged down into the gums of the statue to make the tooth loss look more realistic. Impressed, Lorenzo decided to take the boy under his wing and virtually adopted him into the Medici household.

After his success at age 19 with the *Pietà* sculpture in Rome, Michelangelo was given the opportunity by the city council to carve the enormous block of marble that became *David*. He worked on it behind shuttered scaffolding so few saw it until the unveiling. Legend has it that when Soderini, the head of the city council, came to see the finished work, he remarked the nose looked a tad too large. Michelangelo, knowing better but wanting to please Soderini, climbed up to the head (out of view), grabbed a handful of leftover plaster dust, and while tapping his hammer lightly against his chisel, let the dust sprinkle down gradually as if he were actually carving. "Much better," remarked Soderini when Michelangelo climbed down again and they stepped back to admire it. "Now you've really brought it to life."

start to take form. Whether he intended the statues to look the way they do now or in fact left them only half done has been debated by art historians to exhaustion. The result, no matter what the sculptor's intentions, is remarkable, a symbol of the master's great art and personal views on craft as his *Slaves* struggle to break free of their chipped stone prisons.

Nearby, in a similar mode, is a statue of ***St. Matthew*** ★★ (1504–08), which Michelangelo began carving as part of a series of Apostles he was at one point going to complete for the Duomo. (The *Pietà* at the end of the corridor on the right is by one of Michelangelo's students, not by the master as was once thought.)

Off this hall of *Slaves* is the first wing of the painting gallery, which includes a panel, possibly from a wedding chest, known as the ***Cassone Adimari*** ★, painted by Lo Scheggia in the 1440s. It shows the happy couple's promenade to the Duomo, with the green-and-white marbles of the baptistery prominent in the background.

In the wings off *David*'s tribune are large paintings by Michelangelo's contemporaries, Mannerists over whom he had a very strong influence—they even say Michelangelo provided the original drawing from which Pontormo painted his amorous *Venus and Cupid*. Off the end of the left wing is a long 19th-century hall crowded wall-to-wall and stacked floor-to-ceiling with **plaster casts** of hundreds of sculptures and busts—the Accademia, after all, is what it sounds like: an academy for budding young artists, founded in 1784 as an offshoot of the Academy of Art Design that dates from Michelangelo's time (1565).

Via Ricasoli 58–60. ✆ **055-238-8609** or 055-238-8612. www.polomuseale.firenze.it/english/accademia. (Reserve tickets at ✆ 055-294-883 or www.firenzemusei.it.) Admission 6.50€ adults. Tues–Sun 8:15am–6:50pm; last admission 30 min. before close. Bus: 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 17, 25, 31, 32, 33, 67, 68, or 70.

San Marco ★★ In 1437, Cosimo de' Medici il Vecchio, grandfather of Lorenzo the Magnificent, had Michelozzo convert a medieval monastery here into a new home for the Dominicans, in which Cosimo also founded Europe's first public library. From 1491 until he was burned at the stake on Piazza della Signoria in 1498, this was the home base of puritanical preacher Girolamo Savonarola. The monastery's most famous friar, though, was early Renaissance painter Fra' Angelico, and he left many of his finest works, devotional images painted with the technical skill and minute detail of a miniaturist or an illuminator but on altarpiece scale. While his works tended to be transcendently spiritual, Angelico was also prone to filling them with earthly details with which any peasant or stonemason could identify.

The museum rooms are entered off a pretty cloister. The old Pilgrim's Hospice has been converted into a **Fra' (Beato) Angelico Gallery** ★★, full of altarpieces and painted panels. Also off the cloister is the **Refettorio Grande (Great Refectory),** with 16th- and 17th-century paintings, and the **Sala del Capitolo (Chapter House),** frescoed from 1441 to 1442 with a huge *Crucifixion* by Fra' Angelico and his assistants. The door next to this leads past the staircase up to the Dormitory (see below) to the **Sala del Cenacolo (Small Refectory),** with a long fresco of the ***Last Supper*** by Domenico Ghirlandaio.

The **Dormitorio (Dormitory)** ★★ of cells where the monks lived is one of Fra' Angelico's masterpieces and perhaps his most famous cycle of frescoes. In addition to the renowned ***Annunciation*** ★★ at the top of the stairs to the monks' rooms, Angelico painted the cells themselves with simple works to aid his fellow friars in their meditations. One of these almost anticipates surrealism—a flagellation where disembodied hands strike at Christ's face and a rod descends on him from the blue-green background. Angelico's assistants carried out the repetitious Crucifixion scenes in many of the cells. At the end of one of the corridors is the suite of cells occupied by Savonarola when he was here prior. In the first are two famous portraits of him by his devout follower and talented painter Fra' Bartolomeo, along with an anonymous 16th-century painting of *Savonarola Burned at the Stake* on Piazza della Signoria. The **Biblioteca (Library)** off the corridor

to the right of the stairs was designed by Michelozzo in 1441 and contains beautifully illuminated choir books.

Piazza San Marco 3. ✆ **055-238-8608.** Admission 4€ adults, 2€ children. Mon–Fri 8:30am–1:50pm; Sat–Sun 8:15am–7pm. Closed 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sun and 2nd and 4th Mon of each month. Bus: 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 17, 20, 25, 31, 32, 33, 67, 68, or 70.

Cenacolo di Sant'Apollonia ★ There are no lines at this former convent and no crowds. Few people even know to ring the bell at the nondescript door. What they're missing is an entire wall covered with the vibrant colors of Andrea del Castagno's masterful *Last Supper* (ca. 1450). Castagno used his paint to create the rich marble panels that checkerboard the *trompe l'oeil* walls and broke up the long white tablecloth with the dark figure of Judas the Betrayer, whose face is painted to resemble a satyr, an ancient symbol of evil.

Via XXVII Aprile 1. ✆ **055-238-8607.** Free admission. Daily 8:30am–1:50pm. Closed 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sun and 2nd and 4th Mon of each month. Bus: 1, 6, 7, 10, or 11.

Santissima Annunziata In 1230, seven Florentine nobles had a spiritual crisis, gave away all their possessions, and retired to the forests to contemplate divinity. They returned to what were then the fields outside the city walls and founded a small oratory, proclaiming they were Servants of Mary, or the Servite Order. The oratory was enlarged by Michelozzo (1444–81) and later redesigned in the baroque. Under the facade's **portico,** you enter the **Chiostro dei Voti (Votive Cloister),** designed by Michelozzo with Corinthian-capitaled columns and decorated with some of the city's finest Mannerist frescoes (1465–1515). Rosso Fiorentino provided an *Assumption* (1513) and Pontormo a *Visitation* (1515) just to the right of the door, but the main works are by their master, Andrea del Sarto, whose ***Birth of the Virgin*** ★ (1513), in the far right corner, is one of his finest works. To the right of the door into the church is a damaged but still fascinating *Coming of the Magi* (1514) by del Sarto, who included a self-portrait at the far right, looking out at us from under his blue hat.

The **interior** is excessively baroque. Just to the left as you enter is a huge tabernacle hidden under a mountain of flowers and *ex votos* (votive offerings). It was designed by Michelozzo to house a small painting of the *Annunciation.* Legend holds that this painting was started by a friar who, vexed that he couldn't paint the Madonna's face as beautifully as it should be, gave it up and took a nap. When he awoke, he found an angel had filled in the face for him. Newlywed brides in Florence don't toss their bouquets—they head here after the ceremony to leave their flowers at the shrine for good luck.

The large circular **tribune** was finished for Michelozzo by Leon Battista Alberti. You enter it from its left side via the left transept, but first pause to pay your respects to Andrea del Sarto, buried under a floor slab at the left-hand base of the great arch.

From the left transept, a door leads into the **Chiostro dei Morti (Cloister of the Dead;** track down a sacristan to open it), where over the entrance door is another of Andrea del Sarto's greatest frescoes, the ***Madonna del Sacco*** ★, illustrating the rest on the flight into Egypt, that got its name from the sack Joseph is leaning against to do a little light reading as he takes a breather. Also off this cloister is the **Cappella di San Luca (Chapel of St. Luke),** evangelist and patron saint of painters. It was decorated by late Renaissance and Mannerist painters, including Pontormo, Alessandro Allori, Santi di Tito, and Giorgio Vasari. On the **piazza** ★★ outside, flanked by elegant porticos (see Spedale degli Innocenti, below), is an equestrian statue of *Grand Duke Ferdinando I,* Giambologna's last work; it was cast in 1608 after his death by his student Pietro Tacca,

who also did the two little fountains of fantastic mermonkey-monsters. The piazza's beauty is somewhat ruined by the car and bus traffic routed through both ends, but it's kept lively by students from the nearby university, who sit on the loggia steps for lunch and hang out here in the evenings.

Piazza Santissima Annunziata. ✆ **055-266-181.** Free admission. Daily 7:30am–12:30pm and 4–6:30pm. Bus: 6, 31, or 32.

Spedale degli Innocenti Europe's oldest foundling hospital, opened in 1445, is still going strong as a convent orphanage, though times have changed a bit. The Lazy Susan set into the wall on the left end of the arcade—where once people left unwanted babies, swiveled it around, rang the bell, and ran—has since been blocked up. The colonnaded **portico** ★ (built 1419–26) was designed by Filippo Brunelleschi when he was still an active goldsmith. It was his first great achievement as an architect and helped define the new Renaissance style he was developing. Its repetition by later artists in front of other buildings on the piazza makes it one of the most exquisite squares in all of Italy. The spandrels between the arches of Brunelleschi's portico are set with glazed **terra-cotta reliefs** of swaddled babes against rounded blue backgrounds—hands-down the masterpieces of Andrea della Robbia.

Piazza Santissima Annunziata 12. ✆ **055-203-7308.** www.istitutodeglinnocenti.it. Admission 4€. Mon–Fri 8:30am–7pm. Bus: 6, 31, or 32.

Museo Opificio delle Pietre Dure In the 16th century, Florentine craftsmen perfected the art of *pietre dure,* piecing together cut pieces of precious and semi-precious stones in an inlay process, and the Medici-founded institute devoted to the craft has been in this building since 1796. Long ago misnamed a "Florentine mosaic" by the tourism industry, this is a highly refined craft in which skilled artisans (artists, really) create scenes and boldly colored intricate designs in everything from cameos and tabletops to never-fade stone "paintings." The collection in this museum is small, but the pieces are uniformly excellent. Souvenir shops all over town sell modern *pietre dure* items—much of it mass-produced junk, but some very nice. The best contemporary maestro is Ilio de Filippis, whose workshop is called Pitti Mosaici (see "Shopping," later in this chapter).

Via degli Alfani 78. ✆ **055-265-1357,** or 055-294-883 for ticket reservations (not necessary). www.firenzemusei.it. Admission 2€, free for children under 6. Mon–Sat 8:15am–2pm (Thurs until 7pm). Bus: 6, 11, 17, 31, or 32.

Museo Archeologico (Archaeological Museum) ★★ This embarrassingly rich collection is often overlooked by visitors in full-throttle Renaissance mode. It conserves Egyptian artifacts, Roman remains, and an important Etruscan collection. Parts of it have been undergoing restoration and rearrangement for years and are closed indefinitely, including the garden. The relics to be on the lookout for start in the first ground-floor room with an early-4th-century-B.C. bronze **Chimera** ★★, a mythical beast with a lion's body and head, a goat head sprouting from its back, and a serpent for a tail (the tail was incorrectly restored in 1785). The beast was found near Arezzo in 1553 and probably made in a Chiusi or an Orvieto workshop as a votive offering.

In room III on the upper floor is an extraordinarily rare **Hittite wood-and-bone chariot** from the 14th century B.C. Room XIV upstairs has a cast bronze ***Arringatore,*** or orator, found near Perugia. It was made in the 1st century B.C. and helps illustrate how Roman society was having a great influence on the Etruscan world—not only in the workmanship of the statue but also in the fact that the Etruscan orator Aule Metele is wearing a Roman toga. Room XIII contains the museum's most famous piece, the ***Idolino*** ★. The history of

this nude bronze lad with his outstretched hand is long, complicated, and in the end a bit mysterious. The current theory is that he's a Roman statue of the Augustan period (around the time of Christ), with the head perhaps modeled on a lost piece by the Greek master Polyclitus. The rub: *Idolino* was originally probably part of a lamp stand used at Roman banquets. The male torso displayed here was fished out of the sea near Livorno. It was made in Greece around 480 to 470 B.C.—the earliest known Greek bronze cast using the lost wax method. The horse's head also in this room once belonged to the Medici, as did much of this museum's collections, and tradition holds that it was a source of inspiration for Verrocchio and Donatello as they cast their own equestrian monuments. It was probably once part of a Hellenistic sculpture from the 2nd or 1st century B.C.

Via della Colonna 38. ✆ **055-23-575.** www.firenzemusei.it/00_english/archeologico/index.html. Admission 4€. Mon 2–7pm; Tues and Thurs 8:30am–7pm; Wed and Fri–Sun 8:30am–2pm. Closed 2nd and 4th Mon of month. Bus: 6, 31, or 32.

Cimitero degli Inglesi (Protestant Cemetery) When this plot of green was nestled up against the city's medieval walls, it was indeed a quiet, shady, and reflective spot. When those walls were demolished in the late 19th century and the boulevard Viale put in their place, it became a traffic circle instead. We can only hope that frail and gentle Elizabeth Barrett Browning can block out the noise from her tomb off the left of the main path. The **sepulcher** was designed by her husband and fellow poet Robert Browning after her death in Florence in 1861.

Piazzale Donatello 38. ✆ **055-582-608.** www.florin.ms/cemetery.html. Free admission; donation suggested (ring at the gate). Easter–Oct Mon 9am–noon, Tues–Fri 3–6pm; Nov–Easter Mon 9am–noon, Tues–Sat 2–5pm. Bus: 6, 8, or 33.

AROUND PIAZZA SANTA CROCE

Piazza Santa Croce is pretty much like any in Florence—a nice bit of open space ringed with souvenir and leather shops and thronged with tourists. Its most unique feature (aside from the one time a year it's covered with dirt and violent Renaissance soccer is played on it) is the **Palazzo Antellesi** on the south side. This well-preserved, 16th-century patrician house is owned by a contessa who rents out a bunch of peachy apartments.

Santa Croce ★★ The center of the Florentine Franciscan universe was begun in 1294 by Gothic master Arnolfo di Cambio in order to rival the huge church of Santa Maria Novella being raised by the Dominicans across the city. The church wasn't completed and consecrated until 1442, and even then it remained faceless until the neo-Gothic **facade** was added in 1857 (and cleaned in 1998–99). The cloisters are home to Brunelleschi's Cappella de' Pazzi (see the Museo dell'Opera, below), the convent partially given over to a famous leather school (see "Shopping," later in this chapter), and the church itself a shrine of 14th-century frescoes and a monument to notable Florentines, whose tombs and memorials litter the place like an Italian Westminster. The best artworks, such as the Giotto frescoes, are guarded by euro-gobbling light boxes; bring plenty of change.

The Gothic **interior** is wide and gaping, with huge, pointed stone arches creating the aisles and an echoing nave trussed with wood beams, in all feeling vaguely barnlike (an analogy the occasional fluttering pigeon only reinforces). The floor is paved with worn tombstones—because being buried in this hallowed sanctuary got you one step closer to Heaven, the richest families of the day paid big bucks to stake out small rectangles of the floor. On the right aisle is the first tomb of note, a mad Vasari contraption containing the bones of the most venerated of Renaissance masters, **Michelangelo Buonarroti,** who died of a fever in Rome in 1564 at the ripe age of 89. The pope wanted him buried in

the Eternal City, but Florentines managed to sneak his body back to Florence. Past Michelangelo is a pompous 19th-century cenotaph to Florentine **Dante Alighieri,** one of history's greatest poets, whose *Divine Comedy* codified the Italian language. He died in 1321 in Ravenna after a long and bitter life in exile from his hometown (on trumped-up embezzlement charges), and that Adriatic city has never seen fit to return the bones to Florence, the city that would never readmit the poet when he was alive.

Against a nave pillar farther up is an elaborate **pulpit** (1472–76) carved by Benedetto di Maiano with scenes from the life of St. Francis. Next comes a wall monument to **Niccolò Machiavelli,** the 16th-century Florentine statesman and author whose famous book *The Prince* was the perfect practical manual for a powerful Renaissance ruler.

Past the next altar is an *Annunciation* (1433) carved in low relief of *pietra serena* and gilded by Donatello. Nearby is Antonio Rossellino's 1446 tomb of the great humanist scholar and city chancellor **Leonardo Bruni** (d. 1444). Beyond this architectural masterpiece of a tomb is a 19th-century knockoff honoring the remains of **Gioacchino Rossini** (1792–1868), composer of the *Barber of Seville* and the *William Tell Overture.*

Around in the right transept is the **Cappella Castellani** frescoed by Agnolo Gaddi and assistants, with a tabernacle by Mino da Fiesole and a *Crucifix* by Niccolò Gerini. Agnolo's father, Taddeo Gaddi, was one of Giotto's closest followers, and the senior Gaddi is the one who undertook painting the **Cappella Baroncelli** ★ (1332–38) at the transept's end. The frescoes depict scenes from the *Life of the Virgin,* and to the left of the window is an *Angel Appearing to the Shepherds* that constitutes the first night scene in Italian fresco. The altarpiece *Coronation of the Virgin* is by Giotto. To the left of this chapel is a doorway, designed by Michelozzo, leading to the *sagrestia* (sacristy) past a huge *Deposition* (1560) by Alessandro Allori that had to be restored after it incurred massive water damage when the church was inundated during the 1966 flood. Past the gift shop is a leather school and store.

In the right transept, Giotto frescoed the two chapels to the right of the high altar (for an explanation of Giotto's art, see "The Genius of Giotto," on p. 392). The frescoes were whitewashed over during the 17th century but uncovered from 1841 to 1852 and inexpertly restored. The **Cappella Peruzzi** ★★, on the right, is a late work and not in the best shape. The many references to antiquity in the styling and architecture of the frescoes reflect Giotto's trip to Rome and its ruins. His assistant Taddeo Gaddi did the altarpiece. Even more famous, if only as the setting for a scene in the film *A Room with a View,* is the **Cappella Bardi** ★★ immediately to the right of the high altar. The key panels here include the *Trial by Fire Before the Sultan of Egypt* on the right wall, full of telling subtlety in the expressions and poses of the figures. One of Giotto's most well-known works is the lower panel on the left wall, the *Death of St. Francis,* where the monks weep and wail with convincing pathos. Alas, big chunks of the scene are missing from when a tomb was stuck on top of it in the 18th century. Most people miss seeing *Francis Receiving the Stigmata,* which Giotto frescoed above the outside of the entrance arch to the chapel.

At the end of the left transept is another Cappella Bardi, this one housing a legendary ***Crucifix*** ★ by Donatello. According to Vasari, Donatello excitedly called his friend Filippo Brunelleschi up to his studio to see this *Crucifix* when he had finished carving it. The famed architect, whose tastes were aligned with the prevailing view of the time that refinement and grace were much more important than realism, criticized the work with the words, "Why Donatello, you've put a peasant on the cross!" Donatello sniffed, "If it were as easy to make something as it is to criticize, my Christ would really look to you like Christ. So you get some wood and try to make one yourself." Secretly, Brunelleschi

did just that, and one day he invited Donatello to come over to his studio for lunch. Donatello arrived bearing the food gathered up in his apron. Shocked when he beheld Brunelleschi's elegant *Crucifix,* he let the lunch drop to the floor, smashing the eggs, and after a few moments turned to Brunelleschi and humbly offered, "Your job is making Christs and mine is making peasants." Tastes change, and to modern eyes this "peasant" stands as the stronger work. If you want to see how Brunelleschi fared with his Christ, visit it at Santa Maria Novella.

Past a door as you head back down the left aisle is a 16th-century ***Deposition*** by Bronzino. A bit farther along, against a pier, is the roped-off floor tomb of Lorenzo Ghiberti, sculptor of the baptistery doors. Against the wall is an altarpiece of the *Incredulity of St. Thomas* by Giorgio Vasari. The last tomb on the right is that of **Galileo Galilei** (1564–1642), the preeminent Pisan scientist who figured out everything from the action of pendulums and the famous law of bodies falling at the same rate (regardless of weight) to discovering the moons of Jupiter and asserting that the earth revolved around the sun. This last one got him in trouble with the church, which tried him in the Inquisition and—when he wouldn't recant—excommunicated him. At the urging of friends frightened his obstinacy would get him executed as a heretic, Galileo eventually kneeled in front of an altar and "admitted" he'd been wrong. He lived out the rest of his days under house arrest near Florence and wasn't allowed a Christian burial until 1737. Giulio Foggini designed this tomb for him, complete with a relief of the solar system—the sun, you'll notice, is at the center. The pope finally got around to lifting the excommunication in 1992. Italians still bring him fresh flowers.

Piazza Santa Croce. ✆ **055-244-619.** Admission 4€. Mon–Sat 9:30am–5:30pm; Sun 1–5:30pm. Bus: B, 13, 23, or 71.

Museo dell'Opera di Santa Croce ★ Part of Santa Croce's convent has been set up as a museum, mainly to harbor artistic victims of the 1966 Arno flood, which buried the church under tons of mud and water. You enter through a door to the right of the church facade, which spills into an open-air courtyard planted with cypress and filled with birdsong.

At the end of the path is the **Cappella de' Pazzi ★**, one of Filippo Brunelleschi's architectural masterpieces (faithfully finished after his death in 1446). Giuliano da Maiano probably designed the porch that now precedes the chapel, set with glazed terra cottas by Luca della Robbia. The rectangular chapel is one of Brunelleschi's signature pieces and a defining example of (and model for) early Renaissance architecture. Light gray *pietra serena* is used to accent the architectural lines against smooth white plaster walls, and the only decorations are della Robbia roundels of the *Apostles* (1442–52). The chapel was barely finished by 1478, when the infamous Pazzi Conspiracy got the bulk of the family, who were funding this project, either killed or exiled.

From back in the first cloister you can enter the museum proper via the long hall of the **refectory.** On your right as you enter is the painting that became emblematic of all the artworks damaged during the 1966 flood, Cimabue's ***Crucifix*** ★, one of the masterpieces of the artist who began bridging the gap between Byzantine tradition and Renaissance innovation, not the least by teaching Giotto to paint.

Piazza Santa Croce 16. ✆ **055-244-619.** Admission included with Santa Croce; hours same. Bus: B, 13, 23, or 71.

Museo Horne Of the city's several small once-private collections, the one formed by Englishman Herbert Percy Horne and left to Florence in his will has perhaps the best

individual pieces, though the bulk of it consists of mediocre paintings by good artists. In a 15th-century *palazzo* designed by Cronaca (not Sangallo, as was once believed), the collections are left, unlabeled, as Horne arranged them; the reference numbers on the handout they give you correspond to the stickers on the wall, not the numbers on the frames. The best works are a *St. Stephen* by Giotto and Sienese Mannerist Domenico Beccafumi's weirdly colored tondo of the *Holy Family.*

Via dei Benci 6. ✆ **055-244-661.** Admission 5€. Mon–Sat 9am–1pm; in summer also Tues 8:30–11pm. Bus: B, 13, 23, or 71.

Casa Buonarroti Though Michelangelo Buonarroti never actually lived in this modest *palazzo,* he did own the property and left it to his nephew Lionardo. Lionardo named his own son after his famous uncle, and this younger Michelangelo became very devoted to the memory of his namesake, converting the house into a museum and hiring artists to fill the place with frescoes honoring the genius of his great uncle.

The good stuff is upstairs, starting with a display case regularly rotating pages from the museum's collection of original drawings. In the first room off the landing are Michelangelo's earliest sculptures: the *Madonna of the Steps,* carved before 1492 when he was a 15- or 16-year-old student in the Medici sculpture garden. A few months later, the child prodigy was already finished carving another marble, a confused tangle of bodies known as the *Battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths.* The sculptural ideals that were to mark his entire career are already evident here: a fascination with the male body to the point of ignoring the figures themselves in pursuit of muscular torsion and the use of rough "unfinished" marble to speak sculptural volumes.

Via Ghibellina 70. ✆ **055-241-752.** www.casabuonarroti.it. Admission 6.50€. Wed–Mon 9:30am–2pm. Bus: A, 14, or 23.

Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi The entrance to this church is an unassuming, unnumbered door on Borgo Pinti that opens onto a pretty cloister designed in 1492 by Giuliano da Sangallo, open to the sky and surrounded by large *pietra serena* columns topped with droopy-eared Ionic capitals. The interior of the 13th-century church was remodeled in the 17th and early 18th centuries and represents the high baroque at its restrained best. At the odd hours listed below, you can get into the chapter house to see the church's hidden main prize, a wall-filling fresco of the ***Crucifixion and Saints*** ★ (1493–96) by Perugino, grand master of the Umbrian school. Typical of Perugino's style, the background is drawn as delicately in blues and greens as the posed figures were fleshed out in full-bodied volumes of bright colors.

Entrance next to Borgo Pinti 58. ✆ **055-247-8420.** Free admission to church; Perugino Crucifixion 1€ "donation." Church daily 9am–noon; Mon–Fri 5–5:20pm and 6–6:50pm; Sat 5–6:20pm; Sun 5–6:50pm. Perugino Crucifixion, ring bell at no. 58 9–10am or enter through sacristy (knock at the last door on the right inside the church) at 5pm or 6:15pm daily. Bus: A, 6, 14, 23, 31, 32, or 71.

Sinagoga (Synagogue) and Jewish Museum The center of the 1,000-strong Jewish community in Florence is this imposing Moorish-Byzantine synagogue, built in the 1870s. In an effort to create a neo-Byzantine building, the architects ended up making it look rather like a church, complete with a dome, an apse, a pulpit, and a pipe organ. The intricate polychrome arabesque designs, though, lend it a distinctly Eastern flavor, and the rows of prayer benches facing each other, and the separate areas for women, hint at its Orthodox Jewish nature. Though the synagogue is technically Sephardic, the members of the Florentine Jewish community are Italian Jews, a Hebrew

culture that has adapted to its Italian surroundings since the 1st century B.C. when Jewish slaves were first brought to Rome. (The Florentine community dates from the 14th c.)

Via Farina 4. ✆ **055-234-6654.** www.firenzebraica.net. Admission 4€ adults, 3€ students. June–Aug Sun–Thurs 10am–6pm; Apr–May and Sept–Oct Sun–Thurs 10am–5pm; Nov–Mar Sun–Thurs 10am–3pm.; obligatory 45-min. guided tours every 25 min. Bus: C, 6, 31, or 32.

IN THE OLTRARNO

Santa Felícita The 2nd-century Greek sailors who lived in this neighborhood brought Christianity to Florence with them, and this little church was probably the second to be established in the city, the first edition of it rising in the late 4th century. The current version was built in the 1730s. The star works are in the first chapel on your right, paintings by Mannerist master Pontormo (1525–27). *The Deposition* and frescoed *Annunciation* are rife with his garish color palette of oranges, pinks, golds, lime greens, and sky blues. The four round paintings of the *Evangelists* surrounding the dome are also by Pontormo, except for the *St. Mark* (with the angel), which was probably painted by his pupil Bronzino.

Piazza Santa Felícita (2nd left off Via Guicciardini across the Ponte Vecchio). ✆ **055-213-018.** Free admission. Daily 8am–noon and 3:30–6:30pm. Bus: B or D.

Palazzo Pitti & Giardino Boboli (Pitti Palace & Boboli Gardens) ★★★ Though the original, much smaller Pitti Palace was a Renaissance affair probably designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, that *palazzo* is completely hidden by the enormous Mannerist mass we see today. Inside is Florence's most extensive set of museums, including the Galleria Palatina, a huge painting gallery second in town only to the Uffizi, with famous works by Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, Titian, and Rubens. When Luca Pitti died in 1472, Cosimo de' Medici's wife, Eleonora of Toledo, bought this property and unfinished palace to convert into the new Medici home—she hated the dark, cramped spaces of the family apartments in the Palazzo Vecchio. They hired Bartolomeo Ammannati to enlarge the *palazzo,* which he did starting in 1560 by creating the courtyard out back, extending the wings out either side, and incorporating a Michelangelo architectural invention, "kneeling windows," on the ground floor of the facade. (Rather than being visually centered between the line of the floor and that of the ceiling, kneeling windows' bases extend lower to be level with the ground or, in the case of upper stories, with whatever architectural element delineates the baseline of that story's first level.) Later architects finished the building off by the 19th century, probably to Ammannati's original plans, in the end producing a ground plan that make it one of the masterpieces of Florentine Mannerist architecture.

The ticket office for the painting gallery—the main, and for many visitors, most interesting of the Pitti museums—is off Ammannati's excellent **interior courtyard ★** of gold-tinged rusticated rock grafted onto the three classical orders.

GALLERIA PALATINA ★★★ If the Uffizi represents mainly the earlier masterpieces collected by the Medici, the Pitti Palace's painting gallery continues the story with the High Renaissance and later eras, a collection gathered by the Medici, and later the Grand Dukes of Lorraine. The works are still displayed in the old-world fashion, which hung paintings according to aesthetics—how well, say, the Raphael matched the drapes—rather than that boring academic chronological order. In the first long **Galleria delle Statue (Hall of Statues)** are Peter Paul Rubens's *Risen Christ,* Caravaggio's ***Tooth-puller*** **★**, and a 19th-century tabletop inlaid in *pietre dure*—an exquisite example of the famous Florentine mosaic craft. The next five rooms made up the Medici's main

apartments, frescoed by Pietro da Cortona in the 17th-century baroque style—they're home to the bulk of the paintings.

The **Sala di Venere (Venus Room)** is named after the neoclassical *Venus,* which Napoleon had Canova sculpt in 1810 to replace the *Medici Venus* the emperor had appropriated for his Paris digs. Four masterpieces by the famed early-16th-century Venetian painter Titian hang on the walls. Art historians still argue whether ***The Concert*** ★ was wholly painted by Titian in his early 20s or by Giorgione, in whose circle he moved. However, most now attribute at most the fop on the left to Giorgione and give the rest of the canvas to Titian. There are no such doubts about Titian's *Portrait of Julius II,* a copy of the physiologically penetrating work by Raphael in London's National Gallery (the version in the Uffizi is a copy Raphael himself made), or the *Portrait of a Lady (La Bella).* Titian painted the *Portrait of Pietro Aretino* for the writer/thinker himself, but Aretino didn't understand the innovative styling and accused Titian of not having completed the work. The painter, in a huff, gave it to Cosimo I as a gift. The room also contains Rubens's *Return from the Hayfields,* famous for its classically harmonious landscape.

The **Sala di Apollo (Apollo Room)** has another masterful early *Portrait of an Unknown Gentleman* by Titian as well as his sensual, luminously gold ***Mary Magdalene*** ★, the first in a number of takes on the subject the painter was to make throughout his career. There are several works by Andrea del Sarto, whose late *Holy Family* and especially *Deposition* display the daring chromatic experiments and highly refined spatial compositions that were to influence his students Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino as they went about mastering Mannerism.

The **Sala di Marte (Mars Room)** is dominated by Rubens, including the enormous ***Consequences of War*** ★★, which an aged Rubens painted for his friend Sustermans at a time when both were worried that their Dutch homeland was on the brink of battle. Rubens's ***The Four Philosophers*** ★ is a much more lighthearted work, in which he painted himself at the far left, next to his seated brother Filippo.

The star of the **Sala di Giove (Jupiter Room)** is Raphael's ***La Velata*** ★★, one of the crowning achievements of his short career and a summation of what he had learned about color, light, naturalism, and mood. It's probably a portrait of his Roman mistress called La Fornarina, a baker's daughter who sat for many of his Madonnas.

Raphael is the focus of the **Sala di Saturno (Saturn Room)** ★★, where the transparent colors of his *Madonnas* and probing portraits show the strong influence of both Leonardo da Vinci (the *Portrait of Maddalena Strozzi Doni* owes much to the *Mona Lisa*) and Raphael's old master Perugino, whose *Deposition* and a *Mary Magdalene* hang here as well. The **Sala dell'Iliade (Iliad Room)** has another Raphael portrait, this time of a ***Pregnant Woman*** ★, along with some more Titian masterpieces. Don't miss *Mary Magdalene* and ***Judith*** ★, two paintings by one of the only female artists of the late Renaissance era, Artemisia Gentileschi, who often turned to themes of strong biblical women.

From here, you enter a series of smaller rooms with smaller paintings. The **Sala dell'Educazione di Giove (Room of Jupiter's Education)** has two famous works: one a 1608 ***Sleeping Cupid*** ★★ that Caravaggio painted while living in exile from Rome (avoiding murder charges) on the island of Malta; and the other Cristofano Allori's ***Judith with the Head of Holofernes*** ★, a Freudian field day where the artist depicted himself in the severed head, his lover as Judith holding it, and her mother as the maid looking on.

APPARTAMENTI REALI ★ The other wing of the *piano nobile* is taken up with the Medici's private apartments, which were reopened in 1993 after being restored to their late-19th-century appearance when the kings of the House of Savoy, rulers of the Unified

Italy, used the suites as their Florentine home. The over-the-top sumptuous fabrics, decorative arts furnishings, stuccoes, and frescoes reflect the neo-baroque and Victorian tastes of the Savoy kings. Amid the general interior-decorator flamboyance are some thoroughly appropriate baroque canvases, plus some earlier works by Andrea del Sarto and Caravaggio's ***Portrait of a Knight of Malta*** ★. January through May, you can visit the apartments only by guided tour Tuesday and Saturday (and sometimes Thurs) hourly from 9 to 11am and 3 to 5pm (reserve ahead at ✆ **055-238-8614;** inquire about admission fees).

GALLERIA D'ARTE MODERNA ★ Modern art isn't what draws most people to the capital of the Renaissance, but the Pitti's collection includes some important works by the 19th-century Tuscan school of art known as the Macchiaioli, who painted a kind of Tuscan Impressionism, concerned with the *macchie* (marks of color on the canvas and the play of light on the eye). Most of the scenes are of the countryside or peasants working, along with the requisite lot of portraits. Some of the movement's greatest talents are here, including Silvestro Lega, Telemaco Signorini, and Giovanni Fattori, the genius of the group. Don't miss his two white oxen pulling a cart in ***The Tuscan Maremma*** ★.

GALLERIA DEL COSTUME & MUSEO DEGLI ARGENTI These aren't the most popular of the Pitti's museums, and the **Museo degli Argenti** has what seem like miles of the most extravagant and often hideous objets d'art and housewares the Medici and Lorraines could put their hands on. If the collections prove anything, it's that as the Medici became richer and more powerful, their taste declined proportionally. Just be thankful their **carriage collection** has been closed for years. The **Costume Gallery** is more interesting. The collections concentrate on the 18th to 20th centuries but also display outfits from back to the 16th century. The dress in which Eleonora of Toledo was buried, made famous by Bronzino's intricate depiction of its velvety embroidered silk and in-sewn pearls on his portrait of her in the Uffizi, is usually on display.

GIARDINO BOBOLI (BOBOLI GARDENS) ★★ The statue-filled park behind the Pitti Palace is one of the earliest and finest Renaissance gardens, laid out mostly between 1549 and 1656 with box hedges in geometric patterns, groves of ilex, dozens of statues, and rows of cypress. In 1766, it was opened to the Florentine public, who still come here with their families for Sunday-morning strolls. Just above the entrance through the courtyard of the Palazzo Pitti is an oblong **amphitheater** modeled on Roman circuses. Today, we see in the middle a **granite basin** from Rome's Baths of Caracalla and an **Egyptian obelisk** of Ramses II, but in 1589 this was the setting for the wedding reception of Ferdinando de' Medici's marriage to Christine of Lorraine. For the occasion, the Medici commissioned entertainment from Jacopo Peri and Ottavio Rinuccini, who decided to set a classical story entirely to music and called it *Dafne*—the world's first opera. (Later, they wrote a follow-up hit *Erudice,* performed here in 1600; it's the first opera whose score has survived.)

Around the park, don't miss the rococo **Kaffehaus,** with bar service in summer, and, near the top of the park, the **Giardino del Cavaliere,** the Boboli's prettiest hidden corner—a tiny walled garden of box hedges with private views over the wooded hills of Florence's outskirts. At the north end of the park, down around the end of the Pitti Palace, are some fake caverns filled with statuary, attempting to invoke some vaguely classical sacred grotto. The most famous, the **Grotta Grande,** was designed by Giorgio Vasari, Bartolomeo Ammannati, and Bernardo Buontalenti between 1557 and 1593, dripping with phony stalactites and set with replicas of Michelangelo's unfinished *Slave* statues. (The originals were once placed here before being moved to the Accademia.) All the grottoes are being

restored, but you can visit them by appointment by calling ✆ **055-218-741.** Near the exit to the park is a Florentine postcard fave, the ***Fontana di Bacco*** (**Bacchus Fountain;** 1560), a pudgy dwarf sitting atop a tortoise. It's actually a portrait of Pietro Barbino, Cosimo I's potbellied dwarf court jester.

Piazza Pitti. **Galleria Palatina:** ✆ **055-238-8614;** reserve tickets at ✆ 055-294-883 or www.firenzemusei.it. Admission (with Galleria d'Arte Moderna) 8.50€ adults, 18 and under free. Tues–Sun 8:15am–5:50pm; last admission 45 min. before close. **Galleria d'Arte Moderna:** ✆ **055-238-8601.** Admission (with Galleria Palatina) 8.50€ adults, under 18 free. Daily 8:15am–6:50pm. Closed 1st, 3rd, and 5th Mon and 2nd and 4th Sun of each month. **Museo degli Argenti:** ✆ **055-238-8709.** Admission (with Giardino di Boboli) 7€ adults, under 18 free. Nov–Feb daily 8:15am–4:30pm; Mar daily 8:15am–5:30pm; Apr–May and Oct daily 8:15am–6:30pm; June–Sept daily 8:15am–7:30pm. **Giardino Boboli:** ✆ **055-265-1816.** Admission (with Museo degli Argenti) 6€ adults, under 18 free. Nov–Feb daily 8:15am–4:30pm; Mar daily 8:15am–5:30pm; Apr–May and Oct daily 8:15am–6:30pm; June–Sept daily 8:15am–7:30pm. Cumulative tickets for the Galleria Palatina, Museo degli Argenti, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, and Giardino Boboli 12€ adults. Bus: D, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

Santo Spirito ★ One of Filippo Brunelleschi's masterpieces of architecture, this 15th-century church doesn't look like much from the outside (no true facade was ever built), but the **interior ★** is a marvelous High Renaissance space—an expansive landscape of proportion and mathematics worked out in classic Brunelleschi style, with coffered vaulting, tall columns, and the stacked perspective of arched arcading. Good late-Renaissance and baroque paintings are scattered throughout, but the best stuff lies up in the transepts and in the east end, surrounding the extravagant **baroque altar** with a ciborium inlaid in *pietre dure* around 1607.

The **right transept** begins with a *Crucifixion* by Francesco Curradi. Against the back wall of the transept, the first chapel holds an early-15th-century *Madonna del Soccorso* of uncertain authorship. Two chapels down is one of Filippino Lippi's best works, a *Madonna and Child with Saints and Donors.* In the **left transept,** the first chapel on the right side is a late-15th-century *Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints.* Next to this is the highly skilled *St. Monica and Augustinian Nuns,* an almost monochrome work of black and pale yellow, faintly disturbing in its eerie monotony and perfection of composition. It's now usually attributed to the enigmatic Andrea del Verrocchio, one-time master of Leonardo da Vinci.

The famed **piazza** outside is one of the focal points of the Oltrarno, shaded by trees and lined with trendy cafes that see some bar action in the evenings. It's not quite the pleasant hangout it once was, however—especially since the heroin set moved in a few years ago, making it a less than desirable place to be after midnight (though early evening is still fine). Stop by Bar Ricci at no. 9r, where more than 300 facade designs for faceless Santo Spirito line the walls, the product of a fun-loving contest the bar held in 1980.

Piazza Santo Spirito. ✆ **055-210-030.** Free admission. Daily 8am–noon; Thurs–Tues 4–6pm. Bus: D, 6, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

Santa Maria della Carmine ★★★ Following a 1771 fire that destroyed everything but the transept chapels and sacristy, this Carmelite church was almost entirely reconstructed and decorated in high baroque style. Ever since a long and expensive restoration of the famous frescoes of the **Cappella Brancacci** in the right transept, they've blocked off just that chapel and you have to enter through the cloisters (doorway to the right of the church facade) and pay admission. The frescoes were commissioned by an enemy of the Medici, Felice Brancacci, who in 1424 hired Masolino and his student Masaccio to decorate it with a cycle on the life of St. Peter. Masolino probably worked

out the cycle's scheme and painted a few scenes along with his pupil before taking off for 3 years to serve as court painter in Budapest, during which time Masaccio kept painting, quietly creating one of his masterpieces and some of the early Renaissance's greatest frescoes. Masaccio left for Rome in 1428, where he died at age 27. The cycle was completed between 1480 and 1485 by Filippino Lippi, who faithfully imitated Masaccio's technique.

Even before Lippi's intervention, though, the frescoes had been an instant hit. People flocked from all over the city to admire them, and almost every Italian artist of the day came to sketch and study Masaccio's mastery of perspective, bold light and colors, and unheard-of touches of realism. Even later masters like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo came to learn what they could from the young artist's genius. A 1980s restoration cleaned off the dirt and dark mold that had grown in the egg-based pigments used to "touch up" the frescoes in the 18th century and removed additions like the prudish ivy leaves trailing across Adam and Eve's privates.

Masolino was responsible for the *St. Peter Preaching,* the upper panel to the left of the altar, and the two top scenes on the right wall, which shows his fastidiously decorative style in a long panel of *St. Peter Healing the Cripple* and *Raising Tabitha,* and his *Adam and Eve.* Contrast this first man and woman, about to take the bait offered by the snake, with the ***Expulsion from the Garden*** ★★, across from it, painted by Masaccio. Masolino's figures are highly posed models, expressionless and oblivious to the temptation being offered. Masaccio's Adam and Eve, on the other hand, burst with intense emotion and forceful movement. The top scene on the left wall is also by Masaccio, and it showcases both his classical influences and another of his innovations, perfect linear perspective. On the end wall, Masaccio painted the lower scene to the left of the altar of *St. Peter Healing the Sick with His Shadow,* unique at the time for its realistic portrayal of street beggars and crippled bodies. The two scenes to the right of the altar are Masaccio's as well, with the *Baptism of the Neophytes* taking its place among his masterpieces. Most of the rest of the frescoes were painted by Filippino Lippi.

Piazza della Carmine. ✆ **055-238-2195.** Free admission to church; Brancacci chapel 4€, cumulative ticket with Palazzo Vecchio available. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 1–5pm. Bus: D, 6, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

Museo Zoologico La Specola Italy has very few zoos, but this is the largest zoological collection, with rooms full of insects, crustaceans, and stuffed birds and mammals—everything from ostriches and apes to a rhinoceros. The museum was founded here in 1775, and the collections are still displayed in the style of an old-fashioned natural sciences museum, with specimens crowded into beautiful old wood-and-glass cases. The last 10 rooms contain an important collection of human anatomical wax models crafted between 1775 and 1814 by Clemente Susini for medical students. The life-size figures are flayed, dissected, and disemboweled to varying degrees and are truly disgusting, but fascinating.

Via Romana 17. ✆ **055-228-8251.** www.msn.unifi.it. Admission 6€ adults, 3€ children 6–14 and seniors 65 and over, free for children 5 and under. Daily 9:30am–4:30pm. Bus: C, D, 11, 36, or 37.

San Felice This tiny Gothic church just south of the Pitti Palace sports a High Renaissance facade by Michelozzo (1457) and a *Crucifixion* over the high altar recently attributed to Giotto. Also peek at the remnants of Niccolò Gerini's early-15th-century *Pietà* fresco over the first altar on the right.

At no. 8 on the piazza is the entrance to the **Casa Guidi,** where from 1846 English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning lived with her husband, Robert, moving in just after their secret marriage. When the unification of Italy became official in Florence, Elizabeth

 recorded the momentous event in a famous poem, "Casa Guidi Windows": "I heard last night a little child go singing / 'Neath Casa Guidi windows, by the church, / O bella libertà, O bella!" Mrs. Browning died in this house on June 18, 1861.

Piazza di San Felice. No phone. Free admission. Bus: D, 11, 36, 37, or 68.

IN THE HILLS

Piazzale Michelangiolo ★ This panoramic piazza is a required stop for every tour bus. The balustraded terrace was laid out in 1885 to give a sweeping vista of the entire city, spread out in the valley below and backed by the green hills of Fiesole beyond. The monument to Michelangelo in the center of the piazza is made up of bronze replicas of *David* and his Medici chapel sculptures.

Viale Michelangelo. Bus: 12 or 13.

San Miniato al Monte ★★ High atop a hill, its gleaming white-and-green facade visible from the valley below, San Miniato is one of the few ancient churches of Florence to survive the centuries virtually intact. San Miniato was an eastern Christian who settled in Florence and was martyred during Emperor Decius's persecutions in A.D. 250. The legend goes that the decapitated saint picked up his head, walked across the river, climbed up the hillside, and didn't lie down to die until he reached this spot. He and other Christians were buried here, and a shrine was raised on the site as early as the 4th century.

The current building began to take shape in 1013, under the auspices of the powerful Arte di Calimala guild, whose symbol, a bronze eagle clutching a bale of wool, perches atop the **facade ★★**. The Romanesque facade is a particularly gorgeous bit of white Carrara and green Prato marble inlay. Above the central window is a 13th-century mosaic of *Christ Between the Madonna and St. Miniato* (a theme repeated in a slightly later mosaic filling the apse inside).

The **interior** has a few Renaissance additions, but they blend in well with the overall medieval aspect—an airy, stony space with a raised choir at one end, painted wooden trusses on the ceiling, and tombs interspersed with inlaid marble symbols of the zodiac paving the floor.

Below the choir is an 11th-century **crypt** with small frescoes by Taddeo Gaddi. Off to the right of the raised choir is the **sacristy,** which Spinello Aretino covered in 1387 with cartoonish yet elegant frescoes depicting the ***Life of St. Benedict*** ★. Off the left aisle of the nave is 15th-century **Cappella del Cardinale del Portogallo ★★**, a brilliant collaborative effort by Renaissance artists built to honor young Portuguese humanist Cardinal Jacopo di Lusitania, who was sent to study in Perugia but died an untimely death at 25 in Florence. Brunelleschi's student Antonio Manetti started the chapel in 1460 but soon died, and Antonio Rossellino finished the architecture and carving by 1466. Luca della Robbia provided the glazed terra-cotta dome, a cubic landscape set with tondi of the four *Virtues* surrounding the *Holy Spirit* to symbolize the young scholar's devotion to the church and to humanist philosophy. It stands as one of della Robbia's masterpieces of color and classical ideals. The unfinished **bell tower** seen from the outside was designed by Baccio d'Agnolo. In 1530 the combined troops of Charles V and Medici Pope Clement VII, who had recently reconciled with each other, lay siege to the newly declared Republic of Florence in an attempt to reinstate the Medici dukes. San Miniato al Monte was one of the prime fortifications, and an artilleryman named Lapo was stationed up in the tower with two small cannons—he was basically bait, stuck there to draw the fire of the enemy where it would do little harm. The man in charge of the defenses was Michelangelo, who,

Catching Calcio Fever

To Italians, *calcio* (soccer/football) is something akin to a second religion. You don't know what a "fan" is until you've attended a soccer match in a country like Italy, and an afternoon at the stadium can offer you as much insight (if not more) into Italian culture as a day in the Uffizi. Catch the local team, the Fiorentina, Sundays September through May at the Stadio Comunale, Via Manfredo Fanti 4 (✆ **055-262-5537** or 055-50-721; http://it.violachannel.tv). Tickets go on sale at the stadium box office 3 hours before each game.

the authorities figured, was so good at everything else, why not military fortifications? After throwing up dirt ramparts and cobbling together defensible walls out of oak timbers, Michelangelo helped poor Lapo out by devising an ingenious way to protect the tower: He hung mattresses down the sides to absorb the shock of the cannonballs fired at it and left the tower (and, more important, Lapo) still standing.

The siege was eventually successful, however, and the Florentine Republic fell, but while it lasted, Michelangelo spent his day up here and referred to the church of **San Salvatore al Monte** just below as "my pretty country maid." It's a simple 1400 church built by Cronaca, with a Giovanni della Robbia *Deposition* and a Neri di Bicci *Pietà* inside.

Via del Monte alle Croci/Viale Galileo Galilei (behind Piazzale Michelangiolo). ✆ **055-234-2731.** Free admission. Easter to early Oct daily 8am–7:30pm; winter Mon–Sat 8am–1pm and 2:30–6pm, Sun 8am–6pm. Bus: 12 or 13.

Museo Stibbert Half Scotsman, half Italian, Frederick Stibbert was nothing if not eccentric. A sometime artist, intrepid traveler, voracious accumulator, and even hero in Garibaldi's army, he inherited a vast fortune and this villa from his Italian mother. He connected the house to a nearby villa to create an eclectic museum housing his extraordinary collections, including baroque canvases, fine porcelain, Flemish tapestries, Tuscan crucifixes, and Etruscan artifacts. The museum was partially rearranged in past decades to try and make some sense out of 57 rooms stuffed with over 50,000 items. More recently, however, the city has come to appreciate this rare example of a private 19th-century museum and is busily setting it all back the way Stibbert originally intended.

Stibbert's greatest interest and most fascinating assemblage is of **armor** ★—Etruscan, Lombard, Asian, Roman, 17th-century Florentine, and 15th-century Turkish. The museum has the largest display of Japanese arms and armor in Europe and a new exhibit of porcelain. The high point of the house is a remarkable grand hall filled with an entire cavalcade of mannequins in 16th-century armor (mostly European, but with half a dozen samurai foot soldiers thrown in for good measure). Stibbert even managed to get some seriously historic Florentine armor, that in which Medici warrior Giovanni delle Bande Nere was buried.

Via Stibbert 26. ✆ **055-475-520.** www.museostibbert.it. Admission 6€ adults, 4€ children 4–12, free for children 3 and under. Mon–Wed 10am–2pm; Fri–Sun 10am–6pm. Bus: 4.

PARKS & GARDENS

Florence's best park is the Medici grand dukes' old backyard to the Pitti Palace, the **Giardino Boboli** (p. 171). Less scenic, but free and more jogger-friendly, is the **Parco della Cascine** along the Arno at the west end of the historic center. Originally a wild

delta of land where the Arno and Mugnone rivers met, the area later became a Medici hunting reserve and eventually a pasture for the grand duke's milk cows. Today, the Cascine is home to tennis courts, pools, a horse racetrack, and some odd late-18th- and early-19th-century features like an incongruous pyramid and funky neoclassical fountains. There's a flea market here every Tuesday morning. Though perfectly safe in the daylight, this park becomes a den of thieves and a hangout for heroin addicts after dark, as do most sections of the Arno's banks, so steer clear.

2 SHOPPING

THE SHOPPING SCENE

The cream of the crop of Florentine shopping lines both sides of the elegant **Via de' Tornabuoni,** with an extension along **Via della Vigna Nuova** and other surrounding streets. Here you'll find big names like Gucci, Armani, Ferragamo, and Mila Schön ensconced in old palaces or modern minimalist boutiques.

On the other end of the shopping spectrum is the haggling and general fun of the colorful and noisy **San Lorenzo street market.** Antiques gather dust by the truckload along **Via Maggio** and other Oltrarno streets. Another main corridor of stores somewhat less glitzy than those on the Via de' Tornabuoni begins at **Via Cerretani** and runs down **Via Roma** through the Piazza della Repubblica area; it keeps going down **Via Por Santa Maria,** across the **Ponte Vecchio** with its gold jewelry, and up **Via Guicciardini** on the other side. Store-laden side tributaries off this main stretch include **Via della Terme, Borgo Santissimi Apostoli,** and **Borgo San Jacopo.**

General Florentine **shopping hours** are daily from 9:30am to noon or 1pm and 3 or 3:30 to 7:30pm, though increasingly, many shops are staying open through that midafternoon *riposo* (especially the larger stores and those around tourist sights).

SHOPPING A TO Z

Here's **what to buy in Florence:** leather, high fashion, shoes, marbleized paper, hand-embroidered linens, lace, lingerie, Tuscan wines, gold jewelry, *pietre dure* (known also as Florentine mosaic, inlaid semiprecious stones), and Renaissance leftovers and other antiques.

Art & Antiques

The antiques business is clustered where the artisans have always lived and worked: the Oltrarno. Dealers' shops line Via Maggio, but the entire district is packed with venerable chunks of the past. On "this side" of the river, Borgo Ognissanti has the highest concentration of aging furniture and art collectibles.

The large showrooms of **Gallori-Turchi,** Via Maggio 14r (✆ **055-282-279**), specialize in furnishings, paintings, and weaponry (swords, lances, and pistols) from the 16th to 18th centuries. They also offer majolica and ceramic pieces and scads of excellent desks and writing tables of hand-carved and inlaid wood. Nearby you'll find **Guido Bartolozzi Antichità,** Via Maggio 18r (✆ **055-215-602**), under family management since 1887. This old-fashioned store concentrates on the 16th to 19th centuries. They might be offering a 17th-century Gobelin tapestry, an inlaid stone tabletop, or wood intarsia dressers from the 1700s. The quality is impeccable: The owner has been president of Italy's

antiques association and secretary of Florence's biannual antiques fair. There's another showroom at Via Maggio 11.

For the serious collector who wants his or her own piece of Florence's cultural heritage, the refined showroom at **Gianfranco Luzzetti,** Borgo San Jacopo 28A (✆ **055-211-232**), offers artwork and furniture from the 1400s to 1600s. They have a gorgeous collection of 16th-century Deruta ceramics and majolica, canvases by the likes of Vignale and Bilivert, and even a glazed terra-cotta altarpiece from the hand of Andrea della Robbia. Bring sacks of money.

Books

Even the smaller bookshops in Florence these days have at least a few shelves devoted to English-language books. **Feltrinelli International,** Via Cavour 12–20 (✆ **055-219-524;** www.lafeltrinelli.it), is one of the few of any size.

For English-only shops, hit **Paperback Exchange,** Via Fiesolana 31r (✆ **055-247-8154;** www.papex.it); it's not the most central, but it is the best for books in English, specializing in titles relating in some way to Florence and Italy. Much of their stock is used, and you can't beat the prices anywhere in Italy—dog-eared volumes and all Penguin books go for just a few euros. You can also trade in that novel you've already finished for another. **BM Bookshop,** Borgo Ognissanti 4r (✆ **055-294-575**), is a bit smaller but more central and carries only new volumes. They also have a slightly more well-rounded selection—from novels and art books to cookbooks and travel guides. A special section is devoted to Italian- and Tuscany-oriented volumes.

G. Vitello, Via dei Servi 94–96r (✆ **055-292-445**), sells coffee table–worthy books on art and all things Italian at up to half off the price you'd pay in a regular bookstore. Other branches are at Via Verdi 40r (✆ **055-234-6894**) and Via Pietrapiana 1r (✆ **055-241-063**). **Libreria Il Viaggio,** Borgo degli Albizi 41r (✆ **055-240-489**), is a cozy niche specializing in specialty travel guides, related literature, and maps, with a sizable selection in English.

Department Stores

Florence's central branch of the national chain **Coin,** Via Calzaiuoli 56r (✆ **055-280-531;** www.coin.it), is a stylish multifloored display case for upper-middle-class fashions—a chic Macy's. **La Rinascente,** Piazza della Repubblica 2 (✆ **055-219-113;** www.rinascente.it), is another of Italy's finer department stores. This six-floor store serves as an outlet for top designers (Versace, Zegna, Ferré, and so on). It also has areas set up to sell traditional Tuscan goods (terra cotta, alabaster, olive oils, and wrought iron).

Design, Housewares & Ceramics

Viceversa ★, Via dello Stella 3 (✆ **055-696-392;** www.viceversa.com), offers one of the largest selections of the latest Robert Graves–designed teakettle or any other whimsical Alessi kitchen product. The friendly staff will also point out the Pavoni espresso machines, Carl Merkins' totemic bar set, the Princess motorized gadgets, and shelf after shelf of the best of Italian kitchen and houseware designs.

Tiny **La Botteghina,** Via Guelfa 5r (✆ **055-287-367**), is about the best and most reasonably priced city outlet for true artisan ceramics I've found in all Italy. Daniele Viegi del Fiume deals in gorgeous hand-painted ceramics from the best traditional artisans working in nearby Montelupo, the famed Umbrian ceramics centers of Deruta and Gubbio, and Castelli, high in the Abruzzi mountains.

If you can't make it to the workshops in the hill towns themselves, La Botteghina is the next best thing. If you like the sample of pieces by **Giuseppe Rampini** you see here (or in his Chianti workshop; see chapter 7) and want to invest in a full table setting, visit Rampini's classy showroom at Borgo Ognissanti 32–34 (right at Piazza Ognissanti; ✆ **055-219-720;** www.rampiniceramics.com).

For big-name production-line china and tablewares, visit **Richard Ginori,** Via Giulio Cesare 21 (✆ **055-420-491;** www.richardginori1735.com). Colorful rims and whimsical designs fill this warehouselike salesroom of the firm that has sold Florence's finest china since 1735. Other houseware bigwigs are represented as well—Alessi coffeepots, Nason and Moretti Murano glass, and Christofle flatware.

Fashion & Clothing

Although Italian fashion reached its pinnacle in the 1950s and 1960s, the country has remained at the forefront of both high (Armani, Gucci, Pucci, Ferragamo, just to name a few) and popular (evidenced by the spectacular success of Benetton in the 1980s) fashion. Florence plays second fiddle to Milan in today's Italian fashion scene, but the city has its own cadre of well-respected names, plus, of course, outlet shops of all the hot designers. Also see "Leather, Accessories & Shoes," below.

FOR MEN & WOMEN **Cinzia,** Borgo San Jacopo 22r (✆ **055-298-078**), is a grab bag of hand-knit, usually bulky wool sweaters offered by an elderly couple who've been sending their creations around the world for more than 30 years. **Luisa Via Roma,** Via Roma 19–21r (✆ **055-217-826;** www.luisaviaroma.com), is a famed gathering place for all the top names in avant-garde fashion, including Jean Paul Gaultier, Dolce & Gabbana, and Issey Miyake. Men can hand over their wallets upstairs, and women can empty their purses on the ground floor. Service can be chilly.

The address may be a hint that this isn't your average fashion shop: **Emilio Pucci,** Palazzo Pucci, Via de' Pucci 6 (✆ **055-283-061;** www.pucci.com). Marchese Emilio Pucci's ancestors have been a powerful banking and mercantile family since the Renaissance, and in 1950 Marchese suddenly turned designer and shocked the fashion world with his flowing silks in outlandish colors. His women's silk clothing remained the rage into the early 1970s and had a renaissance of its own in the 1990s club scene. The design team is now headed by daughter Laudomia Pucci. If you don't wish to visit the showroom in the ancient family palace, drop by the shop at Via dei Tornabuoni 20–22r (✆ **055-265-8082**).

Then there's **Giorgio Armani,** Via Tornabuoni 48r (✆ **055-219-041;** www.giorgioarmani.com), Florence's outlet for Italy's top fashion guru. The service and store are surprisingly not stratospherically chilly. The **Emporio Armani** branch at Piazza Strozzi 16r (✆ **055-284-315;** www.emporioarmani.com) is the outlet for the more affordable designs. The merchandise is slightly inferior in workmanship and quality and greatly inferior in price. The rest of the Via dei' Tornabuoni is fleshed out with the mainstays of Italian style: notably **Ermenegildo Zegna** (✆ **055-264-254;** www.zegna.com) at 3r and **Salvatore Ferragamo** (✆ **055-292-123;** www.salvatoreferragamo.it) at 4r.

But the biggest name to walk out of Florence onto the international catwalk has to be **Gucci,** with the world flagship store at Via de' Tornabuoni 73r (✆ **055-264-011;** www.gucci.com). This is where this Florentine fashion empire was started by saddlemaker Guccio Gucci in 1904, now run by a gaggle of grandsons. You enter through a phalanx of their trademark purses and bags. Forget the cheesy knockoffs sold on street corners around the world; the stock here is elegant.

Nearby is another homegrown fashion label, **Enrico Coveri,** Via Tornabuoni 81r (✆ **055-211-263;** www.coveri.com). Enrico started off in the nearby textile town of Prato and has a similar penchant for bright colors as contemporary Emilio Pucci. The major difference is that Enrico Coveri's firm produces downscale fashion that fits the bods and wallets of normal folk—not just leggy models. Some of the men's suits are particularly fine, but the children's collection may be best left alone. There's another tiny branch at Via Tornabuoni 81r.

FOR WOMEN **Loretta Caponi,** Piazza Antinori 4r (✆ **055-213-668;** www.lorettacaponi.com), is world famous for her high-quality intimates and embroidered linens made the old-fashioned way. Under Belle Epoque ceilings are nightgowns of all types, bed and bath linens of the highest caliber, curtains, and feminine unmentionables. There's also a large section for the little ones in the back. Peek through the pebble-glassed doors to see the workshop.

STOCK HOUSES To get your high fashion at bargain-basement prices, head to one of the branches of **Guardaroba/Stock House Grandi Firme.** The store at Borgo degli Albizi 78r (✆ **055-234-0271**) carries mainly the past season's models, while the Via dei Castellani 26r branch (✆ **055-294-853**) carries spring/summer remaindered collections, and the Via Verdi 28r (✆ **055-247-8250**) and Via Nazionale 38r (✆ **055-215-482**) stores have outfits from the past winter. **Stock House Il Giglio,** Via Borgo Ognissanti 86 (no phone), also carries big-name labels at 50% to 60% off.

Gifts & Crafts

Florentine traditional "mosaics" are actually works of inlaid stone called *pietre dure.* The creations of young Ilio de Filippis and his army of apprentices at **Pitti Mosaici,** Piazza Pitti 16r and 23–24r (✆ **055-282-127;** www.pittimosaici.it), reflect traditional techniques and artistry. Ilio's father was a *pietre dure* artist, and his grandfather was a sculptor. (The family workshop was founded in 1900.) Besides the pieces on display down the road toward the Arno at Via Guicciardini 80r and across the river at Lungarno Vespucci 36r, the firm will custom make works to your specifications.

Professore Agostino Dessi presides over the traditional Venetian Carnevale–style mask-making at **Alice Atelier,** Via Faenza 72r (✆ **055-287-370**). All masks are made using papier-mâché, leather, and ceramics according to 17th-century techniques, hand-painted with tempera, touched up with gold and silver leaf, and polished with French lacquer.

Jewelry

If you've got the financial solvency of a small country, the place to buy your baubles is the Ponte Vecchio, famous for its gold- and silversmiths since the 16th century. The craftsmanship at the stalls is usually of a very high quality, and so they seem to compete instead over who can charge the highest prices. A more moderately priced boutique is Milan-based **Mario Buccellati,** Via della Vigna Nuova 71r (✆ **055-239-6579**), which since 1919 has been making thick, heavy, high-quality jewelry.

Florence is also a good place to root around for interesting costume jewelry. The audacious bijoux at **Angela Caputi,** Borgo San Jacopo 82r (✆ **055-212-972;** www.angelacaputi.com), aren't for the timid. Much of Angela's costume jewelry—from earrings and necklaces to brooches and now even a small clothing line—is at least oversize and bold and often pushes the flamboyance envelope.

Leather, Accessories & Shoes

It has always been a buyers' market for leather in Florence, but these days it's tough to sort out the jackets mass-produced for tourists from the high-quality artisan work. The most fun you'll have leather shopping, without a doubt, is at the outdoor stalls of the **San Lorenzo** market, even if the market is rife with mediocre goods (see "Markets," below). Never accept the first price they throw at you; sometimes you can bargain them down to almost half the original asking price. The shops below should guarantee you at least quality merchandise, but not the bargaining joys of the market. (See also "Fashion & Clothing," above.)

Anna, Piazza Pitti 38–41r (✆ **055-283-787**), is a fine store for handcrafted leather coats and clothing set in the remains of a 14th-century tower. You can also pick up discounted Versace purses and funky colorful Missoni sweaters. For the best of the leather, head down the stairs in the back, where you'll find fur-collared coats, suede jackets, and supple pigskin vests. They'll do alterations and even full tailoring in 24 hours. **John F.,** Lungarno Corsini 2 (✆ **055-239-8985;** www.johnf.it), is a purveyor of high-quality leather goods as well as Missoni sweaters, Krizia purses, and Bettina bags.

More fun, but no less expensive, is to watch the artisans at work at the **Scuola del Cuoio (Leather School) of Santa Croce.** You enter through Santa Croce church (right transept), Piazza Santa Croce 16, or on Via San Giuseppe 5r on Sunday morning (✆ **055-244-533** or 055-244-534; www.leatherschool.com). The very-fine-quality soft-leather merchandise isn't cheap.

In the imposing 13th-century Palazzo Spini-Feroni lording over Piazza Santa Trínita are the flagship store, museum, and home of **Ferragamo,** Via de' Tornabuoni 4–14r (✆ **055-292-123;** www.ferragamo.it). Salvatore Ferragamo was the man who shod Hollywood in its most glamorous age and raised footwear to an art form. View some of Ferragamo's funkier shoes in the second-floor museum (call ahead at ✆ **055-336-0456**) or slip on a pair yourself in the showrooms downstairs—if you think your wallet can take the shock.

If you prefer to buy right from the cobbler, head across the Arno to **Calzature Francesco da Firenze,** Via Santo Spirito 62r (✆ **055-212-428**), where handmade shoes run 120€ to 300€, and you can see him tap-tapping away on soles in the back room.

For more made-in-Florence accessorizing, head to **Madova Gloves,** Via Guicciardini 1r (✆ **055-239-6526;** www.madova.com). Gloves are all they make in this tiny shop, and they do them well. The grandchildren of the workshop's founders do a brisk business in brightly colored, supple leather gloves lined with cashmere and silk. Although they display a bit of everything at **Beltrami,** Via della Vigna Nuova 70r (✆ **055-287-779;** www.beltramifirenze.it), their forte is still beautiful well-built footwear, bags, briefcases, and luggage. Beltrami is based in Florence, so prices are as low here as you're going to find.

Markets

Haggling is accepted, and even expected, at most outdoor markets (but don't try it in stores). The queen of Florentine markets is the **San Lorenzo street market,** filling Piazza San Lorenzo, Via del Canto de' Nelli, Via dell'Ariento, and other side streets. It's a wildly chaotic and colorful array of hundreds of stands hawking T-shirts, silk scarves, marbleized paper, Gucci knockoffs, and lots and lots of leather. Many of the stalls are merely outlets for full-fledged stores hidden behind them. Haggling is tradition here, and though you'll find plenty of leather lemons, there are also great deals on truly high-quality leather and other goods—you just have to commit to half a day of picking

through it all and fending off sales pitches. March through October, most stalls are open daily about 8am to 8pm (it varies with how business is doing); November through February, the market is closed Sundays and Mondays, except for the 2 weeks or so around Christmas, when it remains open daily.

Somewhere in the center of this capitalist whirlwind hides the indoor **Mercato Centrale food market** (btw. Via dell'Ariento and Piazza del Mercato Centrale). Downstairs you'll find meat, cheese, and dry goods. There's one stall devoted to tripe aficionados, a second piled high with *baccalà* (dried salt cod), and a good cheap eatery called **Nerbone** (p. 122). The upstairs is devoted to fruits and veggies—a cornucopia of fat eggplants, long yellow peppers, stacks of artichokes, and peperoncini bunched into brilliant red bursts. In all, you couldn't ask for better picnic pickings. The market is open Monday through Saturday from 7am to 2pm and Saturday also 4 to 7:30pm.

As if two names weren't enough, the **Mercato Nuovo (Straw Market)** is also known as Mercato del Porcellino or Mercato del Cinghiale because of the bronze wild boar statue at one end, cast by Pietro Tacca in the 17th century after an antique original now in the Uffizi. Pet the well-polished *porcellino*'s snout to ensure a return trip to Florence. Most of the straw stalls disappeared by the 1960s. These days, the loggia hawks mainly poor-quality leather purses, mediocre bijoux, souvenirs, and other tourist trinkets. ***Note:*** Beware of pickpockets. In summer it's open daily around 9am to 8pm, but in winter it closes at 5pm and all day Sunday and Monday.

Music

Although restrictions are ever tightening, Italy still remains one of the best places in western Europe to get bootlegs. Quality, obviously, can vary drastically (most places will let you listen before you buy). Some of the more "reputable" pirate labels include Pluto, Great Dane, Bugsy, On Stage, Teddy Bear, Beech Marten, and Red Line. **Data Records,** Via dei Neri 15r (✆ **055-287-592**), is a hip place with a sassy funk attitude, knowledgeable staff, plenty of cutting-edge music (Italian and international), and scads of good bootlegs. They also run a more mainstream outlet, **Super Records** (✆ **055-234-9526;** www.superecords.com), in the pedestrian passage leading from Santa Maria Novella train station, with some of the best prices in town on first-run presses from major labels. Both are closed in August.

Paper & Journals

Giulio Giannini and Figlio, Piazza Pitti 36–37r (✆ **055-212-621;** www.giuliogiannini.it), offers an expensive but quality selection of leather-bound notebooks, fine stationery, and, the shop's specialty, objects garbed in decorative papers. This was one of the first stores to paste marbleized sheets onto desktop items, but its real trademark is objects sheathed in genuine 17th- to 19th-century manuscript and choir-book sheets. **Il Papiro,** Via dei Tavolini 13r (✆ **055-213-823;** www.madeinfirenze.it/papiro_e.htm), is now a modest Tuscan chain of jewel box–size shops specializing in marbled and patterned paper, as plain gift-wrap sheets or as a covering for everything from pens and journals to letter openers or full desk sets. There are several branches, including the head office at Via Cavour 55r (no phone) and shops at Piazza del Duomo 24r (no phone), Lungarno Acciaiuoli 42r (✆ **055-215-262**), and Piazza Rucellai 8r (✆ **055-211-652**).

Scriptorium, Via dei Servi 5–7r (✆ **055-211-804**), is my own journal supplier, a small shop that's one of the few fine stationery stores in Florence with very little marbleized paper. Come here for hand-sewn notebooks, journals, and photo albums made of

thick paper—all bound in soft leather covers. With classical music or Gregorian chant playing in the background, you can also shop for calligraphy and signet wax sealing tools. There's a new branch in the Oltrarno at Piazza de' Pitti 6 (✆ **055-238-2272;** www.scriptoriumfirenze.com).

Prints

Little **Bottega delle Stampe,** Borgo San Jacopo 56r (✆ **055-295-396**), carries prints, historic maps, and engravings from the 1500s through the Liberty-style and Art Deco prints of the 1930s. You can dig out some Dürers here, as well as original Piranesis and plates from Diderot's 1700 Encyclopedia. There are Florence views from the 16th to 19th centuries, plus a fine collection of 18th-century French engravings.

Toys

Since 1977, Florence's owner-operated branch of national chain **La Città del Sole,** Borgo Ognissanti 37r (✆ **055-219-345;** www.cittadelsole.it), has sold old-fashioned wooden brain teasers, construction kits, hand puppets, 3-D puzzles, science kits, and books. There's nary a video game in sight.

Wine & Liquors

The front room of the **Enoteca Alessi,** Via dell'Oche 27–31r (✆ **055-214-966;** www.enotecaalessi.it), sells boxed chocolates and other sweets, but in the back and in the large cellars, you can find everything from prime vintages to a simple-quality table wine. This large store, 2 blocks from the Duomo, also offers tastings. The **Enoteca Gambi Romano,** Borgo SS. Apostoli 21–23r (✆ **055-292-646**), is another central outlet for olive oil, vin santo, grappa, and (upstairs) lots of wine.

3 FLORENCE AFTER DARK

THE PERFORMING ARTS

Florence doesn't have the musical cachet or grand opera houses of Milan, Venice, or Rome, but there are two symphony orchestras and a fine music school in Fiesole. The city's public theaters are certainly respectable, and most major touring companies stop in town on their way through Italy. Get tickets to all cultural and musical events at the city's main clearinghouse, **Box Office,** Via Alamanni 39 (✆ **055-210-804;** www.boxol.it). In addition to tickets for year-round events of all genres, they handle the summertime Calcio in Costume folkloric festival and the Maggio Musicale.

Many concerts and recitals staged in major halls and private spaces across town are sponsored by the **Amici della Musica** (✆ **055-607-440** or 055-608-420; www.amicimusica.fi.it), so contact them to see what "hidden" concert might be on while you're in town. When Florentines really want a fine night out at the theater, they skip town and head to nearby Prato for the **Teatro Metastasio,** one of Italy's finest (see chapter 8 for more information).

CHURCH CONCERTS Many Florentine churches fill the autumn with organ, choir, and chamber orchestra concerts, mainly of classical music. The tiny **Santa Maria de' Ricci** (✆ **055-215-044**) on Via del Corso seems always to have music wafting out of it; slipping inside to occupy a pew is occasionally free, but sometimes there's a small charge. Around the corner at Santa Margherita 7, the **Chiesa di Dante** (✆ **055-289-367**) puts

on quality concerts of music for, and often played by, youths and children (tickets required). **The Florentine Chamber Orchestra,** Via E. Poggi 6 (✆ **055-783-374**), also runs an autumn season in the Orsanmichele; tickets are available at Box Office (see above) or at the door an hour before the 9pm shows.

CONCERT HALLS & OPERA One of Italy's busiest stages, Florence's contemporary **Teatro Comunale,** Corso Italia 12 (✆ **055-213-535** or 055-211-158; www.maggiofiorentino.com), offers everything from symphonies to ballet to plays, opera, and concerts. The large main theater seats 2,000, with orchestra rows topped by horseshoe-shaped first and second galleries. Its smaller Piccolo Teatro, seating 500, is rectangular, offering good sightlines from most any seat. The Teatro Comunale is the seat of the annual prestigious Maggio Musicale.

The **Teatro Verdi,** Via Ghibellina 99–101 (✆ **055-212-320** or 055-263-877; www.teatroverdifirenze.it), is Florence's opera and ballet house, with the nice ritual of staging Sunday-afternoon shows during the January-through-April season. **The Orchestra della Toscana** (✆ **055-280-670;** www.orchestradellatoscana.it) plays classical concerts here December through May. Like the Teatro Comunale, they do a bit of theater, but not of the caliber of La Pergola (see below).

The only requirement for membership, besides a 5€ fee, at the **Teatro del Sale,** Via dei Macci 111r (✆ **055-200-1492;** www.teatrodelsale.com), is that you must be "a pleasant person." If you qualify, you can enjoy nightly concerts, from jazz pianists to dance, preceded by a countless-course meal courtesy of Cibrèo chef and owner Fabio Picchi.

THEATER The biggest national and international touring companies stop in Florence's major playhouse, the **Teatro della Pergola,** Via della Pergola 12 (✆ **055-226-4335;** www.pergola.firenze.it). La Pergola is the city's chief purveyor of classical and classic plays from the Greeks and Shakespeare through Pirandello, Samuel Beckett, and Italian modern playwrights. Performances are professional and of high quality, if not always terribly innovative. (Of course, all are in Italian.)

THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENES

Italian clubs are rather cliquey—people usually go in groups to hang out and dance only with one another. There's plenty of flesh showing, but no meat market. Singles hoping to find random dance partners will often be disappointed.

LIVE MUSIC For live bands you can dance to in the center, head to **Dolce Zucchero,** Via dei Pandolfini 36–38r (✆ **055-247-7894**). "Sweet Sugar" is one of the better recent efforts to spice up Florence's nightlife and is popular with all ages. Under high ceilings are a long bar and a small dance floor with a stage for the nightly live musicians, usually a fairly talented cover act cranking out American and Italian dance songs for the packed crowd. At the **Chiodo Fisso** (Via Alighieri Dante 16r; ✆ **055-238-1290**), pull up a chair at the saloon-like bar and listen to the tunes of Andrea Ardia, a Capri-born singer/songwriter and guitarist who achieved some fame in the 1970s with his slightly raspy voice and Dire Straits–like riffs. It's open every day from 10pm to the last song, cocktails are 6€, the clientele is pensive student types, and the entertainment is all Ardia, all the time.

DANCE CLUBS & NIGHTCLUBS Florence's clubs have a "minimum consumption" charge of 10€ to 16€. **Universale,** Via Pisana 77r (✆ **055-221-122;** www.universalefirenze.it), is still the biggest thing in town for the under-22 set, housed in a converted 1940s cinema. From 8pm it's a popular restaurant in the balcony and a pizzeria on the

Cafe Culture

Florence no longer has a glitterati or intellectuals' cafe scene, and when it did—from the late-19th-century Italian *Risorgimento* era through the *dolce vita* of the 1950s—it was basically copying the idea from Paris. Although they're often overpriced tourist spots today, Florence's high-toned cafes are fine if you want designer pastries and hot cappuccino served to you while you sit on a piazza and people-watch.

At the refined, wood-paneled, stucco-ceilinged, and very expensive 1733 cafe **Gilli,** Piazza della Repubblica 36–39r/Via Roma 1r (✆ **055-213-896;** www.gilli.it), tourists gather to sit with the ghosts of Italy's *Risorgimento,* when the cafe became an important meeting place of the heroes and thinkers of the unification movement from the 1850s to the 1870s. The red-jacketed waiters at **Giubbe Rosse,** Piazza della Repubblica 13–14r (✆ **055-212-280;** www.giubberosse.it), must have been popular during the 19th-century glory days of Garibaldi's red-shirt soldiers. This was once a meeting place of the Florentine futurists, but aside from organized literary encounters on Wednesdays, today it too is mainly a tourists' cafe with ridiculous prices.

Once full of history and now mainly full of tourists, **Rivoire,** Piazza della Signoria/Via Vaccherecia 5r (✆ **055-214-412;** www.rivoire.it), has a chunk of prime real estate on Piazza della Signoria. Smartly dressed waiters serve smartly priced sandwiches to cappuccino-sipping patrons. **Giacosa,** Via de' Tornabuoni 83r (✆ **055-239-6226**), was a 19th-century hangout for literati and intellectual clutches as elegant as any of the others, but today it's really more of a high-class bar, with no outside tables. It makes a good shopping break, though, with panini, pastries, cold salads, and hot pasta dishes.

main floor. Around 11pm a live band takes the main-floor stage for an hour or so, after which a DJ comes on board to conduct the disco until 3am.

In the city center near Santa Croce, **Full-Up,** Via della Vigna Vecchia 25r (✆ **055-293-006;** www.fullupclub.com), is a long-enduring disco/piano bar that's one of the top (and more restrained) dance spaces in Florence for the postcollegiate set. There are plenty of theme evenings (revival, samba, punk), so call to find out what's on.

Not exactly cutting edge, but the most centrally located is **Yab,** Via Sassetti 5r (✆ **055-215-160;** www.yab.it), just behind the main post office on Piazza della Repubblica. This dance club for 20-somethings is a perennial favorite, a relic of a 1980s disco complete with velvet rope and surly bouncers.

A balanced combination of visitors and Italians—teenagers, students, and an under-30 crowd—fills the two-floor **Space,** Via Palazzuolo 37 (✆ **055-293-082**). On the first floor are a video karaoke bar, a pub, an American-style bar, and a conversation area. Head upstairs for the dance floor.

PUBS, BARS & WINE BARS

PUBS & BARS There's an unsurprising degree of similarity among Florence's half-dozen **Irish-style pubs'** dark, woody interiors usually with several back rooms and plenty

of smoke; and a crowd (stuffed to the gills on weekends) of students and 20- and 30-something Americans and Brits along with their Italian counterparts. The better ones are the Florence branch of the successful Italian chain **Fiddler's Elbow,** Piazza Santa Maria Novella 7r (✆ **055-215-056;** www.thefiddlerselbow.com); **The Old Stove,** Via Pellicceria 4r (✆ **055-284-640;** www.theoldstovepub.com), just down from Piazza della Repubblica; and, under the same management, **The Lion's Fountain,** Borgo Albizi 34r (✆ **055-234-4412;** www.thelionsfountain.com), on the tiny but lively Piazza San Pier Maggiore near Santa Croce. You'll find plenty of others around town—they pop up like mushrooms these days, but often disappear just as quickly.

Red Garter, Via de' Benci 33r (✆ **055-234-4904**), is a speak-easy attracting a 20s-to-30s crowd of Italians and some Americans, Australians, and English. There's a small bi-level theater room in the back with live music some nights, karaoke others, nearly always with a one-man band with a guitar playing American and Italian rock hits with some blues mixed in.

For a swanky cocktail with a panoramic view of the city, check out the rooftop terrace of the **Hotel Continentale,** Vicolo dell'Oro 6r (next to the entrance of the Ponte Vecchio; ✆ **055-272-62;** www.lungarnohotels.com). The music is New Age lounge with a tropical feel. Sunset is the best time to visit. The million-dollar view is amortized by the steep price of a martini.

WINE BARS The most traditional wine bars are called *fiaschetterie,* after the word for a flask of chianti. They tend to be hole-in-the-wall joints serving sandwiches or simple food along with glasses filled to the brim—usually with a house wine, though finer vintages are often available. The best are listed in chapter 5 under "Where to Dine," including **I Fratellini,** Via dei Cimatori 38r (✆ **055-239-6096**), and **La Mescita,** Via degli Alfani 70r (✆ **347-795-1604**). There's also a traditional wine shop in the Oltrarno called simply **La Fiaschetteria,** Via de' Serragli 47r (✆ **055-287-420**), which, like many, doubles as a small locals' wine bar.

A more high-toned spot is the **Cantinetta Antinori,** Piazza Antinori 3 (✆ **055-292-234;** www.cantinetta-antinori.com), also reviewed in chapter 5; see p. 123. It's housed in the palace headquarters of the Antinori wine empire at the top of Florence's main fashion drag, Via Tornabuoni. For a trendier wine bar focusing on handpicked labels offered with plates of cheese and other snacks, head to the Oltrarno and a real oenophile's hangout, **Il Volpe e L'Uva,** Piazza de' Rossi, behind Piazza Santa Felícita off Via Guicciardini (✆ **055-239-8132;** www.levolpieluva.com). The Avuris, who run the Hotel Torre Guelfa (p. 108), also own a great little wine bar right across from the Pitti Palace called **Pitti Gola e Cantina,** Piazza Pitti 16 (✆ **055-212-704**), with glasses of wine from 4€ to 9€. The restaurant also has light dishes, meat and cheese platters, and cakes for 7€ to 15€.

THE GAY & LESBIAN SCENE

The gay nightlife scene in Florence is gradually growing, and for lesbians it's pretty much just the Thursday through Saturday nights mixed gay-and-lesbian party at the **Flamingo Bar,** Via Pandolfini 26r (✆ **055-243-356**), whereas the rest of the week it's men only. The main bar is downstairs, where an international gay crowd shows up in everything from jeans and T-shirts to full leather. Upstairs are a lounge and a theater showing videos and the occasional show. September through June, the ground floor becomes a dance floor Friday and Saturday nights pumping out commercial pop and lots of disco. The bar is open Sunday through Thursday from 10pm to 4am (until 6am Fri–Sat).

One of Florence's dark rooms is the **Crisco Club,** Via Sant'Egidio 43r, east of the Duomo (✆ **055-248-0580;** www.criscoclub.it), for men only. Its 18th-century building contains a bar and a dance floor open Wednesday through Monday from 9pm to 3am (until 5am weekends). They also have male strippers and drag shows some weekends.

The only real gay dance floor of note is at the **Tabasco Bar,** Piazza Santa Cecilia 3r (✆ **055-213-000;** www.tabascogay.it). Italy's first gay disco attracts crowds of men (mostly in their 20s and 30s) from all over the country. The music is techno, disco, and retro rock, but entertainment offerings also include cabaret, art shows, and the occasional transvestite comedy. In summer, foreigners arrive in droves. It's open Sunday through Thursday from 10pm to 3 or 4am (until 6am Fri–Sat). Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday it's all disco; Wednesday is leather night.

Recently, the owners of the Tabasco Bar opened **Hard Bar 85** at Via Guelfa 85r (✆ **055-264-5461;** www.tabascogay.it/bar85), which every night lives by their motto "Free your fantasies." Directly next door is **Florence Baths** (Via Guelfa 93r; (✆ **055-216050**), which has saunas for men only. It's open daily from 2pm to 1am.

4 A SIDE TRIP TO FIESOLE: A PERFECT SUMMER ESCAPE

Although it's only a city bus ride away from Florence, Fiesole is very proud of its status as an independent municipality. In fact, this hilltop village high in the wash of green above Florence predates that city in the valley by centuries.

An Etruscan colony from Arezzo probably founded a town here in the 6th century B.C. on the site of a Bronze Age settlement. By the time Caesar set up a Roman retirement colony on the banks of the Arno below, Faesulae was the most important Etruscan center in the region. It butted heads with the upstart Fiorentina in the valley almost right from the start. Although it eventually became a Roman town, building a theater and adopting Roman customs, it always retained a bit of the Etruscan otherness that has kept it different from Florence throughout the ages. Following the requisite barbarian invasions, it became part of Florence's administrative district in the 9th century, yet continued to struggle for self-government. Medieval Florence put an end to it all in 1125 when it viciously attacked Fiesole and razed the entire city, save the cathedral and bishop's palace.

Becoming an irrelevant footnote to Florentine history has actually aided Fiesole in the end. Modern upper-middle-class Florentines have decided it's posh to buy an old villa on the hillside leading up to the town and maintain the villa's extensive gardens. This means that the oasis of cultivated greenery separating Florence from Fiesole has remained. Even with Florence so close by, Fiesole endures as a Tuscan small town to this day, entirely removed from the city at its feet and hence the perfect escape from summertime crowds. It stays cool all summer long, and while you sit at a cafe on Piazza Mino, sipping an iced cappuccino, it might seem as though the lines at the Uffizi and pedestrian traffic around the Duomo are very distant indeed.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Take bus no. 7 from Florence, which, after a scenic 25-minute ride through the greenery above Florence, lets you off in the town's main square, Piazza Mino.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** is at Piazza Mino 36–37, 50014 Fiesole (✆ **055-598-720;** fax 055-598-822; www.comune.fiesole.fi.it; Mon–Sat 8:30am–1:30pm).

If the office is closed, as it sometimes is from October to Easter, there's another small office (✆ **055-596-1256**) at Via Portigiani 3/5.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS Fiesole's biggest event is cultural: 2 months of music, ballet, film, and theater from late June to August called the **Estate Fiesolana** ★. A pleasant way to cool off from the Florentine heat, this festival allows you to sit back under the stars in the restored 1st-century-A.D. Roman theater and listen to Mozart and Verdi. You can get information and tickets in Florence at Box Office (see "Florence After Dark," earlier in this chapter) or at the Roman Theater itself after 4:30pm the day of the show. The **Festa di San Romolo** on July 6 brings processions and partying all day and fireworks in the evening. Call ✆ **055-59-611** for info. There's a market every Saturday in Piazza Mino.

EXPLORING FIESOLE

Fiesole's two museums and its Teatro Romano archaeological site keep the same hours and use a single admission ticket, costing 10€ adults, 6€ students age 7–25 and seniors over 65, and free for children 6 and under. They all open Easter through October daily from 10am to 7pm, in winter Wednesday through Monday from 10am to 5pm. For more information, call ✆ **055-59-118** or visit **www.fiesolemusei.it**.

Cattedrale The cathedral's 13th-century **bell tower,** with its comically oversize crenellations added in the 18th century, can be spotted for miles around. The cathedral is a pleasingly plain medieval church, built in 1028 using columns from nearby Roman buildings. There are coin-op lights to illuminate the nave and presbytery and another set for the half-submerged crypt, so bring pocket change. The **crypt** is supported by slender columns with primitive carvings on the capitals. The remains of St. Romolo, Fiesole's patron, reside under the altar, and the 15th-century lunette frescoes tell his story. There's a spot near the front of the crypt where you can see through the floor to a bit of Roman road and column bases, discovered during restoration in the early 1990s.

Piazzetta della Cattedrale/Piazza Mino. No phone. Free admission. Daily 9am–noon and 3–6pm. Bus: 7.

A Countryside Stroll in the City

Take the afternoon to **walk back down to Florence from Fiesole** ★. As you exit Piazza Mino, just as the main road makes its big downward curve to the left, look straight ahead where Via Vecchia Fiesolana, the narrow old road linking the two cities, forks right. It's steep, winding, and banked by high walls along many parts over which occasionally peek olive trees or more exotic plantings that are from the gardens of rich eccentrics from the 18th century. A few of these gardens are open to the public; free admission. Among them are the **Villa Medici** (✆ **800-414-240;** open Mon–Fri 8:15am–1pm—you can just drop by, but it's best to call ahead), the first major entrance on your left; and the **Villa Le Balze** (✆ **055-59-208;** call Mon–Fri 9am–5pm to reserve a visit) at no. 26, now owned by Georgetown University. Every so often along the road is a break in the cypress where a Florence panorama opens before you—a scene you share only with yourself and the occasional passing nun.

Teatro Romano (Roman Theater & Archaeological Museum) ★★ If you're in the Florence area during the summertime Estate Fiesolana music concerts, by all means try to get a ticket for a night of music under the stars in this 1st-century-B.C. **Roman Theater.** The *cavea,* of which the right half is original and the left rebuilt in the 19th century when this area was first excavated, seats 3,000. This archaeological area is romantically overgrown with grasses, amid which sit sections of column, broken friezes, and other remnants of architectural elements. A grove of olive trees grows in the center. Beyond the theater to the right, recognizable by its three rebuilt arches, are the remains of the 1st-century-A.D. **baths.** Near the arches is a little cement balcony over the far edge of the archaeological park. From it, you get a good look at the best stretch that remains of the 4th-century-B.C. **Etruscan city walls.** At the other end of the park from the baths are the floor and steps of a 1st-century-B.C. **Roman Temple** built on top of a 4th-century-B.C. Etruscan one. To the left are some oblong **Lombard tombs** from the 7th century A.D., when this was a Gothic necropolis.

Among the collections in the **Museum,** recently reopened after a prolonged rearrangement, are the bronze "she-wolf," a fragment of the back of what was probably a statue of a lion, lots of Etruscan urns and Roman architectural fragments, and Bronze Age remains found atop the hill now occupied by San Francesco. The Costantini collection of beautiful Greek vases includes significant works from Greek colonies in Apulia that span the 8th to 4th centuries B.C., as well as many red- and black-figure vases and amphorae, 7th-century-B.C. Corinthian vases, and some black Bucchero ware.

Via Portigiani 1. ✆ **055-59-118.** www.fiesolemusei.it. For admission and hours, see the section intro above.

Museo Bandini Newly restructured, this modest museum to the left of the Roman Theater entrance has a good small collection of 13th- to 15th-century Florentine paintings arranged chronologically. There are works by the likes of Bernardo Daddi, Taddeo and Agnolo Gaddi, Nardo di Cione, Bicci di Lorenzo, and Neri di Bicci, plus a pair of altar doors by the bottega of Filippino Lippi.

Via Duprè 1. ✆ **055-59-118.** www.fiesolemusei.it. For admission and hours, see the section intro above.

San Francesco The road up here is intimidating, rising steeply to a sharp bend, which you round only to discover you're not even near the end. You can take a break halfway up in the small ilex-planted **panoramic gardens ★★**, which offer a postcard view of Florence. This garden is called the Park of Remembrance, and there's an odd, dangerously sharp-looking modern memorial set up near the edge in honor of the three *carabinieri* who laid down their lives before a Nazi firing squad in exchange for the safety of Fiesole civilians.

At the top of the hill, the ancient focal point of the Etruscan and Roman cities, are the church and convent of **San Francesco.** The 14th-century church has been largely overhauled, but at the end of a small nave hung with baroque canvases is a fine *Crucifixion and Saints* altarpiece by Neri di Bicci. Off the cloisters is a quirky but interesting little archaeological/ethnographic museum.

Via San Francesco (off Piazza Mino). ✆ **055-59-175.** Free admission. Church daily 8am–noon and 3–6pm. Museum Mon–Sat 10am–noon and 3–6pm; Sun 9–11am and 3–6pm (until 7pm daily in summer). Bus: 7.

EN ROUTE FROM FLORENCE TO FIESOLE

San Domenico ★ Halfway between Fiesole and Florence's outskirts, this crossroads hamlet grew around two religious buildings: the **Badia** and the 15th-century **church and convent of San Domenico.** Soon after the convent opened, one Giovanni da Fiesole came knocking on the door wanting to put on the Dominican habit, take his vows, and

start painting altarpieces. He moved along with many other friars to San Marco in Florence a little later, and we now know him as Fra' Angelico. He did leave his old convent a few works, such as a beautiful *Crucifixion* (1430) and a detached *Madonna and Child* in the Chapter House. (Ring at no. 4, to the right of the church, between 9am and noon, the earlier the better. You may or may not get an answer. Like those of the church itself, the hours seem somewhat arbitrary.)

Inside the church are *pietra serena*–accented chapels. Verrocchio's student Lorenzo di Credi painted the *Baptism of Christ* in the second chapel on the right. In the first chapel on the left is a rich ***Madonna and Saints*** ★ by Fra' Angelico, recently restored to its fully ripe colors and modeling. (There's a light switch on the right.) Lorenzo di Credi filled in the background landscape in 1501.

Via San Domenico. No phone. http://sandomenicodifiesole.op.org. Free admission. Daily 8am–noon and 4–5pm. Bus: 7.

7

The Chianti, Siena & the Western Hill Towns

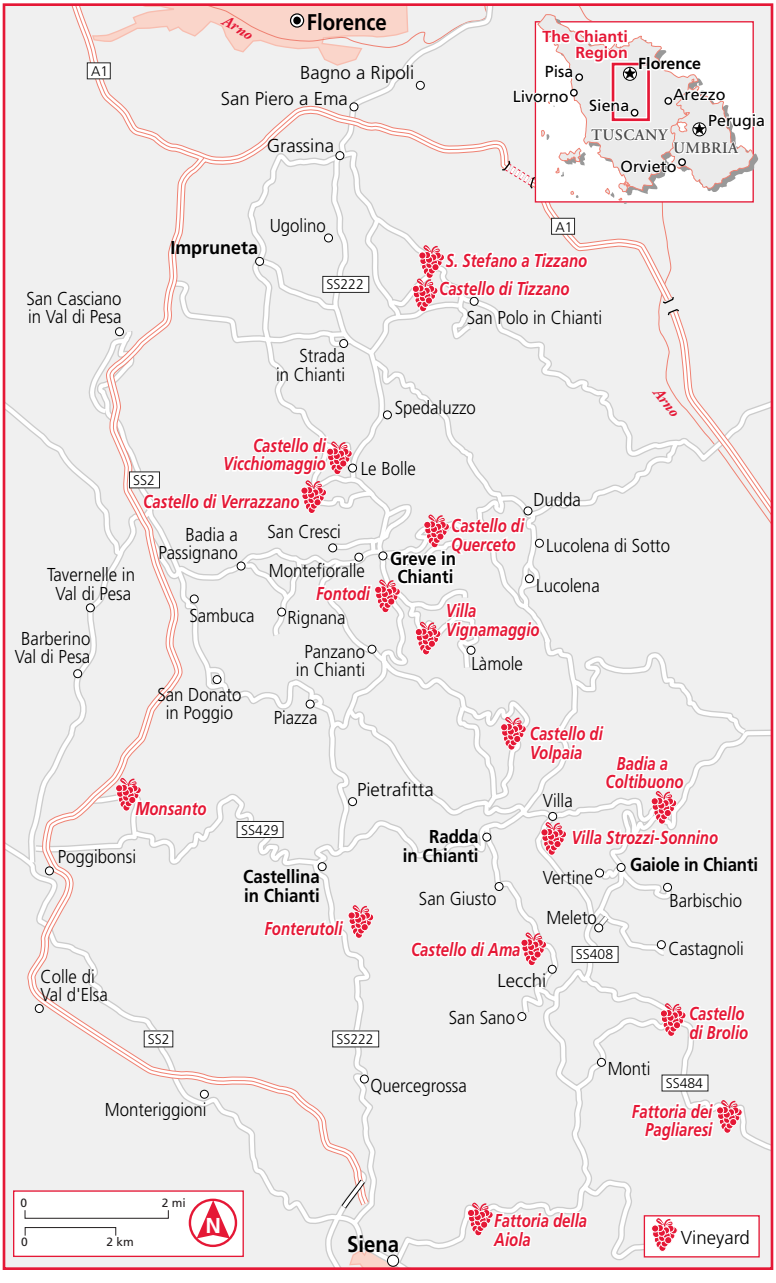
Siena, a great banking and textile rival of Florence in the Middle Ages, slumbered through the Renaissance. As a result, it has preserved dozens of Gothic palaces and churches, and its museums are filled with a distinctive and decorative style of painting. Between there and Florence is one of Tuscany's most picturesque regions: the castle-topped hills and Arcadian vineyards of the **Chianti,** Italy's most famous wine district.

Siena is also the center of hill-town territory, a landscape of small mountains and river-fed valleys watched over by stony medieval towns perched on the taller peaks. (Those towns south of Siena are covered in chapter 10.) West of the city, in some of the tallest mountains of central Tuscany, hide two of the more famous hill towns: **San Gimignano** still sprouts more than a dozen medieval towers, and **Volterra** is an ancient Etruscan center and modern workshop of alabaster artisans. Nearby, but seldom visited, **Massa Marittima** makes a great excursion off the beaten path into a city from the Dark Ages.

1 WINE TASTING IN THE CHIANTI

You can find many people's idea of earthly paradise in the 167 sq. km (64 sq. miles) of land between Florence and Siena, known as the Chianti. In fact, the British have such a history of buying up old farmhouses and settling here it's often referred to as Chiantishire. It isn't hard to see why they come—the tall, closely gathered hills are capped by ancient cities and medieval castles, and the stream-fed valleys are dotted with expanding market towns. All is often shrouded in a light mist that renders the blue-gray distance inscrutable and cloaks the hills in a mysterious rural magic. Many of the rolling slopes are planted with olive groves that shimmer dark green and dusty silver, but some 4,000 hectares (9,884 acres) are blanketed with marching vines. The grapes that grow from these gnarled, woody "question marks" form the primary capital in the region's bacchanalian economy.

This is the world's definitive wine region, in both history and spirit; these hills have been an oenological center for several thousand years. In fact, one local grape, the canaiolo nero—one of the varietals that traditionally goes into Chianti Classico—was known to the ancients as the "Etruscan grape." The name Chianti, probably derived from that of the local noble Etruscan family Clantes, has been used to describe the hills between Florence and Siena for centuries, but it wasn't until the mid–13th century that Florence created the **Lega del Chianti** to unite the region's three most important centers—Castellina, Radda, and Gaiole—which chose the black rooster as their symbol. By 1404, the red wine long produced here was being called chianti as well, and in 1716 a grand ducal decree defined the boundaries of the Chianti and laid down general rules for its wine production, making it the world's first officially designated wine-producing area.


Florence
Arno
A1
Bagno a Ripoli
San Piero a Ema
Grassina
Ugolino
Impruneta
SS222
San Casciano in Val di Pesa
Strada in Chianti
Spedaluzzo
Castello di Vicchiomaggio
Le Bolle
SS2
Castello di Verrazzano
Badia a Passignano
San Cresci
Montefioralle
Greve in Chianti
Tavernelle in Val di Pesa
Sambuca
Rignana
Fontodi
Barberino Val di Pesa
Panzano in Chianti
San Donato in Poggio
Piazza
Monsanto
SS429
Poggibonsi
Castellina in Chianti
Fonterutoli
Colle di Val d'Elsa
SS2
Monteriggioni
SS222
Quercegrossa
Siena
S. Stefano a Tizzano
Castello di Tizzano
San Polo in Chianti
Castello di Querceto
Dudda
Lucolena di Sotto
Lucolena
Villa Vignamaggio
Làmole
Castello di Volpaia
Badia a Coltibuono
Pietrafitta
Villa
Radda in Chianti
Villa Strozzi-Sonnino
Gaiole in Chianti
Vertine
Barbischio
San Giusto
Meleto
Castello di Ama
SS408
Castagnoli
Lecchi
San Sano
Castello di Brolio
Monti
SS484
Fattoria dei Pagliaresi
Fattoria della Aiola
0
2 mi
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2 km
N
Vineyard
The Chianti Region
Florence
Pisa
Livorno
Siena
Arezzo
Perugia
TUSCANY
UMBRIA
Orvieto
A1

In the 19th century, one vintner, the "Iron Baron" Ricasoli, experimented with varietals using the sangiovese grape as his base. Working off centuries of refinement, he eventually came up with the perfect balance of grapes that became the unofficial standard for all chianti.

Soon the title "chianti" was being used by hundreds of poor-quality, *vino*-producing hacks, both within the region and from far-flung areas, diminishing the international reputation of the wine. To fight against this, Greve and Castelnuovo Berardenga joined the original Lega cities and formed the **Consorzio del Gallo Nero** in 1924, reviving the old black rooster as their seal. The *consorzio* (still active—their members produce about 80% of the Chianti Classico that's bottled) pressed for laws regulating the quality of chianti wines and restricting the Chianti Classico name to their production zone. When Italy devised its DOC and DOCG laws in the 1960s, chianti was one of the first to be defined as DOCG, guaranteeing its quality as one of the top wines in the country. Today, of the 100 sq. km (39 sq. miles) of vineyards in the hills between Florence and Siena, some 6,972 hectares (17,228 acres) are devoted to the grapes that will eventually become Chianti Classico and carry the seal of the black rooster.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING AROUND

The only way to explore the Chianti effectively is **by car.** But know that many of the roads off the major SS222 (known as the Chiantigiana) are unpaved and sometimes heavily potholed. More importantly, wine tasting presents its own obstacles to driving, and so oenophiles might consider joining a wine tour. Local tourist offices, especially Siena, have a number of them from which to choose. One wine tour guide in particular is memorable: **Dario Castagno,** who wrote a well-received book called "Too Much Tuscan Sun," in response to Frances Mayes' best seller of a similar name. He now runs a company conducting the same tours he recounts in the book. Track him down at **www.dariocastagno.com**.

On the other hand, **biking** through the Chianti can be one of Tuscany's most rewarding and scenic strenuous workouts. See "Special Interest Trips," in chapter 3, for tour companies, or go on your own by renting a bike in Greve at **Ramuzzi Marco,** Viale Falsettacci 6 (✆ **055-853-037;** turn right at tourist office—it's down on the left); the cost is 20€ per day for a road bike or mountain bike, and 35€ a day for a mid-sized scooter. (There are discounts for multiple days.) The region's low mountains and stands of ancient forest are also excellent for **hiking.**

For exploring by any means, you'll need a good **map;** both the huge Edizioni Multigraphic (EMG) 1:50,000 map and the smaller free 1:70,000 sheet called "Il Chianti," put out by the Florentine tourist board, are excellent for back-road exploring. (***Drivers be warned:*** These maps do, on occasion, mark dry streambeds as "unpaved roads.") I'd have to give the edge to the free map for detailed accuracy, but reading it involves a lot more squinting than with the EMG sheet, which is widely available in bookshops and souvenir stores in the Chianti, Siena, and Florence.

You can visit the major towns by **bus,** but be prepared to stay awhile until the next ride comes along. **SITA** (✆ **055-214-721;** www.sitabus.it) from Florence services Strada (40 min. from Florence), Greve (65 min.), Panzano (75 min.), Radda or Castellina (95 min.), and Gaiole (2 hr.); it leaves at least hourly for stops up through Greve and Panzano and at least one to three times a day all the way through to Gaiole. Monday through Saturday, about eight different lines of **TRA-IN** buses (✆ **0577-204-111;** www.trainspa.it) from Siena hit Radda, Gaiole, and Castellina; and, you can get to Impruneta with a **CAP** bus (✆ **055-214-637**) from Florence.

VISITOR INFORMATION You can pick up some information on the Chianti at the **Florence tourist office** (see "Essentials," in chapter 5, for details) or the **Siena tourist office** (see "Siena: A Taste of the Tuscan Middle Ages," later in this chapter). The unofficial capital of the area is Greve in Chianti, and its **tourist office** (✆ **055-854-6287;** fax 055-854-4149), in a modern little shack on the right just as you arrive in Greve coming from the north, makes an effort to provide some Chianti-wide info. From Easter to October, it's open Monday through Friday from 10am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm, Saturday from 10am to 1pm. In winter, it might keep shorter hours. You can also try **www.chianti.it/turismo**, a site with links to many hotels and restaurants in the area. Most importantly, it has a good list of the hundreds of rural bed-and-breakfasts that dot the local landscape. (Go to the pull-down menu and select the town, then select *"agriturismi."*)

WINE FESTIVALS The second weekend in September, Greve in Chianti hosts the main annual **Rassegna del Chianti Classico,** a bacchanalian festival of food and dancing that showcases wine from all the region's producers. Call ✆ **055-853-295** for more information. **Radda** sponsors its own **wine festival** the last weekend in May, where buying the commemorative glass lets you sample 50 to 60 wines for free. There are also a free concert, snacks, and a communal grappa tasting.

ON THE ROAD IN THE FLORENTINE CHIANTI: EN ROUTE TO GREVE

Cross Florence's eastern Ponte San Niccolò and follow the signs from Piazza Ferrucci on the other side toward Grassina and the SS222 Chiantigiana. At **Ponte a Ema,** take a 1km (⅔-mile) detour to the left to the **Oratorio di Santa Caterina dell'Antella,** which has a wall fresco cycle of the *Life of St. Catherine* (1390) by Spinello Aretino. The apse frescoes are also of St. Catherine and were painted by the "Master of Barberino" around 1360.

Continuing on to **Grassina,** you'll find a side road leading 9km (5½ miles) to terracotta-producing **Impruneta** (tourist info: ✆ **055-231-3729**). The Collegiata church on the main piazza was restored to its Renaissance appearance after World War II bomb damage. On the right aisle are some good baroque works—*Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* by Cristofano Allori, *Birth of the Virgin* by Il Passignano, and a Giambologna bronze *Crucifix* in the chapel. The most revered bits are kept in a pair of chapels designed by Michelozzo and decorated with excellent glazed terra cottas by Luca della Robbia. Another byroad swings back onto the Chiantigiana at Santa Caterina. South on the SS222 takes you through **Strada in Chianti,** where a Donatello-school crucifix rests in the church of San Cristofano.

At the bend in the road called Le Bolle is a right turnoff for the **Castello di Vicchiomaggio** ★ (✆ **055-854-079;** fax 055-853-911; www.vicchiomaggio.it). This A.D. 957 Lombard fortress was modified in the 15th century and is today one of the best preserved of the typical Chianti castles. Its estate, under British ownership, produces well-regarded wines, including Ripa delle More, a sangiovese/cabernet sauvignon whose 1997 vintage won "three glasses" from Gambero Rosso (the Italian oenological equivalent of two Michelin stars). You can taste for free at the roadside Cantinetta San Jacopo wine shop (on the SS222 right at the turnoff for the castle) daily from 9am to 12:30pm and 2:30 to 6:30pm (as late as 7:30pm in summer). Sadly, visits to the cellars, parts of which date to the 10th century, are now limited only to groups, though it's worth the short drive up here just to look at the castle exterior and for the countryside views. They do, however, offer cooking courses (anywhere from 1–2 hr. to several days) and rent rooms (see "Where to Stay in the Florentine Chianti," below).

A bit farther along on the right is the turnoff for the **Castello di Verrazzano** ★★ (✆ **055-854-243** or 055-290-684; fax 055-854-241; www.verrazzano.com), the 12th-century seat of the Verrazzano family. Young Giovanni Verrazzano, born here in 1485, became restless with viticultural life and sailed out of the Chianti to discover New York. The estate has been making wine at least since 1170, and you can sample it Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm. Their 100% sangiovese is called Sasello, while the "Bottiglia Particolare" ("Particular Bottle") is 70% sangiovese and 30% cab. Tours of the gardens and cellars run Monday through Friday starting at 11am (lasting until 3pm); book ahead at least a day in advance, a week or more in advance in high season (May and June especially). Wine tastings range from 14€ for a tour and tasting of three wines to 48€ for a tour, wine tasting, and a four-course lunch (you'll get a few more wines, too) and 85€–110€ depending on group size to include transportation to and from Florence. On weekends, you can buy the wine at the small stand on SS222 (✆ **055-853-211**).

GREVE IN CHIANTI ★★

Throughout the Dark Ages and Middle Ages, the Chianti castles and their heavily fortified princelings ruled the patchwork of fiefdoms that made up this area. As alliances sweetened castle-to-castle relations in the later Middle Ages, trade began flowing. Valley crossroads became market towns, and one such town began growing along the tiny river Greve in the 13th or 14th century. As trade became increasingly important, so did that market town. Today, as Greve in Chianti, the oversize village is the center of the wine trade and the unofficial capital of Chianti.

The central **Piazza Matteotti** is a rough triangle surrounded by a mismatched patchwork arcade—each merchant had to build the stretch in front of his own shop. The statue in the center is of the intrepid explorer **Giovanni Verrazzano** (for whom the bridge in New York is named), and the narrow end of the piazza spills into the tiny **Piazzetta Santa Croce,** whose pretty little church houses an *Annunciation* by Bicci di Lorenzo and a 13th-century triptych.

Greve is the host of Chianti's annual September wine fair, and there are, naturally, dozens of wine shops in town. Two of the better ones are the **Bottega del Chianti Classico,** Via Cesare Battisti 2–4 (✆ **055-853-631**), and the **Enoteca del Chianti Classico,** Piazzetta Santa Croce 8 (✆ **055-853-297**). At Piazza Matteotti 69–71 is one of Italy's most famous butchers, **Macelleria Falorni** (✆ **055-854-363;** www.falorni.it), established in 1700 and still containing a cornucopia of hanging prosciutti and hundreds of other cured meats, along with a decent wine selection. For **visitor information,** see the beginning of this chapter.

NEAR GREVE

One kilometer (⅔ mile) east of (and almost as high above) Greve perches the solid stone 14th-century medieval hamlet of **(Castello di) Montefioralle** ★, where the circular main street and enticing alleyways have only a few electric cables to remind you you're still in the 21st century. Don't miss the prettily isolated 10th-century Pieve di San Cresci, located outside the walls.

The road beyond Montefioralle continues over several miles of winding, often potholed dirt roads to the **Badia a Passignano** ★ (✆ **055-807-1622**), dramatically situated amid a cypress grove atop its vineyards and olive groves. The monastery was established in 1049 by Benedictine St. Giovanni Gualberto, who founded the Vallombrosan order. Gualberto died here in 1073 and is buried in what was originally the small Romanesque church of San Michele. The church is the meeting spot for tours of the rest of the monastery that leave

Cheap Sleep!

The **Bar Lucarelli** (✆ **0577-733-538;** www.lucarelli.info) in the town of the same name midway between Panzano and Radda, offers clean, simple singles for 40€ per night and doubles for 60€. It's no frills, but a neat throw-back to the days when weary travelers spent the night at a room above the tavern.

Sundays around 3pm. The tour's highlight is the Ghirlandaio brothers' (Davide and Domenico) fresco of the *Last Supper* (1476) in the refectory, though it's hard to ignore the attraction of the kitchen with its massive fireplace and dozens upon dozens of Bundt cake pans nailed to the walls. The Antinori family now runs the small burg and has created a very refined ***osteria*** (✆ **055-807-1278**) out of the monks' old wine cellars.

South of Greve, the SS222 takes you past the left turn for **Villa Vignamaggio** ★★ (✆ **055-854-661;** fax 055-854-4468; www.vignamaggio.com), a russet-orange villa surrounded by cypress and elegant gardens that might seem suspiciously similar to Signor Leonato's home in the 1993 movie *Much Ado About Nothing*. Kenneth Branagh's choice of movie sets wasn't the first time this 14th- or 15th-century villa garnered fame: Lisa Gherardini, who grew up to pose for Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa,* was born here in 1479. The estate's wine was famous in the past and in 1404 became the first red wine of these hills to be referred to as "chianti" in written record. Long derelict in reputation, Vignamaggio wines have been stunningly revived by the new owners, who have made it one of the top vineyards in the region. Book ahead at least 1 week in advance and you can tour the cellar and ornate gardens Tuesdays and Thursdays and sample five wines with simple snacks for 35€. They also rent rooms (see "Where to Stay in the Florentine Chianti," below).

The Chiantigiana next cuts through the town of **Panzano in Chianti** ★. The town is known for its embroidery and for another famed butcher, **Antica Macelleria Cecchini,** Via XX Luglio 11 (✆ **055-852-020**), where Dario Cecchini loves to entertain visitors with classical music and tastes of his products, while he recites the entirety of Dante's "Inferno" from memory. (Something of a local character, Dario has been featured on more than one TV program in Italy; he held a large, well-publicized mock funeral for the *bistecca fiorentina* on the day it was temporarily outlawed in 2001 during Europe's mad cow disease outbreaks.)

Just south of town is the turnoff for the Romanesque **Pieve di San Leolino.** Beyond the 16th-century portico, this simple church conserves several 14th- and 15th-century Sienese altarpieces, including on the left aisle a *Madonna with Sts. Peter and Paul* (1260–80), attributed to Meliore di Jacopo, and a pretty little brick-columned courtyard off the right aisle. The SS222 continues south toward Castellina in Chianti (see "On the Road in the Sienese Chianti: En Route to Radda in Chianti," below).

WHERE TO STAY IN THE FLORENTINE CHIANTI

Besides the choices below, the **Castello di Vicchiomaggio** wine estate (✆ **055-854-079;** fax 055-853-911; www.vicchiomaggio.it), just north of Greve, offers seven basic self-catering apartments in a National Monument Renaissance castle. Each sleeps two to six and has a kitchenette, TV, hair dryer, iron, and safe. Most have a countryside view, and while there are no phones, there is a pool on a panoramic terrace. Prices start at 100€ per night for two people. During high season, they often require a 1-week minimum stay.

March through November, **Castello di Verrazzano** (✆ **055-853-211;** fax 055-854-241; www.verrazzano.com) also rents seven double rooms in their *agriturismo,* breakfast included, at 77€ for one person, 103€ for two people, and 129€ for three people. Two apartments with kitchenette are available; one, for two people, is 103€, while the apartment for four people is 142€. The apartments require a stay of at least 3 nights. All units have TV and access to the gardens.

One of the largest vintners, **Rocca delle Macìe,** offers gorgeous one- and two-bedroom guest villas at **Riserva di Fizzano** (✆ **055-777-371;** www.riservadifizzano.com). A two-bedroom apartment rents for 100€ to 180€ per night, while the three-bedroom is 150€ to 250€. The estate also houses the Culinary Institute of Tuscany, where chefs from the Olive Garden restaurants train, and the fruits of that same kitchen are served nightly at the restaurant. Dinner is 30€ to 50€, wine excluded.

Hotel Giovanni da Verrazzano The Verrazzano hotel/restaurant sits across from its namesake's statue on Greve's triangular central piazza. The rooms are on the smallish side, the furnishings functional but nice, with painted wrought-iron bed frames with firm mattresses, dark wood furniture, terra-cotta floors, spotless bathrooms, and a handful of wood-beamed ceilings. Those on the front overlook the mismatched arcades of the piazza, while the back rooms have tiny terraces with late-morning sun, potted plants, and a view over lichen-spotted roof tiles to the Chianti hills. The four-sleeper in the attic is perfect for families, and the restaurant serves hearty portions of highly recommendable Tuscan fare in a laid-back trattoria atmosphere, with alfresco summer dining on a terrace atop the arcades.

Piazza G. Matteotti 28, 50022 Greve in Chianti (FI). ✆ **055-853-189.** Fax 055-853-648. www.ristorantevverrazzano.it. 10 units, 8 with private bathroom (shower only). 90€ double without bathroom; 105€ double with bathroom; 133€ triple; 158€ quad. Half and full pension available. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Jan 15–Feb 15. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; pool; room service. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Villa Rosa di Boscorotondo ★★ This villa offers wonderful countryside seclusion at perfectly modest prices—a rarity in the Chianti. Giancarlo and Sabina Avuri and their son Neri, who own Florence's Hotel Torre Guelfa, opened this huge pink villa as a roadside inn in 1998, retaining the original features and roominess while modernizing with an elegance that lends it an antique rustic air. The curtained beds on wrought-iron frames rest under gorgeous beamed ceilings, and rooms along the front open onto two huge terraces with views of the small valley in which the villa nestles. There are a series of small drawing rooms, a pool with a view, and a path that leads through the vineyards all the way to San Leolino church outside Panzano. Famed butcher Dario Cecchini provides the meat for fixed-price dinners (25€ not including wine) on the terra-cotta terrace in summer.

Via San Leolino 59 (on the SS222 btw. Panzano and Radda), 50022 Loc. Panzano in Chianti (FI). ✆ **055-852-577.** Fax 055-856-0835. www.resortvillarosa.it. 15 units. 80€–140€ double; 100€–150€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Closed mid-Nov to Apr. **Amenities:** Small restaurant; babysitting; concierge; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C in some rooms, TV, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

Villa Vignamaggio ★★ You can't actually stay in the room where Mona Lisa grew up, but you can certainly make do with the suites here, each with a tiny kitchenette and complimentary bottle of the estate's award-winning chianti. This is one of the most comfortable *agriturismi* on the market, offering hotel-style amenities such as daily maid service. The heavy wood-beam ceilings and the comfortable rustic furnishings mesh well with the contemporary designer lights, spanking-new bathrooms, and cast-iron bed frames; four suites even have Jacuzzi tubs and air-conditioning. You can stay in one of

several suites in the villa, rent the small cottage next door, or shack out in a suite in one of the old stone peasant houses dotting the property on either side of the road.

Villa Vignamaggio (5km/3 miles southeast of Greve), 50022 Greve in Chianti (FI). ✆ **055-854-661.** Fax 055-854-4468. www.vignamaggio.com. 4 units, 16 apts. 150€ double; 210€ triple; 250€–450€ apt. Breakfast included. Minimum 2-night stay; 10% discount for stays of a week or longer. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Turn off the SS222 just south of Greve onto the Lamole road, then follow the signs. **Amenities:** Restaurant (only twice a week; days vary); free bikes; children's playground; small exercise room w/ Jacuzzi shower; 2 outdoor pools (1 heated); room service (breakfast); smoke-free rooms; outdoor tennis court (lit for night play). *In room:* A/C (for now, not in villa rooms), TV, fax on request, hair dryer, kitchenette in apts, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE IN THE FLORENTINE CHIANTI

Beside the restaurants below, don't miss the hearty meals at **Hotel Giovanni da Verrazzano** (see above). Also in Greve, the **Enoteca Bar Gallo Nero,** Via C. Battisti 9 (✆ **055-853-734**), is a good pizza and pasta place (order the *affettati misti* appetizer) popular with locals and families—and cheaper than most Chianti spots. It's open Friday through Wednesday from noon to 10pm (closed Jan 6–31).

Bottega del Moro ★ TUSCAN Modern art and a view over the tiny Greve River are the backdrop at this pleasant trattoria in the center of Greve. After *bruschetta al pomodoro,* dig into the light *maltagliati del Moro* (wide noodles with slivers of porcini and prosciutto in butter-and-sage sauce) or the richer *crespelle alla fiorentina* (pasta crepes stuffed with ricotta and spinach and served in a cheesy béchamel garnished with tomato purée). For an encore, try *coniglio al forno* (tender, meaty rabbit baked with spices and black olives). The local specialty is *zampone con puree* (stewed pigs' feet). Whatever you order, see if they're offering *pecorino con pere* as a *contorno* (side dish)—the creamy, firm, fresh sheep's cheese pairs excellently with the soft, sweet slices of ripe pear.

Piazza Trieste 14r (a tiny park on the east side of the main road, near the south end of Greve). ✆ **055-853-753.** www.labottegadelmoro.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–8€; secondi 11€–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:15–2:15pm and 7:15–9:15pm. Closed 1st week of May and Nov.

La Cantinetta di Rignana ★★ TUSCAN From Greve, follow the signs to Montefioralle, then stay on the steep, curvy road toward Badia a Passignano until the signposted turnoff. A medieval ramble of stone houses at the end of a long dirt road hides La Cantinetta, one of the Chianti's most genuine countryside *trattorie.* The outdoor tables take in a sweeping view, while inside, a congregation of reproduction Madonna and Child icons on one wall stare down. The staff is given to warbling snatches of folk songs and opera as they prepare handmade pasta (ravioli, gnocchi, or tagliolini) with your pick of rich sauces—the thick, pasty *noci* (nut) sauce is excellent. Be sure to start with the artichokes from their garden, soaked all day outside and then served roasted with olive oil. Grilled meats top the main courses (try the pheasant if it's in season), and the *tagliata* with sea salt and Balsamic is excellent if you really like vinegar. The white-chocolate mousse is legendary. If the beautifully isolated setting appeals to you, the attached farm also offers seven country-style rooms from April to early November for 95€ for a double, including breakfast (minimum 3 nights; book at ✆ **055-852-065;** www.rignana.it).

Loc. Rignana, Greve in Chianti. ✆ **055-852-601.** www.lacantinettadirignana.it. Reservations strongly recommended. Primi 8€–10€; secondi 10€–18€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 12:30–2:15pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Closed Nov 30–Dec 22.

La Cantinetta di Spedaluzzo ★★ TUSCAN Atop a rise in the Chiantigiana, this countryside trattoria offers friendly service and excellent Tuscan dishes. The *crostini caldi*

al fornello are do-it-yourself affairs—spread the pâté of your choice onto slabs of toasted peasant bread. The *ribollita* is especially tasty, with some meat for flavor, and comes with an enormous urn of olive oil to ladle over it. *Pipe al sugo ricco* are large maccheroni in a duly rich sauce of pork, mutton, beef, and strips of tomato. The stars of the secondi are the *involtini ai porcini* (veal rolls cooked in a sauce of concentrated porcini mushrooms), the *salsicce al tartufo* (a pair of salty sausages with white truffles chopped into the mix), and the huge *bistecca alla fiorentina.* Don't leave without ordering their homemade tiramisù for dessert, one of the best I've ever tasted. They've added a glassed-in veranda with a fireplace for three-seasons dining with a view.

Via Mugnana 93, Loc. Spedaluzzo (halfway btw. Strada and Greve on SS222). ✆ **055-857-2000.** Reservations required. Primi 8€–12€; secondi 7€–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Closed for 3 weeks in late Feb/early Mar.

Oltre Il Giardino ★ TUSCAN Here you can dine on the terrace in warm weather or ensconce yourself in the intimate second-floor dining room, lit by table candles and a fireplace, with great Chianti-side views (so long as you don't look straight down from the window, where Panzano's mini-urban-sprawl festers). The daily handwritten menu includes primi like *tagliatelle al ragù di anatra* (they don't skimp on the duck in the ragù!) and *maltagliati ai carciofi* (sheets of fresh-cut pasta with artichoke hearts, tomatoes, celery, and carrots). The meat that goes into the excellent *stracotto al chianti* (beef strewed in chianti wine and served with sautéed spinach) and *maiale al senape* (suckling pig with mustard and pearl onions) comes from neighbor and famed "poet butcher" Dario Cecchini.

Piazza G. Bucciarelli 42 (a few steps toward the Old Town from the central traffic triangle), Panzano in Chianti. ✆ **055-852-828.** Reservations highly recommended. Primi 8€; secondi 12€–13€; fixed-price menu without wine 35€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–3pm and 7–10pm. Closed Dec 8–Feb.

Solociccia ★★ INVENTIVE TUSCAN This is Dario Cecchini's baby, a marvel of glass and contemporary art and architecture that opened in 2007 right across from his famous butcher shop. As the name ("only flesh") suggests, this is not a place for vegetarians. Cecchini brings his own meat and his own diabolical sense of humor to the menu: Look for *carne in galera,* "meat in jail," a roasted pork marinated in spices, and *ramarino in culo,* "rosemary up the you-know-what," which are little peach-shaped balls of tartare impaled with a sprig of rosemary. The restaurant's four rooms each have a large table that seats 10 to 14 people, which means small parties will share. The menu is fixed and it's BYOB (or a quaffable house wine will be provided).

Via Chiantigiana 5, Panzano in Chianti. ✆ **055-852-727.** www.solociccia.it. Reservations highly recommended. Fixed-price menu 30€. AE, DC, MC, V. Seatings Thurs, Fri, and Sat at 7 and 9pm, Sun at 1pm.

ON THE ROAD IN THE SIENESE CHIANTI: EN ROUTE TO RADDA IN CHIANTI

An Etruscan center later fortified by the Florentines as an outpost against rival Siena, **Castellina in Chianti** ★ is one of the more medieval-feeling hill towns of the region and a triumvirate member of the old Lega del Chianti. The closest thing to a tourist office is the **Colline Verdi travel agency,** Via della Rocca 12 (✆/fax **0577-740-620**). Castellina's medieval walls survive almost intact, and the central piazza is dominated by the imposing crenellated **Rocca** fortress. The nearby **Via delle Volte** is an evocative tunnel street with open windows facing out to the valley below—it's a soldiers' walk from the town's days as a Florentine bastion. You can taste a few drops of *vino* at **La Castellina**'s enoteca and shipping point in the ground floor of the family *palazzo* at Via Ferruccio 26 (✆ **0577-740-454**). The **Bottega del Vino,** Via della Rocca 13 (✆ **0577-741-110;** www.enobottega.it), is a good wine shop.

Outside town on the road to Radda is a 6th-century-B.C. Etruscan tomb, the **Ipogeo Etrusco di Montecalvario** ★. It's a perfect example of its type, a little green beanie of a hill surrounded by pines, topped with a pair of cypress, and slashed with stone-walled tunnels leading to the burial chambers beneath. Push the button on the little fuse box–looking thing on your right as you enter the gate to flip the lights on inside.

From Castellina, you can take a long but rewarding detour on the road to Poggibonsi into the Val d'Elsa to visit the vineyards of **Monsanto** ★★ (✆ **055-805-9000**), which produces my favorite chianti wine. (Their Classico Riserva 1995 is about the best I've ever tasted.) At this medieval estate, Dr. Laura Bianchi carries on her father Fabrizio's often iconoclastic oenological traditions—after buying Monsanto in 1961, he was among the first to produce a 100% sangiovese chianti, and using only *sangiovese grosso* grapes at that. (Because this was illegal back in 1974, they still listed all the unused grapes on the labels.) Aside from their exquisite "chardonnay" (aged half in steel and half in wood, so that its fruitiness isn't overpowered with oak but still has its body and longevity), they use native grapes as much as possible. The result is a suite of remarkable and singular wines, like Il Poggio, a full-bodied elixir made with 90% sangiovese and 10% colorino and canaiolo (aged in Slovenian-wood *barriques*), or Tinscvil, a sangiovese-cabernet Supertuscan whose name, in Etruscan, means "Gift to the gods." They started bottling that last one after discovering an Etruscan tomb on the property, which also inspired them to extend their vast cellars with a huge hall built using a low Etruscan-style arch. Down here and in the original 18th-century cellars are stored thousands of bottles from every year of production—many still for sale. They do tastings and direct sales Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 6pm; reserve a tour of the cellars for 16€ per person at least a few days in advance.

If you're tired of these wine-sodden hills, you can shoot down the Chiantigiana from here to Siena, an 18km (11-mile) trip. It takes you past the medieval village of **Fonterutoli** ★ (✆ **0577-740-212;** www.fonterutoli.com)—a working *borgo* that has been supporting the winemaking business of the Mazzei Marquis since 1435. Fonterutoli produces some of the most highly regarded wines in the region, including an excellent Chianti Classico and Chianti Classico Riserva, Supertuscans Siepi and Brancaia (the latter a sangiovese and merlot cru), the rich berry-flavored Belguardo (a Morellino di Scansano cru), and the superb fruity IGT Badiola, a sangiovese wine (with 3% each of merlot and cabernet) meant to be drunk young, after about 2 years. The direct sales office in town is usually locked; follow the signs for the *ristorante* to find the easygoing, old-fashioned bar where you can sample their bounty (and get the *barrista* to fetch a few cases from that direct sales office when you're ready to buy). You can taste and buy daily from 10am to 10:30pm. While you're there, be sure to buy a bottle or two of Fonterutoli's olive oil, which is also superb.

The road continues on to Siena, passing through **Quercegrossa,** the birthplace of Siena's great sculptor Jacopo della Quercia. But if you want to explore what many consider the best of the Chianti, it's time to cut east into the rugged, mountainous heart of the old Lega del Chianti along the SS429 toward Radda.

Just before you hit Radda, a signposted right turn will take you a winding 7km (4⅓ miles) past the Romanesque **San Giusto** to the **Castello di Ama,** a top-rated winery whose Frenchified methods are seen by some as bucking homegrown tradition—they not only produce a merlot *vino di tavola* but also age almost all their more traditional Tuscan wines in—gasp—French oak *barriques.* The quality of their oaky chianti can't be disputed, however, and they also produce an excellent barrel-aged pinot grigio along with

Cheap Eats!

Chianti is no place to skimp on meals, but at the **Bar Di Mori** (✆ **0577-328-038**) in the central Piazza Quercia, you don't feel like you're cheating yourself with a *pici all'anatra* (homemade pasta with duck) for 4.70€. Salads cost 1€. It's a local bar feeding the everyday working man, but more than qualified for your daily bread.

silky olive oils. Direct sales (year-round) and tastings (Easter–Sept) are available down the road in the hamlet of **Lecchi** at the **Rinaldi Palmira** shop (✆ **0577-746-021**) on Via San Martino 8. (If there's no one inside, ask at their little grocery store next door.)

RADDA IN CHIANTI & ENVIRONS

Radda in Chianti ★, one of the three players in the original Lega del Chianti and still an important wine center, retains its medieval street plan and a bit of its walls. The center of town is the 15th-century **Palazzo del Podestà,** studded with the mayoral coats of arms of past *podestà;* it contains the tourist office (✆/fax **0577-738-494;** www.chianti net.it; Mon–Sat 10am–1pm and 3–7pm, Sun 10am–1pm; in winter, mornings only). The local butcher here is a true artisan; **Luciano Porciatti** and his sister will give you a taste of traditional salami and cheeses at their *alimentari* on Piazza IV Novembre 1 at the gate into town (✆ **0577-738-055**). They also sell local products, from wines to pasta, at their enoteca along Radda's tunnel-like old soldier's wall walk.

Seven kilometers (4⅓ miles) north of Radda on a secondary road is the **Castello di Volpaia** ★★ (✆ **0577-738-066;** fax 0577-738-619; www.volpaia.com), a first-rank wine estate with a medieval stone heart. The castle here was a Florentine holding buffeted by Sienese attacks and sieges from the 10th to 16th centuries. The still-impressive central keep is all that remains, but it's surrounded by an evocative 13th-century *borgo* (village) containing the Renaissance La Commenda church. Sunday through Friday, you can tour the winery—installed in a series of buildings throughout the little village (with an eye to preserving its medieval visual charm; there is nonetheless high-tech plumbing, through which the wine flows, buried seamlessly inside the stone walls)—for 11€ to 23€ per person depending on the size of the group (cheaper for larger groups); the tour includes tasting of the wines and their fantastic olive oil. Call ahead, preferably a week in advance. The central tower has an enoteca (daily 10am–6pm; closed Feb) for drop-in tastings and direct sales of some of the wines that helped found the Chianti Consorzio in 1924, plus award-winning (and scrumptious) olive oils and the only farm-produced vinegars in the Chianti. They also rent apartments and two small villas and lease out a small hotel on a neighboring hill of the estate. (See "Where to Stay in the Sienese Chianti," below, for details.)

Three kilometers (2 miles) east of Radda, get on the left byroad for a 19km (12-mile) trip to the beautifully isolated **Badia a Coltibuono** ★ (✆ **0577-749-498** or 0577-74-481; fax 0577-749-235; www.coltibuono.com). The abbey's core was founded in A.D. 770, but the monastery was owned and expanded by the Vallombrosan Order from the 12th century to 1810, when the Napoleonic suppressions passed it into private hands and it became an agricultural estate. You can visit the 11th-century San Lorenzo church only during daily Mass (open 4:30pm in summer, 3:30pm in fall, 3pm in winter, and 4pm in spring). Today, the estate is owned by the Stucchi-Prinetti family, which oversees the wine production; try their Sangioveto label, a 100% sangiovese wine. The family's

most famous member, international cookbook maven Lorenza de' Medici, started a famed (and egregiously overpriced) culinary school here in summers, though it's now run by an acolyte (see "Special-Interest Trips," in chapter 3, for details), and her son, Paolo, runs the fine and oft-acclaimed on-site restaurant (✆ **0577-749-424;** closed Mon and Nov–Feb). There's a direct-sales office for their products called the ***osteria*** (✆ **0577-749-479**) down at the main road. March through December, the *osteria* is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9:30am to 1pm and 2 to 6:30pm, and Mondays from 2 to 6:30pm.

EN ROUTE TO SIENA

Follow the scenic road leading south out of Radda toward Siena along the valley of the Piana stream and you'll immediately see the 17th-century **Villa Strozzi-Sonnino** crowning a steep hillside of **Vistarenni** vines to your left (✆ **0577-738-476;** www.villavistarenni.com). They offer direct sales weekdays from 8:30am to 5:30pm and will set up tastings for small groups (book at least a day in advance) as well as tours of 18th-century cellars. Like most vineyards these days, they also offer apartments and villas for long-term rental; visit the website for details and photos.

A bit farther south on this road, on the left side, you'll see the **ceramic workshop** ★★★ and showroom of master Giuseppe Rampini (✆ **0577-738-043**). Here the Gubbio-born maestro (who still remembers gathering clay from the Tiber riverbed for his father when he was 8) and his assistants create hand-painted ceramics based on antique Florentine motifs or inspired by the Renaissance art of Venetian painter Arcimboldo. The front space is full of pattern displays; the back room has individual pieces for sale.

Heading south directly from Badia a Coltibuono on the SS408 will take you through **Gaiole in Chianti,** the third member of the Lega del Chianti. The tourist office is at Via Ricasoli 50 (✆ **0577-749-411;** gaiole@chiantinet.it; Mon–Sat 9:30am–1pm and 3–6:30pm). An ancient market town like Greve, Gaiole is now basically modernized without much to see, aside from the wine shops: the **Cantina Enoteca Montagnani,** Via B. Bandinelli 13–17 (✆ **0577-749-517**), and **La Cantinetta del Chianti,** Via F. Ferrucci 20 (✆ **0577-749-125**).

A side road here leads west past the 12th-century **Castello di Spaltenna** (now a hotel; see below) 3km (1¾ miles) to the 13th-century **Castello di Vertine,** an imposing castle surrounded by a 9th-century village.

East of Gaiole, an unfinished road winds up to the fortified medieval hamlet of **Barbischio.** For more castle viewing, head south of Gaiole to the turnoff for Meleto and Castagnoli. **Castello di Meleto**'s twin circular towers stand mighty at either expanse of a long blank wall to watch over the estate's vineyards. The poor castle-cum-villa was built in the 1100s, partially dismantled by the Sienese in the 15th century, rebuilt by the Florentines, and then smashed by the Sienese again in the 16th century before a 1700s restoration transformed it to the villa we see today. Farther up this road is the hamlet of **Castagnoli,** wrapped around the thick, squat walls of an early medieval castle.

Farther south of Gaiole, the SS484 branches east toward Castelnuovo Berardenga and the famous **Castello di Brolio** ★★ (✆ **0577-749-066;** www.ricasoli.it; pull the bell rope and wait). The Chianti as a region may date to the 1200s, but Chianti Classico as a wine was born here in the mid–19th century. The Brolio castle has been in the Ricasoli family since 1141, though its vineyards date from at least 1007; the current fortress was rebuilt in 1484. "Iron Baron" Bettino Ricasoli inherited it in 1829 at age 20 and, before he went off in 1848 to help found a unified Italy and become its second prime minister,

spent his days here, teaching—really dictating—scientific farming methods to his peasants. He also whiled away the time tinkering with grape varietals. By the mid–19th century, he'd arrived at a quaffable formula balancing sangiovese, canaiolo, trebbiano, and malvasia grapes that was used when Italy's wine-governing DOC and DOCG laws were written in the 1960s. You can visit the castle grounds, including the small chapel (Bettino rests in peace in the family crypt) and the gardens, and walk along the wall for a good view of the lower Chianti valleys. Admission is 3€. In summer, the gardens are open daily 9am to noon and 3 to 6pm; in winter, from 9am to noon and 2 to 5pm.

After years of being passed from larger to larger corporate ownership, Brolio declined as a winery; then in 1993 the Baron Francesco Ricasoli bought it from Seagram's and brought it back into the family. He effected a drastic turnaround, investing billions of lire, replanting vines, and rigorously revising the philosophy to rocket Brolio back to superstardom and respect on the Italian wine scene, winning acclaim and awards once again. They now produce several wines, including the newest—a single Castello di Brolio, 100% sangiovese Chianti Classico. They're going for the French châteaux concept, where the wine is associated with a place, not a brand. To buy their award-winning wines, visit the wine shop (✆ **0577-749-301**) from Monday to Friday between 9am and 7:30pm, Saturday and Sunday from 11am to 6:30pm. They offer *cantina* tours by appointment (call at least a few days in advance) with a wine tasting at the end, for 21€ per person for up to five people. On the side of the private road up to the *castello* is also a quite good **Osteria del Castello** restaurant (✆ **0577-747-277**).

The westerly byroad out of here leads most quickly to join the SS408 as it heads south, out of the land of the black rooster and into Siena.

WHERE TO STAY IN THE SIENESE CHIANTI

Besides the choices below, the medieval **Castello di Volpaia** (✆ **0577-738-066;** fax 0577-738-619; www.volpaia.com), listed above as a winery, rents out five *agriturismo* apartments with kitchenettes and TVs and, in a few, working fireplaces (bookable from the estate) in the stony buildings of its 13th-century village for 570€ to 930€ per week for two people, or 1,000€ to 2,070€ for the room that sleeps six. Guests can take part in various programs, from self-guided hikes to cooking lessons, wine tastings, or dinner with the owner. They also rent two lovely villas (sleeping up to 8 or 11) with private gardens and pools with views (bookable only via the private agency Salogi in Lucca at ✆ **0583-48-717** or fax 0583-48-727), and lease a *casa colonica* on a nearby hillock amid the estate's vineyards to a hotelier who operates it as the rustic chic **La Locanda** hotel (✆/fax **0577-738-833;** www.lalocanda.it), with 200€ to 280€ doubles.

Borgo Argenina ★★ From the flagstoned terrace of Elena Nappa's hilltop B&B (she bought the whole medieval hamlet), you can see the farmhouse where Bertolucci filmed *Stealing Beauty* in 1996. Against remarkable odds (she'll regale you with the anecdotes), Elena has created the rural retreat of your dreams. Since the place isn't easy to find, English-speaking Elena will fax you directions when you reserve. In addition to four doubles, she offers accommodations in two suites, two small houses (for two or three people), and the Villa Oliviera (for four people). When faced with all the questions foreign guests often inundate her with when booking (Do you have air-conditioning? Is there parking? How much of a deposit do I need to make?), Elena replies, "Don't worry. Just come!" Good advice.

Loc. Argenina (near San Marcellino Monti), 53013 Gaiole in Chianti. ✆ **0577-747-117.** Fax 0577-747-228 (they prefer faxes and will respond within the day). www.borgoargenina.it. 4 units, 2 suites, 2 small

houses, 1 villa. 170€ double; 200€ suite for 2 people; 240€ suite for 3 people; 240€ house for 2 people; 300€ house for 3 people. 3-night minimum stay. Rates include country breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Ask for directions when reserving. **Amenities:** Room service (breakfast). *In room:* Hair dryer, minibar.

Castello di Spaltenna ★ The Spaltenna is one of the Chianti's most famous luxury hotels, a converted medieval castle from before the 12th century set in a grassy field. The rooms have a simple but tasteful decor, with reproduction and genuine country-style antiques, including some massive wooden desks and wrought-iron 19th-century bed frames. Most have views of the valley below, but a few look over the unfortunate housing developments of modern Gaiole creeping up the hill. No room is overly spacious, but the semi-lofted corner suites in the main building are sizable, with fantastic cross ribbing of heavy hewn wood beams on the ceilings. Suites in the outbuilding, such as no. 28, are particularly nice, with two rooms and their own little terraces overlooking the hotel's vineyards. Rooms of the deluxe category and above have Jacuzzi tubs in the modernized bathrooms, many with double sinks.

53013 Gaiole in Chianti (SI; on a small hill west of Gaiole). ✆ **0577-749-483.** Fax 0577-749-268. www.spaltenna.com. 38 units. 195€–330€ double, 380€–540€ suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (in an old stone wine cellar or, in summer, in the central courtyard around an old stone well); babysitting; free bikes; concierge; exercise room (a Stairmaster, stationary bike, and treadmill); indoor heated pool and 2 outdoor pools; room service; sauna; tennis courts. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Hotel Il Colombaio ★ This modest, excellently priced hotel sits in a 16th-century stone house at the edge of Castellina (near the Etruscan tomb and a 5-min. walk into town for restaurants) and once housed shepherds who spent the night after selling their sheep at market. The good-size rooms with their sloping beam-and-tile ceilings, terracotta floors, and iron bed frames seem to belong to a well-to-do 19th-century farming family. Upstairs accommodations are lighter and airier than the ground-floor rooms (formerly stalls) and enjoy better views over the vineyards (a few overlook the road). Six of the rooms are in an annex across the road. The house's old kitchen has been converted into a comfy rustic reading room. You breakfast in winter under stone vaults and in summer on a terrace sharing its countryside vistas with the pool.

Via Chiantigiana 29, 53011 Castellina in Chianti (SI). ✆ **0577-740-444.** Fax 0577-740-402. www.albergoilcolombaio.it. 21 units. 85€ double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed 2 weeks in winter. **Amenities:** Restaurant (a block away); babysitting; concierge; outdoor pool (June–Sept); room service (breakfast). *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

La Petraia ★★ Canada-born Susan McKenna Grant and her husband, Michael, bought what was an historic pile of rocks at the turn of the millennium and, with the help of historians and horticulturalists, turned it into an astounding, high-end *agriturismo,* a monument to haute cuisine and low-impact living. They grow rare species of fruit trees and every imaginable herb and vegetable, keep their own bees, raise the famous cinta senese pig, and collect eggs every morning. In sum, they rely on their own land for breakfasts, lunches, and dinners that are beyond compare, thanks to Susan's expertise as a Europe-trained chef. For a truly special experience, join one of her cooking classes or the "Petraia Sessions" with a renowned chef. (See "Cook Like a True Tuscan" in chapter 5). The cuisine and the peaceful garden are the attractions here, in an otherwise isolated farm. It sits on Chianti's highest point, with views to Volpaia to the west and Siena on the southern horizon.

SS72, about 4km (1½ miles) outside Radda (toward Castello d'Albola). ✆ **0577-738-582.** Fax 0577-739-009. www.lapetraia.com. 4 units. 250€ per person based on double occupancy, including breakfast and

5-course dinner. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Home-cooked meals in restaurant. *In room:* Hair dryer, high-speed Internet.

Podere Terreno ★★ Paris-born Silvie, who used to run a Florentine art gallery, and her Italian husband, Roberto, are your gracious hosts at their small 16th-century farmstead turned *agriturismo* topping a hillock between Radda and Volpaia. They and their son Francesco treat you like family—the last one to go to bed has to turn out the lights, the wonderful home-cooked dinner is served promptly at 7:30pm, and they'll scold you if you aren't being a good guest. With this quiet countryside retreat slowly growing in fame, the nightly extended family can get quite multinational. Many who sign up for just a night or two in the simple, comfortably rustic rooms with old peasant furnishings and firm beds on terra-cotta floors return the following year to stay for a week. Breakfast includes salami, excellent homemade marmalades and jams, and soft sheep cheese; and, the scrumptious dinner is accompanied by their own velvety chianti, consistently rated among the top 25 in the Classico region.

Strada per Volpaia (2km/1¼ miles north of Radda off the road to Volpaia), 53017 Radda in Chianti (SI). ✆ **0577-738-312.** Fax 0577-738-400. www.podereterreno.it. 7 units. 95€ per person, including breakfast and obligatory dinner half pension. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Home-cooked dinners in living room; free bikes; 2 swimming ponds. *In room:* Hair dryer on request, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE IN THE SIENESE CHIANTI

Albergaccio ★ CREATIVE TUSCAN On the outskirts of Castellina, this place offers an excellent mix of fine cuisine and rustic timbered atmosphere with valley views. Francesco Cacciatori glides through the place serving a changing roster of dishes steeped in local traditions but enlivened by the creativity of chef Sonia Visman. Among the tasty combinations I've sampled, I heartily recommend the *bavette con timo e pecorino di fossa* (thin noodles with tomatoes, thyme, and specially aged pecorino cheese) and *gnocchi di ricotta con tartufo marzolo* (dollops of ricotta with shaved truffles and thyme leaves). The *rollé di maiale con cavolo nero* (pork *involtini* made with black cabbage, tomatoes, and wild fennel) and *piccione speziato con fichi caramellati al marsala* (stuffed pigeon with figs caramelized in Marsala wine) are fine secondi.

Via Fiorentina 63, Castellina in Chianti (just outside the walls along the road toward San Donato). ✆ **0577-741-042.** www.albergacciocast.com. Reservations highly recommended. Primi 14€; secondi 25€. Tasting menus 45€. MC, V. Mon–Sat 12:30–2:15pm and 7:30–9:30pm. Closed last 2 weeks of Nov and 1st week of Dec.

La Bottega TUSCAN The Barucci family takes care of hospitality in Volpaia's main square: Carla runs this cozy tavern with outdoor seating in a garden, and her sister owns the bar across the piazza. The cuisine is simple and honest, with Tuscan classics such as *ribollita* and *pici con ragù* and rabbit with white wine and olives, plus just about anything with wild boar in it. They make their own cold cuts and offer a nice wine list of local labels, all at fair prices.

Piazza della Torre 1, Volpaia. ✆ **0577-738-001.** Primi 5€–9€; secondi 8€–14€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–3pm and 7–10pm.

Le Vigne TUSCAN The aptly named Le Vigne is tucked between the rows of vines covering the slopes southeast of Radda. You can watch vintners working the vines as you sip your wine and sample such well-turned dishes as *pici all'aglione* (hand-rolled spaghetti with tomatoes, leeks, and a dab of pancetta), bready *ribollita,* boned duck stuffed with porchetta, and excellent *agnello alla griglia* (tender lamb chops grilled with aromatic herbs). Definitely order the homemade *patate fritte,* thinly sliced discs of potato fried in olive oil.

Podere Le Vigne (off the SS408 to Villa just east of Radda in Chianti). ✆ **0577-738-640.** Reservations recommended. Primi 7€–10€; secondi 10€–14€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2:30pm and 7:15–9:30pm (daily in summer). Closed Nov 15–Mar 15.

2 SIENA: A TASTE OF THE TUSCAN MIDDLE AGES

70km (43 miles) S of Florence; 232km (144 miles) N of Rome

Siena is a medieval city of brick. From a vantage point such as the Palazzo Pubblico's tower, its sea of roof tiles blends into a landscape of steep, twisting stone alleys. This cityscape hides dozens of Gothic palaces and pastry shops galore, unseen neighborhood rivalries, and altarpieces of unsurpassed beauty.

Siena is proud of its past. It trumpets the she-wolf as its emblem, a holdover from its days as *Saena Julia,* the Roman colony founded by Augustus about 2,000 years ago (though the official Sienese myth has the town founded by the sons of Remus, younger brother of Rome's legendary forefather). Siena still parcels out the rhythms of life, its rites of passage and communal responsibilities, to the 17 *contrade* (neighborhood wards) formed in the 14th century. It makes a point of offering an image of Tuscany different from that of Florence, its old medieval rival: Siena is as inscrutable in its culture, decorous in its art, and festive in its life attitude as Florence is forthright, precise, and serious on all counts. Where Florence produced hard-nosed mystics such as Savonarola, Siena gave forth saintly scholars like St. Catherine (1347–80) and St. Bernardino (1380–1444).

Its bankers, textile magnates, and wool traders put 12th-century Siena in direct competition with Florence, and the two cities kept at each other's throats for more than 400 years. When Florence went Guelph, Siena turned Ghibelline and soundly thrashed Florence at the 1260 Battle of Montaperti. Unfortunately for Siena, the battle was fought in alliance with ousted Florentine Ghibellines, who refused to allow the armies to press the advantage and level Florence. Within 10 years, Charles of Anjou had crushed the Sienese Ghibellines.

With Siena now Guelph again, Sienese merchants established in 1270 the Council of Nine, an oligarchy that ruled over Siena's greatest republican era, when civic projects, the middle-class economy, palace building, and artistic prowess reached their greatest heights. Artists like Duccio, Simone Martini, and the Lorenzetti brothers invented a distinctive Sienese art style, a highly developed Gothicism that was an excellent artistic foil to the emerging Florentine Renaissance (see "Florence, Tuscany & Umbria's Art & Architecture," in chapter 2).

Then, in 1348, the Black Death hit the city, killing more than three-quarters of the population, decimating the social fabric, and devastating the economy. The Council of Nine soldiered on, but Charles IV attacked Siena from 1355 to 1369, and though Siena again trounced Florence in 1526, the Spanish took control in 1530 and later handed Siena over to Ducal Florence.

To subdue these pesky Sienese once and for all, Cosimo I sent the brutal marquis of Marignano, who besieged the city for a year and a half, destroying its fields and burning its buildings. By the time he stormed the city in 1555, the marquis had done more damage than even the Black Death—only 8,000 out of a population of 40,000 had survived—and the burned and broken city and countryside bore an uncanny resemblance to the *Effects of Bad Government,* half of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco in Siena's Palazzo

Pubblico. Some 2,000 fiercely independent Sienese escaped to Montalcino, where they kept the Sienese Republic alive, in name at least, for another 4 years. Then Montalcino, too, was engulfed by Florence. Siena became, on paper and in fact, merely another part of Grand Ducal Tuscany. Since the plague of the 14th century, Siena was so busy defending its liberty it had little time or energy to develop as a city. As a result, it has remained one of the largest Tuscan cities to retain a distinctively medieval air and offers your best chance in Italy to slip into the rhythms and atmosphere of the Tuscan Middle Ages.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** The bus is often more convenient, because Siena's train station is outside town. Some 19 trains daily connect Siena with **Florence** (90 min.–2¼ hr.). There's also a line to **Chiusi–Chianciano Terme** (90 min.) passing through **Asciano** and **Montepulciano** (see chapter 10 for more information). Siena's **train station** (✆ **0577-280-115**) is at Piazza Fratelli Roselli, about 3km (1¾ miles) north of town. Take the C minibus to Piazza Gramsci in Terza di Camollia or a taxi.

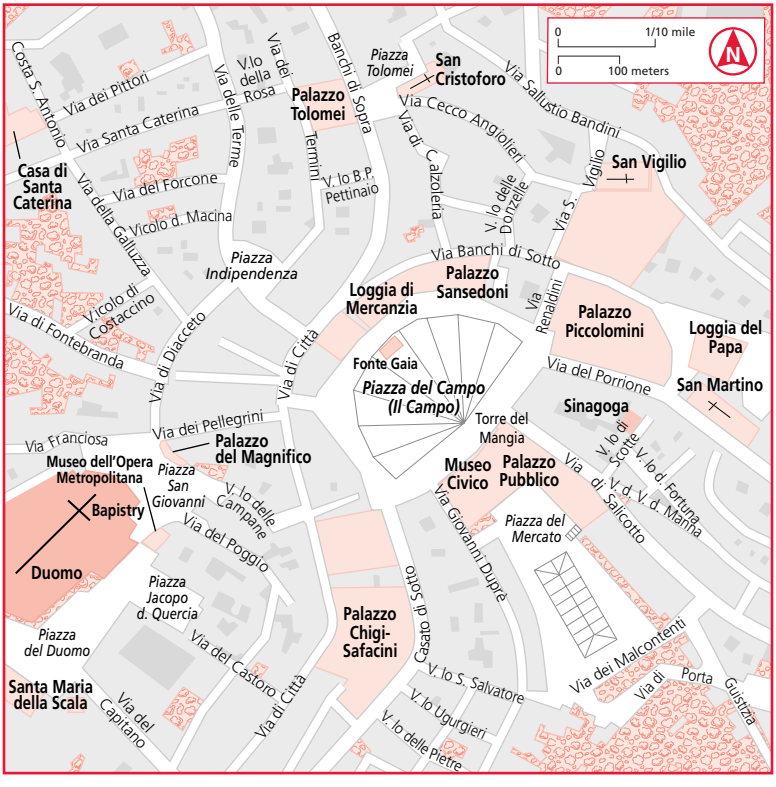
By Car There's an autostrada highway direct from **Florence** (it has no route number; follow the green autostrada signs toward Siena), or take the more scenic routes, down the old Via Cassia SS2 or the Chiantigiana SS222 through the Chianti (see "Wine Tasting in the Chianti," earlier in this chapter). From **Rome** get off the A1 north at the Val di Chiana exit and follow the SS326 west for 50km (31 miles). The SS223 runs 70km (43 miles) here from **Grosseto** in the Maremma. From **Pisa** take the highway toward Florence and exit onto the SS429 south at Empoli (100km/62 miles total).

Trying to drive into the one-way and pedestrian-zoned center isn't worth the massive headache. Siena **parking** (✆ **0577-22-871**) is now coordinated, and all the lots charge 1.75€ per hour or 36€ per day, ranking it among the most expensive places to park on the planet. Luckily, almost every hotel has a discount deal with the nearest lot for anywhere from 40% to 100% off. All are well signposted, with locations just inside city gates Porta Tufi (the huge and popular Il Campo lot, though it's a 20-min. walk from the Campo!), Porta San Marco, and Porta Romana; under the Fortezza (another large lot) and around La Lizza park (the latter closed market Wed and soccer Sun); and at Piazza Amendola (just outside the northern gate Porta Camollia). You can **park for free** a bit farther away around the unguarded back (northwest) side of the Fortezza all week long. There's also free parking outside the southeast end of town at Due Ponti (beyond Porta Pispini) and Coroncina (beyond Porta Romana); from both you can get a *pollicino* (minibus) into the center, Piazza del Campo (see below).

By Bus Because buses from **Florence** are faster and let you off right in town, they're more convenient than trains. **TRA-IN** runs express (19 daily; 75 min.) and slower buses (18 daily; 90 min.–2 hr.) from **Florence**'s SITA station to Siena's Piazza San Domenico or Piazza Gramsci. Siena is also connected with **San Gimignano** (hourly Mon–Sat; change in Poggibonsi; 55–65 min. not including layover), **Volterra** (three daily; change in Colle di Val d'Elsa; 40 min. each leg), **Massa Marittima** (three daily; 80 min.), **Perugia** (two to four daily; 85 min.), and **Rome**'s Tiburtina station (five to seven daily; 2 hr., 47 min.).

Follow the signs to Siena's **TRA-IN bus ticket office,** underneath Piazza Gramsci in the pedonale della Lizza (✆ **0577-204-246** or 0577-204-225; www.trainspa.it), and there's another small office in the city's train station (✆ **0577-204-245**).

CITY LAYOUT Siena is splayed out like a "Y" along three ridges with deep valleys in between, effectively dividing the city into thirds, called ***terze.*** The *terze* are each drawn out along three main streets following the spines of those ridges. The southern arm,

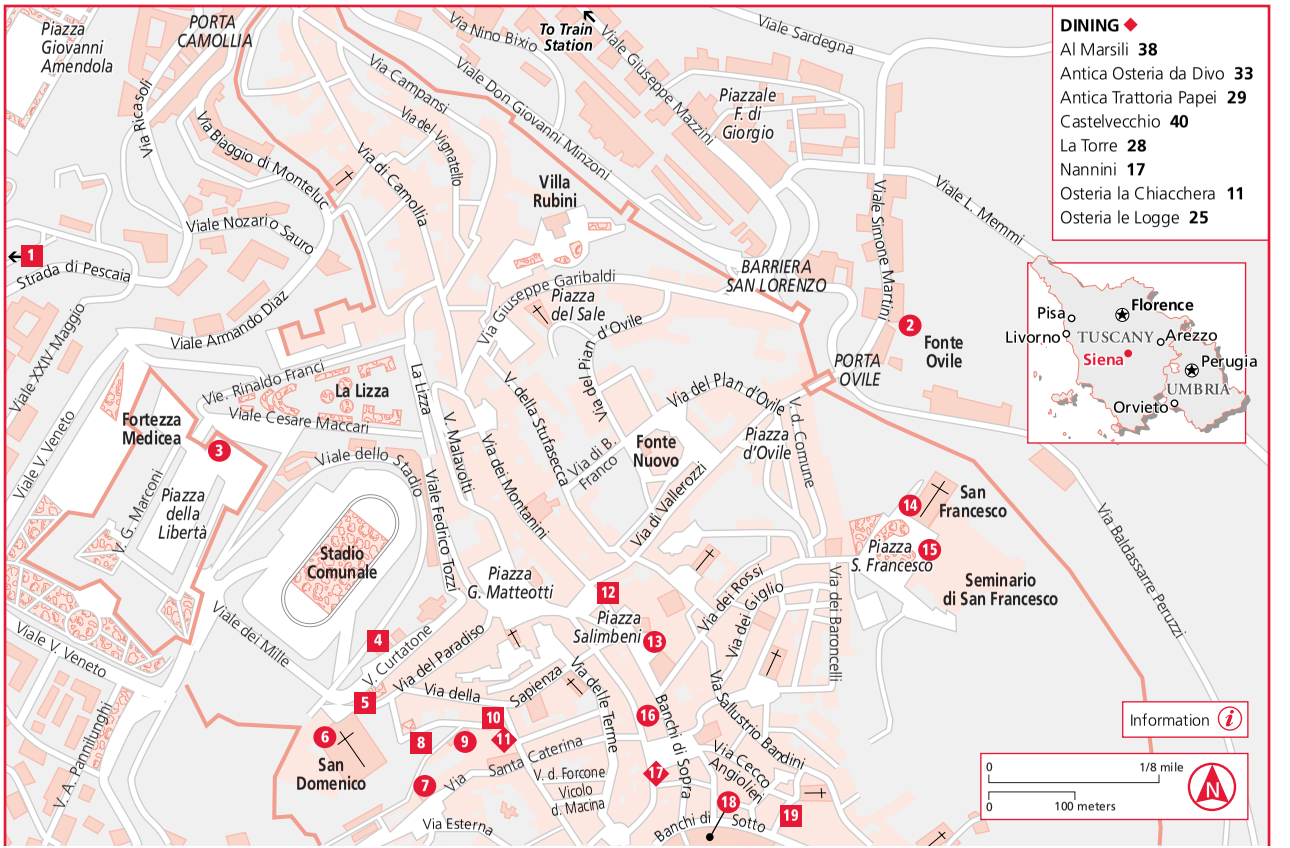


Terza di San Martino, slopes gently down around **Via Banchi di Sotto** (and the various other names it picks up along the way). To the west is **Terza di Città** (home to the Duomo and Pinacoteca), centered on **Via di Città. Terza di Camollia** runs north around **Via Banchi di Sopra.** These three main streets meet at the north edge of **Piazza del Campo,** Siena's gorgeous scallop-shaped central square.

Tip for the footsore: Each *terza*'s main ridge-top street is relatively flat—for Siena—while off either side medieval alleyways drop precipitously. If you hate climbing hills, the shortest (or at least less strenuous) distance between two points in Siena isn't a straight line but a curve that follows the three main drags as much as possible.

GETTING AROUND Although it often looks and feels like a small Tuscan hill town, Siena truly is a city (albeit a small one), and its sites are widely spread apart. There is no efficient public transport system in the center, so it's up to your feet to cover the territory. There are plenty of steep ups and downs and no shortcuts from one *terza* to another without a serious workout.

The city does run **minibuses,** called *pollicini* (✆ **0577-204-246**), which dip into the city center from 6am to 9pm. The B services the Terza di San Martino and out the Porta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To Train Station
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Via Ricasoli
Via Biaggio di Monteluc
Via del Vignatello
Via di Camollia
Villa Rubini
Viale L. Memmi
Viale Nozario Sauro
Strada di Pescaia
BARRIERA SAN LORENZO
Viale Simone Martini
Via Giuseppe Garibaldi
Piazza del Sale
Viale Armando Diaz
Viale XXIV Maggio
Via del Pian d'Ovile
Fonte Ovile
PORTA OVILE
Vie. Rinaldo Franci
La Lizza
Viale Cesare Maccari
Fortezza Medicea
Viale V. Veneto
V. della Stufasecca
Via del Pian d'Ovile
V. d. Comune
Viale dello Stadio
V. Malavolti
Via dei Montanini
Via di B. Franco
Fonte Nuovo
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Via di Vallerozzi
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Piazza della Libertà
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Via dei Baroncelli
Viale dei Mille
Piazza Salimbeni
Viale V. Veneto
V. Curtatone
Via del Paradiso
Via della Sapienza
Via delle Terme
Banchi di Sopra
Via Sallustrio Bandini
Via Cecco Angiolieri
V. A. Pannilunghi
San Domenico
Via Santa Caterina
V. d. Forcone
Vicolo d. Macina
Via Esterna
Banchi di Sotto
Pisa
Florence
Livorno
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Palazzo Salimbeni **13**
Palazzo Sansedoni **18**
Piazza del Campo (Il Campo) **31**
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San Niccolò al Carmine **43**
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Pispini gate, as does bus no. 5 (there's also an N night bus on this route 9pm–1am). Confusingly, there are four A buses, differentiated by color. ***A pink*** goes around Terza di San Martino (and out the Porta Romana gate), as does bus no. 2; ***A green*** and ***A yellow*** cover Terza di Città (green from Porta Tufi to the Duomo, yellow from Porta San Marco to the Duomo); and ***A red*** takes care of the southerly part of Terza di Camollia (from Piazza della Indipendenza out Porta Fontebranda).

You can call for a radio **taxi** at ✆ **0577-49-222** (7am–9pm only); they also queue at the train station and in town at Piazza Matteotti.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office,** where you can get a great free map, is at Piazza del Campo 56, 53100 Siena (✆ **0577-280-551;** fax 0577-270-676; www.terresiena.it). From March 21 to November 11, it's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm, and Saturday from 8:30am to 1pm; winter hours are Monday through Saturday from 8:30am to 7:30pm. For help finding a hotel, see the agencies under "Where to Stay," later in this section.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS Aside from the two annual **Palio races** ★★★ (see "The Palio delle Contrade," later in this chapter), Siena throws a **pottery fair** in honor of the Festa di Santa Lucia on December 13. The prestigious **Accademia Musicale Chigiana** music center, Via di Città 89 (✆ **0577-22-091;** www.chigiana.it), sponsors concerts and opera year-round (the website has a schedule), culminating in the week of the **Settimana Musicale Senese** in July or August. **St. Cecilia** is celebrated on November 22 with church concerts. The extensive main city **market** is held Wednesday from 8am to 1pm, filling the streets around the Fortezza Medicea and La Lizza park.

IL CAMPO: THE HEART OF SIENA

Via Banchi di Sopra, Via Banchi di Sotto, and Via di Città all meet at the **Loggia della Mercanzia,** begun from Sano di Matteo's plans in 1417. Here Siena's merchants argued cases before a commercial tribunal so impartial that foreign governments came to have them settle financial differences.

From here, several tunnel-like stepped alleys lead down into **Piazza del Campo (Il Campo)** ★★★, arguably the most beautiful piazza in all of Italy. Crafted like a sloping scallop shell, the Campo was first laid out in the 1100s on the site of the Roman forum. The herringbone Siena brick pavement is divided by white marble lines into nine sections representing the city's medieval ruling body, the Council of Nine. The Campo's tilt, fan shape, and structure are all a calibrated part of the city's ancient water system and underground canal network. At the top of the Campo is a poor 19th-century replica of Jacopo della Quercia's 14th-century masterpiece fountain, the **Fonte Gaia** ★★. Some of the very badly eroded original panels are kept in the Palazzo Pubblico (see below).

The only surviving medieval buildings on the square are, at the top, the curving facade of the battlemented 13th-century **Palazzo Sansedoni** and at the fan's base, the city's focal point, the **Palazzo Pubblico** ★★ (1297–1310). This crenellated town hall is the city's finest Gothic palace, and the Museo Civico inside is home to Siena's best artwork (see below). When the Black Death finally abated in 1348, the city built a loggia chapel, the **Cappella della Piazza,** at the left end of the *palazzo*'s base to give thanks that at least parts of the city had been spared. Rising above it is the slender 100m-tall (328-ft.) brick **Torre del Mangia** ★ (1338–48), crowned with a Lippo Memmi–designed cresting in white travertine. It was the second-tallest tower in medieval Italy and was named after a slothful bell ringer nicknamed *Mangiaguadagni,* or "profit eater." (There's an armless statue of him in the courtyard.)

If you fancy climbing 503 steps and aren't particularly claustrophobic, the tower is a great place to check out the unforgettable view across Siena's cityscape and the rolling green countryside beyond. Admission is 7€. The tower (entrance in the courtyard) is open from November 1 to March 15 from 10am to 4pm and from March 16 to October 31 from 10am to 7pm.

Museo Civico ★★★ Don't be put off by the first rooms of mediocre 16th- to 18th-century works; the museum's pride comes later with the masterpieces of Sienese painting giants Simone Martini and Ambrogio Lorenzetti. The fifth room, the **Sala del Risorgimento,** was painted (1887–90) to celebrate the career of Italy's first king, Vittorio Emanuele II. A detour up the wide staircase leads up to an open-air **loggia** with Jacopo della Quercia's eroded panels from the original Gaia fountain.

The **Sala di Balia ★** beyond the foot of the stairs was frescoed (1407) by Spinello Aretino and his son Parri, with scenes from the *Life of Pope Alexander III,* including an exceptional naval battle. The **Anticamera del Concistoro** has a detached Ambrogio Lorenzetti fresco on the entrance wall and a Matteo di Giovanni *Madonna and Child.* The **Sala del Concistoro** was frescoed (1529–35) by Domenico Beccafumi in his best Mannerist style, illustrating the heroic feats of ancient Greece and Rome in order to give the government authorities who met here a backbone.

The **vestibule** has a 1429 gilded bronze she-wolf, Siena's republican symbol and link to its Roman founding. The ***Anticappella*** was frescoed by Taddeo di Bartolo with ancient Greek and Roman heroes, along with the *Virtues* and a giant *St. Christopher.* The ***Cappella*** is difficult to see through Jacopo della Quercia's iron screen, but it was also frescoed by Domenico di Bartolo (1407–08). The altarpiece is a dark *Madonna and Child with Saints* by Sodoma.

The **Sala del Mappamondo** off the chapel—named after a now lost Ambrogio Lorenzetti painting of the world—contains two of Simone Martini's greatest works. On the left is his masterpiece, ***Maestà*** ★★. Incredibly, this was his very first painting, finished in 1315 (he went over it again in 1321). Cleaned and restored in the early 1990s, it's the next generation's answer to Duccio's groundbreaking work on the same theme painted just 4 years earlier and now in the Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana (p. 214). Martini's paintings tend to be characterized by richly patterned fabrics, and the gown of the enthroned Mary is no exception.

Those fabrics can be seen again across this great hall in Simone Martini's other masterwork, the fresco of ***Guidoriccio da Fogliano*** ★★★, where the captain of the Sienese army rides his charger across the territory he has just conquered (Montemassi, in 1328). Recently, iconoclastic U.S. art historians have disputed the attribution of this work to Martini, claiming that it was either a slightly later work or even a 16th-century fake. Part of what sparked the debate was the 1980 discovery of another, slightly older scarred fresco lower on the wall here. This earlier painting depicts two figures standing in front of a wooden-fenced castle. Some claim this is the fresco Martini painted, while those who support the authenticity of the *Guidoriccio* attribute this older fresco to Duccio, Pietro Lorenzetti, or Memmo di Filippuccio.

The **Sala della Pace** was where the Council of Nine met, and to keep them mindful of how well they needed to govern, the city commissioned Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1338) to fresco the walls with his masterpiece and the single most important piece of secular art to survive from medieval Europe, the ***Allegory of Good and Bad Government and Their Effects on the Town and Countryside*** ★★★. Good government is represented by a bearded old man surrounded by virtues (starting with a languid, sexy Peace on the

Siena's Cumulative Tickets

Siena has several **reduced-price cumulative ticket** combos you can pick up at any of the participating museums or sites. One, valid for 2 days, covers civic museums—**Museo Civico, Santa Maria della Scala,** and the contemporary art gallery in the **Palazzo delle Papesse** on Via di Città (where admission is 5€)—for 11€ total. Alternatively, a 7-day ticket for these sites, plus the **Baptistery,** costs 14€.

There is also a combined ticket valid for 7 days that gives you access to those sites plus the **Museo Dell' Opera Metropolitana, Baptistery, Crypt,** and **Museo Diocesano** for 17€.

left). The good effects of this government are played out on the entrance wall. A prosperous 14th-century Siena is pictured here—easily recognizable by its towers, battlemented houses, and the Duomo squeezed into the corner. The painted city wall breaks the scene in half so that the countryside—with its cultivated hillsides watched over by winged Serenity—runs the length of the Sienese territory all the way to their seaport Talamone.

The bad government frescoes are, perhaps appropriately, in a high state of ruin. Monstrous Tyranny reigns with the help of such henchman as Cruelty, Fraud, and the creaturelike Deceit. The city under their rule is literally falling into ruin, soldiers must patrol constantly, the shops are abandoned, and citizens are robbed on the streets. The countryside, over which flies Terror, fares as badly, with scorched, lifeless fields and armed highwaymen scaring travelers off the roads.

The **Sala dei Pilastri** beyond contains a 1330 stained-glass window of St. Michael the Archangel designed by Ambrogio Lorenzetti and a *Maestà* by Guido da Siena painted in the 1270s (despite the date on it of 1221, which was perhaps used to commemorate the year St. Domenic had died). The main prize is Matteo di Giovanni's ***Massacre of the Innocents*** ★, a richly painted but highly disturbing work. They sometimes display this painting in the Sala Mappamondo.

In the Palazzo Pubblico, Piazza del Campo. ✆ **0577-292-226.** www.comune.siena.it. Admission on cumulative ticket with Torre Mangia 12€ (for other cumulative ticket options, see "Siena's Cumulative Tickets," below), or 6.50€ adults with a reservation, 7.50€ adults without a reservation; 3.50€ students and seniors over 65 with a reservation, 4€ students and seniors without a reservation; free for under 11. Nov 1–Mar 15 daily 10am–6:30pm; Mar 16–Oct 31 daily 10am–7pm. Bus: A (pink), B, N, 22, 25, 26, or 27.

ON PIAZZA DEL DUOMO

Duomo ★★★ Siena's cathedral is a rich treasure house of Tuscan art. Despite being an overwhelmingly Gothic building, the Duomo has one eye-popping Romanesque holdover: its 1313 **campanile** with its mighty black-and-white banding. What draws the crowds these days, however, is a newly discovered cycle of 13th-century frescoes in the crypt by an unknown artist. The Duomo was built from around 1215 to 1263, involving Gothic master Nicola Pisano as architect at some point. His son, Giovanni, drew up the plans for the lower half of the **facade,** begun in 1285. Giovanni Pisano, along with his studio, also carved many of the statues decorating it (most of the originals are now in the

Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana; see below). The facade's upper half was added in the 14th century and is today decorated with gold-heavy, 19th-century Venetian mosaics.

The city was feeling its oats in 1339. Having defeated Florence 80 years earlier, Siena was by now its rival's equal as a middle-class-ruled republic. It began its most ambitious project yet: to turn the already huge Duomo into merely the transept of a new cathedral, one that would dwarf St. Peter's in Rome and trumpet Siena's political power, spiritual devotion, and artistic prowess. The city started the new nave off the Duomo's right transept but completed only the fabric of the walls when the Black Death hit in 1348, decimating the population and halting building plans forever. The **half-finished walls** remain—a monument to Siena's ambition and one-time wealth.

You could wander inside the Duomo for hours, just staring at the **flooring** ★, a mosaic of 59 etched and inlaid marble panels (1372–1547). Some of the top artists working in Siena lent their talents, including Domenico di Bartolo, Matteo di Giovanni, Pinturicchio, and, especially, Beccafumi, who designed 35 scenes (1517–47)—his original cartoons are in the Pinacoteca. The ones in the nave and aisles are usually uncovered, but the most precious ones under the apse and in the transepts are protected by cardboard flooring and uncovered from August 23 to October 3 in honor of the Palio (when admission to the cathedral is charged). The only floor panel usually visible in the Duomo's center, in the left transept, is Matteo di Giovanni's fantastic 1481 *Massacre of the Innocents* (a theme with which the painter was obsessed, leaving us disturbing paintings of it in the Palazzo Pubblico and Santa Maria dei Servi).

At the entrance to the right transept, the small octagonal **Cappella Chigi** ★ was designed by Roman baroque master Gian Lorenzo Bernini in 1659. It houses the *Madonna del Voto,* a fragmentary late-13th-century painting by a follower of Guido da Siena. The work fulfilled a vow the Sienese made on the eve of the Montaperti battle that they would devote their city to the Madonna should they win the fight against Florence (they did). Five times since, in times of dire need, the Sienese have placed the keys to the city in front of the miraculous Madonna and prayed for deliverance, most recently in June 1944 during Nazi occupation. Two weeks later, the city was liberated. The *St. Jerome* and *St. Mary Magdalene* statues cradling their heads in the niches nearest the door are also by Bernini, who did the organ outside the chapel as well.

At the entry to the left transept is Nicola Pisano's masterpiece **pulpit** ★★ (1265–68), on which he was assisted by his son, Giovanni, and Arnolfo di Cambio. The elegantly Gothic panels depict, as do the Pisanos' other great pulpits in Pisa and Pistoia, the life of Christ in crowded, detailed turmoil, divided by figures in flowing robes. The columns are supported on the backs of lions with their prey and cubs, and the base of the central column is a seated congregation of philosophers and figures representing the liberal arts. In the left transept's far right corner is Tino di Camaino's **tomb of Cardinal Petroni** (1313), which set the new standard for tomb design in the 14th century.

Umbrian master Pinturicchio is the star in the **Libreria Piccolomini** ★★★, built in 1485 by Cardinal Francesco Piccolomini (later Pope Pius III—for all of 18 days before he died in office) to house the library of his famous uncle, Pope Pius II. The marble entrance was carved by Marrina in 1497, above which Pinturicchio was commissioned to paint a large fresco of the *Coronation of Pius III* (1504). In the center of the room is a Roman copy of the Greek Praxiteles' *Three Graces,* which Pinturicchio, Raphael, and Canova studied as a model. Pinturicchio and assistants covered the ceiling and walls with 10 giant frescoes (1507) displaying Pinturicchio's rich colors, delicate modeling, limpid light, and fascination with mathematically precise, but somewhat cold, architectural

space. The frescoes celebrate the life of Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini, better known as the humanist Pope Pius II. The next-to-last scene on the left wall records the act Siena most remembers the pope for, canonizing local girl Catherine as a saint in 1461.

Next door to the library's entrance is the **Piccolomini Altar** ★, designed by Andrea Bregno around 1480. The *Madonna and Child* above may be Jacopo della Quercia's earliest work (1397–1400). A young, squash-nosed Michelangelo carved the statuettes of *Sts. Peter, Pius, Paul,* and *Gregory* in the other niches here (1501–04).

Beneath the church is the latest artistic discovery in Siena, in a room widely referred to as the **"crypt,"** although no bodies have been found buried here. More likely the subterranean room is an old entrance to the Romanesque church. What the 21st-century restoration workers scraped up was a cycle of frescoes painted between 1270 and 1275, shedding some light on the early development of the Sienese school. The crypt has only been viewable since 2004, and scholars have yet to attribute the cycle to a particular artist. Some have speculated it may be the work of Duccio, though he would have been exceedingly young at the time. What is more or less certain is that the style and composition, such as the way Christ's feet are oddly crossed on the crucifix, have been mirrored—almost copied—in the paintings in the church above. Though chipped and still a little rough around the edges, the vibrant blue, gold, and burgundy colors have been impressively preserved thanks to the lack of light and humidity in this part of the church since the 1300s, when the room was entirely interred.

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **0577-283-048.** Admission to church free, except when floor uncovered in Sept–Oct, then 6€; Libreria Piccolomini on cumulative ticket, or 3€. Mar 15–Oct daily 9am–7:30pm; Nov–Mar 14 daily 10am–1pm and 2:30–5pm. Admission to crypt 5€. Sept–May daily 9:30am–7pm; June–Aug 9:30am–8pm.

Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana ★★ Housed in the walled-up right aisle of the Duomo's abortive new nave, Siena's Duomo museum contains all the works removed from the facade for conservation as well as disused altarpieces, including Duccio's masterpiece. It also offers one of the city's best views. The **ground floor** has the fascinating but weather-beaten facade **statues by Giovanni Pisano** and his school (1284–96), remarkable for their Gothic plasticity and craned, elongated necks. (When they were 15m/50 ft. up in niches, these protruding necks made sure their faces were visible from the ground.) In the center of the room is Jacopo della Quercia's last work, a 1438 marble panel of *Cardinal Casini Presented to the Virgin by St. Anthony Abbot.* Also here is a luminous marble tondo of the ***Madonna and Child*** ★ carved in refined *schiacciato* relief. Most scholars now agree it's the work of Donatello. There are more statues out a side door, but that leads to the exit, so first head up the stairs.

Upstairs is the museum's (if not the city's) masterpiece, **Duccio's *Maestà*** ★★★. It's impossible to overstate the importance of this double-sided altarpiece, now separated and displayed on opposite sides of the intimate room. Not only did it virtually found the Sienese school of painting, but it has also been considered one of the most important late medieval paintings in all of Europe since the day it was unveiled. When Duccio finished the work on June 9, 1311, it was reportedly carried in procession from the painter's workshop to the Duomo's altar by the clergy, government officials, and every last citizen in Siena. The centuries have, all told, been unusually kind to it. Although eight of the predella panels are in foreign museums and one is lost (12 pinnacle angels suffered similar fates), it's otherwise remarkably intact and in great shape. The central scene of the *Maestà,* or Virgin Mary in Majesty enthroned and surrounded by saints, became the archetypal grand subject for a Sienese painter. Her dark bulk and the gorgeous inlaid

throne contribute to the Madonna's majesty, while the soft folds of her robes and her gentle features bring out her humanity.

On the wall is an early Duccio *Madonna and Child.* Almost overlooked here is Pietro Lorenzetti's incredible ***Birth of the Virgin*** ★★. The perspective in the piece may be a bit off, but Lorenzetti broke traditions and artistic boundaries with his fabrics, his colors, and (most important) the architectural space he created. Instead of painting a triptych with a central main scene and two unrelated side panels of saints, as was the norm, Lorenzetti created a single continuous space by painting vaulted ceilings that seem to grow back from the pointed arches of the triptych's frame. Pietro never got a chance to develop these ideas; this is the last work he painted before succumbing to the plague.

The upper floor's **Treasury Room** has a remarkable early *Crucifix* by Giovanni Pisano (ca. 1280), a 13th-century gilded silver reliquary containing the head of St. Galgano, and paintings by Domenico Beccafumi, Sassetta, and Vecchietta kept in a usually locked side room. In the **Sala della Madonna degli Occhi Grossi,** the namesake *Madonna of the Big Eyes,* which got nudged off the cathedral's high altar by Duccio's *Maestà,* was painted in the 1220s by the "Maestro di Tressa." Also here are some Ambrogio Lorenzetti *Saints* (and a few by Il Sodoma) and *Madonna and Child* works by Matteo di Giovanni, Sano di Pietro, and the "Master of Città di Castello."

If you take the stairs (past rooms of baroque canvases and church vestments) that lead up to the walkway atop the would-be facade of the "New Duomo," you get the best visualization of how the enlarged Duomo would have looked as well as sweeping **views** ★★ across the city's rooftops with the Torre del Mangia towering over the Palazzo Pubblico.

Piazza del Duomo 8. ✆ **0577-42-390** or 0577-283-048. www.operaduomo.siena.it. Admission on cumulative ticket, or 6€. June–Sept daily 9:30am–8pm; Sept–Oct and Mar–June daily 9:30am–7pm; Jan–Feb daily 10am–5pm.

Baptistery ★ The Duomo's baptistery was built in the 14th century beneath the cathedral's choir and supports a Gothic facade left unfinished by Domenico di Agostino (1355). The upper walls and vaulted ceilings inside were **frescoed by Vecchietta** and his school in the late 1440s (look for the alligator) but "touched up" in the 19th century. What you're here to see, though, is the **baptismal font** ★ (1417–30). The frames are basically Gothic, but the gilded brass panels were cast by the foremost Sienese and Florentine sculptors of the early Renaissance. Starting on the side facing the altar, Siena's master Jacopo della Quercia did the *Annunciation to Zacharias.* Giovanni di Turino did the next two, the *Birth of the Baptist* and the *Preaching of the Baptist.* The *Baptism of Christ* is by the author of the Baptistery doors in Florence, Lorenzo Ghiberti, who collaborated with Giuliano di Ser Andrea on the *Arrest of St. John.* The final panel is perhaps the greatest, Donatello's masterful early study of precise perspective and profound depth in the *Feast of Herod.*

Piazza San Giovanni (down the stairs around the back right flank of the Duomo). ✆ **0577-283-048.** www.operaduomo.siena.it. Admission on cumulative ticket, or 3€. June–Aug daily 9:30am–8pm; Sept–Oct and Mar–Apr daily 9:30am–7pm; Jan–Feb daily 10am–5pm.

Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala ★ The hospital across from the Duomo entrance cared for the infirm from the 800s up until the 1990s, when it began to be restructured as a museum and exhibition space, including the city's archaeological collections. The original decorations of the hospital itself, inside, however, merit a visit on their own. And if the round stained-glass window from the cathedral's apse is still under restoration here, by all means check it out—it's your only chance to see up close the oldest stained glass of Italian manufacture, designed by Duccio in 1288.

The first fresco you see, just after the ticket booth, is Domenico Beccafumi's luridly colored ***Meeting at Porta Andrea*** (after 1512). Off to the left, just past the bookshop, is the entrance to the **Sala del Pellegrinaio** ★, which held hospital beds until just a few years ago. The walls were frescoed in the 1440s with scenes from the history of the hospital and its good works (all labeled). Most are vivid masterpieces by Domenico di Bartolo, richly colored and full of amusing details. However, Vecchietta did the upwardly mobile orphans over the exit door; Jacopo della Quercia's less talented and little known brother, Priamo, did a cartoonish scene on the left wall; and a pair of Mannerist hacks filled in the spaces at the room's end.

Downstairs are rooms documenting the restoration of Jacopo della Quercia's Fonte Gaia with plaster casts, and the **Oratorio di Santa Caterina della Notte.** This latter was decorated mainly in the 17th century by Rustici and Rutilio Manetti but also contains a rich *Madonna and Child with Saints, Angels, and Musicians* by Taddeo di Bartolo (ca. 1400) in the back room. Exit through the church of **Santissima Annunziata,** with a bronze *Risen Christ* by Vecchietta over the high altar and an apse-covering fresco by Sebastiano Conca (1732).

The collection in Siena's new **Museo Archeologico,** recently incorporated into the Santa Maria della Scala complex, is small, and while there's nothing of earth-shattering significance, there are some surprisingly good pieces for a museum hardly anyone knows exists. Wander past fading frescoes to examine local Etruscan bronzes, black *bucchero* vases, funerary urns in terra cotta and alabaster, and some Roman pocket change.

Piazza del Duomo 2. ✆ **0577-49-153.** http://santamaria.comune.siena.it. Admission on cumulative ticket, or 5.50€ with reservations, 6€ without reservations. Mar 15–Nov 5 Mon–Sat 10am–6:30pm; Nov 6–Mar 14 Mon–Sat 10:30am–4:30pm.

THE PALIO DELLE CONTRADE

No other festival in Italy is as colorful, as intense, or as spectacular as **Siena's Palio** ★★★. Twice a year, Siena packs the Piazza del Campo with dirt and runs a no-holds-barred bareback horse race around it, the highlight of a full week of trial runs, feasts, parades, spectacles of skill, and solemn ceremonies. The tradition, in one form or another, goes back to at least 1310.

The Palio is a deadly serious competition, and while Siena doesn't mind if visitors show up (you may, in fact, find yourself adopted into the *contrada* of the first person you make friends with and invited to the communal feasts), in the end visitors are peripheral. The Palio is for the Sienese.

To understand the Palio—really, to understand Siena—you must know something of the *contrada* system. In the 14th century there were about 42 *contrade,* neighborhood wards that helped provide militia support for Siena's defense. The number of wards was successively reduced until the current 17 *contrade* were fixed in 1675. Each ward is named after an animal or object—*Drago* (Dragon), *Giraffa* (Giraffe), *Istrice* (Porcupine), *Onda* (Wave), *Torre* (Tower)—and each has its own headquarters, social club, museum, and church.

Each *contrada* has always been responsible for its own. You are born into the *contrada* of your parents, are baptized in your *contrada*'s open-air font, learn your *contrada*'s allies and enemies at an early age, go to church in your *contrada*'s oratory, almost invariably marry within your *contrada,* spend your free time hanging out in the *contrada* social club, and help elect or serve on your *contrada*'s governing body. Even your funeral is sponsored by the *contrada,* which mourns your passing as family. In a way, it's like a benevolent form

of Hollywood's mythical Mafia—but no *contrada* tolerates unlawfulness, and as a result Siena has a shockingly low crime rate.

Ten *contrade* are chosen by lot each year to ride in the **July 2** Palio (established in 1659). The other seven, plus three of the July riders, run the even bigger Palio on **August 16** (which dates from 1310). Although both races are technically equal in importance, the August Palio gets the most attention, partly because it's older but mainly because it's a sort of rematch, the last chance to win for the year. Actually, chance really is what wins the Palio: Your opportunity to ride, the horse you're given, and the order you're lined up on the track are each chosen by separate lots; even your jockey is a wild card. He's always imported—traditionally a Maremma horseman, but many come these days from Sardegna and Sicily as well—and you'll never know how well he'll ride, whether the bribe one of your rival *contrade* may slip him will outweigh the wages you paid, or if he'll even make it to the race without being ambushed. If your jockey does turn on you, you'd better hope he's thrown quickly. The Palio, you see, is a true horse race—the horse is the one that wins (it's hoped no rivals have drugged it), whether there's a rider still on it or not. The jockey's main job is to hang onto the horse's bare back and thrash the other horses and their riders with the stiff ox-hide whip he's given for the purpose. The Palio may at this point seem pretty lawless, but there actually is one rule: No jockey can grab another horse's reins.

At the two 90-degree turns of the Campo, almost every year a rider or two—and occasionally an entire horse—goes flying out of the racetrack to land among the stands or slams up against the mattresses prudently padding the *palazzi* walls. Sienese lore, however, maintains that no one has ever died in the running of a Palio. What is the prize for all this? A *palio,* a banner painted with the image of the Virgin Mary, in whose name the race is run. That, and the honor of your *contrada.* The Sienese refer to the *palio* banner offhandedly as *il cencio* (the rag), trying their best to sound flippant about the single greatest object of their collective desires and aspirations.

The Palios really start on June 29 and August 13, when the lots are drawn to select the 10 lucky racers and the trial races begin. Over the next 2 days, morning and afternoon trial runs are held, and on the evening before each Palio, the *contrade* hold an all-night feast and party lasting more or less until the 7:45am Jockey's Mass in the Cappella della Piazza on the Campo. There's a final heat at 9am, then everybody dissolves to his or her separate *contrada* for last-minute preparations. The highlight is the 3pm (3:30pm in July) Blessing of the Horse in each *contrada*'s church—a little manure dropping at the altar is a sign of good luck—at which the priest ends with a resounding command to the horse: "Go forth, and return a winner!"

Unless invited by a *contrada,* you're probably not going to get into any of the packed churches for this, so your best strategy is to stick around the Campo all day. Because standing in the center of the Campo for the race is free (the grandstands require tickets; see below), you should ideally stake out a spot close to the start-finish line before 2pm. Just before 5pm, the pageantry begins, with processions led by a contingent from Montalcino in honor of it harboring the last members of the Sienese Republic in the 16th century. The *palio* banner is drawn about the piazza in the War Chariot (a wagon drawn by two snowy white oxen), and *contrada* youths in Renaissance costume juggle huge, colorful banners in the *sbandierata* flag-throwing display.

At 7:30pm (7pm in July) the horses start lining up between two ropes. Much care is taken to get the first nine in some indeterminate perfect order. After countless false starts and equine finagling, suddenly the 10th horse comes thundering up from behind, and as

soon as he hits the first rope the second one is dropped and the race is on. Three laps and fewer than 90 seconds later, it's over. The winning *contrada* bursts into songs celebrating its greatness, losers cry in each other's arms, and those who suspect their jockeys of double-crossing them chase the hapless men—whose horses don't stop running at the finish line—through the streets, howling for blood. The banquets that night, at long tables laid out on the streets of each *contrada,* are more solemn than the feasts of the night before, with only the winners truly living it up—their party goes on for several days.

If standing in the middle of the hot and crowded Campo doesn't attract you—and anyone with a small bladder might want to think twice, as there are no facilities and no one is allowed in or out from just before the procession until the race is over (about 3½ hr.)—you can try to buy a ticket for a seat in the grandstands or at a window of one of the buildings surrounding the piazza. These are controlled by the building owners and the shops in front of which the stands are set up and cost anywhere from 350€ for a single seat to about 1,500€ for a window seating four people. They can easily sell out a year in advance. **Palio Viaggi,** Piazza Gramsci 7 (✆ **0577-280-828**), can help you score a few, and the tourist office has all the contacts for the individual shops and buildings if you want to negotiate directly for a seat. If you show up late and sans ticket, make your way up Via Giovanni Duprè to the Piazza del Mercato behind the Palazzo Pubblico; the police stationed there will often allow people into the Campo between the processions and the race itself.

SEEING THE REST OF SIENA

In Terza Di Città

Pinacoteca Nazionale ★ Siena's painting gallery houses the most representative collection of the Sienese school of art. It wouldn't be fair to label it a museum of second-rate paintings by first-rate artists, but the supreme masterpieces of Siena do lie elsewhere. It's laid out more or less chronologically starting on the second floor, though the museum is constantly rearranging (especially the last bits), and there are rumors that all the collections will eventually be moved to the Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala (p. 215).

Room 1 contains the first definite work of the Sienese school, a 1215 altar frontal by the "Maestro di Teresa," and one of the earliest known paintings on canvas, Guido da Siena's *Scenes from the Life of Christ* (late 1200s). Rooms 3 and 4 have works by the first great Sienese master, Duccio, including an early masterpiece showing Cimabue's influence, the tiny 1285 *Madonna dei Francescani* (in poor condition, it's kept under glass). Rooms 5 to 8 pay homage to the three great early-14th-century painters, Simone Martini and the brothers Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Of Martini, be sure to look at the *Madonna and Child* (1321) from the Pieve di San Giovanni Battista and the *Altar of Beato Agostino Novello.* Martini's brother-in-law Lippo Memmi weighs in with a fresco fragment of the *Madonna and Child with Saints,* and there's a gold-heavy *Ascension* by the "Maestro di Ovile." The best Lorenzetti works are in the small side rooms off room 7, including a *Madonna Enthroned* and a *Madonna of the Carmelites* by Pietro; also look for Ambrogio's small cityscapes of castles and cities, and his last dated work, a 1344 *Annunciation.*

In the atrium corridor are some 14th-century Sienese and Florentine works, then rooms 13 to 19 feature 15th-century Sienese paintings by the likes of Giovanni di Paolo, including a 1440 *Crucifixion* and two of the *Presentation at the Temple.* Matteo di Giovanni is also represented here before passing to the work of Sano di Pietro, Vecchietta, and Francesco di Giorgio Martini. The third floor houses a small, formerly private collection of 16th- and 17th-century paintings, including a Dürer *St. Jerome.*

The regular collections continue on the first floor, which is often rearranged. Among the paintings are two by the "Maestro di Volterra," a Pinturicchio *Holy Family,* and Girolamo Genga's 1509 frescoes *Ransom of Prisoners* and the *Flight of Aeneas from Troy.* The museum sometimes displays in the next rooms its many works by Mannerist master Domenico Beccafumi, including a *Trinity with Saints,* a *Stigmata of St. Catherine,* a *Birth of the Virgin,* and a particularly fine *Christ Descending into Limbo.* Also look for Beccafumi's huge **cartoons** ★★, from which many of the panels in the Duomo floor were made. Beccafumi's 16th-century rival, who painted more in the classicist branch of the High Renaissance rather than in the Mannerist style, was Sodoma, also well represented here. If it's on display, you can compare the two painters by looking at Sodoma's take on *Christ in Limbo;* it's a brighter work with a better use of color but lacks Beccafumi's weird mastery of light and experimentation with form. The detached fresco of Sodoma's *Christ at the Column* is remarkably realistic and has a fascinating use of rich colors, as does his large and detailed *Deposition,* where parts of the scene are reflected in the soldier's armor and helm.

Via San Pietro 29. ✆ **0577-281-161.** Admission 4€. Mon 8:30am–1:30pm; Tues–Sat 8:15am–7:15pm; Sun 8:15am–1:15pm.

San Niccolò al Carmine (Santa Maria del Carmine) This 14th-century church on the edge of town was remodeled by Sienese master architect Baldassare Peruzzi in 1517 and contains some good baroque works. Search out especially Domenico Beccafumi's eerily luminous *St. Michael,* on the right wall's altar. The chapel holds Sodoma's dark *Birth of the Virgin.* The left side of the church has—to balance the Beccafumi—a beat-up but well-done *Ascension* by Girolamo del Pacchia.

Pian dei Mantellini. No phone. Free admission. Bus: A (green, yellow).

In Terza Di San Martino

Palazzo Piccolomini This 1469 palace is a touch of Florence peeking into the southeast corner of the Campo. It was designed by Bernardo Rossellino in the Florentine Renaissance style and is now home to the *Archivio di Stato* (head down the corridor off the left of the courtyard to grab the elevator to the fourth floor). The state archives preserve, among other notable documents, Boccaccio's will and Jacopo della Quercia's contract for the Fonte Gaia. But the main thing to see is a remarkable set of wooden covers made for the city's account books, called the ***Tavolette di Biccherna*** ★, painted from the 13th to 17th centuries with religious scenes and important events in Siena's history—Sano di Pietro, Vecchietta, Domenico Beccafumi, and Ambrogio Lorenzetti even did a few.

Via Banchi di Sotto 52 (btw. Via Banchi di Sotto and Via del Porrione at Via Rinaldini). ✆ **0577-247-145.** www.comune.siena.it. Free admission. Mon–Sat 9am–1pm. Archives open Mon–Fri, 4 hourly viewings: 9:30, 10:30, and 11:30am, and 12:30pm. Bus: A (pink), B, N, 22, 25, 26, or 27.

San Martino Beyond a 1613 facade by Giovanni Fontana, this little church, whose founding dates from before the 8th century, retains a few good late-Renaissance paintings. The second altar on the right has a Guido Reni *Circumcision* (1636), and beyond it is a severely darkened Il Guercino *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew.* The high altar is a fair baroque job by Giuseppe Mazzuoli, and as you leave take a good look at Domenico Beccafumi's Mannerist *Nativity* on the third altar of the left aisle.

Just to the facade's left is the Renaissance **Loggia del Papa** (1462), built for Pius II. When you exit San Martino, head left down Via delle Scotte to no. 14 to see the 18th-century **Synagogue,** a remnant of the Jewish ghetto that existed behind the Campo from

1571 to 1796. You can visit by guided tour only (for a donation of about 3€) every 40 minutes on Sundays from 10am to 1pm and 2 to 5pm (to 4pm Nov–Mar); book at the Florentine number ✆ **055-234-6654.**

Off Via Banchi di Sotto. No phone. Free admission. Bus: A (pink), B, N, 22, 25, 26, or 27.

Santa Maria dei Servi Beyond some cypress and a small patch of green grass, this huge 13th-century church sits facadeless, with mute rough brick climbing up the front next to an enormous campanile. The second chapel on the right aisle houses the church's masterpiece, a late Byzantine-style ***Madonna del Bordone*** ★ by Coppo di Marcovaldo, signed in 1261. The third chapel jumps ahead to the baroque with Rutilio Manetti's *Birth of the Virgin,* and the Renaissance is represented in the fifth chapel with Matteo di Giovanni's stupendous and frightening *Massacre of the Innocents* (1491). The right transept has another take on the subject in the second chapel to the right of the altar; this *Massacre* was probably frescoed by Francesco di Segna with the help of Niccoló di Segna and Pietro Lorenzetti. Across the transept are a painted *Crucifix* by Niccoló di Segna in the chapel and an *Annunciatory Angel* by Francesco Vanni (the *Mary Annunciate* half is in the left transept). The second chapel to the left of the high altar has frescoed scenes from the *Life of St. John the Baptist,* again by the di Segnas and Pietro Lorenzetti; Taddeo di Bartolo did the *Nativity* altarpiece in 1404.

Piazza A. Manzoni. No phone. Free admission. Bus: A (pink), B, N, 22, 25, 26, or 27.

In Terza Di Camollia

Siena's northern third spreads off either side of the palace-lined **Via Banchi di Sopra.** Two blocks up on the left is the oldest Gothic palace in the city, the **Palazzo Tolomei,** begun in 1208 and now home to the Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze bank. The piazza out front is where the city council met from the 11th century until the Palazzo Pubblico was built. Two blocks farther is the piazza formed by the Gothic **Palazzo Salimbeni** and its tributary palaces, linked to form the seat of the Monte di Paschi di Siena, Siena's powerhouse bank founded in 1472 and still a strong player in Italian finance (and the city's largest employer).

San Francesco A late Gothic church (1326–1475), Siena's Franciscan barn was badly damaged in a 1655 fire and used as a military barracks for a long time before being reconstructed in the 1880s. On the inside of the entrance wall you can see what happens to frescoes that are left out under the elements at city gates. Remounted here are heavily deteriorated works that once graced tabernacles at the Porta Romana (on the left, painted by Sassetta and Sano di Pietro) and the Porta Pispini (on the right, by Sodoma). On the right wall are 14th- or 15th-century Sienese school frescoes. In the second chapel to the right of the altar is a tomb with a *schiacciato* effigy carved by Urbano da Cortona (1462–87); the chapel to its left has a late-14th-century *Madonna and Child* by St. Catherine's friend Andrea Vanni. The first chapel to the left of the altar contains a detached *Crucifixion* by Pietro Lorenzetti, whose brother Ambrogio did the excellent frescoes, now in poor condition, kept in the third chapel down. What's left of these early 1330s works, Ambrogio's first fresco attempt, depict the *Martyrdom of Franciscan Missionaries at Ceuta* and *St. Louis d'Anjou Taking Leave of Pope Boniface VIII,* where Lorenzetti makes you, the viewer, part of the papal court looking on. The last choir chapel has a *Madonna and Child Enthroned* attributed to Jacopo di Mino.

Piazza San Francesco. No phone. Free admission. Daily 7am–noon and 3:30–7pm.

Oratorio di San Bernardino e Museo Diocesano ★ The church of San Francesco was where St. Bernardine first donned his monkish robes. The exact spot where he prayed and began preaching is now marked by the **Oratory of San Bernardino,** built in the late 15th century. The lower of the oratory's two levels was frescoed by the best 17th-century Sienese artists—including Francesco Vanni, Rutilio and Domenico Manetti, and Ventura Salimbeni—and houses a little *Madonna* by Sano di Pietro. The upper level has higher-quality **frescoes ★** by 16th-century artists Sodoma, Domenico Beccafumi, and Girolamo del Pacchia. The rooms that make up the **Diocesan Museum** contain mostly unremarkable paintings and churchly artifacts.

Via del Comune doglegs off Via dei Rossi just down from Piazza San Francesco and leads to the 14th-century double city gate **Porta Ovile,** which preserves a tabernacle frescoed by Sano di Pietro. Just outside the gate you'll find the 1262 **Fonte Ovile,** one of the city's most picturesque public fountains.

Piazza San Francesco 18. ✆ **0577-283-048.** www.operaduomo.siena.it. Admission 3€. Mar 15–Oct daily 10:30am–1:30pm and 3–5:30pm. Closed Nov–March 14.

Casa di Santa Caterina ★ The remarkable Caterina Benincasa, daughter of a rich Sienese dyer, took a nun's veil (but never an order's vows) in 1355 at the age of 8 after her first of many visions of Christ. In 1375, a crucifix in Pisa cinched her holiness by giving her the stigmata of Christ's wounds. Her name and reputation for devout wisdom and saintly life spread, and in 1378 she was chosen as Siena's ambassador to Pope Gregory XI in Avignon. There, her eloquent letter writing and sharp, argumentative mind eventually succeeded in doing what no amount of traditional political finagling had been able to accomplish for 73 years: She persuaded the pope to leave civilized Avignon and return the papal seat to Rome, which was then a medieval backwater rife with the armed squabbles of noble clans. Caterina died in Rome in 1380, at age 33, and was canonized 80 years later. In 1939, she was declared patron saint of Italy, and in 1970, together with St. Teresa of Avila, received the highest honor the church can bestow: Saints Catherine and Teresa became the first women ever elevated to Doctor of the Church.

The house where she was born was converted into a sanctuary in 1466, and it remains a peaceful, reflective spot. The entrance is a small brick-lined courtyard where you can occasionally see a pair of Goose *contrada* teenagers practicing the complicated art of flag tossing for the Palio. Beyond this is a small but pretty little loggia built in 1533 by Peruzzi or his student Giovanni Battista Pelori.

To the left is the old family kitchen transformed into an **oratory** and decorated in the 16th and 19th centuries with paintings by Il Pomarancio, Il Riccio, Francesco Vanni, and others. The majolica-tiled floor is 16th century. The **church** opposite the oratory was built in 1623 over Catherine's orchard to house the 12th-century Pisan-school *Crucifixion,* in front of which the saint received the stigmata. Back under the loggia, the stairs lead down past Catherine's **cell,** frescoed in 1896, toward the Goose *contrada*'s church, the **Oratorio dell'Oca** (seldom open, but containing works by Sodoma).

At the bottom of Via Santa Caterina below, nestled amid the remaining green of the narrow valley between San Domenico and the Duomo, is the brick 1246 **Fonte Branda,** a public wash house battlemented like a tiny fortress.

Costa di San Antonio (btw. Via della Sapienza and Via Santa Caterina). ✆ **0577-247-393.** www.caterinati.org. Free admission. Easter–Oct daily 9am–12:30pm and 3–6pm; winter daily 9am–12:30pm and 3:30–6pm. Bus: A (red), 2, or 5.

San Domenico ★ The Dominican's Siena home is an enormous, severe, and vaguely unattractive pile of bricks (1226), jutting above a modern section of town. There are good views here, though, of the Duomo and Siena's rooftops. The raised chapel off the west end (to the right as you enter) preserves the only genuine *Portrait of St. Catherine,* painted by her friend and contemporary Andrea Vanni.

The **Cappella di Santa Caterina (Chapel of St. Catherine)** halfway down the right wall was frescoed with scenes from the saint's life. All except the right wall (where in 1593 Francesco Vanni painted Catherine performing an exorcism) were frescoed by Sodoma in 1526. The large work on the left wall of her interceding on behalf of a condemned man as well as the other scenes of her in ecstasy and swooning are some of Sodoma's best work. Drop some coins in the light box and the frescoes, as well as Catherine's venerated head, in a gilt reliquary case, on the altar light up.

At the end of the nave, on the right, is a *Nativity* by Francesco di Giorgio Martini, dominated by a crumbling Roman triumphal arch in the background and a *Pietà* above. The first chapel to the right of the altar is home to a *Madonna and Child with Saints* by Matteo di Giovanni, one of whose masterpieces, *St. Barbara Enthroned with Angels and Sts. Mary Magdalene and Catherine,* is in the second chapel of the left transept. An altar on the right as you leave has a 14th-century *Madonna and Child Surrounded by Four Saints and God* by Sodoma, with a 16th-century Siena skyline above the tiny-paneled predella.

Piazza San Domenico. No phone. Free admission. Apr–Oct 7am–12:55pm and 3–6:30pm; Nov–Mar 9am–12:55pm and 3–6pm. Bus: 1, 3, 6, 10, 18, 30, 31, 37, or 106.

Enoteca Italiana ★★ The 16th-century Fortezza Medicea has been turned into a public park. Its courtyard is an open-air theater, its ramparts are a place for a stroll and a view, and its vaults are filled with Italy's national wine museum. Seated at small tables in the tunnel-like brick halls or out on the terraces in summer, you can sample a choice selection of Tuscan and Italian wines by the glass or go all out on an entire bottle from their extensive *cantine* (more than 1,200 labels cool their heels here). It wouldn't be fair to say this is a truly representative collection, because not all vintners choose to take part, but it has been Italy's official state-mandated *museo del vino* since 1950. Out of Italy's some 4,000 wines, it preserves at least all 266 kinds of DOC, each of the 17 DOCG labels, and every last one of Italy's 128 IGT wines.

Fortezza Medicea. ✆ **0577-288-497.** www.enoteca-italiana.it. Free admission; glass of wine 3€–7€. Cold plate of typical regional foods 7.50€–12€. Mon noon–8pm; Tues–Sat noon–1am. Closed Dec 25–Jan 6.

SHOPPING

ANTIQUES You may not find any real bargains at **Antichità Monna Agnese** (✆ **0577-282-288**), Via di Città 45, but you will find spectacular period furniture aimed at those with fairly deep pockets to decorate an antique home.

BOOKS & PAPER The **Libreria Senese,** Via di Città 62–66 (✆ **0577-280-845**), has the largest selection of English-language books, though it's now getting competition from the chain store **Feltrinelli,** Via Banchi di Sopra 52 and 64–66 (✆ **0577-271-104** or 0577-44-009; www.lafeltrinelli.it). If you enjoyed browsing the leather-bound journals and quality stationery at **Il Papiro** in Florence, you have a second chance to buy that literary someone a gift at the Siena branch: Via di Città 37 (✆ **0577-284-241;** www.ilpapirofirenze.it). **Arte & Libri,** Via di Città 111 (✆ **0577-221-325**), carries what its name indicates, art and books; some of its publications tout such fabulous images of Tuscany that the store's name seems redundant.

CERAMICS & HOUSEWARES Once upon a time there were countless ceramic stores lining Via di Città, few of them offering any real quality. Now there are fewer ceramic stores in town, and they offer fine examples of Tuscan ceramics. The most authentic ceramics feature only black, white, and—surprise—the reddish-brown Crayola color of "burnt sienna," or *terra di Siena.* **Ceramiche Artistiche Santa Caterina,** with showrooms at Via di Città 51, 74, and 76 (✆ **0577-283-098**) and a workshop outside town at Via P.A. Mattioli 12 (✆ **0577-45-006**), sells genuine high-quality ceramics, courtesy of Maestro Marcello Neri, who trained at Siena's premier art and ceramics institutions, and his son, Fabio.

For kitchen appliances that make you realize that only Italians know how to cook in style, check out the juicers, stemware, and other accoutrements at **Muzzi Sergio,** Via dei Termini 97 (✆ **0577-40-439**).

CLOTHING For men's and women's high fashion, bring your credit cards along for a date with Armani, Gucci, Versace, Burberry, Missoni—and some more affordable labels—at **Cortecci,** Via Banchi di Sopra 27 (✆ **0577-280-096;** www.corteccisiena.it). There's another branch on Il Campo at 30–31 (✆ **0577-280-984**).

Antiche Dimore, Via di Città 115 (✆ **0577-45-337**), is a good place for amateur seamstresses to pick up fabric only found in Italy. At **Tessuti a Mano,** Via San Pietro 7 (✆ **0577-282-200**) weaver Fioretta Bacci will do the hard work for you, creating old-school sweaters and other outerwear on her giant looms.

FOOD Supermarkets are a rarity in Tuscany, and so much the better. The markets that do exist are worth visiting for the experience alone. At **Consorzio Agrario Siena,** Via Pianigiani 9 (✆ **0577-2301**), local restaurateurs stock up on ingredients for their classic dishes, as most of the produce comes directly from the farm, and many of the packaged goods are packaged locally. The **Antica Drogheria Manganelli,** Via di Città 71–73 (✆ **0577-280-002**), is a little more upscale but just as authentic: It has made its own its own *panforte* and soft *ricciarelli* almond cookies since the 19th century. The best prices for wine, cheese and every other fruit of the fields that make this region famous can be found at **La Terra di Siena,** Via G. Duprè 32 (✆ **0577-222-368**).

WHERE TO STAY

For help finding a room, there are two private agencies. Stop by the **Siena Hotels Promotion** booth on Piazza San Domenico (✆ **0577-288-084;** fax 0577-280-290; www.hotelsiena.com), where for 1.50€ to 4€, depending on the category of hotel, they'll find you a room and reserve it. The booth is open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 7pm (until 8pm in summer). In the underground office of Parcheggio il Campo parking lot, Via Fontanella 4, is **Protur** (✆ **0577-45-900;** fax 0577-283-145), which will book you a room for free; it also runs guided tours of Siena and its province.

Expensive

Palazzo Ravizza ★ The Santi-Ravizza family has run this hotel in a 17th-century Renaissance *palazzo* since the 1920s. It's a bit overpriced in the high season, when you have to take dinner here, but an excellent deal in winter. (Make sure to call ahead, as some years they close for a month to renovate.) The rooms tend to be large, with high ceilings—some gorgeously frescoed, a few with painted details around the wood beams. Those on the front catch some traffic noise, but on the back you'll hear only birdsong and the splashing fountain in the grave garden with sublime countryside vistas. The

Ravizza is outside the center of Siena, but still inside the city walls, offering a good Sienese neighborhood experience away from the tourist bustle.

Pian dei Mantellini 34 (near Piazza San Marco), 53100 Siena. ✆ **0577-280-462.** Fax 0577-221-597. www.palazzoravizza.it. 30 units. 150€–200€ double; 220€–270€ suite. 10% discount for stays of more than 3 nights. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: A (green, yellow). **Amenities:** Restaurant (closed Jan–Feb); bar; babysitting; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar in suites, Wi-Fi.

Moderate

Antica Torre ★★ The very friendly Patrizia Landolfo and her family run one of Siena's most simply elegant hotels, installed in a 16th-century tower house atop a brick-lined 600-year-old potter's workshop, which now serves as a minuscule breakfast room. A travertine staircase leads to rooms that are on the cozy side of small, with marble flooring, iron filigree headboards, old writing desks, and gauzy curtains. The rooms on the street are a smidgen larger, but those in back are quieter. The best rooms are the two on the top levels with a view over the Sienese rooftops to rolling green hills. The old tower is on a residential side street near the Porta Romana, a 10-minute stroll down Via Banchi di Sotto from the Campo.

You may also be interested in the **Palazzo di Valli ★**, Via Enea Silvio Piccolomini 135 (✆ **0577-226-102**), the Landolfos' 12-room countryside hotel converted from a 17th-century villa set amid olive trees and flower gardens that lies .8km (½-mile) from Porta Romana gate (a bus carries you to the Campo in 5 min.). Doubles here go for 120€ to 135€, including breakfast, bathroom, TV (on request), minibar, and phone. It's open April through the July Palio, then again August through October.

Via di Fieravecchia 7, 53100 Siena. ✆/fax **0577-222-255.** www.anticatorresiena.it. 8 units. 90€–120€ double; 110€–130€ triple. Breakfast 7€. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking in streets around hotel or public lot nearby. **Amenities:** Internet; 1 smoke-free room. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Hotel Chiusarelli This vaguely neoclassical palm-fronted villa is just a 5-minute hike from the Campo yet only half a block from the bus depot; it's not a particularly charming area but certainly convenient. The rooms have been prettied up a bit and the bathrooms have been redone with tub/shower combinations. The rooms overlook either the noisy road or the clipped lawn of the soccer stadium out back. Monday through Saturday, the latter are the quietest rooms in the house; come Sunday in soccer season (which mercifully takes a hiatus in the busy months of July and Aug) you're in for a noisy but entertaining and educational afternoon. This is a "proper" hotel with a bar, a breakfast terrace, a restaurant, and many tour groups.

Viale Curtatone 15 (near San Domenico), 53100 Siena. ✆ **0577-280-562.** Fax 0577-271-177. www.chiusarelli.com. 48 units. 88€–132€ double; 125€–175€ triple; 153€–208€ quad. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking (8 spaces; call to reserve) or around 18€ in garage. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; bike rentals; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Duomo ★★ This hotel, excellently located just south of its namesake, is housed in a 12th-century *palazzo* that once served as barracks to medieval troops, though the only reminders of this are the Renaissance central staircase and the ancient brickwork in the basement breakfast room. Most of the carpeted guest rooms are of a modest size but not cramped, and the modern furnishings are as tasteful as functional gets, some with worn veneer units, others with newer wicker-and-wood pieces. The bathrooms are tiny, but the mattresses lie on wood-slat orthopedic frames. If you want to secure one of the

nine "panoramic" rooms with a view of the Duomo, be sure to ask when booking. The friendly staff is polished and professional.

Via Stalloreggi 34–38 (halfway btw. the Duomo and Il Campo), 53100 Siena. ✆ **0577-289-088.** Fax 0577-43-043. www.hotelduomo.it. 23 units. 105€–150€ double; 140€–200€ triple; 175€–250€ quad. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking free in nearby garage. Bus: A (green, yellow). **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Hotel Santa Caterina ★ You'll find some of the friendliest hoteliers in Siena here, and they've been slowly reinvesting in the place. The rooms have tile floors (antique terracotta flooring in some), soft beds, and furniture made of old wood; and many have a view down one of the most verdant, unspoiled valleys around Siena. (Most of the other vales in the area have been filled with housing developments.) In summer you can breakfast in the pretty little garden; a glassed-in breakfast veranda is used for winter dining.

Via Enea Silvio Piccolomini 7 (just outside the Porta Romana), 53100 Siena. ✆ **0577-221-105.** Fax 0577-271-087. www.hscsiena.it. 22 units. 144€ double; 195€ triple. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking along street or 12€ in small lot. Bus: A (pink), N, or 2. **Amenities:** Babysitting; bike rental; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Inexpensive

Castagneto Hotel This 200-year-old brick farmhouse owned by the Franconi brothers sits on a ridge northwest of the city and has good views down the valley over their olive grove and up to Siena beyond. You get the vista from all but two rooms, and several even enjoy a small terrace. The accommodations are all good-size and comfortable, with tile floors and those soft, cradling Italian beds of dubious spring power. It's a friendly, homey, and very quiet place to escape from the city a bit without going too far—a city bus stop is right outside the gates (or take a taxi into town for about 10€). There's also a good bar up the road if you want a cheaper breakfast.

Via dei Cappuccini 39, 52100 Siena. ✆ **0577-45-103.** Fax 0577-283-266. 11 units. 80€ double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Dec–Mar 15. Bus: 1. **Amenities:** Concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Hotel Bernini ★ (Value) Mauro and Nadia and their son Alessandro oversee a very amiable, homey set of clean and, for the price, surprisingly comfortable rooms decorated with the odd antique. The firm beds rest on patterned tiling and are surrounded by whitewashed walls curving into the ceilings. (A few have painted wood beams.) Printed curtains hang in the archways of some guest rooms. A pair of rooms have a distant view of the Duomo's flank, and all are mouse quiet, as the place sits atop St. Catherine's house-cum-convent. If you ask, they'll let you go up on the terrace for views of the city and valley. This is a family environment; there is a midnight curfew.

Via della Sapienza 15 (near San Domenico), 53100 Siena. ✆/fax **0577-289-047.** www.albergobernini.com. 9 units, 4 with private bathroom. 65€ double without bathroom; 85€ double with bathroom; 100€ apartment. Sometimes rates are discounted up to 20% in slow periods. Breakfast 7€. No credit cards. Parking in public lots. Closed Dec 1–28. Bus: A (red), C, 2, or 10. **Amenities:** Internet; room service (breakfast); smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C in 2 units, hair dryer on request, no phone.

Hotel Cannon d'Oro ★ (Kids) It's just a few short blocks up the shop-lined Via Banchi di Sopra (its name changes to Via Montanini) to this 15th-century *palazzo.* Most rooms here are antiseptically clean, plain and large, though the decor is livened up in some rooms with old-fashioned bevel-glass mirrors in the wardrobe doors or an antique chest of drawers. The beds are mercifully firm, and while there's some moped and chatter noise outside most windows, it mostly disappears by bedtime on weekdays.

Via Montanini 28 (a few blocks north of Il Campo), 53100 Siena. ✆ **0577-44-321.** Fax 0577-280-868. www.cannondoro.com. 30 units. 60€–105€ double; 75€–135€ triple; 95€–165€ quad. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Bus: C. **Amenities:** Concierge. *In room:* TV, hair dryer on request.

Piccolo Hotel Etruria ★ (Value) This small family-run hotel could thumb its nose at the big corporate chains: It offers equally comfortable modernity with twice the character at one-third the price. In both the main building and the *dipendenza* across the street, the rooms have tiled floors, wood-toned built-in furnishings with stone-topped desks and end tables, and leather strap chairs. The bathrooms are immaculate, and everything is kept spotless. This place gets a star for being as clean, comfortable, and central as you're ever going to find, especially at these prices. Book early. The only real drawback is the 1am curfew, which unfortunately is not when the rest of this neighborhood goes to bed, so nocturnal noise could be a problem.

Via delle Donzelle 3 (off Via Banchi di Sotto), 53100 Siena. ✆ **0577-288-088.** Fax 0577-288-461. www.hoteletruria.com. hetruria@tin.it. 13 units. 80€–110€ double; 90€–117€ triple. Continental breakfast 5€. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. Closed around Dec 10–27. Bus: A (red), B, or N. **Amenities:** Room service (breakfast). *In room:* A/C (June–Oct), TV, hair dryer.

Santuario S. Caterina/Alma Domus (Kids) Down below San Domenico church in an untouristy part of Siena, this simple, cheap hotel is run by the nuns of St. Catherine, so there's a certain monastic quality—but also a kindly hospitality and meditative calm. Many of the midsize rooms have balconies with great views of the Duomo across the little valley. The furnishings are a mix of modular and old-fashioned, with a few wrought-iron bed frames (but soft mattresses). The showers lack curtains, but they're clean and come with fuzzy towels. They have installed air-conditioning in some of the rooms and will probably charge a bit extra for those in summer. While you can only receive calls on your room phone, there are four pay phones. Guests share a common living room and a TV room—and a lamentable 11:30pm curfew.

Via Camporegio 37 (the steep street down off Piazza San Domenico), 53100 Siena. ✆ **0577-44-177.** www.hotelalmadomus.it. Fax 0577-47-601. 40 units. 65€–75€ double; 80€–95€ triple; 95€–110€ quad. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. No parking. Bus: 1, 3, 6, 10, 18, 30, 31, 37, or 106. **Amenities:** Bar; Internet. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer on request.

WHERE TO DINE

Siena has a pretty good **cafe culture,** and during the *passeggiata,* Sienese cozy up to the bar of the cafes lining Via Banchi di Sopra and Via di Città to gulp down espresso and sample finger-size pastries and slices of ***panettone*** **(dry cake)** and Siena's famous, dense, barlike ***panforte.*** (It comes in many types, most a variation on a thick honey paste binding nuts and bits of candied fruit, a holdover from the cane sugar–less Middle Ages.)

For pastry makers and specialty food shops, see "Shopping," earlier in this chapter. Or, sample the bounty at Siena's top cafe, the bustling **Nannini,** Via Banchi di Sopra 22–24 (✆ **0577-41-591**), which also has a **gelateria** branch several blocks farther along at Via Banchi di Sopra 99 (no phone). The cafe is open Monday from 6:30am to 8:30pm, Tuesday through Saturday from 6:30am to midnight, and Sunday from 8am to 8:30pm. Its pastry and *panforte* "factory" is outside the walls at Via Massetana Romana 42 (✆ **0577-285-208**).

Few smaller operations turn out *panforte* anymore, leaving this traditional sweet to be mass-produced by Sapori and Nannini—though recently, Nannini gave over its *panforte* production to Sapori, so while they're still labeled separately and the formulas may differ slightly, in effect they're all the same now.

Expensive

Al Marsili SIENESE Under massive cross-vaulted ceilings of rough old brick, Al Marsili's soft-yellow plaster walls are pocketed with a few very private alcoves. This is the most elegant place in town, complete with bow-tied waiters and a very well chosen, if pricey, wine list. Standout primi are *pici alla casareccia* (fat spaghetti in meat-and-mushroom sauce) and *conchiglie alla rustica* (shell pasta in a strong spinach-and-sausage sauce). For your second course, try *scaloppine al dragoncello* (veal scallops with tomatoes and tarragon), or their best dish, *faraona alla Medici* (meaty guinea hen cooked with pine nuts, almonds, and prunes).

Via del Castoro 3 (btw. Via di Città and the Duomo). ✆ **0577-47-154.** www.ristorantealmarsili.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 8€–10€; secondi 10€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:15pm and 7:30–10pm. Bus: A (green, yellow).

Antica Osteria da Divo ★★ Finds SIENESE This former trattoria has gone mid-scale and greatly improved its menu to offer excellent innovative dishes rooted in Sienese traditions in a classy, but not frosty, atmosphere of soft jazz. The main dining room is a crazy medieval mélange of stone, brick, wood supports, and naked rock, while the rooms in back and in the basement are actually Etruscan tombs carved from the tufa. *Pici al ragout di lepre* (thick hand-rolled pasta strands in hare ragù) and *gnocchetti di patate con erbe cipollina e pecorino di fossa* (gnocchi with chives on a parmigiana pastry crust swimming in melted pecorino cheese) are palate-pleasing primi. For the main course, they ascribe to the growing school of Italian cooking wherein a side dish is included with each secondo (making a meal here less costly than the prices below would suggest). A perfect example: the exquisite *petto d'anatra al vin santo con patate allo zafferano* (duck breast with crisp balls of saffron-kissed mashed potatoes).

Via Franciosa 25–29 (behind the left flank of the Duomo). ✆ **0577-284-381.** www.osteriadadivo.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 10€; secondi with side dish 18€–22€. MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7–10pm. Bus: A (green, yellow).

Osteria le Logge ★★★ SIENESE/TUSCAN Le Logge is many a local's choice for a special night out, offering excellent cooking in a sedate—yet not sedated—atmosphere. The *taglierini al tartufo* has a light butter sauce that doesn't mask the delicate flavor of the black truffles. Heavier primi include *malfatti all'Osteria* (spinach-and-ricotta balls in a creamy tomato sauce) and *ravioli ripieni di pecorino e menta* (ravioli stuffed with sheep's-milk cheese and mint in a sauce flavored with port). The staff is friendly and very accommodating. I once visited with a vegetarian, and our waitress quickly established his eating parameters, proceeded to indicate what my friend could order, and then had the kitchen concoct for him a suitable secondo of all the veggies they had on hand. Meatier palates can enjoy the *bistecche di vitello* (tender veal steaks) or delicate *carpaccio di pesce spada affumicato* (smoked swordfish sliced and pounded into thin disks).

Via del Porrione 33 (just off the Campo). ✆ **0577-48-013.** www.osterialelogge.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 7€–10€; secondi 14€–18€; tasting menu 40€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:45pm and 7–10:30pm. Closed Jan 1–Feb 7. Bus: A (pink), B, or N.

Moderate

Antica Trattoria Papei ★★ SIENESE Although tourists now know to filter behind the Palazzo Pubblico to this large family-run trattoria, locals still hang on vigorously, returning for the simple but good Sienese fare. In summer, you can dine alfresco on the unsightly piazza with a view of the Terza di San Martino. If you're eating inside, head to the left of the door or upstairs for wood-ceilinged ambience—the modern room to the

right is where they try to stick all the tourists. The *pappardelle al sugo di cinghiale* (noodles in wild boar sauce) is a traditional dish, while the *pici alla cardinale* (chewy fat spaghetti in tomato sauce with hot peppers and chunks of pancetta) is a bit more original. Keep it spicy with *coniglio all'arrabbiata* (rabbit cooked in white wine, rosemary, and sage with a pinch of pepperoncino), or try *anatra alla Tolomei* (duck stewed with tomatoes).

Piazza del Mercato 6 (behind the Palazzo Pubblico). ✆ **0577-280-894.** Reservations suggested. Primi 7€; secondi 6.50€–10€. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–3pm and 7–10:30pm.

Castelvecchio ★★ TUSCAN/VEGETARIAN This intimate and very personable little restaurant has a devoted following of regulars who enjoy Simone Romi's skilled service and Mauro Lombardini's daily changing menu of creative Tuscan cuisine. There's at least one meatless dish nightly, and on vegetarian Wednesdays only one meat dish is available. I've had their excellent risotto of zucchini, mint, and basil; a delicious lentil-and-turnip soup; *pennette* in tomato sauce sprinkled with crunchy cream; vegetable pie with a mashed-potato crust; and chicken with peppers and onions.

Via Castelvecchio 65 (off Via San Pietro). ✆ **0577-49-586.** Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–7€; secondi 9€–11€; tasting menu without wine 25€ each for 2 people only. AE, DC, MC, V. Apr–Sept daily 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–9:30pm; Oct–Mar Wed–Mon 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–9:30pm. Bus: A (green, yellow).

La Torre Value TUSCAN You can usually trust a place that doesn't hide its kitchen. La Torre's is in plain view, next to a dozen tightly packed tables under an undulating brick ceiling. It's a popular place, so reserve ahead or show up early. All the pasta is homemade (none more deliciously than the *pici* and the plump tortellini) and served with the sauce of your choice with a generous heap of Parmesan cheese on top. Afterward, try the *vitello arrosto* (slices of roast veal) or *piccione al forno* (oven-baked pigeon).

Via Salicotto 7–9 (9m/30 ft. off Il Campo to left of the Palazzo Pubblico). ✆ **0577-287-548.** Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–8€; secondi 9€–10€; *menù turistico* with wine 18€. AE only. Fri–Wed noon–3pm and 7–10pm. Closed Aug 17–Sept 1. Bus: A (pink), B, or N.

Inexpensive

Osteria la Chiacchera Value SIENESE This is a tiny joint with worn wooden tables, terra-cotta floors, and barrel ends embedded everywhere. "The Chatterbox" proudly serves Sienese "poor people's food." Young couples come here to save money on the date (not only is it cheap, but there's no cover charge or service fee—though tips are greatly appreciated). A choice first course is the *pici boscaiola* (long strands of fat, hand-rolled pasta in tomato-and-mushroom sauce), though the *penne arrabbiata* (in piquant tomato sauce) goes pretty quickly, too. Secondi are simple peasant dishes such as *salsicce e fagioli* (grilled sausages with beans) and *stracotto* (beef and boiled potatoes in piquant tomato sauce). They also do a mean chocolate pie.

Costa di Sant'Antonio 4 (near San Domenico, off Via della Sapienza under the Hotel Bernini). ✆ **0577-280-631.** Reservations recommended. Primi 5€–7€; secondi 6€–8€. MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

EN ROUTE TO SAN GIMIGNANO

Monteriggioni ★★, 20km (12 miles) northwest of Siena along the SS2, is one of the most perfectly preserved fortified villages in all of Italy. The **tourist office** is at Largo Fontebranda 5, 53035 Monteriggioni (✆ **0577-304-810**). You've probably seen aerial photos of this place at postcard stands. The town was once a Sienese outpost; the city's soldiers patrolled the walls and kept an eye out for Florentine troops from the vantage

points of Monteriggioni's towers. All 14 of these have survived more or less intact since the day Dante likened them to the circle of Titans guarding the lowest level of Hell. Although more day-trippers are stopping by every year and there's even a board-rated four-star hotel (**Hotel Monteriggioni; ✆ 0577-305-009;** www.hotelmonteriggioni.net; doubles 230€) hidden in one of the buildings, Monteriggioni remains a sleepy little place. Most of the village is taken up with gardens and a few olive trees. Monteriggioni is content to offer you a lunch at one of its two restaurants, and sell you a few postcards from the shops on the central piazza.

Another 10km (6¼ miles) along a secondary road takes you to **Colle di Val d'Elsa,** the medieval birthplace of master Gothic architect Arnolfo di Cambio, who designed Florence's Palazzo Vecchio and Duomo. The **tourist office** is at Via Campana 43, 53034 Colle di Val d'Elsa (✆ **0577-922-791;** fax 0577-922-621). Buses run here from Siena and San Gimignano, and you can also get a train on the Siena-to-Empoli line (with connections to Florence) that stops in Poggibonsi, from which buses connect to Colle di Val d'Elsa. Don't enter Colle's old city at the east end; instead, circle around the small center to come in the west side for the proper introduction, passing over a short bridge and under the yawning arch of Baccio d'Agnolo's Mannerist **Palazzo Campana** gate (1539). If you're driving and want to get out to explore, park beneath the walls at the lot off the SS68 and walk up the steps to the old town.

The main road of the Old Town, Via del Castello, leads to **Piazza del Duomo.** The cathedral contains one of the nails supposedly used to crucify Christ in a Mino da Fiesole tabernacle in the left transept and a bronze *Crucifix* designed by Giambologna and cast by his student Pietro Tacca over the high altar. Next door is the **Palazzo Pretorio,** which houses a small **archaeology museum** (✆ **0577-922-954**) with a rather bland Etruscan collection and some 14th- and 15th-century frescoes. The communists jailed here in the 1920s scrawled political graffiti on some of the walls. April through September, it's open Tuesday through Friday from 10am to noon and 5 to 7pm and Saturday and Sunday from 10am to noon and 4:30 to 7:30pm; October through April, hours are Tuesday through Friday from 3 to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 10am to noon and 3 to 6pm. Admission is 3€. A fine set of Sienese-school paintings resides in the nearby **Museo Civico e d'Arte Sacra,** Via del Castello 31 (✆ **0577-923-888**), housed in the graffiti-covered **Palazzo dei Priori.** It's open April through October Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to noon and 4 to 7pm; November through March, hours are Saturday and Sunday only from 10am to noon and 3:30 to 6:30pm. Admission is 3€.

3 SAN GIMIGNANO: THE MEDIEVAL MANHATTAN ★★

40km (25 miles) NW of Siena; 57km (35 miles) SW of Florence; 270km (168 miles) NW of Rome

The scene that hits you when you pass through the Porta San Giovanni gate, inside the walls of San Gimignano, and walk the narrow flagstone Via San Giovanni is thoroughly medieval. Okay, so the crossbows, flails, and halberds in shop windows are miniature souvenir versions, and the small Romanesque church facade halfway up the street today hides a modern wine shop. But, if you can mentally block out the racks of postcards, you've got a stage set straight out of Tolkien.

At the top of Via San Giovanni is the center of town, formed by two interlocking triangular *piazze:* **Piazza della Cisterna ★★**, centered on a 1237 well, and **Piazza del**

Duomo, flanked by the city's main church and civic palace. Both spaces are guarded by the tall medieval towers that have made San Gimignano, "city of the beautiful towers," the poster child for Italian hill towns everywhere. No one can agree how many stone skyscrapers remain in this Medieval Manhattan—so many have been chopped down it's a tough call whether they're still officially towers or merely tall, skinny houses—but the official tower count the tourist office gives is 14. There were at one time somewhere between 70 and 76 of the things spiking the sky above this little village. The spires started rising in the bad old days of the 1200s, partly to defend against outside invaders but mostly as command centers for San Gimignano's warring families. Several successive waves of the plague that swept through the town and region (1348, 1464, and 1631) caused the economy (based on textiles and hosting passing pilgrims) to crumble, and San Gimignano became a provincial backwater. Because there was no impetus for new building, by the time tourism began picking up in the 19th century, visitors found a preserved medieval village of crumbling towers.

San Gimignano is by far the most popular Tuscan hill town, a day-trip destination for masses of tour buses coming from Siena and Florence. Therefore, the town is best enjoyed in the evening, after the tour buses leave, especially in the off season and on spring nights: The alleyways are empty, and you can wander in the yellow light of street lamps.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

By Train The 20 or so daily trains on the line between **Siena** (trip time: 20–45 min.) and Empoli, where you can connect from **Florence** (60–75 min.), stop at Poggibonsi (✆ **0577-933-646** or 0577-936-462). From **Poggibonsi,** 19 buses make the 25-minute run to San Gimignano Monday through Saturday, but only nine buses run on Sunday.

By Car Take the Poggibonsi exit off the **Florence-Siena** autostrada or the SS2. San Gimignano is 12km (7½ miles) from Poggibonsi. Another secondary road meets this coming up from Colle di Val d'Elsa.

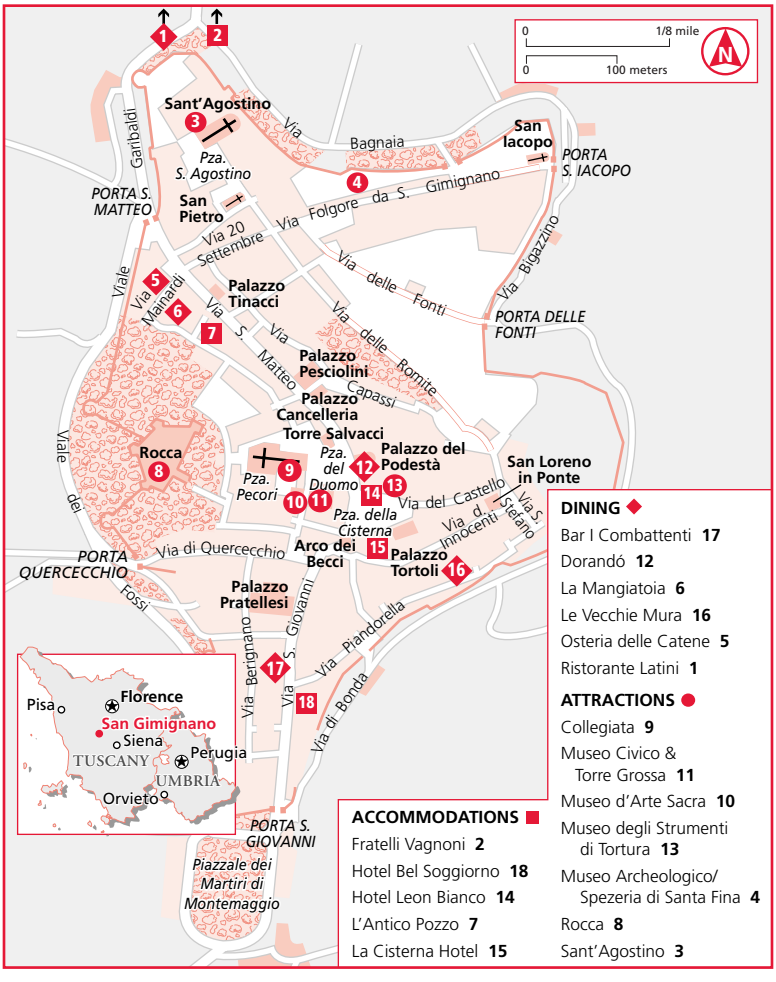
By Bus You almost always have to **transfer buses at Poggibonsi** (see "By Train," above). SITA (✆ **055-47-821;** www.sitabus.it) runs 26 buses daily from **Florence** to Poggibonsi (50–90 min.), 13 of which meet right up with the connection to San Gimignano. There's also a **Sunday direct bus from Florence** (80 min.) at 8:30am. **TRA-IN** (✆ **0577-204-246;** www.trainspa.it) runs about 33 daily buses from **Siena** to Poggibonsi (35–45 min.), stopping at **Colle di Val d'Elsa** on the way. In San Gimignano, buy tickets at the tourist office.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The **tourist office** is at Piazza Duomo 1 (✆ **0577-940-008;** fax 0577-940-903; www.sangimignano.com). It's open daily: March through October from 9am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm and November through February from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 6pm.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS

The citizens dress up in elaborate masks and costumes for a **Carnival** parade just before Lent. **Sangimignanese Summer—**now known as **Dentro e Fuori le Mura—**has, since 1924, brought some lightweight culture to town on the last weekend in July, with open-air opera recitals, classical concerts, and film screenings in the ruins of the Rocca fortress. Thursday and Saturday morning see a bustling **market** on Piazza del Duomo.



EXPLORING THE TOWN OF TOWERS

You can buy a **cumulative ticket** that covers the Torre Grossa and its Museo Civico; the little Pinacoteca painting gallery in the Palazzo Pubblico; the tiny Museo Archeologico detailing the region's Etruscan era and the adjacent Spezieria Santa Fina (a preserved Renaissance pharmacy); the Galleria d'Arte Moderna modern art gallery; and the weird little Museo Ornitologico, a couple of glass cases containing stuffed birds in the dimly lit confines of a tiny, deconsecrated church—basically all the museums in town *except* the Collegiata, the Museo d'Arte Sacra, and the privately run Torture Museum. The cumulative

Tips Take a Hike

The tourist office sponsors guided walks through the countryside April through October, 2 to 3 days a week (usually weekends), costing 10€ to 15€ per person. Because the country edges right up to San Gimignano's walls, you could also easily set out on your own to wander with a good map—the tourist office also sells a map and catalog marked with suggested hikes and walks, or you can pick up a regional map from any of the local souvenir stands.

ticket costs 7.50€ adults and 5.50€ ages 6 to 18 and over 65. Prices listed below are for individual entries to each.

Collegiata ★★ The main church in town—it no longer has a bishop, so it's no longer officially a *duomo* (cathedral)—was started in the 11th century and took its present form in the 15th century. It's not much from the outside, but the interior is smothered in 14th-century frescoes, making it one of Tuscany's most densely decorated churches.

The right wall was frescoed from 1333 to 1341—most likely by Lippo Memmi—with three levels of **New Testament scenes** (22 in all) on the life and Passion of Christ along with a magnificent *Crucifixion.* In 1367, Bartolo di Fredi frescoed the left wall with 26 scenes out of the **Old Testament,** and Taddeo di Bartolo provided the gruesome ***Last Judgment*** frescoes around the entrance wall in 1410. Benozzo Gozzoli wins the "Prickliest ***St. Sebastian*** in Tuscany" prize for his colorful and courtly 1464 rendition on the entrance wall.

In 1468, Giuliano da Maiano built the **Cappella di Santa Fina ★★** off the right aisle, and his brother Benedetto carved the relief panels for the altar. Florentine Renaissance master Domenico Ghirlandaio decorated the tiny chapel's walls with some of his finest, airiest works. With the help of assistants (his brother Davide and Sebastiano Mainardi), Ghirlandaio in 1475 frescoed two scenes summing up the life of Santa Fina, a local girl who, though never officially canonized, is one of San Gimignano's patron saints. Little Fina, who was very devout and wracked with guilt for having committed the sin of accepting an orange from a boy, fell down ill on a board one day and didn't move for 5 years, praying the entire time. Eventually, St. Gregory appeared to her and announced her death, whereupon the board on which she lay miraculously produced flowers. When her corpse was carried solemnly to the church for a funeral, the city's towers burst forth with yellow pansies and angels flew up to ring the bells. At the church, a blind choirboy and Fina's nurse, who had a paralyzed hand, found themselves miraculously cured merely by touching her body. The town still celebrates their child saint every year on March 12, when the pansies on San Gimignano's towers naturally bloom.

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **0577-940-316.** Admission on cumulative ticket, or 3.50€ adults, 1.50€ ages 6–18. Mar daily 9:30am–5pm; Apr–Oct Sun–Fri 9:30am–7:30pm, Sat 9:30am–5pm; Nov–Jan 26 Mon–Sat 9:30am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm. Closed Jan 27–Feb 28.

Museo Archeologico/Spezieria di Santa Fina San Gimignano's modest Etruscan collection proves the town's roots run deeper than the Middle Ages. Atop one of the funerary urns, a reclining figure representing the deceased is holding the cup of life—now empty of all but a single coin to pay his way into the afterlife. This museum is now

installed in the 1253 pharmacy branch of the medieval Santa Fina hospital (though the painted druggery vases and other accouterments on display are largely 15th–18th c.). There's also a small modern art gallery here.

Via Folgore 11. ✆ **0577-940-384.** Admission on cumulative ticket, or 3.50€ adults, 2.50€ ages 6–18 and over 65. Daily 11am–6pm. Closed Jan 7–Mar 31.

Museo Civico & Torre Grossa ★ In the late 13th century, the city government moved from the Palazzo del Podestà, across from the Collegiata, to the brand-new **Palazzo del Comune** (or del Popolo). You can climb its **Torre Grossa ("Big Tower") ★★★**, finished in 1311, for one of the best tower-top views of the cityscape and rolling countryside in all Tuscany. Before the step workout, though, check out the worthy **civic painting gallery** on the palace's second floor.

The small museum was built around a large fresco in the Sala del Consiglio of the ***Maestà*** (1317) by the Sienese Lippo Memmi. Up the stairs is the Pinacoteca, but before entering it, duck through the door to the left to see perhaps San Gimignano's most famous **frescoes ★**. Painted in the 14th century by Memmo di Filippuccio, they narrate a rather racy story of courtship and love in quite a departure from the usual religious themes of the era. The most oft-reproduced scenes are of a couple bathing together and then getting into bed for their wedding night.

The first work in the painting gallery across the hall is a Coppo di Marcovaldo Crucifix surrounded by Passion scenes, one of the true masterpieces of 13th-century Tuscan art. Benozzo Gozzoli's *Madonna and Child with Saints* (1466) has an almost surreal Deposition scene with a delicate landscape running the length of the predella. A 25-year-old Filippino Lippi painted the matching tondi of the *Annunciation* in 1482, and the huge early-16th-century *Madonna in Glory with Sts. Gregory and Benedict,* with its wild Umbrian landscape, is a late work by Pinturicchio. That psychedelic almond-shaped rainbow of cherub heads over which Mary is hovering was one of Pinturicchio's favorite painterly devices to symbolize virginity.

Two works here tell the stories of the city's most popular patron saints. Lorenzo di Niccolò Gerini did a passable job in 1402 on the *Tabernacle of Santa Fina,* built to house the teen saint's head and painted with scenes of the four most important miracles of her brief life. In the late 14th century, Taddeo di Bartolo painted the *Life of St. Gimignano* as an altarpiece for the Collegiata; the saint himself sits in the middle, holding in his lap the town he was constantly invoked to protect.

This city, you see, was founded by the Etruscans and originally called Castel di Selva. When Totila the Goth was rampaging through the area in the 6th century A.D., the town decided to pray—no one is quite sure why—to Gimignano, an obscure martyred bishop from the far-off city of Modena. The sanctified bishop came riding out of the clouds clad in golden armor, and the Goths took to their heels and left the city alone. The town gratefully changed its name and has kept St. Gimignano on call ever since against plagues and other natural disasters.

A Great Point of View

Behind the Collegiata, the remains of the city's 14th-century fortress, the **Rocca ★**, are now a public park. Climb atop the crumbling ramparts for a view of the surrounding farmland and the best panorama of San Gimignano's towers.

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **0577-940-340** (ask for *museo*). Admission on cumulative ticket, or 5€ adults, 4€ kids and seniors. Mar–Oct daily 9:30am–7pm; Nov–Feb daily 10am–5:30pm (until 1:30pm Dec 24–31).

Museo d'Arte Sacra The archway to the left of the Collegiata's facade leads to a pretty brick courtyard called Piazza Pecori. On one side, under brick vaulting, is a fresco of the *Annunciation* painted in 1482 by either Domenico Ghirlandaio or his brother-in-law and pupil Sebastiano Mainardi. Inside the small museum across the piazza, the sacred art collection includes a *Madonna and Child* triptych painted by Bartolo di Fredi and some illuminated choir books. The Etruscan museum that was once here has been moved (see Museo Archeologico, above).

Piazza Pecori (the courtyard through the arch to the left of the church entrance). ✆ **0577-942-226.** Admission 5€ adults, 4€ ages 6–18. Apr–Oct Mon–Fri 9:30am–7:30pm, Sat 9:30am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; Nov–Mar Mon–Sat 9:30am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm. Closed Jan 21–Feb 28.

Museo degli Strumenti di Tortura (Torture Instruments Museum) The Torture Instruments Museum (formerly known as the Museum of Medieval Criminology and the Inquisition, and not to be confused with the nearby Museum of Torture and Witchcraft) is serendipitously installed in the medieval **Torre del Diavolo (Devil's Tower).** Its iron maidens, racks—both the spiked and unspiked varieties—chastity belts, various bone-crunching manacles, breast-rippers, and other medieval party favors are accompanied by engrossingly dispassionate descriptions of their uses and history. If nothing else, the kids might think it's cool (though the historical etchings and watercolors showing the torture instruments at work are definitely R-rated). Its popularity has spawned an epidemic of even worse imitations across Central Italy.

Via del Castello 1 (just off Piazza della Cisterna). ✆ **0577-942-243.** Admission 8€ adults, 5.50€ students. Mar 16–July 18 daily 10am–7pm; July 19–Sept 17 daily 10am–midnight; Sept 18–Nov 1 daily 10am–8pm; Nov 2–Mar 15 Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat–Sun 10am–7pm.

Sant'Agostino ★ This 13th-century church at the north end of town is full of good 15th-century frescoes. In 1464, a plague swept the town and the citizens prayed to their patron saint to end it. When the sickness passed, they dutifully hired Benozzo Gozzoli to paint a thankful scene, on the nave's left wall, showing St. Gimignano and his cloak full of angels stopping and breaking the plague arrows being thrown down by a vengeful God and his angelic hosts. The city liked the results, so they commissioned Gozzoli to spend the next 2 years frescoing the choir behind the main altar floor-to-ceiling with scenes from the *Life of St. Augustine.*

Against the main entrance wall to the left is a chapel filled with an elaborate marble tomb (1495) by Benedetto di Maiano. Sebastiano Mainardi painted the frescoes on the chapel's vaults and the *Saints Gimignano* (holding his city), *Lucy, and Nicholas of Bari* to the left of the tomb. Next to the cloister door on the nave's left wall is another fresco by Sebastiano Mainardi, this one of an enthroned St. Gimignano blessing three of the city's dignitaries.

Piazza Sant'Agostino. ✆ **0577-907-012.** Free admission. Daily 7am–noon and 3–7pm (Oct–Apr closes at 6pm).

WHERE TO STAY

Hotels in this most popular hill town aren't cheap. The **Siena Hotels Promotion** office, Via San Giovanni 125 (✆/fax **0577-940-113;** www.hotelsiena.com), will help you find a room. It's open daily March through October from 9:30am to 7pm and November through February from 9am to 12:30pm and 3 to 6:30pm. Because of this, and the difficult parking

situation and the sheer beauty of the countryside, you might prefer to find a farmhouse bed-and-breakfast, or *agriturismi,* nearby, of which there are dozens.

You can sort through a list of *agriturismi* at **www.sangimignano.com**. Several *agriturismi* are centered in the neighboring hamlet of **Pancole.** Wander into this wine-producing countryside and you'll find clearly marked signage pointing you directly to dozens of *agriturismi.* One good choice is **Fratelli Vagnoni** (✆ **0577-955-077;** www.fratellivagnoni.com), run by an extended family that not only makes prestigious San Gimignano wines, but also has built a spacious guest house with a new pool in the vineyards. Doubles there are 60€ to 70€. For an even cheaper option, the matriarch of the same family rents out clean, simple town-house units next door, called **Casa Maria,** for as low as 50€ per apartment.

Hotel Bel Soggiorno Owned and run by the Gigli family since 1886, the Bel Soggiorno rooms provide views of the countryside below (three share a panoramic terrace) or of the ultramedieval, if souvenir-ridden, main street in town. The modern, medium-size accommodations are mostly fitted with cheap, functional furniture and beds verging on the over-soft. Little of the original 13th-century structure shows through, and its general lack of antique charm makes it the least desirable of the hotels within the walls. But the friendly family management and highly recommendable restaurant, serving Tuscan fare in a half-medieval, half-plate-glass panoramic environment, keep the Bel Soggiorno in the running. Many of the amenities, such as a swimming pool, are available at their countryside sister hotel, Pescille, 4km (2½ miles) from town.

Via San Giovanni 91 (near Porta San Giovanni), 53037 San Gimignano. ✆ **0577-940-375.** Fax 0577-907-521. www.hotelbelsoggiorno.it. 22 units. 95€–120€ double; 130€–150€ suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ in garage outside walls. Closed Jan or Feb; restaurant closed Jan 7–Feb 28. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; Jacuzzi (at Pescille); pool (at Pescille); tennis (at Pescille). *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer on request, minibar.

Hotel Leon Bianco ★ Typical of a 500-year-old building turned hotel, the rooms here can't seem to agree on a style or decor scheme, but most retain some element from the 14th-century *palazzo*—a painted wood-beam ceiling here, an old stone wall in a bathroom there, or a brick barrel vault filling one room. Accommodations overlook the pretty well of the tower-lined piazza out front or across a garden next door and rooftops to a glimpse of the countryside. (A few, however, overlook the partially glassed-in courtyard of the lobby.) "Superior" rooms are merely larger and come with minibars. The rooms are smaller and less well appointed and posh than those at La Cisterna Hotel (see below) or the Antico Pozzo (see below), but this place has more vestigial Renaissance charm than the Bel Soggiorno (see above), plus the most central location in town.

Piazza della Cisterna 8, 53037 San Gimignano. ✆ **0577-941-294.** Fax 0577-942-123. www.leonbianco.com. 26 units. 85€–125€ standard double; 110€–105€ superior double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ in lot. Closed 20 days before Christmas and Jan 7 to early Feb. **Amenities:** Bar; exercise room; Jacuzzi; room service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

L'Antico Pozzo ★★ L'Antico Pozzo is the choicest inn within the walls, a 15th-century *palazzo* converted to a hotel in 1990 with careful attention to preserving the structural antiquity without sacrificing modern convenience. The subdued elegance and comfort offer the most medieval-feeling experience in this most medieval of cities. Over the building's colorful history it has hosted Dante, the Inquisition trials, a religious community, and an 18th-century salon. Accommodations vary in size and decor, but none is small, and the huge junior suites have large writing desks, wood ceilings, and spumante

waiting for you. Throughout, the furnishings are simple wooden 19th-century pieces, and the firm beds are surrounded by cast-iron frames—the junior suites come with canopies. "Superior" doubles have 17th-century ceiling frescoes and the smaller "standard" rooms on the third floor have wood floors and a view of the Rocca and a few towers, while other rooms look over the street or the rear terrace (where breakfast is served in summer).

Via San Matteo 87 (near Porta San Matteo), 53037 San Gimignano. ✆ **0577-942-014.** Fax 0577-942-117. www.anticopozzo.com. 18 units. 110€–140€ double; 180€ superior double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ in nearby garage or lot. Closed Feb. **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

La Cisterna Hotel ★ The rooms in this hotel, installed in the bases of 14th-century tower stumps, vary in size; some are quite large and others seem almost cramped, but all are comfortable, with firm beds and a tastefully uncluttered decor. The place was scenic enough to serve as a set for the film version of E. M. Forster's novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread.* You have a choice of views: the piazza side with its towers vista or the verdant valley out back. (Don't go for the cheapest rooms with no view at all; you get at least a vista, if not a balcony, starting at 100€.) The breakfast room and bar sit in the well-preserved brick- and tufa-walled base of one of the towers.

Piazza della Cisterna 23–24, 53037 San Gimignano. ✆ **0577-940-328.** Fax 0577-942-080. www.hotelcisterna.it. 50 units. 88€–100€ double without view; 100€–120€ double with view; 108€–144€double with view and balcony; 118€–150€ suite. Half and full pension available. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ in lot. Closed Jan 8–Mar 8; restaurant closed Jan 8–Mar 8. **Amenities:** Restaurant (closed Tues and lunch Wed); concierge; room service (bar). *In room:* A/C in 17 units, TV, hair dryer, minibar in suites.

WHERE TO DINE ★★

Few of San Gimignano's restaurants are outstanding, but its white wine certainly is. **Vernaccia di San Gimignano,** probably the best white in Tuscany, is a slightly peppery, dry wine old enough to have been cited in Dante's *Divine Comedy.*

Bar I Combattenti, Via San Giovanni 124 (✆ **0577-940-391**), has been serving coffee since 1924 just inside the gates of town. Try their creamy gelato: the award-winning *ricciarelli di Siena* made with the Sienese cookies, or even a local saffron-tinged flavor.

Dorandò ★★★ TUSCAN The Dorandò is an elegant splurge tucked away just off Piazza Duomo, where the stone-walled rooms, alabaster platters, and knowledgeable waiters create a backdrop for San Gimignano's best dining. The menu doesn't just list dishes; it describes each one's history in detail as the chef attempts to keep the oldest traditions of Sangimignanese cooking alive—many of the dishes purport to be medieval, some even Etruscan, in origin—while balancing nouvelle cuisine philosophy with hearty home-cooking quality. The menu varies with the season and market, though if the excellent *cibrèo* (chicken livers and giblets scented with ginger and lemon) is offered, by all means order it. The desserts are excellent, too.

Vicolo dell'Oro 2. ✆ **0577-941-862.** www.ristorantedorando.it. Reservations highly recommended. Primi 12€–15€; secondi 18€–21€; tasting menus 47€. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7–9:30pm. Closed mid-Jan to mid-Mar.

La Mangiatoia ★★ TUSCAN "The Eatin' Trough" is a quirky mix of largish but still cozy rooms with heavily stuccoed stone walls inset with backlit stained-glass cabinet doors. This place is fond of Latin quips and dramatic classical music, and the staff is friendly and helpful. Alas, the food's a mix, too—stick to the more unusual dishes,

intriguing and excellently prepared choices where the cook seems to try harder. The *gnocchi deliziose* (spinach gnocchi in a delicious Gorgonzola sauce) is good, as is the *tagliatelle dell'amore* (with prosciutto, cream, tomatoes, and a little hot spice). Afterward, try the *coniglio in salsa di carciofi* (rabbit with artichokes), but I'd choose the more adventurous *cervo in dolce et forte,* an old Sangimignanese recipe of venison cooked with pine nuts and a strong sauce of pinoli, raisins, vinegar, and chocolate—traditionally used to cut the gaminess of several-day-old venison. The desserts are excellent.

Via Mainardi 5 (near Porta San Matteo). ✆ **0577-941-528.** Reservations recommended. Primi 8€–12€; secondi 14€–16€. MC, V. Wed–Mon 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10pm. Closed early Nov to early Dec.

Le Vecchie Mura (Value) ITALIAN/TUSCAN Even better than holing up in these cavernous 18th-century former stalls, with terra-cotta bricks cross-vaulting the ceiling, is booking a table on the wall-top panoramic terrace in summer. The dining room was recently renovated in a modern style, yet it maintains a cozy feel. The satisfying *ribollita* comes with sliced pungent red onion on the side, and the *tagliatelle al cinghiale* (noodles with wild boar) is delicious. The house specialty is *cinghiale alla vernaccia* (chunks of tender wild boar marinated in vernaccia white wine and served with green sauce and black olives), or you can try *cervo in bianco* (venison in white-wine sauce). They also rent out two simple double rooms, with bathroom, for 49€.

Via Piandornella 15 (a twisty walk down the first right off Via San Giovanni as you walk up from Porta San Giovanni). ✆ **0577-940-270.** www.vecchiemura.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 6.50€–7.50€; secondi 8€–13€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 6–10pm. Closed Dec–Feb.

Osteria delle Catene ★ (Finds) TUSCAN This is an *osteria* true to its name, a small gathering place offering ultratraditional dishes to accompany its well-priced selection of local wines. The decor can only be described as minimalist medieval, with contemporary paintings and modern lighting in concert with an abbreviated barrel vault made of hand-cast bricks. A great appetizer to pair with your Vernaccia is the *piatto misto di prosciutto* (with both pig and boar ham) along with *formaggi Toscani* (Tuscan cheeses). The *ribollita* adds a purée of cannellini beans to the usual mix, and the *penne al porro* (stubby pasta quills in cheesy cream sauce) and *pipe coi broccoli* (maccheroni with broccoli-based vegetable purée cut with onions) are eminent pasta choices. If you're still hungry, try the Tuscan standbys *salsicce con fagioli all'uccelletto* (grilled sausage with beans stewed with tomatoes) and *stracotto al chianti* (beef muscle cooked in chianti wine).

Via Mainardi 18 (near Porta San Matteo). ✆ **0577-941-966.** Reservations recommended. Primi 8€–10€; secondi 12€–14€; fixed-price menu without wine 17€. AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 12:30–2pm and 7:30–9:30pm. Closed occasionally Dec–Feb.

Ristorante Latini ★★ TUSCAN Just outside town, locals and tourists alike flock to this restaurant opened by Florentine personality Giovanni Latini and run by his daughter Chiara, whose sister, in turn, helps run the Florence-based L'Osteria di Giovanni (p. 124). They offer hearty fare, such as homemade pici with sausage, black cabbage, and fennel, and whatever else springs to Chiara's mind. The hotel upstairs lacks views of San Gimignano but makes up with convenience (for those with a car) and in price: Doubles in the high-season cost 76€.

Via dei Platani 1, La Steccaia (11km/7 miles toward Certaldo). ✆ **0577-945-019.** www.ristorantelatini.com. Reservations recommended. Primi 7€–9€; secondi 12€–14€. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2pm and 7:30–9:30pm.

4 VOLTERRA: CITY OF ALABASTER

29km (18 miles) SW of San Gimignano; 50km (31 miles) W of Siena; 72km (45 miles) SW of Florence; 300km (186 miles) NW of Rome

Volterra is, in the words of the writer D. H. Lawrence, "on a towering great bluff that gets all the winds and sees all the world." The city seems to rear higher than any other in Tuscany, rising a precipitous 540m (1,772 ft.) above the valley below. It's a fortresslike town, drawn out thinly along a narrow ridge with a warren of medieval alleys falling steeply off the main piazza.

Lawrence came here to study the Etruscans, who took the 9th-century-B.C. town established by the Villanovan culture and by the 4th century B.C. had turned it into Velathri, one of the largest centers in Etruria's 12-city confederation. The Etruscans left some hauntingly beautiful bronzes and a stupefying collection of alabaster funerary urns. The art of carving the translucent white alabaster still flourishes today in artisan workshops scattered throughout the city, but modern Volterra has only recently moved beyond the shrunken womb of its medieval inner circle of walls to fill in the abandoned extent of Velathri's 4th-century-B.C. defensive belt.

ESSENTIALS

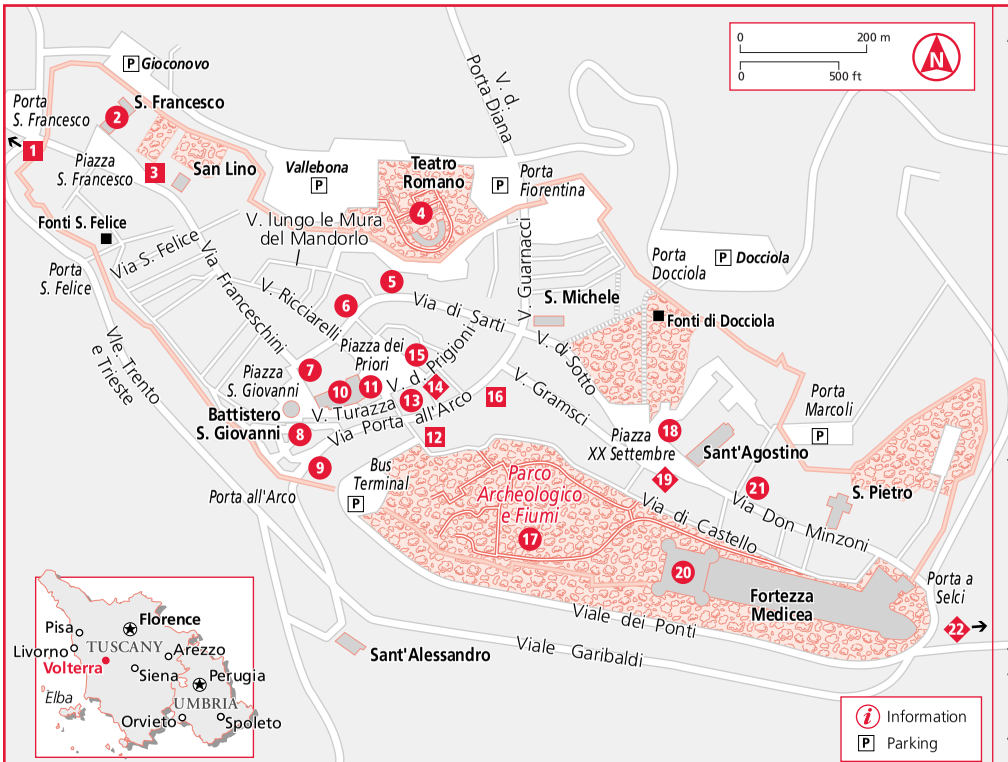
GETTING THERE **By Train** Volterra isn't very convenient by train, with a station only at **Saline di Volterra** (✆ **0588-86-150**) 10km (6¼ miles) away, to which five daily trains run on a secondary line from Cécina (trip time: 30–40 min.) on the coast. You can transfer at Cécina from one of the coastal-line trains between **Rome** (17 trains daily; 3 hr.) and **Pisa** (26 daily; 40–75 min.). Buses meet the incoming trains for the 20-minute ride up to Volterra.

By Car Volterra is on the SS68 about 30km (19 miles) from where it branches off the Colle di Val d'Elsa exit on the Florence-Siena autostrada. From San Gimignano, head southwest on the secondary road to Castel di San Gimignano, which is on the SS68.

By Bus From **Siena,** there are 16 daily TRA-IN buses (www.trainspa.it) that make the 20- to 30-minute trip to **Colle di Val d'Elsa,** from which there are five daily buses to Volterra (50 min.). From **San Gimignano,** you have to first take a bus to Poggibonsi (20 min.), four of which daily link up with buses to Colle di Val d'Elsa for the final transfer. From **Florence,** TRA-IN has two midafternoon direct runs (2½ hr.), or you can take one of five daily buses (three on Sun) to Colle di Val d'Elsa and transfer there (2½–3 hr.). Six to 10 CPT buses run here Monday through Saturday from **Pisa** (change in Pontedera; 2–2½ hr. total). **Tickets** and information in Volterra are available at the tourist office. Buses run to and from Piazza Martiri della Libertà.

VISITOR INFORMATION Volterra's helpful **tourist office,** Piazza dei Priori 19–20, 56048 Volterra (✆ **0588-87-257;** fax 0588-86-099; www.volterratur.it), offers both tourist information and free hotel reservations. April through October, it's open daily from 10am to 1pm and 2 to 6pm; November through March, hours are Monday through Saturday from 10am to 1pm and 2 to 5pm and Sunday from 10am to 1pm only.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS **Volterrateatro** is a July theater festival. On the first Sunday of September, Volterrans dress up in medieval costume to engage in a bit of **flag-tossing** on Piazza dei Priori. On the last Saturday of September, the town hosts the **International Festival of Choral Singing.** The sizable **weekly market** is Saturday morning.



ATTRACTIONS
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One **cumulative admission ticket** covers all three major museums—Museo Etrusco Guarnacci, Museo d'Arte Sacra, and Pinacoteca e Museo Civico. It costs 8€ adults, 5€ students and seniors over 60, 18€ family of four (children under 6 are admitted free). All museums' summer hours run from March 16 to October 31.

If it was feeling at all overshadowed by neighboring San Gimignano's famous and macabre torture museum (see p. 234, earlier in this chapter), Volterra has remedied that by adding its own torture museum, **Museo della Tortura,** Piazza XX Settembre 5 (✆ **0588-80-501;** www.museodellatortura.com). Admission is 8€. Open daily 10am–7pm (in winter Mon–Fri).

Besides the Museo della Tortura, Volterra has managed to out-spook every town this side of Dracula's castle. First, it served as the backdrop to scenes in Stephenie Meyer's 2009 vampire flick *New Moon,* the sequel to *Twilight.* Additionally, since June 2009, there has been **a monthly dinner in the Fortezza's high-security prison,** with patrons being served by the inmates themselves—including prisoners convicted of murder!

San Francesco Just inside the 14th-century Porta San Francesco, Volterra's 13th-century Franciscan church has one overwhelming reason to visit: Halfway up the right aisle is the **Cappella Croce del Giorno** ★★, frescoed with the *Legend of the True Cross* in medieval Technicolor by Cenni di Francesco. (The light switch is outside the chapel entrance.) Cenni painted this story in 1410, creating an unmatched example of early-15th-century narrative art. His vivid and unusual color palette, eye for detail, and painterly tailoring have also left us a valuable record of the dress and architecture of his era.

Piazza San Francesco (off Via San Lino). No phone. Free admission.

Palazzo dei Priori The Palazzo dei Priori (1208–57) is the oldest building of its kind in Tuscany, the Gothic town hall on which Florence's Palazzo Vecchio and most other civic buildings in the region were modeled. Walk up to the first floor to see the town council chamber, which aside from getting a new vaulted ceiling in 1516 has pretty much looked the same over its 740 years of continuous use. The end wall was frescoed with an *Annunciation* by Jacopo di Cione or his brother Orcagna in 1383.

Volterra's civic palace sits on a medieval rectangle of a piazza. The **Piazza dei Priori** ★ is laid with mason-cut stone and surrounded on all sides with 13th- and 14th-century buildings, some crenellated, some with Gothic two-light windows, and some just implacably old and stony. It's particularly evocative at night under the moonlight. Across from the Palazzo dei Priori is the **Palazzo Pretorio,** sprouting the rough old **Torre del Porcellino**—a tower named after the weather-beaten little sculpted boar jutting out near the top window. The only impostor on this perfectly medieval piazza was built to blend in very well—the modern **Palazzo Demaniale** on the southeast end. Next to the Palazzo dei Priori on the piazza, a bit of imitation Romanesque striped marble (added in 1937) tucked into a corner announces the back entrance to the Duomo (see below).

Piazza dei Priori. ✆ **0588-86-050.** Price 1€. Summer Mon–Sat 10am–1pm and 3–4pm; winter Mon–Sat 10am–1pm.

Duomo Beyond the 13th-century Pisan-style facade, the first thing that strikes you in this 12th-century church is its magnificent **ceiling.** It was carved and embossed with gold and azure in 1580 and is filled with portraits of Volterran saints, including St. Linus, a truly venerable native son who became the world's second pope, filling St. Peter's shoes in A.D. 67.

In Search of Alabaster

Volterrans have been working the watery, translucent calcium sulfate stone found around their mountain for almost 3,000 years. The Etruscans turned the **alabaster** into the tiny sarcophagi that fill the Guarnacci museum; the industry revived in the late 19th century, mainly to crank out lampshades for the exploding market in electric lights. The working of alabaster is taken very seriously in town, and you can major in it at the local art school. Among the producers are the roadside workshops outside town that use machines and trained hacks to churn out chess sets, life-size reproductions of famous Italian sculptures, and such follies as alabaster kitchen sinks; and then there are the craftsmen in town who put a great deal of skill and pride into their bowls and statuettes.

The *comune* has put Plexiglas plaques at the workshops of some of the most traditional artisans, the ones who still handwork every stage. Via di Sotto has a good run of them, including the workshop of **Lido Baroncini** at no. 7; he welcomes visitors to peek in his window and watch him work. **Renzo Gazzanelli and Roberto Guerrieri's** workshop is at Via del Mandorlo 42, and the larger **Rossi Alabastri** (✆ **0588-86-133**) outfit works out of a shop at the end of the block, where the street turns for the Roman theater panoramic walk.

There's a good **figure-carving workshop** based at Via Gramsci 60, and Via Porta all'Arco has several fine shops, including the shop of the town's top artiste, **Paolo Sabatini,** at no. 45 (✆ **0588-87-594**). For some of the better craft objects, the **Società Cooperativa Artieri Alabastro,** Piazza dei Priori 4–5 (✆ **0588-87-590**), has since 1895 been a cooperative showroom and sales outlet for artisans who don't have big enough operations to open their own shops.

Volterra's Duomo is filled with well-done baroque paintings, but few stand out. Among those that do is the first altarpiece on the right, Belgian Mannerist Pieter de Witte's *The Presentation of Volterra to the Virgin,* with a 1578 view of the city. In the right transept, above the door to the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament, is a 1611 ***Crucifixion*** ★ by Francesco Curradi—a good baroque study of light and fabric. Across the transept from this chapel is a life-size sculpted wood group of the ***Deposition*** ★, painted in bright primaries and heavy gold. It looks vaguely mid-20th-century but was actually carved around 1228 by anonymous masters, artists who were bridging the gap between stiff Byzantine traditions and the more fluid, emotional art of the Romanesque era.

The **Cappella degli Inghirami** at the end of the left transept was built in 1607 and dedicated to St. Paul with some good paintings from the 1620s, including the central *Conversion of St. Paul* by Domenichino. In the left aisle of the church is a **pulpit** assembled from 13th-century Pisan relief panels in the 16th century; the *Last Supper* on the front is particularly arresting for its visual style and whimsical detail.

In the **Cappella dell'Addolorata (Lady Chapel)** ★, off the end of the left aisle, are a pair of niches made for anonymous 15th-century terra-cotta sculptures. On the left wall, in the niche housing the *Nativity* terra cottas, Benozzo Gozzoli frescoed an intimate

backdrop for the scene, placing it in a rocky pass bursting with foliage and the horse train of the Magi riding in from the distance (viewable by coin-op lights).

Piazza San Giovanni (also entrance on Piazza dei Priori). No phone. Free admission. Summer daily 7am–7pm; winter daily 7am–12:30pm and 2–6pm.

Baptistery The baptistery drum, with its one side of distinctive black-and-white marble bands, was built in 1283, but the dome was added in the 16th century. Just inside the door is an Etruscan funerary urn recycled as a holy water stoup, and in the center is an 18th-century font. This polychrome affair replaced the smaller, more elegant **marble font** Andrea Sansovino carved with simple reliefs in 1502, now against the right wall.

Piazza San Giovanni. No phone. Free admission. Summer daily 7am–7pm; winter daily 8am–12:30pm and 3–6pm.

Porta all'Arco ★ At the end of Via Porta all'Arco stands the main gateway to Etruscan Volterra, a huge arch of a gate that has survived since the 4th century B.C.—with a bit of Roman-era rebuilding in the 1st century B.C. On the outside of the arch are mounted three basalt heads—worn by well over 2,000 years of wind and rain to featurelessness—said to represent the Etruscan gods Tinia (Jupiter), Uni (Juno), and Menrva (Minerva). In 1944, just before intense fighting began against the Germans laying siege to the city, Volterran partisans saved the gate from destruction by filling it overnight with stones—both for structural support and to keep it from being a focus of attack.

No phone. Free admission.

Museo d'Arte Sacra The medieval and early Renaissance fragments salvaged from an older version of the cathedral and other Volterran churches along with a few good paintings make this small museum a good half-hour stopover. Among the sculptural pieces are some works by Tino di Camaino and Romanesque elements fitted with Roman friezes. Giovanni della Robbia may have crafted the painted terra-cotta *Bust of San Lino,* while Antonio Pollaiolo created the hyper-realist silver-and-gilt reliquary *Bust of San Ottaviano.* Of the paintings, keep an eye out for Rosso Fiorentino's Mannerist *Madonna of Villamagna* (1521) and a *Madonna of Ulignano* (1545) by Daniele "da Volterra" Ricciarelli.

Palazzo Vescovile, Via Roma 13. ✆ **0588-86-290.** www.diocesivolterra.it. Admission by cumulative ticket. Daily 9am–1pm (Mar 16–Nov 1 also 3–6pm).

Ecomuseo dell'Alabastro Start with the first disc laid for the Tower of Pisa, kept at this small museum, and you'll start to get a feel for the importance of this porous stone in western Tuscany. The most significant highlight is the collection of 19th-century hand-carved cameos by Luigi Albino Funaioli: delicate bas-reliefs and portraits of the ladies and gentlemen of the era. Upstairs is a description of how the stone is formed, and later extricated and carved, as well as a sweeping view of the valley below from the third-floor tower.

Piazza Minucci. ✆ **0588-875-80.** Admission 3€ or 7.50€ for family of 4. Mon–Fri 11am–5pm; winter and weekends 9am–1:30pm.

Pinacoteca e Museo Civico Volterra's worthy small painting gallery contains some pick-of-the-litter works by artists working in Volterra between the 12th and 17th centuries. Room 4 has a remarkably intact polyptych of the *Madonna with Saints* (1411), complete with pinnacles, predella, and all, signed by Taddeo di Bartolo; the guy in the red cape and beard in the tiny left tondo is Santa Claus (St. Nicholas of Bari). Room 5 preserves a polyptych by Cenni di Francesco, and in the following room hangs a polyptych by Portuguese

immigrant Alvaro Pirez d'Evora (1430), who mixed Spanish traditions with early Renaissance Sienese styles. In room 11 is an *Apotheosis of Christ with Saints* (1492), the last great work from the brush of Florentine Domenico Ghirlandaio. The figures create a perfectly oval architectural frame for the Flemish-inspired landscape detailing of the background—if you look hard, you can spot a giraffe, recently acquired by the Medici for their menagerie, being led along the road.

Room 12 pulls out all the stops and hits you with two large 1491 Luca Signorelli paintings, including a remarkably colored *Annunciation,* and an early masterpiece by Rosso Fiorentino. A 26-year-old Rosso Fiorentino painted the ***Deposition*** ★★ here (1521). The late Renaissance instruction of his teacher Andrea del Sarto shows through in the young artist's work, as do the influences of other contemporary masters, like Filippino Lippi, from whom Rosso lifted the basic composition, and Michelangelo, from whom he copied the pose of the mourning St. John on the right. (It's Eve expelled from the garden on the Sistine Chapel ceiling.) But Rosso's supremely odd color palette and exaggerated use of light are purely his own, and the work's tense action and the rhythm created by the ladders and alternately calmly posed or violently contorted figures have helped set it among the masterpieces of the Mannerist movement. Try to picture it hanging amid the bright Cenni frescoes in San Francesco church, where it originally sat atop the altar.

Palazzo Minucci-Solaini, Via dei Sarti 1. ✆ **0588-87-580.** Admission by cumulative ticket. Mar 16–Nov 2 daily 9am–7pm; Nov 3–Mar 15 daily 9am–2pm.

Teatro Romano (Roman Theater & Baths) ★ A left turn off Via Guarnacci as you head steeply down toward Porta Fiorentina takes you to a walkway atop the medieval ramparts overlooking the impressive remains of Volterra's Roman theater and baths. These are some of the best-preserved Roman remains in Italy, dating back to the 1st century B.C. The view from up here is the best way to see it all, but there's an entrance down on Viale Francesco Ferrucci if you want to wander among the ruins.

Viale Francesco Ferrucci. ✆ **0588-86-050.** Admission 3€ adults, 2€ students. Mar 16–Nov 2 daily 11am–5pm. Closed when raining.

Museo Etrusco Guarnacci ★★ Volterra has managed to hold on to a horde of valuable remains from its rich past in one of Italy's most important and fascinating Etruscan museums. Besides the prehistoric section with its Villanovan tombs and some Roman busts and mosaic floors, the lion's share of this museum is taken up with more than 600 **Etruscan funerary urns** ★. Most of these date from the 3rd century B.C., but

Tips A Cappuccino Break

Right on the main square, with a few tables outside, sits the very friendly little **Bar Priori,** Piazza Priori 2 (no phone). The **Vecchia Osteria dei Poeti,** Via Matteotti 55 (✆ **0588-86-029**), is a narrow, stand-up bar with good panini, snacks laid out on the bar during *passeggiata* hour, and the thickest hot chocolate you ever stuck a fork in. Its neighbor, newcomer **l'Incontro,** Via Matteoti 18 (✆ **0588-80-500**), makes for a more relaxed pit stop, with music playing to small wooden tables and a marble bar scattered under high medieval ceilings, with homemade pastries (they specialize in minitarts) and panini made fresh at the deli counter.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

While Volterra cuts a frightful figure in vampire movies, the locals aren't afraid of anyone, least of all the prison inmates who inhabit their fortress. In fact, the left-leaning town now has dinner with them regularly at **Cene Galeotte,** a meal of local specialties prepared and served by the prisoners—some of them convicted for murder—held in its high-security jail. Helped by a Florentine chef, the inmates set up a beautiful banquet in the fortress chapel, even if they are required to use plastic silverware for security reasons. It is held once a month, except in July, and the cost is 35€ a head. Ask the tourist office for reservations.

there are some entire tomb finds gathered from as early as the 9th century B.C. The urns—rectangular boxes about 3 feet long, the oldest ones in plain terra cotta, but most carved of alabaster or other stone with a relief on the front and capped with a lid sculpted with the reclining figure of the deceased—are grouped by their many styles and types. The effect of room after room lined with these intricate studies on the Etruscans' views of life and death is fascinating.

The reliefs and reclining effigies often show a primitive naturalism unmatched even by the Renaissance, and because many of the panels depict the symbolic departure of the deceased to the realm of the dead—on horseback, in wagons, aboard ships, riding centaurs, driving chariots—there's room for plenty of touching episodes where friends and family are shown waving their last goodbyes. One of the finest is a striking bit of portraiture: an early-1st-century-B.C. **sarcophagus lid** carved with the figures of a husband and wife, both very old, somewhat dour-faced and full of wrinkles, but staying together even in death. Also here, among the bronzes, is an early-3rd-century-B.C. votive figure of an exceedingly elongated young boy known as the ***Shadow of the Evening*** ★.

Via Don Minzoni 15. ✆ **0588-86-347.** Admission 8€ or by cumulative ticket. Mar 16–Nov 2 daily 9am–7pm; Nov 3–Mar 15 daily 9am–2pm.

Parco Archeologico Volterra's public park calls itself "archaeological" after the jumbled remains of a Roman-era *piscina* reservoir partially excavated in one corner, but it's really just a grassy space spotted with trees and crossed by hedge-lined gravel paths. It's good for picnics, sightseeing breaks, and napping in the sun. Guarding it at one end is the **Fortezza** (1343–1475), used since the Medici times as a prison, a function it still performs admirably. (See "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" above.)

Via del Castello. No phone. Free admission. Mar 16–Nov 2 daily 11am–5pm. Closed when raining.

WHERE TO STAY

Albergo Etruria Kids The elevator-less Etruria is housed in an 18th-century *palazzo* on one of the town's main drags, which is packed with strolling Volterrans every evening. The rooms and bathrooms have been completely refurbished, and there are some hidden treats, such as the stretch of 5th-century-B.C. Etruscan wall up on the second floor. A rooftop garden overlooks the terra-cotta roofs of Volterra and hides a gate opening directly into the city's manicured public gardens, the Parco Archeologico. The rates change according to the season, and in winter they prefer you take bed-and-breakfast.

Via Matteotti 32 (in the center of town), 56048 Volterra (Pisa). ✆ **0588-87-377** or 0588-81-606. www.albergoetruria.it. 21 units, 19 with private bathroom. 52€ double without bathroom; 80€–90€ double

with bathroom. Breakfast 6€. MC, V. **Amenities:** Babysitting; bike rental; concierge; Internet; room service (breakfast and bar). *In room:* TV in 17 units.

Albergo Nazionale Built atop medieval stalls a few yards from Piazza dei Priori and opened as a hotel in 1890, the Nazionale has hosted the likes of Gabrielle d'Annunzio and D. H. Lawrence, who stayed here while researching *Etruscan Places.* The furniture is pretty mix-and-match, with a few Art Deco bed frames, 19th-century chairs or dressers, and some contemporary cast-iron crafted tables alongside functional pieces. The beds are firm, and most of the bathrooms redone. There are some pretty ceramic-patterned floors throughout, and the rooms on the front side of the top floor have a panorama of the countryside below Volterra's rocky crag. In all, you'll find a slightly erratic gaggle of accommodations maybe one notch above those at the nearby Etruria (see above). Half-pension option available for 90€.

Via dei Marchesi 11 (at Piazza Martiri di Libertà), 56048 Volterra (Pisa). ✆ **0588-86-284.** Fax 0588-84-097. www.hotelnazionale-volterra.it. 36 units. 78€–88€ double; 95€–105€ triple. Breakfast included. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking in nearby lot 10€. **Amenities:** Restaurant (in winter, only on request); concierge; room service. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Hotel San Lino ★ The San Lino is the best hotel in town, a 13th-century *palazzo* that until 1978 was a cloistered convent. The older rooms on the first floor, reserved mainly for students and groups, have battle-scarred functional furniture and subcompact bathrooms of the curtainless shower persuasion. The accommodations on the second floor (and those on the first that stretch alongside the large terrace with its small pool) are what make this hotel stand out. These rooms feature minibars, curtained windows, and larger, new bathrooms. The San Lino isn't as centrally located as the other hotels listed here (still, it's only a 2-min. walk up to the main piazza), but it is definitely more comfortable. One unusual perk: The staff offers to download your digital photos onto a CD, to free up space on your camera.

Via San Lino 26 (near Porta San Francesco), 56048 Volterra (Pisa). ✆ **0588-85-250.** Fax 0588-80-620. www.hotelsanlino.com. 44 units. 85€–90€ standard double; 95€–105€ superior double; 100€–110€ triple; 115€–125€ superior triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 11€ in garage next door. Closed 3 weeks in Nov. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Apr, Aug, and Sept); bar; concierge; outdoor pool; room service (breakfast and bar). *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Villa Nencini ★ Finds This converted 17th-century farmhouse may be a 10-minute walk from the city, but it's got great countryside views, and Mario Nencini, an ex–trattoria owner, is passionate about wine and keeps a private enoteca downstairs. He appreciates groups, which receive substantial discounts on rooms, and he'll also treat a party of at least six hotel guests to a free tasting in the cellar with snacks. Ground-floor rooms of the newer of the two wings are larger, with independent entrances (note that the reception closes 12:30am–7am), but the trade-off is there are no real views.

Borgo Santo Stefano 55 (a 10–15-min. walk from Porta San Francesco, outside the walls), 56048 Volterra (Pisa). ✆ **0588-86-386.** Fax 0588-80-601. www.villanencini.it. 36 units. 73€–88€ double; 90€–115€ triple. (For a double or triple without bathroom, subtract about 20€.) Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; outdoor pool; room service (breakfast and bar); smoke-free rooms. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Da Badò ★ VOLTERRANA In the satellite village of San Lazzero, the small and simple Badò is loved and respected by locals for its unwavering commitment to Volterran cuisine, which means improvising dishes based on the freshest ingredients available while

sticking to traditional recipes. The thick-sliced prosciutto in the *antipasto misto* is gorgeously soft, flaky, and salty. The *zuppa alla Volterrana* is a ribollita with fresh veggies, and the *pappardelle alla lepre* are wide homemade egg noodles in hare sauce. Bunnies pop up again for the *coniglio à modo nostro* (rabbit cooked with onions and tomatoes), but Badò's true specialty secondo, for those who can stomach tripe, is *trippa alla Volterrana,* stewed with tomatoes and herbs.

Borgo San Lazzero (just outside the walls). ✆ **0588-86-477.** www.trattoriadabado.com. Reservations recommended. Primi 4€–8€; secondi 6€–12€. MC, V. Thurs–Tues noon–2:30pm and 7–9:30pm. Closed Feb 10–28 and Nov 15–30.

Etruria TUSCAN The finest restaurant inside Volterra's walls sits right on the main piazza. Its kitchen—under the guidance of the acclaimed late owner Beppino Raspi—drew actors, artists, and heads of state to its frescoed vaulted ceilings and well-priced food. The cooking is still excellent and abundant. Start with a *fantasia di crostini* (a huge plate piled with a rich assortment of crostini). The *poker d'assi* allows you and a companion to sample three primi, which may be *pappardelle di lepre* (noodles in hare sauce), *riso salsiccia e funghi* (rice with mushrooms and sausage), or *farfalle all'Etrusca* (spinach bow ties with spinach-Gorgonzola sauce underneath and tomato purée on top).

Piazza dei Priori 6–8. ✆ **0588-86-064.** Reservations recommended. Primi 5€–9€; secondi 5€–14€; *menù turistico* without wine 13€; fixed-price menus with wine 13€–20€. AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues noon–3pm and 7–10pm.

Il Sacco Fiorentino TUSCAN This inventive establishment features a Tuscan menu with international touches while remaining a moderately priced and friendly neighborhood hangout. The polenta served with wild boar and porcini ragù is excellent, as is the odd *tagliatelle de sacco,* the noodles enveloped in saffron-chicken sauce studded with fresh veggies. For a secondo, try *costolette d'agnello gratinate con carciofi* (broiled lamb chops with artichokes).

Piazza XX Settembre 18. ✆ **0588-88-537.** Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–7.75€; secondi 8.50€–11€. AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues noon–2:30pm and 7–9:30pm. Closed Jan.

5 MASSA MARITTIMA: AN OVERLOOKED GEM

70km (43 miles) S of Volterra; 65km (40 miles) SW of Siena; 115km (71 miles) SW of Florence; 230km (143 miles) NW of Rome

Massa Marittima, sitting stately atop its 356m (1,168-ft.) mount with a sweeping view over the farmland far below and Metalliferous Hills beyond, is an Etruscan grandchild. It's a medieval mining town that's heir to ancient Pupolónia, now little more than fragmentary remains 64km (40 miles) away on the coast (see "Livorno: A Busy Port City with Great Seafood," in chapter 9, for more information). When St. Cerbone moved his bishop's seat here in the 9th century, he kicked off Massa's Middle Ages prosperity, based on mining the metal-rich hills around it. It established a republic in 1225 and grew fat on mine proceeds—unfortunately attracting the attentions of the nearby Sienese.

In 1335, Siena attacked and subdued Massa, taking the upper half of town and fortifying it as their Città Nuova (New Town). In its heyday, the city produced both religious heritage (St. Bernardine of Siena was born and died here) and civic legacy. (The first mining code in European history was drawn up here in the 14th c., one of the most important legislative documents from the Middle Ages.)

Today, Massa is an overlooked gem of the western Tuscan hill towns. The Germans are the only ones who come in droves in the summer, but aside from them, the fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, and the occasional bike tour whizzing through, Massa and its gorgeous cathedral lie empty for exploration.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

By Train Massa Marittima doesn't have its own train station, but there's a stop 27km (17 miles) away at Follonica (✆ **0566-902-016**) on the main line between **Rome** (10 daily; 2½ hr.) and **Pisa** (15 daily; 1 hr., 20 min.). Buses meet incoming trains for the ride to Massa.

By Car Massa sits where the SS439 from Volterra meets the SS441 coming up from the coast at Follonica and continues on to just past San Galgano, where it meets up with the SS73 coming down from Siena. Parking is 0.50€ per hour at public lots.

By Bus Three to four daily buses run from **Volterra** (you have to change in Monterotondo), one from **Grosseto,** and two from **Florence** and **Siena.**

VISITOR INFORMATION The private agency Amatur (✆ **0566-902-756;** fax 0566-940-095; www.amatur.it) acts as the official **tourist information center** at Via N. Parenti 22, 58024 Massa Marittima. It'll also offer help finding a hotel or signing up for courses (usually weeklong) in artisan crafts like ceramics, leather, wood inlay, and cooking. It's open Sunday and Tuesday through Friday from 9:30am to 12:30pm (in summer also 3:30–7pm), Saturday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 3:30 to 6pm. There's also a small **information stand** (✆ **0566-902-289;** fax 0566-902-052) at the museum desk inside the Palazzo del Podestà at Piazza Garibaldi 1. It has a few pamphlets and maps for sightseeing.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS The **Balestro del Girifalco** involves a crossbow competition, processions, and displays of complex flag juggling all done in 13th-century costume. It's put on twice a year, on May 20 or the following Sunday and on the second Sunday in August. March through October, there are **chamber music concerts,** and in July there's an international **mineralogical fair** held in the cloisters of Sant'Agostino. There's a Wednesday **market** on Viale Risorgimento and a Saturday one on Piazza XXIV Maggio.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Exploring the Città Vecchia

The Old Town focuses around triangular **Piazza Garibaldi.** Today, the medieval buildings guard over sleepy cafes with tables out on the flagstones or shaded under arcades. The square is anchored at one end by the steeply angled off-kilter steps of the **Duomo** ★★, turned slightly as if to show off its good side and bell tower (open daily 8am–noon and 3–6pm). The bulk of the building was raised in travertine in the early 13th century with Pisan-Romanesque blind arcading, but the Gothic style had hit town by the time they got to the top half of the facade, so it was crowned with an architecturally agile arcade of slender columns and pink and white marbles. Above the main door lintel, a 12th-century Pisan sculptor carved a relief panel celebrating the miracle-ridden life of Massa's patron saint and one-time bishop, 9th-century African immigrant San Cerbone, to whom the cathedral is dedicated.

The interior is supported by fat travertine columns with flowing Corinthian capitals. Just inside the entrance is a font carved with *St. John the Baptist* scenes by Giroldo da Como from a single block of travertine (1267). The tabernacle balancing above it is an anonymous 15th-century Sienese work. On the entrance wall to the left of the main door are several spellbinding **early medieval reliefs** ★ carved from a dark chestnut-brown stone. These pre-Romanesque images of Christ and his apostles and a riveting *Massacre of the Innocents* scene, with skull-faced figures wearing stiffly pleated robes, are of unknown provenance and by an unknown hand and are unique in the Maremma province.

In the apse behind the altar is the **Arco di San Cerbone** ★. This marble urn sheltering the remains of the town patron is covered with reliefs depicting the saint's life carved in 1324 by little-known Sienese Gothic talent Goro di Gregorio. Across the piazza from the Duomo is the 13th-century **Palazzo del Podestà**—recognizable by the old mayoral coats of arms. Inside you'll find Massa's minuscule **Museo Archeologico e Pinacoteca** (✆ **0566-902-289;** www.coopcollinemetallifere.it/musei). Down the corridor to the right off the entrance room is Massa's main art treasure, **Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Maestà*** ★ painted in the late 1330s. Sitting at the feet of Mary nuzzling her baby is a glowing reddish Lorenzetti angel, and amid the stacks of saintly halos on the right is black-robed St. Cerbone, his geese milling about his feet. During the baroque era, which didn't care for these early "crude" paintings, the city lost track of the work, and it wasn't rediscovered

until 1867, by which point it had been divided into five pieces and, nailed together, was serving as an ash bin for a stove. The museums are open Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 12:30pm and 3:30 to 7pm (3–5pm Nov–Feb). Admission is 3€ adults and 1.50€ children under 14 and seniors over 60.

From the narrow end of Piazza Garibaldi, Via Moncini branches steeply up from Via della Libertà toward the New Town.

Exploring the Città Nuova

The upper part of town is only "new" by virtue of the fact that the conquering Sienese revamped it after 1335. You enter the New Town through the **Porta alla Silici,** part of the *cassero* fortifications built by the Sienese (1337–38). The gate's back side sprouts a narrow **flying arch** framing the trees of the tiny park beyond—though built as a viaduct for the Sienese garrisons, it was made more for show than for sound military purposes. The arch connects the fortress ramparts to the 1228 **Torre del Candeliere** (✆ **0566-902-289;** www.coopcollinemetallifere.it/musei/torre.html), a clock tower since 1443 and still impressive at two-thirds of its original 60m (197 ft.). You can climb it for **views** ★ over the ramparts. April through October, it's open daily from 10am to 1pm and 3 to 6pm; November through March, it's open daily 11am to 1pm and 2:30 to 4:40pm. Admission is 2.50€ adults and 1.50€ children under 14 and seniors over 60. Around the right side, through the small park, is an always-open entrance to the ramparts' lower level and a cityscape view over the Città Vecchia below.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Il Sole Since it opened in 1990 at the center of town, Il Sole has been the best choice in Massa, stealing much steam from older peripheral board-rated two-stars such as the Duca del Mare. Persian runners line the halls, and the carpeted rooms are of a simple low-key elegance with carved wood furnishings that vaguely recall the Liberty style, plus small but modern bathrooms. The management has promised a computer with Internet access in the lobby in the near future.

Via della Libertà 43, 58024 Massa Marittima (GR). ✆ **0566-901-971.** Fax 0566-901-959. www.ilsolehotel.it. 50 units. 75€–95€ double; 100€–115€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ in garage. Closed mid-Jan to mid-Feb. **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Osteria da Tronca ★ (Finds MAREMMANA) This restaurant, known by most people simply as L'Osteria, is split-level medieval—all stone walls, brick arches, and hand-hewn wood ceiling beams but spread over two floors with open spaces in between. An explanation of any dish begins "Oh, that's the way we make it." "We" seems to incorporate the jocular restaurateurs, the septuagenarian cook who steadfastly prepares food the way her mamma taught her, and Massans in general. Kick off your meal with *tortelli alla maremmana* (giant ravioli stuffed with ricotta and Swiss chard in meaty ragù) or *zuppa dell'Osteria* (a cannellini bean and cabbage soup poured over toasted garlic bread). Follow with *cinghiale alla cacciatore* (wild boar huntsman style, stewed with mushrooms—but no olives, which, they sniff, are only "for making oil") or an *arista di maiale* (slices of roast pork with potatoes).

Vicolo Porte 5 (parallel to Via della Libertà; from Piazza Garibaldi, take left turn after Hotel Il Sole, then left again). ✆ **0566-901-991.** Reservations recommended. Primi 8€; secondi 7€–11€. MC, V. Thurs–Tues 7–10:30pm. Closed Jan–Feb.

Taverna del Vecchio Borgo MAREMMANA Step inside under the low vaulted stone rooms and you may see owner Claudio Bindi at the corner fireplace, roasting an entire pig on a spit. His wife, the felicitously named Grazia Innocenti (Innocent Grace), is a skilled chef and devotee of traditional cooking. Her antipasti are unusual, like *spiedini di polenta gratinati con pancetta* (fried polenta cubes speared with pancetta ham and cheese and grilled). The classic Maremma poor man's soup is *acqua cotta dei butteri* (celery, onions, tomatoes, and chicken stock poured over stale bread), named for the lonely cowboys who roam this region. More festive is the *gnocchi di patate con zucchini e speck di anatra fumé* (gnocchi in a rich sauce of zucchini and smoked duck). Two people can split a *tris di primi* and sample three of Grazia's creations. For a main course, stick with the excellent *grigliata mista* (fresh meats grilled) or *agnello scottadito* (succulent lamb chops).

Via Norma Parenti 12. ✆ **0566-903-950.** Reservations highly recommended. Primi 7€–10€; secondi 10€–35€; fixed-price menu without wine 23€ per person for 2 people only. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 7:30–10pm. Closed Feb 15–Mar 15 and Sun in winter.

EN ROUTE TO SIENA

The Abbey of San Galgano ★, about 30km (19 miles) northeast of Massa Marittima along the SS441, is one of the most secluded sights of its kind in Tuscany, an imposing, roofless Gothic cathedral built by Cistern monks in the 13th century. It is accompanied by the **rotunda of Montesiepi** atop a nearby hill, held together by a dome of 24 concentric stone circles. In the middle of the floor is **the sword of Saint Galgano Guidotti** ★ springing from a rock. The saint is said to have miraculously thrust his sword into the stone, like the legend of King Arthur in reverse, in a sign of his renunciation of violence. Adorning the hermitage are fairly well preserved **frescoes** by Sienese painter Ambrogio Lorenzetti.

Next to the gravel parking lot is the simple but pleasant **Agriturismo di San Galgano** (✆ **0577-751-041;** www.sangalgano.it) which provides country fare for pilgrims at 7€ a plate, and also offers clean and quiet doubles for 50€, triples for 60€.

From the Abbey, follow the SS441 for a few kilometers until it ends at SS73, turn left and follow the road up and over the mountain switchbacks toward the town of Rosia. These are the woods ribbingly referred to as the *toscana montagnola,* or "hillbilly Tuscany" because of the poverty that drove these unfortunate farmers in one of the less fertile zones of Tuscany to other parts of Italy and to the New World. These days, many of the failed feudal farms have become communes and cooperatives, with families pooling the income from the produce they sell at a local **farmer's market** in Sovicille.

Spannocchia (the marked turn-off is about is about 4km/2½ miles before Rosia on the SS73) is a fascinating *tenuta* that has several past lives and even today wears many hats. It has for decades been a popular retreat for foreign university programs and traveling academics, hosting them in a bucolic setting and a simplicity that seems to be disappearing in this moneyed tourist mecca. Today it is a non-profit organization that hosts agronomy and hospitality interns and conducts workshops under the guise of the **Spannocchia Foundation** (✆ **0577-75-211;** www.spannocchia.org), which generates revenue by selling its farm-raised products and accommodating guests. It generally attracts artists, writers, and history lovers who share family-style meals and enjoy the genuine atmosphere of a bygone era.

The 12th-century estate was purchased in the early 1900s by the Cinelli family, Florentine hat makers. Today the **Tenuta di Spannocchia** (✆ **0577-75-211;** www.spannocchia.com) is a conglomeration of styles that is managed by Massachusetts-born architecture lover Randall Stratton. Guest rooms evoke another era and are adorned with period details such as early-20th-century bathtubs. Doubles in the main building rent for 95€ per day, while rentals of separate farmhouses on the estate range from 600€ to 1,350€ per week.

8

Lucca & Northwestern Tuscany

The strip of Tuscany riding along the Apennines and the Emilia-Romagna border remains relatively uncrowded despite its being wedged between Florence and Pisa, favorites of guided tours. Florence's close neighbors—**Prato,** with its renowned theater and friendly folk and the best *cantucci* in Tuscany, and **Pistoia,** known in the Middle Ages for its murderous tendencies but today for Romanesque churches and a booming economy—have rich histories and artistic patrimonies that can keep you steeped in Tuscan culture just a few dozen kilometers from Florence but a world away from its summer tourist traffic.

Beyond them stretches a land of genteel spas such as **Montecatini Terme** and tall alpine mountains buried in green forest and capped with snow. Tuscany's northern coast catches the southern extreme of the Riviera attitude in resort towns like **Viareggio** and **Forte dei Marmi,** while just inland from them tremendous peaks around the **Garfagnana Valley** rise jaggedly, hiding the marble of Michelangelo, a hotbed of the anarchy movement, and some of the most extensive caves in Italy.

Lucca, the region's main city, lies in the plains just south of these mountains. It has joined the ranks of the "to-see" lists for travelers in Tuscany because it is a considerably more interesting town than Pisa (a 15-minute train ride to the south). Still, it doesn't get one-tenth of Pisa's hordes. This regally refined burg of scant few cars and many bicyclists is home to beautiful Romanesque churches, towers, and the mightiest set of walls of any medieval Italian metropolis—now tamed into a city park and planted with trees to shade Sunday strollers.

1 PRATO & THE VIRGIN MARY'S GIRDLE

17km (11 miles) NW of Florence; 333km (207 miles) N of Rome

Poor Prato is overlooked by many sightseers simply because it seems too close to Florence to be different. What they're missing is one of northern Tuscany's most open, friendly, and lively cities, one with a modest repository of heavyweight art treasures from the likes of Donatello and Filippo Lippi, as well as a glittering collection of early Renaissance altarpieces. The city was probably an Etruscan campsite and later meadow (*prato* in Italian) market site that quickly developed into a stable Lombard town around A.D. 900. It has always been a thriving trade center and was a free commune from 1140 until 1351, when Florence bought it from its nominal lord and set it up as an ally state. Prato is the region's fastest-growing city, a hardworking community that helps debunk the myth of the lackadaisical Italian with a millennium of serious commitment to its economy. The Pratese also know how to roll up their sleeves and enjoy themselves, with festivals, lively bars, and what is perhaps Tuscany's top theater.

The textile industry has been important since the Middle Ages and was the foundation of the medieval wealth of early Pratese capitalists like Francesco Datini, the famous Merchant of Prato; it's going stronger than ever today, as is other light industry. The town is proud to assume the moniker "Prato: Industrial City," which is nicer than its Anglo nickname, snorted somewhat derisively, the "Manchester of Tuscany." And the Pratese are positively elated that their expanding economic empire has allowed the city to become the third largest in Tuscany, in recognition of which regional officials in 1992 carved out a sliver of a new province with Prato as its capital.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** Prato is on the Florence-Lucca-Viareggio and the Florence-Bologna lines, with more than 50 trains daily from Florence (about 30 min.). All trains stop at **Prato Centrale station,** a 10-minute walk southeast from the center, but only the former line stops at the more convenient **Prato Porta Serraglio station,** outside the gate just a few blocks north of the Duomo. For train information, call ✆ **0574-26-617** or 0574-28-398.

By Car If you're taking the A11 from Florence or Pistoia, Prato Est is the exit you want. The best place to **park** is on Piazza Mercatale (free parking along the edges, payment by the hour in the central lot).

By Bus Lazzi and CAP buses make the trip from Florence in about 30 minutes. The half-hourly **CAP** buses from Florence drop you off at the train station (✆ **0574-608-218** in Prato, 055-214-637 in Florence at Largo Fratelli Alinari 11; www.capautolinee.it). **Lazzi** buses (✆ **055-215-1558** in Florence; www.lazzi.it) from Florence, Pistoia, Lucca, Pisa, and Siena terminate in Prato at Piazza San Francesco.

VISITOR INFORMATION The well-stocked and helpful **tourist office** (✆/fax **0574-24-112;** Mon–Sat 9am–1:30pm and 4–6:30pm [until 6pm Sat]), is at Piazza Santa Maria delle Carceri 15. The monthly **events calendar,** available here and at many hotels and restaurants, is called *Pratomese.* Additionally, Prato's tourism website (www.prato turismo.it) features an event search by date, so you can learn what's happening during your visit—or plan your trip around a particular festival. A cumulative ticket for San Domenico, the Castello dell'Imperatore, and the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo is available for 8€.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS The town's main event is the **display of the Virgin's girdle** ★★, which is done five times yearly—Easter, May 1, August 15, September 8, and December 25. This girdle is actually Mary's belt, which she removed and passed down to that ever-doubting St. Thomas while she was being Assumed into Heaven (rather than have Mary suffer the pain and indignity of mortal death, God decided to assume her, or lift her bodily, up into the afterlife right at the point of her death; Thomas, as usual, didn't believe his eyes, and Mary did this to convince him it was really her rising into the sky—you'll see the moment captured in paint, marble, and inlaid wood all over town).

The holy artifact, which was passed down to generations of Thomas's family, came to Prato at the time of the Crusades, when a local boy fighting in the Holy Land married Thomas's descendant and got the girdle as part of her dowry. The strip of dark green cloth is now preserved in a glass-and-gilt case that's kept inside nesting boxes within its own chapel in the Duomo under a series of locks that only keys held by the bishop, mayor, and local chief of *carabinieri* can open—and they do this with much pomp and Renaissance-style ceremony during the five yearly High Masses to celebrate the relic. The

prelate, amid swirling incense and chanting, shows the girdle three times each to the parishioners inside the church and to the crowds massed on the piazza outside (there's a special exterior pulpit solely for this purpose), the faithful chosen to be so blessed line up to kneel and kiss the case with the girdle in it, and the relic is then locked away until the next celebratory Mass. A costumed parade with lots of drumming and fifing then follows. The best celebrations are held for the Christmas viewing.

The **Festa degli Omaggi** is a costumed historical pageant on September 8. The renowned **Teatro Metastasio's season** runs October through April, and the main **market** is held on Mondays at the Mercato Nuovo.

EXPLORING THE CITY

Duomo ★ There was once the Pieve di Santo Stefano in the center of the Prato of the 900s, but between 1211 and 1457 a new building with Romanesque green-and-white striping rose on the site to become Prato's Duomo. The facade has a glazed terra-cotta *Madonna and Sts. Stefano and Lorenzo* (1489) by Andrea della Robbia above the main door. The beautiful *Pulpit of the Sacred Girdle* hangs off the facade's right corner, from which Prato's most revered relic, the Virgin Mary's girdle, is displayed five times yearly. The pulpit is a Michelozzo (design) and Donatello (sculpted friezes) collaborative effort (1434–38). The frolicking cherubs around the base are cast replacements for Donatello's originals, now kept in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (see below).

Inside the church on the left is the **Cappella della Cintola (Chapel of the Sacred Girdle),** entirely frescoed (1392–95) by Agnolo Gaddi. On top of the altar stands one of Giovanni Pisano's finest sculptures, a small marble *Madonna and Child* (1317). Alas, popping a few coins in the box doesn't buy much light.

The nave **pulpit** was carved by Mino da Fiesole and Antonio Rossellino (1469–73). To the right of the high altar is the **Cappella dell'Assunzione (Chapel of the Assumption),** frescoed with scenes from the lives of St. Stephen and the Virgin.

The **frescoes ★★** (1452–66) covering the walls of the choir behind the high altar—the *Life of St. Stephen* on the left wall and *St. John the Baptist* on the right—comprise one of the masterpieces of Filippo Lippi. This randy, monkish painter asked if a certain Lucrezia Buti, a beautiful young novice from the nearby convent, could model for his Madonnas. The nuns agreed, Filippo promptly seduced her, and the two ran off, eventually having a son, Filippino Lippi, who became an important painter in his own right. Supposedly Filippo did actually use Lucrezia in the paintings—she's the graceful flowing figure of Salome dancing into the banquet of Herod on the right wall. Lippi portrayed himself, along with Fra' Diamante and others of the assistants who helped him here, on the left wall among the crowd mourning the passing of St. Stephen. (They're the little red-hatted group on the far right; Filippo is third in from the end.) Sadly, the choir has been closed to visitors since the mid-1990s, when someone armed with a paintbrush decided to add his own touch to Lippi's works. They have undergone an extensive facelift and are open to the public. Guided tours for groups of 15 to 30 people—available, on request, in English, French, Spanish, German, or Russian—cost 5€ per person and must be booked in advance. The hour-long tours are given on Thursdays at 3:30 and 4:30pm; Saturdays at 10 and 11am and 3:30 and 4:30pm; and Sundays at 3:30, 4:30, and 5:30pm. To book, call ✆ **0574-24-112** or stop by the tourist office. Individuals can visit Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm and Sunday 3 to 5pm.

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **0574-26-234.** Free admission. July–Sept daily 7:30am–7:30pm; Oct–June daily 7am–6:30pm (until 8pm Sun).

Museo dell'Opera del Duomo The pickings here are fairly slim, though the admission price is worth it if only for the worn originals of Donatello's beautifully detailed friezes of dancing putti from the Duomo's outdoor *Pulpit of the Sacred Girdle.* First, however, you pass through a room with early-14th-century works, including Bettino di Corsino's *Madonna del Parto*—the pregnant Mary is an extremely rare subject in early Italian art. Through the cloister, there is a room containing Fra' Diamante's *Annunciation,* a *St. Lucy* sprouting a huge sword from her neck by Filippino Lippi, a possible Paolo Uccello in the detached fresco of *Jacopone da Todi,* and a 15th-century reliquary case for the Holy Girdle worked by Maso di Bartolomeo. (Apparently dancing putti were de rigueur for girdle-associated artworks.)

Piazza del Duomo 49 (left of the Duomo entrance). ✆ **0574-29-339.** Admission on cumulative ticket, or 5€ museum only. Mon and Wed–Sat 9:30am–12:30pm and 3–6:30pm; Sun 9:30am–12:30pm.

Galleria Comunale e Museo Civico ★ Inside the tall, crenellated, 14th-century Palazzo Pretorio in Prato's civic heart, the communal museum kicks off with a World War II–damaged 1498 **Filippino Lippi tabernacle** he frescoed for his mother, Lucrezia, and a *Portrait of Baldo Magini* by Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio. Through the large salon of 16th- and 17th-century canvases you can get to the stairs up to the good stuff. A long, poorly lit hall glitters with the gold-leaf backgrounds of one of the finest collections of **polyptych ★** altarpieces in Tuscany. Among the masterpieces is a predella by Bernardo Daddi telling the story of the Holy Girdle cartoon-strip style. Most of the works, though, are various takes on the Madonna theme (with Child, with Saints, Enthroned, and so on) by Pietro di Miniato, Lorenzo Monaco, Luca Signorelli, both Filippo and Filippino Lippi, Raffaelino di Garbo, Andrea di Giusto, and Botticini.

On the piazza outside is a **statue of Francesco Datini** (see Palazzo Datini, below) with bronze plaques showing the man's life accomplishments—besides making obscene amounts of money in the 14th-century textile business, he founded the charitable Ospedale del Ceppo.

Note: The museum is still closed for renovations as it has been for years, and it seemed doubtful at press time that it would reopen by 2010. In the meantime, the collection of excellent 14th- and 15th-century polyptychs and paintings is on display at the Museo di Pittura Murale in San Domenico (see below).

Piazza del Comune. ✆ **0574-616-302.** Currently closed for restoration. Admission on cumulative ticket. Mon and Wed–Sat 9:30am–12:30pm and 3–6:30pm; Sun 9:30am–12:30pm.

Santa Maria delle Carceri This was the first centrally planned templelike church of the High Renaissance (1485–1506), a not entirely successful exercise in Brunelleschian theoretical architecture by Giuliano da Sangallo. The light plaster walls with *pietra serena* accents and Andrea della Robbia friezes and tondi are still pleasantly evocative, but the place somehow leaves you cold. The interior contains a St. John the Baptist statue over the font by the architect's son Francesco and the miraculous small 14th-century fresco of the *Madonna with Child and Two Saints* the church was built to house. The basilica's stained-glass windows were designed by Domenico Ghirlandaio.

Piazza Santa Maria delle Carceri. ✆ **0574-27-933.** Free admission. Daily 7am–noon and 4–7pm.

Castello dell'Imperatore Hohenstaufen Emperor Frederick II's sharp-lined and blindingly white stone citadel was inspired by the Norman-style fortresses in Puglia. Frederick II built it here in the 1240s to remind the Pratese who was boss and to defend the route from his homelands in Germany to his realm in southern Italy. While these

days the inside is bare, you can climb onto what's left of the broken-toothed ramparts for a view of the city. Nearby is the newly restored 14th-century tower **Cassero,** once connected to the defensive wall by a viaduct until modern roads cut through it.

Piazza Santa Maria delle Carceri. ✆ **0574-38-207.** Admission on cumulative ticket, or 2.50€. Apr–Sept Wed–Mon 9am–1pm and 4–7pm; Oct–March Wed–Mon 9am–1pm. Closed Tues.

San Francesco The earthly remains of Prato's late medieval financial genius, Francesco Datini (see Palazzo Datini, below), are laid to rest at the altar's steps. There's a pretty tomb erected after 1460 by Bernardo Rossellino on the left wall. Off the cloister (also accessible through a door in the sacristy) is the **Cappella Migliorati,** entirely frescoed in 1395 by Niccolò di Pietro Gerini with the lives of St. Anthony Abbot and St. Matthew played out in medieval Technicolor around a large Crucifixion.

Piazza San Francesco. ✆ **0574-31-555.** Free admission. Daily 8am–noon and 3:30–6:30pm.

Palazzo Datini ★ This was the home of Francesco di Marco Datini (1330–1410), a textile magnate and secular patron saint of capitalism whose life was drawn so vividly by Italian-American author Iris Origo that he's become known by the title of her book, *The Merchant of Prato.* Datini, almost single-handedly responsible for Prato's late medieval trade prosperity, was the inventor of the promissory note, and he kept scrupulous records of all his business activities—the basis for Origo's book—and inscribed each one of his financial ledgers with an accountant's battle cry: "For God and Profit."

One of the few places he allowed himself to spend money was on the decoration of his home, hiring Niccolò Gerini and Arrigo di Niccolò di Prato for the job. The outside frescoes have faded to reveal their fascinating *sinopia* sketches underneath, but many paintings on the interior walls remain. The de facto ticket room retains bucolic scenes bubbling with plant and animal life, and a side room contains a portrait of Datini dressed in red. Next to the main door, as in many medieval houses, is a giant St. Christopher, which Datini glanced at daily to protect against sudden death while he was out and about conducting business.

Via Mazzei 33/Via Rinaldesca. ✆ **0574-21-391.** Free admission. Mon–Sat 9am–noon (Wed and Fri also 4–6pm).

Galleria degli Alberti Just up the street from the Palazzo Datini, the pinkish Palazzo degli Alberti houses the Cassa di Risparmio di Prato bank, which keeps its good little painting collection above the pit where they carry on Datini's money-making tradition. Giovanni Bellini crucified his beautifully modeled ***Christ*** ★ in the middle of a Jewish graveyard and painted an amalgamated fantasy city in the background. Next to this masterpiece hangs a small *Madonna col Bambino* against a scallop-shelled niche by Filippo Lippi, and a few paintings later we get the large canvas of *Christ Crowned with Thorns* (1604), the crowning apparently being done by Roman soldier triplets—Caravaggio must have used the same model for the different poses.

Via Alberti 2. ✆ **0574-617-359.** www.galleriapalazzoalberti.it. Free admission, but you must book ahead. Mon–Fri 8:30am–12:30pm and 3–4pm.

Museo di Pittura Murale in San Domenico Inside this barnlike Dominican church finished by Giovanni Pisano in 1322 is a Niccolò Gerini *Crucifix* on the second altar on the right, a pair of Matteo Rosselli works (*Madonna and St. Filippo Neri* on the second altar on the right and an *Annunciation* on the fifth altar), and an Il Poppi *Crucifix Speaking to St. Thomas Aquinas* on the fourth altar on the right. The chapter house off the cloister has some excellent 15th-century fresco bits by Pietro di Minato rescued from under the whitewash in the 1980s.

Italy's Best Biscotti & Tuscany's Top Theater

Prato is known throughout Italy for making the finest of those twice-baked hard almond crescent cookies called *cantucci*. To pick up a bag of these **biscotti di Prato,** stop by the award-winning shop **Antonio Mattei,** Via Ricasoli 20–22 (✆ **0574-257-56;** www.antoniomattei.it), which has been selling Prato's famous *cantucci* and the *vin santo* in which to dunk them since 1858. The shop is open Tuesday through Friday from 8am to 8pm, and weekends from 8am to 1pm and 3:30 to 7:30pm (closed Sun afternoon).

For an evening at one of Tuscany's, and even Italy's, most innovative theaters, pick up a brochure at the tourist office for the **Teatro Metastasio** ★, Via B. Cairoli 59 (✆ **0574-608-501** for tickets; www.metastasio.it). The box office is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 1pm and 3:30 to 7pm. You can also visit **Dischi Niccoli** at Via Cairoli 19 (✆ **0574-27-890**). The theater dates from 1830 and puts on contemporary and classic plays and music concerts ranging from classical orchestral pieces to modern jazz acts.

Also housed here are the 14th- and 15th-century altarpieces from the Museo Civico and the **Museo di Pittura Murale.** The latter contains works, many of them damaged, by Niccolò Gerini, Pietro di Miniato, Agnolo Gaddi, and a nice Taddeo Gaddi *San Domenico,* along with anonymous 15th-century graffiti decorations saved from the gardens of the Palazzo Vaj.

Piazza San Domenico. ✆ **0574-440-501.** Admission on cumulative ticket. Mon–Sat 10am–6pm; Sun 10am–1pm.

Sant'Agostino This 13th-century church holds 17th-century paintings by the likes of Empoli and Lorenzo Lippi. Off the cloister is the Cappella di San Michele, with the remains of a 14th-century frescoed police lineup of saints and, in the next tiny chapel, a *Pietà* from the same era.

If you've got some more time, head down Via Convenevole and detour up Via Seminario. Ring at no. 28 and ask, "*Posso vedere* ('can I see') **San Fabiano**?"; it's one of the oldest churches in Prato. The interior is modernized, but they do preserve bits of the early medieval mosaic floor mounted on the walls. Some, such as the siren figure, were probably adopted straight from pagan symbolism and hint at a possible older cultish temple on this site.

Piazza Sant'Agostino 19. ✆ **0574-37-629.** Free admission. Mon–Sat 7am–1pm and 3:30–7:30pm; Sun 8am–1pm and 3:30–7:30pm.

WHERE TO STAY

With tourist juggernaut Florence just a few kilometers down the road, Prato doesn't bother offering much in the way of hotels. If you're traveling by rail and staying at the Hotel Giardino, ask the conductor if the train stops at Prato's secondary station, Prato Porta al Serraglio, and get off there, because it's closer. For the hotels San Marco and Flora, get off at the main station, Prato Centrale.

Besides the choices below, you might try the **San Marco,** Piazza San Marco 48 (✆ **0574-21-321;** fax 0574-22-378; www.hotelsanmarcoprato.com), a modern but not new hotel overlooking the Henry Moore sculpture halfway between the train station and the Castello; doubles run 80€ to 90€ (Discounts available for stays of 2 and 3 nights).

Hotel Flora The Flora is on a central but quiet street between the Castello and the Galleria Comunale. The rooms are uninspiringly contemporary but very livable, with amenities like double-glazed windows and personal climate control. The friendly owners keep the place in tiptop shape—after all, they live on the top floor, just across from the glassed-in terrace with a view over Santa Maria delle Carceri and the Palazzo Pretorio, and where in warm weather you can enjoy breakfast. They also rent out five small apartments downtown, all fitted with wireless Internet access.

Via Cairoli 31, 50047 Prato. ✆ **0574-33-521.** Fax 0574-400-289. www.hotelflora.info. 31 units. 80€–140€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 10€ in garage. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV/VCR, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Giardino The Giardino is right on the corner of Piazza del Duomo, but you can't see the Duomo itself. On the plus side, this once heavily trafficked corner has recently become blessedly pedestrianized. The Giardino is the center's most modern hotel, with built-in furniture, carpeting in all the rooms, and large, firm beds. Another plus is the Risalti family who run it: an extremely friendly bunch who have kept their little inn in great shape since the 1930s.

Via Magnolfi 2–6, 50047 Prato. ✆ **0574-60-6588.** Fax 0574-606-591. www.giardinohotel.com. 28 units. 60€–100€ double; 70€–110€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking in Piazza del Duomo or 11€ in garage. **Amenities:** Concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

The restaurant scene fares better than hotels in Prato, and many local restaurateurs have taken advantage of the city's proximity to Florence's airport to partake of the daily infusions of fresh fish flown in from the coast.

Besides the places listed below, try **Tonio,** Piazza Mercatale 161 (✆ **0574-21-266;** Tues–Sat 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm), a formal place with very good seafood dishes. For a sweet treat, be sure to stop by **Chocolat,** Via Magnolfi 83 (✆ **0574-27-308**), home to some of the best hand-made ice cream in Tuscany, and an arsenal of chocolate goodies besides. It's just across from the main entrance to the Porta Serraglio train station. (It also makes for a great, air-conditioned lobby while waiting for a train in the summer.)

Baghino PRATESE/TUSCAN This is the bread-and-butter choice of the Prato dinner crowd, a reasonably priced and centrally located institution in the heart of the historic center. Baghino is best known for its signature Pratese dish, *sedano ripieno*—that is, celery stuffed with meat—and for the *minestra di pane,* a local take on ribollita. It also offers Tuscan favorites from farther afield, such as *ravioli alle senese* (ravioli in a spinach and pecorino sauce). Expect warm and informal service, which is a breath of fresh air in a city with some fairly stuffy restaurants.

Via dell'Accademia 9. ✆ **0574-27-920.** Reservations recommended. Primi 7€–10€; secondi 20€–25€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm; Sat noon–2:30pm and 8–10:30pm. Closed Aug.

Il Piraña ★★ SEAFOOD Hard to believe, but this refined modern restaurant landlocked in an industrial suburb of Prato is one of Tuscany's bastions of fine seafood. They leave you no doubt about their purpose: When you open the door you come face-to-fish

with an aquarium of the flesh-eating critters after which the place is named. After you target the fresh specimen you want grilled for a second course from the ample selection, start with a scampi salad or a "fantasy of crustaceans" with asparagus and tartar sauce. Select primi include *gnocchetti di patate con scampi e fiori di zucca* (potato dumplings with shrimp and served with stuffed squash blossoms) or *riso con crema di scampi* (a large portion of shrimpy, creamy rice). Secondi include the baked *rombo con patate olive nere capperi e pomodoro* (turbot with potatoes and a salsa of black olives, capers, and tomatoes). A small selection of vegetarian primi is also available. The Piraña is popular enough to warrant reservations even midweek, but service, while very competent, can make a glacier look speedy.

Via Valentini 110 (south of the walls near A11). ✆ **0574-25-746.** www.ristorantepirana.it. Reservations strongly recommended. Primi 6€–10€; secondi 13€–24€; tasting menu (fresh fish and vegetables) without wine 37€–47€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 12:30–2:30pm and 8–10:30pm; Sat 8–10:30pm. Closed Aug 5–Sept 5. Bus: 3.

2 PISTOIA: WHERE ROMANESQUE MEETS RENAISSANCE

17km (11 miles) NW of Prato; 35km (22 miles) NW of Florence; 336km (209 miles) N of Rome

An ancient Roman town (Catiline and his conspirators were defeated here in 62 B.C.) built against the foothills of the Apennines, Pistoia is another city whose proximity to Florence causes many travelers to pass it by on their way to Lucca or Pisa. Its pretty churches, small but worthy art collections, and well-preserved dark medieval alleyways make it a worthwhile stop—and hint at its unusual historic situation. Halfway between rivals Pisa and Florence, it inherited beautiful Romanesque churches and Gothic sculpture through the influence of the former and the best of the Renaissance from its proximity to the latter.

However, the machinations of these eternally feuding Tuscan rivals, with some 14th-century meddling by Lucca thrown in, also left their mark on Pistoia's medieval character. After the city's Ghibelline *comune* was conquered by Guelph Florence in 1254, the Pistoiese were reportedly the ones who began the schism between Black and White Guelphs. One day, a Pistoiese child of the ancient Neri (Black) family was playing at wooden swords with a friend from the Bianchi (White) household and one—the legend doesn't say which—was injured. When the perpetrator was sent by his father to apologize to the other boy, the hurt child's father responded by hacking off the offending youth's hand, declaring, "Iron, not words, is the remedy for sword wounds." The ensuing conflict spread to Florence as noble households waged secret wars and occasional all-out street battles against one another. This political plague was so devastating and devious that Michelangelo later stigmatized the Pistoiese as the "enemies of Heaven."

Pistoiese already had a nasty reputation. Political arguments in Pistoia were historically decided by secret assassinations, performed with the aid of the daggers, called *pistolese,* produced by the city's famous metalworking industry. As times advanced and science allowed men to kill one another in increasingly effective ways, the city began producing hand-held firearms that adopted the dagger's old name: pistol.

Modern-day Pistoia, aside from its art treasures, has little to do with its notorious past. Today, the metal industry's chief products are the train cars and buses made by the Breda

works, which outfitted the Washington, D.C., Metro. The town's biggest modern industry is horticulture, and Pistoia's peripheral "industrial zone" is a Dr. Seuss miniature landscape of ornamental trees and shrubbery lined up in orderly rows.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** Pistoia is on the Florence-Lucca-Viareggio line, with more than 35 trains daily from **Florence** (45–55 min.). There are also 16 daily local trains from **Bologna** (a 2-hr. trip), most of which connect in Prato. Pistoia's **train station** (✆ **0573-20-789**) is on Piazza Dante Alighieri, a short walk south of the town center on Via XX Settembre.

By Car Take the A11 from **Florence,** past Prato. The SS64 leads here from **Bologna.** You can park off Via Pacinotti (just outside the south wall) at the ex-Officine Meccaniche Breda.

By Bus **Lazzi/COPIT** buses (✆ **0573-363-243** or 0573-21-170; www.copitspa.it) run to Via XX Settembre 71 (near the train station) from Florence (75 min.), Prato (30 min.), Montecatini Terme, Lucca, Viareggio, Pisa, Livorno, and other destinations. COPIT buses also run from Piazza San Francesco 4 to service Pistoia province (Abetone, Cutigliano, and nearby areas) and Florence. You can buy tickets onboard from the driver.

VISITOR INFORMATION The helpful **tourist information office** (✆ **0573-21-622;** fax 0573-34-327; www.pistoia.turismo.toscana.it, though you'll find more info regarding museums and such on the city website at www.comune.pistoia.it) is open daily 9am to 1pm and 3 to 6pm at Via Roma 1/Piazza del Duomo 4, 51100 Pistoia (cater-cornered to the Baptistery).

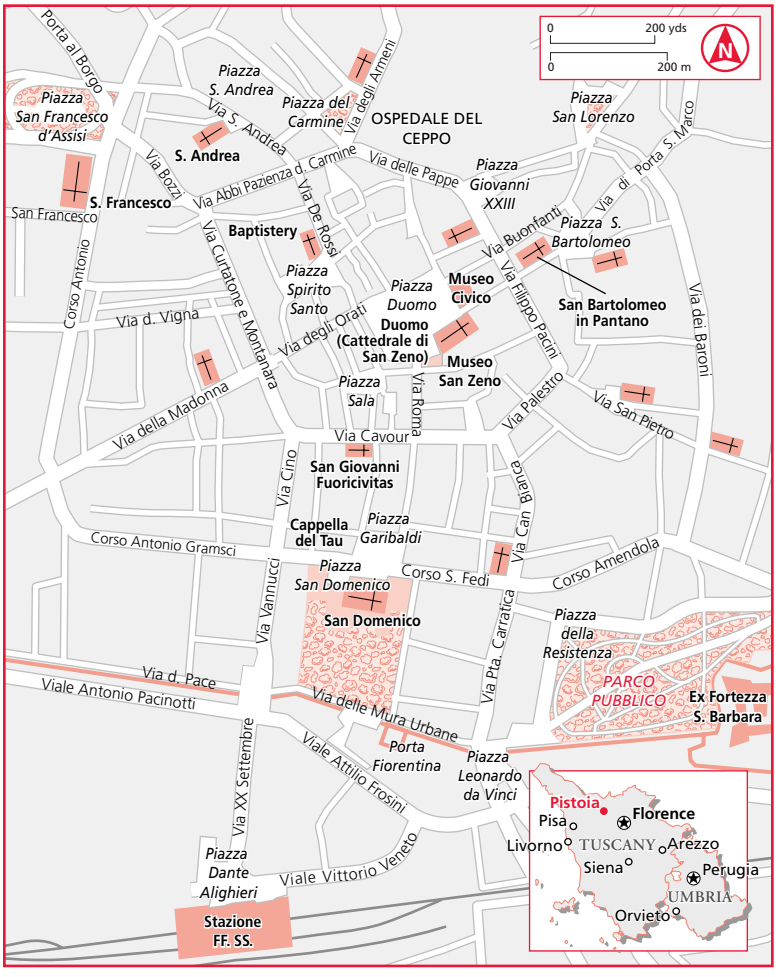
FESTIVAL & MARKETS In 1300, the **Giostra del Orso** was a real Joust of the Bear, a bearbaiting event in which horsemen ceremonially took on the captive ursine. Revived in 1947, the wildly popular July 25 event is now more humane. The highlight in a day of general costumed pageantry is the joust, when mounted knights circle opposite each other around a track and score points by slamming their lances into stylized bear targets. There are **daily fruit and veggie markets** (except Sun) on Piazza della Sala and Via Ciliegiole, and a **Wednesday and Saturday morning market** on Piazza del Duomo (which, incidentally, makes for a pretty messy visit on those afternoons, before the streetsweepers get there).

EXPLORING THE CITY

Ospedale del Ceppo ★ Pistoia's star attraction is the facade of the Ospedale del Ceppo, one of the best works by the often disappointing Giovanni della Robbia and Pistoia's answer to the Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence, which was decorated by Giovanni's father, Andrea. Here, Giovanni was in top form, creating a frieze (1514–25) of glazed terra-cotta panels to surmount a Michelozzo-designed loggia. Because this is a hospital, founded in 1277 and still going strong, the six well-preserved della Robbia panels, plus a decaying one added later by Filippo Paladini, represent the seven acts of mercy, divided by the cardinal and theological virtues.

Piazza Giovanni XXIII.

San Domenico This 1280 church squats a block inside the southern walls of town. The first item on the right as you enter is the **tomb of Filippo Lazzari,** one of Dante's best friends. The scholar lectures on eternally in the relief panel below. (I like to think his young follower Boccaccio, said to be one of the students here, is the kid stifling a yawn



on the right.) The chapel to the left of the high altar contains a Cristofano Allori canvas of ***St. Domenic Receiving the Rosary,*** interesting not so much for the painting itself, but for the argument in the background between the artist and the church sacristan over payment for the picture. Benozzo Gozzoli, who died of the plague while on a fresco job here in 1497, is buried in the cloister, which also gives access to several rooms housing detached **13th-century frescoes.** The refectory and attached tiny museum house the remaining fragments of Gozzoli's last work, a ***Journey of the Magi,*** and a possible early Verrochio *St. Jerome.* To see all the above if the cloister isn't open, hunt down a sacristan or ring the bell at Piazza San Domenico 1.

Piazza San Domenico. ✆ **0573-28-158.** Free admission. Daily 7–11:50am and 4:30–6pm (Sun to 8pm).

Cappella del Tau ★★ This remarkable chapel was built in 1360 by a branch of the Franciscan order that cared for the sick and those with disabilities and whose members wore a Greek Tau as their symbol. In the 1500s a private citizen bought it and whitewashed over the 1372 **fresco cycle by Niccolò di Tommaso** that covered every inch of the walls and ceiling. In the process of stripping the whitewash in 1968, many of the frescoes were seriously damaged, but what remains of the *Life of St. Anthony Abbot* and (on the ceiling) the stories of *Creation* and *Original Sin* is stupendous. The colors on the few in the upper corners of the back give some idea of how vivid the original effect must have been.

Corso Silvano Fedi 70. ✆ **0573-32-204.** Free admission. Mon–Sat 9am–1pm.

San Giovanni Fuoricivitas The **side facade ★** of this tiny but supremely Romanesque church is one of the most photographed sites in Pistoia, an orderly festival of blind arcades, inlaid diamond lozenges, and stripes to put a zebra to shame. Inside are a giant 13th-century crucifix, a *Visitation* in white terra cotta by Luca della Robbia, and a Giovanni Pisano holy-water stoup. The main attraction, however, is the **pulpit ★** (1270) by Fra' Guglielmo da Pisa (a student of Nicola Pisano). Of the three major pulpits in Pistoia (see San Bartolomeo in Pantano and Sant'Andrea, both below), this is the most solidly Romanesque.

Via Cavour. ✆ **0573-24-784.** Free admission. Daily 7:30am–6:30pm.

Duomo (Cattedrale di San Zeno) ★ The current incarnation of San Zeno dates from 1220, soon after which an old defensive tower close by, bristling with Ghibelline swallowtail crenellations, was given a respectable church clothing of Romanesque striped arches and converted to the cathedral bell tower. The glazed **terra-cotta decorations** of the barrel vault in the entrance arcade and the lunette above the main door are Andrea della Robbia creations.

On the inside right wall is a tomb by Cellino di Nese (1337) and a good Byzantine painted crucifix by Coppo di Marcovaldo (1275). Just past that is the Cappella di San Jacopo and the Duomo's greatest treasure, the **Altare di San Jacopo (Altar of St. James) ★**. Close to a ton of partially gilded silver is molded into medieval saints (the upper half), early Renaissance biblical scenes (the front and flanks), and a pair of Brunelleschi prophets around on the left side. Started in 1287 and not finished until the 15th century, this altar outlasted a number of silversmiths, including a handful, such as Leonardo di Ser Giovanni, who also worked on the only other comparable altar, a similar pile of silvery holiness now in Florence's Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.

The **Il Passignano frescoes** inside the dome are hard to see. Pop down into the **crypt** for the remains of the 5th-century church and marvelously medieval bits of a **Guido da Como pulpit** (1199), dismembered in the 17th century. Get the custodian from the St. James altar to pull aside the curtain and turn on the lights in the chapel to the left of the high altar so you can see the 1485 ***Madonna di Piazza,*** a brightly colored work, including a fantastically rich carpet under the Virgin's feet, that has been declared the only documented painting by Verrochio (though some are now trying to credit it to his protégé Leonardo da Vinci—or even Leonardo's student Lorenzo di Credi).

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **0573-25-095.** Admission to Duomo free; Cappella di San Jacopo 4€ adults, 3€ children. Duomo daily 8am–7pm. Cappella di San Jacopo Mon–Sat 10am–12:30pm and 3–5:30pm; Sun 8–9:30am, 11–11:30am, and 4–5:30pm.

Baptistery This baptistery was built in those strong Pistoian bands of dark green and white by Cellino di Nese from 1337 to 1359, based on a design by Andrea Pisano. The

Gothic pulpit set to the right of the entrance was added in 1399, and the *Madonna* above the door is the work of Tommaso and Nino Pisano. The spare interior, with bare bricks showing off the bulk of the dome, contains a reconstituted baptismal font (1226) of carved and intarsia marble panels by Lanfranco da Como that date from an earlier version of the baptistery.

Piazza del Duomo. No phone. Free admission. Tues–Sun 10am–1pm and 3–6:30pm.

Museo San Zeno A local bank now owns the old Bishop's Palace wedged between the Duomo and the Baptistery, but they keep their archaeological and Duomo-related collections open to the public via a guided tour (see listing below). The highlights of the excavation are bits of a **Roman house** and an **Etruscan furnace.** There are also a pair of **Etruscan tomb markers** and a precious **alabaster funerary urn** carved with a chariot scene in high relief. The placard declares it Roman of the 2nd century A.D., but a team of American art historians has declared it was more likely of Etruscan origin. There's a **gold reliquary case** (1407) by Lorenzo Ghiberti and his workshop in the room that was once used as the Duomo's sacristy and treasury. In the 13th century, Vanni Pucci—one of those bad seeds who helped cement Pistoia's evil reputation—broke into this room looking for politically damaging documents. While inside, Pucci also helped himself to some of the church's riches, a despicable act that caused Dante to stick Pucci, surrounded by snakes and cursing God, in a fairly low circle of Hell. The tour also takes you past the bishop's private chapel, devoted to San Niccolò, with badly damaged **14th-century fresco fragments,** and a room specially built to receive the detached dry tempera frescoes from a nearby villa, painted in 1868 by Macchiaioli artist Giovanni Boldini.

Via Roma 1, Palazzo dei Vescovi (Piazza del Duomo). ✆ **0573-369-277.** Admission 4€ adults, 2€ children over 1m tall (3¼ ft.) and seniors. Open by reservation on a guided tour only: Mon–Sat 8am–12:30pm and 3:30–7pm; Sun 8am–1pm and 3:30–7pm. Tours meet at the tourist office.

Museo Civico Pistoia's most worthwhile museum is housed in the 1294 **Palazzo del Comune,** sprouting a hard-to-see basalt black head from the early 14th century that local legends make out to be either a Moorish king of Mallorca, enslaved by pirating Pistoiese, or a traitorous citizen who sold his city out to Lucca. The museum's first floor boasts a Lucchese-style panel painting of *St. Francis* surrounded by his life story (1260s), a 14th-century *Lamentation* by Lippo di Benivieni, a polyptych of the *Madonna and Child with Saints* by the anonymous Master of 1310, and four early-16th-century *Sacred Conversations* with heavy colors of deep saturation. Two of the Conversations are by local boy Gerino Gerini, and one each came from the brushes of Florentines Lorenzo di Credi and Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio. The collection continues upstairs but goes downhill from here, with a glut of 17th- to 19th-century efforts on the third floor.

Piazza del Duomo 1. ✆ **0573-371-296.** Admission 3.50€ adults, 2€ children; free to all Sat afternoon. Tues–Sat 10am–7pm; Sun 9am–12:30pm. Closed Wed mornings. (In winter, hours are shortened by 1 hr.)

San Bartolomeo in Pantano "St. Bartholomew in the Swamp" is a 12th-century enlargement of an 8th-century church that has been sinking slowly into its namesake bog for more than a millennium. In the very dark interior, you may be able to make out the **13th-century fresco** in the apse, and you'll certainly stumble over the **pulpit** ★ by Guido da Como (1250), one of the quirkier medieval sculptors. The crouching figure supporting one of the back columns is said to be a self-portrait.

Piazza San Bartolomeo. ✆ **0573-24-297.** Free admission. Daily 8:30am–noon and 4–6pm.

Tips A Cappuccino Break

Valiani, Via Cavour 55 (✆ **0573-23-034**), is a cafe and pastry shop installed in 1831 under the high, vaulted ceilings behind a striped Romanesque facade next to San Giovanni Fuoricivitas. There are also a few tables outside.

Sant'Andrea ★ Pistoia's other artistic heavyweight is Giovanni Pisano's **pulpit ★★** (1298–1301) in this 12th-century church. The third of the four great Pisano pulpits (the others are in Pisa and Siena) and the first carved by Giovanni without the help of his dad, Nicola, this is the work with which the Pisan sculptor brought his art to absolute Gothic perfection. The reliefs are so deeply carved that the figures seem to come out at us. Because the naturalism of the Renaissance hadn't yet come into vogue, Giovanni relied on narrative density (the Annunciation, two takes on the Nativity, and the angels averting the shepherds in their fields are all crammed into the first panel) and exaggerated expression to bring his works to life. But the reliefs do foreshadow later movements, especially where Giovanni breaks the borders of the panels to carry the artistic narrative across real space. Notice how the angel of the Magi panel is pointing back to the Nativity scene as it wakes the three wise men to go adore the baby Jesus. There are also two **wood crucifixes,** one behind the pulpit by Gerino Gerini (early 1500s) and another by Giovanni Pisano across the nave. Feed the light box one coin at a time; otherwise, you'll waste your euros lighting the whole church instead of just the good bits.

Via Sant'Andrea. ✆ **0573-21-912.** Free admission. Daily 8am–12:30pm and 3:30–6pm (to 7pm in summer).

San Francesco Pistoia's barnlike Franciscan church contains lots of good **14th-century frescoes,** the best of which are in the chapels along the transept. Behind the high altar is a fresco cycle on the *Life of St. Francis* by a Giotto copycat (perhaps a student) who mimicked his master's formulae for most of the scenes. The chapel to the left has a Sienese-school cycle of an *Allegory of the Triumph of St. Augustine.* After giving a nod to the frescoes in the second chapel to the right of the high altar, go through the door at the transept's end for a peek at more 14th-century works in the **sacristy.** If it's open (if you're quiet about it, you can lift the blockade bar yourself), pass though the door into the **chapter house** beyond for even better frescoes, including a giant *Tree of Life* that just might be by the hand of Sienese master Pietro Lorenzetti.

Piazza San Francesco. ✆ **0573-368-096.** Free admission. Daily 7:30am–noon and 4–7pm.

WHERE TO STAY

With just a few business travelers and a handful of tourists staying the night, Pistoia doesn't have a particularly scintillating crop of hotels. An additional choice to the ones below is the **Hotel Leon Bianco,** Via Panciatichi 2 (✆ **0573-26-675** or 0573-26-676; fax 0573-26-704; www.hotelleonbianco.it), a block from the Patria and very comparable, only with thicker quilts, smaller rooms, and newer bathrooms. Doubles cost roughly the same (75€–100€). All hotels listed provide a permit to park free on the surrounding streets.

Hotel Firenze Value Pistoia's only central budget choice is run by an American/Italian couple who keep the spacious, plain rooms very clean. The floors are stone linoleum tile and the beds swaybacked, but there's at least a sink-and-bidet affair in the corner of

bathroom-less rooms (the shared bathroom bears an uncanny resemblance to a chapel, with a box shower as the altar). A few of the largest units have extra beds thrown in for families on a shoestring.

Via Curtatone e Montanara 42 (btw. the Duomo and San Francesco), 51100 Pistoia. ✆/fax **0573-23-141.** www.hotel-firenze.it. 20 units. Double 55€–85€; superior double 65€–88€; 25€ more for a triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking on street; ask hotel for overnight parking permit. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; Internet. *In room:* A/C, TV in units with bathrooms, hair dryer.

Hotel Il Convento Finds A friendly Florentine family runs this 18th-century Franciscan-monastery-turned-countryside-inn on the lower slopes of the Apennines northeast of the city. The highlight is the public areas—arcaded salons with overstuffed sofas, a panoramic terrace with a view stretching all the way down to Prato, a beautifully landscaped pool with a view, and an extremely intimate restaurant in the former monks' cells on the first floor. Each cell has just a few tables, or you can dine like the *frate* did in the tiny old refectory.

Via San Quirico 33 (4km/2½ miles northeast of town), 51030 Pontenuovo (Pistoia). ✆ **0573-452-651** or 0573-452-652. Fax 0573-453-578. www.ilconventohotel.com. 32 units. 75€–110€ double without view; 100€–130€ double with view. Breakfast 8€. MC, V. Free parking on street; ask hotel for overnight parking permit. Restaurant closed Jan–Mar. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; outdoor pool (May–Sept); room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

Hotel Patria This is the most pleasant option in the historic center, a modern hotel with built-in lacquered headboards and furniture, carpeting on the floors and the walls, and recently renovated bathrooms. Its location can't be beat: just a few blocks from the train station but also only three doors down from the Romanesque stripes of San Giovanni Fuoricivitas and a minute's walk from the Duomo.

Via F. Crispi 8, 51100 Pistoia. ✆ **0573-25-187.** Fax 0573-368-168. www.patriahotel.com. 28 units. 75€–90€ double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking on street; ask hotel for overnight parking permit. **Amenities:** Concierge. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Besides the choices below, you can get a good and fairly inexpensive pasta and pizza meal at perennially packed **La Sala "Da Ale,"** Via San Anastasio 4 (✆ **0573-24-108;** Fri–Wed noon–2:30pm and 7pm–midnight), at the edge of Piazza della Sala. For excellent mid-priced meals under brick vaults, go to **San Jacopo,** Via Crispi 15 (✆ **0573-27-786;** Wed–Sun 12:15–2:30pm and 7–10pm, Tues 7–10pm), for *panzerotti gratinati* (a pasta casserole with mozzarella, tomatoes, mortadella, and prosciutto).

La BotteGaia Value TUSCAN This popular enoteca and restaurant opened in 2001 to great fanfare in the gastronomic community after the success of the owners' wine shop across the street. It serves classic local cuisine, but also some more daring Tuscan specialties, such as the *lampredotto trippato all fiorentina*—which, even for someone who normally steers clear of tripe, is a tasty stew—and *baccala' livornese,* which seems to be the favorite. The tables in the back look across the square to the cathedral.

Via del Lastrone 17 (a few steps off Piazza del Duomo). ✆ **0573-36-5602.** www.labottegaia.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 8€; secondi 12€. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 10:30am–3pm and 6:30pm–1am.

Rafanelli ★ PISTOIESE/TUSCAN This countryside trattoria has become hidden in the midst of a growing "industrial zone"—serendipitously consisting mainly of carefully tended gardens feeding Pistoia's midget tree trade—but that hasn't diminished its popularity as a spot for Pistoian city slickers to come out for a big Sunday lunch in one of the

large modernized rooms. The *pappardelle alle lepre* (wide noodles with hare) and *risotto ai funghi porcini* (rice with porcini mushrooms) are perennial favorites, as is the local dish *maccheroni Pistoiese* (pasta in duck sauce). You can go all out on a *tris di primi* (three primi chosen at the chef's discretion). The *cinghiale alla Maremmana* is wild boar cooked with black olives, while their grilled meats selections include a *bistecca fiorentina* and *scottadito d'agnello.*

Via Sant'Agostino 47 (Loc. Sant'Agostino, just east of the city walls). ✆ **0573-532-046.** Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–8€; secondi 13€–18€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7:30–9:30pm; Sun noon–2:30pm. Closed Aug and 1 week in Jan.

3 MONTECATINI TERME & MONSUMMANO TERME: SPAS & SAUNAS

15km (9 1/3 miles) W of Pistoia; 46km (29 miles) W of Florence; 330km (205 miles) N of Rome

The curative powers coursing through the sulfurous underground hot springs and steaming vaporous caverns of the Valdinievole west of Pistoia have been renowned for centuries. This "Valley of Mists" is home to Montecatini Terme, the grande dame of Italian spas, and Monsummano Terme, with eerie natural sauna caves. Though modern thermal centers aimed at relaxing your body and emptying your wallet have begun filling the valley, the hillsides remain beautiful. Capped with tiny medieval villages, the hills are a joy to wander—the SS633 twists its way into the mountains north of Montecatini, providing an especially gorgeous route for Sunday drivers. If you're heading here hell-bent on heavy relaxation, know that both Montecatini and Monsummano become veritable ghost towns from mid-October to Easter.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** The Florence-Viareggio train, which pauses at Pistoia on the way, stops at Montecatini (19 daily; 50–70 min. from Florence, 10 min. from Pistoia). If you're staying in Montecatini, get off at the second stop in town, Montecatini Succursale. If you're heading to Monsummano Terme, get off at Montecatini Terme–Monsummano or Centrale.

By Car Take the A11 from Florence or Pistoia to the Montecatini exit.

By Bus Hourly **Lazzi** (✆ **055-363-041;** www.lazzi.it) buses run from Florence (52 min.). From Pistoia, it's best to take the train.

VISITOR INFORMATION Montecatini Terme's **tourist office** is at Viale Verdi 66 (✆ **0572-772-244;** fax 0572-70-109; apt@montecatini.turismo.toscana.it; no official site, but the following are all useful: www.termemontecatini.it, www.montecatini-terme.it, and www.montecatini-alto.it). It's open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 12:30pm and 3 to 6pm and Sunday from 9am to noon; closed Sundays from December to Easter. For Monsummano, contact **Hotel Grotta Giusti** (see below) directly.

TAKING THE WATERS

MONSUMMANO TERME One of the eeriest spas in Italy lies just south of Montecatini at Monsummano Terme. In 1849, the Giusti family discovered on their lands a series of stalactite- and stalagmite-laden caves with a sulfurous lake at the bottom and hot mineral-laden vapors permeating the air. By 1852, they had built a spa around it dubbed

the **Grotta Giusti Terme** ★ and converted their adjacent villa into a luxury hotel (see below).

You don't have to stay at the inn to visit the **spa** at Via Grotta Giusti 171 (✆ **0572-90-771;** fax 0572-907-7300; www.grottagiustispa.com), where you can don a white shift and a dun-colored robe—like a member of some hedonistic monastic order—and descend through a series of increasingly hot and steamily dripping caverns named, of course, Paradiso, Purgatorio, and Inferno, after Dante (the scalding sulfur pool below is the Lake of Limbo). It costs 40€ to steam in the caves for 1 hour, but you can also go in for a massive array of treatments (such as full-body massages, starting at 30€ for 20 min, or 60€ for a 50-min. Swedish massage; or 40€ for either a citrus or white chocolate massage; or else splurge on a "thermal nasal irrigation" or cellulite-reduction programs). From April to the first weekend of November, the *terme* are open from 9am to noon (last entry 11am) and 3 to 6pm (last entry 5pm). The shuttle bus for the Hotel Grotta Giusti (see below) will take you here from the Montecatini train station free of charge.

The town of Monsummano Terme doesn't offer much more than the small 16th-century **Santa Maria della Fontenuova** on the main piazza, with a frescoed wraparound portico and a tiny museum (opened on request) containing some 17th-century paintings and an ivory crucifix reputedly by Giambologna. In front of the church is a statue of the town's only citizen of historical note, poet Giuseppe Giusti.

Follow the yellow signs for the steep, twisty road through groves of chestnuts, olives, and pines up to the old village of **Monsummano Alto,** all but abandoned since the population moved down to the valley in the 1500s. Founded in the Dark Ages, the village is mostly in ruins, but still intact are half a guard tower (the first thing you come to) and, down to the right of it, one of the crumbling town gates. A path of crushed gravel and grass slowly becomes stone as you arrive at the few houses and tiny church—with an inexplicable small pine sprouting out halfway up the facade—that huddle around the small piazza, surrounded by the junglelike ruins of the rest of town. Only three of the houses are continuing concerns, home to a handful of old residents, several loud dogs, and a dozen lazing cats. Beyond the church are some excavated 15th-century house foundations. The views of the surrounding valleys are excellent.

MONTECATINI TERME Montecatini is a quiet and aging town that longs for its heyday as a "ville d'eau" where the very wealthy came to "take the waters." It is still a mecca for well-heeled seniors who like to do a bit of shopping to unwind after spending long hours drinking mineral-laden waters, getting radioactive vapors steamed into various parts of their body, and generally lying about doing nothing. This town's on permanent *riposo,* and its nucleus is the **Parco dei Termi,** a long park of neoclassical temples each expanding over the sources of various underground hot springs and vaporous crevices.

The oldest is **Terme Tettuccio** (✆ **0572-778-501**), written of as early as 1370 and visited by the high-strung merchant of Prato, Francesco Datini, in 1401. The spa wasn't really exploited until Grand Duke Leopold I took an interest in developing the *terme* of the town in the 1700s. Reconstructed from 1919 to 1927, the long neoclassical facade opens onto the 20th-century ideal of a Roman bathhouse, decorated with murals, ceramics, and statues by Italy's Art Nouveau Liberty masters, like Galileo Chini and Ezio Giovannozzi. Drinking the waters here will supposedly do wonders for the liver you've been rotting with all that Chianti Classico.

The **Terme Leopoldine** (✆ **0572-778-551**) at the park's entrance goes so far as to dedicate itself as a neoclassical (1926) temple to Aesculapius, the god of health, as if its mineral mud baths could cure all ills. These and most of the other spas are open May

through October only, but one remains open to the ailing, aching public year-round: the neo-Renaissance-meets-modernism house of the **Excelsior** (✆ **0572-778-509**).

All the spas charge in the neighborhood of 5€ to 10€ for half a day's entrance and water to sip and anywhere from 25€ to 110€ for mud baths and more serious treatments, depending on season. Tickets are sold at the **Società delle Terme** office, Viale Verdi 41 (✆ **0572-7781** or 0572-778-487 for reservations; www.termemontecatini.it), outside the park entrance.

For a very light cultural workout to wring out your spa-sodden brain, you can drop by the **Accademia d'Arte** on Viale Diaz (no phone) during afternoons to see Macchiaioli and Liberty-style works by the likes of Giovanni Fattori and Galileo Chini as well as some Salvador Dalí surrealism and the piano on which Verdi composed *Otello* while taking the waters here. The hill sloping up behind the Parco delle Terme contains the wooded **Parco della Panteraie,** good for strolls through the woods and deer reserve, and a dip in the swimming pool.

Perhaps the most exciting part of the place for younger people is **Montecatini Alto** (✆ **0572-766-862;** www.montecatini-alto.it) reachable in the summer via a funicular, which makes a 10-minute trip from Viale Diaz about every half-hour daily from 10am to 1pm and 3pm to midnight (in case all the relaxation has made the 5km/3-mile climb by foot daunting). It costs 3€ one-way and 5€ round-trip. For a bite to eat at night, be sure to stop by **La Torre,** Piazza Giusti 8 (✆ **0572-706-50;** closed Tues), the most prestigious restaurant in town, built around a medieval tower. The Old Town offers a few other, less interesting cafes and *trattorie* on its diminutive main piazza, but there are fine views across the Valdinievole. Mostly, it's a pleasant break from the languorous wallet-draining hedonism and general flatness of the modern spa town below. It's also a base for short hikes into the surrounding valley, especially to visit the stalactites of the **Grotta Maona** caverns nearby (✆ **0572-74-581**), open April through November Tuesday through Sunday from 9am to noon and 2:30 to 6:30pm. Admission is 4.50€ adults, 2.50€ for kids 6 to 12. The surrounding complex includes a bar that becomes a disco some evenings.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

In Montecatini Terme

I sometimes wonder where Montecatinians live, because almost every building that isn't a restaurant, store, or spa seems to be an *albergo* (hotel). With more than 300 hotels in town, you should have no difficulty finding a room—Montecatini's tourist office spends half its time hunting them up for vacationers. Most hotels require you to take half or full board, and the vast majority are closed completely from mid-October to Easter. If you can escape your hotel's pension requirement, head to the **Enoteca da Giovanni,** Via Garibaldi 25 (✆ **0572-71-695**), for an excellent, but far from cheap, meal of innovative Tuscan fare and game dishes.

Grand Hotel & La Pace ★★ In a town where half the hotels use the name "Grand," this one should adopt the moniker "Monumental." The palatial lounges, the suites that have hosted celebrities from the king of Italy to Kevin Costner, the 2-hectare (5-acre) wooded grounds, and the frescoed restaurant that could host a UN conference: La Pace keeps early-20th-century formal elegance alive and very well cared for. It has been *the* place to stay in town since 1870. The guest rooms, many of them recently refurbished, are more subdued but still create a sense of comfort with shiny wood floors, high ceilings, and tasteful furnishings, including some new polished granite bathrooms. To keep up

with the times, in a Belle Epoque resort whose modern relevance is always in question, the hotel regularly adds new facilities; in 2009, it completed a new spa, with a pool and hammam, and it created new treatments in its Centro Benessere (the Natural Health Center). This was a huge undertaking, and in fact the new spa was only completed in 2009. "Truffle therapy" and "Chocotherapy" are just part of the menu. (Treatments applied externally—for internal chocolate and truffle treatments, be sure to visit its grandiose restaurant.)

Via della Torretta 1 (off Via Verdi), 51016 Montecatini Terme (PT). ✆ **0572-9240.** Fax 0572-78-451. www.grandhotellapace.it. 150 units. 250€ double; 560€ junior suite; 640€ suite. Continental breakfast 13€, buffet breakfast 20€. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Nov 1–Mar 30. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (1 formal and 1 low-key poolside, open June–Sept); 2 bars; babysitting; bike rental; concierge; nearby 18-hole golf course (60% discount); health club; Jacuzzi; heated outdoor pool; room service; sauna; spa; outdoor clay tennis court. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

In Monsummano Terme

Hotel Grotta Giusti ★ Converted from a family villa in the 1850s, this hotel has hosted Garibaldi, Verdi, and Liz Taylor on relaxing escapes. The rooms are well sized if bland, but they're comfortable, have thermal bathwater on tap, and come with robes and shifts for descending into the grottoes. A few accommodations downstairs have frescoed ceilings, and some on the third floor have balconies, but steer clear of the boring modern rooms in the new wing. The ceiling frescoes are repeated in the sunny breakfast rooms and in the vaulted lounges off the lobby. They also have a 42-hectare (104-acre) forest with a fitness path. The hotel's Spa and Wellness Center offers many therapeutic treatments (see "Taking the Waters," above).

Via Grotta Giusti 1411, 51015 Monsummano Terme (PT). ✆ **0572-90-771.** Fax 0572-907-7200. www.grottagiustispa.com. 64 units. 260€–300€ "comfort" double; 296€–356€ "charm" double; 346€–406€ superior. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Jan 8–Mar 20. From Montecatini Terme–Monsummano station take a free shuttle bus (3 run in morning and in afternoon); a blue LAZZI bus from in front of train station, buying ticket at newsstand in station (make sure it's the tiny bus for Grotta Giusti, not the larger one to Monsummano Terme itself); or take a taxi (try to bargain the fare down to 12€). **Amenities:** Restaurant; small bar; babysitting; concierge; exercise room; driving range on grounds or nearby golf course; health spa; frescoed lounges; massage; outdoor pool; room service; natural sauna; outdoor tennis court. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

La Cantina (da Caino) GAME/ITALIAN Caino bustles out of the kitchen carrying a plate of shriveled mushrooms, joins a table of regulars under the wood-beamed ceiling, and launches into a discourse on the merits of various *tartufi* (truffles). He holds each one up, invoking its city of origin as he turns it like a gem in the light of the bright globe lamps. He excuses himself but returns with a wooden crate packed with regiments of dead sparrows—his catch from that morning. Though the menu is long, this place really excels in game, fish, and the produce of the forests. So forgo standard Italian dishes for anything with *cinghiale* (wild boar), *coniglio* (rabbit), *lepre* (hare), *uccelini* (Caino's sparrows), or fresh *pesce* (fish). In warm weather, you can dine in the arbor-covered garden or on the open-windowed terrace.

Via Picasso 55. ✆ **0572-53-173.** Reservations not necessary. Primi 6€–7€; secondi 8€–12€; pizza 5€–7€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight. Closed Aug 16–30. From Hotel Grotta Giusti, exit property and take 1st left (just before Albergo La Speranza). La Cantina is the last building on the right.

EN ROUTE TO LUCCA: THE LAND OF PINOCCHIO

Pescia, stretched along the Pescia River 12km (7½ miles) west of Montecatini along the SS435, is Italy's capital of flowers, second in Europe only to Holland in flower production.

Kids Pinocchio's Park

Another 5km (3 miles) along the road from Pescia takes you to **Collodi,** family home village of 19th-century Florentine novelist Carlo Lorenzini, who visited the village often as a child and took the pen name Collodi when he wrote ***The Adventures of Pinocchio*** (1881). Although it's one of the world's most beloved children's stories (translated into more than 60 languages), Italians of all ages have an especially fierce love of and devotion to the tale. The **Parco di Pinocchio** (✆ **0572-429-342;** www.pinocchio.it) was built here in 1956 to celebrate it, with a bronze *Pinocchio* by Emilio Greco, mosaic scenes from the story by Futurist Venturino Venturi, a restaurant designed by Liberty master Giovanni Michelucci, and a museum, hedge maze, and other minor diversions for the kids. The park is open daily from 8:30am to sunset; admission is 10€ adults, 7€ ages 3 to 14 and seniors over 65.

Its huge market daily ships out millions of carnations, gladioli, lilies, and chrysanthemums—all before 8am. Pescia's horticulture industry also produces excellent asparagus, olive oil, and cannellini beans. Art aficionados will enjoy dropping by its 13th-century **San Francesco,** frescoed by Bonaventura Berlinghieri (1235) with a cycle of the *Life of St. Francis*—Berlinghieri was a close friend of Francis, who had died a mere 9 years earlier, and many believe that these may be some of the most accurate portraits of Assisi's famous mystic.

4 LUCCA & ITS MIGHTY MEDIEVAL WALLS

26km (16 miles) W of Montecatini; 72km (45 miles) W of Florence; 335km (208 miles) NW of Rome

Lucca is the most civilized of Tuscany's cities, a stately grid of Roman roads snug behind a mammoth belt of tree-topped battlements. It's home to Puccini and soft pastel plasters, an elegant landscape of churches and palaces, delicate facades, and Art Nouveau shop fronts on wide promenades. The sure lines of the churches here inspired John Ruskin to study architecture, and though the center isn't the traffic-free Eden many other guidebooks would lead you to believe, cars truly are few and far between. Everyone from rebellious teens to fruit-shopping grandmothers tools around this town atop bicycles.

Lucca's greatest cultural contribution has been musical. The city had a "singing school" as early as A.D. 787, and this crucible of musical prodigies gave the world Luigi Boccherini (1743–1805), the composer who revitalized chamber music in the 18th century with such compositions as his widely famous Minuet no. 13, and most famously the operatic genius Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924), whose *Tosca, Madame Butterfly, Turandot,* and *La Bohème* have become some of the world's favorite operas.

Lucca boasts some pretty heavyweight history. Its plains were inhabited more than 50,000 years ago, and as a Roman *municipium,* it was the site of the First Triumvirate between Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus in 56 B.C. Bishop Paulinus, one of St. Peter's disciples, brought a third-generation Christianity here in A.D. 47, making Lucca the first Tuscan city to convert. It was a major pit stop for pilgrims and crusaders coming from

DINING ◆
Amadeo Giusti **5**
Da Giulio **2**
Da Leo **6**
Gli Orti di Via Elisa **12**
La Buca di Sant'Antonio **8**
Pizzeria da Felice **4**
Ristorante Giglio **10**

ACCOMMODATIONS ■
Fattoria Maionchi **13**
Hotel Ilaria **11**
Hotel La Luna **3**
Hotel Universo **9**
Moderno **12**
Ostello S. Frediano **1**
Piccolo Hotel Puccini **7**
Rex **12**

northern Europe along the Francigena road, and in 588 local clergy shanghaied one passing Irish pilgrim, the abbot Finnian, and pronounced him bishop as "Frediano."

When Pisa conquered Lucca in 1314, hometown adventurer Castruccio Castracani fought back until Lucca regained its liberty. Over the next 10 years, Castracani went on to conquer Pisa and expanded a Luccan empire over western Tuscany. Both Pistoia and Volterra fell, but in 1328, just as Castracani was training his sights on Florence, malaria struck him down. Disgruntled Pisa took over again until 1369, when Charles IV granted Lucca its independence. The proud, if relatively unimportant, city stayed a free *comune*—occasionally under powerful bosses such as Paolo Guinigi (1400–30)—for 430 years. Napoleon gave it to his sister Elisa Baciocchi as a principality in 1805, and in 1815 it was absorbed into the Tuscan Grand Duchy.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

By Train Lucca is on the Florence-Viareggio train line, with 21 trains daily passing through **Florence** (trip time: 70–90 min.), **Pistoia** (50 min.), and **Montecatini Terme** (35 min.). The short hop from **Pisa** takes about 20 to 30 minutes

(24 trains daily, 12 on Sun). The **station** (✆ **848-888-088**) is a short walk south of Porta San Pietro, or you can take *navetta* minibus no. 16 into town.

By Car The A11 runs from Florence through Prato, Pistoia, and Montecatini before hitting Lucca. The SS12 runs straight up here from Pisa.

By Bus **Lazzi** buses (✆ **0583-584-876;** www.lazzi.it) run hourly from Florence (70 min.) and Pisa (50 min.) to Lucca's Piazzale Verdi. Lazzi also services Bagni di Lucca, Forte dei Marmi, Lago di Torre Puccini, Livorno, and Viareggio. **CLAP** buses (✆ **0583-587-897;** also based on Piazzale Verdi) run between Lucca and Bagni di Lucca, Barga, Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, Collodi, Forte dei Marmi, Massa, Pescia, and Viareggio.

GETTING AROUND A set of *navette* (electric minibuses) whiz dangerously down the city's peripheral streets, but the flat town is easily traversable on foot.

To really get around like a Lucchese, though, you need to **rent a bike.** There are four main rental outfits. There's the **city-sponsored stand** on Piazzale Verdi (✆ **0583-442-937;** closed Nov to mid-Mar), and **Cicli Barbetti** near the Roman amphitheater at Via Anfiteatro 23 (✆ **0583-954-444;** Mon–Fri 9am–12:30pm and 2:30–6pm, Sat 2:30–6pm; also open Sat morning and Sun if the weather is nice). Only one bicycle shop in town is open all day: **Antonio Poli,** Piazza Santa Maria 42 (✆ **0583-493-787;** www.biciclettepoli.com; daily 8:30am–7:30pm; closed Sun mid-Nov to Feb and Mon mornings year-round). There you can rent a city bike for 13€ for a day; a mountain bike is 18€. You can also try **Cicli Bizzarri** next door at Piazza S. Maria 32 (✆ **0583-496-031;** www.ciclibizzarri.net; Mon–Sat 8:30am–1pm and 2:30–7:30pm and Sun Mar to mid-Sept). Bizzarri's rates are 2.50€ an hour for a regular bike, 5.50€ an hour for a tandem. **Taxis** line up at the train station (✆ **0583-494-989**), Piazza Napoleone (✆ **0583-492-691**), and Piazzale Verdi (✆ **0583-581-305**).

VISITOR INFORMATION The main **tourist information office** is just inside the east end of the city walls at Piazza Santa Maria 35, 55100 Lucca (✆ **0583-919-931;** fax 0583-469-964; www.luccaturismo.it; summer daily 9am–7pm, Nov–Mar daily 9am–1pm and 3–6pm). It provides an excellent free pocket map and good pamphlets on Lucca and the Garfagnana. The comune also has a small **local info office** on Piazzale Verdi (✆ **0583-442-944**), which keeps similar hours.

For **events** and theater, pick up the English-language monthly ***Grapevine*** for 1.50€ at most newsstands. Another good, private website for lots of Lucca info is **www.in-lucca.it**.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS **Musical festivals** celebrate the town's melodious history. Every evening, the Basilica di San Giovanni hosts an opera recital or orchestral concert dedicated to hometown composer Giacomo Puccini, in a series called **Puccini e la sua Lucca** (✆ **349-366-3453;** www.puccinielasualucca.com). Tickets are 17€ (12€ for children) and can usually be purchased at the door. In April through June, the churches take part in a **Festival of Sacred Music.** All September long, the **Settembre Lucchese** brings concerts and Puccini operas to the theater where many premiered, the Teatro Comunale on Piazza del Giglio. On September 13, an 8pm candlelit procession from San Frediano to the Duomo honors Lucca's most prized holy relic, the **Volto Santo** statue of Christ that tradition holds was carved by Nicodemus himself.

A huge **antiques market,** one of Italy's most important, is held the third Sunday (and preceding Sat) of every month in Piazza Antelminelli and the streets around the Duomo. It's great fun but also leaves rooms hard to find and restaurants booked, especially at lunch (even those normally closed Sun reopen for this one). It's spawned a local **art market** on Piazza del Arancio on the same dates, and the final Sunday of the month sees

an **artisans' market** on Piazza San Giusto. A cute little **Christmas market** is held on Piazza dell'Anfiteatro from December 8 to December 26, and September 13 to September 29 brings an **agricultural market** to Piazza San Michele featuring Lucca's wines, honeys, and olive oils.

DISCOVERING LUCCA'S TREASURES

Cattedrale di San Martino ★★ The **facade ★** of Lucca's Duomo is an excellent and eye-catching example of the Pisan–Lucchese Romanesque school of architecture. Long lines of baby columns—every variety imaginable—backed by discreet green-and-white Romanesque banding are stacked into three tiers of arcaded loggias. Signed in 1204 by Guidetto da Como, the facade is technically unfinished, lacking the topmost loggia and a tympanum. The carved great arches making up the portico underneath include a dwarfish third partner, probably made smaller to accommodate the preexisting (1060) base of the bell tower, the crenellated marble top half of which was finished in 1261. The pillar abutting the tower is carved with a circular 12th-century **labyrinth,** a symbol of the long, torturous road to salvation. Such mazes once pointedly graced the entrance to many medieval churches.

The 13th-century **reliefs under the portico ★** are beautiful examples of medieval stonework, a few of them carved by Guido da Como. Around the central door are the months of the year and stories from the life of St. Martin. Martin of Tours was a 4th-century Hungarian soldier in the Roman army who famously divided his cloak to share with a beggar and, after converting, preached against capital punishment (panel 1), cured lepers with kisses (panel 2, though here he's not puckering), raised a few dead (panel 3), and was made bishop (panel 4) before becoming the first saint to die of natural causes instead of martyrdom. Bedecking the left portal are an *Adoration of the Magi* and *Deposition* that may be early Nicola Pisano works. Few visitors know to wander around the back of the church to admire the arcaded **exterior of the apse,** which sits in a small grassy park.

In the 14th- to 15th-century **interior,** talented local sculptor Matteo Civitali designed the **pavement** as well as the holy-water stoups and the **pulpit** along the aisles. Against the entrance wall is the original 13th-century statue of St. Martin dividing his cloak to give to a beggar (outside is a replica). Among the fine baroque works in the right aisle is (third altar) a ***Last Supper*** (1590–91) by Tintoretto and his assistants.

On the right aisle just past a few steps is the entrance to the former sacristy (for admission, see below), containing an altarpiece of the ***Madonna Enthroned with Saints*** by Domenico Ghirlandaio over a predella by his pupil Bartolomeo di Giovanni and surmounted by a lunette of the *Deposition* by a follower of Filippo Lippi. The sacristy is also home to the Duomo's masterpiece, Jacopo della Quercia's **tomb of Ilaria Carretto Guinigi ★★★** (long-term plans are to move it to the Museo della Cattedrale, below). Married in 1403 to Paolo Guinigi and dead 2 years later at age 26, Ilaria del Carretto had only been in the limelight for a brief moment. But her rich husband also happened to be the town boss, so she was guaranteed everlasting fame as the subject of Jacopo della Quercia's masterpiece marble tomb. Jacopo barely had time to finish it in 1407 before Guinigi married again. Della Quercia's International Gothic style is influenced here by French models—the lying-in-state look with folded hands and with a little pug dog at her feet to symbolize fidelity. But he also started to introduce Renaissance elements that look back to antiquity, such as the sarcophagal friezes of putti and garlands around the sides; the natural and accurate representation of Ilaria's face; and the flowing, limpid lines

full of grace and repose. The tomb is famous—if for nothing else—because the young lady was quite obviously very beautiful, and Jacopo's chisel has kept her beauty alive. Incidentally, Ilaria is actually buried, and always has been, in the Guinigi chapel of Santa Lucia in San Francesco; Paolo Guinigi had the tomb placed in the cathedral just to show off what he could buy.

In the right transept are more Matteo Civitali works, including the 1472 **tomb of Pietro Noceto** and the tomb of Domenico Bertini. In the far right transept chapel, Civitali did the two praying angels flanking the tabernacle, and the chapel next to the choir has his *Altar of St. Regolo* (1484). The first chapel in the left transept houses Giambologna's Mannerist altar that includes the Risen Christ, Sts. Peter and Paul, and a very low **bas-relief of Lucca's skyline** as it appeared in 1577, complete with towers and the newly finished city walls. The baroque canvases decorating the left aisle are fine, the only outstanding one being Bronzino's 1598 *Presentation of Mary at the Temple,* full of gorgeously rich fabrics appropriate to this textile town; it's on the second altar from the door.

Halfway down this aisle is Civitali's octagonal **Tempietto** (1482), built of white Carrara and red porphyry marble, with a St. Sebastian on the backside. It houses Lucca's most holy relic, the **Volto Santo** ★. This thick-featured, bug-eyed, time-blackened wooden statue of Jesus crucified was rumored to have been started by Nicodemus—who would've known what he was carving since he was the one who actually took Jesus off the Cross—but was miraculously completed. Hidden during the persecutions and eventually stuck on a tiny boat by itself and set adrift, it found its way to the Italian port of Luni in 782, where the local bishop was told in a dream to place it in a cart drawn by two wild oxen, and wherever they went, there the Holy Image would stay. The ornery beasts, submitting meekly to the yoke, wandered over to Lucca and hit the brakes, and the miraculous image has been planted here ever since.

The city was famous for its Holy Visage throughout the Middle Ages—not many cathedrals could claim a bona fide portrait of Christ. Lucca's mints turned out coinage stamped with its image; the medieval French invented a St. Vaudeluc out of corruption of its Latin name (sanctum vultum de Lucca); and King William Rufus of England even swore oaths by it. In truth, however, the simple sculpture was probably carved in a 13th-century Lombard workshop to replace a lost 11th-century version that may have been copied from a Syrian statue of the 700s. Every September 13 and 14 (and again May 3) the Luccans dress their Christ up in kingly jewel-encrusted medieval vestments (kept in the Museo della Cattedrale) and hold a solemn procession in its honor.

Piazza San Martino. ✆ **0583-957-068.** Admission to church free; Ilaria tomb (in sacristy) 2€ adults, 1.50€ children 6–12. Cumulative ticket for tomb, Museo, and San Giovanni 6€ adults, 3€ children 6–12. Daily 9:30am–5:45pm (to 6:45pm Sat).

Museo della Cattedrale The highly successful architectural marriage of the town's 12th- to 15th-century buildings with the cast-iron-and-glass modernity of this new museum is almost more interesting than the collections themselves. The first floor contains a bit of Matteo Civitali's late-15th-century **choir screen,** removed from the Duomo in 1987 despite vehement local protest. The second floor starts with 16th-century paintings and a pair of too-realistic wooden carvings of St. John the Baptist's head on a plate. Past an early-17th-century Francesco Vanni ***Crucifixion*** and a stretch of priestly vestments is a room with sculptures from the Duomo's facade, such as Jacopo della Quercia's huge early-15th-century ***St. John the Evangelist*** ★. At the end of the route are the jewelry and baubles the Volto Santo wears on the days he's specially venerated.

Walking the Walls

The walls are Lucca's defining characteristic, and they make up a city park more than 4km (2½ miles) long but only about 18m (59 ft.) wide, filled with avenues of plane, chestnut, and ilex trees planted by Marie Louise Bourbon in the 19th century. The shady, paved paths of Lucca's formidable bastions are busy year-round with couples walking hand in hand, tables of old men playing unfathomable Italian card games, families strolling, children playing, and hundreds of people on bicycles, from tykes to octogenarians.

Rent a bike ★★ (see "Getting Around," above) and take a Sunday afternoon spin, peering across Lucca's rooftops and down into its palace gardens and narrow alleys, gazing toward the hazy mountains across the plane, and checking out the 11 bastions and 6 gates. The 1566 **Porta San Pietro,** the southerly and most important gate into town, still has a working portcullis, the original doors, and Lucca's republican motto, "Libertas," carved above the entrance. You can also visit a photo archive and some of the **tunnels under the bastions** daily from 10am to noon and 4 to 6pm. You must make an appointment in advance (8am–2pm) with CISCU, the **International Center for the Study of Urban Walls** (✆ **0583-496-257**), located in the gatehouse at no. 21 near the San Paolino bastion (south of Piazzale Verdi on the west end of town).

The defensive walls you see today—a complete kidney-shaped circuit built from 1544 to 1654—are Lucca's fourth and most impressive set and perhaps the best preserved in all of Italy. About 12m (39 ft.) high and 30m (98 ft.) wide at their base, the ramparts bristled with 126 cannons until the Austrian overlords removed them. The walls were never put to the test against an enemy army, though it turned out they made excellent dikes—there's no doubt the walls saved the city in 1812 when a massive flood of the Serchio River inundated the valley. Elisa Bonaparte Baciocchi was governing Lucca at the time from her villa outside the walls, and when she tried to get into the city for safety, the people didn't want to open the gates for fear of the surging waters. Lest they let their princess—and, more important, the sister of Europe's emperor—drown, however, they hoisted her highness over the walls rather unceremoniously with the help of a crane.

Via Arcivescovado (next to the cathedral). ✆ **0583-490-530.** Admission 4€ adults, 2.50€ children 6–12. Cumulative ticket for Ilaria tomb, Museo, and San Giovanni 6€ adults, 4€ children 6–12. Mid-Mar to Oct daily 10am–6pm; Nov to mid-Mar Mon–Fri 10am–3pm, Sat–Sun 10am–6pm.

Chiesa e Battistero di San Giovanni e Santa Reparata ★ The Duomo's Romanesque neighbor has a 16th-century facade and a 12th-century body, but recent excavations have revealed the structure is actually five layers deep. It sits atop a much older Lombard church that served until the early 700s as Lucca's cathedral, which in turn was built atop a 5th-century-A.D. paleo-Christian church and 6th-century cemetery, which took the place of a Roman temple built atop Roman houses. In the 9th century, a crypt was added. In all, 12 centuries of history jumble together in a confusing but

interesting mélange beneath the pavement inside (well-signed, nonrestrictive use with a handout to help you figure it all out).

Piazza San Giovanni. ✆ **0583-490-530.** Admission 2.50€; or get the cumulative ticket for Ilaria tomb, Museo, and San Giovanni 6€ adults, 4€ children 6–12. Hours same as Museo della Cattedrale; see above.

San Michele in Foro ★ This church is as beautiful as a 12th-century Romanesque church can get. It boasts a Pisan-inspired **facade ★** of blind arches with lozenges and colonnaded arcades stacked even higher than San Martino's, and it's smack in the center of town—on top of the ancient Roman forum, in fact, hence the name—and yet this isn't the Duomo. Past the marvelous facade, with its orderly rows of doggedly unique columns topped by a Romanesquely flattened St. Michael, however, the **interior** of the church doesn't have too much to hold our attention. The original Matteo Civitali ***Madonna and Child*** sculpture from the facade is wedged in the right corner as you enter. (Its replacement doppelgänger basks in gilded beams of holy light on the outside corner of the church.) Another take on the same theme in glazed **terra cotta** by Andrea della Robbia (some now say it was by his uncle Luca) is inset on the first altar on the right. The church's best art hangs on the far wall of the right transept, a painting of ***Sts. Roch, Sebastian, Jerome, and Helen ★*** by Filippino Lippi, whose figures are more humanly morose but every bit as graceful as those of his famous teacher Sandro Botticelli. As you leave, check out the **medieval graffiti drawings** scratched on the columns of the left aisle (especially the third and fourth from the door).

Two generations of Puccinis played the organ in this church, and the third, one young master Giacomo, sang in the choir as a boy. He didn't have far to walk, for the young **Giacomo Puccini,** who was to become one of Italy's greatest operatic composers, was born in 1858 just down the block at Via Poggio no. 30 (plaque). Around the corner at Corte San Lorenzo 9 is the entrance to a small museum installed in his birth home (✆ **0583-584-028**). Along with the usual composer memorabilia, it includes the piano on which he composed *Turandot.* Admission is 3€ adults, 2€ for kids under 14. It's open daily June through September from 10am to 6pm, in winter Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 1pm and 3 to 6pm; closed January and February. The nearby heavily baroque church of **San Paolino** is where the boy Puccini got his first crack at twiddling an organ's keyboard.

Piazza San Michele. ✆ **0583-48-459.** Free admission. Daily 7:30am–noon and 3–6pm.

Torre Guinigi ★ Only one of the two towers sprouting from the top of the 14th-century palace, home of Lucca's iron-fisted ruling family, still stands, but it certainly grabs your attention. Historians tell us that many of Lucca's towers once had little gardens like this on top—the city was civilized even in its defenses—but that doesn't diminish the delight at your first glance at this stack of bricks 44m (144 ft.) high with a tiny forest of seven holm oaks overflowing the summit. For a closer look, climb the tower (230 steps) for a spectacular **view ★★** of Lucca's skyline with the snowcapped Apuan Alps and the Garfagnana mountains in the distance. Up here, you can also see the oval imprint the Roman amphitheater left on the medieval buildings of Piazza Anfiteatro (see below).

Via Sant'Andrea, at Via Chiavi d'Oro. ✆ **0583-48-524** or 0583-491-205. Admission 3.50€ adults, 2.50€ children 6–12 and seniors over 65. Mar–May daily 9am–7:30pm; June–Sept 15 daily 9am–midnight; Sept 16–Oct daily 9:30am–8pm; Nov–Feb daily 9:30am–5:30pm.

Santa Maria Forisportam This church was built in the 12th century outside the gates, hence the name, with a Pisan-style facade from the 1200s. Inside are two late-17th-century Guercino paintings: ***St. Lucy*** on the fourth altar on the right, a simple composition with Lucia holding her eyes daintily on a plate, and a smoke-blackened ***Assumption***

in the north transept. There's also a ciborium in *pietre dure* in the left transept (1680) and a 1386 Giottesque *Assumption* by Angelo Puccinelli with angels emerging from cocoon-like clouds in the sacristy (ring for the custodian). Just beyond the church is the sandstone **Porta San Gervasio,** a gate preserved from the medieval walls of 1260. Out the other side of the gate, running down the center of **Via del Fosso,** is the **former moat** of the wall, now demoted to charming canal status.

Via Santa Croce and Via della Rosa. ✆ **0583-467-769.** Free admission (donation suggested). Mon–Sat 9am–noon and 3:15–6:30pm. Tours by appointment.

Museo Nazionale Villa Guinigi The early-15th-century palace built for Paolo Guinigi on the occasion of his second marriage is now home to the best gallery in Lucca's poor museum crop. The collections start with **archaeological finds** that are well labeled—alas, only in Italian. Among the scraps from the Iron Age of the 10th century B.C. through the 8th-century-B.C. Villanovan period and 6th- to 3rd-century-B.C. Etruscan era are some reconstructed 3rd-century-B.C. Ligurian tombs that look like miniature versions of Fred Flintstone's suburban Bedrock home. There are some fascinating **medieval carvings** and capitals and a **coin collection** that proves just how important a symbol the Volto Santo has been throughout the ages.

Upstairs are some **14th- and 15th-century paintings,** including panels by Ugolino Lorenzetti and Francesco Traini, and a Zanobi Machiavelli *Madonna and Child with Saints.* The **15th-century wood inlays** show Luccan scenes as well as the Devil's Bridge at Borgo a Mozzano (see "North of Lucca: The Garfagnana & the Lunigiana," later in this chapter). Fra' Bartolomeo is represented here by a classically simple *The Eternal Father with Saints* and a Raphael-influenced *Madonna della Misericordia.*

Via della Quarquonia. ✆ **0583-496-033.** Admission 4€ adults, 2€ children under 18 and seniors over 65 (cumulative ticket with Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Mansi available). Tues–Sat 9am–7pm; Sun 9am–2pm.

Piazza Anfiteatro ★ Near the north end of Via Fillungo, a series of houses were built during the Middle Ages into the remains of a 1st- or 2nd-century-A.D. Roman amphitheater, which had been used for centuries as a quarry for raw materials to raise the city's churches and palaces. The outline of the stadium was still visible in the 1930s when Duke Ludovico asked local architect Lorenzo Nottolini to rearrange the space and bring out the ancient form better. Nottolini pulled down the few structures that had been built inside the oval, restructured the ground floors of each building, and inserted four tunneled entryways, but he retained the jumbled, medieval look that the differing heights of the tower stumps and houses give the place. Nothing, other than the occasional market and kids playing soccer, interrupts the oval space ringed with lazy cafes and a few shops. The floor of the amphitheater is about 3m (10 ft.) underground, but you can make a circuit of the piazza's outer edge to see the imprint of the stadium's ancient arcade and

Cumulative Tickets

Museums in both the Villa Guinigi and the Palazzo Mansi are covered by a cumulative ticket. It costs 6.50€ for adults and 3.25€ for children under 18 and seniors over 65. Another cumulative ticket, 6€, is available for the Museo della Cattedrale and the Church and Baptistery of San Giovanni e Santa Reparata.

The Patron Saint of Ladies-in-Waiting

Just beyond the font inside San Frediano is the **Cappella di Santa Zita (Chapel of St. Zita),** built in the 17th century to preserve the glass-coffined body of the saint and painted with her miracles by Francesco del Tintore. Zita is the patron saint of ladies-in-waiting and maids everywhere who, as a serving girl in the 13th-century Fatinelli household, was caught sneaking out bread in her apron to feed poor beggars on the street. Her suspicious master demanded to know what she was carrying, to which she answered, "Roses and flowers." She opened her apron and, with a little divine intervention, that's what the bread had become. Every April 26, the Lucchesi carpet the piazza of the nearby amphitheater with a dazzling flower market to commemorate the miracle and bring out the glass coffin containing her shrunken body to the front of the church to venerate.

poke your head into the entrance halls of apartments, a few of which contain interrupted spans of tufa arches and other Roman remnants.

Piazza Anfiteatro. No phone. Free admission. Daily 24 hr.

San Frediano ★ Especially on a sunny day, San Frediano's **facade** vies with those of the Duomo and San Michele as the most attention-grabbing in town, with a glittering 13th-century mosaic two stories high taking the place of the other churches' stacks of columns. Berlinghiero Berlinghieri designed it in a Byzantine/medieval style and threw just enough color into the apostles and ascending Christ to balance the tens of thousands of gold-leaf tiles solid in the background for a truly eye-popping effect. The original church here was built by Irish Bishop Frediano in the 6th century, and when the current structure was rebuilt (1112–47), it was rededicated to the by-then-sanctified Frediano. Bring a euro for the light boxes.

All the interior works are well labeled, and the highlight is just inside the entrance, a Romanesque **baptismal font** in the right aisle from around the 12th century, dismantled and squirreled away in the 18th century and discovered and reassembled only a few decades ago. Three master carvers probably worked on it. A Lombard sculptor gave us the stories of Moses on the large lower basin, and one Maestro Roberto signed the last two panels of the Good Shepherd and six prophets. The small tempietto sprouting out of the top was carved by a Tuscan master, with the apostles and months of the year on the lid. Behind this work, high up on the wall, is a glazed terra-cotta lunette attributed to Andrea dell Robbia of the ***Annunciation*** framed by garlands of fruit and a chorus line of winged putti heads. Matteo Civitali carved the 15th-century polychrome ***Madonna Annunciata*** in the corner.

Up to the left of the high altar is a massive **stone monolith,** probably pilfered from the nearby Roman amphitheater. The Cappella Trenta, fourth in the left aisle, contains another Jacopo della Quercia masterpiece, an **altar** carved with the help of his assistant Giovanni da Imola (1422) as well as a pair of tombstones from the master's chisel.

A long restoration was recently finished on **Lucca's finest fresco cycle ★** in the second chapel of the left aisle, painted by Amico Aspertini (1508–09). In the *Miracles of St.*

Frediano, the Irish immigrant bishop saves Lucca from a flood in a realistic way—though he symbolically performs a miracle in the middle ground by raking a new path for the water to be diverted away from the city, naked-torsoed workmen take the prudent, pragmatic step of building a dam as well; the group of noblemen on the left (who aren't doing the least bit to help) are probably portraits of Luccan bigwigs of the day as well as the artist himself. In the *Arrival in Lucca of the Volto Santo,* opposite, the legend says the pair of heifers drag the holy statue, which washed ashore at the port of Luni in the background, to Lucca of their own volition, accompanied only by Luni's bishop. But here they're joined by a crowd of singing monks, townsfolk, and a wonderfully stooped old lady in voluminous red robes who steals the show down in front.

Around the left side of the church and down Via Battisti, at Via degli Asili 33, is the 17th-century **Palazzo Pfanner** (✆ **0583-491-243**), whose sumptuous 18th-century walled garden out back was featured in Jane Champion's 1996 film *Portrait of a Lady.* In 1999, the palace reopened to visitors to house a costume collection and offers a peek inside those fabulous gardens. Admission is 3€ each to visit the gardens *or* the *palazzo* (or 4.50€ for both). It's open March 1 to November 15 daily from 10am to 6pm. If you tool around the city's ramparts you can look down into the gardens for free.

Piazza San Frediano. ✆ **0583-493-627.** Free admission. Apr to mid-Nov Mon–Sat 7:30am–noon and 3–5pm; Sun 10:30am–5pm.

Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Mansi This museum is worth the admission price if only to see the ridiculously sumptuous tapestries, frescoes, and other decorations of this 16th- to 19th-century palace. The collection isn't large or particularly spectacular, but be on the lookout for Luca Giordano's *St. Sebastian,* Domenico Beccafumi's wildly colored *Scipio,* Jacopo Vignali's *Tobias and the Angel,* and Rutilio Manetti's *Triumph of David.* In the second room is one of several versions of Agnolo Bronzino's definitive *Portrait of Cosimo I* and Pontormo's Mannerist *Portrait of a Boy.* The third room has a *Madonna and Child* by Correggio and Il Sodoma's *Christ with the Cross,* along with some portraits by Tintoretto and Luca Giordano.

Via Galli Tassi 43. ✆ **0583-55-570.** Admission 4€ adults, 2€ children under 18 or seniors over 65 (cumulative ticket with Museo Nazionale Villa Guinigi available). Tues–Sat 8:30am–7pm; Sun 8:30am–1pm.

SHOPPING

Lucca's main shopping promenades are the elite **Via Fillungo** and more proletarian **Via Santa Lucia,** both epicenters of the evening *passeggiata.* To pick up a bottle of DOC Vino Rosso delle Colline Lucchesi, divine Lucca olive oil, Garfagnana honey, and other local edibles, head to **Lucca in Tavola,** Via San Paolino 130–132 (✆ **0583-581-002**). For a less commercial venture, drop by the famous ultratraditional dried beans and seed shop **Antica Bottega di Prospero,** Via Santa Lucia 13 (no phone; www.bottegadiprospero.it). Since 1965, the best wine cellar in town has been the **Enoteca Vanni,** Piazza del Salvatore 7 (✆ **0583-491-902;** www.enotecavanni.com), with hundreds of bottles of local and Tuscan vintage lining the cryptlike rooms under the tiny storefront. And who can pass up the heavenly rich chocolates at the **Cioccolateria Caniparoli,** Via San Paolino 96, at the corner of Via Galli Tassi (✆ **0583-53-456**).

Lucca has lots of jewelry stores but none more gorgeous than **Carli,** Via Fillungo 95 (✆ **0583-491-119**), specializing in antique jewelry, watches, and silver from its high-vaulted room frescoed in 1800.

Hotels within the walls are, as a general rule, more romantic and more refined than those outside the walls, which are more geared toward business or budget travel. These include the **Rex,** Piazza Ricasoli 19 (✆ **0583-955-443;** fax 0583-954-348; www.hotelrexlucca.com), where doubles run 85€ to 120€, and the **Moderno,** Via V. Civitali 38 (✆ **0583-55-840;** fax 0583-53-830; www.albergomoderno.com), where doubles cost 65€.

Another economical option is the **Ostello S. Frediano,** Via della Cavallerizza (✆ **0583-469-957;** fax 0583-461-007; www.ostellolucca.it). It has 140 beds in 20 multibed rooms and eight mini-apartments sleeping six. The cost is 18€–20€ per day for a bunk in a multibed room. Space in the mini-apartments is 55€ for two people, 75€ for three, and 100€ for four. Lock-out is noon to 3:30pm; curfew is at midnight.

Fattoria Maionchi ★ Kids Fitted into the olive-blanketed hills where Lucca's valley rises to Le Pizzorne mountains, the *agriturismo* of Fattoria Maionchi offers you the chance to stay in an outbuilding of a 17th-century farming estate—with concessions to modernity such as fully outfitted kitchens and a pool overlooking the grapevines. A motley assortment of antiques acquired over the centuries is scattered throughout the spacious multifloor apartments, but the overall scheme manages to remain rustic. The friendly owners will show you their cellars and let you sample their wine—good enough to be the house red of Lucca's top restaurant, La Buca di Sant'Antonio (see below). A stay here (must be at least a week) makes a perfect escape in the country; you're close enough for easy excursions into Lucca (15 min. by car) as well as trips into the Garfagnana mountains.

Località Tofori (13km/8 miles east of Lucca), 55012 Camigliano (LU). ✆ **0583-978-194** or 0583-978-138. Fax 0583-978-345. www.fattoriamaionchi.it. 11 efficiency apts (sleeping 4–5). Weekly rates July–Aug, Easter, and Christmas 670€–982€; June and Sept 530€–878€; May and Oct 413€–568€; other months 370€–568€ per week (Sat afternoon–Sat morning). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Fri, Sat dinner, Sun lunch); babysitting; free bikes; children's center; 2 outdoor pools (1 private to a single apartment). *In room:* TV, kitchenette, no phone.

Hotel Ilaria/Residenza dell'Alba ★★ This hotel sits in the gardens of the sprawling Villa Bottini, and once served as the stables. These days it provides deluxe, business-like accommodations with modern rooms, and all guests enjoy such complimentary perks as a snack bar (free beer, anyone?), fresh pastries, wireless Internet, and free use of bikes—all included in the price. The rooms are fitted simply but stylishly with cherry veneer built-in units and double-paned windows—though you don't even need them on this quiet street. The rooms opening onto the little canal out front are nice, but even better views are over the gravelly tree-filled garden out back. Three of these rooms even open onto a shared terrace, and there's also a public terrace dotted with potted camellias and shaded by a giant sycamore. The same group owns three restaurants in town, including the Buca di Sant'Antonio—all are recommended below—and you can work out a pension deal. A nearby medieval church across the street, formerly the Church of the Annunciation, is now an annex they call Residenza dell'Alba. Two suites incorporate the church's medieval walls, and the conference room is a 14th-century frescoed chapel.

Via del Fosso 25, 55100 Lucca. ✆ **0583-469-200.** Fax 0583-991-961. www.hotelilaria.com. 41 units. 140€ standard double; 200€ superior double; 220€ triple; 340€ suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Babysitting; free bikes; concierge; room service (breakfast and bar). *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Hotel La Luna Kids This hotel is divided between two buildings on a dead-end street off Lucca's main shopping promenade and just a few steps from the medieval houses

following the curves of the Roman amphitheater. The rooms are mostly furnished in 1980s style, but a few lush 17th-century frescoes grace the second-floor rooms in the older half of the hotel—including no. 242, a family-perfect quad. The bathrooms range from spacious to cramped, from tub plus box shower to a curtainless wall nozzle, but all have fluffy towels. The accommodating owners keep the place very clean and well maintained.

Corte Compagni 12 (off Via Fillungo near the amphitheater), 55100 Lucca. ✆ **0583-493-634.** Fax 0583-490-021. www.hotellaluna.com. 30 units. 100€–115€ double. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ in garage. Closed Jan 6–Feb 6. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; Internet. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Hotel Universo ★ A huge, rambling hotel that since 1857 has hosted luminaries such as John Ruskin, the Universo is installed in a 15th-century palace across the square from Lucca's premier opera house/theater. No two rooms are alike—though refurbishments have begun to standardize the accommodations. There are still a few decorative holdovers from the 1960s, but most rooms have renovated bathrooms (waffle towels, alas) and generally pleasant, if lackluster, built-in furnishings. The majority are carpeted and have heavy curtains framing the windows. The few rooms that tend toward the tiny side are decorated with floral-print fabrics in a charming country style.

Piazza del Giglio 1 (off Piazza Napoleone), 55100 Lucca. ✆ **0583-493-678.** Fax 0583-954-854. www.universolucca.com. 57 units. 150€ double. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. 10 free parking spaces or nearby paid lots. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C in about 20 units, TV, hair dryer on request.

Piccolo Hotel Puccini ★★ Value This tiny hotel boasts Lucca's best location: just off the central piazza of San Michele. Your neighbor is the ghost of Puccini, who grew up across the street. The prices are fantastic for the location and comfort. And Paolo and his staff are the friendliest hoteliers in town. Most of the rooms are smallish, but they have been renovated with firm beds, compact bathrooms, floral-print wallpaper, carpeting, and reproduction opera playbills framed on the walls. From the 12 rooms along the front (this street sees very little traffic), you can lean out and see a sliver of the fabulous San Michele facade half a block away. The Puccini fills quickly, so be sure to book ahead.

Via di Poggio 9 (just off Piazza San Michele), 55100 Lucca. ✆ **0583-55-421.** Fax 0583-53-487. www.hotelpuccini.com. 14 units. 93€ double. Breakfast included. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking nearby. **Amenities:** Babysitting; bike rental; concierge; Internet; massage; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* TV, fridge, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Gastronomically, Lucca is famous above all for its divine extra-virgin olive oil, a light-green elixir with a fresh olive taste that's drizzled on just about every dish in these parts. The most typically Luccan dish is the creamy, filling *zuppa di farro,* a soup made with spelt, an emmer or barleylike wheaty grain cooked al dente. The Lucca area is also known for its asparagus, strawberries, and honey. Accompany any dish with Lucca's excellent and little-known DOC **wines,** Rosso delle Colline Lucchesi and Montecarlo.

If you just want to grab a slice and a Coke for 5€, try the **Pizzeria da Felice,** Via Buia 12 (✆ **0583-494-986;** Tues–Sat 9:30am–2pm and 4–8:30pm, Mon 11am–2pm and 4–8:30pm), which serves generous slices of real wood-oven pizza and where you can also sample two Lucchese specialties: *cecina* (a flat bread made of ceci beans) and *castagnaccio* (a sort of chestnut-flour pita, split with each half wrapped around sweetened fresh ricotta).

People line up to wait for the bakery **Amadeo Giusti,** Via Santa Lucia 18–20 (✆ **0583-496-285**), to reopen at 4:30pm (it's open daily 7am–1pm and 4:30–7:45pm, but closed

Sat afternoons), and the shop has installed a window on the street just to distribute its immensely popular focaccia, which is used by many local restaurants in their bread baskets.

Da Giulio ★ LUCCHESE/TUSCAN This cavernous and very popular trattoria is short on antique charm but long on antique tradition. Don't let the modern decor put you off—the friendly service and genuine peasant cuisine are as trattoria as they come. The soups are superb, such as the *farro con fagioli* (emmer and beans) and the *farinata* (a creamy soup of polenta corn grain with beans and veggies), or you can try the *maccheroni tortellati* (large pasta squares in ricotta, tomatoes, and herbs). *Pollo al mattone* (chicken breast roasted under a heated brick) is the secondo most in demand, but *spezzatino con olive* (stewed beef with olives) runs just behind. They also have plenty of local specialties—tripe, horse tartar, and veal snout—to whet your appetite. The homemade tiramisù is positively heavenly.

Via Conce 45, Piazza San Donato (nestled in the very northwest corner of the walls). ✆ **0583-55-948.** Reservations recommended. Primi 5€–6€€; secondi 7€–25€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–3pm and 7–11:30pm. Sun lunch only. Closed 10 days in Aug and 10 days around Christmas.

Da Leo Value LUCCHESE/TUSCAN It isn't often that a homespun trattoria dramatically improves its cooking while retaining its low prices and devoted following of local shopkeeps, groups of students, and solitary art professors sketching on the butcher-paper place mats between bites. This place is now good enough to recommend for the best cheap meals in the town center. There's usually an English menu floating around somewhere—the good-natured waiters are used to dealing with foreigners who've discovered one of this authentic Lucchese dining spot run by the amiable Buralli family. The food isn't fancy, but they do traditional dishes well: *minestra di farro, spaghetti pancetta piselli* (with pancetta bacon and sweet peas), *arrosto di manzo con patate arrosto* (roast beef and potatoes), and the excellent *zuppa ai cinque ceriali* (a soup with emmer, red and green lentils, barley, a cousin to black-eyed peas, and cannellini beans).

Via Tegrimi 1 (just north of Piazza San Michele). ✆ **0583-492-236.** www.trattoriadaleo.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 5€; secondi 9€–16€. No credit cards. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm.

Gli Orti di Via Elisa ★★ PIZZA/LUCCHESE The proprietor Samuele wakes up every morning before 5am to bake the bread for this artistic pizzeria and trattoria, which has the feel of a 1930s Parisian bistro. Musical instruments line the wall, while homestyle Lucchese favorites line the menu. The *capretto al forno con verdure stufate* is a scrumptious collection of roasted goat with thinly sliced roasted carrots, celery, zucchini and red peppers, dressed with just the right amount of rosemary. The pizzas and breads are reason enough to come here, as are the best 4€ desserts in Tuscany. Finish off with a simple *Coppa Elisa* of mascarpone and fresh strawberries, accompanied by a delicate Moscato d'Asti.

Via Elisa 17 (near Porta Elisa, the easternmost gate of the walls). ✆ **0583-491-241.** www.ristorantegliorti.it. Call ahead for a table in their glassed-in garden. Reservations recommended. Primi 7€; secondi 10€–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Sat 11:30am–3pm and 7:30pm–midnight; Wed 11:30am–3pm.

La Buca di Sant'Antonio ★★★ LUCCHESE Since before 1782, La Buca has been the premier gastronomic pit stop inside Lucca's walls. It's a maze of a place with copper pots and musical instruments hanging everywhere. It's attracted the likes of Puccini, Ezra Pound, and others who in times past just wanted to read the restaurant's secret stock of banned books. The menu changes regularly, but expect exciting lineups like *sella di coniglio lardellata su radicchietti di campo* (a cold rabbit salad), followed by ravioli filled

with ricotta and lightly sautéed in butter and zucchini, and then move to one of their signature dishes, *capretto nostrale allo spiedo con patate arrosto e sformato di carciofi* (tender spit-roasted kid with roast potatoes and artichoke pudding). Finish it off with a green apple sorbet and smile the rest of the day.

Via della Cervia 3 (a hidden alley just west of Piazza San Michele; follow the signs). ✆ **0583-55-881.** www.bucadisantantonio.com. Reservations highly recommended. Primi 8€–9€; secondi 14€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 12:30–3pm and 7:30–10:30pm; Sun 12:30–3pm. Closed 1st week of Jan and 1st week of July.

Ristorante Giglio ★★ LUCCHESE Run by the same family who owns La Buca di Sant'Antonio, the Giglio proposes a delicate, refined take on Lucchese classics with an inventive twist. Start off with an artichoke tort, a piping hot pastry lined with creamed chickpeas and ricotta. For something a little lighter, try the *risotto alle seppioline e fave,* a lively mix of cuttlefish and fresh fava beans. If you've had your fill of rabbit and wild boar on this trip, take advantage of an excellent *filetto* here, which the sommelier Angelo will pair with a spectacular red. Choose the quiet, elegant dining room, or book an outdoor table in advance. If there is a loud concert on the square that night, it's best to stay indoors.

Piazza del Giglio 2. ✆ **0583-494-058.** www.ristorantilucca.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 9€; secondi 13€–15€. AE, MC, V. Thurs–Mon noon–2:30pm and 7:30–10pm.

AFTER DARK: THEATER

The **Teatro del Giglio,** Piazza del Giglio 13–15 (✆ **0583-467-521;** www.teatrodelgiglio.it), is where Rossini premiered his *William Tell* in 1831 (Paganini was in the orchestra, little realizing that the dramatic Overture he was playing would one day be better known as the theme song from *The Lone Ranger*). Today it presents opera, plays, and ballet in the fall, winter, and spring months, and concerts in the summer, with a rare orchestral performance in the winter as well.

5 NORTH OF LUCCA: THE GARFAGNANA & THE LUNIGIANA

The Garfagnana region north of Lucca along the Serchio River is heavily wooded and mountainous, peppered with Romanesque churches, medieval Alpine villages, and good hiking trails. (The regional tourist office is in Castelnuovo di Garfagnana; see below.) It's home to the eastern slopes of the Alpi Apuane, now a natural park protecting the wildlife of these massive Apuan Alps. Over one-quarter of the plants known in Italy grow here; it's also a good bird-watching region, with more than 165 species wheeling in the skies above the mountains, including peregrine falcons and golden eagles. The **Lunigiana** to the north, a Ligurian land that's part of Tuscany in name only, preserves some remarkable prehistoric carvings in the communal museum of Pontrémoli.

GETTING AROUND BY BUS & TRAIN

CLAP buses (✆ **0583-5411**) service most of the Garfagnana, and **Lazzi** buses (✆ **0583-584-877;** www.lazzi.it) hit the major towns of **Bagni di Lucca** (trip time from Lucca: 40 min.), **Barga** (1 hr.), and **Castelnuovo** (90 min.). In Lucca, both lines are based at Piazzale Verdi. A **scenic railway line** (12 runs daily from Lucca) ducks in and out of tunnels alongside the Serchio River—you ride under an arch of the Devil's Bridge—and goes out onto the Lunigiana plain to Aulla, where you can change for a train to Pontrémoli.

A DRIVE UP THE GARFAGNANA

The main SS12 road north toward Barga and Castelnuovo splits to go up either side of the steep-valleyed Serchio just south of Ponte a Moriano. You want to stay on the east (right) branch because there's no parking on the other side of the river when you get to Borgo a Mozzano (20km/12 miles) and the **Ponte del Diavolo (Devil's Bridge),** sometimes called the Ponte della Maddalena. This impossibly narrow humpbacked 11th-century bridge of fitted stone was built under the auspices of the area's iron-fisted ruler, Countess Matilda. Much more fun to believe, however, is the legend that Satan agreed to build the span for the townspeople if they'd grant him the first soul to cross it. The morning after the bridge was completed—diabolical work crews move fast—the villagers outwitted Lucifer by sending a hapless dog trotting over.

Two and a half kilometers (1½ miles) farther along, the SS12 diverges east up the Lima valley for **Bagni di Lucca;** the **tourist office** is at Viale Umberto I 139, 55022 Bagni di Lucca (✆ **0583-809-911** or 0583-805-745; fax 0583-809-937; www.prolocobagnidilucca.it). This was one of Europe's most famous spas in the 19th century. It hosted nobles and moneyed princes from the 17th century onward and a veritable stampede of British Romantics at the height of its popularity. Napoleon's sister Elisa Baciocchi, whom he made the princess of Lucca, helped its heyday along by turning it into her summer residence. As you enter the lower part of town, known as **Ponte a Serraglio,** take the lower road to the left along the tree-shaded river to see the **Casino,** one of Europe's first licensed gaming houses and the birthplace of roulette.

Back in the Serchio valley, the main road now becomes the SS445 and runs another 18km (11 miles) to the turnoff to **Barga** set up on the mountainside; the tourist office is at Piazza Angelio 3 (✆ **0583-723-499**). Barga is home to a gaggle of **della Robbian terra cottas** (on the main entrance gate, in the 15th-c. Conservatorio di Sant'Elisabetta, and in the Duomo), and dominated by the outsize battlemented bell tower of its cathedral. The facade of the 9th- to 14th-century **Duomo** is made from local white stone called albarese and covered with medieval and Romanesque low reliefs. The interior houses a reddish-toned 13th-century **pulpit** ★ by the quirky Lombard carver Guido Bigarelli da Como, full of medieval symbolism. The red marble columns are supported by a pug-nosed dwarf (evil) and the Lion of Judea (representing Jesus), who under one pillar conquers a dragon (evil) and under another is simultaneously killed and stroked worshipfully by a man (supposedly representing the fact that man, who once crucified Christ, later came to love him). Don't miss the 10th-century painted wooden St. Christopher and the della Robbian terra cottas in a right-hand chapel.

Next take the road heading directly back down to the Serchio, cross under the railroad tracks, cross over the river and under the main road on the other side, proceed through the hamlet of Gallicano, and climb alongside the Turrite stream into the **Parco Naturale delle Alpi Apuane.** After about 9km (5½ miles) up the slopes of the 1,800m (5,906-ft.) "Queen of the Apuan Alps," Pania della Croce, you'll come to Fornovolasco and the **Grotta del Vento (Cave of the Winds)** ★ (✆ **0583-722-024;** www.grottadelvento.com). It's one of the best and most easily visited caverns of the system that honeycombs these mountains, a grotto network offering the best caving in all Italy. The cave is a fascinating subterranean landscape of tunnels, stalactites, bottomless pits, eerie pools of water, and polychromatic rivers of rock that seem to flow in sheets and cascade down stony shoots. April through September, it's open daily with 1-hour guided tours (7.50€ adults, 5€ children 9 and under) on the hour from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm; 2-hour jaunts (12€ adults, 8.50€ children 9 and under) at 11am, 3, 4, and 5pm; and 3-hour

explorations (17€ adults, 12€ children 9 and under) leaving at 10am and 2pm. October through March, it's open Sunday only. Go as early as possible to miss the crowds.

The stony capital of the Garfagnana, **Castelnuovo di Garfagnana,** lies about 11km (7¾ miles) north of Barga. For tourist information, visit the **Comunità Montana Garfagnana** off Piazza delle Erbe (✆/fax **0583-644-473**); Castelnuovo itself is covered next to the Rocca at Loggiato Porta 10 (✆ **0583-641-007;** fax 0583-644-354). There's not much to see other than the 14th-century **Rocca** castle, a stronghold of the Este dukes of Ferrara. You can't even get into the Rocca anymore, so the best Castelnuovo is good for are views of the mountains and valley, and as an information office for hikes into the Apuan Alps and the Orecchiella mountains.

At Castelnuovo, you can branch off into the **Parco Naturale Orecchiella (Orecchiella Natural Park)** on the east (Apennine) side of the valley by heading up one of the most scenic winding roads in this part of Tuscany, toward Villa, San Pellegrino in Alpe, and the Emilia-Romagna border.

Otherwise, keep heading along the main road for another 58km (36 miles) or so to **Aulla,** lorded over by the 16th-century Brunella fort. You're now in the **Lunigiana,** a northern spur of Tuscany wedged between Liguria and Emilia-Romagna. The chief town and main point of interest here is the sleepy, partly medieval city of **Pontrémoli** on the Magra River 22km (14 miles) north of Aulla (the tourist office is on Piazza Municipio). Tuscany's northernmost city has a baroque church of **San Francesco,** the rare Tuscan rococo church of **Nostra Donna,** and a baroque **Duomo** hitched up to the **Torre del Campanone,** the only remnant of the fortress Castruccio Castracani built in 1322 to keep the town's two feuding factions from ripping each other to shreds.

The city's most important attraction, though, almost worth the whole trip up here, is the **Museo delle Statue Stele di Pontrémoli** (**Castello del Piagnaro; ✆ 0187-831-439;** www.lunigiana.com/pontremoli/stele.htm), housed in a 14th-century castle and created to show off some 20-odd prehistoric **statue-stele** ★★ and casts of 30 or so others whose originals are elsewhere. The stylized menhirs look sort of like tombstones carved to resemble humans and were created by a long-lived Lunigiana cult that existed from about 3000 to 200 B.C. The earliest (3000–2000 B.C.) have just a "U" for a head and the mere suggestion of arms and a torso; the next group (2000–800 B.C.) has more features and realism, and the most recent (700–200 B.C.) are developed to the point where many of them carry weapons in both hands. The museum is open daily from 9am to 1pm and 2:30 to 6:30pm (in winter Tues–Sun 9am–noon and 2–5pm). Admission is 3.50€ for adults, 1.50€ for children ages 12 to 16.

9

Pisa, Tuscany's Coast & the Maremma

The ancient maritime republic of **Pisa** is one of Italy's grand cities. This sleepy university town boasts one of the most peaceful and beautiful *piazze* in all of Italy, an expansive grassy lawn studded with serene Gothic-Romanesque buildings of white- and gray-banded marble and delicate colonnaded arcading. But it'll forever be known chiefly for that square's cathedral bell tower: It just can't for the life of itself stick straight up.

The brawny Medici-created port of **Livorno,** to the south, is Tuscany's second-largest city, but is perhaps unique in the region for its lack of art (beyond some Tuscan "Impressionists") and dearth of decorative churches. The seafood in its restaurants, though, is some of the best in the country, and its back-street canals add a quasi-Venetian romantic touch to this Tuscan city.

The green islands of the Tuscan archipelago sitting off the **Etruscan Riviera** shoreline are dotted with some fine beaches and fantastic nature preserves. Most, however, are off-limits unless you're doing 10 to 20 in one of their high-security prisons. But the granddaddy of the group, **Elba,** is a high-power summer tourist destination. It's Italy's third-largest island and a veritable mineral horde that has been mined since before the Etruscans. Elba is famous as the short-lived kingdom of exiled ex-emperor Napoleon and popular for its colorful fishing towns, island cuisine, inland hiking, and beaches.

The **Maremma** is Tuscany's deep south, a little-visited province with deep Etruscan roots, crumbling ancient hill towns built atop dramatic tufa outcrops, and snow-white cattle watched over by the *butteri,* some of the world's last true-grit cowboys.

1 THE VALDARNO

MONTELUPO FIORENTINO The old SS67 and a newer superhighway link ancient rivals Florence and Pisa down the industrialized Arno valley. Along the way, the road passes through the village of **Montelupo Fiorentino** (www.comune.montelupo-fiorentino.fi.it), famous in the 15th and 16th centuries for producing some of the Mediterranean's finest ceramics as well as the father-and-son sculptor/architects Baccio and Raffaello di Montelupo. Today, the village is worth a brief stop for Botticelli's *Madonna Enthroned with Saints* in the church of **San Giovanni Evangelista,** on Via Baccio di Montelupo (daily 9am–8pm) and the **Museo Archeologico e della Ceramica,** Via Sinibaldi 43 (✆ **0571-51-352;** www.museomontelupo.it). The latter is an eclectic small-town collection of archaeological finds, 15th-century frescoes, and a detailed exhibit on ceramics production. It's open Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 6pm, and the ticket (5€ adults, 4€ children 6–14 and seniors over 65, free for children under 6) also gets you into Empoli's Museo della Collegiata di Sant'Andrea and Vinci's Museo.

A Central Tourist Office

The **Ufficio Turistico Intercomunale,** Via della Torre 11, 50059 Vinci (✆ **0571-568-012;** fax 0571-567-930; www.terredelrinascimento.it), is the central tourism office for **Vinci, Montelupo Fiorentino,** and **Empoli.** In summer, it's open daily from 2 to 7pm; winter hours are often shorter. **Montelupo Fiorentino** maintains its own info point at Via Sinibaldi 43, 50056 Montelupo Fiorentino (✆ **0571-518-993;** fax 0571-911-421; www.comune.montelupo-fiorentino.fi.it), open Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 6pm.

EMPOLI The modern market town of **Empoli** gave forth in 1551 a talented baroque painter christened Jacopo Chimenti but known by the name of his hometown. The town today manufactures green-glass chianti jugs and raincoats for the rest of Italy. Although World War II bombs wreaked havoc on much of the town, the historic main piazza, Piazzetta della Propositura, is still graced with the **Collegiata di Sant'Andrea,** an 8th-century church with a harmonious green-and-white Romanesque facade. The facing is original 12th century in the bottom half, but the top was finished off in a seamless imitation style in the 19th century; even that had to be rebuilt following World War II damage.

The inside doesn't live up to the exterior, but its **Museo della Collegiata di Sant'Andrea** ★, Piazza Propositura 3 (✆ **0571-76-284**), entered through the courtyard to the right, certainly does. It was one of Tuscany's first community museums when it opened in 1859, and the collections include a Bernardo Rossellino 1447 font, a detached Masolino *Pietà* fresco (1424–25), a Francesco di Valdambrino polychrome wood statue of *St. Stephen* (1403), a tiny Filippo Lippi *Madonna,* and works by Lorenzo Monaco, like his 1404 *Madonna dell'Umiltà with Saints.* The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 9am to noon and 4 to 7pm, and the ticket (5€ adults, 4€ children 6–14 and seniors over 65, free for children under 6) is also valid for the Montelupo's ceramics museum (see above) and Vinci's Museo Leonardiano (see below).

VINCI Leonardo fans can jog east to take a 9km (5½-mile) detour north to visit his hometown, Vinci. The village honors the original Renaissance man with a minuscule **Museo Leonardiano,** Via della Torre 2 (✆ **0571-56-055;** www.leonet.it/comuni/vincimus), in the 13th-century castle of the Guidi counts. It has no original Leonardos but does contain models of some of the machines he invented and reproductions of his drawings. It's open daily from 9:30am to 6pm (until 7pm in summer), and the admission (5€ adults, 4€ children 6–14 and seniors over 65, free for children under 6) is also valid for museums in Montelupo and Empoli. You can also see the baptismal font where he was baptized in **Santa Croce** church and drop by the **Biblioteca Leonardiana,** Via Giorgio la Pira 1 (✆ **0571-56-540**), preserving copies of anything printed relating to Leonardo. The biblioteca is open Tuesday through Friday from 3 to 7pm. Hike or drive 3km (2 miles) up the hill to the tiny hamlet of Anchiano to see **Leonardo's modest birth house** (free admission; open Mar–Oct daily 9:30am–7pm, Nov–Feb until 6pm).

SAN MINIATO More diverting than Vinci is a trip southeast of Empoli to the other major town of the Arno valley, **San Miniato.** The tourist office is at Piazza del Popolo, 56027 San Miniato (✆ **0571-418-739;** www.sanminiatotartufo.it and www.comune.san-miniato.pi.it; June to mid-Sept daily 9:30am–1pm and 3:30–7:30pm; in winter

Mon–Sat 9am–1pm and 3–6:30pm, Sun 10am–1pm and 3–7:30pm). The hilltop Old Town of this large village is famous these days mainly for its kite-flying championships (the weekend after Easter) and the white **truffles** hiding under the soil of the surrounding valley. San Miniato's long history, though, puts it as a former outpost of the Holy Roman Empire and countryside seat of emperors from Otto I to Frederick II. The latter left the town a 1240 **Rocca** (rebuilt entirely after it was bombed in World War II), the taller remaining tower of which rises gracefully above the village and the shorter of which serves as the bell tower for the Duomo.

On Piazza del Castello is the **Duomo,** open daily from 8am to 12:30pm and 3 to 6:30pm. Few of its original 12th-century Romanesque features remain, save the facade, unusually inset with ceramic North African bowls. A few of those bowls have been removed and are kept next door in the **Museo Diocesano** (✆ **0571-418-071**), along with a Sienese school *Maestà,* a Neri di Bicci *Madonna and Child,* a Verrocchio terracotta bust of the *Redeemer,* and some baroque works upstairs. Admission is 2.50€. Summer hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 1pm and 3 to 6pm and winter hours Saturday and Sunday from 9am to noon and 2:30 to 5pm. The town's other worthwhile church is **San Domenico,** Piazza del Popolo, which contains works ranging from 14th-century Masolino-school frescoes to early-20th-century Art Deco frescoes. It's open daily from 8:30am to noon and 4 to 7pm (3–7pm in winter). The church of **San Francesco,** Piazza San Francesco, also has some frescoes in the style of Masolino and is open daily from 8am to 12:30pm and 3 to 6:30pm.

2 PISA & ITS TIPSY TOWER

22km (14 miles) S of Lucca; 81km (50 miles) W of Florence; 334km (208 miles) NW of Rome

Pisa is the ultimate Tuscan day trip. Millions of people descend annually on the Leaning Tower and its neighboring architectural miracles on Campo dei Miracoli square. Few visitors, however, venture beyond this monumental grassy square into the rest of the city.

The city began as a seaside settlement around 1000 B.C. and was expanded into a naval trading port by the Romans in the 2nd century B.C. By the 11th century, Pisa had grown into one of the peninsula's most powerful maritime republics, along with Venice, Amalfi, and Genoa. Its extensive trading in the Middle East helped import advanced Arabic ideas (decorative and scientific), and its wars with the Saracens led it to create an offshore empire of Corsica, Sardegna, and the Balearics. It lay waste to rival Amalfi in 1135 and, riding a high tide of wealth in the late Middle Ages, created its monumental buildings. In 1284, Pisa's battle fleet was destroyed by Genoa at Meloria (off the Livorno coast), a staggering defeat allowing the Genoese to take control of the Tyrrhenian Sea and forcing Pisa's long slide into twilight. Its Ghibelline nature gave Florence the excuse it needed to take control in 1406. Despite a few small rebellions, Florence stayed in charge until Italian unification in the 1860s.

Pisa's main claim to fame since the end of its naval power has been its university, one of Italy's top schools, established in 1343. Pisa was also the birthplace of one of Western history's greatest physicists and astronomers, Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), a man prone to dropping uneven weights from the Leaning Tower and making blasphemous statements about Earth revolving around the sun.

ATTRACTIONS
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Stazione Pisa-S. Rossore
Piazza D. Manin
Via Galli-Tassi
Orto Botanico
Piazza Cavallotti
Via dei Mille
Via della Faggiola
Via Martiri
Via L. Bianchi
Via G. Carducci
Piazza S. Caterina
Piazza Martiri della Libertà
S. FRANCESCO
Via S. Lorenzo
Piazza S. Francesco
Via S. Francesco
Via G. Oberdan
Piazza dei Cavalieri
V. Case Dipinte
Borgo Stretto
Via S. Frediano
Piazza S. Frediano
Via D. Cavalca
Piazza Vettovaglie
Piazza della Repubblica
Piazza G. Mazzini
Via Paolo Salvi
Via Roma
Via Santa Maria
Via A. Volta
S. MARIA
Piazza D. Alighieri
Via Risorgimento
Piazza F. Carrara
Via Bonanno Pisano
Lungarno Pacinotti
Lungarno Mediceo
Ponte di Mezzo
Arno
Ponte della Fortezza
Lungarno Galileo Galilei
Piazza XX Settembre
Piazza S. Sepolcro
Via del Borghetto
Lungarno Bruno Buozzi
Via Enrico Fermi
Piazza Solferino
Lung. Gambacorti
Via San Martino
Via Volturno
Ponte Solferino
Via Maddalena
Via Giuseppe Mazzini
Corso Italia
Via del Carmine
S. MARTINO
Via P. Gori
Via A. Ceci
Via G. Bruno
Via Nicola Pisano
Lung. R. Simonelli
Via Francesco Crispi
Lungarno Sonnino Sidney
Ponte della Vittoria
Via F. Niosi
P.S. Paolo Ripa d'Arno
S. ANTONIO
Ponte della Cittadella
Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II
Via Benedetto Croce
Viale Bonaini
Piazza Guerrazzi
Via Nino Bixio
Via Cesare Battisti
Staz. Centrale (Train Station)
0 1/4 mi
0 0.25 km
Pisa
Florence
Livorno
TUSCANY
Arezzo
Siena
Perugia
UMBRIA
Orvieto
Spoleto

GETTING THERE **By Train** There are more than 20 trains daily from **Rome** (3 hr.). From **Florence,** 40 daily trains make the trip (80–90 min.). Three to four trains an hour run from nearby **Livorno** (15 min.); and there are trains running approximately every hour from **Siena** (100–110 min.). **Lucca** offers 24 runs here every day (20–30 min.). On the Lucca line, day-trippers (and anyone staying in any of the hotels listed here *except* the Royal Victoria) should get off at the **San Rossore station,** just a few blocks west of Piazza del Duomo and its Leaning Tower. All other trains—and eventually the Lucca one—pull into **Pisa Centrale station** (✆ **050-41-385**). From here, bus no. 1, 3, or 11 will take you to Piazza del Duomo.

By Car There's a Florence-Pisa autostrada along the Arno valley. Take the SS12 or S12r from Lucca; the A12 comes down the coast from the north, and the SS1 runs north and south along the coast. **Park** just outside Porta Santa Maria, either along Via A. Pisano (metered; 1€ per hour 8am–8pm) or in the nearby lot at Via C. S. Cammeo 51 (same rates).

By Bus **Lazzi** (✆ **0583-584-876;** www.lazzi.it), Via d'Azeglio, runs hourly buses from **Florence** (2–2½ hr.), but you have to connect through Lucca (hourly runs; 20–30 min.). **CPT,** Via Nino Bixio (✆ **050-505-511** or 800-012-773 in Italy; www.cpt.pisa.it), has routes from **Volterra** (10 daily connect through Pontedera for a 2- to 2½-hr. total trip), **Livorno** (half-hourly; 40–55 min.), and towns along the coast. The bus **station** is at Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, just north of the main train station.

By Plane Tuscany's main international airport, **Galileo Galilei** (general info ✆ **050-500-707;** www.pisa-airport.com), is just 3km (2 miles) south of Pisa. Trains zip you downtown to the train station in 5 minutes (1€). A taxi ride to town will cost 4€ to 8€. For more information, see "Getting There & Getting Around," in chapter 3.

GETTING AROUND **By Bus** **CPT** (✆ **050-505-511** or 800-012-773 in Italy; www.cpt.pisa.it) runs the city's buses. Bus nos. 1, 3, and 11 run most directly to Campo dei Miracoli from the main train station.

By Taxi Taxis rank on Piazza Stazione and Piazza del Duomo. Call a radio taxi at ✆ **050-541-600.**

VISITOR INFORMATION The main **tourist office** is at Via Matteucci, Galleria Gerace 14, 56124 Pisa (✆ **050-929-7777** or 050-830-253; www.pisa.turismo.toscana.it; daily Mon–Fri 9am–1pm; Tues, Thurs 3–5pm by appointment only). There is also a small office to the left as you exit the train station at Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II 16, 56125 Pisa (✆ **050-42-291**). Either can hand out maps and pamphlets, but they're oddly uninformed on the city of Pisa. Considerably more knowledgeable "Custodians of the Duomo" usually hang around the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo desk. The administrative **APT** office is at Via Pietro Nenni 24, 56125 Pisa (✆ **050-929-777;** fax 050-929-764). A helpful **private tourism consortium** (supported by the state) shares office space with the Via C. S. Cammeo tourist office (✆ **050-830-253;** fax 050-830-243; www.pisae.it); among other services, it will book rooms for free.

To find out what's going on in town, pick up a copy of the free weekly ***Indizi e Servizi*** (at some newsstands and hotels).

FESTIVALS & MARKETS Since the 1400s, teams from the north and south sides of the Arno have dressed in Renaissance costumes and tried their darnedest to run one another over with a giant 7-ton (14,000-pound) decorated cart on the Ponte di Mezzo,

site of the city's old Roman bridge. This inverse tug-of-war, the **Gioco del Ponte** ★, is held on the last Sunday in June. Also in June is the **Festa di San Ranieri,** when Pisans honor their patron saint by lining the Arno with torches on the 16th, then running a boat race on the 17th. There's an excellent **daily food market** on Piazza delle Vettovaglie, described later in this chapter under "Other Attractions in Pisa."

THE LEANING TOWER & OTHER PISAN MIRACLES

On a grassy lawn wedged into the northwest corner of the city walls, medieval Pisans created one of the most beautiful squares in the world. Historically dubbed the **Campo dei Miracoli (Field of Miracles)** ★★★, Piazza del Duomo contains an array of elegant buildings that heralded the Pisan Romanesque style.

But Piazza del Duomo isn't the central plaza in town as in most Tuscan cities. When it was built between the 11th and 13th centuries, the square was against the city walls, surrounded by farmland. But this peripheral location also somehow plays a role in the piazza's uniqueness. A very large but hidden part of its appeal, aside from the beauty of the buildings, is its spatial geometry. The piazza's medieval engineers knew what they were doing. If you take an aerial photo of the square and draw connect-the-dot lines between the centers, doors, and other focal points of the buildings and the spots where streets enter the piazza, you'll come up with all sorts of perfect triangles, tangential lines of mathematical grace, and other unfathomable hypotenuses.

Incidentally, only the tourist industry calls it Campo dei Miracoli. Pisans think that's just a bit too much and refer to it, as they always have, as Piazza del Duomo. I recommend visiting the Camposanto after the two museums, since both contain exhibits that'll help you appreciate the loss of the Camposanto frescoes.

Baptistery ★★ Italy's biggest baptistery (104m/341 ft. in circumference) was begun in 1153 by Diotisalvi, who gave it its lower Romanesque drum. Nicola and Giovanni Pisano "Gothicized" the upper part from 1277 to 1297 and Cellino di Nese capped it with a Gothic dome in the 1300s. Most of the exterior statues and decorative elements by Giovanni Pisano are now kept in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (see below), and only a few have been replaced here with casts. It may not look it, but if you include the statue on top, this building is actually taller than the Leaning Tower across the square. The interior is surprisingly plain but features the first of the great Pisano pulpits as well as a large baptismal **font,** carved and inlaid by the idiosyncratic Guido Bigarelli da Como and sprouting a 20th-century statue of St. John.

Nicola Pisano was the founder of a great line of Gothic sculptors who liberated their art from the static iconography of medievalism to a new level of dynamic action and intense expressiveness that would influence Ghiberti and Donatello and so pave the road

Campo Dei Miracoli Admissions

Admission charges for the group of monuments and museums on the campo are tied together in a needlessly complicated way. The Cattedrale alone costs 2€. Any other single sight is 5€. The Cattedrale plus any two other sights is 6€. Children under 10 enter free. For more information, visit their collective website at www.opapisa.it. Admission to the Leaning Tower (15€) is by advance reservation only; see "Pisa's Perpendicularly Challenged Tower," on p. 292.

Pisa's Perpendicularly Challenged Tower

Most medieval towers still standing in Italy haven't been able to keep perpendicular over the centuries. But it's the Leaning Tower of Pisa that has become international shorthand for Italy itself.

The tower's problem—that which has been the bane of Pisan engineers trying to overcome it for more than 800 years—is that you can't stack that much heavy marble on top of a shifting subsoil foundation and keep it all on the up and up. It was started in 1173—the date on the wall of 1174 owes to an old Pisan quirk of starting the year with the date of the Virgin's conception—by Guglielmo and Bonnano Pisano (who also sculpted the Duomo's original bronze doors). They got as far as the third level in 1185 when they noticed the lean, at that point only about 3.8 centimeters (1½ in.), but enough to worry them. Everyone was at a loss as to what to do, so work stopped for almost a century and wasn't resumed again until 1275 under the direction of Giovanni di Simone. He tried to correct the tilt by intentionally curving the structure back toward the perpendicular, giving the tower its slight banana shape. In 1284, work stopped yet again just before the belfry. In 1360, Tommaso di Andrea da Pontedera capped it all off at about 51m (167 ft.) with a slightly Gothic belfry that tilts jauntily to the side.

The only major blip in the tower's long career as a world-famous, bizarre Italian attraction came in 1590, when a hometown scientist named Galileo Galilei dropped some mismatched wooden balls off the leaning side to prove to an incredulous world his theory that gravity exerted the same force on two falling objects no matter what their relative weights. In the early 19th century, someone got it into his head to dig out around the base of the tower in order to see how the foundations were laid and perhaps find a way to correct the slipping lean, but all he accomplished was to remove what little stability the tower had acquired over the centuries, and it started falling faster than ever before (not that it was all that fast: about 1mm/.04 in. a year).

For several decades, a series of complicated and delicate projects have been directed at stabilizing the alluvial subsoil. In 1989, more than a million people climbed the tower, but by 1990 the lean was at about 4.6m (15 ft.) out of plumb

for the Renaissance. The **pulpit** ★ Nicola carved for the baptistery (1255–60) is his masterpiece and the prototype for a series he and his son Giovanni carried out over the years (the last, Giovanni's greatest work, is in Pisa's Duomo; the other two are in Pistoia and Siena). Heavily influenced by classical works—including the Roman sarcophagi and Greek vase now in the Camposanto—Nicola's high-relief panels (a synopsis of Christ's life) include pagan gods converted to Christianity as Madonnas and saints.

The other main attraction of the baptistery is its renowned **acoustics.** When it's crowded in summer, you may have to bribe a guard to warble, but when there are fewer people (come early in the morning), lean over the ropes to get as near to center as possible and let fly a clear loud note, listening to it echo around the room as it fades. Even

and, by order of a mayor's office concerned for safety, the tower was closed to the public. At 3:25pm on January 7, 1990, with the tower's bells sounding a death knell, the doors were closed indefinitely. In 1992, steel cables were belted around the base to prevent shear forces from ripping apart the masonry. In 1993, even the bells and their dangerous vibrations were silenced, and the same year a series of lead weights was rather unaesthetically stacked on the high side to try to correct the list. In 1997, engineers took a chance on excavating around the base again—this time carefully removing more than 70 tons of soil from the foundation of the high side so the tower could gradually tip back.

In December 2001, righted to its more stable lean of 1838 (when it was a mere 4m/13 ft. off its center), the tower reopened to the public. Now, however, the number of visitors is strictly controlled via compulsory 35- to 40-minute guided tours—and a massive admission charge. Visit **www.opapisa.it/box office** to book tickets. It's wise to book well ahead; if you show up in Pisa without reservations in the height of the tourist season, you will *not* be able to get into the tower.

The campanile, by the way, isn't the only edifice out of whack on the piazza. The same water-saturated and unsteady sandy soil under the Field of Miracles that causes the bell tower's poor posture has taken its toll on the other buildings as well. The baptistery leans toward the north, and if you catch the Duomo's facade at the correct angle, you'll see it, too, is a few feet shy of straight. The nature of Pisa's alluvial plain has caused many of its older buildings to shift and settle in this manner, and a couple of other campanile about town have been nicknamed Pisa's "other leaning towers" (San Michele degli Scalzi is, if anything, even more weirdly askew than its more famous cousin; see "Other Attractions in Pisa," below). Admission to **Piazza del Duomo** (✆ **050-560-547;** www.opapisa.it/boxoffice) is 15€. Children under 8 not permitted. Show printed proof of receipt at the ticket offices of Opera della Primaziale Pisa 1 hour prior to scheduled visit. Open Monday to Friday 8am to 1:30pm. Take bus no. 1, 3, or 11.

better, sing two notes a half-octave apart and listen for their echoing atonal mingling. When a choir sings here, you can hear it for miles.

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **050-560-547.** www.opapisa.it. For admission fees, see "Campo Dei Miracoli Admissions," above. Apr–Sept daily 8am–7:30pm; Mar and Oct daily 9am–5:30pm; Nov–Feb daily 9am–4:30pm. Bus: 1, 3, or 11.

Cattedrale ★★ Buscheto, the architect who laid the cathedral's first stone in 1063, kicking off a new era in art by building what was to become the model for the Pisan Romanesque style, is buried in the last blind arch on the left of the facade. All the elements of the nascent Romanesque style are here on the **facade ★**, designed and built by Buscheto's successor, Rainaldo: alternating light and dark banding, rounded blind arches

with Moorish-inspired lozenges at the top and colored marble inlay designs, and Lombard-style open galleries of tiny mismatched columns stacked to make the facade (currently being restored) much higher than the church roof. A disastrous 1595 fire destroyed most of the works inside the church, but luckily the 16th-century Pisans recognized and hired some of the better late- and post-Renaissance artists for the refurbishing.

In summer, you sometimes enter through the **main door,** one of three cast by students of Giambologna after the 1595 fire destroyed the originals. The normal entrance to the church is usually on the back of the right transept, across from the bell tower, where the fourth original bronze **Door of San Ranieri** ★ still survives. It was cast (along with the now-lost facade doors) by Bonnano Pisano in 1180 while he was working on the soon-to-be-listing bell tower. Inside the right transept (which you enter through this door), you'll find another work that survived the fire, the **tomb of Emperor Henry VII** by Tino di Camaino (1315) surmounted by a pair of Ghirlandaio angels. Henry VII was a hero to the Ghibelline Pisans, who supported his successful bid for Holy Roman Emperor.

On the north side of the nave, Giovanni Pisano's masterpiece **pulpit** ★ (1302–11) has regained its rightful place. After the fire, the baroquies decided the nasty old Gothic pulpit was an eyesore, so they dismantled it and put it in a crate; it wasn't found and reassembled until 1926. It's the last of the famed Pisano pulpits and arguably the greatest.

Hanging low near the pulpit is a large **bronze lamp** that, according to legend, a bored Galileo was staring at one day during Mass, watching it sway gently back and forth, when his law of the pendulum suddenly hit him. Spoilsports like to point out the lamp was cast in 1586, a few years after Galileo's discovery, but the legend may still be salvaged: Another lamp probably hung here before this one. Beneath the frescoed oval dome is what remains of the **Cosmatesque pavement** of particolored marble designs. The **bronze angels** (1602) flanking the choir entrance and the **crucified Christ** over the altar are by the baroque master of bronze Giambologna, and on the entrance pier to the choir is Andrea del Sarto's almost Leonardesque ***St. Agnes with her Lamb*** ★, painted in High Renaissance style. In the apse is the last of the major survivors of the fire, an enormous 13th-century mosaic ***Christ Pancrator,*** completed in 1302 by Cimabue, who added the St. John the Evangelist on the right.

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **050-560-547.** www.opapisa.it. For admission fees, see "Campo Dei Miracoli Admissions," above. Apr–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–8pm, Sun 1–8pm; Mar and Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5:30pm, Sun 1–5:30pm; Nov–Feb Mon–Sat 10am–12:45pm and 3–4:30pm, Sun 3–4:30pm. Bus: 1, 3, or 11.

Camposanto Begun in 1278 by Giovanni di Simone to house the shiploads of holy Golgotha dirt (the mount where Christ was crucified) brought back by an archbishop from the Crusades, the Camposanto has been burial ground for Pisan bigwigs ever since. Most funerary monuments are recycled Roman sarcophagi or neoclassical confections installed in the peacefully arcaded corridor encircling the patches of green in the center.

The walls were once covered with important 14th- and 15th-century frescoes by Taddeo Gaddi, Spinello Aretino, and Benozzo Gozzoli, among others. On July 27, 1944, however, American warplanes launched a heavy attack against the city (which was still in Nazi hands) and the cemetery was bombed. The wooden roof caught fire, and its lead panels melted and ran right down over the frescoes, destroying most of the paintings and severely damaging the few that remained. When the surviving frescoes were detached to be moved, workers discovered the artists' preparatory sketches *(sinopie)* underneath. These, along with the *sinopie* of the destroyed frescoes, are housed in the Museo delle Sinopie (see below).

A doorway off one corridor leads to an exhibit of photos of the frescoes from before 1944 and of the devastation wreaked by the bombing. Also here is a 2nd-century-B.C. **Greek vase** that inspired the Pisan Gothic sculptors. Then come the few damaged frescoes that made it through the bombing. The most fascinating is the 14th-century ***Triumph of Death*** ★. The attribution to any one artist is so contested that the work's painter has been dubbed, somewhat melodramatically, "The Master of the Triumph of Death." Liszt was so moved by it that he sat down and wrote his famous *Totentanz*.

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **050-560-547.** www.opapisa.it. For admission fees, see "Campo dei Miracoli Admissions," above. Apr–Sept daily 8am–7:30pm; Mar and Oct daily 9am–5:30pm; Nov–Feb daily 9am–4:30pm. Bus: 1, 3, or 11.

Museo delle Sinopie ★ This museum houses the *sinopie* sketches that were discovered underneath the charred remains of the Camposanto's ruined frescoes (see above). Placards reproducing Carlo Lasinio's 19th-century engravings of the finished frescoes sit in front of each *sinopie* to help you reconstruct what the final work once looked like. The two most interesting things are how different artists used the *sinopia* stage of the fresco process (some sketched just rough outlines to guide their later work, others went as far as shading the drapery and detailing facial features) and to see where the master changed his mind between sketch and finished work—like a giant academic's game of "One of These Things Is Not Like the Other."

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **050-560-547.** www.opapisa.it. For admission fees, see "Campo dei Miracoli Admissions," above. Apr–Sept daily 8am–7:30pm; Mar and Oct daily 9am–5:30pm; Nov–Feb daily 9am–4:30pm. Bus: 1, 3, or 11.

Museo dell'Opera del Duomo ★ The old Chapter House–cum-convent has been transformed into a storehouse for sculptures, paintings, and other works from the ecclesiastical buildings on Piazza del Duomo. Room 1 has **models** of the Duomo buildings and engraved glass plans showing the square's history and geometry. Room 3 has delicate 12th-century carvings and intarsia marble decoration displaying a strong Moorish influence and a massive 12th-century wooden crucifix from Burgundy, with a Christ styled so medievally naive that it looks like modern art. But the main attraction is the Islamic 11th-century bronze **griffin** ★, war booty from the Crusades, which long decorated the Duomo's cupola before it was replaced by a copy.

Room 6 contains curving ranks of faded-to-facelessness 13th-century Giovanni Pisano statues from the baptistery. The treasury has two Pisanos: a wooden crucifix and a sway-backed ***Madonna col Bambino*** ★ he carved from a curving ivory tusk (1299). Also here is a precious Pisan relic, the cross that led Pisans on the First Crusade.

The last few rooms house the precious legacy of Carlo Lasinio, who restored the Camposanto frescoes in the early 19th century and, fortunately for posterity, made a series of **etchings** ★ of each fresco, the prints from which were colored by his son. Not only did the original publication of these prints have an important influence on the developing pre-Raphaelite movement at the time, but they're the best record we have of the paintings that went up in flames when the Camposanto was bombed in 1944.

Piazza Arcivescovado 6. ✆ **050-560-547.** www.opapisa.it. For admission fees, see "Campo dei Miracoli Admissions," above. Apr–Sept daily 8am–7:20pm; Mar and Oct daily 9am–5:20pm; Nov–Feb daily 9am–4:20pm. Bus: 1, 3, or 11.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS IN PISA

If you go down Via Santa Maria from Piazza del Duomo and take a left on Via dei Mille, you'll come out into **Piazza Cavalieri,** possibly the site of the Roman town's forum and

Pisa's Sunken Treasure

The old Medici Arsenale, Lungarno Simonelli, houses the finds of the remarkable ongoing excavation of the 10 **ancient Roman wooden ships** ★—spanning the 1st century B.C. to the Imperial Age, from riverboats to seafaring vessels—stumbled upon by workers expanding the San Rossore train station in 1998. After just 2 years open to the public, however, the museum closed its doors for restoration in January 2004 and now offers tours by reservation only.

Buried by silt in the 12th century (which has since moved the shoreline 8km/5 miles west), these docks where the Arno met the sea were probably half marshy flatlands, half lagoon—much like modern-day Venice. Alas, this sort of harbor is prone to flash flooding during storms, a recurrent event that probably sank these ships at various times over the centuries.

Fortunately for us, their sudden demise also meant that much of their contents have survived, from holds filled with clay amphorae (whose seals have preserved shipments of olives, cherries, walnuts, and wine for 2,000 years) to sailors' quarters still containing their belongings: leather sandals, sewing kits, even a wax writing board. In the decade since the discovery, maritime archaeologists have uncovered two more vessels, including what may be the only Roman warship ever recovered intact. Call the **Cantiere delle Navi Antiche di Pisa** (✆ **050-21-441** or 055-321-5446; www.cantierenavipisa.it), for a look at the ships' contents (including a sailor's skeleton) and an idea of the arduous restoration of the vessels.

later the square where the citizens of the medieval city-state met to discuss political issues. Giorgio Vasari remodeled the **Palazzo dei Cavalieri** in 1562 and decorated it with recently restored and very detailed graffiti; it now houses the renowned university college Scuola Normale Superiore. Next to the palace is the baroque **San Stefano,** housing some tempera paintings by the likes of Empoli, Cristofano Allori, and Vasari (Mon–Fri 9am–12:30pm, Sat–Sun 9am–12:30pm and 3–6pm). Also on the piazza is the stubby clock tower of the **Palazzo dell'Orologio,** where Count Ugolino della Gherardesca, suspected of having betrayed his fellow Pisans in the fateful battle where Genoa decisively crushed Pisan naval might, was locked up to starve to death along with his sons and grandsons. The tragic story was immortalized by Dante in his *Inferno* and Shelley in his *Tower of Famine.* In 2009, the city opened a new collection of Pisan artists at the recently renovated **Palazzo Blu,** Lungarno Gambacorti 9 (✆ **050-500-197;** www.palazzoblu.org), the striking blue palace on the banks of the Arno. It houses some perhaps lesser known Tuscan artists, such as Giovan Battista Tempesti, who generally chose Pisa as a backdrop for their paintings. Admission is 7€, open Tues–Sun, 10am to 6pm, with three guided tours per day (in Italian only).

If you continue down Via Santa Maria toward the Arno, you'll come to the millennial church of **San Nicola** (✆ **050-24-677**), with a Francesco Traini *Madonna and Child* on the first altar on the right and a 1400 St. Nicholas of Tolentino *Protecting Pisa from the Plague.* To the left of the high altar is Giovanni Pisano's gaunt *Jesus* being crucified. The church is also home to the second of Pisa's leaning towers, a 13th-century campanile

whose spiral staircase inspired Renaissance architect Bramante for the stairs he installed in the Vatican. (Though the church is officially open daily 9am–noon and 5–8pm, you often need to seek out the sacristan to get in; ring the bell at the door next to the tower.)

To the northeast of Piazza Cavalieri lies **Santa Caterina** (✆ **050-552-883**), with a Gothic facade from 1330 and the tomb of Archbishop Simone Saltarelli by Nino Pisano along with Francesco Traini's *Apotheosis of St. Thomas Aquinas.* It's open daily from 8am to 1pm. Southeast of this, near the city walls, **San Francesco** (✆ **050-544-091**) contains some good baroque works by Empoli, Il Passignano, and Santi di Tito. The vault has 1342 frescoes by Taddeo Gaddi, and in the second chapel to the right of the high altar is a *Crucifixion with Saints* by Spinello Aretino. It's open daily from 7:30am to noon and 4 to 7:30pm.

Walk west along Via San Francesco to **Borgo Stretto,** Pisa's arcaded shopping street. Off Borgo Stretto near Piazza Garibaldi is hidden the arched **Piazza Vettovaglie,** which houses an old-fashioned **food market.**

A ways up the Arno near Ponte Fortezza is Pisa's only significant painting collection, the **Museo Nazionale di San Matteo** ★★, Lungarno Mediceo (✆ **050-541-865**). To see the collection in chronological order, head immediately out into the pretty brick cloister and cross to ascend the central staircase on the opposite side. (If you mistake doors, you'll be in for a whole lot of medieval and Renaissance painted plates.) Poorly lit and sporadically labeled, the collections are constantly being rearranged, but you should be able to find the masterpieces amid the shuffle. The first large room of paintings has many good 14th- and 15th-century works by Turino Vanni, Taddeo di Bartolo, and Spinello Aretino, plus a pair of Agnolo Gaddi polyptychs. One of the prides of the collections is the Sienese master Simone Martini's polyptych of the *Virgin and Child with Saints.* In a side room they keep the originals of the Giovanni and Nino Pisano sculptures from Santa Maria della Spina, including Nino's masterpiece, *Madonna del Latte,* a very human mother in Gothic curving grace who smiles down at her nursing baby.

Other star works are a *St. Paul* by Masaccio, the greenishly aged *Madonna dell'Umiltà* by Gentile da Fabriano, and a *Madonna col Bambino* by Fra' Angelico. The Donatello gilded bronze reliquary *Bust of St. Rossore* (1427) is an important sculptural step from medieval to Renaissance style and is held by some to be a self-portrait. Take bus no. 5, 7, or 13 to get to the museum; it's open Tuesday through Saturday from 9am to 7pm and Sunday from 9am to 2pm; admission is 4€.

If you follow the north side of the Arno upstream about a mile past San Matteo (or take bus no. 14), you'll come to Pisa's third and perhaps most skewed "leaning tower." It almost looks as if the Pisans simply gave up on rulers and right angles when building **San Michele degli Scalzi.** Nothing stands straight up: not the outer walls, the tiers of columns dividing the nave from the aisles, the apse, the windows, or, of course, the bell tower. Take bus no. 13 (from Via San Michele degli Scalzi) back to the center.

The south bank of the Arno holds little of interest except for the Gothic gem **Santa Maria della Spina** ★★ (✆ **050-21-441**), which sits along the river. The church is a collaborative Giovanni and Nino Pisano work of 1230 to 1323, dismantled and raised to current ground level (for fear of floods) in 1871. It was built to house a *spina* (thorn) from Christ's Passion crown brought back by a merchant from the Crusades. Much of the Pisano sculpture from the outside has been removed for safekeeping to the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, as has the church's primary attraction, Nino Pisano's *Madonna del Latte.* However, for the first time since it closed 35 years ago, you can finally peek inside. Open Tuesday through Friday: October through March from 10am to 2pm (and 10am–1pm and 2:30–5pm on the second Sun of those months); April, May, and September

 from 10am to 1:30pm and 2:30 to 6pm (7pm weekends); June through August from 11am to 1:30pm and 2:30 to 6pm (8pm weekends). Admission is 1.10€ adults, free for children under 10 and seniors over 65.

WHERE TO STAY

Pisa is such a major day-trip site that few people stay here overnight, which helps keep hotel prices down but also limits selection. The hotel desk in the main tourist office (see earlier in this chapter) will book you a room at no charge. The low season for most hotels in Pisa is July through August.

Grand Hotel Duomo This is the best hotel near the Duomo, but it's pricey. Its outward appearance and public spaces aren't much to look at, but the rooms are pleasant enough, with parquet floors and built-in furniture in dark wood. Some of the rooms were refurbished in 1997 with marble flooring, but it seems like the hotel could use another renovation. Along the front, rooms have views of the monuments on Campo dei Miracoli. The suites are large and have direct access onto the rooftop terrace. The rooms have large new bathrooms. An expanded continental breakfast, including cheese and ham, is served in the elegant dining room.

Via Santa Maria 94 (1½ blocks down from Piazza del Duomo), 56126 Pisa. ✆ **050-561-894.** Fax 050-560-418. www.grandhotelduomo.it. 92 units. 130€–160€ double; 140€–190€ triple. Huge discounts (sometimes more than 50%) online. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking around 16€. Bus: 4. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Francesco Carmela Corradino and her family care for this small, modern hotel. The rooms are smallish but not cramped, the ceilings high and vaulted, the mattresses firm, and the furnishings are relatively new. Many of the rooms have a third bed, making them perfect for families, but I'd go for room no. 201 or 202 (which can be connected), which share a lovely terrace overlooking the botanical gardens behind the hotel. In fact, any room on the back will be quieter than those on the busy street (though the windows' double glazing does muffle things somewhat). The small terrace where you can breakfast in summer glimpses the top half of the Leaning Tower.

Via Santa Maria 129 (1½ blocks from Piazza del Duomo), 56126 Pisa. ✆ **050-554-109.** Fax 050-556-145. www.hotelfrancesco.com. 13 units. 60€–150€ double; 80€–150€ triple. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 5€. Bus: 4. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bike rental; concierge; smoke-free rooms.*In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi (free).

Royal Victoria Hotel ★ "I fully endorse the above," wrote Teddy Roosevelt of this place in one of the antique guest books. It opened in 1839 as Pisa's first hotel, uniting several medieval towers and houses, and it's Pisa's only inn with any real character. The rooms on the Arno tend to be larger, as do the quieter (and cooler) ones installed in the

Cheap Eats!

The **Vineria di Piazza** (✆ **050-382-0433;** www.vineriadipiazza.it) in the central market square of Pisa is a great new enoteca that offers Pisan specialties at very reasonable prices. Sit down at one of the Vineria's outdoor tables for lunch, and enjoy an appetizer of roasted artichoke, an entree of stewed stockfish with potatoes, a glass of wine, bread, and water for under 15€. Linger with the glass of wine and watch the daily movements of this student quarter.

remains of a tower dating from the 980s. There are many frescoed ceilings, and one room is a triumph of *trompe l'oeil,* including fake curtains painted on the walls surrounding the bed. They have several rooms with common doors that can be turned into family suites for four (with two separate bathrooms). The new small, plant-filled terrace is a lovely place to take drinks or sun surrounded by roof tiles. Although some rooms are very small and plain, in all you'll probably find yourself, as Ruskin did in terse simplicity, "always very comfortable in this inn."

Lungarno Pacinotti 12 (near Ponte di Mezzo), 56126 Pisa. ✆ **050-940-111.** Fax 050-940-180. www.royalvictoria.it. 48 units. 80€ double without bathroom; 130€–150€ double with bathroom; 190€–200€ suites. 20% discount for a stay of 5 nights or longer. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 20€ in hotel garage. Bus: 1, 3, 4, or 7. **Amenities:** Babysitting; bike rental; concierge; room service (breakfast, bar, and food from nearby restaurant). *In room:* A/C in 17 units, TV, Internet.

Villa Kinzica The carpeted medium-size rooms in this middle-range hotel have modern wood furniture and tasteful art prints on the walls. Around the corner from the Leaning Tower, the Kinzica's rooms are mostly arranged on the front and east sides, so you can open your window and have a camera-ready shot of the campanile. Half the rooms have air-conditioning. The bathrooms are modern but small, and the price is excellent for the location and general comfort.

Piazza Arcivescovado 2 (just off Piazza del Duomo), 56100 Pisa. ✆ **050-560-419.** Fax 050-551-204. www.hotelvillakinzica.it. 34 units. 85€–108€ double; 100€–124€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking on street (ask for permit). Bus: 4. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms; Wi-Fi in lobby. *In room:* A/C in some units, TV, hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

For a quick bite near Piazza del Duomo, or perhaps for a picnic in front of the Leaning Tower, the **Paninoteca il Canguro** (✆ **050-561-942**), a few short blocks down Via Santa Maria at no. 151, serves scrumptious sandwiches for the hordes of tourists.

Antica Trattoria da Bruno ★ PISAN/TRATTORIA The decor is typical, cluttered trattoria—paintings of the Duomo, pictures of the owner with famous people and of the local soccer team, copper pots—for this is a typical trattoria that has been dignified to *ristorante* status only through its years of deserved success. It specializes in tried-and-true Pisan dishes. The *prosciutto con crostini* antipasto is as good as it comes, to be followed by *pasta e ceci* (pasta with garbanzo beans) or *zuppa pisana* (a very bready Pisan *ribollita*). Although you can order well-turned versions of *agnello arrosto* (roast lamb) or *coniglio al forno* (baked rabbit), the famous secondo here is a *Pisan baccalà con porri,* salt cod cooked with leeks and tomatoes.

Via Luigi Bianchi (outside Porta Lucca on the north end of town). ✆ **050-560-818.** www.anticatrattoriadabruno.com. Reservations recommended. Primi 8€–10€; secondi 10€–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–3pm and 7–10:30pm. Bus: 1 or 4.

La Mescita PISAN/WINE BAR The marketplace location and simple decor of this popular spot belie its reputation for fine cuisine. The menu changes each month, but includes the delicious likes of a *sformatino di melanzane* (eggplant soufflé in tomato sauce), to be followed by *ravioli di ceci con salsa di gamberetti e pomodoro fresco* (ravioli stuffed with a garbanzo bean pâté and served in shrimp-and-tomato sauce) or *strozzapreti al trevisano e gorgonzola* (a slightly bitter dish of pasta curlicues in a cheesy sauce topped with shredded red cabbage). You can stick to tradition with your secondo by ordering the *baccalà con patate e ceci* (salt cod with potatoes and garbanzo beans). Because the place operates as an enoteca after-hours, the wine list is long and detailed.

Via D. Cavalca 2 (just off the market square of Piazza Vettovaglie). ✆ **050-544-294.** Reservations recommended. Primi 9€–11€; secondi 15€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 8–11pm; Sat–Sun 1–2:30pm. Closed 20 days in Aug. Bus: 1, 2, or 4.

Trattoria S. Omobono ★ PISAN Around a column surviving from the medieval church that once stood here, locals gather to enjoy authentic Pisan home cooking. Open with something like *brachette alla renaiaola* (an antique Pisan dish consisting of large pasta squares in a purée of turnip greens and smoked fish) or *tagliatelle alla scarpara* (in a sausage ragù). The secondi are simple and straightforward: *baccalà alla livornese* (salt cod with tomatoes) or *maiale arrosto* (thinly sliced roast pork), with which you can order fried polenta slices or ultra-Pisan *ceci* (garbanzo) beans. This restaurant has stopped serving lunch, and is now only open for dinner.

Piazza S. Omobono 6 (the piazza next to the market square Piazza Vettovaglie). ✆ **050-540-847.** Reservations recommended. Primi 6€; secondi 8€. DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7:30–10pm. Closed Aug 8–20. Bus: 1, 2, or 4.

A MONASTERY & A WILDLIFE AREA NEAR PISA

Twenty kilometers (12 miles) or so east of Pisa outside the town of Calci lies the largest and most interesting Carthusian monastery in Italy, the **Certosa di Calci** ★ (✆ **050-938-430**). It was founded in 1366, but most of its current facade dates from the 18th and 19th centuries. You can see this huge complex of baroque frescoed chapels and cloisters during a fascinating guided tour leading you through 11 chapels, the main church, and a monk's "cell." The University of Pisa also keeps a **natural history museum** here (✆ **050-936-193** or 050-937-092), with a large taxonomy collection, including a dinosaur and an articulated giraffe skeleton. The Certosa is open Tuesday through Saturday from 8:30am to 6:30pm, and Sunday from 8:30am to 12:30pm year-round. Admission is 4€, with guided tours on the hour. The natural history museum is open Tuesday through Saturday 9am to 5pm (Sun 9am–6pm), and admission is an additional 5€. The best way to get to the Certosa is by taking the APT bus to Montemagno, which lets you off at the gates, rather than the one to Calci. (Catch the bus in Pisa at Piazza Sant'Antonio, off Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II.)

Just west of Pisa, close enough that you can take city bus no. 11 (from Lungarno Gambacorti) to get there, begins the **Tenuta di San Rossore** ★ (✆ **050-530-101;** www.parcosanrossore.it). Once the summer estate of Italy's president, it is now a publicly owned park system. It now forms part of one of Tuscany's most precious protected wildlife areas, a coastal zone of dense pines with populations of wild deer, boars, and aquatic birds surrounding several beaches and some boggy wetlands. Although it isn't open to the public often, it is well worth the free visit, from Saturday to Sunday 8:30am to 5:30pm in winter, until 9:30pm in summer (they also run various guided tours for modest fees—in Italian naturally, but since they include walking, biking, and horseback visits, they can be fun even if you don't understand the language; the website has details). In 1822 at the beach at Gombo, now part of the park, the body of self-exiled English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley washed ashore. (He drowned while sailing off the coast; many hold it was a pirate murder.)

3 LIVORNO: A BUSY PORT CITY WITH GREAT SEAFOOD

19km (12 miles) S of Pisa; 95km (59 miles) W of Florence; 315km (195 miles) NW of Rome

Livorno is like a blue-collar Tuscan Venice, a busy port city second only to Florence in size and graced with canals and some of the peninsula's best seafood, as well as a nice

Fun Facts Masterpiece Theater

Bohemian sculptor Amadeo Modigliani was born here in 1884. In Paris, his womanizing was notorious, and he drank himself to death at age 35. Rumor held that a despondent Modigliani had thrown some of his works into a canal on his last visit to his hometown. In 1984, several sculptures were dredged up and trumpeted as his lost works. But just before they sold for millions of dollars, some school kids appeared on national TV showing how they'd made the works themselves—one of the most successful art hoaxes of the century.

seaside promenade that was once the dreary banks of the port but has seen a rebirth over the past 3 or 4 years with new bars and ice cream stands opening every year. The recently overhauled **waterfront esplanade** has had a profound effect on Livornese life. For one thing, nightlife has gravitated south to take advantage of the emerging seaside energy. Moreover, the city has built on this tourism-driven momentum by adding a cumulative ticket that includes a tour on the city's ***battello,*** or boat rides, around the downtown canals and underground passages. For example, the **Cooperativa Itinera** operates a 50-person *battello* called the Marco Polo, which even offers a food tasting tour. Their website, www.itinera.info, is in Italian only and doesn't have much critical information. Your best bet is to contact the Livorno tourist office for the latest schedules and details.

Other than that, there isn't much to grab a photo-snapping tourist's attention. The city is unique in Tuscany because there are very few churches to speak of and just one measly museum of 19th- and 20th-century paintings by artists of the Macchiaioli movement, a Tuscan variant on French Impressionism.

You'll see posters in town of a tower sprouting from pale cobalt-blue waters apparently in the middle of the sea. Actually, this watchtower, **Meloria,** is resting on a barely submerged reef about 5km (3 miles) offshore. It was here, in 1284, that Genoa's navy thoroughly trounced the Pisan fleet, signaling the beginning of Pisa's slow decline under Genoese maritime dominance.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** The Arno valley line runs 24 trains daily from **Florence** (about 1½ hr.) through **Pisa** (14 min.) to **Livorno Centrale** (✆ **0586-400-456**), where you can catch the no. 1, 2, or 8 bus (and many others, though they don't make a beeline) to Piazza Grande in the center of town.

By Car There's a highway from Florence that runs straight into town. From Pisa, the fastest way is to zip down the SS1. Convenient pay parking is along the Fosse Reale, on Via Magenta, and on Viale Carducci.

By Bus **Lazzi** buses (✆ **0586-899-562;** www.lazzi.it) run from **Florence** and **Pisa** to the Livorno terminal at Piazza Manin on the Fosse Reale, just a hop away from the tourist office on Piazza Cavour. **ATL** buses (✆ **0586-884-262;** www.atl.livorno.it) run from Piazza Grande to service **Pisa** and **Livorno's province** down the coast, including Castiglioncello, Cecina, and Piombino.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist info booth** is at Piazza Cavour 6, 57126 Livorno (✆ **0586-204-629**), open Monday through Saturday 10am to 1pm and 3 to 6pm. The

administrative APT, which also has information, is tucked away on the second floor of an unassuming building at Piazza Cavour 6, on the south edge of the Old Town (✆ **0586-204-611;** fax 0586-896-173; www.livorno.turismo.toscana.it or www.comune.livorno.it). It's open Monday through Friday from 9:30am to 1:30pm and also 3 to 5pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 1:30pm. A **summer information booth** operates June through September at the main dock on Molo Mediceo (✆ **0586-895-320** or 0586-210-331) Monday through Thursday from 8am to 1pm and 3 to 9pm, Friday through Sunday from 8am to 1pm and 3 to 10pm.

EXPLORING THE PORT

Most of the interesting bits of Livorno are within the old **Porto Mediceo** part of town (laid out by Florentine architect Bernardo Buontalenti in 1567 on behalf of the Medici), still surrounded by its five-sided **Fosso Reale canal.** The canal is bridged in the east by an enormous vault called the Voltone, better known today as the huge rectangular **Piazza della Repubblica,** off the north of which you can see the **Fortezza Nuova,** which today is home to the city's most popular, if somewhat downtrodden, public park (daily 10am–7pm).

Via Grande leads west from Piazza della Repubblica, passing **Via Madonna** on the right, with its three baroque facades (no churches, just the facades) before spilling into Piazza Grande. The **Duomo** here, laid out in 1587, had to be almost entirely reconstructed after World War II bombing. The piazza used to be much longer, but a modern building has separated it from what's now Largo Municipio to the north, where you'll find the bell tower and double stairs of the 1720 **Palazzo Municipio** and, to the left, the 17th-century **Palazzo di Camera.**

Follow Via San Marco past a glassy school built into the rubble of a bombed-out *palazzo* to see the facade of the former **Teatro di San Marco,** where the Italian Communist Party was founded in 1921. Heading west toward the harbor is a bombed-out district with the church of **San Ferdinando** standing forlornly in the middle.

On the water is the **Fortezza Vecchia,** designed by Antonio da Sangallo (1521–34) and built into a 1377 Pisan fort with the stump of the 11th-century **Torre Matilda** poking perkily above it and hiding a Roman *castrum* in its bowels. The road along the harbor gives a good glimpse into the life of a still very much alive and functioning seaport, and where it hits the other end of Via Grande coming down from the Duomo is Livorno's prize sight, the Mannerist **Monumento dei Quattro Mori** ★ (1623–26). It's the masterpiece of Giambologna's student Pietro Tacca and is much more famous for the four bronze Moorish slaves lunging and twisting in their bonds than the statue of Ferdinando I above them.

South of the Old Town, Livorno's modern art collections were consolidated in 1994 at the **Museo Civico Giovanni Fattori.** It's housed in the Villa Mimbelli, which is surrounded by a public park on Via San Jacopo in Acquaviva (✆ **0586-808-001;** http://pegaso.comune.livorno.it/index). The villa is a trip, designed by Liberty architect Vincenzo Micheli in 1865 for a local businessman; its sumptuous restored interior contains quite an eclectic grab bag of styles. The museum is almost entirely dedicated to the only Tuscan art movement of note over the past several hundred years, the Macchiaioli, whose painters were interested in the way a viewer perceived the marks of light and color on a painting and covered canvases with their own take on French Impressionism. The museum is dedicated to one of the Macchiaioli's greatest talents and Livorno native son, Giovanni Fattori, whose work spanned the 1860s to 1908. Admission is 4€ adults, or 2.50€ for students, children, and anyone who happens to have an FS train ticket less than 3 days old. The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 1pm and 4 to 7pm. You can grab bus no. 1, 3, or 8 out in this direction.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Europa This has always been a rather dull option, but there aren't too many other clean, midrange choices in Livorno. At press time, the hotel management was in the midst of restoring all of its rooms, and the lobby and bar are sparkling new. On the upside, it is a close walk to virtually everything. On the downside, the immediate neighborhood is a little down at the heels.

Via dell'Angiolo 23 (off Via Grande, 2 blocks east of the Duomo), 57123 Livorno. ✆ **0586-888-581.** Fax 0586-880-085. www.hoteleuropalivorno.it. 24 units. 80€ double; 110€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking in nearby garage 5€. Bus: 1, 5, 8r, or 18. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Giardino Because of the lack of outstanding hotel options in central Livorno, the Giardino makes the list only because of its great location, clean rooms, acceptable price, and convenient parking. Don't expect any charm, but you will find cleanliness, quiet, greenery, and convenience. Leave the car here and go explore the city: To the left is the seaside walkway and to the right is the downtown area.

Piazza Mazzini 85 (by the port), 57126 Livorno. ✆ **0586-806-330.** Fax 0586-262-994. 24 units. 85€ double; 115€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 1, 5, 8r, or 18. **Amenities:** Bar; Internet. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Hotel Gran Duca Overlooking the harbor and Pietro Tacca's *Monument of the Four Moors,* the Gran Duca is the nicest hotel in the center of town. Most accommodations are medium to small, with unassuming but comfortable furniture, and some rooms have futons that fold out to sleep up to four. The hotel's 80 rooms were renovated in 2007. The rooms along the front have small terraces so you can sit and watch the shipping trade at your feet.

Piazza Micheli 16–18 (on the port at the end of Via Grande), 57123 Livorno. ✆ **0586-891-024.** Fax 0586-891-153. www.granduca.it. 80 units. 85€ double; 115€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 13€ in garage. Bus: 1, 5, 8r, or 18. **Amenities:** Restaurant; American bar; babysitting; concierge; compact health club; oversize Jacuzzi; massage; room service; sauna; smoke-free rooms; spa. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (in some units), minibar, Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

If you don't like seafood, you've come to the wrong town. Livorno's king of all seafood dishes is ***cacciucco,*** a poor man's soup of shellfish, squid, mollusks, fish, prawns, and other fruits of the sea in a tomato soup base spiked with hot peppers, garlic, and red wine, poured over stale bread.

Antico Moro LIVORNESE/SEAFOOD The place is sea shanty meets trattoria, with chianti flasks hanging from the wood ceiling beams, a postcard-clad bar, and various crustaceans nailed to the walls. The *antipasto mare* of shellfish and squid is brought out almost automatically, and you can follow it with *spaghetti alle vongole* (with clams) or *penne al favolo* (pasta in a slightly spicy tomato sauce made with minced shellfish and garnished with a scampi claw). Just two veal dishes sit lonely on the "meat" side of the menu—this is Livorno, after all—but there's a school of fishy secondi, from *fritto* (fried) and *griglia* (grilled) *misti* of various swimming things to *aragoste* (small lobsters) or any one of the daily catches cooked however you choose. The *torta di pesca* (layers of sponge cake, cream, and peach compote) is a particularly good dessert.

Via di Franco 59 (near market). ✆ **0586-884-659.** Reservations recommended. Primi 7€–7.50€; secondi 10€–20€. AE, MC, V. Thurs–Sat and Mon–Tues 7:30–11pm; Sun and holidays noon–2:30pm and 7:30–11pm. Closed Sun lunch in summer and Aug 24–Sept 7. Bus: 1.

L'Angiolo d'Oro ★ Finds LIVORNESE/SEAFOOD This corner trattoria is not on any tourist's short list, because it is utterly unnoticed and intends to remain so. Good news for the rest of us, since the *cacciucco* (garlicky fish stew) and the *triglie alla livornese* (red mullet in a marinara sauce) are as authentic as they come. Families will gather on a Sunday, filling up its dozen tables to enjoy a plate of delicious but unassuming *spaghetti all'orata* (spaghetti with sea bream in a marinara sauce), with fresh fish that only had to make a 50m (164-ft.) trek from the port. At 7€ a plate there's precious little spent on marketing or unnecessary frills. Skip dessert in exchange for a gelato somewhere along the seaside esplanade.

Piazza Mazzini (on the port side). ✆ **0586-881-295.** Reservations not necessary. Primi 5€–7€; secondi 10€–15€. No credit cards. Thurs–Tues noon–2:30pm and 7:30–9:30pm Bus: 1, 5, 8r, or 18.

Trattoria il Sottomarino ★ LIVORNESE/SEAFOOD "The Submarine" is a die-hard nautical joint with model ships, yellowing naval paintings, and walls carpeted with smoke-stained shellfish, documenting the history of Italy's long-lost love affair with cigarettes. (As in every other restaurant in the country post-2004, it is now forbidden to light up.) The relentlessly jovial and ironical waiters serve no-excuses portions of Livornese seafood. You could order the *riso nero sulle seppie* (risotto with squid blackened with their ink), followed by a mixed seafood fry of "the fish you see in the window." But, everybody flocks here for the spicy *cacciucco di mamma Vinicia,* so big that it can make a full meal accompanied by nothing other than your basket of bread.

Via Terrazzini 48 (off Piazza della Repubblica). ✆ **0586-887-025.** Reservations recommended. Primi 7.50€; secondi 10€–16€. No credit cards. Wed–Sun noon–3pm and 7:30–11pm. Closed July 4–Aug 7. Bus: 1.

Vecchia Livorno LIVORNESE/SEAFOOD With a cheerful staff, a bright dining room decorated with colorful coffee cups, and a menu loaded with homemade pasta, this place offers that warm, fuzzy feeling you're longing for after spending the day in an otherwise dreary port. Though it has been here for decades, the place is still usually hopping. Try the homemade ravioli stuffed with fish, followed by fried shrimp with zucchini flowers.

Scali delle Cantine 34 (off Piazza Garibaldi). ✆ **0586-884-048.** Reservations not necessary. Primi 6€–8€; secondi 10€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 12:30–2:30pm and 8–11pm. Closed Aug. Bus: 1.

BOLGHERI WINES & THE COAST SOUTH OF LIVORNO

Livorno's tourist office has been trying valiantly to sell the idea that the stretch of coast south of it is an "Etruscan Riviera." Few foreigners know about the area, although it is teeming with Italian vacationers in summer. The old Roman Via Aurelia SS1 down the coast has become a highway in some places and passes **Castiglioncello,** a popular resort town with a good pay beach at **Quercetano. Vada** is a modern center with passable sand, and **Marina di Cécina** has some good stretches of free sand.

Another 10km (6¼ miles) farther down the road is the turnoff for **Bolgheri.** This is the birthplace of the so-called "Supertuscans," wines that back in the 1980s greatly surpassed in quality the usual plonk then offered by Chianti vintners. The most prestigious of these remains Sassicaia, its scarcity and correspondingly stratospheric price due largely to the fact that only one vineyard is allowed to produce it under DOC regulations. That estate is the **Tenuta San Guido** (www.sassicaia.com) and is still owned by the noble Incisa della Rocchetta family. The estate concentrates more on wine than tourism, which is to say they don't offer tours of the property. To tour a well-known Bolgheri estate, try the **Tenuta dell'Ornellaia** (✆ **0565-718-242;** www.ornellaia.com), which produces the prestigious wine of the same name and conducts tours of its giant and awe-inspiring

modern cantina, culminating in a tasting or even lunch in the estate's more historic buildings. By appointment only.

Just south of the Bolgheri turnoff is the right turn into the **Rifugio Faunistico di Bolgheri** ★ (✆ **0565-224-361;** reachable Mon–Fri 10am–noon and 3–7pm, Sat 10am–noon), Italy's first nature preserve, established when the land was deeded by its nature-loving owner to the World Wildlife Fund in 1962. Its 22 sq. km (8½ sq. miles) of shoreline, marshland, and wooded areas constitute a microcosm of the Maremma region, one of the best places to glimpse native fauna and flora. Alas, to enjoy it you must reserve at the number above or by stopping by the Vigili Urbani office of **Castagneto Carducci,** about 10km (6¼ miles) south on the SS329 byroad (✆ **0565-777-125**). Only 20 people at a time are allowed into the park for 3-hour escorted visits at specific entry times: Fridays and Saturdays at 9am and again at 2pm. The cost is 5€ for adults, 3€ for kids 13 and under.

Back on the coastal road, you'll find that **Marina di Bibbona** has plenty of sand to go around, and if you don't mind crowds the busy and trendy resort of **San Vincenzo** has even longer swaths of quality beach. Ancient **Populonia,** on its promontory beyond some excellent beaches, was an important center in the Etruscan world. On sunny days you get a great coastal view from its castle (daily 9:30am–12:30pm and 2:30pm to dusk), and the town still retains bits of the walls the Etruscans built. The best archaeological materials discovered in the surrounding tombs were carted off to Florence, but you can still visit the tombs in the **Necropolis of Baratti/Populonia (San Cerbone),** off the road into town (✆ **0565-29-002;** www.parchivaldicornia.it). They're open Tuesday through Friday from 10am to 4pm, Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 2pm (open until sunset in spring, until 8pm in summer). At the south end of this promontory sits **Piombino,** a modern port most popular among travelers taking the ferry to Elba.

4 ELBA: TUSCANY'S ISLAND RESORT

12km (7½ miles) off the coast at Piombino; 86km (53 miles) S of Livorno; 179km (111 miles) SW of Florence; 231km (143 miles) NW of Rome

Elba is a proletarian resort, visited mainly by middle-class Italian families and German tourists, who together fill just about every available inch of hotel and camping space in August and September. What Elba lacks in the glamour department it makes up for in variety. It's Italy's third-largest island, but at about 27×18km (17×11 miles), it's much smaller than Sicily or Sardinia. So while it has a tall, mountainous interior speckled with ancient mining villages, the sea is never far away. Coastal fishing and port towns in soft pastels are interspersed with modest sandy beaches.

The Greeks founded the first large-scale settlements here in the 10th century B.C., calling the island *Aethalia* after the Greek word for sparks, a reference to the dozens of forges sailors could see winking throughout the night. The forges were smelting iron ore, one of the hundreds of minerals that make up the fabric of Elba. After an Etruscan interlude, the Romans, calling it *Ilva,* used its raw iron to forge the swords with which they conquered their empire. The island was raided by pirates (including Barbarossa) and split between Italian and Spanish rules until the 18th century, but mining remained at the core of Elban economy for about 3,000 years until the easily accessible iron finally ran out. The last iron mine shut down in 1984.

When would-be emperor of Europe Napoleon Bonaparte was first defeated, he was exiled to Elba to rule as the island's governor. Beginning May 3, 1814, the Corsican

general busied himself with revamping the island's economy, infrastructure, and mining system—perhaps out of nation-building habit or merely to keep himself and his 500-man personal guard occupied. Napoleon managed to be a good boy until February 26, 1815, at which point the conquering itch grew too strong and he sailed ashore to begin the famous Hundred Days that ended in his crushing defeat at the Battle of Waterloo. The island is proud to have had, no matter how briefly, a resident of such considerable note, and preserves his two villas and various other mementos of the Napoleonic era.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The easiest way to get to the island is by **ferry from Piombino** to Portoferraio, Elba's capital. In August and throughout the high season, it's best to reserve, especially if you're taking a car over. There are two major ferry companies, **Toremar** (✆ **0565-31-100** in Piombino, **0565-918-080** in Portoferraio; www.toremar.it) and **Moby Lines,** also known as **NAV.AR.MA** (✆ **0565-225-211** or 0565-221-212 in Piombino, 0565-914-133 in Portoferraio; www.mobylines.it). Both run regular ferries (*traghetto* or *nave*) that take about an hour. Toremar also offers slightly faster (40 min.) but almost twice-as-expensive hydrofoils *(aliscafo)* on which you can't take a car. Toremar has the most ferry runs daily, especially off season, with hourly runs April through August and six to eight daily in winter. Year-round, there are three or four hydrofoils daily to Cavo, on Elba's northeast coast, plus three to four direct to Portoferraio in summer only. You can compare both companies' schedules quickly and easily at **www.traghetti.com**. They have also begun offering discount rates when the ferries don't fill up. See websites for those last-minute offers.

You'll find uncrowded **ticket offices** on the right side of the road as you approach Piombino, more crowded offices just before the port on the right, and packed offices at the port itself (all well sign-posted). Round-trip ferry tickets are about 20€ per passenger including tax (the price depends on the period). Cars with one person in them cost about 70€.

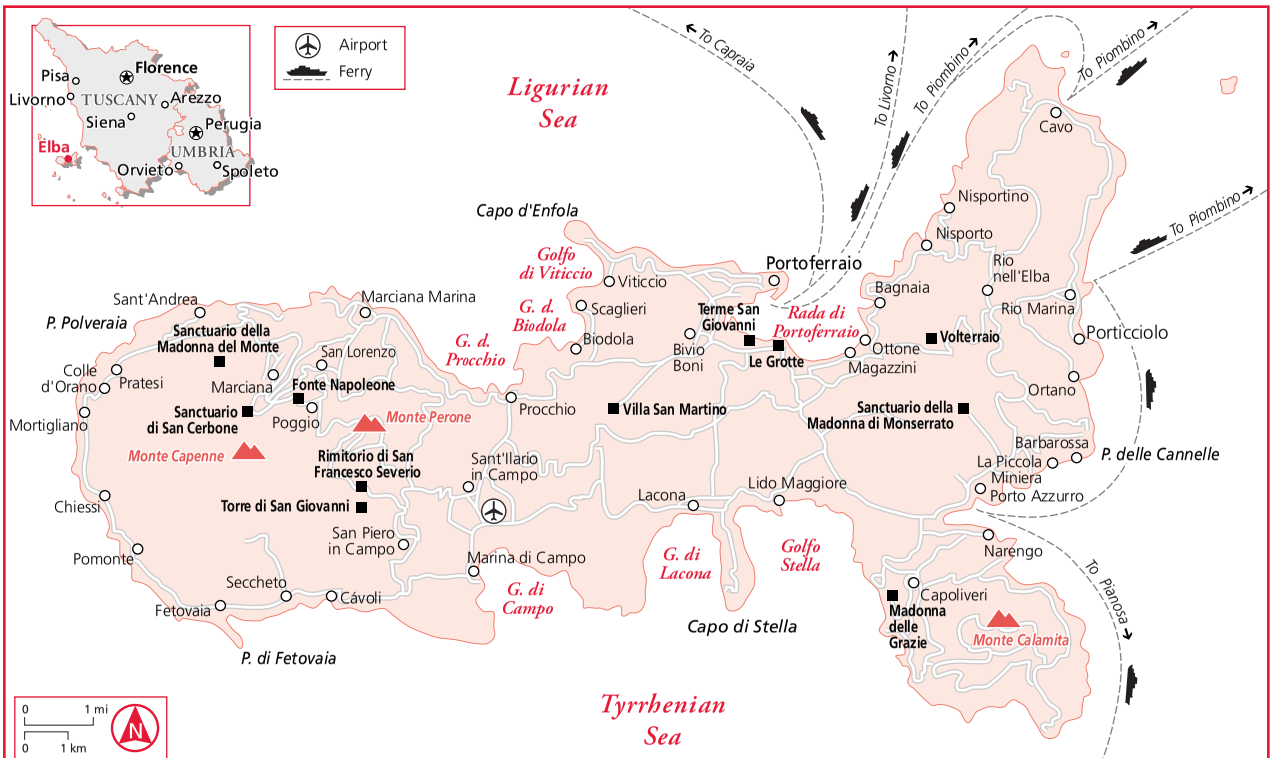
Hydrofoils cost about 10€ per passenger to Portoferraio or about 5€ to Cavo. You can **park** at a number of garages and lots at the Piombino docks for 10€ to 15€ per day.

Toremar's office in Portoferraio is at Calata Italia 23; Moby Lines' Portoferraio office is at Via Ninci 1. Toremar also runs boats to Elba's other ports (Cavo, Rio Marina, and Porto Azzuro) as well as a longer-haul **ferry from Livorno** to Elba once daily (plus an extra Sat run) from May 24 to September 14 that calls on Capraia (and sometimes also Gorgonza) along the way. Toremar in Livorno is at the Porto Mediceo (✆ **0586-896-113**).

GETTING AROUND Drivers will have no problem, as the island's road system is quite good. If you want to rent a car on Elba, contact **Hertz,** Viale Elba 4 (✆ **0565-917-148;** www.hertz.com); **Maggiore,** Calata Italia 8 (✆ **0565-930-222** or 0565-903-212; www.maggiore.it); or **Happy Rent,** Viale Elba 5 (✆ **0565-914-665;** www.renthappy.it).

To rent a scooter or bike—not a bad way to tool around—try these places in Portoferraio: **BW's Racing,** Via Manganaro 15 (✆ **0565-930-491**), or **Two Wheels Network,** Viale Elba 32 (✆ **0565-914-666**). Rates vary widely depending on season, but expect scooters to run about 40€ per day and bikes and mountain bikes to start at 15€.

Elba is also blessed with an excellent **bus** network run by **ATL** (✆ **0565-914-392**). Buses leave Portoferraio from the main terminal at Viale Elba 20 in the newer part of town (turn right out of the tourist office, then right again at the main street), servicing just about every town on the island. (If you know the name of a beach between villages where you want to be let off, tell the driver.) You can **store your bags** at the bus station for 1.30€ per bag per day. It's open daily: summer from 8am to 8pm and winter from 7:40am to 1:20pm and 4 to 6:05pm.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Golfo di Viticcio
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Biodola
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Portoferraio
Terme San Giovanni
Le Grotte
Rada di Portoferraio
Bivio
Boni
Bagnaia
Ottone
Magazzini
Volterraio
Cavo
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Nisporto
Rio nell'Elba
Rio Marina
Portiicciolo
Ortano
Barbarossa
La Piccola
Miniera
Porto Azzurro
P. delle Cannelle
Sant'Andrea
P. Polveraia
Marciana Marina
Sanctuario della Madonna del Monte
San Lorenzo
Colle d'Orano
Pratesi
Marciana
Fonte Napoleone
Mortigliano
Sanctuario di San Cerbone
Poggio
Monte Perone
Monte Capenne
Rimitorio di San Francesco Severo
Torre di San Giovanni
Chiessi
Pomonte
Secchetto
Cávoli
Fetovaia
P. di Fetovaia
Procchio
Villa San Martino
Sant'Ilario in Campo
San Piero in Campo
Marina di Campo
G. di Campo
Lacona
Lido Maggiore
G. di Lacona
Golfo Stella
Capo di Stella
Sanctuario della Madonna di Monserrato
Narengo
Capoliveri
Madonna delle Grazie
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VISITOR INFORMATION Elba's main **tourist office** is in Portoferraio's new town at the ferry dock, Calata Italia 26, 57037 Portoferraio up the stairs (✆ **0565-914-671;** fax 0565-916-350; www.arcipelago.turismo.toscana.it; Mon–Sat 8am–2pm and 3–6pm; in summer also sometimes Sun 8am–2pm). Two private websites are loaded with info and pictures (and paid for by local businesses, so take it all with a grain of salt): **www.elba com.it**, mostly in Italian but with spiffy music; and **www.elbatuttanatura.com**, put up by an Elban hotel devoted to enjoying the natural wonders of the island (with a downloadable newsletter in English).

For help in the hotel hunt, head to the **Associazione Albergatori Isola d'Elba,** Calata Italia 20 (✆ **800-903-532** toll-free in Italy or 0565-914-754; fax 0565-917-865; www.albergatorielbani.it; open Mon–Fri 9am–1pm and 3–7pm, Sat 9:30am–12:30pm). Though it isn't an official body, its network does include most hotels on the island, and it'll be happy to give you a catalog and price list.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS Elba puts on a **wine festival** the last week of July at Le Ghiaie beach behind Portoferraio. During the July and August high season, every town puts on some sort of **small *festa;*** in Marciana Alta, it's an August **medieval pageant** that robes the locals in costume and fills the streets with artisans offering old-fashioned crafts (call ✆ **0565-901-215** for info). Portoferraio's weekly **Friday market** is held on Viale Zambelli.

TOURING THE ISLAND

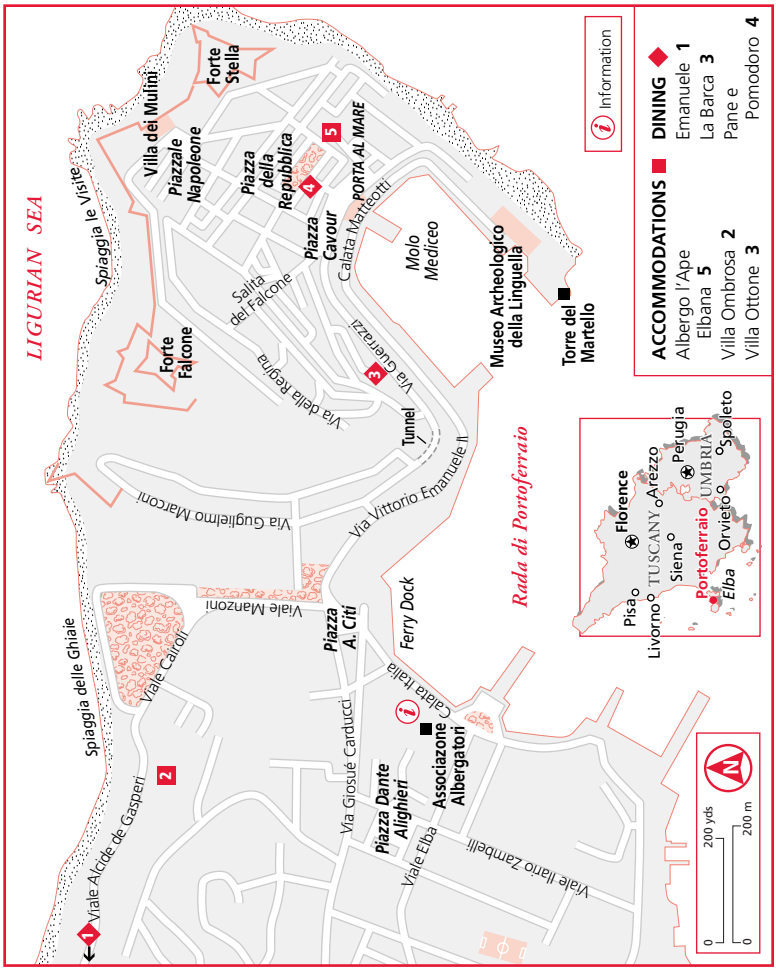
Napoleon & More In & Around Portoferraio

PORTOFERRAIO Founded in 1548 by Medici grand duke Cosimo I, Portoferraio is Elba's capital and largest city. Ferries dock in the city's newer half to the west, but its core is still an old fishing village, a U-shaped theater of streets terracing up the rocky promontory. It was guarded in Medici days by two massive fortresses, the **Forte Falcone** and the **Forte Stella.** You can explore the rambling battlements of both for free; the Forte Falcone to the west is open daily from 9am to 8pm (until midnight July–Aug); the Forte Stella is open daily from 9am to 8pm.

The old entrance to the city is through **Porta al Mare** at the base of Portoferraio's "U." In the town's upper reaches is the house where Napoleon lived in exile for 9 months: The **Villa dei Mulini** (✆ **0565-915-846**) doesn't excite much, but you do get to wander through the emperor's apartments and see the books he kept in his study. March through October, it's open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 7pm and Sunday from 9am to 1pm (it sometimes keeps longer hours in summer). Admission is 3€, though the 5€ cumulative ticket also gets you into Napoleon's summer villa just outside Portoferraio (see below); you have 3 days to use the other half of the ticket. There's a rocky little beach, **Le Viste,** signposted down the backside of the sheer cliff behind the villa. On your way back down toward the docks, stop off at the **Chiesa della Misericordia** (✆ **0565-914-009**) or **Santissimo Sacramento** (no phone)—both have copies of Napoleon's death mask.

NEAR PORTOFERRAIO Cut through the edge of Portoferraio's new town to the north shore, past **Le Ghiaie,** Portoferraio's only real (but not great) beach. Farther beyond are better beaches at **Acquaviva, Sanzone,** and **Viticcio.** Barely connected to the rest of the island out here is the large green hump of **Capo d'Enfola,** closed to cars and a lovely place to take an easy hike.

South of Portoferraio, the road divides at Bivio Boni to head east and west. A short trip west (right) then off the main road, following the signs, will lead you to the entrance to the **Villa San Martino** ★ (✆ **0565-914-688**), the more interesting of the two villas



Napoleon left on the island. The pretentious neoclassical facade wasn't the ex-emperor's idea—his step-nephew had it constructed years after his death to honor him with its giant N's all over. Head to the left to be escorted up a path to Napoleon's more modest cottage—for the former ruler of half the known world, he had surprisingly simple tastes. The only extravagance is the Egyptian Room, celebrating his most successful campaign with *trompe l'oeil* desert scenes glimpsed between hieroglyphic-painted walls and columns. For hours and admission, see the Villa dei Mulini under "Portoferraio," above.

A left (east) at Bivio Boni will take you past the **Terme San Giovanni** (✆ **0565-914-680;** www.termelbane.com), which offers spa treatments such as sulfurous mud baths,

massages, and seaweed body wraps for 10€ to 70€. Just beyond are the ruins of a Roman villa overlooking Portoferraio's bay. Little remains of **Le Grotte** ★, but the crumbling walls of the now-buried rooms and patches of mosaic with their stunning bay view are rather romantic. It's open summer only daily from 9am to 6:30pm; admission is free.

You'll find a small beach at **Magazzini,** and a bit farther along is the turnoff for a dirt road detour to the 14th-century **Santo Stefano,** a pretty little Pisan Romanesque church perched on a small olive-planted hilltop. The main road leads north to the fine beaches at **Ottone** and **Bagnaia.**

EASTERN & WESTERN ELBA

On eastern Elba, visit the old Spanish capital of **Porto Azzurro,** with a 1603 fortress built so well they're still using it as a prison. Today, the fortified Spanish port is one of the island's major resort cities, but you can catch a whiff of the past in the shop fronts and bustle of the **Old Quarter** around Via d'Alarcon. From Porto Azzurro, you can see the fortified Capo Focardo across the bay, with the nice resort beach of **Naregno** leading up to it.

South of Porto Azzurro lies eastern Elba's most picturesque town, the ancient mountainside village of **Capoliveri** ★. It's full of twisty old streets, a large terracelike main **Piazza Matteotti,** and cavernlike bars like the **Enoteca Elba,** on the piazza's edge (✆ **0565-968-707**), where you can quaff Elba's wines by the glass until 2 or 3am. In fact, the town is known for its nightlife, as well as for its traditional Thursday market.

On western Elba, **Marciana** ★, the island's oldest settlement, is the most attractive and the central base for exploring western Elba. It's a picturesque and very steep little town made of minuscule tree-shaded *piazze* and winding stepped-stone streets stacked atop one another. Aside from relaxing with a view, you can get in some light culture by popping into the small prehistoric and Roman collections of the **Museo Archeologico** (✆ **0565-901-215;** 3€ admission; Apr–Sept daily 9:30am–12:30pm and 3:30–7:30pm).

WHERE TO STAY

Elba is a resort island, chock-full of resort hotels. To find the perfect hotel to fit your needs, you can call, fax, or drop by the **Associazione Albergatori** office (see "Essentials," above).

Seasons on the island have seemingly infinite gradations. The highest season is August, when the island is packed with vacationing Italians and you'll find the highest prices and most hotels booked months in advance (and at most places at least half pension required). The second most crowded and expensive seasons are Easter and Christmas, again often with half pension obligatory. Then come various midseasons in June, July, late spring, and early fall. The lowest season is winter, when most places are closed, while those that stay open offer deeply discounted rates. To simplify matters, the prices below lump together the higher seasons and the lowest into ranges not including pension, with any period wherein pension is required quoted separately.

Campers will find plenty to satisfy them. Ask at the tourist office for a color catalog of campgrounds because sacking out on most beaches is frowned on, and you'll often get shooed away.

In Portoferraio

Albergo l'Ape Elbana One of the island's oldest inns, the Elban Bee is very simple but sits on the main square in Portoferraio's Old Town—best for those who didn't come

exclusively for a beach vacation. The basic furniture is a bit worn, but the beds are firm, the tile floors clean, and the price as good as you're going to find, especially off season. Twelve of the rooms even have air-conditioning. Some look over the main piazza, while others spread their vista across the rooftops.

Salita Cosimo de' Medici 2 (in the center of the Old Town, on Piazza della Repubblica), 57037 Portoferraio (LI). ✆ **0565-914-245.** Fax 0565-945-985. www.ape-elbana.it. 24 units. 110€ double. Deep discounts in low season. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. Free parking on piazza. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Apr–Oct); room service (breakfast and bar). *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Villa Ombrosa On the north shore behind Portoferraio, off Le Ghiaie beach, the Ombrosa is one of the best all-around places in Portoferraio itself. A renovation completed in 1999 prettied both the public areas and the well-kept guest rooms. The furnishings and bathrooms vary from room to room, and while a few rooms push the small side of medium, most have plenty of space—they even have some rooms with a communicating door you can turn into a two-room family suite. Try by all means to get a sea-view room, most of which come with a balcony. Rates include a beach umbrella and lounge chairs. Half-pension is obligatory in high season.

Via A. de Gasperi 3, 57037 Portoferraio, Elba (LI). ✆ **0565-914-363.** Fax 0565-915-672. www.villaombrosa.it. 38 units. Low season 82€ double; shoulder season 100€ double; high season 114€–224€ double with half pension. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; concierge; room service (bar). *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Villa Ottone ★★ This genteel hotel's showpiece is a gorgeous 19th-century villa overlooking the bay, with basic furnishings but frescoed ceilings (in most rooms) and fantastic views from the front rooms. But the 1970s main building is also fine, renovated in the late 1990s to add wicker units to rooms on the lower floors and 19th-century-style furnishings and Jacuzzi shower/bathtub combos to the nicer (and pricier) third-floor accommodations. All rooms enjoy small terraces with at least a lateral sea view. Sit in the frescoed bar at the Villa's porch above the private beach and watch the sun set over Portoferraio across the waters. The hotel requires a minimum stay of 3 days and half pension, and rates are highly variable depending on the season, the view, and whether you can control the air-conditioning in your own room or whether, as in the original villa, it's centralized and hence not all that cooling.

Loc. Ottone (about 15–20 min. around the bay from Portoferraio), 57037 Portoferraio, Elba (LI). ✆ **0565-933-042.** Fax 0565-933-257. www.villaottone.com. 75 units. Apr 24–May 30 and Sept 12–Oct 11 125€–215€ double, 185€–420€ suite; May 30–June 20 and Aug 29–Sept 12 145€–255€ double, 220€–490€ suite; June 19–July 30 and Aug 20–26 170€–295€ double, 260€–570€ suite; July 31–Aug 19 200€–335€ double, 310€–565€ suite. All rates include half pension. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Oct–Apr. **Amenities:** Restaurant; poolside lunch grill; 3 bars; babysitting; free bikes; children's club; golf (discount on course 3km/2 miles away); health club; 2 pools w/bay view; room service; tennis court; watersports equipment. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

In Marciana

Bellavista ★ (Finds) This is a secluded, semi-isolated oasis a 20-minute drive beyond Marciana, set above one of Elba's trendier, quieter villages. The family-run Bellavista is aptly named: Its position at the isthmus of a short peninsula gives most of the accommodations a "beautiful view" of the sea in three directions, and on clear days you can see the whole of the Tuscan coast, Gorgona, Capraia, and Corsica from many windows and the shared terrace. Some rooms have terraces that overlook the owners' vineyards and gardens to the infant chestnut grove and wooded Sant'Andrea spur and blue sea beyond.

Trails lead into these woods, down to the little Sant'Andrea beach in one direction, or to secluded shoals in the other. Only two rooms are without views.

Sant'Andrea, 57030 Marciana, Elba (LI). ✆ **0565-908-015.** Fax 0565-908-079. www.hotel-bellavista.it. 10 units. Low season 70€ double; high season 112€–134€ double. Half pension (14€–20€ depending on the season) available. Small discounts for longer stays. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. Closed 1 month sometime between Dec and Feb. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; children's center; concierge. *In room:* TV (in some), hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

In & Near Portoferraio

When all I want is a quick sandwich in a split focaccia or a simple *tavola calda* dish such as lasagne, I stop by unpretentious **Pane e Pomodoro,** on Via Cavalieri di Vittorio Veneto in Portoferraio, between the town gate and main square (✆ **0565-917-121**). It's a simple bar with a small glassed-in veranda off the side; panini go for about 3€, main dishes and pizza for 5€ to 8€.

Emanuele ★★ ELBAN/SEAFOOD Behind a beach-bum bar facade hides what most Italian gastronomic critics agree is the best dining on Elba. Snuggled into the beach at the Enfola headland, friendly family-run Emanuele excels at marrying the catch of the day and pick of the crustaceans with fresh pastas and seasonal vegetables. Reserve ahead for one of a few tables in the pocket-size courtyard out back, strewn with gravel and shaded by pine trees and umbrellas just feet from the waves lapping at the pebble beach. The *garganelli branzino e verdure* (sea bass scented with rosemary and tossed with zucchini, carrots, oil, and a bit of peperoncino) is outstanding, as is the simple *tagliolini bottarga e carciofi* (thin pasta strands twirled with grated tuna roe and artichoke hearts). For a secondo, have them grill or oven-roast the sea bream, grouper, or perch pulled in by local fishermen that morning, or try the island specialty *totani alla diavola* (small cuttlefish cooked up with oil and hot peppers). Save room for the *torta di mele* (warm caramelized apple torte drizzled with sweetened cream).

Loc. Enfola (15 min. west of Portoferraio along coast). ✆ **0565-939-003.** Reservations highly recommended. Primi 7€–12€; secondi 9.50€–18€; fixed-price menu without wine 25€. MC, V. Daily noon–3:30pm and 7:30–11pm. Closed mid-Oct to Easter and Wed until June 15.

La Barca ELBAN "The Boat" is one of Portoferraio's best restaurants. It sees its fair share of tourism but remains a place locals return to for well-prepared fish dishes and a friendly atmosphere. You can dine alfresco under an awning on the quiet street out front or inside surrounded by island art and with a fresh tulip on your table. The *gnocchi all'Elbana* is a good preparation of the potato dumpling pasta with a mix of tomato sauce and pesto, while the *spaghetti alla bottarga* is more traditional—thin spaghetti in butter with dried tuna eggs grated over it. For a secondo, try the catch of the day baked in the oven (the *spigola,* or sea bass, is good) or the *stoccafisso con patate* (dried cod cooked with potatoes, onions, and parsley).

Via Guerrazzi 60–62, Portoferraio (in the Old City, a block up from the dock on the landward arm of the "U"). ✆ **0565-918-036.** Reservations strongly recommended. Primi 7.50€–13€; secondi 8€–16€. AE, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 12:30–2pm and 7:30–10pm (June to mid-Sept, dinner is served daily). Closed mid-Jan to mid-Feb.

5 THE MAREMMA: TUSCANY'S COWBOY COUNTRY

The **Maremma** stretches along Tuscany's coast from Cecina to Monte Argentario and extends inward along mostly flat land toward the mountainous interior. The Maremma was once the heartbeat of the Etruscan world and preserves scant remains of some of their most important cities and miles of the mysterious sunken roads they carved more than 4m (13 ft.) into the tufa. The complex canal and drainage system built by those ancient Tuscans allowed them to turn the marshy flatlands into a breadbasket.

The conquering Romans, though, weren't as able as landscape administrators, and when the neglected drainage system broke down, marshes and bogland swamped the region and brought with them the malaria mosquito. Grand Duke Leopold I was the first to seriously attempt a large-scale reclamation of the land in 1828, and his canals still form an important part of the drainage network, but it wasn't until malaria was defeated here in the 1950s that the land became livable again.

Today, the Maremma puts forth a mixed image. It's part rugged new colony, where man has reconquered the land and cowboys called *butteri* watch over herds of white oxen. It's also part relic of the ancient past, where centuries of relative isolation have allowed Etruscan ruins and towns to decay romantically. You'll encounter very few other tourists as you explore archaic hill towns and grassy, mounded Etruscan tombs.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING AROUND

By Train The slowest trains on the main **Rome-Pisa** line stop at Follonica, Grosseto, Albarese, and Ortobello (for Monte Argentario). The faster ones pause at Grosseto and Ortobello, but IC trains take the time to hit only Grosseto. There's also a train from **Florence** that passes through **Siena** on its way to Grosseto and Ortobello.

By Bus Maremma's **RAMA** bus network (✆ **0564/454-169**) runs from Grosseto to Florence, Siena, Marina di Grosseto, Castiglione, Alberese, Follonica, Scansano, and Massa Marittima. It also services Ortobello to Monte Argentario's main towns.

EXPLORING THE MAREMMA

GROSSETO

The Maremma's capital isn't a promising introduction to the region. Grosseto certainly doesn't invite lingering, but the region's website, **www.gol.grosseto.it**, offers a few options for visitors. The tourist office is at Via Monterosa 206 (✆ **0564/462-611;** fax 0564/454-606; www.grosseto.turismo.toscana.it; Mon–Fri 8:30am–1:30pm and 3–6pm, Sat 8:30am–12:30pm). Grosseto's a fairly scuzzy burg, with the highest drug-use rate per capita in Italy. I suggest taking a quick gander at its few worthwhile sights in the Old Town and moving on. The main sight is the **Museo Civico Archeologico e d'Arte della Maremma,** Piazza Baccarini 3 (✆ **0564-488-752;** Tues–Sun: May–Oct 10am–1pm and 5–8pm; Nov–Feb 9am–1pm, plus 4:30–7pm Sat and Sun; Mar–Apr 9:30am–1pm and 4:30–7pm). The Maremma is particularly rich in prehistoric, Etruscan, and Roman remains, and this museum's archaeological collections bring together almost all the major finds from across the province. Upstairs is a small painting collection from local churches. The collection's prima donna is a 13th-century *Last Judgment* by Guido da Siena. Admission is 5€.

Mostly, though, the area around Grosseto is known for its cowboy country, its beaches, and the **thermal springs of Saturnia.** The springs are popular among not only Romans; throngs of Germans and Dutch also come here in the summer in their camper vans and take in the volcanic water. The stream runs right through town and then cascades through a series of semicircular, white pools made of calcium deposits. Admission is free, and in the summer there are groups of vendors selling towels, bathing suits, and the like.

HITTING THE BEACH Along the southern stretch of Tuscany's coast are several beaches and resorts. **Follonica** represents the huge down-market brand of beach with lots of city folk who've dashed to the shore for the day. There is plenty of sand, but little of it is special. From here you can turn 19km (12 miles) inland to **Massa Marittima** (see chapter 7). **Punta Ala** is a posh spot, with luxury hotels and a well-heeled vacationing crowd sunning on the modern bay side. **Castiglione della Pescaia** ★ is more middle-of-the-road and perhaps the best all-around. The beach is passable, the prices are lower, and it has only a touch of the resort air about it, relying on an old fishing-village atmosphere and the ancient Old Town up on the hill as attractions. **Marina di Grosseto** is a bland town, but the beach is clean.

Tuscany's most southerly point is along the coast at the resort peninsula of **Monte Argentario** ★. The city of Ortobello, sitting in the middle of a lagoon between Monte Argentario and the mainland, serves as the gateway to L'Argentario. The lagoon surrounding Ortobello is partly protected by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) as a natural oasis called the **Laguna di Ortobello** (✆ **0564-820-297**), which, together with the WWF nature reserve **Lago di Burano** (✆ **0564-898-829**), a bit farther down the main coast, comprises Italy's most important birding center, where an estimated 200 of the 450 species that call the country home live or pass through every year. Both are open September through April by guided visit only: Ortobello, Thursday through Sunday at 10am and 2pm; Burano, Sunday between 10am and 3pm.

HORSEBACK RIDING & HIKING Just 15km (9 miles) southwest of Grosseto, a 15km (9-mile) stretch of hilly coastline is protected as the **Parco Naturale della Maremma** ★ (www.parco-maremma.it or www.parks.it/parco.maremma). It's called "one of the last earthly paradises in Italy" and incorporates the **Monti dell'Uccellina,** capped by crumbling medieval towers. The "Mountains of the Little Bird" are actually hills some 390m (1,279 ft.) high, covered with the almost unbroken carpet of an umbrella pine forest, though you'll also find ilex, oak, elms, juniper, and the occasional dwarf palm, Italy's only native-growing palm tree. Rustling around in the myrtle and juniper *macchia* brush are families of Italy's small native wild boar, herds of roe deer, foxes, crested porcupines, and the occasional feral cat. Larger critters include a famous pack of semiwild horses and long-horned white cattle, both of which are wrangled by the Maremma's famous but dwindling breed of cowboy, the *butteri.* Seaside, there are wondrous stretches of sand-dune beaches in the center, rising to a rocky cliff toward the south and petering into marshy bog land to the north. The latter is the park's best bird-watching area, where you might even spot flamingos, peregrine falcons, and osprey among the scores of migratory and water birds that spend time here.

The park entrance is at **Alberese** (✆ **0564-407-098**), site of the annual August *butteri* rodeo. An hourly bus takes you from Alberese into the closed-to-traffic park and drops you off at the trail heads. The park office's map is pretty bad; buy an Istituto Geografico Militare 1:25,000 map or something similar in town. The path marked **strada degli olivi** leads straight to the beach. Trail 1 is 6km (3.8 miles) in its entirety and involves the most

rugged, but most rewarding, climbing; it leads past the evocative ruins of the 11th-century San Rabano abbey. Trail 2 runs for 5km (3.1 miles) past abandoned medieval watchtowers toward the rocky southern coast with the best vistas of the pine forests along the way. Trail 3 follows 8km (5 miles) of sandy pine woods and visits caves once inhabited by prehistoric man. Trail 4 is 11km (6.8 miles) and takes you along cliffs, down on the coast, and up hills. They also offer guided visits by foot, canoe, or horseback, as well as (pricey) nighttime excursions. The park is open Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday from 7am (9am Oct–June 14) to dusk. Admission ranges from 6€ to 8€.

A number of farm bed-and-breakfasts in the area offer horseback rides through the park. One of them is **the Agriturismo il Melograno di Banditella Alberese** (✆ **339-875-6919;** www.agriturismoilmelograno.eu), which offers a 4-day package deal including room, half-board, and cowboy-guided tours on horseback starting at 220€ per person.

10

Southern Tuscany

The hill towns and valleys south of Siena comprise perhaps Tuscany's most enchanting and downright picturesque region. It's a land of medieval castles guarding narrow road passes, isolated farmhouses sitting atop long, eroded limestone ridges, clusters of cypress and ribbons of plane trees against a bucolic backdrop, and thermal spas enjoyed by both the Medici and the modern proletariat. The region has a few small patches of forest on the steeper slopes of its river valleys, but most of it has been landscaped to a human scale over thousands of years, turning the low, rolling hills into farmlands and vineyards that produce Tuscany's mightiest red wines.

Southern Tuscany's cities are textbook Italian hill towns. **Chiusi** dwells deep in its Etruscan roots, still remembering a time when King Lars Porsena was one of the few leaders of the Etruscan confederation who had the audacity to take on Rome. Roman settlements like **Montalcino** and **Montepulciano** grew into medieval cities and today produce two of Italy's top red wines, the powerhouse Brunello di Montalcino and the noble Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. And the gemlike village of **Pienza,** famed for its pecorino sheep's cheese, shelters within its tiny ring of walls a Renaissance core of the most perfect proportions and planning.

Much of the area is filled with the expansive and beautiful **Val d'Orcia**—many people's idealized picture of Tuscany because well over half the souvenir-stand postcards and cover shots of coffee-table books with "Tuscany" in the title were snapped here. From many parts of it, especially the zone around Montalcino and Pienza, you can see the broken tooth of the **Rocca d'Orcia.** From the 11th to the 14th century, the castle was a stronghold and strategic watchtower of the Aldobrandeschi clan, formidable toll collectors along the Francigena pilgrim road through these parts. The castle juts from its crag to the south, still keeping an eye on its valley.

EN ROUTE TO MONTALCINO

The SS438 leads 26km (16 miles) from Siena to **Asciano,** a small town still partially girded by its 1351 Sienese walls. The tourist office is at Corso Matteotti 18, 53041 Asciano (✆ **0577-719-510** for all sights), open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to noon and 3 to 6pm, Sunday from 10am to noon.

The 14th-century **Palazzo Corboli,** Corso Matteotti 122, frescoed by Ambrogio Lorenzetti or his school, now houses two museums. The **Museo d'Arte Sacra** contains good early Sienese works; don't miss the *Madonna* by Segna di Bonaventura, a 1410 *Annunciation* carved in wood by Francesco di Valdambrino, and Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *St. Michael* altarpiece. The Etruscan collections were gleaned from tombs discovered in the area and include a couple of nicely painted 3rd- to 5th-century-B.C. vases, funerary urns, and the standard pile of pottery bits. The *palazzo* is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm. Admission is 4€ adults, 2.50€ for students and seniors over 65.

At the **Museo Cassioli,** Via Mameli 36, is a collection of late-19th- and early-20th-century art by a local artist and his son (open by request at the number above). A block

and a half up the street, at Corso Matteotti 80, is the **Antica Farmacia Francini Naldi,** a 19th-century pharmacy where you can view the **Roman mosaic floor** in the basement if you ask politely. At the opposite end of the block stands the Romanesque and Gothic **Collegiata,** built of travertine between the 10th and 13th centuries. The interior has, unusually, three apses and a 15th-century Sienese-school crucifix over the altar.

Asciano is surrounded by ***biancane,*** land formations where erosion has left emerald lawns, sitting like toupees atop knobby white hills. These blend to the south with the ***Crete Senesi,*** a similarly eerie landscape of eroded clay and Jura limestone hillsides with farmhouses perched atop deep washed-out gullies and cypress crowded along sheer ridges. In the center of these weird badlands, accessible by a couple of side roads out of Asciano, the abbey of **Monte Oliveto Maggiore** ★ (✆ **0577-707-611** or 0577-707-017) is hidden in its own womb of cypress.

Founded in 1313 by a group of wealthy Sienese businessmen who wanted to retire to a contemplative spiritual life, the red-brick monastic complex was built by the early 15th century. The Olivetans, which are still an active order within the Benedictines, were trying to restore some of the original simplicity and charity of the Benedictine rule, and the monks cared for victims during the 1340s Black Death outbreak. What draws most casual visitors today is the 36-scene **fresco cycle** by Luca Signorelli and Sodoma, one of the masterpieces of High Renaissance narrative painting and Sodoma's greatest work. When you arrive, pass under the gate tower with its small cafe and walk through the cool woods for about 5 minutes to the bulky brick of the complex. The entrance to the monastery is around to the right, but first pop into the **church** to see some gorgeous choir stalls inlaid by Giovanni da Verona (1505). A doorway, not always open, leads into the ***chiostro grande*** ★★ and puts you right at the frescoes' start. Otherwise, leave the church by the front and enter the Great Cloister through the doorway to your left.

Signorelli started the job of illustrating the *Life of St. Benedict* here in 1497. He finished nine of the scenes before skipping town the next year to work on Orvieto's Duomo. Antonio Bazzi arrived in 1505 and finished the cycle by 1508 in his own inimitable style. Bazzi was known as "Il Sodoma," a derogatory nickname that Vasari suggests was due to Bazzi's predilection for young men. Sodoma was married at least three times, however, and may have had in the neighborhood of 30 children. On the third, or west, wall are the Signorellis. Scene 20, *Benedict Sending Mauro to France and Placido to Sicily,* is an interlude by Il Riccio. Scenes 21 to 28, starting with *Fiorenzo's Death,* are by Signorelli (his last work, no. 29, was destroyed when a door was installed). Sodoma did most of the rest of the painting in this part of the monastery, including the grotesques and monotone details on the pilasters between the scenes and two fine separate frescoes: a small *Christ at the Column* and *St. Benedict Confers the Rule on the Olivetans,* both in the passage leading from the church. Monte Oliveto is open daily from 9:15am to noon and 3:15 to 5:45pm (until 5pm from the last Sun in Oct to the last Sun in Mar). Admission is free.

Tips Wine Cities Website

Montalcino and dozens of other cities in Tuscany are part of the National Association of Wine Cities, whose website, **www.cittadelvino.com**, contains a database of every denomination of wine in Italy, as well as a calendar of events and a list of publications for wine-road travelers.

The SS451 leads 9km (5½ miles) to the Via Cassia SS2 and **Buonconvento** (tourist info at the museum). Hidden within a ring of industrial suburbs are Buonconvento's medieval core and an excellent small museum of Sienese-school art, the **Museo d'Arte Sacra,** Via Soccini 18 (✆ **0577-807-181**), with works by Duccio, Sano di Pietro, Andrea di Bartolo, and Matteo di Giovanni. It's open Easter through October Tuesday through Sunday from 10:30am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm, November through Easter Saturday and Sunday from 10:30am to 1pm and 3 to 5pm. Admission is 3.10€. Before leaving town, drop by the 14th-century **Santi Pietro e Paolo,** where you'll see a pair of *Madonna and Child* paintings, one with saints by Pietro di Francesco degli Orioli and one without by Matteo di Giovanni. Just south of Buonconvento on the right is the turnoff for Montalcino.

1 MONTALCINO: HOME OF THE MIGHTY BRUNELLO

42km (26 miles) S of Siena; 112km (70 miles) S of Florence; 190km (118 miles) NW of Rome

Montalcino presents a mighty image on the approach from the valley—a walled town set very high on a tall hill with the spires of medieval buildings sprouting from the middle and a glowering fortress at one end. Up close, the town becomes a much smaller, meeker place, but the precipitous medieval alleyways and stone buildings make it a day-trip delight, and the views of the valleys from which you just ascended are magnificent from this height.

Paleolithic tribes and the Etruscans set up camp here, but it wasn't until the Roman era that a permanent settlement formed. By the Middle Ages, Montalcino was a bustling town and a defensive center for the surrounding farming community. Although it divided itself into four minuscule neighborhood *contrade* after the Sienese model, Montalcino was initially allied to Florence and at odds with its northerly neighbor Siena. After several skirmishes, though, the Sienese took over Montalcino in the 13th century. By 1462, the town had grown large enough to be declared a city, and in 1555 its now-cozy relations with Siena led it to harbor the 700 Sienese families who refused to submit to the Medici when Florence defeated Siena. The exiles set up the defiant "Republic of Siena at Montalcino," which lasted 4 years until the Medici grand dukes finally laid their hands on both the Sienese and Montalcino through treaty. Montalcino's loyalty is honored to this day—their standard-bearer rides in pride of place at the front of Siena's annual pre-Palio parade.

Montalcino's Medici-induced slide into obscurity began to turn around in the 1960s, when the world discovered that the sangiovese grosso grapes—known as "Brunello" to the locals, who had been quietly experimenting with them for about a century—made one of the finest red wines in all Italy. Today, with an annual production of more than 3.5 million bottles of **Brunello di Montalcino**—and 3 million of its lighter-weight cousin Rosso di Montalcino—Montalcino has become a rather well-to-do town. Also, don't miss the white dessert wine called Moscadello or the fine honey.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** The bus is better, as few trains on the Siena-Grosseto line stop at either Torrenieri or Sant'Angelo (both about 10km/6¼ miles away), from which there are a few buses to connect you with Montalcino. One shining exception to this rule is the **TrenoNatura** (✆ **0577-280-551;** www.terresiena.it; 28€, reservations required), a vintage steam engine that departs from Siena three times a day and takes

wine buffs to the Torrenieri station, continues to Monte Amiata, and then completes the loop. The first train leaves Siena at 8:30am, and the last leaves Torrenieri at 5:46pm. Bring a bicycle if you like.

By Car Montalcino is about 8km (5 miles) off the SS2 Via Cassia running between Siena and Rome. There is a small parking lot next to the fortress just inside the walls. If it's full, you can also find some parking just outside the walls.

By Bus There are roughly hourly **TRA-IN** buses from Siena (1 hr.); a few require a change at **Buonconvento. SITA** (✆ **05-547-821** in Florence; www.sitabus.it) makes two runs daily from Rome. The **bus terminus** in Montalcino is Piazza Cavour; buy your tickets at Bar Prato on the piazza.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** (✆/fax **0577-849-331**) is across from the entrance to the Palazzo Comunale at Via Costa Municipio 8. It's open Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 1pm and 2 to 6pm.

FESTIVALS Celebrating the opening of hunting season is the **Torneo della Apertura della Caccia,** held on the second Sunday in August. The events, dating from the 14th century, include archery competitions and lots of food as everybody struts in medieval costume. The residents dust off those outfits again for a similar but much larger festival called the **Sagra del Tordo** ★, held the last weekend in October. It kicks off at noon on Saturday with an archery competition pitting Montalcino's four *contrade* against one another. Parades, pageantry, and plenty of food follow for the next 2 days. The *festa* honors the lowly thrush, hundreds of which meet their maker on huge spits over open fires during the weekend. The fowl is accompanied by plates piled high with *pici* pasta and Brunello to wash it all down. Friday is **market** day on Viale della Libertà.

STROLLING THROUGH MONTALCINO

The dominant feature of Montalcino's skyline is the 14th-century Sienese **fortress** ★★, expanded in 1571 by Duke Cosimo I. The inside is now a pretty little park; duck through the archway into a small garden planted with ilex trees on a plateau with a view of the valley. Inside the old keep is the **Enoteca La Fortezza** wine shop (✆ **0577-849-211;** www.enotecalafortezza.it; see "Sampling the *Vino,*" below), where you can buy tickets to climb up onto the ramparts for panoramic views of the Val d'Orcia and Vallombrone. In one of the castle rooms, the last battle standard of the Sienese Republic is preserved. April through October, the fortress is open daily from 9am to 8pm; November through March, hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 9am to 6pm. Admission is 3.50€ adults and 1.50€ children under 12. A 6€ cumulative ticket also gets you into the Museo Civico e Diocesano, but you must buy it at the museum (see below).

Walk down Via dell'Oca and turn left on Via Panfilo to **Piazza Garibaldi,** with the small 11th-century church of **Sant'Egidio.** Inside is a frescoed triptych by Francesco Cozza and a *Madonna and Saints* by Luca di Tommé.

Out the other end of the piazza, Costa del Municipio leads past the entrance to the **Palazzo Comunale** (1292), which houses a small display on the history of Brunello and other Montalcino wines and the headquarters of the wine consortium. The elongated front of the *palazzo* on Piazza del Popolo, sporting the mayoral coat of arms of past *podestà,* looks far too narrow to stand. It's nothing more than a slender clock tower with a loggia off the left side. On the long piazza you'll find a 14th- to 15th-century **loggia** and the 19th-century cafe **Fiaschetteria Italiana** ★ (see "Sampling the *Vino,*" below), focal point of the evening *passeggiata* up Via Mazzini.

Sampling the Vino

Brunello di Montalcino exudes the smell of mossy, damp earth and musky berries. It tastes of dark, sweet fruits and dry vanilla. It's also the backbone of Montalcino's economy. As the deep ruby liquid mellows to garnet, the wine takes on its characteristic complex and slightly tannic aspect. Brunello is one of Italy's mightiest reds, a brawny wine that can tackle the rarest *bistecca alla fiorentina*. It's also the perfect accompaniment to game, pungent mushroom sauces, and aged cheeses.

Though Montalcino has produced wine for centuries, its flagship Brunello is a recent development, born out of late-19th-century sangiovese experiments to concentrate the grapes through very strict cultivation methods. By the 1960s, Brunello was becoming known as one of Italy's finest reds, and it has found its way to discriminating cellars around the world—Queen Elizabeth II is fond of a quaff, and President Reagan toasted his 1980 inauguration with a Brunello. Most Brunellos are drinkable after about 4 to 5 years in the bottle, and the complex ones are best after 10 years or so (few last beyond 30). Bottles of '98 and '99 are good, and 2000 and 2001 are excellent. Heavy rains in 2002 hurt that harvest, and 2003 was a scorching summer throughout Europe, and so producers like to talk about how that translates into low-quantity but high-quality grapes. As a general rule, 2003 did not produce the best wines in Tuscany. On the other hand, the 2004 vintage is considered very good, although 2007, by many reviews, is shaping up to be even better. Montalcino's **wine consortium** (✆ **0577-848-246;** www.consorziobrunellodimontalcino.it) is inside the Palazzo Comunale at Costa del Municipio 1, and staff members are happy to answer your questions and provide you with information on area *vini*.

In town, the best informal introduction to the deep-red liquid is a few hours spent at the **Enoteca La Fortezza** (✆ **0577-849-211;** www.enotecalafortezza.it), inside the fortress. The stone-and-brick vaults are filled with excellent wines and grappa, as well as prosciutto, salami, pecorino cheese, biscotti, and Montalcino's famous honey. The enoteca came under new management in 2003, but rest assured: The new staff is as adept as the old one at helping you and the wine get better acquainted, and glasses start at 1.50€. The Brunello generally starts at 3.50€. The enoteca is open the same hours as the fortress (p. 319).

On the town's main square, the 19th-century cafe **Fiaschetteria Italiana,** Piazza del Popolo 6 (✆ **0577-849-043**), offers more imbibing pleasure, open Friday through Wednesday from 7:30am to midnight. A glass of wine ranges anywhere from 4€ to 12€.

If you prefer to go right to the source, the following Brunello wine estates welcome visitors. **Poggio Antico** (✆ **0577-848-044;** fax 0577-846-563;

www.poggioantico.com) is 4km (2½ miles) south of town along the Grosseto road (right-hand road at the fork). Its Brunellos, especially the *riserva,* are consistently voted among the top 100 wines in the world by leading oenological magazines—and they often hold the number-one spot among Brunello wines. Their elegant and velvety elixir deserves to be at least one of the bottles you bring home. *Cantina* visits should be reserved at least a day in advance (more in summer), but the direct-sales store is open daily to drop-ins from 8am to 5pm. Poggio Antico also has an excellent restaurant (p. 324).

Banfi (✆ **0577-816-001** or 0577-840-111; www.castellobanfi.com) above Sant'Angelo Scalo, 10km (6¼ miles) south of town (right-hand road at the fork), is part of an American-owned exporting empire, an enormous ultramodern vineyard with a massive *cantine.* The *riserva* wines are precisely balanced Brunellos. Banfi also makes Moscadello and various non-Montalcino wines and runs a small museum (2.50€ admission) on the history of glass and wine in its medieval castle. This place has a highly developed commercial end. The huge enoteca sells books, ceramics, packaged local foods, and all the Banfi wines. This is also where you go for tastings; your first glass is free, but after that prices range from 2€ to 6€ per glass. The enoteca and museum are open daily from 10am to 7pm (until 6pm Oct–Mar). Call ahead for an appointment (best at least a week in advance) to take a free guided tour of the cellars at 4pm Monday through Friday. They also run an *osteria* for light snacks and a *ristorante* for pricey full meals with multiple wine tastings. In 2005, the estate opened a group of luxury villas called **Il Borgo** (✆ **0577-877-700;** www.castellobanfiil borgo.com; 400€ double, 860€ suite), which is a good way to fully experience the castle's Michelin-rated restaurant, where 5-course tasting menus and wine sampling costs 140€ per person.

Fattoria dei Barbi (✆ **0577-841-111;** fax 0577-841-112; www.fattoriadei barbi.it), 5km (3 miles) south of town on the road to Castelnuovo (middle road at the fork), makes a mean Brunello di Montalcino *riserva,* Vigna del Fiore. The *cantina* also sells Moscadello and vin santo and is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 1pm and 2:30 to 6pm, Saturday and Sunday from 2:30 to 6pm. The slightly refined taverna (✆ **0577-841-200**) serves good traditional meals off a seasonally changing menu using their own farm products (olive oil, cheeses, and, of course, wine) at a middlin' price, open Thursday through Tuesday from 12:30 to 2:30pm and 7:30 to 9:30pm. Free *cantina* tours and wine tastings are given Monday through Friday hourly at 11am, noon, and 3, 4, and 5pm. You can buy their delicious cheeses weekdays from 9am to noon and 1:30 to 5pm (closed 4pm Fri).

A stepped street leads uphill from Piazza del Popolo to the 14th-century church of **Sant'Agostino,** rarely open these days, but which has lots of frescoes covering the walls, including the *Life of St. Augustine* by Bartolo di Fredi in the choir.

Just to the right of the church, in its former convent, is the **Museo Civico e Diocesano** (✆ **0577-846-014**), a good little grouping of 12th- to 16th-century Sienese paintings and sculpture. The most important works are some 12th-century illuminated Bibles; *Madonna and Child* paintings by Luca di Tommé, Simone Martini, Vecchietta, and Sano di Pietro; and several good Bartolo di Fredi works. There are also 15th-century glazed terra cottas by Andrea della Robbia and a passel of 14th- and 15th-century polychrome wood statues in excellent repair, including some by Francesco di Valdambrino and Domenico Cafaggi. The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday: January through March from 10am to 1pm and 2 to 5:40pm and April through December from 10am to 5:50pm (might close 1–2pm if staffing is short). Admission is 4.50€ adults and 3€ under 12; or you can buy a 6€ cumulative ticket that also gets you into the fortress (see above).

A ROMANESQUE ABBEY NEAR MONTALCINO

In a pocket-size vale bounded by low green hills, the Cistercian abbey of **Sant'Antimo** ★★★ (✆ **0577-835-659;** www.antimo.it) rises amid olive groves. Its church is one of the most astoundingly intact Romanesque countryside temples left in Tuscany, but its monastery is mostly ruins. Since 1992, a handful of French monks have inhabited what's left, and the church interior echoes with their haunting Gregorian chant throughout the day. The first stone was supposedly laid on the order of Charlemagne in A.D. 781, but the current structure dates from 1118. Its amalgamated Lombard-French architecture has produced a building of singular beauty, with strong, simple lines of pale yellow and white stone. The fabric of the walls is studded with recycled materials, some inscribed and many with fantastic medieval (and even a few Roman) reliefs. A cypress is challenging the 30m (98-ft.) bell tower to a height contest. One side of the campanile supports a medieval relief of the *Madonna and Child,* and the carvings of animals and geometric designs around the doors are worth study. Before going inside, walk around to the back; at the base of the apse is a small, round window through which you can glimpse a bit of the 9th-century crypt underneath, part of the original church.

The honey-colored travertine interior of the church, with its second-level women's gallery adapted from Byzantine models, is filled even on cloudy days with a warm, diffuse light. Two Lombard lions, now toothless with age, once flanked the entrance but have been moved inside. Several of the column capitals have intricate alabaster carvings. One on the right aisle tells the story of *Daniel in the Lion's Den,* and, like the other alabaster capitals and column bases here, glows as if lit from within when sunlight streams into the church. You can descend to the cramped crypt, where you'll find a *Pietà* fresco, and spend hours admiring the carvings—a plethora of eagles and evangelists, sheep and medieval Christs—throughout the church. Behind the high altar and its 13th-century wooden crucifix is an unusual three-apsed ambulatory that gets plenty of sun—your best bet for seeing that luminous effect on the alabaster column bases and capitals. Ask the guy at the postcard desk *"Posso vedere la sagrestia per piacere?"* (*Poh*-so ved-*air*-ay la sah-gres-*tee*-yah pair pee-ah-*chair*-ay) for a peek into the sacristy and its cartoonish 15th-century frescoes by Giovanni di Asciano on the *Life of St. Benedict,* interesting mainly for their earthy details and the animal extras that often seem wonderfully oblivious to the holy events happening around them. (One scene features a blatantly amorous pig couple.) Sant'Antimo is open to visitors Monday through Saturday from 10:30am to 12:30pm and 3 to 6:30pm, Sunday from 9:15 to 10:30am and 3 to 6pm. Admission is free.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel dei Capitani ★ In 1996, Letizia and Roberto Fioravanti opened Montalcino's first new hotel in years, offering friendly service at a comfortable inn of modest refinement. The building probably served the Sienese army as a refuge from the Florentines during their incessant wars in the Middle Ages. The halls are carpeted, the staircase is travertine, and the rooms are mainly rustic in style, with wood-beamed ceilings and terracotta floors. Most are furnished with the wares of the artisan wood workshops of Arezzo. The four mini-apartments, with lofted master bedrooms and a pair of futon chairs in the living space, are great for families. A drop-dead view of the Val d'Orcia and Val d'Arbia is visible from about half the rooms, the breakfast space, and the gravel-covered terrace with a tiny pool out back. The Capitani is located in the heart of Montalcino's pedestrian zone, making for a quiet stay.

Via Lapini 6 (down the hill from Piazza Cavour), 53024 Montalcino (SI). ✆ **0577-847-227.** Fax 0577-847-239. www.deicapitani.it. 29 units. 115€ double; 145€ triple; 180€ mini-apartment. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking in small lot next door or public lots nearby. Closed Jan–Feb. **Amenities:** Bike rental; concierge; outdoor pool (open May–Sept, weather permitting); room service (breakfast and bar); Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Hotel Il Giglio ★ (Value) Several years ago, when this hotel in the center of town was taken over by a new family, the tired old *pensione* was transformed into a board-rated three-star hotel—serious competition for the Hotel dei Capitani (see above). The hotel sports a rustic theme (beamed ceilings and tiled floors) in slightly smaller rooms. The best part is the view (from eight of the rooms) of the cliff-clinging houses of Montalcino, to your left, and the rumpled patchwork of green valleys stretching out below. Il Giglio has a pair of slightly larger rooms, each with a futon chair, good for families. The family also runs a Tuscan trattoria. If they run out of room, the owners will send you to their five rental rooms or one efficiency apartment in the annex on a medieval street around the corner. Some of these have painted stuccoed ceilings, but there are no phones (hence the lower price).

Via Soccorso Saloni 5, 53024 Montalcino (SI). ✆/fax **0577-848-167.** www.gigliohotel.com. 17 units. 122€ double in main hotel; 135€ double with terrace; 75€ double in the annex. Breakfast included in hotel rooms, 16€ for annex rooms. AE, MC, V. Parking in public lots (Fortezza). Closed Jan 7–28. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; concierge; room service. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, kitchenette (only in *dependence* apt), minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Pick up excellent pastries at **Mariuccia ★**, Piazza del Popolo 29 (✆ **0577-849-319**), where since 1935 they've turned out homemade *torrone, panforte,* Sienese cookies, and the formidable *cioccolatoni di Mariuccia* (giant chocolate truffles filled variously with cream, caramel, coffee, grappa, or walnut cream). The *baccio di Montalcino* is best described as a semi-frozen "death, burial, and several weeks of mourning" by chocolate.

Il Pozzo (Finds) SOUTHERN TUSCAN This is the definition of so-called *cucina casalinga,* or "housewife cuisine," where Paola and her sisters serve up homemade *pinci* and *ribollita* in a simple and cozy atmosphere. Although the ragù and porcini sauces are not particularly intricate, they are deeply satisfying. Locals flock here for the *fiorentina* steak, enjoyed with an honestly priced Brunello. If you're only interested in wine tasting, try the expertly run enoteca next door, **Enoteca Il Leccio** (✆ **0577-843-016**), which moved here from downtown Montalcino in 1994.

Piazza Castello Sant'Angelo in Colle (a hill town south of Montalcino). ✆ **0577-844-015.** Reservations not necessary. Primi 5€–9€; secondi 7€–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 12:30–2pm and 7:30–9:30pm.

Ristorante di Poggio Antico ★★ TUSCAN The most refined dining around Montalcino is offered in these converted stalls surrounded by the vineyards of an award-winning wine estate. Huge windows fill it with light, and designer halogen lamps pop out from between the wood beams of the ceiling. Bouquets of fresh wildflowers sit on each table, the staff is informative, and the tiny flavored rolls are freshly baked. The best deal is the *menù degustazione,* small samplings of the restaurant's specialties, including a ravioli stuffed with wild boar and a selection of desserts. The *parfait di fegatini in salsa di moscadello* (mousse of chicken livers prepared as foie gras in a sweet sauce of reduced Moscadello wine) is excellent, and the *ravioli alle erbette* (ricotta-and-herb ravioli in butter sauce with grated black truffles) are fine as well. For a second course, try the *piccione disossato con vin santo* (deboned pigeon with a sweet liqueur) or the *tagliata alle erbette* (thick short strips of prime beef).

Loc. i Poggi (just south of town). ✆ **0577-849-200.** www.poggioantico.com. Reservations highly recommended. Primi 10€–25€; secondi 20€–36€; *menù degustazione* without wine 35€–46€. MC, V. Apr–Oct daily 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–9:30pm; Nov–Mar Tues–Sat 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–9:30pm, Sun 12:30–2pm. Closed Mon in winter. Closed Jan 8–Feb 4. Follow the Grosseto road 3.6km (2¼ miles) south of Montalcino to the turnoff at the signpost on the right.

Trattoria Sciame SOUTHERN TUSCAN You'll be lucky to wrest one of the seven tables (crammed into Sciame's small, modern dining room) away from the devoted locals who fill it with clamorous chatter almost every night. The food here is firmly *cucina casalinga.* You needn't decide on an appetizer because everything is gathered together in the *antipastone misto.* Top honors go to both the *pinci al cinghiale* (fat spaghetti in a sauce of tomatoes and wild boar) and the *zuppa di fagioli* (a bean-and-cabbage soup poured over bread, with a red onion slice over it). Afterward try a *pollo arrosto* (roast chicken or guinea hen) or the *scaloppina agli asparagi* (veal scallop with wild asparagus). For dessert, order the *cantucci e ossi di morti con moscadello* (almond cookies and brittle, hollow "bones of the dead" cookies with sweet white dessert wine).

Via Ricasoli 9 (a block from the fortress). ✆ **0577-848-017.** Reservations strongly recommended. Primi 5.50€–8€; secondi 5.50€–11€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2:30pm and 7–9:30pm. Closed Feb and last week of July.

EN ROUTE TO PIENZA

The Via Cassia SS2 meets the SS146 toward Pienza at **San Quirico d'Orcia;** the tourist office is at Via Dante Alighieri 33, 53027 San Quirico d'Orcia (✆ **0577-897-211**), open April through October (and Dec 19–Jan 6) daily from 10am to 1pm and 3:30 to 7pm. This farming village with its 12th-century Romanesque **Collegiata** ★ makes a good half-hour diversion. The travertine church has three elaborate medieval portals. The front entrance is the oldest and most intricate, a Lombard-style affair with animal heads as capitals, a receding stack of carved arches, friezes of dueling fantasy animals, and columns made of four slender poles knotted in the middle. To the right side is the second portal, perhaps by Giovanni Pisano, with telamon columns posing atop lions' backs. Another kneeling telamon supports a nearby window arch. The smaller, final portal dates to 1298. Inside is a Sano di Pietro polyptych (any coin in the box will light it up) and a set of 15th-century intarsia choir stalls by Antonio Barili that were originally set up in a chapel of Siena's Duomo. Down the block in the main square is the entrance to the **Horti Leonini,** a Renaissance Italianate garden (1580) with geometric box-hedge designs and shady holm oaks, originally a resting spot for holy pilgrims on the Francigena road from France to Rome. It's open daily from sunrise to sunset.

Five kilometers (3 miles) south on SS2 is **Bagno Vignoni** ★, little more than a group of houses—a few of them fine spa hotels—surrounding one of the most memorable *piazze* in Tuscany. The Medici harnessed the naturally hot sulfur springs percolating from the ground by building a giant outdoor pool that fills the main square, lined with stone walls and finished with a pretty loggia at one end. Even St. Catherine of Siena, when not performing religious and bureaucratic miracles, relaxed here with a sulfur cure. Alas, swimming is no longer allowed on the main square, but there's a modern pool below. To see the springs in their more natural state, take the second turnoff on the curving road into town and pull over when you see the tiny sulfurous mountain on your right. The waters bubble out here in dozens of tiny rivulets, gathering in a pool at the bottom, and there's a fairy-tale view, especially on misty days, of the Aldobrandeschi **Rocca d'Orcia.**

Eighteen kilometers (11 miles) farther down the SS2, in a land filled with dramatically eroded swathes of *Crete,* **Radicofani** glowers from atop its basalt outcropping; the tourist office is at Renato Magi 25, 53040 Radicofani (✆ **0578-55-684** or 0578-55-905; www.comune.radicofani.siena.it; open July–Aug daily 9:30am–1pm and 3:30–7:30pm; Sept–June Sun only, same hours). The remains of the **Rocca fortress** (✆ **0578-55-867**) are surrounded by a medieval warren of streets and houses with outdoor stairs in stony gray basalt; all were seriously damaged by explosions and earthquakes in the 18th century. The castle, built by Hadrian IV—the only English pope—is most famous as the base of operations of the "gentle outlaw" Ghino di Tacco, immortalized by both Dante in his *Inferno* (*Purgatorio,* Canto VI) and Boccaccio in the *Decameron* (day 10, tale 2). Ghino was something of a Robin Hood figure, robbing from the rich to give to the poor—and taking a hefty share himself. It's open November through March Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 5pm, April through October daily from 10am to 7pm (until midnight July–Aug). Admission is 3€.

There are some **della Robbia terra cottas** in Radicofani's churches of San Pietro and Sant'Agata, and the views from Radicofani of the surrounding rugged farmscape can be especially evocative when there's a morning mist melting shadows into soft relief. The locals call the region the Mare di Sassi ("Seas of Stones")—an assessment with which Dickens, Montaigne, and other grand tourists heartily agreed. Those intrepid early travelers all stayed at the **Palazzo la Posta,** a hotel converted from Grand Duke Ferdinando I's hunting lodge along the road south out of town down to Via Cassia. The 1584 structure was designed by Buontalenti, but these days it sadly crumbles by the roadside across from a 1603 **Medici fountain.**

2 PIENZA: THE IDEAL RENAISSANCE CITY

24km (15 miles) E of Montalcino; 55km (34 miles) SE of Siena; 125km (78 miles) S of Florence; 177km (110 miles) NW of Rome

In the midst of the rolling farmland of Tuscany's Val d'Orcia, on a tiny bump of a hill, the village of Pienza sits as a testament to one man's ambition and ego. At the height of the 15th-century Renaissance, humanist Pope Pius II, with the help of architect Bernardo Rossellino, converted the tiny village in which he had been born into the ideal Renaissance city. The "city" began and ended with the new central square and its buildings—the plan to cover the surrounding area with a grid of streets never materialized. The village of Pienza, however, retains its remarkable city-size piazza, one of the grandest achievements of Renaissance architecture and the only intact example of a city-planning scheme from

 the era. Director Franco Zeffirelli was so taken by the village's look he dethroned Verona as the city of the Montagues and Capulets and filmed his *Romeo and Juliet* in Pienza. Pienza was also used in the Oscar-winning epic *The English Patient.*

But for all Pius's dreams, Pienza never became more than a village. Today, its 2,500 inhabitants put up with the stream of day-trippers with good humor, lots of craft stands, and a surfeit of health-food stores. The main drag, **Corso Rossellino,** goes in one end of town and out the other in less than 2 minutes at a stroll. There are a handful of spacious side streets within Pienza's proud little walls, and modest new developments surround the burg on three sides (the fourth is saved for a view). Pienza will take no more than half a day in your schedule, time enough to admire the palaces, Sienese art collection, and Duomo at the town's perfect core; nibble on the famous goat cheeses and honey; and take a short walk to the odd, isolated medieval churches in the countryside outside the walls.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** There's no convenient train station. You can take the main **Rome-Florence** line to Chiusi/Chianciano Terme, about 30km (19 miles) away, and from there an LFI bus to Montepulciano, where you can change for another bus to Pienza.

By Car Pienza is on the SS146 between San Quirico d'Orcia and Chiusi. From Montalcino, take the road toward Torrenieri and the SS2; take the SS2 south 7km (4⅓ miles) to San Quirico d'Orcia, where the SS146 toward Chianciano/Chiusi runs for 10km (6¼ miles) to Pienza. From Siena, take the SS2 south to the SS146 (or the SS148 south through Asciano and Monte Oliveto Maggiore). You can park along the streets surrounding the city walls.

By Bus **TRA-IN** buses run from **Siena** (five daily; 80 min.) and **Montepulciano** (10 daily; 20 min.) In Pienza, buy tickets at the little Edicola Libreria at Piazza Dante 8.

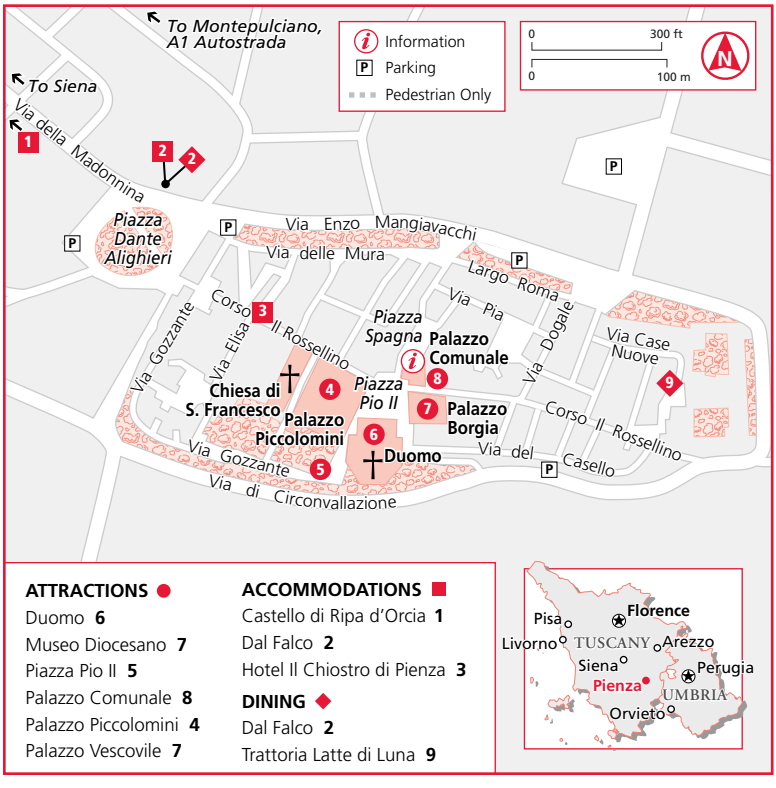
VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** is under the portico of the Palazzo Pubblico on Piazza Pio II, Corso Rossellino 59, 53026 Pienza (✆/fax **0578-749-071;** open daily 9:30am–1pm and 3–6:30pm). You can also find more about the city online at **www.pienza.info**.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS On the first Sunday in September, Pienza celebrates its peerless pecorino goat cheese in the **Fiera di Cacio** with a low-key medieval festival. It also tries to keep current by sponsoring **modern art exhibits** April through October. **Market** day is Friday.

PONTIFICAL EGOMANIA

When local boy Enea Silvio Piccolomini was elevated from cardinal to Pope Pius II in 1458, he decided to play God with his hometown of Corsignano and rebuild the village based on High Renaissance ideals. The man he hired for the job was Bernardo Rossellino, a protégé of Florentine architect Leon Battista Alberti. Rossellino leveled the old center of town and built in its place **Piazza Pio II** ★★, a three-dimensional realization of the "Ideal City" paintings by such artists as Raphael and Piero della Francesca.

The square is flanked by the cathedral and three palaces: one for the government, one for the bishop, and one (of course) for Pius II. The pope liked the result so much he felt the village needed a new name for its new look, and he modestly decided to rename it after himself: Pienza ("Pio's Town"). As with modern big productions, Rossellino's civic face-lift came in both late and way over budget. (He fudged the account books so Pius wouldn't realize how deep the architect was dipping into the papal purse for funding.) Pius, aware



of the duplicity but still immensely pleased with his new burg, reportedly reduced Rossellino to tears by saying, "You did well, Bernardo, in lying to us about the expense. . . . Your deceit has built these glorious structures, which are praised by all except the few consumed with envy." When the pope went south to try to drum up support for a Crusade to the Holy Land, he left a papal bull that said, in refined Latin, "Don't touch anything until I get back." He died in 1464, trying to raise his army in Ancona, and Pienza dutifully kept the cathedral and palaces exactly as Pius II left them in the 15th century—the only Renaissance town center in Italy to survive the centuries perfectly intact.

Pius II liked the German churches he'd seen in his travels, so he had Rossellino grace one side of the piazza with a syncretic **Duomo** ★★ whose Renaissance facade hides a Gothic interior. The gigantic coat of arms gloating above the rose window is that of Pius II's Piccolomini family. Not above letting everyone know who was financing all this, Pius II had the family *cinque lune* (five moons) device repeated more than 400 times throughout the church. The apse is set right on the cliff's edge so that sunlight can stream through its tall Gothic windows unencumbered by surrounding buildings, making this by far the best-lit church in Italy. Alas, the site has proved none too stable, and dangerous

cracks have appeared in the apse fabric. With no good way yet found to shore up the structure, the altar end of the church threatens to slide down the slope without warning.

The **five altarpieces** inside were painted specifically for the cathedral by Sienese masters (1461–63), and they make a good study of how the mid-15th-century artists worked a theme: Four of the five paintings are *Madonna and Child with Saints* (the other is an *Assumption*). First, on your right, is Giovanni di Paolo's take, where angels cluster around Mary to coo at the baby. A young Matteo di Giovanni rendered the scene next, his Mary accompanied by Saints Catherine of Siena, Matthew, Bartholomew, and Lucia (the last carrying an awful lot of her martyrs' eyeballs on a plate). The following chapel has a marble **tabernacle** by Bernardo Rossellino (there's a bit of St. Andrew's head inside), and after the choir stalls comes Vecchietta's *Annunciation,* in which it takes quite a number of angels to boost Mary up to Heaven. The Duomo is open daily from 7am to 1pm and 2:30 to 7pm. Admission is free.

Coming out of the Duomo, you'll see the travertine portico of the **Palazzo Comunale,** also by Rossellino and another odd hybrid—this time Renaissance architecture masquerading as a medieval Tuscan town hall. To your right is the **Palazzo Vescovile,** built by Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, who later became Pope Alexander VI. It's the new home of the **Museo Diocesano** (✆ **0578-749-905**), entered at Corso Rossellino 30, which collects treasures of Sienese art from the churches of Pienza and small towns in the area. One of its most important works is the early-14th-century Cape of Pius II, a silk papal garment embroidered with gold, saintly portraits, and colorful scenes from the Life of the Virgin. The 14th-century school of Bartolo di Fredi produced a portable triptych that reads like a comic book, and the master himself is responsible for the *Madonna della Misericordia* (1364), in which Mary protects a kaleidoscope of tiny saints under her shawl. Il Vecchietta's altarpiece of the *Madonna and Child with Saints, Annunciation* lunette, and predella show off the peculiar grace and intent perspective of his flowing lines. From March 15 to November 1, the museum is open Wednesday through Monday from 10am to 1pm and 3 to 6:30pm; November through mid-March, it's open weekends only from 10am to 1pm and 3 to 6pm. Admission is 4.10€ adults and 2.60€ ages 6 to 12.

Across the piazza, past Rossellino's Renaissance well, is the architect's finest palace (Pius II's Pienza digs). The **Palazzo Piccolomini** ★★ (✆ **0578-748-503;** www.palazzopiccolominipienza.it) was inspired by Alberti's Palazzo Rucellai in Florence, but Rossellino added an Italianate hanging garden out the left side of the inner courtyard. Pius particularly liked his small patch of box hedges backed by a triple-decker loggia. It's perched on the edge of Pienza's tiny bluff and offers postcard views across the rolling cultivated hills of the wide Val d'Orcia to Monte Amiata. Half-hourly tours take you through the pope's private apartments and out on the loggia to see the gardens Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 12:30pm and 3 to 6pm (last tour leaves 5:30pm). Admission is 7€ adults and 5€ students. Members of the Piccolomini family lived here until the 1960s but kept the Renaissance look in the pope's bedroom, the library, and a heavily armed great hall.

SHOPPING FOR WINE & CHEESE

Even though it's far tinier than neighboring hill towns, Pienza has about the same number of wine shops. The main difference is that these stores aren't tied to a single estate or producer (in Montalcino and Montepulciano, most *enoteche* are thinly disguised branches of nearby vineyards). Here you can often get a more well-rounded tasting experience, plus less biased advice.

These shops—indeed, any food store in town—usually double as outlets for other regional specialties, including the king of all sheep cheeses, Pienza's own **pecorino** ★ (or *cacio*). You can get it *fresco* (fresh), *semistagionato* (partially aged), or *stagionato* (aged and suitable for grating, though it really needs a few extra years for that). Many *pecorini* are also dusted with ground materials to keep them soft and alter the taste slightly. Most popular are *cenerato* or *sottocenere* (an ash coating that's mainly a softening technique), *peperocinato* (hot peppers), and *tartufato* (truffles). A few producers even mix ingredients directly into the cheese (*tartufi* are a favorite), but others claim this mars the purity of the pecorino. Luckily, you can judge for yourself, as pecorino tasting is even more popular here than wine tasting. Two of the best places are **La Bottega del Cacio,** Corso Rossellino 66 (✆ **0578-748-713**), and the tiny **La Bottega del Naturista,** Corso Rossellino 16 (✆ **0578-748-760**).

On Corso Rossellino you'll find several ceramics stores and the showroom for **Biagiotti Fratelli** (✆ **0578-748-666**), a family of artisans who specialize in *ferro battuto* (cast iron). Its workshop and foundry is on SS146 on the way to Montepulciano. **Calzoleria Pientina,** down a side street at Via Gozzante 22 (✆ **0578-749-040** or 0578-748-195), handcrafts leather shoes to measure as well as bags and purses.

WHERE TO STAY

Dal Falco (✆ **0578-749-856** or 0578-748-551; www.nautilus-mp.com/tuscany/affitti/falco), recommended as a restaurant below, also rents six simple **rooms** upstairs, all with bathrooms and TVs (but no phones), for 62€ for a double or 78€ for the room with four beds, perfect for a family.

Castello di Ripa d'Orcia ★★ This oasis of tranquillity in the countryside occupies an early medieval castle mentioned as far back as 1218. The Piccolomini family—who've owned it since 1484—transformed several of the buildings into a hotel in 1990. The fairy-tale views sweep across forested hillsides (protected as a nature preserve) capped with other medieval castles, and the 10-minute dirt road that winds its way out here only enhances the feeling of solitude and a quiet retreat. In fact, they emphasize relaxation: The rooms, which require at least a 2-night stay, have phones but no TVs or other worldly temptations. The rooms are enormous country affairs, with antique furnishings and very comfy beds surrounded by thick stone walls and heavily beamed ceilings. There's a reading room with a fireplace and chessboard in the former granary, a quite good restaurant below the rooms (closed Mon), and they have installed an enoteca in the old *cantina.* The office will provide you with a map for hikes to sights in the surrounding area. Check-in is only from 2:30 to 5pm; call to arrange arrival at any other time.

Loc. Ripa d'Orcia (signposted from San Quirico), 53023 San Quirico d'Orcia (SI). ✆ **0577-897-376.** Fax 0577-898-038. www.castelloripadorcia.com. 6 units, 8 apts (sleep 2–4). 125€–168€ double (2-night min.); 550€–840€ per week apt for 2; 745€–1,150€ per week apt for 4. Rates for units (not apts) include breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. Closed Nov to mid-Mar. **Amenities:** Restaurant (closed Mon, dinner only); bike rental; concierge. *In room:* Hair dryer, kitchenette in apts, minibar.

Hotel Il Chiostro di Pienza ★ Even though this hotel in a 15th-century Franciscan convent faces no competition within Pienza's walls, the young staff still strives to maintain a high level of comfort with a keen attention to detail. The interior atmosphere—frescoes on a few walls, the enlarging of old monks' cells to make larger rooms—owes much to the building's 19th-century incarnation as a seminary, but most of the rooms feature modern touches like glass-topped tables and fabrics in bright colors. A few rooms in a wing of the hotel have a more antique charm, with simple peasant-style furniture

 made of old wood. The garden outside the breakfast room/restaurant (which offers fine Tuscan food) has sweeping views of the Val d'Orcia and tables for breakfast and bar service in summer. During the high season, light lunches are served under the arcades of the convent's cloister for those just passing through town.

Corso Rossellino 26, 53026, Pienza (SI). ✆ **0578-748-400.** Fax 0578-748-440. www.relaisilchiostrodi pienza.com. 37 units. 120€–160€ double; 220€–280€ suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Jan 5–Mar 15. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; concierge; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

The restaurant at **Hotel Il Chiostro di Pienza** (see above) serves fine Tuscan food.

Dal Falco TUSCAN In a modern building off the large piazza just outside Pienza's main gate, Dal Falco offers good cheap meals and good cheap rooms. You know this is a true local trattoria because there's a TV in the corner that's usually locked into a soccer match. *Pici* take the place of honor among the primi, and those made *all'aglione* have just the right amount of hot pepper in the tomato sauce. Grilled meats are the specialty secondo, and you can go for an *arrosto misto alle brace* or *pecorino alle brace* (grilling it sweetens the thick slab of sheep's cheese sandwiched between two slices of prosciutto). The house red is highly recommended.

Piazza Dante Alighieri 3. ✆/fax **0578-749-856** or 0578-748-551. www.ristorantedalfalco.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 5€–8€; secondi 7€–13€. AE, DC, MC, V. Sat–Thurs noon–3pm and 7–10pm. Closed 10 days in Nov, 10 in July, and 10 in Feb.

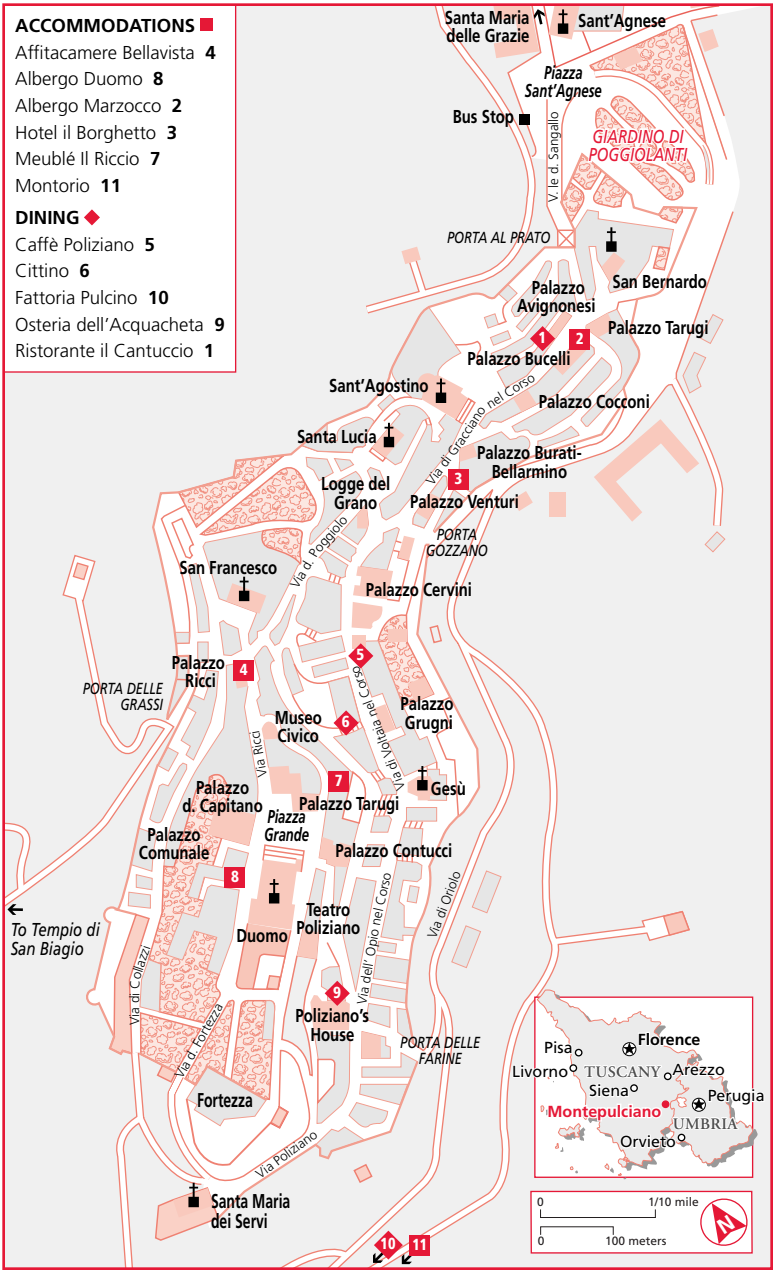
Trattoria Latte di Luna ★ Kids SOUTHERN TUSCAN This friendly, easygoing trattoria has captured a following of everyone from English art students to local *carabinieri.* To enter, thread through the wedge of outdoor tables and past the cage of Willy, a merlin who squawks *"Ciao"* and *"Come stai?"* at each passerby. Inside, brick and yellow stucco are the backdrop for your *pici all'aglione* (with spicy tomato-and-garlic sauce) or *zuppa di pane* (a local variant on *ribollita,* with more cabbage and no extra day of cooking, so the bread is still in slices). You can follow this up with *vitello girello* (thin slices of veal, with or without mushrooms) or the specialty, *maialino arrosto* (roast suckling pig). For dessert, the restaurant makes its own *semifreddi* flavored with seasonal ingredients.

Via San Carlo 2–4 (at Porta al Ciglio end of Corso Rossellino). ✆ **0578-748-606.** Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–10€; secondi 6€–13€. MC, V. Wed–Mon 12:20–2:20pm and 7:30–9:20pm. Closed Feb–Mar 15 and July.

3 MONTEPULCIANO & ITS NOBLE WINE

13km (8 miles) E of Pienza; 67km (41 miles) SE of Siena; 124km (77 miles) SE of Florence; 186km (116 miles) N of Rome

The biggest and highest of southern Tuscany's hill towns, steeply graded Montepulciano, with its medieval alleyways and plethora of Renaissance palaces and churches, has just enough city feel and tourist infrastructure to make it one of the best bases for visiting the region. The fields around the town produce a violet-scented, orange-speckled ruby wine called **Vino Nobile di Montepulciano.** This area has been known since at least the 8th century for its superior wine, and in the 17th century, when Francesco Redi wrote his *vino*-praising poem, *Bacchus in Tuscany,* he described the Noble Wine of Montepulciano as "the king of all wines." Vino Nobile is known as Tuscany's number-two red because it's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Sant'Agnese
Piazza Sant'Agnese
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GIARDINO DI POGGIOLANTI
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PORTA AL PRATO
San Bernardo
Palazzo Avignonesi
Palazzo Tarugi
Palazzo Bucelli
Sant'Agostino
Palazzo Cocconi
Via di Gracciano nel Corso
Santa Lucia
Palazzo Burati-Bellarmino
Logge del Grano
Palazzo Venturi
Via di Poggiolo
PORTA GOZZANO
San Francesco
Palazzo Cervini
Palazzo Ricci
PORTA DELLE GRASSI
Via Ricci
Via di Voltaia nel Corso
Museo Civico
Palazzo Grugni
Palazzo d. Capitano
Palazzo Tarugi
Gesù
Piazza Grande
Palazzo Comunale
Palazzo Contucci
To Tempio di San Biagio
Via di Collazzi
Duomo
Teatro Poliziano
Via dell' Opio nel Corso
Via di Ortolo
Poliziano's House
PORTA DELLE FARINE
Via di Fortezza
Fortezza
Via Poliziano
Santa Maria dei Servi
Florence
Pisa
Livorno
TUSCANY
Arezzo
Siena
Perugia
Montepulciano
UMBRIA
Orvieto
0
1/10 mile
0
100 meters

 slightly less beefy than Montalcino's Brunello. But for my money, its high quality and more mellow character make it a better all-around wine, good to age and save for special occasions but also to toss back with dinner or on a picnic.

The locals call themselves Poliziani after the Roman name for the town, and Poliziano is also the name the local classical scholar/humanist Angelo Ambrogini took when he went to Florence to hold discourses with Lorenzo de' Medici, tutor Lorenzo's sons, and write some of the most finely crafted Renaissance poetry of the era—some say his *Stanze per la Giostra* inspired Botticelli's mythological paintings, such as the *Birth of Venus* and *Allegory of Spring*.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** Use the Chiusi/Chianciano Terme station, whether you're on one of the 30 daily trains on the main **Rome-Florence** line (1 hr. 45 min.–2 hr. 45 min. from Florence) or the 16 trains on the secondary **Siena** line (1 hr. 15 min.). On the Siena line, don't get off at the stop called Montepulciano Staz. It's about as far from Montepulciano as the Chiusi stop, but local LFI buses to Montepulciano are coordinated with the trains only at the Chiusi station. You can also reach Montepulciano on the **TrenoNatura** (✆ **0577-207-413;** www.ferrovieturistiche.it), a recently launched vintage steam engine that transports tourists from Siena three times a day.

By Car From Siena, the quicker, more scenic route is south on the SS2 to San Quirico d'Orcia, where you get SS146 through Pienza to Montepulciano. From Florence, take the A1 south to the Chianciano Terme exit, and then take SS146 (direction Chianciano) for 18km (11 miles). As in most Tuscan hill towns, you will need to park at one of the public lots outside the historic center.

By Bus Five to eight **TRA-IN** buses (✆ **0577-204-111;** www.trainspa.it) run three to five times daily from Siena (1½ hr.) through Pienza (20 min.). **LFI** (✆ **0578-31-174**) buses run hourly from Chiusi (50 min.) through Chianciano Terme (25 min.), and twice daily from Florence to Bettole, where you transfer for the bus to Montepulciano (2 hr. total). There are three direct buses daily from Florence run by **Ferroviaria** lines (no phone).

In Montepulciano, buy **TRA-IN** and **Ferroviaria tickets** at Caffè Tubino, in the little parking lot just below Porta al Prato; get **LFI tickets** from the *tabacchi*/bar at Via Gracciano del Corso 36–38.

VISITOR INFORMATION Montepulciano's **tourist office** is tacked onto the right side of Sant'Agostino at Via Gracciano nel Corso 59a (✆ **0578-757-341;** www.comune.montepulciano.siena.it or www.prolocomontepulciano.it). It's open daily from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 3 to 6pm (until 8pm in summer); closed Sunday afternoons, but not for *riposo* in August.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS Poliziani in general are still adept wordsmiths and poets. The tradition of popular theater, which had its roots in extemporaneous performances on threshing-room floors, is carried on by a company of locals who write lyric plays on themes of religion, local legends, and chivalric romances. During the annual **Bruscello,** the townspeople perform their homespun musicals out on the *piazze* on the days surrounding August 15 (Assumption Day).

Poliziani also used to gallop horses pell-mell through the streets in an annual palio, but for safety reasons this has been reduced in modern times to the **Bravio della Botti** ★★. In this only slightly less perilous race, the locals don 14th-century costumes as teams from

the traditional *contrade* neighborhoods roll barrels weighing more than 79kg (175 lb.) toward the finish line. (Oh, yeah: It's uphill.) To witness the hernias and join in the pageantry before the race and the feast after, drop by town on the last Sunday in August.

This display of brute strength follows a few weeks of classic and modern music, dance, theater, and art in the **Cantiere Internazionale d'Arte.** Never ones to let everyone else do all the work, the Poliziani again turn up as key players in the festival, performing alongside the hundreds of international artists who attend. It starts in late July and lasts until mid-August.

Montepulciano's **market** day is Thursday.

A STROLL THROUGH MONTEPULCIANO

Outside the city walls below Porta al Prato squats the church of **Sant' Agnese,** with a striped 1935 facade surrounding a 14th-century portal. Inside, the first chapel on the right (hit the free light switch) has a frescoed *Madonna* by Simone Martini. Ring at the door to the right of the altar for access to the pretty cloister. Die-hards can make the 1.6km (1-mile) trek down Viale Calamandrei to **Santa Maria delle Grazie,** with *Mary of the Graces* and *Annunciation* figures by Giovanni della Robbia on the second altar and a rare late-16th-century organ with cypress wood pipes to which musicians from all over the world travel to play.

You'll see architecture by Antonio Sangallo the Elder before you even get inside the walls. **Porta al Prato** was reconstructed in the 1500s on his designs, and the Medici balls above the gate hint at Montepulciano's long association with Florence. One block up Via Gracciano nel Corso, a Florentine Marzocco lion reigns from atop a **column.** (It's a copy of a 1511 original, now in the museum.) To the right (no. 91) is the massive **Palazzo Avignonesi,** with grinning lions' heads, and across the street is the **Palazzo Tarugi** (no. 82). Both are by Vignola, the late Renaissance architect who designed Rome's Villa Giulia. A bit higher up on the left is the **Palazzo Cocconi** (no. 70) by Sangallo; the top floor looks out of place because it was added in the 1890s. In lieu of an Etruscan museum, Montepulciano has the **Palazzo Bucelli** (no. 73), the sort of place that makes archaeologists grit their teeth—the lower level of the facade is embedded with a patchwork of dozens of Etruscan reliefs and funerary urns. Most probably came from the Chiusi area, and they represent the collection of 18th-century antiquarian scholar and former resident Pietro Bucelli.

Next on the right is **Sant'Agostino** ★, with a facade by Michelozzo in a style mixing late Gothic with early Renaissance. The first altar on the right has a *Resurrection of Lazarus* by Alessandro Allori. Over the high altar is a wooden crucifix by Donatello, and, behind it, the entrance to the choir of an older church on this spot, with frescoes and an Antonio del Pollaiolo crucifix. On the right as you leave is a painted *Crucifixion* by Leonardo da Vinci's protégé Lorenzo di Credi. On Piazza Michelozzo in front of the church stands the **Torre di Pulcinella,** a short clock tower capped with a life-size Pulcinella, the black-and-white clown from Naples, who strikes the hours. It was left by a philandering Neapolitan bishop who was exiled here for his dalliances. At the next corner on the left is the **Palazzo Burati-Bellarmino** (no. 28), where the door is kept open so you can admire the Federico Zuccari frescoes on the ceiling inside.

The road now rises steeply to Piazza delle Erbe and the **Logge del Grano,** a *palazzo* designed in the 15th century by Vignola with an arcaded porch and the Medici balls prominent above the entrance. The main road (it takes a left here) now becomes Via di Voltaia nel Corso, passing the grandiose **Palazzo Cervini** (no. 21) on the left, probably designed by Antonio Sangallo the Younger (Sangallo the Elder's nephew) for Cardinal

Underground Tunnels & Noble Wine

The local wine consortium, the **Consorzio del Vino Nobile di Montepulciano** (www.consorziovinonobile.it and www.vinonobiledimontepulciano.it), has a **showroom and tasting center** in the Palazzo del Capitano on Piazza Grande where you can sample the wares of every single member (which means most Vino Nobile vineyards) Monday through Friday from 11am to 1pm and 4 to 7pm, Saturday from 11am to 3pm. There are also plans underway to convert more of the *palazzo* into a wine museum. However, many folks still like to visit the cellars of individual producers.

Montepulciano has more *enoteche* and *cantine* (wine cellars) than you can shake a wine bottle at, most offering the chance to sample local products: pecorino cheese, salami, honey, olive oil, and, of course, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. Many shops also let you descend into their *cantine,* often a linked maze of basements, underground tunnels that once connected the palaces, and older grottoes carved into the tufa of the mountain. Calling the grottoes "Etruscan tombs," as the signs in the stores proclaim, may not be far from the truth—the earliest foundations of a city on this site are still contested.

The *cantine* with the most attention-grabbing tunnels include the second of Montepulciano's two **Pulcino** wine shops, at Via Gracciano nel Corso 80 (✆ **0578-757-948;** www.pulcino.com), which boasts a grab bag of "attractions" in its lengthy cellars, from a wishing well and an Etruscan tomb to a collection of iron implements found here—medieval weapons, household tools, and even a chastity belt. The **Gattavecchi** *cantine* (✆ **0578-757-110;** www.gattavecchi.it) burrow under Santa Maria dei Servi (see below), with moldy tunnels and a staircase leading down to an even moldier chapel-like structure carved into the rock—no one knows when it dates from or what it was, but it's intriguingly and suggestively located directly below the altar end of the church. At Piazza Grande, the **Contucci** winery (✆ **0578-757-006;** www.contucci.it) occupies the 13th-century cellars of the Palazzo Contucci. Down at the opposite end of town, the classy showrooms of the **Avignonesi** wine empire reside at Via Gracciano nel Corso 91 (✆ **0578-757-872;** www.avignonesi.it).

Marcello Cervini just before he was elevated to the papacy. One of the shortest-lived pontiffs, Pope Marcellus II died 21 days into office. Climbing farther, you'll pass the elegant 19th-century **Caffè Poliziano** ★, which serves snacks and pastries. Next comes the rough facade of the baroque **Chiesa del Gesù** (the little *trompe l'oeil* cupola on the dome inside is courtesy of Andrea Pozzo) and, much farther on—the street's name is now Via del Poliziano—the **house where Poliziano was born** stands at no. 5. A scholar, writer, and philosopher, Angelo Ambrogini (called Poliziano after the Latin name of his hometown) had an enormous impact on the Florentine humanist movement as a friend of Lorenzo de' Medici and tutor to his children. Just before his house, Via delle Farine leads left to **Porta delle Farine,** an excellent and intact example of a 13th-century Sienese double gate.

The main road now passes out of the city walls, wrapping around the **Medici fortress** (now a school) and passing the seldom-open **Santa Maria dei Servi,** with another

late-17th-century interior by Andrea Pozzo and a *Madonna and Child* by the Duccio school (third altar on left).

Back inside the walls, you come to Montepulciano's historic and civic heart, **Piazza Grande.** On the left is the **Palazzo Comunale** ★, designed by Michelozzo as a late-14th-century variation in travertine on Florence's Palazzo Vecchio. Monday through Saturday from 8am to 1pm, you can wander through dingy civic offices and past overflowing file cabinets to climb the tower for a great view of the surrounding countryside. (It's free; watch your head.) Back on terra firma, to your left is the **Palazzo Tarugi,** with an arcaded loggia on the corner facing a **well** topped by the Medici arms flanked by two Florentine lions and two Poliziani griffins. Both palace and well are the design of Antonio Sangallo the Elder, as is the **Palazzo Contucci** across from the Palazzo Comunale.

The last side of Piazza Grande is taken up by the rambling brick nonfacade of the **Duomo** ★, a somewhat embarrassing reminder to Poliziani that, after building so many palaces and fitting so many of them with travertine, the city ran out of money to finish the ambitious plans for rebuilding the cathedral and had to leave it faceless. To the left of the church, the suspiciously 1950s-looking bell tower is actually the oldest thing on the piazza, dating from the 14th century and the cathedral of Santa Maria that once stood here. Inside, the Duomo makes up for its plain facade with two important works. The first takes some explaining because it's scattered in pieces around the church. Between 1427 and 1436, Michelozzo carved a monumental tomb for Bartolomeo Aragazzi, secretary to Pope Martin V. In the 18th century it was disassembled and the pieces lost until they were discovered under the altar of the Duomo in 1815. Two of the figures were stolen and eventually found their way to London, but the rest remain here. Because no indication of what the monument originally looked like exists and the supporting architecture is gone, the various figures are distributed throughout the church. They start with a reclining statue of the deceased to the right of the central entrance door (he's the one with the hood) and two bas-reliefs on the first two columns on either side of the nave. The Greco-Roman-influenced statues flanking the high altar and the putti frieze above it, along with a statue in a niche to the right of the altar, are the other main pieces of the monument.

The gold-heavy triptych on the high altar is by Taddeo di Bartolo (1401) and depicts the *Assumption of the Virgin with Saints* topped by *Annunciation* and *Crowning of the Virgin* pinnacles, and is banded with a *Passion* cycle in the predella. Bartolo was one of the masters of late-14th-century Sienese art, and this is one of his greatest works. (I particularly like the predella panel where one child is shinning up a tree to get a better view of Christ entering Jerusalem.) On a pilaster to the right of the altar is a *schiacciato* bas-relief tabernacle by Vecchietta. Also inside the Duomo, as you walk out on the right, is an almond-eyed *Madonna and Child* (1418) by Sano di Pietro, located on the pilaster between the first two chapels. In the last chapel stands a 14th-century baptismal font with bas-relief and caryatid figures and, on the wall, a della Robbia altar surrounding a gilded marble bas-relief of the *Madonna and Child* by Benedetto di Maiano.

Continue down Via Ricci to the intersection with Via del Paolino, where you can cut back to the left on Via de' Grassi. Head outside the city walls and you'll be on the road toward Antonio da Sangallo the Elder's **Tempio di San Biagio** ★★ (1518–34), one of the true masterpieces of High Renaissance architecture. It became fashionable in the High Renaissance to build a church, usually on a Greek cross plan, just outside a city so that the classically inspired architecture would be unimpaired and uninhibited by surrounding buildings and the church could be appreciated from all angles. Todi and Prato each have their own version, but Montepulciano's is the best of the lot, a pagan temple built entirely

 of travertine, dedicated to the gods of mathematical and architectural purity and only nominally to any saint. Two bell towers were to have been fitted into the corners at the front, but the right one reached only 4.5m (15 ft.). The interior, while as peaceful and elegantly restrained as the overall structure, has nothing to hold you. Sangallo also designed the companion canon's house nearby, which was built after his death.

WHERE TO STAY

If the hotels below are full, try the **Hotel il Borghetto,** Borgo Buio 7, off Piazza Michelozzo (✆ **0578-757-535;** fax 0578-757-534; www.ilborghetto.it), where doubles cost 105€. You might get a view and a grand antique armoire, and you'll certainly get a family-style reception as well as access to the cozy salons in the *cantina* and the tiny garden on the warrior's walk atop the medieval city walls. All rooms have private bathroom, phone, and Internet, and most have satellite TV. They also rent out two suites next door that sleep four for 152€, perfect for families. One daughter is even a professional guide if you want to organize a small tour.

Certainly don't overlook the three doubles Marcella rents for 50€ over her restaurant **Cittino** (✆ **0578-757-335;** see "Where to Dine," below); stay if only to get great food without leaving the building. In a pinch, you can fall back on the **Affittacamere Bellavista,** Via Ricci 25 (✆ **0578-716-341,** 347-823-2314, or 338-229-1964; fax 0578-716-341; www.cretedisiena.com/camerebellavista; 65€–70€). Don't accept no. 5, the only room without a view, but do try for no. 6, which has a small terrace (80€).

Albergo Duomo ★ This family-run hotel is a better option than the Albergo Marzocco (see below). The very firm beds have thick floral-print quilts and pleasingly simple cast-iron frames, and the furniture, while mostly unobtrusively modern, includes a few writing tables and fat armoires made of old wood. All the bathrooms were redesigned in 2007. There's a sitting area with a fireplace at one end of the breakfast room and a cozy TV room that opens onto a small terra-cotta–tiled courtyard where you can take your coffee and rolls in the morning. It's also the only hotel in town with an elevator.

Via San Donato 14 (next to the Duomo), 53045 Montepulciano (SI). ✆/fax **0578-757-473.** www.albergoduomomontepulciano.it. 13 units. 90€–110€ double; 110€–120€ triple. Rates include breakfast. Free parking. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Albergo Marzocco The largest hotel inside the walls, just a block up from Porta al Prato on the piazza, sports the establishment's namesake Florentine lion. The rooms are spacious enough, if not overly special, and have a few antiques in 18th-century Venetian style alongside some modern pieces. Several accommodations have large terraces over a side piazza; others look over the Marzocco sitting atop his column out front. The somewhat dusty sitting rooms give the hotel the feel of a Victorian-era *pensione,* though the pool table makes a rather strange contrast.

Piazza Savonarola 18 (on Via Gracciano nel Corso), 53045 Montepulciano (SI). ✆ **0578-757-262.** Fax 0578-757-530. www.cretedisiena.com/albergoilmarzocco. 16 units. 90€ double; 120€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Jan 20–Feb 10. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

Meublè Il Riccio Finds This hotel's name comes from the *ricci* (hedgehogs) that were carved on the wooden supports once adorning the outside of this 13th-century house. They now decorate the rooms. The mosaics in the small colonnaded entrance courtyard come from the school founded by the hotel proprietor's father. Upstairs are comfortable rooms with functionally modern furniture and whitewashed walls. Guests share the pretty sitting room, which has floral-print couches, and a rooftop terrace where the views

stretch over the Valdichiana and even get in the top of the Palazzo Comunale's tower. In 2002, they expanded into the floor below with a large new reception area and breakfast room. It's a two-story walk-up with no elevator.

Via Talosa 21 (a few steps off Piazza Grande), 53045 Montepulciano (SI). ✆/fax **0578-757-713.** www.ilriccio.net. 6 units. 100€ double; 116€ triple. Breakfast 8€. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking (with permit for lot). Closed June 1–15 and Nov 1–15. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Montorio ★★ Founded on a lark by two sisters in 2000, these five spacious mini-apartments sit atop a hill overlooking the Tempio di San Biagio and the Sienese countryside just outside Montepulciano's walls. All save the smallest of the sumptuously homey accommodations combine the best of countryside tradition with modern amenities such as full kitchens, complimentary wine upon arrival (everything in the stocked minifridges is free as well); the smallest unit is more like a suite with a kitchenette. The only drawbacks: Montorio is a stiff 20-minute walk uphill into town, and no children under 10 are allowed. They've also completed renovations on the **Villa Poggiano** (✆ **0578-758-292;** www.villapoggiano.com), which is exceptionally quiet and has views of sheep-dotted hillsides 1.6km (1 mile) along the road to Pienza. It now boasts 10 enormous suites, inheriting the wildly dramatic and elegant touches of its 1930s owner. Either property makes a perfect base for exploring southern Tuscany.

Strada per Pienza 2, 53045 Montepulciano (SI). ✆ **0578-717-442.** Fax 0578-715-456. www.montorio.com. 100€–170€ for 2-person apt; 200€–250€ for 4-person apt. Discounted weekly rates available. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bike rental; concierge; room service. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

To accompany their celebrated Vino Nobile, the Poliziani concentrate their culinary energies on grilled and roasted meats (beef, duck, and pork) and handmade pasta: gnocchi, tagliatelle, and especially *pici* (fat, chewy spaghetti rolled out between the palms so they're wonderfully irregular and hold the ragù or *piccante* tomato sauce well).

Besides the restaurants below, Montepulciano has a couple of good *osterie* that double as bars and stay open past midnight. One of the three proprietors of the **Osteria dell'Acquacheta,** Via Teatro 22 (✆ **0578-758-443** or 0578-717-086), is in the cheese-making business, and a selection of his pecorino creations makes a good main course. Come early to try items like the fresh ricotta with honey before they run out. A full meal will run you about 25€. It's open Wednesday through Monday from 12:30 to 2:30pm (or so) and 7:30 to 10:30pm (or later, if things are hopping).

Cittino ★ Value POLIZIANA Despite the dozen set tables, Cittino makes you feel as though you stumbled by accident into someone's grandmother's dining room. In this case, the grandmother is Marcella, and after you've had a hard day of hill-climbing she will take you under her wing and nourish you back to form. She makes all her pasta by hand and will basically decide what you want to eat (she's usually right) and bustle off to her kitchen to prepare it fresh. Choosing to recommend her *pici* over her gnocchi or tagliatelle would be like singling out a favorite child. The artichoke involtini should also not be missed. The bill might seem suspiciously less than the sum of its parts.

If you find yourself too stuffed to move after the meal, Marcella rents three plain yet comfortable rooms upstairs for 50€—one of which, with a double and a bunk bed, is perfect for families on a budget.

Vicolo della Via Nuova 2 (off Via Voltaia nel Corso). ✆ **0578-757-335.** Reservations not necessary. Primi 6€–7€; secondi 9€. No credit cards. Thurs–Tues noon–3pm and 7–11pm. Closed June.

A Famous Spa Town En Route to Chiusi

Take the SS146 about 7km (4 1/3 miles) southeast out of Montepulciano to **Chianciano Terme** (✆ **0578-682-923;** www.termechianciano.it), one of Tuscany's most famous spas. You drink the thermal mineral waters of the **Acqua Santa,** Piazza Martiri Perugini (✆ **0578-68-411**), supposedly to clean out your liver (daily 8am–2pm; Mar 16–Nov 15 also 4–6pm), and the other hot springs, those of **Acqua Sillene,** Piazza Marconi (✆ **0578-68-551**), are used for thermal baths and to make mud packs for aching muscles and joints (daily 8am–6pm; Apr 16–Oct 16). The cold springs of **Acqua Fucoli,** Viale G. Baccelli (✆ **0578-68-430;** daily 8am–6pm Apr 16–Oct 16), are usually drunk in the afternoon (allegedly to clean out the digestive system). **Chianciano Terme** (the Old Town) and **Chianciano Bagni** (the spa) are of the same *comune* but really separate communities, about 1.6km (1 mile) apart, connected only by an umbilical cord of hotels called Viale Libertà.

The Old Town is compact and full of cars (with no pedestrian zones as in more popular hill towns), but it's still pretty. The **Museo della Collegiata,** Piazzolina dei Soldati (✆ **0578-30-378;** Tues–Sat 10am–12:30pm and 3–6:30pm; Nov–Mar open only on request), has some good Florentine and Sienese art from the 13th to the 18th centuries. Admission is 1.50€; ring the bell for the custodian.

There are many hotels in town, so the **tourist office,** Piazza Italia 67, 53042 Chianciano Terme (✆ **0578-671-122;** fax 0578-63-277; www.chianciano.turismo.toscana.it), will be able to find something to suit you, but you'd do well at the **Grand Hotel Ambasciatori,** Viale della Libertà 512 (✆/fax **0578-64-371;** www.barbettihotels.it). It offers all the amenities, a rooftop pool, and a small gym, and doubles cost 95€.

About 5km (3 miles) south of Chianciano on a side road is **La Foce** (no admittance), the house where American Iris Origo and her Italian husband aided and hid partisans fighting against the German occupation of Italy during World War II. A scholar and biographer, Origo penned the famous biography of 13th-century businessman Francesco Datini titled *The Merchant of Prato,* and she also recorded her war experiences at this villa in the well-regarded *War in the Val d'Orcia.* From the road you get a good view of the eroded *biancane* and a famously scenic Etruscan road winding its way back and forth up the next hill (you'll recognize it instantly from all the postcards). Many an amateur watercolorist, including Prince Charles, has taken a stab at capturing the scene on paper.

Fattoria Pulcino ★ TUSCAN You run into a gauntlet of farm products at this 16th-century farmhouse just outside town before arriving at the giant dining room with long communal tables set with stainless steel platters (you can also dine outside on the terrace). Go for Poliziani dishes, such as *pici di Montepulciano* (in a ragù) or *ribollita,* followed by a steak or other grilled meat. For dessert, make sure you try the owner's own fruitcake sweetened with honey—*panella alla Gabriella*—supposedly based on a Franciscan recipe.

(This was once a monastery.) Accompany it with one of the estate's Ercolani label Vino Nobile wines.

Via SS146 per Chianciano 35 (3km/2 miles SW of town). ✆ **0578-758-711.** www.pulcino.com. Reservations not necessary. Primi 6€–8€; secondi 10€–20€; fixed-price menu 12€. AE, DC, MC, V. Easter–Dec daily noon–11pm; winter daily noon–3pm (reserve ahead and they'll open for dinner, too), Sat–Sun 7–10pm. Bus: LFI from outside Porta al Prato toward Chianciano.

Ristorante il Cantuccio POLIZIANA/TUSCAN In a long room divided by a double brick arch with a roaring fire at one end in winter, locals come to get the closest thing to fine dining in town. Start with the excellent mixed antipasto of various sliced salami and assorted *crostini.* If you choose *la bruschetta contadina* (two slabs of toasted bread loaded with prosciutto, tomatoes, cheese, and arugula) over the *tagliatelle al sugo di anatra* (in duck ragù) to start, you can have the fowl as your secondo in the *anatra con le* (covered with cooked-down onions). The grilled sausage or steak is also good, accompanied by roast potatoes or *fagioli all'olio* (Tuscan beans). *Torta alla ricotta,* the pielike forerunner of cheesecake, rounds out a meal nicely.

Via delle Cantine 1–2 (off Via Gracciano nel Corso). ✆ **0578-757-870.** www.ristoranteilcantuccio.com. Reservations recommended. Primi 8€–10€; secondi 9€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10pm. Closed 2 weeks early Nov, 2 weeks June or July.

4 CHIUSI: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE ETRUSCANS

21km (13 miles) SE of Montepulciano; 89km (55 miles) SE of Siena; 151km (94 miles) SE of Florence; 165km (103 miles) N of Rome

One of southern Tuscany's smaller hilltop cities, Chiusi doesn't transport you to the Middle Ages or wow you with the Renaissance. You come to Chiusi for one thing: Etruscans.

Alternately spelled *Camars* or *Clevsins,* the Etruscan center here was of considerable importance in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. One of the more powerful among the Etruscan 12-city confederation, it was ruled in the late 500s B.C. by the *lucumo* (king) Lars Porsena, who was famous for attacking Rome from 507 to 506 B.C. Like Cortona just up the Valdichiana (see chapter 11 for more information), the lowlands around Chiusi are a treasure-trove of tombs. Most of the archaeologically important ones are closed for preservation, but you may visit a few with a guide. And the less famous ones are open to anyone armed with a good map, a few oranges in their pocket, and half a day to explore the valley on their own. Chiusi's excellent restaurants await you after a hard day's tomb hunting.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** The Chiusi/Chianciano Terme station (✆ **0578-20-074**) is a major stop on the main **Rome-Florence** line (which passes through Arezzo) and is also the terminus of a secondary line that originates in **Siena** (about 12 trains daily). A bus will carry you up to the *centro storico.*

By Car From Montepulciano, follow the SS146. From **Florence,** take the A1 to the Chiusi exit. From **Siena,** take the SS326 toward Sinalunga to the A1 south to the Chiusi exit. You can **park** off Via Pietricia and Via dei Longobardi.

By Bus Because Chiusi has one of the main train stations in the region, most towns run several LFI buses here daily. There are 16 daily from Montepulciano (45 min.) that stop in Chianciano Terme (25 min.) along the way. Ask to get off at the *centro storico* or you'll end up in the meatpacking town of Chiusi Scalo down below.

By Bike The best way to see the land of the Etruscans up close is by bike, and the provinces of Arezzo and Siena have made that much easier by completing a **bicycle path** called il **Sentiero della Bonifica** that stretches about 60km (37 miles) between Chiusi and **Arezzo.** It crosses historic bridges and passes friendly farms that offer a true taste of the region. The gravelly path is better suited for mountain bikes and hybrids than for fancy road bikes, and can be an arduous trek under the hot sun. For more instructions and for a good map, see **www.sentierodellabonifica.it**.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **information office** is at Piazza Duomo 1, 53043 Chiusi (✆/fax **0578-227-667**), open Monday through Saturday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 3 to 5pm (sometimes to 7pm in summer) and Sunday from 9am to 12:30pm (the office itself admits these hours are more indicative, not precise; they might open at 10am or close at noon).

SPECIAL EVENTS Chiusi has no festivals of particular note, although locals do drive their Fiats to the lake on July 2 to have the **cars blessed** in the name of the city's St. Mustiola and to watch fireworks. From mid-July to August, a series of outdoor concerts, films, and theater productions are staged for **Summer Under the Stars.** The local restaurants get involved with **neighborhood feast days** on May 5, May 26, and June 29 and 30. Also in May are a **costumed procession** (on the 17th) and a **classic car race** (on the 2nd). **Market** day is Tuesday.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE ETRUSCANS

Although a huge portion of Chiusi's rich archaeological patrimony was carried off by early archaeologists to museums in Orvieto and elsewhere, the city's **Museo Archeologico Nazionale Etrusco** ★★, in Via Porsenna (✆ **0578-20-177**), has no mean share of what's left. The collections inside this neoclassical building are in eternal rearrangement. There are plenty of the famous rectangular Etruscan funerary urns, in which the deceased's ashes were kept in a box topped by a lid carved with the man or woman's reclining likeness. Keep on the lookout for find no. 407, featuring a winged version of the split-tailed siren—the mythological symbol of sex and fertility, which pops up as late as the Middle Ages on Christian buildings like Pienza's Pieve. One of the museum's greatest treasures is a set of **painted urns** dating back to the 2nd century B.C. on which the polychrome decorations are still marvelously intact.

Another Etruscan funerary vehicle on display is the anthropomorphic canopic jar, made of terra cotta and sometimes bronze with a carved human head for a lid and handles like arms. Occasionally an entire statue would top off the affair, as in the 7th-century-B.C. example here. The deceased, perched on the lid, is apparently orating, surrounded by stylized griffins whose heads are raised high, crying out. Aside from the prehistoric and Villanovan bits, the imported Attic black- and red-figure vases, and some ebony-toned 7th- to 6th-century-B.C. *bucchero* ceramics, keep your eyes peeled for the marble portrait of Augustus and the 3rd-century-A.D. mosaic of a boar hunt. The basement is devoted to depicting local necropolises and their excavations. The museum is open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 8pm. Admission is 4€ adults, 2€ ages 18 to 25, free for children under 18 and people over 65.

A block up from the museum, **Piazza del Duomo** opens off to your left, past a medieval tower converted to Christian purposes in the 16th century as the bell tower to San Secondiano cathedral. The piazza, with its loggia running down one side, is a small but striking square of light-gray cut stone that matches the facade of the 12th-century **Duomo** at one end. The inside was restored in the late 19th century but retains its recycled columns and capitals pilfered from local Roman buildings. On closer inspection, you'll note those seemingly early medieval "mosaics" covering every inch of the nave and apses are actually made of paint—an 1887-to-1894 opus by Arturo Viligiardi (viewable by coin-op lights).

The entrance to the **Museo della Cattedrale** (✆ **0578-226-490**) is to the right of the Duomo's doors under the arcade. The first floor has some uninspired paleo-Christian and Lombard remains, but in the gardens are remains of the Etruscan city's walls and a 3rd-century-B.C. tower. The museum's main attraction is upstairs, a series of 21 **antiphonals** from the abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore that were illuminated by artists like Sano di Pietro and Liberale da Verona in the 15th century. The entire set was stolen in 1972, but miraculously all save one and a few pages of another were recovered. The museum is open daily from June to October 15 from 9:30am to 12:45pm and 4 to 6:30pm and from October 16 to May from 9:30am to 12:45pm (Sun also 3:30–6:30pm). Admission is 2€.

Meet at the museum desk for the obligatory guided tour of the **Labirinto di Porsenna (Labyrinth of Porsenna)** ★ (✆ **0578-226-490** for reservations), the tourist board's inventive way to describe a jaunt through a painstakingly excavated portion of the tunnel system carved under the city by the Etruscans. The cathedral museum and gardens in the square above were once the bishop's palace, and the tunnels were used as a refuse dump. They were rediscovered in the 1920s by some kids who decided to start cleaning them out. The good-hearted teenagers kept at their task, eventually becoming a volunteer society of amateur archaeologists, and slowly the tunnels were reopened. A good stretch of the *cunicoli* (water sewers) was opened to the public in 1995. The narrow passages were apparently part of a vast plumbing system that once supplied the entire Etruscan city from a huge underground lake (also being archaeologically explored, but not yet public). As a bonus to the tour, the cathedral bell tower sits right on top of this well, and the climb to the top is worth it for the sweeping city and countryside vista. The half-hour tours cost 3€ (or 4€ combined with Museo), free for those under 10, and leave about every 30 minutes during museum hours.

Of the **Etruscan tombs** ★★ in the surrounding area, especially to the north and northeast toward the small Lake Chiusi (a remnant of the once widespread Valdichiana marshes), currently only the **Tomba della Pellegrina** (with 4th-C.-B.C. sarcophagi and 3rd-C.-B.C. cinerary urns still in place) and **Tomba del Leone** (still showing a bit of color on its walls) are open to visitors. For the moment at least, on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, you can also book ahead (space is limited for two visits a day, around 11am and 3:30pm—but those hours aren't fixed) to see the famous painted **Tomba della Scimmia,** though its accessibility is decided year to year. To visit any of them, make an appointment at the archaeological museum (✆ **0578-20-177**). You must have your own car, in which the custodian accompanies you.

You must also have wheels to visit the 3rd- to 5th-century-A.D. **paleo-Christian catacombs** in the same area. Meet the guide at 11am at the cathedral museum's desk (in summer also around 4pm).

Few other sights in town hold much interest, but on a stroll you might pass through the market square of **Piazza XX Settembre,** anchored at one end by the 13th-century **Santa Maria della Morte,** with its tall, flat tower and with a 14th-century loggia along one side. At the square's other end sprouts a **clock tower,** near which is the medieval **San Francesco.** Via Petrarca leads from Via Porsenna to a **panorama** over the Valdichiana from Piazza Olivazzo. The west end of town is a **public park** with a more intimate vista of Chiusi's cultivated slopes.

WHERE TO STAY

If **Albergo La Sfinge** (see below) is full, there are some unobjectionable if utterly bland places around Chiusi Scalo in the valley near the train station.

Albergo La Sfinge The greatest selling point here is that the family who runs Chiusi's oldest inn is as friendly as can be. The decor is also pleasant for the price: Most rooms have wrought-iron bedsteads, tiny Tiffany-style bedside lamps, and old-fashioned armoires and desks. Some rooms come with a vista over Monte Amiata. There are also two rooms with a common door that can be made into a family suite.

Via Marconi 2 (just off Via Garibaldi), 53043 Chiusi Città (SI). ✆/fax **0578-20-157.** www.albergolasfinge.it. 15 units. 85€ double. Breakfast 5€. MC, V. Limited free parking (call for details) or 10€ in garage. Closed Jan 30–Mar 8. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* A/C (in some), TV (in some), hair dryer, Wi-Fi.

Hotel La Fattoria ★ (Finds) The rooms at this 1850s lakeside farmhouse are fitted out in full country-inn style, with dark wood furniture and floral-patterned fabrics. Most are fairly large, and a few have a view out over the lake. In the large restaurant (closed Mon) you can get *affettati misti* (cold cuts sliced the old-fashioned way, by hand) and fish fresh from the lake. In summer, you can dine on an open lake-view terrace and toast the view with a *torta al limone* (in this case, an American-style lemon meringue pie) for dessert.

Via Lago di Chiusi (5km/3 miles east of Chiusi on the lake), 52043 Chiusi (SI). ✆ **0578-21-407.** Fax 0578-20-644. www.la-fattoria.it. 8 units. 85€–95€ double. Half and full pension available. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Jan 10–Feb 10. The LFI bus from train station to Lago di Chiusi stops here. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bike rental; children's playground; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Every Chiusi restaurant excels at both traditional, hearty peasant dishes and putting creative spins on old favorites. Don't forget to consider a countryside lunch at **La Fattoria,** mentioned under hotels, above.

La Solita Zuppa ★ TUSCAN An ex-theater couple runs this excellent restaurant, where the atmosphere is a strange mix of country trattoria and refined *boîte,* with Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong as the musical accompaniment. When I asked Laura Pacchieri if she had a menu, she responded, "I have me," and proceeded to describe each dish in such succulent detail it was tough to choose (although there is, in fact, a written menu). You'll be served a delicious assortment of warm *crostini* and sliced salami and an aperitif while you decide between *pici* or *lasagne al cinghiale* (lasagne layered with cheese and wild boar), cooked in a ceramic casserole. Some of "The Same Old Soups" of the restaurant's name include *porri e patate* (potato leek), *fagioli e farro* (bean and emmer), and a peasant *lenti e castagne* (lentils and chestnuts). For secondi, the chef makes a mean *faraona arancie e pere* (pheasant with pear and orange).

Via Porsenna 21. ✆ **0578-21-006.** www.lasolitazuppa.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 6.50€; secondi 10€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10pm. Closed Jan 15–Mar 10.

Ristorante Zaira ★★ SOUTHERN TUSCAN Regarded as the best restaurant in a city where the competition is tough, Zaira highlights its success by lining the entrance with a gallery of the distinguished guides that recommend it. Try *trota in carpione* (marinated trout) as an appetizer in place of the same old *crostini misti* before passing on to the justifiably famous house specialty, the tasty *pasta del lucumone* (ziti baked with ham and three types of cheese in a ceramic casserole). The *lucumone* is a tough act to follow, but you can try with *coniglio al limone* (rabbit kissed with lemon) or *anatra al vino nobile* (duck cooked in red wine) with *carciofi fritti* (fried artichokes). Ask to visit the rambling wine cellars, which house more than 20,000 bottles.

Via Arunte 12. ✆ **0578-20-260.** www.zaira.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 5.50€–8.50€; secondi 8.50€–14€. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:45pm and 7–10:30pm (closed Mon mid-Jan to June and Oct–Nov). Closed 15 days in Nov.

11 Arezzo & Northeastern Tuscany

The province of Arezzo, bounding Tuscany's northeast corner, is a land of castle-dominated hill towns, misty blue mountains, and the vestiges of Apennine forests. Snowy-white cattle graze in the wide Chiana Valley, while light industry toils at the edges of medieval centers. In the reaches of the mountains lie hermitages of ecologically minded vegetarian monks and **La Verna,** St. Francis's favorite spot to pray, where he became the first human to receive the stigmata.

This is the area where the brawny, humanist Renaissance of Florence meets and melds with the intangible, hazy spirituality of Umbria's green hills. This hybrid is perfectly displayed in the works of the region's two most famous artistic sons, Piero della Francesca and Luca Signorelli, both masters of mathematical proportion and of rarefied moods and landscapes in painting. Piero is the focus of his native **Sansepolcro,** and one of the main draws in **Arezzo,** a low-key city of amiable citizens and modest art treasures. Art-rich **Cortona,** Luca Signorelli's hometown, is an ancient Etruscan hill town that doesn't quite fill up its medieval walls; much of the space is occupied by oversize gardens.

Arezzo province has given us the melodic genius of Guido Monaco, inventor of the musical scale, and the earthy, bold painting of Masaccio, the first artist to master perspective. It brought forth the great poet Petrarch, whose classical studies and humanist philosophy rang in the Renaissance and earned him the moniker "the first modern man," and Giorgio Vasari, architect of the Uffizi, court painter to Cosimo I, and the Western world's first art historian. Vasari brought Petrarch's movement full circle by literally writing the book on the Renaissance. It's no surprise the ultimate Florentine of the Renaissance era, Michelangelo, was born in the forested hills east of Arezzo.

THE CASENTINO: FROM FLORENCE TO AREZZO

The forested mountains of the **Casentino,** the route from Florence to Arezzo closest to the Apennines, have been a hotbed of spirituality for centuries, the corner of Tuscany most like a bit of mystical Umbria. For information on the region, call ✆ **0575-593-098** or check **www.turismo.casentino.toscana.it**.

Head east out of Florence, and on the other side of Pontassieve, a right toward Pelago leads a winding, scenic 24km (15 miles) to **Vallombrosa.** In 1038, the **abbey** here was the site of the foundation of the Vallombrosan order by Giovanni Gualberto, a Florentine moved to the spiritual life when he was confronted with his brother's murderer and found he had a greater desire to pardon him than to seek revenge. The current 15th- to 18th-century incarnation of the monastery doesn't welcome visitors, but it's surrounded by stands of evergreen recalling the verdant forests that impressed Milton enough to include them in *Paradise Lost.*

Another picturesque road leads back up to the SS70, where you can continue 20km (12 miles) to the medieval hill town of **Poppi,** whose **Castello dei Conti Guidi**

(✆ **0575-520-516**) is visible for miles. This castle, started by the architect Lapo in 1274 and finished by his student Arnolfo di Cambio, was the seat of the Guidi counts who ruled the Casentino until 1440, when it came under Florence's realm. Rouse the custodian to visit the frescoed main hall and the Taddeo Gaddi–decorated chapel (1330–40). It's open summer daily from 10am to 7pm, winter Thursday through Sunday only from 9:30am to 1pm and 2:30 to 5:30pm. Admission is 4€.

The rest of diminutive Poppi is fun to explore. Many of the medieval buildings have retained their wooden porticos, and a slightly sleepy village atmosphere prevails. The church of **San Fedele** is home to a 13th-century *Madonna and Child* in the right transept painted by the "Maestro della Maddalena." A few of the town's other churches contain paintings by the local baroque talent Francesco Morandini, universally known as Il Poppi.

A branch road leads 15km (9 miles) north from Poppi into the Tuscan half of the national park of **Monte Falterona, Campigna, e Foreste Casentinesi** (www.parks.it/parco.nazionale.for.casentinesi), one of the last sizable chunks of native forest left in Italy; you can get information at the website above, or in Pratovecchio at Via G. Brocchi 7 (✆/fax **0575-559-054;** www.turismo.casentino.toscana.it), open Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to noon and 3 to 5pm (Oct–Mar open Sat–Sun only, and possibly Fri). Among the beech and silver fir trees are the sylvan religious complexes of **Camáldoli.** The hermitage was founded in 1012 under a rigorous rule of purity and meditation. Such a rarefied spot so near Florence and Arezzo immediately attracted a number of meditative hacks who just wanted a few weeks of monkish life. Because this threatened to disrupt the contemplative routine of the hermitage, in 1046 the founder, St. Romualdo, wisely decided to build a **Monastero di Camáldoli** about 20km (12 miles) down the road for the dabblers to use. This is now home to the pharmacy, where you can buy the monks' herbal remedies and poultices. Although the monks in the hermitage no longer live as hermits but as monastics, they're still strict about their purity. Vegetarians who eat only what they can grow, members of the order help replenish the forest slowly by planting 5,000 trees yearly, and they don't allow women past the gate into the hermitage proper. (You're not missing much; it's like a miniaturized subdivision of monks' cottages surrounded by tall pines.)

Bibbiena, just 7km (4⅓ miles) down the road from Poppi, has had most of the charm industrialized right out of it; the **tourist office** is at Via Berni 29, 52011 Bibbiena (✆/fax **0575-593-098;** open Mon–Sat 9am–12:30pm and 3:30–6:30pm, Sun 10am–noon and 3:30–6:30pm; winter Mon–Fri only). However, the church of **San Lorenzo** has some della Robbian terra cottas and **San Ippolito e Donato** has a *Madonna and Child with Saints* triptych by Bicci di Lorenzo.

You can branch off here onto the SS208 and travel 25km (16 miles) to the holy mount of **La Verna** ★. Count Orlando Cattani gave this secluded rock outcropping to Francis of Assisi for his new monastic order in 1213. Francis loved to come here to meditate and sleep on the rocks—a vision had informed him that the odd rents in the rocky ground were caused by the earthquakes that occurred when Christ was crucified. On his last trip here, the night of September 14, 1224, he was praying alone on the rocks when he was visited by a seraph who left him with a wholly new mark of sanctity—the stigmata of Christ's wounds. Although the wounds in his feet caused him much pain while walking for the remainder of his life, the stigmata confirmed the spirituality of a man already widely believed to be just about the holiest person alive. The small **mud-hut monastery** he founded has grown and is still a pilgrimage site for the devout. Even those with just a passing interest can tour it to see the saint's cell and the spot where the miracle occurred (tours daily 6:30am–9:30pm, until 7:30pm in winter).

In the **main church,** Andrea della Robbia left some of the greatest, most spiritual examples of his glazed terra-cotta works, like an *Ascension* and a beautifully simple *Annunciation.* The door to the chapel built around the rock where St. Francis received the stigmata is marked with a tondo of the *Madonna and Child* by Luca della Robbia; the *Crucifixion* inside is by Andrea. The small **Santa Maria degli Angeli,** begun while the saint was alive, has another Andrea della Robbia *Assumption.* Scramble up to the summit of **La Penna** for spectacular countryside views.

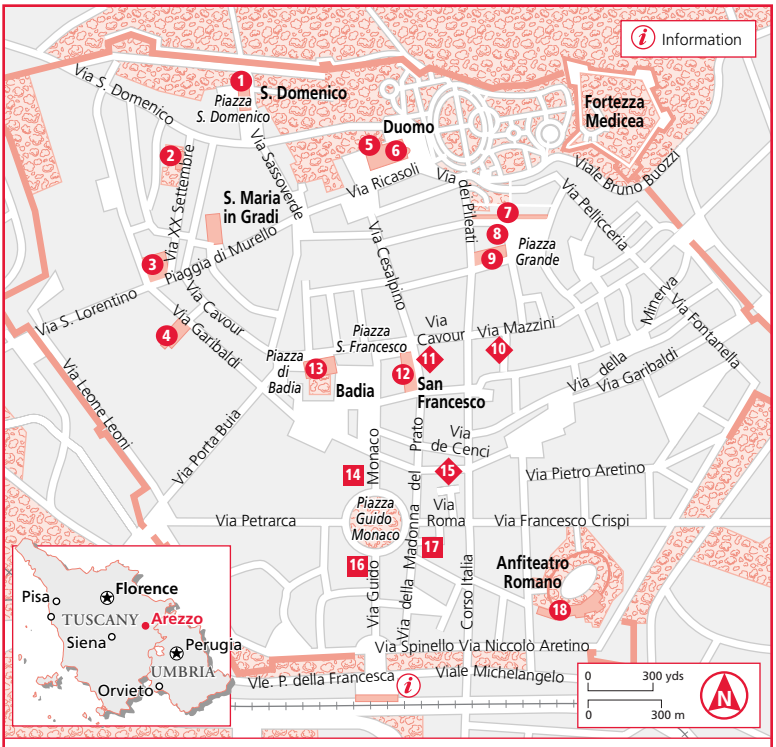
Just below La Verna is the village of Chiusi, which was governed with the hamlet of **Caprese** for 6 months (late 1474 to early 1475) by the assigned *podestà* (mayor) from Florence, an impoverished minor nobleman named Ludovico Buonarroti. This brief term of office was just long enough for Ludovico's second son to be born in the house of the *podestà* at Caprese on March 6, 1474. The baby was christened at the local church of San Giovanni as Michelangelo Buonarroti. Caprese has never forgotten it and has even changed its name to Caprese Michelangelo after the boy grew up to become one of the greatest artists the world has ever known. His birthplace above the town and the nearby small castle have been converted into a small, and not terribly engrossing, museum about Michelangelo's career called the **Museo Michelangiolesco** (✆ **0575-793-776;** daily 9:30am–6:30pm, closed Mon in winter). At press time, many of the buildings were closed for restoration work; tickets to the open and least interesting of them were half-price. Normally, admission is 4€ adults, 2€ ages 7 to 14, free for children under 7. Later in life, Michelangelo wrote to Giorgio Vasari, "If my brains are any good at all, it's because I was born in the pure air of your Arezzo countryside."

1 AREZZO: WHERE LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL

85km (53 miles) SE of Florence; 246km (153 miles) N of Rome

Arezzo is a medium-size Tuscan city, an agricultural center clambering up a low hill. On the very top of the slope live the aristocrats, peering down at the newly wealthy citizens who are gradually moving upward, both literally and figuratively. The city is best known for its antiques and its artistic masterpieces by Piero della Francesca, and stained-glass marvels by Guillaume de Marcillat. Arretium was an important member of the 12-city Etruscan confederation, and it was famous in Roman times for its mass-produced *corallino* ceramics. The Ghibelline medieval *comune* ran afoul of Florence's Guelphs, and the city's armies were soundly trounced by Florence in the 1289 Battle of Campaldino. (The Florentine forces counted a young Dante Alighieri among the foot soldiers.) More recently, the city's gotten some international face time as the setting for Roberto Benigni's 1999 Oscar-winning film *La Vita è Bella (Life Is Beautiful).*

Arezzo has produced an unusual number of cultural giants. Guido Monaco (or Guido d'Arezzo), born around A.D. 995, invented the modern musical scale and notation. The poet Petrarch (1304–74) helped found the humanist movement that was the basis for the entire cultural Renaissance. Spinello Aretino (1350–1410) was one of the great *trecento* masters of Italian fresco. Pietro Aretino (1492–1566), a gifted poet, was capable of writing the most vituperative, scandal-causing verses. He was an even more gifted blackmailer, adept at appealing to powerful men's purses in order that his select words about them might never reach the general public. Another towering Aretine was Giorgio Vasari (1512–74), a mediocre painter, a much more talented architect, and, with his book *Lives*



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of the Artists—a collection of biographies of masters from Cimabue and Giotto through Michelangelo—the unwitting author of the first art history text.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** The main line between **Rome** (22 daily; 2 hr.–2 hr., 55 min.) and **Florence** (45 daily; 40–90 min.) also passes **Chiusi/Chianciano Terme** (24 daily; 35–70 min.) and **Orvieto** (15 daily; 50–80 min.) on its way to Arezzo. You can transfer at Terontola/Cortona for the dozen daily trains to **Perugia** (2¼ hr. total riding time) and **Assisi** (2 hr., 40 min.). The **train station** (✆ **0575-20-553**) is at Piazza della Repubblica just southwest of the city walls. All hotels are within a few blocks' walk.

By Car The quickest route from Florence or Rome is the **A1 autostrada.** You can **park,** usually not free, along Via Niccolò Aretino just inside the southwest corner of the walls and Via B. Alberti, behind the train station. There's free parking on Via Pietri and Via XXV Aprile.

By Bus **SITA** buses (✆ **0575-749-818;** www.sita-on-line.it) from **Florence** (1 hr., 20 min.–2 hr.) and **LFI** buses (✆ **0575-324-294**) from **Siena** (1½ hr.) let you off in front of the train station.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **APT information office** is at Piazza della Repubblica 28, 52100 Arezzo, just outside the train station (✆ **0575-377-678** or ✆/fax 0575-20-839; www.apt.arezzo.it; Mon–Fri 9am–1pm and 3–7pm, Sun 9am–1pm). There's a **provincial APT office** at Piazza Risorgimento 116 (✆ **0575-23-952** or 0575-23-523; fax 0575-28-042); go up Via Guido Monaco a block and turn right; call for hours. The website **www.cittadiarezzo.com** is also very helpful for planning a visit.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS In the last week of August, Guido Monaco's musical traditions are carried on in a series of choral concerts called the **International Polyphonic Conference.**

On the third Sunday in June and the first Sunday in September, Arezzo pulls out the stops for a full-fledged medieval jousting tournament, the **Giostra del Saracino** ★★, dating from at least the 16th century. After an afternoon of complex flag-tossing and pageantry, mounted, armored riders thunder across dirt-lined Piazza del Duomo with their lances aimed at the effigy of a Saracen warrior. The twist is that when the "knights" strike a blow on his shield, the Saracen swivels, and his other arm is carrying a whip. Hitting the shield's bull's-eye is only half the trick—the other is dodging the whip.

On the first Sunday of every month, Piazza del Duomo is filled with more than 600 dealers in one of Italy's leading **antiques fairs** ★. The dealers specialize in 19th-century furniture and 17th- to 19th-century glass, but items dating from the Renaissance are well represented (as are items from the 1950s and 1960s). It draws serious collectors from around the world. In winter, the fair runs from 7:30am to 3pm (in summer as late as 7 or 9pm).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Arezzo's main square, **Piazza Grande** ★, is charmingly off-kilter. Since 1200, it has listed alarmingly to one side, creating a slope crowned with a graceful **loggia** ★ designed in 1573 by Giorgio Vasari. Perpendicular to where the shop-filled tunnel-like loggia runs out of the square sits the composite **Palazzo della Fraternità dei Laici.** The Gothic lower half (1377) has a detached Spinello Aretino fresco of the *Pietà* and a Bernardo Rossellino *Madonna della Misericordia* (1434) in bas-relief above the door. The upper loggia was built in 1460, and the clock bell tower added by Vasari in 1552. An extensive renovation of the *palazzo* was completed in 2002. One palace down to the left is the arcaded apse of Santa Maria della Pieve (see below).

San Francesco ★★ One of the greatest fresco cycles by one of the greatest artists of the Renaissance covers the sanctuary of this 14th-century church. Piero della Francesca's ***Legend of the True Cross*** ★★★ (1448–66) has drawn art-loving pilgrims from around the world for centuries. Piero's work features perfect perspective and hauntingly ethereal, woodenly posed figures that nonetheless convey untold depths of emotion. It fascinates art theorists just as his innovative narrative schemes and figurative style earned him the admiration of his contemporaries. The entire cycle was gorgeously restored from 1985 to 2000

to fix the extensive damage wreaked by 500 years of fires, earthquakes, Napoleonic troops, and creeping dampness in the plaster. You can see them from the ropes at the base of the altar steps, about 10m (33 ft.) away, but it is well worth booking a ticket to get up close.

French master Guillaume de Marcillat painted the **rose window** in 1520, and for a peek at what Piero's assistant Lorentino d'Andrea was capable of, check out the first altar on the right. Here in 1463, Lorentino frescoed a scene of San Bernardino leading the Aretines out of this very church on a good old-fashioned pagan-smashing day trip to destroy the cultish temple of Fons Tecta. Just beyond it is a *Sacred Conversation* by Niccolò Soggi and, in the second chapel, scenes from the *Life of St. Bartholomew* by another of Piero's followers. Spinello Aretino painted the ***Annunciation*** at the end of the right aisle.

A new policy requires visitors to make reservations to view the fresco cycles. Twenty-five people are admitted every 30 minutes, and are required to leave at the end of the time slot. Go online to the website listed below. Note that you're required to pick up your tickets at least a half-hour before your entry time or you risk losing your space on the tour.

Piazza San Francesco. ✆ **0575-20-630;** required reservation for Piero cycle tickets at ✆ 0575-24-001, 06-32-810, or www.pierodellafrancesca.it. Admission to church free; Piero cycle 6€ including the booking fee. Church daily 8:30am–noon and 2:30–6:30pm. Piero cycle by 30-min. guided tour only, leaving on the half-hour Mon–Fri 9am–6pm; Sat 9am–5:30pm (5:45pm in winter); Sun 1–5:30pm. Box office closes 1 hr. earlier.

Santa Maria della Pieve ★ This 12th-century church is Lombard Romanesque architecture at its most beautiful, with a craggy, eroded **facade ★** of stacked arcades in luminous beige stone. The spaces between the columns of the arcades get narrower at each level, which, along with the setting on a narrow street, only adds to the illusion of great height. The occasional carved column was mixed in; look for the human telamon in the top row. The fat 36m (118-ft.) **bell tower** "of the hundred holes," with its bifore windows (mullioned windows with two lights), is a 1330 addition. The medieval reliefs lining the main doorway depict the months of the year, including the two-faced pagan god Janus sitting in for the month of January (named after him).

The arches in the interior are just starting to get plucked to Gothic pointiness, and dozens of windows light the place. On the high altar above the raised crypt is a 1320 **polyptych of the *Madonna and Child with Saints* ★**—all wearing gorgeously worked fabrics—by Sienese master Pietro Lorenzetti. In the crypt, with its carved medieval capitals, is a 1326 reliquary bust by Aretine goldsmiths Peter and Paul; inside are the remains of Arezzo's patron saint, St. Donato, a local bishop martyred in the 5th century.

Corso Italia 7. ✆ **0575-22-629.** Free admission. May–Sept daily 8am–7pm; Oct–Apr daily 8am–noon and 3–6pm.

Duomo At the highest point in town, surrounded by the Parco il Prato with its 16th-century Medici fortress ruins, Arezzo's cathedral was slowly agglomerated between 1278 and 1510, though it took until 1859 to raise the neo-Gothic bell tower and until 1935 to finish the simple facade. Among the masterpieces inside, the greatest may be the **stained-glass windows ★** (1519–23) by the undisputed master of the form, the French immigrant Guillaume de Marcillat. This is one of the few complete cycles of his work in Italy that hasn't been destroyed, and it includes the *Pentecost* rose window in the facade; the *Calling of St. Matthew,* the *Baptism of Christ,* the *Expulsion of Merchants from the Temple,* the *Adulteress,* and the *Raising of Lazarus* along the right wall; and *Saints Silvester and Lucy* in the chapel to the left of the apse. De Marcillat, who left France after becoming a Dominican friar (apparently to avoid murder charges), painted the first three **ceiling vaults** of the nave.

There are fine Gothic tombs throughout the church, and the city's patron saint, St. Donato, is buried under the beautifully sculpted 14th-century Gothic **high altar.** At the end of the left aisle, on the wall next to the sacristy door, is a scraggly-haired but still magnificent ***Mary Magdalene*** frescoed by Piero della Francesca (use the switch hidden on the pillar across from the fresco to turn on the light). Sienese sculptors Agostino da Giovanni and Agnolo di Ventura, who worked on the high altar, created the Gothic stone comic book of the **tomb of Bishop Guido Tarlati** in the left aisle. The 14th-century relief panels depict scenes from the life of the warrior bishop with Aretine landscapes in the background. The mammoth 1535 *cantoria* beyond it was Vasari's first go at architecture.

The large **Cappella della Madonna del Conforto (Lady Chapel)** in the left aisle near the church entrance preserves several della Robbia terra cottas, including an *Assumption,* a *Crucifixion,* and a pretty *Madonna and Child* by Andrea, plus a polychrome *Madonna and Child with Saints* attributed to Giovanni. In the small **baptistery** is a **font** bearing Donatello-school *schiacciato* relief panels—the *Baptism of Christ* scene may have been carved by Donatello himself.

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **0575-23-991.** Free admission. Daily 7am–12:30pm and 3–6:30pm.

Museo del Duomo This small but worthy museum is hidden on the back side of Arezzo's Duomo. Inside are three painted wood crucifixes from the 12th and 13th centuries and a terra-cotta ***Annunciation*** (1434) by Bernardo Rossellino. The Annunciation is a popular theme here, and you can see how Spinello Aretino, his teacher Andrea di Nerio, and Spinello's son Parri each handled the scene in fresco. One of the collection's star frescoes is a 15th-century ***St. Jerome in the Desert*** by Bartolomeo della Gatta, who collaborated with Domenico Pecori on the 1520 *Madonna and Child with Saints Fabian and Sebastian.* The museum also preserves some of hometown boy Giorgio Vasari's better works, a ***Preaching of the Baptist*** and a ***Baptism of Christ*** (1549), in which Jesus is surrounded by a lyrical, pastoral landscape.

Piazzetta dietro il Duomo (entry sometimes through sacristy in Duomo's left aisle). ✆ **0575-23-991.** Admission 2.60€. Thurs–Sat 10am–noon.

San Domenico The interior of this 1275 church, fronted by a brick-lined piazza planted with lime trees, is very dark, but to the left and right of the altar are fuse boxes where you can switch on the lights. Lots of good 14th-century **fresco fragments** line the walls, and over the high altar is a painted ***Crucifix*** ★ by Cimabue, brilliantly restored and returned to this place of honor in early 2003.

On the entrance wall are frescoes of the *Crucifixion* and the *Life of St. Nicholas of Bari* by Parri di Spinello. On the right wall, under a Gothic canopy, Luca di Tommé painted a very young *Christ with the Doctors of the Church* in the Sienese style. The chapel to the right of the high altar contains a 14th-century stone *Madonna and Child* and a delicate fresco of the ***Annunciation*** by Spinello Aretino. More frescoes line the church's left wall, and the last one on your right as you leave is a 15th-century *St. Vincent Ferrer.* According to Giorgio Vasari, this is the only known work by his grandfather, Lazzaro Vasari.

Piazza San Domenico. ✆ **0575-22-906.** Free admission. Nov 3–Mar 22 daily 9am–6:30pm; Mar 23–Nov 2 daily 9am–7pm.

Casa di Vasari (Vasari's House) Giorgio Vasari bought this house in 1540 and decorated it with rather bland, semi-Mannerist paintings with the help of his contemporaries and students. There are works by Il Poppi, Alessandro Allori, Santi di Tito, and, of course, Giorgio himself. The best of the Vasari pieces are a *Deposition* in the second room

and a painting in the first room of ***Virtue, Envy, and Fortune*** duking it out on the ceiling. It features a nifty optical trick: The figure that appears to be on top changes as you view it from different perspectives.

Via XX Settembre 55. ✆ **0575-409-040.** Admission 2€ adults, 1€ ages 18–25, free under 18. Wed–Sat and Mon 9am–7pm; Sun 9am–1pm.

Museo Statale d'Arte Medievale e Moderna Every epoch of Aretine and imported artistry from the Middle Ages to the Macchiaioli is represented in the moderately large, moderately interesting collections here. A room off the ground-floor courtyard has **medieval sculptures** ranging from 11th-century capitals to 14th-century *Madonnas* rescued from various town gates and defunct churches. On the first floor are a Byzantine-style 13th-century painting of *St. Francis* by Margaritone d'Arezzo and an early-Sienese-school *Madonna* embedded with baubles. The 15th-century frescoes of Spinello Aretino's pupil Giovanni d'Agnolo di Balduccio dominate room 2. In the next room, the master weighs in with a ***Trinità,*** accompanied by his son Parri's ***Sconfitta di Massenzio,*** a battle scene discovered in the Badia during World War II cleanup. Historic tournament armor is preserved in room 5 in the form of loads of 17th-century weapons of death. There are two paintings by Bartolomeo della Gatta here of ***St. Roch***—one shows a medieval Arezzo in the background but doesn't reveal that the city is in the throes of the Black Death. This work was part of an offering to the saint begging him to intercede to stop the disease.

An ancient pottery center, Arezzo is always ready to appreciate art from outside masters. Its museum has a fine collection of 14th- to 18th-century **majolica ceramic** works from Faenza, Gubbio (including one precious plate by the famous Mastro Giorgio), and Deruta, along with some Andrea della Robbia terra cottas. The first-floor collections contain Mannerist and baroque canvases by Il Poppi, Empoli, and Salimbeni, plus several by Vasari—the best is his large, crowded 1548 ***Supper for the Marriage of Esther.*** The second floor has a gathering of small Macchiaioli paintings and a pair of Luca Signorelli ***Madonna with Child*** paintings (1518–22) but sputters out into insipid baroque pieces.

Via San Lorentino 8. ✆ **0575-409-050.** Admission 4€ adults, 2€ ages 18–25, free for children under 18 and seniors over 68. Tues–Sun 9am–6pm.

Santissima Annunziata The main attractions of this 14th-century church's Renaissance interior—designed by Bartolomeo della Gatta and Giuliano and Antonio da Sangallo the Elder—are a series of **stained-glass windows** by Guillaume de Marcillat. Just inside to the right is what may be his masterpiece, the ***Marriage of the Virgin.*** Behind the high altar is an *Assumption,* and saints are depicted in windows along the aisles. The church retains some good baroque works, as well as Niccolò Soggi's restored 1522 ***Nativity*** to the left of the high altar, and, on the first altar on the left, a painting of the *Deposition* that an 18-year-old Giorgio Vasari painted based on a Rosso Fiorentino cartoon.

Via Garibaldi 185. ✆ **0575-26-774.** Free admission. Daily 7:30am–12:30pm and 3:30–7pm.

Badia In 1565, Giorgio Vasari performed a High Renaissance architectural overhaul on this 13th-century church. He did such a good job that in 1865, church officials hijacked what Vasari had intended to be his and his family's tomb, installed in the Pieve di Santa Maria, and reassembled it here in the Badia as the church's **high altar.** Vasari's paintings adorning the altar include a 1551 *Calling of St. Peter* in cotton-candy pastels and a watery classical background. On the inside entrance wall of the church is a 1476 fresco by Bartolomeo della Gatta, who painted a remarkably lifelike face of ***St. Lawrence*** in a *trompe l'oeil* niche. Past the third altar on the right is a 1320 ***Crucifix*** by Segna di Bonaventura. Above

the transept is the restored ***trompe l'oeil* dome** painted on canvas (1702) by the baroque master of perspective illusion, Andrea Pozzo. There actually is a dome there, but it's a shallow one—Pozzo was hired to make it look mightier. The best effect isn't from directly underneath but from the little bronze marker in the aisle near the front of the pews.

Piazza di Badia. ✆ **0575-356-612.** Free admission. Mon–Sat 8am–noon and 4–7pm; Sun 7:15–9:15am and 10:15am–12:30pm.

Museo Archeologico Mecenate Arezzo has made a small park out of the remains of its **Roman amphitheater** (entered from Via Crispi). Atop one of the amphitheater's curves, a 15th-century convent with a double loggia has been converted into an archaeological museum housing remains from Etruscan and Roman Arretium. After some 6th-century-B.C. bronzes and a red-figure amphora from the 5th century B.C., rooms 6 to 8 contain the museum's pride, a collection of the mass-produced ***corallino* pottery** that made Roman Arezzo famous from 50 B.C. to A.D. 70. These waxy brick-red ceramics were decorated with stamped reliefs and depressions, and the tools and styles of various production studios are didactically laid out. Room 8 contains the remnants of the famed Ateius workshop, which at its height had branch ateliers in Pisa and Lyons. Upstairs are some relics from the Chiusi area, including an unusually anthropomorphic 7th-century-B.C. urn with human arms and a lid shaped like a human head. Don't miss the highly refined tiny **portrait of a toga-wearing man** incised on gold and silver leaf and protected by a glass disk. This remarkably realistic artistry dates from the early 3rd century A.D.

Via Margaritone 10. ✆ **0575-20-882.** Admission 4€ adults, 2€ children. Daily 8:30am–7:30pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotels in Arezzo are nothing to write home about—they cater mainly to businesspeople passing through. A distant third choice after the places listed below is the **Hotel Vogue,** Via Guido Monaco 56 (✆ **0575-24-361;** www.voguehotel.it) whose doubles at 200€ are sleek and set in a beautifully renovated space, though, like most Aretines, the hosts are perhaps better known for their artistic prowess and business acumen than any down-home hospitality.

Cavaliere Palace Hotel This former boarding house is the nicest game in town. The functional furnishings and carpeted floors are pleasantly unassuming and comfy, and you can breakfast on a viewless terrace in summer. The hotel is tucked on a side street off the right of Piazza Guido Monaco, so it's generally quieter than the Continentale (see below).

Via Madonna del Prato 83 (off Via Roma just east of Piazza G. Monaco), 52100 Arezzo. ✆ **0575-26-836.** Fax 0575-21-925. www.cavalierehotels.com. 27 units. 135€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ in nearby garage. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Hotel Continentale In a 1950s building on the south edge of Piazza Guido Monaco, the Continentale offers cozy modern rooms with built-in white lacquer furniture and floral-print curtains and upholstery. Try to get one away from the main street or piazza, both of which suffer from traffic noise. Rooms with numbers that end in 22 are larger and come with satin quilts, plush easy chairs, curtained archways, and nifty flip-top desks. Guests can eat breakfast in the breakfast room or on a large panoramic terrace upstairs in summer.

Piazza Guido Monaco 7 (btw. the station and San Francesco), 52100 Arezzo. ✆ **0575-20-251.** Fax 0575-350-485. www.hotelcontinentale.com. 76 units. 108€ double; 145€ triple; 300€–450€ suite. Breakfast 9€. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ in nearby garage. **Amenities:** Bar; babysitting; bike rental; concierge; room service (bar). *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Antica Osteria L'Agania TUSCAN This small joint doesn't bother with a wine list; a staff member plunks down a bottle of the eminently quaffable house chianti, and you pay for what you drink. The locals pack into this long, wood-paneled room for unpretentious food like their grandmas used to make. They come especially for the thick rib-sticking *ribollita,* but you can also mix and match gnocchi, tagliatelle, and creamy polenta with the basic Tuscan sauces (the gnocchi and the ragù make a nice combo). The trattoria proudly offers the lovely "local dishes" foreign visitors rarely order, such as tripe and the very fatty *grifi e polenta* (chunks of veal stomach in polenta). You may find your taste buds more attuned to the *arista* (roast pork) or *polpette fritte con patate* (fried meatballs with roast potatoes).

Via Mazzini 10 (near San Francesco). ✆ **0575-295-381.** www.agania.com. Reservations recommended. Primi/secondi 5€–8€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–3pm and 7–10:30pm. Closed last 2 weeks of June.

Buca di San Francesco ★ TUSCAN The Buca resides in the frescoed cellar of a 14th-century *palazzo* and has been run by the same family for over 70 years. Mario de Filippis likes to keep "the memory of old flavors" in his ancient dishes. Try the respectable *ribollita* or good *bringoli casalinghi con il sugo finto* (homemade spaghetti in chunky tomato sauce). If you're waffling over a secondo, order *la saporita di bonconte,* a plate piled with portions of all the restaurant's specialties—tripe, roasted sausages, baked rabbit, and others—a dish from the days when an army on the march had to make a communal stew out of what each man could muster (it comes with a commemorative plate). They'll keep pouring the vin santo until you run out of *cantucci* or fall off your chair, and they love sending you off with a bag of little goodies. (Tell them Frommer's sent you, and they may throw in an original print or collection of de Filippis's famous bookplates.)

Via San Francesco 1 (next door to San Francesco). ✆ **0575-23-271.** www.bucadisanfrancesco.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 10€–15€; secondi 15€–20€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2:30pm; Wed–Sun 7–9:30pm. Closed 2 weeks in July.

Le Tastevin TUSCAN Tastevin is a chic and haughty spot that serves up Aretine dishes as well as plenty of more innovative foods, too. The *rigatoni a'le Tastevin* is a creamy version with truffles and asparagus, while the very good *penne alla Tastevin* comes in a cream sauce of puréed yellow peppers. Or you can try a variety of fish dishes or a *bistecca di vitello al pepe verde* (beef cooked in its own juices with whole peppercorns). But beware: If you're not a regular, service can verge on rude.

Via de' Cenci 9 (btw. Via Madonna del Prato and Corso Italia). ✆ **0575-28-304.** Reservations recommended. Primi 5€–7€; secondi 8€–11€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–3pm and 7–10pm.

EN ROUTE TO SANSEPOLCRO

Twenty-five kilometers (16 miles) from Arezzo on the SS73 toward Sansepolcro is the turnoff onto SS221 to **Monterchi.** This is home of Piero della Francesca's ***Madonna del Parto*** ★★, which you can see in a museum built specially for it at Via della Reglia 1 (✆ **0575-70-713** or 0575-70-710). This psychologically probing fresco depicts the Virgin Mary 9 months pregnant with Jesus, shown to us by a pair of angels who hold back the intricately embroidered flaps of a tent. It's one of the earliest depictions of a pregnant Madonna, a subject exceedingly rare in Italian art (one in Prato predates it slightly). Mary here is heavy with child, with one eyelid drooping and a hand on her swollen belly. She emanates a solemnity that's at once human yet regal, reflecting the grave import of becoming the mother of the Savior.

The *Madonna del Parto* has come far. It started as a lowly chapel decoration for a church in the local cemetery. Much of the church was demolished in 1785, but the chapel and fresco remained and became the focus of pilgrimages by both art historians and pregnant women praying for an easy birth. It was moved a few years ago after extensive renovation to its current high-tech command bunker, though the sterile museum environment has robbed the work of some of its mysticism and charm. Monterchi was the birthplace of Piero's mother, and some believe she was buried in the cemetery and the fresco was painted as a memorial. It's open Tuesday through Sunday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 7pm (until 6pm Oct–Mar). Admission is 3.10€ adults and 1.80€ students; children under 14 are free. If you're planning to visit Sansepolcro, the best way to get here is by bus. It's a 30-minute ride; there are six runs on weekdays and two on Sundays (see below for details).

2 SANSEPOLCRO: ARTISTIC TREASURES OFF THE BEATEN PATH

37km (23 miles) NE of Arezzo; 15km (9 miles) N of Città di Castello; 122km (76 miles) E of Florence; 240km (149 miles) N of Rome

The medieval walled town of Sansepolcro is far off the tourist path for anyone not enamored of the art of **Piero della Francesca.** It's the birthplace of painters Raffaellino del Colle (1490–1566) and Santi di Tito (1538–1603), and of the Buitoni pasta empire. The small village founded here around A.D. 1000 was so proud of the bits of the Holy Sepulcher a couple of pilgrims brought back that the town was named Borgo San Sepolcro. Chances are, if they'd held off on the christening a few hundred years, the place would now be called Borgo Piero della Francesca, after the monumentally important painter who was born here around 1420.

One of the leading lights of the early Renaissance, Piero took the perspective obsession of Florentine masters Masaccio and Paolo Uccello and mixed it with the ethereal posed beauty of the Umbrian school to create a haunting style all his own. Piero's figures are at once hyper-posed masses of precision Euclidean geometry and vehicles for a profound expressive naturalism and astute psychological studies. His backgrounds, even those of the countryside, are masterpieces of architectural volume. His painting has so fascinated the modern world that the connect-the-dots loop of cities preserving his works has become known as the **Piero della Francesca Trail,** a pilgrimage route of sorts for art lovers. When Piero's eyesight began to fail later in life, he wrote two treatises, *On the Five Regular Bodies* and *On Perspective in Painting,* which together set the rules for his universe of perspective and logic, broke down the human body into a geometric machine of perfect proportions, and became required reading for almost every Renaissance artist. He died near his hometown in 1492.

Piero is somewhere between a cultural hero and a patron saint here. Every Sansepolcran seems to be a Piero expert. A tourist-office employee argues stridently that Piero's is the first pregnant Madonna. The Fiorentino owner can give a ready discourse on the man and his art. And there's a tired office worker who climbs the steps to the glass window of the museum's Piero room every evening—he just pauses and peers through the glass at the Piero della Francesca masterpieces inside for a few moments before walking back down the stairs and heading home.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** Unless you're coming from Umbria, the train is not an option. Sansepolcro anchors one end of the private FCU train line, with about 20 trains daily from **Perugia** (80 min.–2 hr.). Seven trains a day run from **Rome** to Terni, where you can switch to this FCU line (3½ hr. total if you hit the layover right). The station (✆ **0575-742-094**) is just outside the city walls at Piazza Battisti.

By Car Sansepolcro lies where the SS73 from Arezzo intersects with the SS3bis from Perugia. You can park outside Porta Fiorentina along Viale Vittorio Veneto to the east, or north outside Porta del Castello.

By Bus **CAT** buses (✆ **0575-736-083** or 0575-85-211) arrive and leave at the traffic circle off Via G. Marconi (at the west end of Via Aggiunti). Buses serve **Arezzo** (1 hr.), **Florence** (1½ hr.), **Monterchi** (25 min.), and **Caprese Michelangelo** (40–75 min.). Buy tickets at the Bar Autostazione on the piazza.

VISITOR INFORMATION The helpful **tourist office** is inside the Palazzo Pretorio at Piazza Garibaldi 2, 52037 Sansepolcro (✆/fax **0575-740-536;** www.sansepolcro.net; daily 9:30am–1pm and 3:30–6:30pm).

FESTIVALS & MARKETS On the second Sunday in September, the **Palio della Balestra** allows Sansepolcro a crossbow rematch with its traditional rivals from Gubbio. This medieval test of archery skill is highlighted with a display from Sansepolcro's famous *sbandieratori* (flag tossers). They perform their medieval act of juggling colorful banners dressed in Renaissance costumes lifted straight from Piero paintings. Call ✆ **0575-75-827,** or visit **www.balestrierisansepolcro.it** for more info. A huge **market** is held after the fourth Sunday of Lent, and August 16 is a more low-key local festival in honor of **San Rocco.**

ENJOYING SANSEPOLCRO'S ARTISTIC LEGACY

Sansepolcro's only outstanding sight is the Museo Civico (see below), housed in a 15th-century building that was once the **Palazzo Comunale.** An outdoor staircase runs to the former main entrance, now a glassed-in doorway where you can see into one of the museum's main halls. There you can gaze on Piero della Francesca's masterpieces at any time of day or night—Sansepolcro's singularly unselfish way of opening its artistic patrimony to everyone, regardless of whether one buys a ticket to the museum. A local, nodding approvingly, called the arrangement "highly advanced."

The palace is connected by a bridge to a perpendicular building, the 14th-century **Palazzo Pretorio,** embedded with two orderly rows of della Robbian terra-cotta coats of arms left by previous mayors. Both palaces were heavily restructured in the 19th century. If you pass under their connecting bridge and cross the street, you'll be on a small piazza flanked on the right by **San Francesco** and the left by **Santa Maria delle Grazie.** The former has some baroque canvases and a 1304 Gothic sandstone altar carved with reliefs; the latter is fronted by a 1518 double loggia and preserves a small *Madonna in Prayer* by Raffaellino del Colle and a wood ceiling carved by Alberto Alberti.

Back under the bridge connecting the *palazzi,* you'll see the huge portico of the late-16th-century **Palazzo delle Laudi** across from them. Next door is Sansepolcro's **Duomo,** with a Romanesque-Gothic interior. On the right wall is a fresco of the *Madonna with Saints Thomas Becket and Catherine of Alexandria* (of whom only the iconographic wheel remains) painted by a Rimini-school artist in 1383. Just past it is Santi di Tito's baroque *Incredulity of St. Thomas* (1575), followed by a faded Bartolomeo della Gatta fresco of the

Crucifixion. Behind the high altar is Niccolò di Segna's polyptych, whose "Resurrection of Christ" scene heavily influenced Piero della Francesca's famous version now in the Museo Civico. To the altar's left is a 10th-century wood *Volto Santo* crucifixion. Between the first two altars on the left wall is an *Ascension* by Umbrian master Perugino, restored in 1997, as well as a *Resurrection* by Raffaellino del Colle.

Just below the Duomo is Sansepolcro's main square, **Piazza Torre di Berta,** named for a tower demolished in World War II. Off its right side runs the main shopping street and *passeggiata* drag, **Via XX Settembre.** Three blocks down is the intersection with Via L. Pacioli, which leads all the way to the southern city walls at Via Santa Croce and the deconsecrated church of **San Lorenzo.** Only die-hard Rosso Fiorentino fans need bother hiking down, as there's no guarantee you'll find anyone in the lace-making school or Choral Society headquarters next door to let you inside to see Rosso's darkened *Deposition.*

Museo Civico ★★ Though most famous for its remarkable Piero della Francesca works, Sansepolcro's museum also has paintings by native baroque masters Santi di Tito and Raffaellino del Colle and a piece by Luca Signorelli. First, though, a staircase off the entrance leads down to a small didactic collection of **prehistoric remains** (stone tools and bits of ceramics) as well as to a room of churchly vestments and reliquary busts alongside a courtly **13th-century stone frieze** of knights and monsters.

Room 1 sports a 19th-century terra-cotta bust of Piero della Francesca. Among the 17th-century works in room 2 is a late Mannerist *Crucifixion* painted by il Passignano or someone in his circle. Stairs lead up to a pair of rooms housing detached 15th-century frescoes by unknown local artists, some with their *sinopie* (preliminary sketches).

Room 3 houses Piero's ***Madonna della Misericordia*** ★ (1445–62), reassembled without its frame. The Mary of Mercy spreads her cloak around kneeling donors (the one to the left of her, looking up, is believed by some to be a self-portrait by Piero), while a sleepy-eyed St. John the Baptist and other saints look on. The central panel and Saints John and Sebastian are certainly from Piero's brush, as are the Crucifixion above and the Angel and Virgin Annunciate panels flanking it. The rest were probably worked on by assistants or a miniaturist.

Room 4 starts with two detached frescoes by Piero, one ***San Ludovico da Tolosa*** (1460, and attributed by some to Piero's student Lorentino), and a famous partial fresco of ***San Giuliano*** ★ (1455–58), discovered in the 1950s under the whitewash of Sant'Agostino (later Santa Chiara) Church.

At the end of the room is one of Piero's indisputable masterpieces, the ***Resurrection of Christ*** ★★★. Painted in 1463 for another room in this palace and moved here in 1480, this work made Piero's modern reputation—art historians began paying attention to it and Piero in general after 1925, when Aldous Huxley dubbed it the "best picture in the world." The fresco-and-tempera work displays a resounding naturalness in its perfect perspective and the almost uncanny modeling of the figures and faces. At the same time it's imbued with an eerie spirituality, or rather supernaturalness, in the deadpan gaze of the risen Christ—here, truly a god in human form—and in the soldiers who look less asleep than under a magic spell of suspended animation. Piero lets the power of his art speak through his incomparable technique, leaving the religious symbolism to be relayed simply through the background: As the Savior rises from the dead, the trees and the land come back to life around him from left to right. The second sleeping soldier on the left in the brown armor is thought to be a self-portrait of Piero. This fresco may be one of the few pieces of art that actually did save its city from destruction. In 1944, a British commanding officer

had orders to bomb Nazi troops occupying the city. The officer, having read Huxley's words, held off the attack until the Germans withdrew on their own.

Room 5 has a 16th-century Umbrian-school *Assumption* and a processional banner painted in 1505 by Luca Signorelli with the ***Crucifixion*** (with a beautiful group of mourning Marys) on one side and a *St. Anthony Abbot and San Egidio* on the other. Matteo di Giovanni's 1440 cathedral altarpiece is missing the central *Baptism of Christ* panel by Piero (it's in London's National Gallery), but the *St. Peter* and *St. Paul* are worth a study, and (in an innovative touch) a slide projector fills in the missing gap with a blurry reproduction. Room 6 has two paintings by Raffaellino del Colle, a huge 1526 *Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin* and a detached fresco of *St. Leo I* (1520–30), as well as a *Martyrdom of St. Quentin* (1518) by quintessential Mannerist master Pontormo. The last few rooms are filled with Mannerist and baroque canvases, including five by Santi di Tito.

Via Aggiunti 65 (back side of the former Palazzo Comunale on Piazza Garibaldi). ✆ **0575-732-218.** www.museocivicosansepolcro.it. Admission 6€ adults, 4.50€ seniors over 65 and students aged 19–25, 3€ children 10–18. June–Sept daily 9am–1:30pm and 2:30–7:30pm; Oct–May daily 9:30am–1pm and 2:30–6pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Besides the following, **Da Ventura** restaurant (see below) also rents basic rooms.

Hotel Fiorentino Since 1807, Piero pilgrims and other Sansepolcro visitors have been stopping at this inn. The rooms are nothing special—tiled floors with a throw rug or two, a random assortment of furniture and Piero posters, and many shower heads without a curtain—but the Fiorentino is central, clean, friendly, and very well priced. And you never have to leave the building for the best restaurant in town (see Ristorante Fiorentino, below). The accommodations on the third floor are a bit smaller but more pleasant, with nice parquet floors, views over the rooftops (some to the mountains beyond), and country-style quilts. There's also a small terrace where you can breakfast in nice weather.

Via L. Pacioli 60 (on the corner of Via XX Settembre), 52037 Sansepolcro (AR). ✆ **0575-740-350.** Fax 0575-740-370. www.albergofiorentino.com. 21 units. 65€ double; 88€ triple; 100€ quad. Breakfast 7€–10€. MC, V. Parking 9€ in garage. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bike rentals; room service (breakfast). *In room:* A/C, TV.

Hotel La Balestra Past a shopping complex in a modern building on the major road running along the north side of town, La Balestra provides more solid comfort than the Fiorentino (see above). If you want large, carpeted rooms with built-in furniture and all the trimmings—and don't mind the total lack of charm and 10-minute hike to the Pieros at the Museo Civico—this is the place for you. Ask for a room off the front, as there's traffic all night. The moderately priced restaurant offers Tuscan dishes (the ricotta-stuffed cannelloni are good) and a decent wine list, and you can eat on a shaded veranda in summer.

Via Montefeltro 29 (northeast of the city walls), 52037 Sansepolcro (AR). ✆ **0575-735-151.** Fax 0575-740-282. www.labalestra.it. 52 units. 98€ double; 112€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; smoke-free rooms; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Da Ventura ★ TUSCAN Service at this unpretentious trattoria, in its third generation of Tofanelli family management, is truly "by the cart." Under rough-hewn wood ceilings and arches made of wine bottles, you can mix and match your own antipasto with selections from a wheeled cart. Another cart bears fresh homemade tagliatelle so you can choose the sauce of your choice to top it. (The ragù is a tasty bet.) The *bistecca di vitello* (thick veal steak) and the *maialino in porchetta* (roast suckling pig) are also accompanied by a gurney of *contorni* so that you can sample several side dishes. Of course, it's

all capped off with a cart of homemade desserts. Upstairs are seven very plain rooms with bathrooms that rent for 47€ per double.

Via Aggiunti 30 (a few blocks west of the Museo Civico on the other side of the walls). ✆/fax **0575-742-560.** Reservations recommended. Primi 7€–15€; secondi 8.50€–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–9:30pm; Sun 12:30–2:30pm. Closed Jan 1–10 and Aug 1–20.

Ristorante Fiorentino ★★ TUSCAN This very traditional 2-centuries-old place with coffered wood ceilings has a mélange of trattoria artifacts crowding the walls. The genial owner, Alessio, would rather recite what the kitchen is most proud of that night than break out an impersonal menu. Everything is fresh, the pasta is made by hand, and though the kitchen sticks to antique recipes, it does trim meats lean, and they won't look askance if you order a *porzione ridotto* (small portion). The *cappelli d'Alpino con pasta verde* (ricotta and veggies stuffed into spinach ravioli) is the primo to order, but you may also enjoy the *pappardelle al sugo di lepre* (noodles with hare sauce). Afterward, try the *coniglio arrosto* (slices of roast rabbit filled with herbed bread stuffing) or the *involtini di vitello* (veal rolled around artichokes or zucchini and cooked in its own juices).

Via L. Pacioli 60. ✆ **0575-742-033.** www.ristorantefiorentino.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 5€–7€; secondi 9€–13€. DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 12:30–3pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Closed Jan 20–30 and last 2 weeks of July.

EN ROUTE TO CORTONA

From Sansepolcro, it's a 15km (9-mile) jaunt across the border to **Umbria** (see chapters 12 and 13 for more information). If you haven't finished with Tuscany, you can head back toward Arezzo, turning south on the SS71 to go down the wide **Chiana Valley (Valdichiana),** famous for its snowy-white cattle that make such excellent *bistecca fiorentina,* toward Cortona.

Along the way, you'll pass **Castiglion Fiorentino,** a fortified medieval town dominated by a pronglike tower, the **Torre del Cassero.** The tourist info office is at Piazza Risorgimento 19 (✆ **0575-658-278;** fax 0575-659-457). It's open Tuesday through Sunday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 3:30 to 6:30pm, but may keep shorter hours in winter. The center of town is **Piazza del Municipio,** bordered by a 16th-century loggia supposedly by Giorgio Vasari. Just above this is the deconsecrated church of Sant'Angelo, now the entrance to the **Pinacoteca Comunale,** Piazza del Municipio 12 (✆ **0575-657-466**). Its well-labeled collections include some medieval gilded copper crosses, a Taddeo Gaddi *Madonna and Child,* and an odd Bartolomeo della Gatta *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata.* (Tradition holds the other friars nearby weren't awake when Francis was visited by the seraph, but here one clearly is.) There's a good view from a tower here. The museum is open Tuesday through Friday from 10am to 12:30pm and 4 to 6:30pm (until 7pm Sat–Sun). Admission is 3€ adults and 2€ children, or 5€ if you want to tack on a visit to any of the town's other museums. Next door to the **Palazzo Pretorio** is a tiny museum of Etruscan remains found in the area. Also worth calling on is the **Collegiata,** 300m (984 ft.) away on Piazza San Giuliano, with a *Madonna Enthroned with Saints* by Bartolomeo della Gatta on the third altar on the right, Lorenzo di Credi's *Adoration of the Child* in a chapel to the right of the high altar, and a huge *Maestà* by Segna di Bonaventura in the left transept. The **Pieve** next door (ask the Collegiata sacristan to unlock it) preserves a *Deposition* by Signorelli's school. On the edge of town is the High Renaissance templelike church of **Madonna della Consolazione,** an octagonal structure built in the 16th century.

A bit farther south along the SS71, you'll see the 13th-century walls of **Montecchio Vesponi** off to the left. The Florentines gave this castle to the English *condottiere* John Hawkwood (the gentleman in Paolo Uccello's equestrian painting in Florence's Duomo), who had fought battles for them.

3 CORTONA: LAND OF THE TUSCAN SUN

34km (22 miles) S of Arezzo; 105km (63 miles) SE of Florence; 194km (120 miles) N of Rome

Cortona sits implacably on a green mountainside above terraced olive groves, stony yet inviting. It's a steep medieval city where cut-stone staircases take the place of many streets, and views over the wide Chiana Valley stretch south to Umbria's Lake Trasimeno. Cortona has truly punched above its artistic weight; it spawned (among others) the great pre-Michelangelo painter Luca Signorelli and the early-17th-century painter/architect Pietro da Cortona. (Witness the very respectable church embellishments and the particularly rich collection of the tiny Museo Diocesano.)

The city's roots are deep and long. It claims to be no less than "the mother of Troy and grandmother of Rome," and legendarily had its start when Dardanus (who'd later go to Turkey and found Troy) dropped his helmet *(corythos)* during a battle—not an overly auspicious beginning for the town he founded here and named Corito. Cortona was already a thriving city by the 4th century B.C., when it was one of 12 cities that formed the Etruscan confederation. New finds at Melone II, one of the several Etruscan tombs dotting the hillside and valley below the town, suggest it may have been an even more important center than previously believed.

Even though it was long in a fairly undervisited corner of Tuscany, Cortona never succumbed to the all-too-common fate of becoming a dusty abandoned backwater. It retained a good bit of *passeggiata* action most evenings on the **Rugapiana** ("flat street," a nickname for Via Nazionale, the only road in town that even comes close to fitting that description), and in summer the city hosts a modest outdoor film festival in the Parterre Gardens behind San Domenico. Its art treasures ensure a steady stream of tourists, and the 140 University of Georgia students who descend every summer to study art help keep it on its toes—and make it the only place in Italy where you'll find wrinkled old olive farmers wearing "Go Dawgs!" sweatshirts.

However, the huge popularity of Frances Mayes's book *Under the Tuscan Sun,* about buying and renovating a villa just outside town, has hurled Cortona from relative obscurity to the forefront of Tuscany tourism, just behind Florence, Siena, Pisa, and the Chianti. Expect more crowds than you'd, er, expect for a town this size, especially in summer.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** Cortona doesn't have its own station, but two stops on the main **Rome-Arezzo** line serve it. The nearer one, Camucia/Cortona (✆ **0575-603-018**), is just 5km (3 miles) from town, but only local trains stop here. More trains stop at Terontola/Cortona (✆ **0575-67-034**) station, 11km (7 miles) from town. It's about a 25-minute ride from **Arezzo** (26 daily), 1 hour (2 hr. on the slow line) from **Florence** (24 daily), and 2 hours from **Rome** (15 daily). To save time, you can buy tickets at Cortona's tourist office.

From both stations, LFI buses leave about every 30 minutes for Cortona. At Camucia you can buy tickets at the bar outside the station or, if it's closed, the *tabacchi* up the street near the next bus stop.

By Car From Arezzo, take the SS71 and turn off for Cortona at Il Sodo (especially for Il Falconiere hotel) or Camucia. From Florence or Rome, take the A1 to the Valdichiana exit and follow the SS326 (direction: Perugia) until the Cortona exit at Appalto. This same highway originates in Siena. There is some parking in town, but your best bet is the free lot outside Porta Santa Maria.

By Bus LFI bus lines run from **Arezzo** (more than 20 daily; 35–60 min.), **Montepulciano** (one early afternoon run on school days; 1½ hr.), and several other, smaller places in the area.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **APT office** is at Via Nazionale 42, 52044 Cortona (✆ **0575-630-353;** fax 0575-630-656). May through September, it's open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm and Sunday from 9am to 1pm and 3:30 to 6:30pm; October through April, hours are Monday through Friday from 9am to 1pm and 3 to 6pm and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS On a Sunday in late May, the town turns out in late-14th-century costume for crossbow competitions in the annual **Giostra dell'Archidado.** At the end of July, Cortona takes part in the **Umbria Jazz festival** (Umbria is just across the border), and a well-regarded **antiques fair** is held in late August/early September (✆ **0575-630-610** for info). From August 14 to August 15, Cortona celebrates the mighty Chiana Valley beefsteak with a **Sagra della Bistecca,** holding a huge communal barbecue in the Parterre Gardens. **Market** day is Saturday.

RENAISSANCE ART & ETRUSCAN REMAINS

Cortona has an embarrassment of art riches for a town of its size. When you've finished with the main sights below, you might want to visit other attractions like **San Domenico,** near Piazza Garibaldi (the first square in town you come to by car or bus), with its faded *Fra' Angelico* under glass above the door and Luca Signorelli's *Madonna and Saints* (1515) to the left of the altar. The 15th-century altarpiece by Lorenzo di Niccolò Gerini is a cross between a Gothic composition and a classic early Renaissance style, plus—unlike many large altarpieces across Italy that have been broken up over the ages—it's completely intact, pinnacles, predella, and all. There's a pleasant **public park** behind the church.

On Piazza San Francesco, **San Francesco,** the second Franciscan church ever built and the burial place of the saint's main disciple, Brother Elias, has been undergoing extensive renovations for quite some time, and Pietro da Cortona's last work, an *Annunciation* in the third chapel, has been removed for safekeeping. Luca Signorelli also may be buried in the church's crypt.

San Niccolò, high in town off Via Berrettini, is a small 15th-century church with a quiet cypress-framed gravel courtyard. Inside, you'll find a detached *Madonna and Saints* fresco (left wall) and a two-sided altarpiece, both by Luca Signorelli. To get into the church, ring for the custodian around to the left; once inside, point to the *Deposition of Christ* altarpiece and ask, *"Posso vedere l'altro lato?"* (*Poh*-so veh-*dair*-ay *lahl*-trow *lah*-toe?) so you can see the *Madonna and Child* on the flip side.

Most of the Etruscan city is hidden in basements, but you can see part of the original **4th-century-b.c. walls** at the base of Porta Colonia's outer side. From here, take the path outside the walls down to the centrally planned 16th-century church of **Santa Maria**

Nuova, in which Giorgio Vasari and Christofanello both had a hand. (Works by Alessandro Allori and Empoli are inside.)

Museo dell'Accademia Etrusca ★ Cortona was one of the 12 cities of the Etruscan confederation, and the proliferation of artifacts discovered in the area led to the founding of an Etruscan Academy in 1727. The collections are now housed in the Palazzo Casali, a 13th-century mansion built for the city's governors; the building's side is embedded with centuries' worth of gubernatorial coats of arms.

The first room contains numerous small **bronze devotional figures** of Etruscan and Roman origin covering a period from the 6th to the 1st century B.C., along with some 15th-century **northern Italian ivories** and a remarkably intact 4th- or 5th-century-A.D. paleo-Christian glass chalice. The pride of the museum's collection is an **Etruscan oil lamp chandelier** from the late 4th century B.C. decorated with human heads, allegorical figures, and a few virile Pans playing their pipes, all surrounding a leering Gorgon's head on the bottom. On the walls hang **paintings** spanning the Renaissance and baroque periods, with works by Luca as well as Francesco Signorelli, Pinturicchio, Pietro da Cortona, Empoli, and Cristofano Allori. The one painting set apart is the famous ***Musa***

Polimnia, an encaustic (pigmented wax on wood) portrait that has of late been accused of being an 18th-century fake rather than a 1st-century-A.D. Roman original.

The small **Egyptian collection** includes some brightly colored wood sarcophagi and a rare wooden model of a funerary boat. In the jumble of Etruscan remains and post-16th-century fine and decorative arts filling the next few rooms, don't miss the 19th-century **Cantonese chessboard** or the elaborately rococo glazed ceramic ***Tempietto Ginori*** (1756), dripping with fanciful allegorical figures and studded with portrait medallions. There's also a 12th- or 13th-century Tuscan mosaic of a ***Madonna*** with oversize hands praying. Its psychedelic coloring makes it look almost like a modern work; keep this in mind when you see actual 20th-century mosaics around town (especially the Passion stations on the steep Via Santa Margherita) done by **Gino Severini.** Severini (1883–1966) was Cortona's most recent artistic master, and the last room on this floor is devoted to his works. Severini's goal apparently was to paint at least one piece in every major artistic style and movement from the first half of this century, though he was ostensibly a die-hard Futurist.

Upstairs is an exhibition of the ongoing excavations of the **Melone II** tomb and its altar, a remarkable Etruscan find first uncovered in 1990 (see below). The more portable pieces from the dig have been removed here for safekeeping, and there's also a plaster cast of one of the sphinxes from the altar.

Piazza Signorelli 9. ✆ **0575-630-415** or 0575-637-235. www.accademia-etrusca.org/museo. Admission 7€ adults, 4€ children. Tues–Sun 10am–7pm (until 5pm Nov–Mar).

Duomo The Duomo's High Renaissance barrel-vaulted interior from the 16th century contains many mediocre 17th-century works and decorations alongside good pieces. You'll see Raffaello Vanni's *Transfiguration,* with a rather effeminate Christ (second altar on the right), and Lorenzo Berrettini's *Death of St. Joseph* (fourth altar), a touching scene where a frightened, dying Joseph turns to Jesus and grasps his son's hand for reassurance. Behind the high altar, in the choir (hit the free light switch), is a collection of 16th- and early-17th-century paintings. In the middle of the right wall is Andrea Commodi's richly detailed *Consecration of the Basilica of San Salvatore.* The back wall has a thematic link from right to left, starting with Luca Signorelli's badly deteriorated *Crucifixion,* then Francesco Signorelli's *Incredulity of St. Thomas,* who pokes his finger suspiciously into the risen Christ's wound. Thomas doubts again in Alessandro Allori's *Madonna of the Holy Girdle.* The only work of note on the choir's left wall is Andrea del Sarto's *Assumption.* As you leave the church, pause at the third altar on your right to see local baroquie Pietro (Berrettini) da Cortona's *Adoration of the Shepherds.*

Piazza del Duomo (at the end of Via Casali). No phone. Free admission. Summer daily 7:30am–1pm and 3:30–6:30pm; winter daily 8am–12:30pm and 3–5:30pm (hours not set in stone).

Museo Diocesano ★ Across from the Duomo, in the deconsecrated church of the Gesù, is a little museum where almost every work is a masterpiece. Just inside the door on the right is a **Roman sarcophagus** from the late 2nd century A.D., made of Apuan marble and carved with a battle scene full of action. The work so impressed Donatello that he rushed home to describe it to his buddy Filippo Brunelleschi, whereupon the architect scurried off to Cortona to sketch the object.

Head next into the former nave of the old church, with its 1536 carved and painted wood **ceiling** by a local maestro called Mezzanotte ("Midnight"). There you'll see a crucified ***Christ*** (1320) gushing blood, by a young Pietro Lorenzetti; a *Madonna and Child with Saints* (1435) by Sassetta (another possible Cortonan) in which Mary looks with

surprising tenderness (for early-15th-c. art) at her baby; and a late-15th-century marble baptismal font. In Bartolomeo della Gatta's ***Assumption*** (1475), Mary, surrounded by a host of heavenly musicians and russet cherubim, dangles her girdle almost suggestively to the incredulous Thomas below. (The other saints are looking very pious; see "Prato & the Virgin Mary's Girdle," in chapter 8, for the story.)

The room's true treasures are the Fra' Angelicos. The polyptych ***Madonna Enthroned with Four Saints*** (1437), in bright primaries, stands out against the gold-leaf background. Over the altar is the theme at which Angelico was the master, an ***Annunciation*** (1436). The delicate feathers on Gabriel's wings and carpet of wildflowers show Angelico's command of minute detail, and the composition demonstrates his deep understanding of meaning in the Bible stories he illustrated so well. In the background is the finale of man's fall from grace, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden; the theme is brought full circle in the foreground's Annunciation of the birth of Christ, the beginning of man's salvation. The room behind the altar has a Pietro Lorenzetti *Madonna and Child* and a damaged 13th-century *St. Margaret of Cortona* by the Aretine school.

The large room off the entrance gives you a chance to appreciate how skilled the master was in comparison to his workshop, his school (painters who imitated him), or even his nephew. Luca Signorelli himself painted the ***Deposition*** (1502), with the crucifixion, the resurrection, and a surreal city by a lake all in the background, and in the foreground a swooning Mary, a well-modeled Christ, and a saint pocketing a crucifixion nail and the crown of thorns—presumably destined for numerous Italian reliquaries. Vasari tells us the face of Christ is actually a portrait of Luca's son, who died during the 1502 plague. Luca also signed the ***Communion of the Apostles*** (1512), painted with a very strong sense of perspective and liberal use of bright primaries and illusionistic marble floor panels (notice Judas in the foreground—ashamed of his imminent betrayal, he can't swallow the Host and instead hides it in his purse as he turns away). The other paintings in the room are by Luca's workshop or the school that followed him.

Piazza del Duomo 1. ✆ **0575-62-830.** Admission 5€ adults, 1€ ages 8–12. Apr–Sept Tues–Sun 9:30am–1pm and 3:30–7pm; Oct Tues–Sun 10am–1pm and 3:30–6pm; Nov–Mar Tues–Sun 10am–1pm and 3–5pm.

SIGHTS OUTSIDE THE WALLS

Just below the city walls, on the hillside carpeted with olive trees, sits Cortona's tribute to High Renaissance architecture: **Santa Maria delle Grazie al Calcinaio** ★. It was built between 1485 and 1513 and is the masterpiece (and only definitely attributable work) of Francesco di Giorgio Martini. He designed it on a Latin cross plan to mark the spot where a worker in a limekiln *(calcinaio)* saw a miraculous image of the Virgin appear on the rock wall. The harmonious Brunelleschian interior has a rose window in stained glass by the French master of that art, Guillaume de Marcillat, as well as a late-16th-century *Madonna and Saints* by Florentine artist Alessandro Allori in the right transept.

Continuing down the hill, you'll come upon a turnoff to the right for the **Ipogeo** or **Tomba di Pitagora,** a 3rd- or 2nd-century-B.C. Etruscan tomb. It's on a circular plan with a vaulted roof that a 19th-century "restoration" left bare of its probable earth covering (but surrounded with solemn cypresses). The tomb's name comes from someone who didn't do his homework and confused Cortona with Crotone, Calabria, the home of Greek mathematician Pythagoras. Giorgio Vasari confused matters further in the 16th century when he decided to rename it the Tomb of Archimedes, for no apparent reason. The buzzer for the custodian is hidden behind the ivy at the gate.

For more Etruscan heritage, continue down to the SS71 crossroads and the hamlet known as Il Sodo. To the left of the stream, a road leads to a group of houses around the **Ipogeo Melone I del Sodo ("First Big Melon")** ★; to get inside, book an appointment ahead of time at ✆ **0575-630-415** or 0575-612-778. The passage and chambers inside this 6th-century-B.C. Etruscan tomb are in excellent condition, due in no small part to the fact that the bits that were missing were replaced by brick guesswork after it was discovered in 1909. The walls are made of tufa from Orvieto (how the rock got all the way here is anybody's guess), and there's an Etruscan inscription (read right to left) above a small passage between two of the burial chambers. The inscription explains this side door: The chambers were the final resting places of a husband and wife; the passage was there in case they felt like visiting each other during eternity.

To the right of the stream, a set of tire ruts leads past a ceramics plant to the **Melone II il Sodo ("Second Big Melon")** ★★, an Etruscan tumulus tomb dating back at least to the late 7th century B.C. Long in the shadow of its partner across the way, the tomb catapulted to the fore of Etruscan archaeological interest after the chance discovery in the early 1990s of a 6th-century-B.C. altar sticking out of one side of the circular tumulus. The feature, previously unknown on any Etruscan tomb, led to a flurry of interpretations (one surely significant fact is that the altar is perfectly aligned with Cortona). An ongoing dig has unearthed more bits from the altar, which is reached by a monumental stairway flanked by two sphinxes biting the heads off warriors who are simultaneously stabbing the animals in the side, thought to represent the battle between life and death. The digs have also revealed a second passage tomb into the hillside and at least 17 more tombs in the ground around the tumulus. Some of these predate the altar, but most are from the Hellenistic and Roman eras, all the way to the 1st century A.D. (In fact, many were lined with stones pirated from the altar, which implies that the altar must've lost some of its religious importance by the 2nd c. B.C.) To visit this dig-in-progress, you need to reserve ahead at ✆ **0575-637-235.**

WHERE TO STAY

Besides the two top places below, you can find standard yet comfortable rooms—some with a great view—at the modern **Hotel San Luca,** Piazza Garibaldi 1 (✆ **0575-630-460;** fax 0575-630-105; www.sanlucacortona.com). The staff is very friendly, and doubles run 120€ with breakfast. The attached restaurant, Tonino, has an elegant atmosphere (at accordingly high prices) and a wonderful valley vista.

If you want to soak up the sun in this now-famous countryside, your best bet is an *agriturismo* outside of town. The tourist office publishes a list of them, or visit **www.apt.arezzo.it** for additional listings of *agriturismo.* For spectacular views across the valley to Cortona and Castiglion Fiorentino, try **Agriturismo il Mandorlo** (✆ **0575-617-313;** www.agriturismoilmandorlo.com). This 17th-century farmhouse sits at the end of a long, sunflower-spotted dirt road about 15 minutes out of town, and has a lovely pool and nicely restored mini-apartments, which start at 630€ per week. Bear in mind this is a working farm and orchard, which comes with all the trappings pertaining to a farm, including rumbling tractors and several barking dogs.

Hotel San Michele ★★ This 11th-century palace is done in High Renaissance Brunelleschian style with off-white plaster walls and vaulted ceilings accented by arches in gray *pietra serena.* It's the nicest place to stay in the center of town. The antiques and wood-beamed ceilings in the accommodations maintain the Renaissance effect. None of the rooms are overly spacious, but that just renders ones like no. 250, in the tower, more

A Vino Break

The **Enoteria,** Via Nazionale 18 (no phone), offers wine tasting accompanied by snacks made from local food products. In addition to wine, it sells honey, preserves, cured meats, cookies, dried spices, olive oils, sauces, and dried pici.

cozily romantic (and it has great views to boot). The breakfast spread is generous, with fruit and ham, and there are two bar lounges, one of them frescoed, to relax in after dinner at Ristorante Preludio next door (under separate management; see below). Five more large suites, some with a terrace, were completed in 2002.

Fifty meters (164 ft.) from the hotel is a *dependence* annex with 10 modest-size rooms of wood-beamed ceilings, wrought-iron bed frames, and the same amenities for 100€. They also run the **Residence Borgo San Pietro** (same phone; www.borgosanpietro.com) 4km (2½ miles) outside town, with 13 apartments each with kitchenette. These rent by the week starting at about 300€ for a double.

Via Guelfa 15 (just off Piazza della Repubblica), 52044 Cortona (AR). ✆ **0575-604-348.** Fax 0575-630-147. www.hotelsanmichele.net. 43 units. 89€–135€ standard double; 119€–150€ superior double; 119€–170€ triple. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 11€ in garage. Closed Jan 6–Mar 6. **Amenities:** Babysitting; bike rental; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Relais Il Falconiere ★★★ Riccardo and Silvia Baracchi have turned a series of 17th-century buildings into a countryside idyll overlooking their own olive grove to the Valdichiana. The rooms are scattered between the main villa, two flanking the little chapel, and seven very large rooms and minisuites in a series of stone buildings a bit removed from the rest of the complex for some privacy. Each guest room is different, many with worn terra-cotta–tiled floors, cast-iron canopied bed frames, hand-woven linens, antique-style furnishings, timbered ceilings, hydromassage tubs, and frescoes on some of the walls. The property is landscaped with gardens, olive groves, grapevines, a chapel, and two pools. Quiet reigns supreme. The old *limonaia* (lemon house) has been converted into one of the best restaurants in the area (recommended below).

Loc. San Martino in Bocena 370 (3km/2 miles north of Cortona), 52044 Cortona (AR). ✆ **0575-612-616** or 0575-612-679. Fax 0575-612-927. www.ilfalconiere.it. 19 units. 270€ classic double; 360€ deluxe double; 460€ junior suite; 570€ suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Follow directions to Cortona listed earlier and turn to head up toward the city at Il Sodo intersection of the SS71; the main road to town immediately curves up to the right, but follow instead the small road veering left (a blue sign reads San Martino in Bocena). **Amenities:** Restaurant (recommended separately below); babysitting; free bike rentals; concierge; 2 pools; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet, minibar, Jacuzzi (in deluxe rooms and suites).

WHERE TO DINE

Cortona specializes in no food outside of the standard Tuscan realm, but the city's restaurants do home-cooked meals rather well, especially at any one of the *trattorie* on Via Dardano. Besides **Trattoria Dardano,** reviewed below, you can also try **Trattoria Toscana,** no. 12, near Piazza Signorelli (✆ **0575-604-192**), or **Trattoria Etrusca,** no. 37, near Porta Colonia (✆ **0575-630-556**).

The local **white wine,** Vergine di Valdichiana, is highly recommended, but most local red table rotgut is overly sweet and harsh.

Relais Il Falconiere ★★★ Finds TUSCAN The old *limonaia* of this 17th-century estate, highly recommended as a hotel above, was converted in 1989 into one of the best restaurants in the area, and is recommended even if you don't stay here. It serves refined Tuscan food (the chef is a master at balancing disparate flavors) in an elegant setting with classical music in the background and has an excellent wine list. Even such simple dishes as *crostini* get an extra touch—duck pâté has slivers of roast duck on top—while more complex ones include a broccoli soufflé topped with grated black Norcia truffles. As many ingredients as possible come from the hotel's garden, and the olive oil is from the grove that extends down the hillside below. In warm weather, you can dine on the terrace with an ancient stone fountain at one end and views of the wide Valdichiana.

Loc. San Martino in Bocena 370 (3km/2 miles north of Cortona). ✆ **0575-612-679.** www.ilfalconiere.it. Reservations highly recommended. Primi 15€–20€; secondi 18€–25€. AE, MC, V. Daily 1–2pm and 8–10pm (closed Mon–Tues afternoon Jan–Feb). Closed several days in Jan.

Ristorante La Loggetta ITALIAN/TUSCAN Piazza della Repubblica is your dining backdrop if you come in warm weather and plunk down the extra charge for one of the alfresco tables under this restaurant's namesake little loggia overlooking the main square. If you choose to sit indoors, you'll be in 16th-century stone-and-brick wine cellars. The *verdure grigliate* (grilled vegetable slices under oil) as an antipasto will make you feel healthy even if you order the succulent *bistecca fiorentina* as a secondo (it goes excellently with roast potatoes). In between, consider the *risotto zucchini e scampi* or the ravioli *gnudi alla fonduta di tartufo,* "naked ravioli"—just the ricotta and spinach stuffing—which is good even if the fondue sauce masks the delicate flavor of the truffles. The new owners, bucking Italian trends, have actually lowered prices a bit.

Piazza di Pescherio 3 (above Piazza della Repubblica). ✆ **0575-630-575.** Reservations recommended. Primi 7€–9€; secondi 8€–18€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Closed Jan.

Ristorante Preludio ★★ TUSCAN In a town otherwise steeped in tradition, Preludio draws crowds for its unique nouvelle twist on Tuscan cooking. The white walls, high ceilings, and gray stone accents give the restaurant a Renaissance look, even though the lunette frescoes are modern. The *bruschette miste* (toasted bread sliced and topped with tomatoes, liver pâté, or cheese and arugula) makes a tasty start, followed by *ravioli di caciotta ai pomodorini* (homemade ravioli stuffed with fresh sheep's cheese and spinach and topped with barely cooked tomatoes and garlic). The *carpaccio alla rucola* is a classic secondo, but even better is the *petto d'anatra ai quattro pepi* (rich, delicate slices of duck served in a sauce laden with four types of softened peppercorn). One piece of advice: Order bottled wine rather than the limp house red.

Via Guelfa 11 (next to the Hotel San Michele). ✆ **0575-630-104.** Reservations recommended. Primi 7€–9€; secondi 12€–18€. AE, DC, MC, V. June–Oct Tues–Sun 12:30–3:30pm and 7:30–10pm; early Nov and Dec 16–May Tues–Sun 7:30–10pm, Sun noon–2pm. Closed Nov 15–Dec 15.

Trattoria Dardano ★ Value TUSCAN Of the several good *casalinga* (home cooking) *trattorie* along this street, this one merits singling out if only for its heavenly tiramisù, made the old-fashioned way. Before dessert, though, you may want to dip your spoon into the thick *ribollita*—Cortonans ask for hot pepper to sprinkle over it, but you can just drizzle on olive oil if that's more your style. When it comes to secondi, Dardano specializes in roasts: Try *pollo* (chicken), *anatra* (duck) or *faraona* (guinea hen)—or go for a modest splurge with a *bistecca alla fiorentina* (this being the valley whence comes Tuscany's best beef).

Via Dardano 24. ✆ **0575-601-944.** Reservations recommended. Primi 5€–6€; secondi 5€–8€; fixed-price menu without wine 13€. No credit cards. Thurs–Tues noon–2:45pm and 7–10pm. Closed Jan–Feb.

Trattoria La Grotta TUSCAN In nice weather, you can eat outside in the tiny dead-end piazzetta just off Piazza della Repubblica. When winter hits, the service moves into the *grotto,* a series of stone- and brick-walled rooms that have a medieval air. A rich, creamy first course is the *gnocchi di ricotta e spinaci,* soft crumbly spheres of fresh ricotta and minced spinach in tomato sauce. For a secondo, order one of the grilled meats, such as *agnello* (lamb) or *salsicce* (sausage), which go well with a plate of *fagioli bianchi* (Tuscan white beans) on the side.

Piazza Baldelli 3 (just off Piazza della Repubblica). ✆ **0575-630-271.** Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–9€; secondi 7€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2:30pm and 7–10pm. Closed Jan 7 to mid-Feb and 1st week of July.

4 THE WESTERN VALDICHIANA: EXPLORING THE CHIANA VALLEY

The wide Valdichiana (Chiana Valley) has been an agricultural area since at least the 3rd century B.C., when Hannibal fed and provisioned his entire army here, elephants and all, before marching off to defeat the Roman legions at Lake Trasimeno. From the fall of the Roman Empire until the era of the Tuscan grand dukes, the untended valley reverted to boggy marshland, leaving only the craggy cities on either side. On the eastern fringe they included **Castiglion Fiorentino** and **Cortona.** The western side of the valley borders Siena's province and is dominated by **Monte San Savino, Lucignano,** and **Sinalunga.**

EXPLORING THE REGION BY TRAIN Train service from Arezzo to Sinalunga—stopping at Monte San Savino and, albeit a bit far away, Lucignano—is operated by the private firm **LFI,** not FS (the state railway). For LFI info, call ✆ **0575-22-663** in Arezzo.

WHAT TO SEE & DO IN THE VALLEY

MONTE SAN SAVINO Monte San Savino is 43km (27 miles) from Arezzo on the SS73; tourist info consists of pamphlets left in the foyer of the **town library** at Piazza Gamurrini 3 (✆ **0575-843-098;** www.comune.monte-san-savino.ar.it). It was a Roman city partly demolished in 1325 by the Aretines. The scenic walled hill town retains some medieval and Renaissance structures that make it worth stopping over. Its ceramic and majolica trade, famous for centuries and still going strong in little shops throughout town, produced ceramist Andrea Contucci (1460–1529), who eventually took up sculpture as well and became known as Andrea Sansovino, master Renaissance carver.

You can see two of Andrea Sansovino's ceramic pieces in the church of **Santa Chiara;** his altarpiece of the *Madonna and Child with Saints* was probably glazed by Andrea or Giovanni della Robbia, and the unglazed *Saints Lorenzo, Roch, and Sebastian* was one of his earliest masterpieces. Next door in the 14th-century **Cassero,** site of the summertime tourist office, is a small ceramics museum open by appointment (✆ **0575-844-845**). Admission is 2€, and they'll open the doors Tuesday through Sunday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 4 to 7pm.

Corso Sangallo leads from here past the 1515 **Palazzo di Monte** on the right, built by Antonio da Sangallo the Elder, who collaborated with Sansovino on the weather-beaten but harmonious **Loggia dei Mercanti** across the street (1518–20). The **Pieve,** farther along the street on the right, was built in 1100 and remodeled in the 18th century; it contains some early Sansovino works, including a sarcophagus (1498) just inside the main door. The **Palazzo Pretorio** beyond on the right is a 14th-century Perugian structure,

while on Piazza di Monte is the disintegrating Sansovino door on **Sant'Agostino.** Andrea Sansovino designed the double loggia against the inside front wall of this church, as well as the cloister (1528), entered from a door to the left of the facade on the piazza outside. The artist's simple tomb slab was discovered in 1969 under the pulpit. Giorgio Vasari did the altarpiece of the *Assumption* in 1539.

LUCIGNANO A byroad leads 8km (5 miles) south to the tiny elliptical burg of Lucignano (www.comune.lucignano.ar.it), a popular aerial photo on posters in area tourist offices. The focuses of the town's four concentric ellipses are the **Collegiata,** with its pretty oval staircase, and the **Palazzo Comunale,** with its small museum (✆ **0575-836-128** or 0575-838-001). The collections include two Signorelli works, 15th-century frescoes, a triptych by Bartolo di Fredi, and a beautifully crafted gold reliquary more than 2.4m (8 ft.) high called the *Tree of Lucignano* (1350–1471). The museum is open Tuesday and Thursday through Sunday from 10am to 1pm and 2:30 to 6pm. Admission is 3€ adults, 2€ children and seniors.

SINALUNGA Although technically in Siena's province and not Arezzo's, the industrial center of Sinalunga is a Valdichiana town 8km (5 miles) south of Lucignano. The **tourist office** is at Piazza della Repubblica 8 (✆ **0577-636-045;** www.sinalunga.it/info), open from May to October 14 Monday through Saturday from 9am to noon and 4 to 7pm, October 15 through April Tuesday through Saturday from 9am to noon. The **Collegiata** has a *Madonna and Child* by Sodoma in the left transept. The Franciscan convent **San Bernardino** on the edge of town still preserves its *Annunciation* (1470) by Benedetto di Giovanni, but Sano di Pietro's *Madonna and Child* was stolen in 1971 and replaced with a photograph. Sinalunga is near Montepulciano and the hill towns of southern Tuscany (see chapter 10 for more information).

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Castello di Gargonza ★★ Nestled among the trees of the forested mountains west of the Valdichiana, Gargonza is a 13th-century walled hamlet complete with a fairy-tale, crenellated castle tower. Count Riccardo Guicciardini, whose family has owned the property for 300 years, decided to save the abandoned village from decay in the 1960s by converting it in its entirety into a guest "residence." It's not a hotel, so don't come expecting hotel amenities, just a wonderfully evocative and isolated retreat. Now the former peasant houses contain self-catering apartments, complete with kitchenettes and working fireplaces, and the *foresteria* has basic doubles with tile and wood beamed ceilings and lazy-springed beds. The old olive-press building has been converted into a common space, with sitting/TV rooms, a bar/breakfast room, and access to the gardens. There's also a pool surrounded by wild rosemary and plenty of wooded park. The Tuscan restaurant is so good you needn't venture out for your meals.

Loc. Gargonza (8km/5 miles west of Monte San Savino), 52048 Monte San Savino (AR). ✆ **0575-847-021.** Fax 0575-847-054. www.gargonza.it. 7 units, 25 apts. 120€–165€ double; 980€–1,344€ apartments per week. Double, triple, and suite rates include breakfast; extra charge for maid service and breakfast with apts. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed 2 weeks in mid-Nov, 2 weeks in Jan. Take the A1 to exit 27 (Monte S. Savino), then the SS73 11km (7 miles) to the turnoff for Gargonza. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bike rental; concierge; outdoor pool. *In room:* Hair dryer, kitchenette in apts, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Locanda dell'Amorosa ★★★ This 14th-century Amorosa farming estate has been preserved as a hotel complex with a luxury-class restaurant. A cypress-lined lane leads to the large central piazza bounded by double loggiaed brick buildings and a tiny chapel

with a well at the center—all immaculately maintained and feeling a bit like a posh Spanish hacienda. The accommodations are comfortably fitted with a mélange of period pieces under beamed ceilings, and the suites have working fireplaces—there's even a two-story deluxe suite on the back with gorgeous vistas over the vineyards. The rooms were an afterthought to the restaurant. When it opened in former cattle stalls in the 1970s, the idea was to bring the products of the farm directly to the public in refined Tuscan cuisine. The chef excels at fish dishes (rare this far inland) as well as homemade pastas and beef, but be warned: A full meal can easily cost around 100€. There's also a (relatively) cheaper enoteca where you can sample a full range of wines from Siena province accompanied by regional dishes.

Loc. Amorosa (1.5km/1 mile south of Sinalunga), 53048 Sinalunga (SI). ✆ **0577-677-211.** Fax 0577-632-001. www.amorosa.it. 20 units. 198€–255€ standard double; 244€–321€ superior double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed mid-Jan to early Mar. Take the A1 to the Valdichiana exit, follow the signs to Sinalunga and then the signs to Chiusi/Chianciano; the hotel is off the SS326 (Sinalunga–Torrita di Siena Rd.). **Amenities:** Excellent refined restaurant and simpler taverna; babysitting; bike rental; concierge; outdoor pool (June–Sept); room service. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

12

Perugia, Assisi & Northern Umbria

Northern Umbria is the mind and soul of the region. The morning mists rolling over the hills of this "green heart of Italy" imbue the place with a sort of magic, an ethereal spirituality that shines from the paintings of Perugino and that has, in the past, coalesced into saints such as Francis and Clare.

The capital city, **Perugia,** is the birthplace of the Umbrian style of painting, which took form during the Renaissance in the work of Perugino and his students Pinturicchio and Raphael. Perugia gets hip each fall with one of Europe's greatest jazz festivals and spends the rest of its time selling Baci chocolates to the world. Nearby **Assisi** was home to St. Francis, Italy's patron saint and favorite mystic. The basilica raised to honor St. Francis was decorated by the greatest artists of the early Renaissance: Cimabue, Simone Martini, Pietro Lorenzetti, and Giotto.

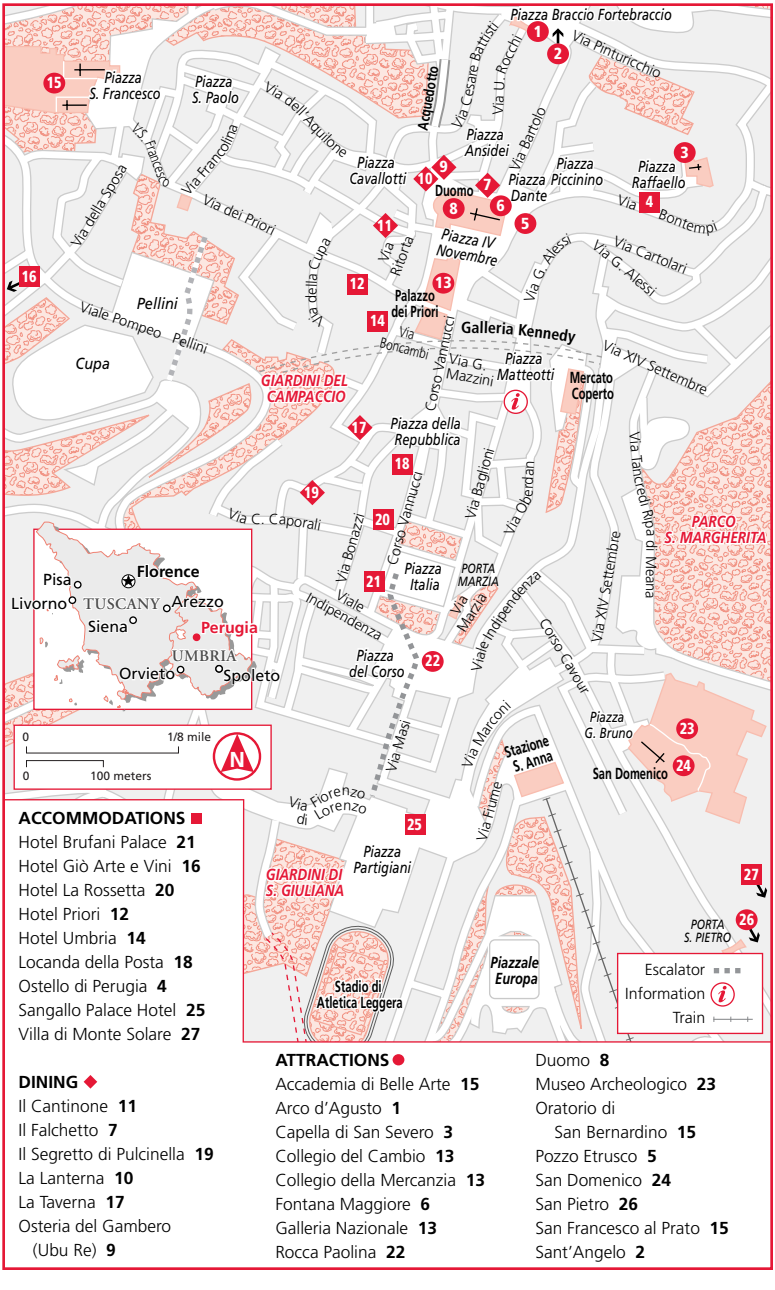
Northern Umbria was the stronghold of the ancient Umbri tribes, neighbors to the Etruscans and even more mysterious. Their strange half-forgotten culture continues to manifest itself in colorful pagan festivals such as the Corso dei Ceri in the stony northern border town of **Gubbio.** Umbria continues in many ways to be a green heart of silence, a landscape of contemplation, and a historic core of overgrown villages surrounded by wild corners of the Apennines where wolves still roam and roads don't go.

1 PERUGIA: CAPITAL OF UMBRIA & QUAINT HILL TOWN

164km (102 miles) SE of Florence; 176km (109 miles) N of Rome

Perugia is a capital city in a medieval hill town's clothing—a town of Gothic palaces and jazz cafes, where ancient alleys of stone drop precipitously off a 19th-century shopping promenade. It produced and trained some of Umbria's finest artists, including Gentile da Fabriano and Perugino (born Pietro Vannucci in nearby Città della Pieve), from whose workshop emerged Pinturicchio, Lo Spagna, and Raphael. It's a respected university city whose student population ensures a lively cultural calendar. After a long and bloody history, Perugia seems to have settled well into its role as capital of Umbria.

Perugia was one of the 12 cities of the Etruscan confederation, and though it submitted to general Roman authority in 310 B.C., it remained a fractious place, always allying itself with a different Roman faction. It chose the losing side in Octavian's war with Marc Antony, and when the future emperor defeated Marc Antony's brother here in 40 B.C., a panicked Perugian noble set fire to his house in a suicide attempt. The flames spread quickly, and most of Perugia burned to the ground. Soon after, Octavian, now Emperor Augustus, rebuilt the city as Augusta Perusia. Throughout the Dark Ages, Perugia held its own against the likes of Totila the Goth, but it became subject to the Lombard Duchy of Spoleto in the later 6th century.



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By the Middle Ages, Perugia was a thriving trade center and had begun exhibiting the bellicose tendencies, vicious temper, violent infighting, and penchant for poisons that would earn it such a sunny reputation among contemporary chroniclers. When not out bashing neighboring towns into submission, Perugia's men would put on minimal padding and play one of their favorite games, the *Battaglia dei Sassi* (War of Stones), which consisted of pelting one another with hefty rocks until at least a few dozen people were dead.

What they did to others didn't even come close to the nastiness that went on among Perugini themselves. The Oddi and Baglioni were just two of the noble families who waged secret vendettas and vied with the middle-class burghers for absolute power. Burgher Biordo Michelotti, egged on by the pope, managed to seize power in 1393 by murdering a few rivals from the Baglioni family. Five years later, his despotic rule ended with a knife in the back. A period of relative calm came in 1416 with the stewardship of Braccio Fortebraccio ("Arm Strongarm"), under whose wise and stable rule the city's small empire expanded over the Marches region. In the end, he was done in by a fellow Perugian while he was besieging L'Aquila in 1424. And then there were the Baglioni.

When their rivals, the Oddi, were run out of town in 1488, the field was more or less clear for the Baglioni to reign in all their horrible glory. The family turned assassination, treachery, and incest into gruesome art forms. When not poisoning their outside rivals, they killed siblings on their wedding nights, kept pet lions, tore human hearts out of chests for lunch, and married their sisters. In a conspiracy so tangled it's almost comic in its ghastliness, the bulk of the family massacred one another on a single day in August 1500.

The last of the surviving Baglioni, Rodolfo, tried to assassinate a papal legate in response to his uncle's murder at the hands of the pontiff. All that did was anger Pope Paul III, who upped the salt tax a year after promising otherwise. The rebellion Paul was trying to provoke ensued, giving the pope the excuse he needed to subdue the city. Papal forces quickly quashed the city's defenses and leveled the Baglionis' old neighborhood. After riding triumphantly into town, the pope had all Perugia's nuns line up to kiss his feet, an experience he reported left him "very greatly edified."

The enormous Rocca Paolina fortress he built to keep an eye on the city quelled most rebellious grumblings for a few hundred years, during which time the Perugini slowly mellowed, save for the uprising in 1859. The pope sent his Swiss Lancers to halt the rebellion, a task they accomplished by pillaging the shops, torching the houses, and murdering citizens in the streets. Within a year, though, Italian unification hit town. King Vittorio Emanuele prudently sent a contingent of troops to protect the Swiss guards as they hastily retreated from a Perugia finally free from papal control.

Since then, Perugia has thrown its energies into becoming the most cosmopolitan medieval city in the world. It's home to one of Italy's largest state universities as well as the Università per Stranieri, the country's most prestigious school teaching Italian language and culture to foreigners. Local industry's biggest name is Perugina, purveyor of Italy's famous Baci chocolates, and the city stages an urbane and stylish *passeggiata* stroll every evening and one of Europe's most celebrated jazz festivals every summer.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

By Train Coming from **Rome,** there are five direct trains (2¼ hr.), and about six more that require a transfer at Foligno. From **Florence,** take one of the dozen daily trains to Terontola/Cortona (1½ hr.) that meet up with a connecting train to Perugia (35–50 min.). From **Assisi,** there are some 24 trains daily (20 min.). These lines are part of the FS state-run railway system and stop at the Fontivegge station on Piazza

Vittorio Veneto (✆ **147-888-088**), a 15-minute ride on bus no. 26, 27, 29, or 32 to 36 from Piazza Italia in the center of Perugia.

Perugia also sits on the privately run FCU train line that serves Umbria. From 10 to 12 trains run daily from **Sansepolcro** (1¼ hr.), and 14 run north from Terni through **Todi** (35–45 min.). These trains pull first into the outlying Ponte San Giovanni Station (✆ **075-393-615**), then chug 8 minutes up a capillary line to the Santa Anna Station (✆ **075-572-3947**) in town, under the curve of Viale Roma under the Piazza Italia end of town. All outgoing trains depart first from Santa Anna Station.

By Car From **Florence,** take the A1 south to the Valdichiana exit and the SS75bis to Perugia. The SS326 also leads to this interchange from Siena. From **Rome,** exit the A1 north at Orte to take the SS204 to the SS3bis north. The SS3 and SS3bis cross at Perugia to connect with northern and southern Umbria. The center is closed to traffic, though you may drop off your baggage at your hotel.

Parking (✆ **075-573-2506**) is fairly abundant, with the most convenient being the underground pay lot at Piazza Partigiani, at the special tourist rate of 7.75€ per day for the first 2 days. The lot is south of the city, but there's an underground escalator through the buried medieval city up to Piazza Italia. Two other pay lots are under the Mercato Coperto (elevator up to Piazza Matteotti) and at Pellini (escalator up to Via dei Priori). Below the latter is free parking on Piazza della Cupa, with an escalator up to Pellini. For more information about parking in Perugia (and other Umbrian cities), visit **www.sipaonline.it**.

By Bus Only one daily **SITA** bus makes the 1-hour, 45-minute trip from **Florence,** and you must reserve a seat (✆ **055-214-721;** www.sitabus.it). **SULGA** lines (✆ **075-500-9641;** www.sulga.it) also has one bus daily from **Florence,** and four or five a day from **Rome** (2½ hr.). **APM** (✆ **075-573-1707**) buses connect Perugia with **Assisi** (six daily; 50 min.), **Gubbio** (eight daily; 1 hr., 10 min.), **Todi** (six daily; 1¼ hr.), and **Chiusi** (five daily; 1 hr., 25 min.). APM (✆ **800-512-141** or 075-506-781; www.apmperugia.it) runs two buses daily from **Spoleto** (1 hr., 25 min.), 7 from **Assisi** (50 min.), 10 from **Gubbio** (1 hr., 10 min.), 8 from **Todi** (1 hr., 15 min.), and 4 from **Chiusi** (90 min.; none on Sun). There are about half as many runs by all bus lines on Sunday. The **bus depot** in Perugia is Piazza Partigiani, an escalator ride below Piazza Italia. The stand there sells tickets for all lines.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** has recently moved to Piazza Matteotti 18, 06121 Perugia (✆ **075-573-6458;** fax 075-573-9386; www.umbria2000.it). It's open Monday through Saturday from 8:30am to 1:30pm and 3:30 to 6:30pm, and Sunday from 9am to 1pm. The **provincial APT office** is at Via Mazzini 21 (✆ **075-575-951**). You can also pick up a copy of ***Viva Perugia*** (.50€) to find out what's going on around town.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS Perugia is something of a musical nucleus for central Italy. The fun starts with the rather tame **Rockin' Umbria** festival at the end of June. For information, contact ARCI-Perugia, Via della Viola 1 (✆ **075-573-1074;** fax 075-573-0616). It's followed by one of Europe's most important jazz festivals, **Umbria Jazz** ★★, which usually runs for 2 weeks in mid-July. Established in 1973, it draws top international names to town for concerts, and instructors from Boston's prestigious Berklee School of Music hold seminars and workshops. It's so popular that a smaller version, **Umbria Jazz Winter,** takes place from December 29 to January 5 in nearby Orvieto. It includes a traditional New Year's Eve banquet and all-night jazz parties. For information,

Calling All Chocoholics!

The weeklong **Eurochocolate Festival** is held annually from mid- to late October in Perugia. Pick up a list of hour-by-hour festivities held throughout town, staged by chocolate manufacturers from all over the world. You can witness a chocolate-carving contest, when the scraps of 1,000-kg (455-lb.) blocks are yours for the sampling, and entire multiple-course menus are created around the chocolate theme. Half-day lessons from visiting chefs are also available. For details, contact the **Eurochocolate Organization,** Via D'Andreotto 19, 06124 Perugia (✆ **075-502-5880;** fax 075-502-5889; www.eurochocolate.com).

contact the **Associazione Umbria Jazz–Perugia,** Piazza Danti 28, Casella Postale 228 (✆ **075-573-2432;** fax 075-572-2656; www.umbriajazz.com).

During the second and third weeks of September, Perugini celebrate music of a different sort in the **Sagra Musicale Umbra,** an international festival of classical music that has, since 1937, become one of the top musical events of its kind in Italy. For more information, contact the **Associazione Sagra Musical Umbra-Perugia,** Via Podiani 11 (✆ **075-572-1374;** fax 075-572-7614; www.perugiamusicaclassica.com). The summer-long gig is rounded out the last week of September with **Perugia Classico,** a classical music festival that includes an antique-instrument market, concerts, shows, musical workshops, and chamber-music performances throughout town. Contact the Comitato Promotore Perugia Classico, c/o Comune di Perugia, Ripartizione XVI Economia e Lavoro, Via Eburnea 9 (✆ **075-577-2253;** fax 075-572-4252).

On July 29 and 30, the cathedral shows off the **marriage ring of the Virgin** that 15th-century Perugini swiped from rival Chiusi. You might drop by town the last week of October for the **antiques market** held in the Rocca Paolina. From November 1 to November 5, the town holds secular celebrations for the **Fiera dei Morti** in honor of All Saints' Day. (Contact the *comune* at ✆ **075-577-3898.**)

Market days are Tuesday and Saturday on Via Ercolano and Saturday at Pian di Massiano. There's also a daily covered market off Piazza Matteotti.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Perugia's public living room is **Corso Vannucci** ★, a wide promenade that's the stage for one of Italy's most lively and decorous evening *passeggiate.* People saunter up and down the Corso at twilight to see and be seen, to pause in the cafes for an espresso, and to discuss politics and soccer scores. One end of Corso Vannucci is anchored by the 19th-century **Piazza Italia** (see "Perugia's Medieval Pompeii," below), while along one side of the other end undulates a huge solid mass of crenellated travertine called the **Palazzo dei Priori.**

One of the largest town halls in Italy, this *palazzo* was started in the 1290s and expanded in 1443. Inside are the Collegio del Cambio and the Galleria Nazionale (see below). The far end of the building has the oldest **facade,** with an off-center main portal from which spills a fan of steps. At their top are a small terrace and the *palazzo*'s first entryway, flanked by bronze copies of the Perugian griffin and the Guelph lion. (The originals are inside.) Through the door is the **Sala dei Notari,** a long rectangular room

supported by eight large arches, formerly a citizens' assembly chamber and now used for public lectures and concerts. Matteo Tassi repainted much of it in 1860 with the coats of arms of Perugia's *podestà* (mayors) from 1297 to 1424, but in the spandrels of the arches remain the Old Testament and mythological scenes painted in 1297 by a follower of the Roman master Pietro Cavallini. The building is open Tuesday through Sunday (and Mon June–Sept) from 9am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm.

This end of the *palazzo* borders Perugia's superb main square, **Piazza IV Novembre,** the turnstile for the evening *passeggiata*—strollers swing around here to start back up Corso Vannucci in the other direction. The centerpiece of the piazza is the **Fontana Maggiore** ★★, one of Italy's prettiest public fountains. It was designed by local monk Fra' Bevignate in 1278, and the two stacked basins are set with panels and figures carved by Gothic master sculptors Nicola Pisano and his son Giovanni. These panels were designed to highlight the glories of Perugia's past and character and are filled with references to everyday life—a man roasting a chicken, a woman picking figs, and a love-struck knight galloping after his lady and clutching a bunch of roses. The fountain emerged spectacularly in 1999 after years of restoration, gleaming white as new.

Via delle Volte twists off the back corner of the piazza, under a high flying arch, and spills into **Piazza Cavallotti,** under which excavations of a Roman-era road and the foundations of some houses are sometimes open in summer. (To ensure a visit, reserve a few days in advance by calling ✆ **075-572-7141.**)

Collegio del Cambio ★★ The meeting rooms of Perugia's Exchange Guild make up one of the best-preserved "office suites" of the Renaissance. Perugino was hired in 1498 to fresco one of the rooms with a **style and scenery** illustrating the humanist marriage of Christianity and classicism. It's perhaps his masterpiece in the medium, replete with a studied naturalism and precise portraiture, and a virtual catwalk of late-15th-century fashion. He finished by 1500 with the help of his students, probably including a 17-year-old Raphael, to whom art historians attribute the figure of Fortitude, seated on a cloud in the second bay of the left wall, and whose young mug may have served Perugino as the model for the prophet Daniel, on the right wall. Perugino frescoed a superlative self-portrait on the pilaster of the left wall, looking sternly out of violet eyes set in a chubby, double-chinned face topped by a red cap. Perugino's less-talented student Giannicola di Paolo frescoed the second room from 1509 to 1529 with a St. John the Baptist theme.

A few doors down at no. 15 is the **Collegio della Mercanzia** ★ (✆ **075-573-0366**), home to the 13th-century Merchants' Guild since 1390—the guild still operates as a charitable institution out of the *palazzo.* In the 15th century, the walls and ceilings were swathed in remarkable woodwork carved and inlaid by anonymous craftsmen, probably northern European. Note that it's open the same hours as the Collegio del Cambio, but it closes at 1pm instead of at 12:30pm.

Palazzo dei Priori, Corso Vannucci 25. ✆ **075-572-8599.** Admission to either Collegio 4.50€ adults, 2.50€ seniors over 65, free for children under 12. Dec 20–Jan 6 Tues–Sat 9am–12:30pm and 2:30–5:30pm, Sun 9am–1pm; Mar 1–Oct 31 Mon–Sat 9am–12:30pm and 2:30–5:30pm, Sun 9am–1pm; Nov 1–Dec 19 and Jan 7–Feb 28 Tues–Sat 8am–2pm, Sun 9am–12:30pm.

Galleria Nazionale ★★★ One of central Italy's top museums, Perugia's National Gallery houses the largest and finest collection of Umbrian art in the world, including plenty of Perugino paintings. The gallery begins on the second floor, but on your way upstairs pause at the first floor to peek into the glass window in the door of the **Sala del Consiglio Comunale.** You'll see the original bronze griffin and lion from the *palazzo*'s old

entrance on Piazza IV Novembre. Recent studies suggest the griffin may actually be an ancient Etruscan sculpture, to which new wings were added when the lion was cast in 1281.

Room 1 currently houses 16th- to 18th-century works, including Caravaggiesque paintings by the likes of Orazio Gentileschi and Valentin de Boulogne, as well as a baroque *Nativity of the Virgin* (1643) by Pietro da Cortona.

Rooms 2 and 3 show the development of 13th-century Perugian painting. It was heavily influenced by the artists working on Assisi's Basilica di San Francesco and therefore torn between the local traditional eastern influences and the classicism of the new Florentine masters, Cimabue and Giotto. The artist called the Maestro del Trittico di Perugia represents the former styling, though he did indulge in a highly creative take on Byzantine motifs in the *Madonna and Child* on the shutters of the tabernacle here. The Maestro di San Francesco and especially the Maestro del Farneto are much more firmly rooted in the Giottesque school of late medieval art that was beginning to form into the Renaissance.

Room 4 is full of 14th-century painting and sculpture, with the Sienese influence represented by works from the early master Duccio di Buoninsegna—a 1304 *Madonna and Child* featuring six tiny angels and a similar 1330s scene by his follower Meo di Guido da Siena. On the left wall is a tiny parchment painting of the *Madonna and Child with the Crucifixion* by Puccio Capanna, one of the most modern and skilled of Giotto's followers. On the far wall is the museum's greatest masterpiece, Piero della Francesca's ***Polyptych of Sant'Antonio*** ★★★. The master from Sansepolcro probably painted this large altarpiece in the mid-1460s, with a Madonna enthroned in a classical niche surrounded by solid-bodied saints. The most arresting portion, though, is the pinnacle's *Annunciation* scene, worked with a delicacy and sense of perspective unheard of at the time. The scene is all the more engrossing for the illusory hole punched straight through the center of it by a receding arched colonnade that puts a gulf between the angel Gabriel and Mary.

Rooms 5 to 8 are devoted to early-15th-century altarpieces from the brushes of Taddeo di Bartolo, Bartolo di Fredi, Ottaviano Nelli, Luca di Tommè, Giovanni Boccati, and Bicci di Lorenzo. Among them, in room 6, is Gentile da Fabriano's tiny gemlike ***Madonna and Child*** ★ (1405), an International Gothic masterpiece. Gentile used layers of transparent paints, plenty of gold, and a sure, delicate hand to produce this unique work.

Rooms 9 and 10 house large canvases by Benedetto Bonfigli, a fairly talented painter of the Perugian Renaissance. These works inspired H. V. Morton to dub the museum a "haunt of exquisite musical angels," and their cityscapes and background buildings offer us a glimpse of Perugia in the 1400s. **Room 11**—alongside a Perugino *Adoration of the Magi* (1523) and a few Agostino di Duccio *Madonnas*—has eight panels depicting the *Miracles of St. Bernardino of Siena.* They were painted in a 1473 workshop in the limpid, colorful Umbrian style soon to be popularized by Perugino; he and Francesco di Giorgio Martini are two of the artists to whom the panels have been tentatively attributed.

After a hall of 17th- and 18th-century **majolica** from Deruta and the Abruzzi and a chapel frescoed by Benedetto Bonfigli comes **room 15,** which contains what many visitors come here for: the 15th- and 16th-century art starring large **altarpieces by Perugino** ★. The *Adoration of the Magi* (1475) is an early Perugino work, painted when he was just 25 and still had a heavy Florentine influence. He may have been assisted on the 1505 *Monteripido Altarpiece* background by his young pupil Raphael. His later works here, especially the 1517 *Transfiguration,* show how he eventually developed a more transparent, spatially spare style with delicate landscapes and crafted pastel figures.

Palazzo dei Priori, Corso Vannucci 19. ✆ **075-574-1247** or 075-57-411. www.gallerianazionaleumbria.it. Admission 6.50€ adults, 3.25€ ages 18–25 (E.U. citizens, technically) and seniors over 65. Tues–Sun 8:30am–7:30pm. Closed Mon.

Perugia's Medieval Pompeii

To cow the insurgent Perugini into submission after he put down their rebellion against his salt tax, Pope Paul III demolished more than one-quarter of the city in 1530, pointedly including the palaces of the fractious former leaders, the Baglioni family. He then ordered Antonio da Sangallo the Younger to build him a fortress, the **Rocca Paolina** ★, in the gaping empty space. By 1543, the massive bastion was complete, and it helped uphold papal domination over Perugia for more than 300 years. At the Italian unification in 1860, when Perugia was finally freed from the pope's yoke, workers came to dismantle the fortress. They found themselves outnumbered, however, as almost every man, woman, and child in the city descended with grim faces on the hated *rocca* and began to tear it apart stone by stone with pickaxes, shovels, and their bare hands.

Sangallo didn't merely raze all the buildings, however. The land sloped away from Perugia's ridge here in all three directions, so to make a flat plain on which to build the fortress; he leveled the field, using the houses, towers, and churches in the area as supports for the *rocca,* aided by brick pillars and vaults. In the process, a whole neighborhood of the medieval town was preserved, intact but eerily silent and still, buried beneath the newer streets above. The vaults of the *rocca* now serve as a **public exhibition space,** and stretches of the subterranean streets are interspersed with the escalators that connect Piazza Italia, which partially takes up the space the dismantled fortress left, with the parking lots below. An underground "Via Baglioni" leads through a section of this almost-forgotten city, with dozens of houses and churches abandoned for hundreds of years. The mid-20th-century travel writer H. V. Morton called it a **medieval Pompeii** and imagined its narrow alleys and ruined buildings inhabited by covens of witches brewing Perugia's notorious poisons. You can clamber through doorless entrances, climb the remains of stairways, walk through empty rooms, and wander at will through the maze of mute walls. Bring a flashlight.

Sangallo also couldn't bring himself to destroy the Etruscan **Porta Marzia (Mars Gate)** to the city. He quietly had workers take it apart and reassemble it as a doorway to the fortress's outer wall, where Via Baglioni now reemerges into the sunlight onto Via Marzia. The worn, dark stone heads probing out from around the arch are said to be those of Etruscan gods.

You can enter the underground city daily from 8am to 7pm (no admission fee) from the escalators at the Prefettura on Piazza Italia, through the Porta Marzia on Via Marzia, or by riding the escalators up from Piazza Partigiani.

Duomo For a major Italian city and provincial capital, Perugia has a pretty disappointing cathedral. First raised in the early 14th century on the Gothic model of the German hall churches, it didn't take its present form until the 16th century. Unsure whether the front on Piazza Danti or the flank facing Piazza IV Novembre should be the facade, Perugians slapped a bit of desultory decoration on both. On the Piazza IV Novembre side is a **statue of Pope Julius III** giving benediction.

The **interior** is a bit gaudy (those columns are painted, not real marble), but there is a handful of good paintings. The first chapel on the left aisle is the **Cappella del Santo Anello,** where a gilded box protected by 15 locks supposedly holds the wedding ring of the Virgin Mary, stolen from Chiusi in 1473. Church officials solemnly take out the ring—set with a pale gray agate whose color they swear changes, mood-ring style, to reveal the character of the person wearing it—to show the crowds on July 29 and 30.

In the **Cappella di San Bernardino** (first on the right aisle) is baroque painter Frederico Barocchio's finest work, a tumultuous *Descent from the Cross* painted in 1567. Against the third pillar of the right aisle is the *Madonna della Grazie,* whose hallowed status is given away by dozens of ex-votos and burning candles surrounding it. It's attributed to Perugino's early-16th-century student Giannicola di Paolo. Just beyond it on the right aisle, in the **Cappella del Sacramento,** Luca Signorelli's 1484 *Madonna* altarpiece is provisionally installed.

Piazza IV Novembre/Piazza Danti. ✆ **075-572-3832.** Free admission. Daily 8am–noon and 4pm–sunset.

Pozzo Etrusco (Etruscan Well) When the 3rd-century-B.C. Etruscans needed water, they sank a 5.4m-wide (18-ft.) shaft more than 35m (115 ft.) into the pebbly soil under Perugia. To support the cover over the well, they built two massive trusses of travertine that have stood the test of more than 2,000 years. You can climb down past the dripping walls to a bridge across the bottom.

Piazza Danti 18 (at the end of the tunnel). ✆ **075-573-3669.** Admission 2.50€ adults, 2€ seniors over 65, 1€ children 7–14, free for children under 7; includes admission to Cappella di San Severo (see below), valid 1 week. Apr–Oct Wed–Mon 10am–1:30pm and 2:30–6:30pm; Nov–Mar Wed–Mon 10am–1:30pm and 2:30–7pm.

Cappella di San Severo Before he set off for Florence and Rome, a young Perugino protégé named Raphael Sanzio made his first attempt at fresco in this chapel in 1505. Though damaged, the upper half of this work, with the *Holy Trinity* surrounded by saints seated on clouds, shows the germ of Raphael's budding genius and his eye for composition and naturalism. By 1521, Raphael had died young, and his now-septuagenarian teacher, Perugino—just 2 years from the grave himself, with his talent fading—finished the scene with six posed saints along the bottom. The rest of the church, which was built in the 11th century by Camaldulensian monks on the site of an old pagan temple, is usually closed.

Piazza Raffaello. ✆ **075-573-3864.** For admission and hours, see Pozzo Etrusco, above.

San Bernardino and San Francesco On your way down Via dei Priori, you'll pass the alley **Via della Gabbia,** behind the Palazzo dei Priori, where in the bad old days the Perugian council members would leave people who didn't see eye to eye with them locked in a cage until the dissidents starved. The long spikes left on some of the walls are where the heads of convicted criminals were impaled. As Via dei Priori continues down even more steeply, you'll see the stone **Torre degli Sciri,** the last of Perugia's medieval towers.

The grassy lawn at the hill's bottom, a lounging spot for university students on sunny days, is bordered by two of the finest church facades in Perugia. On the left is the small **Oratorio di San Bernardino,** whose facade is layered with bas-reliefs and sculptures of saints and angel musicians (1457–61, beautifully restored in the 1990s) by Florentine sculptor Agostino di Duccio in his unique, vaguely Asiatic style. Inside are a 1464 processional banner by Benedetto Bonfigli and a carved 4th-century paleo-Christian sarcophagus serving as the altar. The oratory's lumbering big brother next door is **San Francesco al Prato,** with an unusual, vaguely Moorish geometric facade. The unstable ground

under it began to shift almost as soon as the structure was raised in the 13th century. The altar end has since lost its roof, and the interior has been closed. It is undergoing a lengthy restoration, eventually to serve as a concert space.

Between the two churches is the entrance to the **Accademia di Belle Arte,** Piazza San Francesco 5 (✆ **075-573-0631**), an odd assemblage of turn-of-the-20th-century plaster statues reproducing Italy's great sculptures, from classical through Michelangelo to neoclassical.

Piazza San Francesco (at the bottom of Via dei Priori). Free admission. Daily 8am–12:30pm and 3–6pm.

Arco d'Augusto and Sant'Angelo At the end of Via U. Rocchi (behind the Duomo) is the **Arco d'Augusto (Arco Etrusco).** In the 3rd century B.C., the Etruscans laid the massive stones of the base. Augustus Caesar engraved it with "Augusta Perusia" after he rebuilt the city. And in the 16th century, the left-hand tower was capped off with a Renaissance loggia.

Via G. Garibaldi leads from the piazza to the oldest church in Umbria, **Sant'Angelo** ★. At the end of a quiet cypress-lined lawn, this venerable church was built in the 5th century, perhaps into the remains of a pagan temple. It retained the circular ground plan of its Roman predecessor, which may also have contributed the inner ring of columns inside. It's a peaceful church, with few visitors and only some 14th-century frescoes inside.

Via U. Rocchi. Free admission. Sant'Angelo daily 8am–noon and 4pm–sunset.

Museo Archeologico (Archaeology Museum) Among the cluttered collections here, you'll find a 2nd-century-A.D. well head carved with a frieze of Greeks battling Amazons; several 1st-century-A.D. portrait busts of Roman bigwigs such as Augustus, Claudius, Germanicus, and Agrippina; a 6th-century-B.C. Etruscan sphinx discovered near Cetona; and plenty of Etruscan funerary urns sculpted with intricate relief scenes. Among the collection's prizes are a signed terra-cotta statue of Heracles, a large bronze shield from a 2nd-century-B.C. tomb, and a travertine cippus known as the *Inscription of Perugia.* It's the longest document yet discovered written in the Etruscan language—apparently by lawyers. (It seems to resolve a property dispute.)

Inside **San Domenico church** is Italy's second-largest stained-glass window (Milan's Duomo beats it), assembled in the 15th century, and a Gothic monument of Benedict XI, carved in the early 14th century.

Piazza G. Bruno 10 (in the cloisters of San Domenico). ✆ **075-572-7141.** www.archeopg.arti.beniculturali.it. Admission 4€ adults, 2€ ages 18–25 and seniors over 65. Mon–Sat 8:30am–7:30pm; Sun 9am–1pm.

San Pietro ★ This Benedictine monastery at Perugia's edge, its pointed **Gothic tower** a city landmark, was founded in the late 900s. Inside the first courtyard is the Romanesque entrance to the monastery's San Pietro church. The church's old **facade** was uncovered in the 1980s, revealing 14th-century Giottesque **frescoes** between the arches—the enthroned three-headed woman on the right may represent the Holy Trinity. The 16th-century **interior** is supported by ancient granite and marble columns (pilfered from a pagan temple) and is heavily decorated—wallpapered with 16th-and 17th-century canvases, frescoed with grotesques, and filled with Renaissance and baroque paintings. The first altarpiece on the right is a colorful 16th-century *Madonna with Saints* by Eusebio da San Giorgio. Toward the end of the right aisle is the door to the sacristy (track down a monk to open it), which contains five **small Perugino paintings of saints** that were stolen in 1916 but found their way back here by 1993. Also here are two small Caravaggiesque works: The *Santa Francesca Romana with an Angel* is attributed by some to Caravaggio

himself, and the *Christ at the Column* copperplate sketch is a copy, perhaps of a lost Caravaggio original.

Ask the sacristan also to light up the choir so you can see the incredible **wooden choir stalls** ★, some of the finest examples of wood intarsia in all of Italy, produced in 1526 by a workshop under the direction of Bernardino Antonibi and Stefano Zambelli. In 1536, Stefano's brother Fra' Damiano inlaid the masterpiece door at the back, whose panels could hold their own against any painting of the Renaissance.

At the altar end of the left aisle are a strikingly medieval Pietà scene painted by Fiorenzo di Lorenzo in 1469 and paintings of *St. Peter* and *St. Paul* attributed to Il Guercino. The **Cappella Vibi** houses a gilded marble tabernacle by Mino da Fiesole, and in the **Cappella Ranieri** next door hangs Guido Reni's *Christ in the Garden.* Continuing down the left aisle, before the third altar, is another Eusebio da San Giorgio painting, this one of the *Adoration of the Magi* (1508). Between the second and first altars is a late *Pietà* by Perugino.

Down Corso Cavour, out Porta San Pietro, and to the end of Borgo XX Giugno. ✆ **075-30-482.** Free admission. Daily 8am–noon and 4pm–sunset.

WHERE TO STAY

Most Perugian hotels are flexible about rates, which dive 40% to 50% below posted prices in the off season, so it always pays to ask. Reserve well in advance if you plan to visit during the booked-solid Umbria Jazz season (discussed earlier).

Very Expensive

Hotel Brufani Palace ★ Where the bastions of the papal Rocca Paolina once glowered, Perugia's bastion of luxury now rises, built in 1883 by a Grand Tour guide as an inn for his English clients. It offers standardized comforts and (from most rooms) spectacular views—some over the valley, stretching south all the way to Monte Amiata, others toward Assisi. Most accommodations are done in a modernized classic style—or, in the newer ones, a gilded 18th-century decor to match the original marble statues in the public areas—all with fresh carpets and wall fabrics, heavy curtains, and sparkling bathrooms with marble sinks; some have Jacuzzi tubs. The spacious two-room suites feature plush red tassled sofas and double sinks in the large bathrooms. The first-floor rooms are older and grander—a few even have high, frescoed ceilings and the original furnishings. The public areas include grand salons of chandeliers, intricately inlaid wood floors, high coffered and stuccoed ceilings, and terraces opening to cliff-hanging views over the valley.

Piazza Italia 12, 06100 Perugia. ✆ **075-573-2541.** Fax 075-572-0210. www.brufanipalace.com. 94 units. 120€–330€ double; 300€–440€ junior suite; 400€–750€ suite. Breakfast 23€. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 31€ in private garage. **Amenities:** Collins restaurant/American bar (tables on the piazza in summer); babysitting; concierge; small exercise room; indoor pool; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, VCR and fax in suites, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Expensive

Villa di Monte Solare ★★ It's hard to believe that a luxury hotel such as the Monte Solare would be found here, 25 minutes outside Perugia, in the hills far above civilization. Yet, when you climb up the gravel road, past the olive trees and 17th-century farmhouses, you realize that this *is* civilization: There are nightly classical music concerts in the villa's frescoed chapel, a huge range of spa treatments in a converted *limonaia,* and Michelin-worthy dinners in a jacket-and-tie restaurant led by local chef Nicola Fanfano. The main house is impeccably furnished in period chairs and paintings with ancient terra-cotta floors, while the surrounding farm buildings where most of the guests stay are

fitted with ultramodern finishings, such as automatic lights for the bathroom. The hotel offers walking tours of the historic property and of the surrounding towns, as well as cycling tours and cooking classes. On rainy days you can spend time in the reading room on the top floor of the main house, which has books, games for the children, and sweeping views of the valley all the way to Lake Trasimeno.

Via Montali, 7 Colle San Paolo (near Panicale). ✆ **075-832-376.** Fax 075-835-5462. www.villamontesolare.com. 21 units. 200€–240€ double; 240€–280€ superior double; 300€–350€ suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Formal restaurant; bar; concierge; pool; smoke-free rooms; spa. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Moderate

Hotel Giò Arte e Vini ★ This operation may be commercial to the core, but it's one of the most felicitous concentrations of capitalism around. It's on the outskirts of town, inhabiting an ugly 1960s brick architectural mistake, but the rooms on the back face a small tree-shaded valley, the only oasis of green on Perugia's developed slopes. The rooms are comfortable, large, and well furnished. A contemporary artist and a wine label are paired in each room dedicated to wine: The glass-topped desks contain tiny *enoteche,* the art hangs on the wall, and you're welcome to buy either. The rooms dedicated to Jazz have a more old-school feel, with massage chairs and a CD player. The restaurant serves Umbrian recipes tweaked to fine cuisine levels and accompanied by bottomless wine tasting. The attached enoteca/*gastronomia* stocks almost 800 labels of wine and regional products, from Italy and around the world.

Via Ruggero D'Andreotto 19, 06124 Perugia. ✆/fax **075-573-1100.** www.hotelgio.it. 206 units. 120€–180€ double or junior suite. Half pension available. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 6 or 7. By car, the E45 passes just below the hotel. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Locanda della Posta Value The Posta is in the heart of the action on Corso Vannucci, a few palaces down from the National Gallery and in the midst of the *passeggiata.* Although pricey, rather characterless, and not particularly friendly, it offers comfort as solid as the Brufani (see above) at a better rate. The Posta was the only hotel in Perugia when it opened in the late 1700s and has entertained Goethe, Frederick III of Prussia, and Hans Christian Andersen. The small breakfast room retains its frescoed ceiling, yet most of the property was redecorated in the early 1990s in mainly dark, muted colors; only a few canvases on corridor walls remain of the 18th-century decor. The sizable accommodations now include padded fabric-lined walls, matching Art Nouveau floral prints on the quilts and chair upholstery, and modern wood furniture.

Corso Vannucci 97, 06121 Perugia. ✆ **075-572-8925.** Fax 075-573-2562. www.locandadellaposta.com. 39 units. 134€–170€ double; 167€–201€ suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 20€ in garage or free in front of Brufani nearby. **Amenities:** Concierge; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

Sangallo Palace Hotel Ranking just under Hotel Brufani (see above), this palace is right below the historic center—it sits atop the Partigiani garage, so it's just a 10-minute walk and a few escalator rides from Corso Vannucci. The hotel is modern, elegant, and preferred by business types in town for conferences. Over each bed is a framed reproduction of a Perugino or Pinturicchio. The medium-size to spacious guest rooms come with amenities like private safes, interactive television, and wide beds with firm mattresses, and they often open onto panoramic countryside views. Many of the tiled bathrooms have techno-Jacuzzi tubs. Il Sangallo restaurant is justifiably praised for its Umbrian and national cuisine, with

much of the produce coming from the Umbrian countryside; the cellar is well stocked in regional wines. In summer, breakfast is served on the (noisy) terrace.

Via Masi 9, 06121 Perugia. ✆ **075-573-0202.** Fax 075-573-0068. www.sangallo.it. 93 units. 126€–178€ double; 169€–222€ suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking or 11€ valet parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; small children's center; small exercise room; Jacuzzi; small indoor heated pool; room service; tennis courts (1km/⅔ mile away); Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Inexpensive

Travelers watching their purse strings might want to forgo the more expensive choices above for a quiet hotel in the medieval streets east of Corso Vannucci. The 75€ doubles at **Hotel Umbria,** Via Boncambi 37 (✆/fax **075-572-1203**), are a considerable climb up to Corso Vannucci, but all 18 rooms have bathrooms and TVs at a very good price. Otherwise, the city's youth hostel, **Ostello di Perugia** (✆ **075-572-2880;** www.ostello.perugia.it) has beds for 15€ at Via Bontempi 13.

Hotel La Rosetta ★ This 19th-century medieval-styled *palazzo,* anchoring the Piazza Italia end of Corso Vannucci with its cute faux-Romanesque brick entry courtyard, has been a hotel since 1922. Accommodations range from cramped to palatial, but a renovation has refined them all. A few rooms open onto the Corso (great people-watching but rather noisy). Those on the first floor occupy the *palazzo*'s old *piano nobile,* so they come with high vaulted ceilings, the occasional chandeliers, and some with stunning frescoes from the 1800s or 1920s. Choosing such "superior" doubles lends your stay more antique character, but bumps you well into the Expensive category.

Piazza Italia 19, 06121 Perugia. ✆/fax **075-572-0841.** www.perugiaonline.com/larosetta. 90 units. 60€–84€ double; 58€–64€ standard triple. Ask for discounts for longer stays. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking in nearby piazza. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

Hotel Priori ★★ (Value) The best of Perugia's budget lodgings is just 60m (197 ft.) down the hill through the central arch of Palazzo dei Priori. Plants liven up the halls, and though the huge, sunny terrace surrounded by the buildings and roofs of old Perugia doesn't have a vista, it's great for breakfast alfresco in warm weather. Many savvy younger travelers and Italian families stay in the whitewashed, tile-floor rooms. The fine dark wood furniture was handmade by a local craftsman. The six newer rooms, just off the reception, have 17th-century detailing and air-conditioning.

Via Vermiglioli 3 (at Via dei Priori), 06123 Perugia. ✆ **075-572-3378.** Fax 075-572-3213. www.hotelpriori.it. 57 units. 65€–95€ double. Ask about discounts during slow periods. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. Parking 10€–15€ in garage. **Amenities:** Babysitting; concierge; room service (breakfast). *In room:* A/C; TV, hair dryer on request.

WHERE TO DINE

Dining in Perugia is polarized: There are several worthy fine restaurants and plenty of cheap *pizzerie* supported by the vast student population, but very few *trattorie* in between. The local cuisine includes a secondo called ***torello alla Perugina*** (veal scallops served under liver pâté) that deserves sampling. Of the *pizzerie,* the best is **Il Segreto di Pulcinella,** Via Large 8, off Via Bonazzi (✆ **075-573-6284**). Pizzas are 4€ to 7€. It's open Tuesday through Sunday from 12:10 to 2:30pm and 8:30pm to midnight.

Expensive

Il Falchetto ★★ PERUGINA Il Falchetto is one of Perugia's best and most popular dining spots. Try to sit in the more atmospheric back room, with its 14th-century stone

walls and ceiling, or out on the piazza if it's summer—during Umbria Jazz; it's like having free seats to the concerts on Piazza IV Novembre. The dish to order is *falchetti verdi,* a personal-size casserole of rich, filling spinach and ricotta gnocchi baked with tomato sauce and cheeses. Or, sample the *umbrichelli alla casalinga* (homemade fat spaghetti in spicy tomato sauce). Then try a *tris della casa,* made up of three regional specialty secondi that might include *torello alla Perugina, filetino di vitello* (very thick, tender milk-fed veal served with porcini, truffle, and wood mushrooms), or an *agnello* rope twist of grilled lamb.

Via Bartolo 20 (2 steps north of the Duomo). ✆ **075-573-1775.** www.ilfalchetto.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 5.50€–15€; secondi 8.50€–13€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm. Closed Jan.

Moderate

Il Cantinone UMBRIAN On a side street just a few yards off Piazza IV Novembre, this low-key restaurant is set in a medieval mélange of vaulted ceilings and stone walls. The wall art is of questionable merit, but the food is good. Both the ravioli (covered in spinachy cream sauce) and the *gnocchi al pomodoro* (potato dumplings in tomato sauce) are made from scratch, and the *grigliata mista* (mixed grilled meats) and *torello alla Perugina* (veal smothered in chicken liver pâté) are good secondi. Il Cantinone is known as one of the cheaper choices in town, and their pizza menu has been increasing over the years.

Via Ritorta 4–8 (near the Duomo). ✆ **075-573-4430.** Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–8€; secondi 7€–14€; pizza 4.40€–6.50€. No credit cards. Wed–Mon 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–11pm. Closed Dec 22–Jan 5.

La Lanterna ★ UMBRIAN A series of brick-vaulted rooms descends under a medieval *palazzo* past an open kitchen from which emerge billows of steam and the slightly adventurous creations of the cooking staff: The *capriolo frutti di bosco* (goat served with wild berries) is just one example. Start with the light and delicious *ravioli all'Arancia e petali di rosa* (cheese ravioli in cream sauce flavored with mandarin orange slices and rose petals) or *agnolotti alla Norcina* (a typical Umbrian dish of small meat ravioli under a sauce of cream, sausage, and black truffle). The *arrosto misto* is a particularly good grab bag of roast rabbit, guinea hen, lamb, and other meats, while the *lombetto incrostato* (encrusted filet of pork with a sauce of walnuts, mushrooms, and truffles) is a hearty yet refined option for hungry gourmands.

Via U. Rocchi 6 (behind the Duomo). ✆ **075-572-6397.** Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–10€; secondi 7€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Fri–Wed 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm (daily in summer).

La Taverna ★★ UMBRIAN One of the more refined restaurants in town, candlelit La Taverna is removed from the hubbub (but still central; just follow the signs). Couples meet romantically and families celebrate special occasions under the brick barreled vaults, and wait for Claudio Brugalossi to recommend the best pick of the day. If they're available and you have an appetite, go for the *caramelle rosse al gorgonzola,* a 'zola-soaked plate of homemade ravioli filled with juicy beets. Follow that up with *medaglioni alle punte di asparagi,* which are cuts of filet, smothered in a creamy asparagus sauce and scalloped potatoes. Recently, Claudio has added limited outdoor seating. Call ahead for one of the tables.

Via delle Streghe 8 (near Corso Vannucci's Piazza Repubblica). ✆ **075-572-4128.** Reservations recommended. Primi 8€–10€; secondi 9€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–11:30pm.

Osteria del Gambero (Ubu Re) ★ UMBRIAN/SEAFOOD Ubu Re feels a bit like a private club, with modern art prints, soft jazz, and soft sconce lighting. Once a newcomer to a stodgy restaurant scene, in a city where institutions seem to have been around forever, this has become the best restaurant in Perugia, and it's pretty cheap to boot. The

unique breads, pasta, and desserts are made on-site, and whatever else you do, be sure to order the *mousse tepida di piccione* (pigeon soufflé in black truffle sauce). They offer a "typical cuisine" fixed-price menu, a fish menu, and (in season) a show-stealing *degustazione* (tasting) menu of dishes prepared with Norcia's black truffles—perhaps the cheapest way in town to taste how Umbria's elusive and most prized tuber goes with each course. The wine list represents the entire Italian peninsula well, but is a bit weighty on price.

Via Baldeschi 8/a (behind the Duomo). ✆ **075-573-5461.** Reservations recommended. Primi 7€–8€; secondi 9€–11€. MC, V. Tues–Sun 7:30–11:30pm. Closed 2 weeks in Jan, 2 weeks in July.

NEAR PERUGIA: ETRUSCAN TOMBS, WINE, CERAMICS & MORE

About 5km (3 miles) south of Perugia, on the road to Foligno but still in Perugia's suburbs, you'll see the **Ipogeo dei Volumni** ★ (✆ **075-393-329;** www.archeopg.arti.beniculturali.it; Sept–June daily 9am–1pm and 3:30–6:30pm; July–Aug daily 9am–12:30pm and 4:30–7pm), a tomb of the late Etruscan era that was used from the mid–2nd century to the mid–1st century B.C., the era of ascending Roman authority. This is one of the finest Etruscan tombs in Italy, built like a house underground and still set with its cinerary urns. The ashes of Arunte Volumni, the father of the clan buried here, rest in the central travertine urn carved with his effigy, reclining in true Etruscan style. His daughter's effigy, however, shows a seated lady after the Roman fashion, an indication of the increasing influence of the Latin conquerors on local customs. Unlike other tombs of this style, it's decorated with carved reliefs—Medusa heads, dolphins, and owls—rather than paintings. Admission is 2€. If your group is larger than five, you must reserve ahead through the **Soprintendenza Archeologica per l'Umbria** (✆ **075-572-7141**). You can also take the bus from Perugia's Piazza Garibaldi; it's the one headed for Ponte San Giovanni. (The bus doesn't always stop here, so let the driver know where you're going.)

Torgiano, 15km (9⅓ miles) south of Perugia, is celebrated for its wines, considered the best in Umbria. The top label is the complex red **Rubesco Riserva** ★★, produced by the local estates of the **Fondazione Lungarotti** (www.lungarotti.it), whose vintages were formulated by contemporary wine guru Giorgio Lungarotti. Although he used modern techniques and experimental methods to concoct his excellent reds and vin santo, Lungarotti was also in touch with the region's oenological roots and founded a **Museo del Vino (Wine Museum),** set up in the Palazzo Baglioni at Corso Vittorio Emanuele 11 (✆ **075-988-0200**). It's one of the best didactic collections of its kind (perhaps the only one, come to think of it), fascinating even for those mildly interested in viticulture. Admission, 4€ adults and 2.50€ children under 6, includes a hand-held audiovisual guide in English. It's open daily from 9am to 1pm and 3 to 6pm (until 7pm in summer). The nearby hotel/restaurant complex **Tre Vaselle** ★ (✆ **075-988-0447;** fax 075-988-0214; www.3vaselle.it) also belongs to the wine estate and serves exquisite Tuscan fare in a refined dining room (pricey, but worth it). It also offers upscale guest rooms rambling through several 17th-century buildings; doubles go for 215€ to 240€, junior suites for 280€. The hotel has an indoor and outdoor pool and a large conference center.

Another 5km (3 miles) down the road is a ceramic production center that has been one of Italy's most famous since the 14th century, the crafts town of **Deruta** ★★. The town has, for some reason, closed down its tourist office (which used to be located at Piazza dei Consoli 4), and locals don't seem sure they'll bother opening one back up again. Meantime, the town's website, **www.comune.deruta.pg.it**, has some good info.

Large modern factories now crank out huge numbers of assembly-line plates, bowls, and vases in traditional colors and patterns, and that is what's hawked behind the plate-glass windows of the large showrooms forming a phalanx along the new town's main drag below the highway. The merchandise is usually pretty good quality, but if you explore the back roads in the Old Town, you can find true artisans hand-painting ceramics they've tossed on foot-powered wheels. My favorites are the traditionalists **Deruta Placens,** with shops at Via B. Michelotti 25 (✆ **075-972-277**) and Via Umberto I 16 (✆ **075-972-4027**); and **Miriam,** where at Marcella Favaroni's Via Umberto I 15 shop (✆ **075-971-1452**) she paints vividly colorful and intricate patterns at half the prices most shops charge. Her husband's shop at Piazza dei Consoli 26 (✆ **075-971-1210**) carries more traditional pieces and quality Renaissance reproductions. To get a sense of the evolution of ceramics, visit the **Museo Regionale della Ceramica (Regional Museum of Ceramics),** Largo San Francesco (✆ **075-971-1000**), which houses a precious collection of Deruta ceramics of various periods from the Middle Ages to the 1930s. April through September, it's open daily from 10:30am to 1pm and 3 to 6pm; October through March, hours are Wednesday through Monday 10:30am to 1pm and 3:30 to 7pm (check for shorter hours off season). Admission is 3€.

2 ASSISI: AN ARTISTIC PILGRIMAGE

27km (17 miles) E of Perugia; 190km (118 miles) SE of Florence; 175km (109 miles) N of Rome

Assisi should be a perfect Umbrian hill town. It's a tiered, overgrown village of pink and pale-gray stone drawn out along a mountainside and surrounded by a valley patchwork of fields and olive groves. It boasts Roman roots, a glowering castle and twisting alleyways from the Middle Ages, and some of Italy's finest early Renaissance art—all backed by the brilliant green slope of sacred Mt. Subasio. But this city with a population of fewer than 3,000 (and shrinking) saw, at the end of the 20th century, an average of four to five million visitors every year. This constant flood of travelers has polished the usual hill-town charm right off Assisi. Countless pilgrims, art lovers, and just plain curious travelers over the last 700 years have imparted to the town a thick tourist shellac it often can't quite shake even in its quietest, least visited corners. It's no accident the University of Perugia's "tourism studies" program is based here.

All this aside, Assisi is still one of Italy's top sights, ranking with the Colosseum, Pompeii, and Venice's canals. It preserves the remarkably intact portico of a Roman temple on its main square, one of the better-preserved Albornoz Roccas with sweeping views, and a two-story basilica hulking at one end of town that's a festival of frescoes. The basilica showcases the talents of the greatest geniuses of the early Renaissance, both Sienese (Pietro Lorenzetti and Simone Martini) and Florentine (Cimabue and the incomparable Giotto).

In the late Middle Ages, Assisi witnessed the birth and lives of saints Clare and Francis. Francis is Italy's patron saint, founder of one of the world's largest monastic orders, and generally considered just about the holiest person to walk the earth since Jesus. The town is choked with visitors from Easter to June, and you sometimes can't move in the basilica on religious holiday weekends. The tourism support network, though, is in full force only when the crowds are in town, so while Assisi is packed beyond the limits in high season (book well in advance), you'll find it a ghost town January through March; about three-quarters of the hotels, restaurants, and museums close.

Earthquakes in 1997 rocked the heart of Umbria. In Assisi, Santa Chiara church and the Duomo were both damaged, but the Basilica di San Francesco was the worst hit. Part of the ceiling in the upper church collapsed, killing four people, destroying frescoes by Cimabue and his followers, and damaging Giotto's *Life of St. Francis* frescoes. Knowing the Papal Jubilee celebrations would begin at Christmas 1999, the pope pulled some strings (luckily, the basilica is the only sovereign land belonging to the Vatican outside Rome's Vatican City) and restoration sped along at a remarkable pace. The lower church reopened within weeks, and the upper church and its frescoes by early 2000, but the city wasn't fully restored until 2007.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

By Train From **Perugia,** there are about 20 trains daily (25–30 min.). From **Florence,** there are 11 daily Rome-bound trains, from which you transfer at Terontola/Cortona for Assisi (2–3 hr., often with long layovers). Coming from **Rome,** nine daily trains make the connection through Foligno (2–3 hr. total). The **station** (✆ **075-804-0272**) is in the modern valley town of Santa Maria degli Angeli, about 5km (3 miles) from Assisi, with bus connections to Assisi every 20 minutes, or you can take a **taxi** for about 10€ to 13€.

By Car Assisi is only 27km (17 miles) from Perugia, but you have to take several roads (most are well signposted). Head south of town to the SS3, which you take in the direction of Umbertide. Get off the SS3 after 3.5km (2¼ miles) onto the SS75 toward Foligno. After 9km (5½ miles), you'll come to the exit for Assisi at Santa Maria degli Angeli, its modern suburb. It's another 5km (3 miles) up to town. Assisi is almost entirely closed to traffic except hotel luggage drop-offs and pickups.

You can **park** (✆ **075-813-707**) in the huge lot under Piazza Matteotti ("Parcheggio C") on the town's eastern edge; on Piazza Unità d'Italia outside Porta San Pietro ("Parcheggio A"), the smallest but nearest to the Basilica di San Francesco; or outside the walls' southeastern corner at Porta Moianbo and Porta Nuova ("Parcheggio B," with an elevator up into town). These are all pay-by-the-hour lots that fill up quickly in summer. Rates are 1.15€ per hour, but if you're staying in an Assisi hotel they'll give you an **AssisiCard** that lets you park for 24 hours for 11€. The card also gets you small discounts in shops and some restaurants around town.

For the best **free parking,** drive to the north side of town, up along the ridge above the city, where there's plenty of space in the lot near the cemetery off Viale Albornoz behind the walls; even better are the spaces lining Via della Rocca just inside the walls near the Rocca (enter through Porta Perlici off Viale Albornoz and take the first right within the walls). To test your luck, drive all the way to the end of Viale Albornoz where it enters town through Porta San Giacomo; outside this gate are a few free spaces just a 2-minute stroll from San Francesco.

By Bus Eight **APM** buses (✆ **800-512-141** or 075-506-781; www.apmperugia.it) run the route seven times daily between **Perugia** and Assisi's Piazza Matteotti (50 min.). Most also pass by the lower half of Piazza San Pietro (at the bottom of the big traffic curve) at the other end of town. They also run about five buses from **Gubbio** (1¾ hr.). **Sulga** (✆ **075-500-9641;** www.sulga.it) runs two buses daily from **Rome**'s Tiburtina station, taking about 3 hours, and one daily trip from Piazza Adua in **Florence,** which takes about 2½ hours. In Assisi, buy tickets in any *tabacchi* or at the tourist office.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Fontemaggio **24**
Hotel Alexander **15**
Hotel Fontabella **4**
Hotel Il Duomo **21**
Hotel La Rocca **22**
Hotel Sole **16**
Hotel Subasio **2**
Hotel Umbra **11**
San Rufino **20**
St. Anthony's Guesthouse **14**

DINING

Il Frantoio **4**
La Fortezza **17**
La Stalla **23**
Medio Evo **12**
Trattoria Pallotta **18**

ATTRACTIONS

Basilica di San Francesco **1**
Duomo di San Rufino **19**
Museo e Foro Romano **7**
Oratorio dei Pellegrini **3**
Palazzo Comunale & Palazzo dei Priori **10**
Pinacoteca **6**
Rocca Maggiore **9**
San Damiano **25**
San Pietro **5**
Santa Chiara **13**
Temple of Minerva **8**
Torre del Popolo **8**

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** (✆ **075-812-534** or 075-812-450; fax 075-813-727; www.umbria2000.it) is on Piazza del Comune, 06081 Assisi. It's open summer daily from 8am to 6:30pm, winter Monday through Saturday from 8am to 2pm and 3:30 to 6:30pm, Sunday from 9am to 1pm. The private websites **www.assisionline.com** and **www.assisiweb.com** also have good info.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS In the city of St. Francis, all **church holidays** are pilgrim-ridden, solemn religious rites. Processions and church ceremonies—occasionally mixed with some livelier restaurant feasts—are celebrated throughout Easter Week and on Corpus Domini (early June), Festa del Voto (June 22), Festa del Perdono (Aug 1 and 2), Festa di San Rufino (Aug 11), Festa di Santa Chiara (Aug 12), Ascension Day (around Aug 15), Festa di San Francesco (Oct 3 and 4), and Christmas Eve and Day (Dec 24 and 25).

But for the **Calendimaggio** ★★ spring celebration, the first weekend (starting Thurs) after May 1, Assisi goes totally pagan. The town divides itself into "upper" and "lower" factions that date to the 1300s. The festivities, with processions, medieval contests of strength and skill, and late-night partying—all in 14th-century costume, of course—go back much further to the pre-Roman rites of spring. The winner of the contests gets to have the fair damsel of his choice declared Lady Spring. The whole shebang ends with a singing duel on the main piazza. Call ✆ **075-812-534** for info.

In May, there's an **antiques market.** The regular **weekly market** is Saturday along Via Alessi and Via San Gabriele dell'Addolorata.

SEEING THE BASILICA

In the unofficial Italian hierarchy of the divine, first and foremost, without a doubt, comes la Madonna, the Virgin Mary. Then come Jesus, St. Francis, and a local patron saint or two before you get to God. In Assisi, even the Madonna is demoted to let San Francesco reign supreme.

Basilica di San Francesco ★★★ Francis's story is told below, with the handy visual aid of Giotto's fresco cycle in the upper church. But suffice it to say that Assisi's grandiose, gorgeously embellished Basilica di San Francesco is an incongruous memorial to a man who preached and lived an utterly simple life—one of poverty, abstinence, and renunciation of worldly goods in search of greater spirituality. The basilica's implacable bulk rises like a force of nature from the rock of the mountainside, and the first sight of it as you approach the town from the valley is stupefying.

The person responsible for this edifice was one of Francis's right-hand men, the Cortonan disciple Brother Elia. For all his spiritual devotion, Elia remained much more worldly than Francis. In fact, it was probably Elia's tireless marketing and promotion of the Franciscan order, coupled with papal encouragement (which had political motivations of its own), that ensured the longevity of the Francescani. With the basilica he built

Tips Dress Appropriately

San Francesco and Santa Chiara, like many other churches throughout Italy, have a strict **dress code:** Entrance to the basilica is *forbidden* to those wearing shorts or miniskirts or showing bare shoulders. You also must remain silent and cannot take photographs in the Upper Church of San Francesco.

in 1230 to house Francis's recently sanctified bones, Elia was basically sending a public-relations message: Here was a man so holy he needed not just one but two churches, stacked on top of each other, to honor him. The bi-level basilica enjoys an odd marriage of form and function as one of the world's focal points of both high art and intense spirituality. It moves the devout to tears and art lovers to fits of near-religious ecstasy.

The Lower Church Entered through a Gothic portal under a Renaissance porch on Piazza Inferiore di San Francesco (the lower of the two squares abutting the church), the basilica's bottom half is a low-ceilinged, extremely dim cryptlike church. It's full of masterpieces of the early Sienese school of painting, but they're poorly lit, mainly by beautiful but unfortunately not very transparent stained-glass windows, many of which are as old as the church itself.

There's a 1422 fresco of the *Madonna Enthroned with Saints* by Eugubine master Ottaviano Nelli just past the tiny decorated chapel on the left as you enter, plus some fine Gothic tombs along the right wall. At the opposite end of this hall, past the nave, is the **Cappella di Santa Caterina** (usually closed), frescoed by Andrea de' Bartoli with scenes from the *Life of St. Catherine* (1367). The nave was the first part of the church to be frescoed, with the *Passion* on the right wall and *Life of St. Francis* on the left—all of them damaged when the side chapels were built and all painted by the mysterious but talented master named, because of this job, the Maestro di San Francesco. The first chapel off the nave on the right was decorated in 1574 by Dono Doni with the *Life of St. Stephen.*

Across the nave, the first chapel on the left is the **Cappella di San Martino** ★★, frescoed with that saint's life by the Sienese genius Simone Martini (1312–15). Martini amply displays both his penchant for boldly patterned fabrics—not unusual in an artist from a textile center—and his mastery of the medieval forms and themes of late Gothic Sienese painting. The scene on the right wall, *St. Martin Is Knighted by Emperor Julian,* sums up the chivalric medieval ideal perfectly: the ceremony of a king strapping on a knight's sword and a squire slipping on his spurs; the noble sports of the hunt and falconry; and the love of good music and singing of the bel canto. The portrait of Julian, by the way, is probably accurate; Martini based it on the official profiles stamped on Roman coins from the emperor's era.

Halfway up the nave on either side are stairs descending to the **crypt** containing the venerated stone coffin of St. Francis surrounded by the graves of four of his followers. This crypt was lost until the 19th century, sealed up by canny Brother Elia to keep rival Perugians from stealing the saintly remains. Up in the nave again, beyond the stairs on the left wall, is a ***cantoria*** tricked out with cosmatesque colored marbles. Above it is a niche with the remains of a *Coronation of the Virgin* (1337) and other frescoes by Giotto's talented disciple Puccio Capanna.

Across the nave again, the middle chapel on the right side has 17th-century decorations, but the **Cappella della Maddalena** ★ next door, the last chapel on the right, was frescoed with the *Life of St. Mary Magdalene* by Giotto and his assistants (1303–09). For two of the more dramatic scenes—the *Raising of Lazarus,* where bystanders dramatically cover their noses at the stench of Lazarus's rotting flesh, and a *Noli Me Tangere,* where Christ appears almost to hitch up his robes as he scurries from the Magdalene's touch—Giotto borrowed the compositions from the same scenes he'd recently finished in his fresco cycle for Padua's Scrovegni Chapel.

In the **left transept's barrel vault** and on its walls, early Sienese master Pietro Lorenzetti left one of his masterpieces. A 1320 cycle of *Christ's Passion* ends with a huge and

colorful, but sadly damaged, ***Crucifixion*** ★★, and on the wall is a touching and dynamic *Deposition,* featuring a gaunt Christ and whimpering Marys.

The **barrel vault of the right transept** ★ was originally frescoed in 1280 by Giotto's master, Cimabue, but only his *Madonna Enthroned with Four Angels and St. Francis* survives, containing what has become the most popular portrait of the saint. This panel sticks out like a sore thumb amid the early-14th-century frescoes on the *Childhood of Christ* painted by Giotto's assistants under his direction—though the master himself apparently took his brush to the *Crucifixion* scene. Beneath the Cimabue fresco is the tomb of five of Francis's original followers, above which Pietro Lorenzetti frescoed their portraits. To the left of the door and on the end wall are half-length figures of the *Madonna* and seven saints (including St. Clare) by Simone Martini.

Giotto's assistants also frescoed the large **Cappella di San Nicola** beyond the transept's end according to the master's plans. (Giotto may have dabbled directly in the triptych of the *Madonna and Child with Saints Nicholas and Francis.*) One of Francis's famous brown habits is sometimes displayed here.

A doorway in the right transept opens onto the **chapter house,** housing a 1340 *Crucifixion* by Puccio Capanna and a horde of Franciscan relics. These include a patchwork moth-eaten tunic, shirts and slippers, one of only two surviving letters signed by the saint, the rock on which his head rested in his coffin, a staff presented to him by the Sultan of Egypt (after Francis proved his holiness, or at least impressed the Sultan, by walking over hot coals), and the "Rule of the Franciscans," sent to Francis by Pope Honorius II in 1223.

Stairs lead up from the lower church's two transepts to the upper level of a 15th-century **cloister.** More stairs lead from here to the **upper church,** but you may want to take a minute to zip through the **gift shop** and the **treasury.** Its best works are a 15th-century altar frontal, a Flemish tapestry of *St. Francis,* and a 1290 silver chalice with an enameled portrait of Pope Nicholas IV. Beyond the treasury is the **Mason Perkins Collection** of paintings by Lorenzo Monaco, Taddeo di Bartolo, Pietro Lorenzetti, and Pier Francesco Fiorentino, among others.

The Upper Church The tall, light-filled Gothic interior of the upper church is a striking contrast to its downstairs neighbor. Though it's best to start with the lower church (so you can view the art chronologically) you could also enter the upper one through the plain medieval facade with its double portal (common in pilgrimage churches) and large rose window behind a small grassy park called Piazza Superiore di San Francesco. However, I'll assume you're coming up from the lower church and begin with the oldest frescoes in the upper church, those in the **transept.** The **choir** is lined with early-16th-century inlaid stalls, including a papal throne—the only one outside the Vatican. Above them are large frescoed scenes whose weird photo-negative quality is the result of oxidation in the pigments. As with most of the frescoes in this church, no one can agree on the attribution of these works. Some hold the Vasari opinion that Cimabue did them all (with the help of assistants) in 1277; others allow him only the masterful and dramatic composition of the ***Crucifixion*** ★ and pin the rest on his Roman assistants (Jacopo Torriti, Rustici, and possibly Pietro Cavallini).

By 1288, the artist or artists had moved on to the upper register of the nave, filling the top half of the left wall (standing at the altar and facing the main entrance) with stories from the Old Testament and the upper-right wall with scenes from the New Testament. Among Cimabue's assistants working here was a young Giotto, who's now given

credit for the two red-heavy scenes in the second bay of the left wall depicting *Isaac Blessing Jacob* and *Esau Before Isaac.*

The lower register of the nave, with 28 scenes of the ***Life of St. Francis*** ★★★, is what most art aficionados have traveled here to see: the frescoes of Giotto (see "The Genius of Giotto," below). These frescoes were fully restored in 2002, 5 years after the earthquake that shattered them. Again, there were probably assistants at work here, and there's strong evidence that one pupil, the anonymous Maestro di Santa Cecilia, finished the final four compositionally crowded scenes and may have touched up the first. But most of the attempts to find some additional unknown master can be written off as mere iconoclasm—everyone from Giotto's contemporaries to Vasari to many modern-day art historians accepts Giotto as the primary author of the cycle.

Francesco (Francis), the son of a wealthy local cloth merchant and his Provençal wife, spent much of his youth carousing, drinking, gambling, and going off to wars with his buddies—he even spent a year stewing in Perugia's dungeons as a prisoner of war. Restless and bored, the youth began to suspect there was more to life. The frescoes pick up the story (at the transept end of the right aisle) as Francesco's initial glimmers of saintliness begin to appear. The first few frescoes illustrate the traditional background for the saint's beginnings (I've described only the most important ones here): (1) Francis is honored by a simple man who lays his cloak in the mud for the future saint to walk on—you can tell it's Assisi because of the Temple of Minerva in the background. (2) Francis gives his mantle to a poor man (typical first sign of saintliness). (3) Francis, while praying in front of a crucifix (now in Santa Chiara) in the ruins of the church of San Damiano, hears the cross speak to him. It charges him to "go and repair my house, which as you can see is falling into ruin." The church is obviously falling apart, and Francis went on to take the command both literally, fixing the place up, and figuratively, reforming the spirituality of his fellow man. (4) Francis renounces his father's inheritance, taking off all his clothes and returning them to Dad. (5) Pope Innocent III dreams the Lateran basilica, cathedral of Rome, is on the verge of collapse when a poor little man (Francis) arrives to shore it up with his own shoulders. Finally, (6) Francis and his small band of followers journey to Rome, where the pope, for political reasons, approves the Franciscan rule of poverty, chastity, and obedience and gives the pilgrims papal approval to wear monastic tonsures and preach in public.

The rest of the frescoes focus primarily on the miracles of Francis, including the exorcism of some demons from the pastel buildings of a medieval Arezzo. In a later scene, Francis creates the first Christmas crèche—Francis's humble, earthy views show here, as he ensures that the farm animals and faux rustic setting become an integral part of the Nativity. On the entrance wall is perhaps the most famous and charming of the scenes, where Francis preaches to the birds. Francis taught that, because God was present in all life, everything from the animals to the trees to the smallest bird is worthy of love and respect. Francis was quite the talented poet as well, and his flower-child attitude shows through his most famous composition, a beautifully simple poem and prayer to the elements called "Canticle of the Creatures," or "Brother Sun, Sister Moon" (you'll see copies of it everywhere around town). Also don't miss the scene on the right wall where Francis, praying on Mt. Verna in 1224, is visited by a heavenly seraph who imparts to him a singular honor, the stigmata of Christ's wounds. Although later saints were also blessed with the stigmata, Francis was the first, and the miracle pretty much cinched his saintliness. After a life spent traveling as far as Spain, Morocco, Egypt, and Palestine to preach simplicity and a return to kindness and the basics, Francis died near his hometown in

The Genius of Giotto

Short in stature, ugly of countenance, merry in wit, and one of the single greatest artistic talents in Western history, **Giotto di Bondone** (1266–1337) was born a shepherd boy. According to Giorgio Vasari, the renowned artist Cimabue discovered Giotto one day sitting by his herd, scratching a sketch of one of the sheep with a pointed rock on a stone slab. Cimabue took the lad under his wing and into his studio, and it wasn't long before the student's mastery eclipsed that of his teacher. As Dante wrote, "Cimabue thought to lord it over painting's field / And now his fame is obscured and the cry is Giotto."

Other artists, including Cimabue, had begun to introduce elements of naturalism to the rigid, highly stylized Byzantine tradition that had governed European painting since the Middle Ages. But Giotto exploded convention and plunged painting into a Gothic humanism that quickly developed into the Renaissance.

Giotto did more than just paint pretty pictures. He filled his art with the symbolism of a philosophy and a decisive stamp of realism, of painting from nature for the mind. Boccaccio, in one of his Decameron tales just 10 years after Giotto's death, wrote of Giotto's painting as "that art which had been buried for centuries by the errors of some who painted more to please the eyes of the ignorant than the intellect of the wise." The poet went so far as to call him "the best painter in the world." True, Giotto didn't have a good grasp of single-point perspective or a sense of photographic realism—but to be fair, neither concept had been invented. What Giotto did was portray his biblical characters in a manner unlike any seen before.

The figures in his paintings have bulk under their clothes, they have weight, they're expressive, and they have distinct faces with unique personalities—they are, in a word, individuals. Instead of expressionless medieval Madonnas with tiers of identical angels arranged stiffly around her as if posing, Giotto's scenes are natural, almost like glimpses of private moments—the people laugh, sleep, fidget, preach, move, cry, and even sit with their backs turned.

Whether he was helped extensively or merely moderately by assistants in the painting of Assisi's upper church of San Francesco is in some ways irrelevant, because it was Giotto's vision and influence that humanized the frescoes and allowed reality to slip into the paintings. Giotto shows us the crisscross of lumber on the backs of altar crucifixes, friars singing heartily at a Christmas service, and monkish faces wrinkled in painful sorrow at the death of Francis. There are no stylized wails of anguish here, but rather real, heartfelt tears that well up from inside the friars, creating a moment almost too private to view.

1226. Within 2 years, he was made a saint, and in 1939 he was proclaimed the official patron saint of Italy.

Piazza Superiore di San Francesco/Piazza Inferiore di San Francesco. ✆ **075-819-001.** www.sanfrancescoassisi.org. Free admission. Lower church daily 6am–7pm; upper church daily 8:30am–7pm (until 6pm in winter). Treasury and Perkins Collection Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 9:30am–7pm. You may visit church for Mass on Sun morning (before 2pm), but purely touristic visits at this time are frowned on.

EXPLORING THE REST OF ASSISI

The main square in town is **Piazza del Comune.** The medieval edition of what may have been the old Roman forum (see below) is most famous for the six gleaming white Corinthian columns and tympanum of the **Temple of Minerva** ★, a 1st-century-B.C. Roman temple the Assisians sensibly recycled into a church with a thoroughly uninteresting baroque interior. This was the first object in all of Italy that Goethe—traveling the peninsula for the sole purpose of communing with the ruins of ancient Rome—showed anything but contempt for in his *Italian Journey:* "Lo and behold!—there it stood . . . so perfect in design . . . one could never tire of looking at the facade. . . . I cannot describe the sensations which this work aroused in me, but I know they are going to bear fruit forever." He didn't give the frescoes in San Francesco the time of day.

Next door to the temple is the tall 13th-century **Torre del Popolo,** with the coeval mayor's palace next to that. Across the piazza are the Gothic piles of the **Palazzo Comunale** and connected **Palazzo dei Priori.**

San Pietro This pretty and sober little church downhill from the Basilica di San Francesco was consecrated in 1253, but the simple rectangular facade with its three large spoked windows wasn't finished until 1268. The piazza is used by local boys as an impromptu soccer field, and there's a view over the valley from the square's edge. A relief of ivy patterns running around the central portal ends in two weather-beaten Lombard lions that guard the main door. The interior is spare, of interest mainly for its strange pre-Gothic pointed ceiling vaults and the odd dome, a concentric cone of bricks in the Arab-Norman style.

Piazza San Pietro. No phone. Free admission. Daily 7am–noon and 2pm–sunset.

Oratorio dei Pellegrini ★ The white-robed sisters are nearly always kneeling inside praying, so you'll most likely only be able to poke your head through the heavy curtains and peer through the glass doors for a respectfully quick glance at the 15th-century frescoes inside. Matteo da Gualdo, who was responsible for the painting on the outside wall, frescoed the scenes on the altar wall, and one Pierantonio Mezzastris took care of the ceiling and side walls in 1477, with miracle scenes of *St. Anthony Abbot* on the left and *St. James* on the right. The three saints frescoed on the entrance wall were once attributed to a young Perugino, but these days it seems more likely that L'Ingegno did them.

Via San Francesco 11. No phone. Free admission. Daily 9am–noon and 3–6pm, except during prayers.

Museo e Foro Romano ★ The piles of ancient **Roman artifacts** stacked against the walls here aren't quite worth the bother of matching them with the detailed list you're handed at the door. But keep on the lookout for the 1st-century-A.D. stele on the right wall, with symbols of the deceased's civic scribely duties (a scroll and codex), and the fresco remnants around to the left. A corridor leads under Piazza del Comune to Assisi's old **Roman Forum**—or at least a central religious square—now some 3.9m (13 ft.) below ground level. The plain stone rectangular slab in the middle was probably used as an altar for votive statues. To its left is the base of the stairs leading up to the **Temple of Minerva,** which is still in good shape on the piazza above. Farther along the corridor, ongoing excavations have revealed the bases of some **Roman buildings,** probably shops.

Via Portica (on the edge of Piazza del Comune). ✆ **075-813-053.** Admission 2.50€ adults; 2€ students, children under 18, and seniors over 65. Mar 16–Oct 15 daily 10am–1pm and 4–6pm; Oct 16–Mar 15 daily 10am–1pm and 2–5pm.

Pinacoteca The town's picture gallery is nothing overly special, existing mainly to preserve the faded remains of frescoes from street tabernacles. The collection includes some 13th-century knights on horseback detached from the Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo, and a *Crucifix* by the Maestro Espressionista di Santa Chiara. Pace di Bartolo also did some nice works here, including a *Madonna and Child with Angels,* on whose backside Giotto's student Puccio Capanna painted *St. Francis and Child.* Of later works, there's a *Madonna della Misericordia* with St. Biagio by L'Alunno and a Dono Doni *Annunciation.*

Via San Francesco 10. ✆ **075-812-0333.** Admission 2.20€ adults, 1.50€ children under 18 and seniors over 65. Mar 16–June 30 and Sept 1–Oct 15 daily 10am–1pm and 2–6pm; July 1–Aug 31 daily 10am–1pm and 2:30–7pm; Oct 16–Mar 15 daily 10am–1pm and 2–5pm. Closed Jan 1 and Dec 25.

Santa Chiara ★ The resting place of St. Clare's bones and Francis's miraculous crucifix is fronted by a lively terracelike piazza with views over the valley and some shade trees. The 1260 church is early Gothic. The **facade,** done in strong bands of Assisian pink and white, is set with a giant wagon wheel of a rose window and stabilized by the unwieldy wings of two cumbersome flying buttresses.

The vast **interior** is dark and perennially crowded with people filing down into the neo-Gothic **crypt** to see the original stone tomb of St. Clare. Born to a local minor noble family in 1193, Chiara (anglicized to Clare) was a friend of Francis who followed the mystic's example against her parents' wishes. In 1211, she abandoned her parental household and ran off to meet Francis, who clothed her in sackcloth after his own fashion and hacked off her hair, signaling Clare's renunciation of earthly goods and the beginning of her quest for spiritual enlightenment. This path she pursued with a vengeance, adopting the rule of St. Benedict tempered with Francis's preaching of poverty. She soon gathered a large enough female following at San Damiano that Francis urged her to set up a convent there, and she became abbess. (The order she founded, the Poor Clares, didn't move into town until after her death.)

Chiara's miracles accumulated as Francis's did, and she became adept at using the Eucharist (the communion wafer) to ward off Assisi invaders as diverse as the Saracens (1240) and local thug Vitale d'Aversa (1241). Bedridden and less than a year from death, on Christmas Eve 1252 Clare was upset that her illness was keeping her from the Franciscans' singing of Mass in the new basilica of St. Francis in town. Suddenly, she was blessed with a vision of the Mass, both hearing and seeing it miraculously from several miles away. In 1958, the pope latched on to the audiovisual aspect of the miracle and granted Clare the rather dubious honor of becoming the patron saint of television.

Off the right wall of the church built to house her tomb is the **Oratorio del Crocifisso,** preserving the venerated 12th-century crucifix that spoke to St. Francis at San Damiano and set him on his holy path. Against this oratory's back wall are some holy relics, including tunics worn by Francis and Clare, a shirt she embroidered, and some of the hair Francis sheared from her head. The chapel divided from this one by glass walls is the **Cappella del Sacramento,** with frescoes by Pace di Bartolo and a triptych of the *Madonna and Saints* by Puccio Capanna. Of the frescoes that covered the interior of the church until the 17th century, only some colorfully intense 13th-century ones by an anonymous follower of Giotto remain, up in the transept.

Piazza Santa Chiara. ✆ **075-812-282.** Free admission. Daily 7am–noon and 2pm–sunset.

Duomo di San Rufino Assisi's cathedral is off a quiet walled **piazza** that receives some historians' votes as the true site of Roman Assisi's forum. The first church on this spot may have been raised as early as the 5th century. In 1028, the town's bishop

witnessed an unrecorded miraculous event and had the old church torn down and a Romanesque one built to replace it, accompanied by a fat bell tower built over a Roman cistern. In 1134, however, another bishop had an even greater miraculous vision, and the poor church was flattened to make way for the present structure, saving only the bell tower. Alas, in the more than 100 years it took to build the church, the Romanesque styling of the lower two-thirds of the **facade**—including highly decorative friezes, Lombard lions and griffins at the doors, stone-spoked rose windows, and a classical dividing arcade of thin columns—gave way to Gothic fashion. The top third was finished with a jarring pointed blind arch set in the tympanum.

The **interior** was remodeled in 1571, following structural damage, and deserves your attention only if you're interested in the **font** in which St. Francis, St. Clare, and Emperor Frederick II were baptized (to the right as you enter). At the altar are two canvases by Dono Doni—a *Deposition* on the right and *Crucifixion* on the left. A door at the end of the left aisle leads to the **Museo della Cattedrale** (✆ **075-812-712** or 347-874-0224), which preserves detached frescoes by Puccio Capanna, more works by Dono Doni, and triptychs by L'Alunno and Matteo da Gualdo. You can enter the **crypt** from the door to the right of the facade; its rough vaulting and Ionic columns are, along with the bell tower, the only surviving bits of the 11th-century cathedral.

Piazza San Rufino. ✆ **075-812-283.** Free admission to the church; crypt and Museo della Cattedrale 3€ adults, 2.50€ ages 12–18 and seniors over 60. Church daily 7am–noon and 2pm–sunset. Crypt and Museo della Cattedrale Mar 16–Oct 15 Thurs–Tues 10am–1pm and 3–6pm (Aug 10am–6pm); Oct 16–Mar 15 Thurs–Tues 10am–1pm and 2:30–5:30pm.

Rocca Maggiore ★★ The bleached yellow bones of this fortress glower high above the city, a reminder of the hated Cardinal Albornoz, who built the 14th-century version we see today to establish papal authority over Assisi. A young Frederick II, future Emperor of Swabia, spent his earliest childhood within the walls of the short-lived 12th-century fortress that stood here, on an Umbri burial site. Beyond the circular rampart added in the 16th century by Pope Paul III, you can enter the outer walls to visit the recently restored keep and soldiers' quarters. A very long corridor lit by repeating arrow slits leads to a polygonal watchtower, with a panoramic view, that's not lit at all. The warning sign at the corridor's base is no joke—a spiral staircase in the pitch dark can be quite a challenge for those who don't come equipped with a flashlight. From the top of the keep is a view down the walls to the tower of the smaller **Rocchiola (Rocca Minore),** at the northeast corner of the city's defenses.

Piazzale delle Libertà Comunali, at the top of town, at the ends of Via della Rocca, Via del Colle, and the stepped Vicolo San Lorenzo off Via Porta Perlici. ✆ **075-815-292.** Admission 1.70€ adults; 1€ students, children under 18, and seniors over 65. Daily 10am–sunset.

EXPLORING OUTSIDE THE WALLS

Eremo delle Carceri and Monte Subasio ★ A signposted lane leads left from Porta Cappuccini onto the oak- and ilex-covered slopes of **Mt. Subasio,** where nestled among the trees is the peacefully isolated hermitage built on the site where St. Francis often withdrew to meditate and pray with his followers. The monks living here will show you around—they live on alms alone, so a nice tip of a few euros is appreciated. You'll see the rocky bed where Francis slept, a few worn frescoes, the site where Francis caused water to gush from the rocks, the crevice where he tossed a pesky demon back down to hell, and the ancient ilex tree, now on iron crutches, where the saint preached his sermons to the birds.

The hermitage also makes a good starting point for **walks in the woods.** Monte Subasio is a protected regional park, and there are plenty of marked trails to follow. (Maps are available in town.)

Via Eremo delle Carceri (4km/2½ miles from Porta Cappuccini). ✆ **075-812-301.** Free admission. Eremo delle Carceri daily 6:30am–7pm. Walk or take taxi from Piazza Santa Chiara.

San Damiano San Damiano is where it all began, a dilapidated old church that in 1205 housed a 12th-century painted crucifix before which young and restless Francesco was praying one day when the Christ on it spoke to him. Francis first acted on its "rebuild my church" injunction in literal terms: He decided Jesus wanted him to shore up this decaying building, and reconstructed the church stone by stone. The church later became a favorite retreat for Francis and his followers. St. Clare founded her order of the Poor Clares here, lived out her life as its abbess, and passed away within these walls. The pretty little church is still—in a city filled with garish and monumental memorials to the saint—a pleasingly simple and rudimentary place, with rustic wooden choir stalls and a few simple frescoes on the walls. The monastery, with its quiet 15th-century cloister, is also usually open to visitors.

Via San Damiano (1.5km/1 mile from Porta Nuova). ✆ **075-812-273.** Free admission. Daily 10am–12:30pm and 2–6pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Book ahead, book ahead, book ahead. Never show up in Assisi, especially from Easter to fall, without a reservation. If you do, you'll spend half your morning at the tourist office calling hotels, only to find yourself stuck overnight in one of the hideous large constructions 4km (2½ miles) away in Santa Maria degli Angeli. If you plan to visit at Easter or the first weekend in May, book at least 6 months in advance. Behind only Rome and Bethlehem (tellingly, Assisi's sister city) as a Christian pilgrimage site, Assisi fills up for any religious holiday. On the bright side, it has more guest beds per square meter than any other town in Umbria. The official central booking office is **Consorzio Alberghi ed Operatori Turistici,** Via A. Cristofani 22a (✆ **075-816-566;** fax 075-812-315).

Besides the larger, more standard hotels, dozens of smaller board-rated one- and two-star outfits offer 6 to 10 rooms each. Additionally, families often have a few rooms to rent (*affittacamere;* ask at the tourist office), and many of the religious orders in town will let you play at being a nun or a monk for a few nights at a very low price (usually with many rules about curfew, noise, and bunkmates).

At **Fontemaggio,** hidden in the woods about 1.6km (1 mile) east of town at Via Eremo delle Carceri 8 (✆ **075-813-636;** www.fontemaggio.it), are a campground, a hostel, and a hotel complex with one of the best countryside restaurants in Umbria (La Stalla; p. 399). The campground has 950 sites and costs 6€ per person, plus 5.50€ per tent and 3€ per car. The hostel has 16 rooms, 6 of which are doubles, costing 20€ per person. There are 15 rooms in the hotel portion, with bathroom, phone, and views of the valley, costing 52€ per double with breakfast.

Hotel Alexander The Alexander evokes the feeling that you're visiting your Umbrian parents' house. The good-size accommodations in this medieval building across the street from where St. Francis was born are carpeted and scattered with rugs and Savonarola chairs for atmosphere. They have clean white walls, comfy beds, and fairly new bathrooms. Most of the rooms have multiple beds, which together with the homelike atmo-

Cheap Sleep!

Long a pilgrim destination, Assisi is accustomed to travelers on a tight budget and is consequently one of the few places in Central Italy where you can easily spend under 30€ per person on accommodations. Of the simpler hotels, the **Hotel Il Duomo,** Vicolo San Lorenzo 2 (✆ **075-812-742;** fax 075-812-803), above the cathedral, offers the basics without amenities. The large accommodations go for 49€ double; breakfast is 4.50€ per person. The family who owns it also has two other, ever-so-slightly ritzier hotels called the **San Rufino,** just around the corner on the main street at Via Porta Perlici 7 (✆ **075-812-803**), where doubles go for 55€ plus 5€ per person for breakfast, and **Hotel La Rocca,** Via Porta Perlici 27 (✆/fax **075-812-284;** www.hotelarocca.it), in the dizzying heights of town on the road to the castle. Prices there run around 55€ for a double, and 43€ for a single.

For a stay with a religious order, **St. Anthony's Guesthouse,** Via G. Alessi 10 (✆ **075-812-542;** fax 075-813-723; atoneassisi@tiscalinet.it), is run by the Franciscan Sisters of Atonement, an American order of nuns. They offer hotel-like rooms with bathrooms from 50€ double with breakfast. They're open March through October, have a minimum stay of 2 nights, and usually require a deposit in advance.

sphere makes the place great for families. The separately owned Pizzeria Otello underneath will even make pizza to go, so you can bring it back and really feel at home.

Piazza Chiesa Nuova 6 (just down from Piazza del Comune), 06081 Assisi (PG). ✆ **075-816-190** or 075-812-237 (its parent Hotel dei Priori). Fax 075-816-804. www.assisi-hotel.com. 8 units. 90€–180€ double. Discounts in low season. Rates include breakfast (taken in Hotel dei Priori, around the corner at Corso Mazzini 15). MC, V. Parking 8€–11€ in garage. **Amenities** (all via the Hotel dei Priori): Restaurant; concierge; room service (breakfast); Wi-Fi (on 1st floor only). *In room:* TV.

Hotel Fontebella ★ Kids The spacious rooms in this 17th-century Illuminati family *palazzo* are fitted with contemporary furnishings done in a Renaissance style in rich yellow, gold, and green fabrics. The rooms without wood floors have knobby carpets, and the proprietors jokingly refer to the smallish singles as their "Franciscan cells." The suites are bi-level, lofted affairs good for families, and there are a few attractive little rooms with wood-beam ceilings in a small annex across the back alley from the main building.

Via Fontebella 25 (btw. the basilica and Piazza del Comune), 06081 Assisi (PG). ✆ **075-812-883.** Fax 075-812-941. www.fontebella.com. 46 units. 149€ "classic" double; 195€ "superior" double; 230€ suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking in front. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Il Frantoio, recommended below); concierge; room service (bar); smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

Hotel Sole The Sole, divided between two buildings on a main road in town, has nondescript rooms—all a bit worn around the edges from the occasional student stampede brought by study-abroad programs—but the price is good and the location central. The beds can be a little lumpy, but the bathrooms are in good shape. Although the rooms in the annex are serviced by an elevator, they don't have the odd 15th-century *palazzo* elements sometimes found in the main building. The magnificently stone-vaulted restaurant (closed in winter) serves tasty Umbrian fare.

Corso Mazzini 35 (btw. Piazza del Comune and Santa Chiara), 06081 Assisi (PG). ✆ **075-812-373.** Fax 075-813-706. www.assisihotelsole.com. 35 units. 65€ double; 85€ triple. Pension plan available: Add about 20€ per person half pension, 30€ for full pension. Breakfast 6€. AE, DC, MC. V. Parking 11€ in nearby lot. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; concierge; room service (breakfast and bar). *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Hotel Subasio ★ If you came to town for Giotto's frescoes, you can do no better than this hotel, which opened next to the basilica in 1860. Accommodations in this former 16th-century *palazzo* vary widely in color scheme, decor, size, and appointments. The only real consistencies are the owners' pleasing tendency to fill each room with antiques and the fact that rooms overlooking the valley or the facade of San Francesco are larger and better furnished—insist on one. Bathrooms were recently overhauled. The Umbrian restaurant is partly installed in a 13th-century vaulted cellar. With surroundings fit for a king (or at least the king of Bulgaria, who honeymooned here) and the location just 100 paces from the basilica, the Subasio's a prime choice.

Via Frate Elia 2 (the bottom side of the lower Piazza di San Francesco), 06082 Assisi (PG). ✆ **075-812-206.** Fax 075-816-691. www.hotelsubasio.it. 62 units. 150€ double; 195€ triple; 180€ junior suite. Pension plan available. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 11€ in nearby lot. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; concierge; room service (bar). *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Hotel Umbra ★★ Antiques buffs will feel right at home in the collection of 13th-century houses from which the Umbra was converted, thanks to agreeable old furniture like 19th-century dressers, 18th-century desks, and 17th-century armoires. Many rooms have views over the rooftops and valley, some have balconies, and the hotel is tucked with little hidden panoramic terraces. Ask to see the basement kitchen and laundry rooms, where the town's Roman walls make up part of the foundations. The restaurant is well regarded for its Umbrian food and makes use not only of the standard black truffles but also of Gubbio's rare white variety when in season. In summer, the tables are moved out onto a terrace for lamplit dinners in a pretty vine-shaded garden.

Via dei Archi 6 (15 paces off the west end of Piazza del Comune), 06081 Assisi (PG). ✆ **075-812-240.** Fax 075-813-653. www.hotelumbra.it. 25 units. 100€ standard double; 120€ superior double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 11€ in garage. Closed mid-Jan to Easter. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; bike rental; concierge; room service (breakfast and bar). *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Several of Assisi's restaurants serve a local flatbread called ***torta al testa,*** usually split and stuffed with cheeses, sausages, and vegetables (spinach is popular). The breads make good snacks and appetizers, and are best at La Stalla.

Il Frantoio UMBRIAN The restaurant occupies a 17th-century olive-press building with modernized interiors, a lovely garden terrace, and a stony medieval room below the Hotel Fontebella. Staff members wisely suggest you begin with a *frittatina in salsa di tartufo* (a thin omelet spread with truffle pâté). The chef's specialty first course includes *tortelloni frantoio* (ricotta-and-spinach-filled pasta in a sauce of creamlike mascarpone cheese, sausage, and sage) and *stringozzi paesani* (homemade thick spaghetti with tomatoes, artichokes, and a pinch of hot pepper). Secondi run the gamut from Umbrian standards such as *grigliata di carne miste* (various grilled meats) to *chateaubriand* to *fesa di tacchino ai formaggi* (a huge turkey breast in cheese sauce). The wine list is a book, the wine steward the president of an Italian sommelier association.

Vicolo Illuminati (can enter at Via Fontebella 25). ✆ **075-812-977.** Reservations recommended. Primi 9€–13€; secondi 12€–20€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–2:30pm and 7–9:30pm. ***Note:*** Hours and even closing days are subject to change, depending on the number of tourists.

La Fortezza ★★ UMBRIAN This is one of Assisi's great hidden treasures. Since 1960, the Chiocchetti family has offered refined *ristorante* service and often-inspired cuisine at trattoria prices, and all just a few steps above the main piazza. The *cannelloni all'Assisiana* are scrumptious (fresh pasta sheets wrapped around a ragù made with yearling veal, all baked under parmigiana), as is the *gnocchi alla Fortezza* (homemade gnocchi tossed with a garden of chopped vegetables: tomatoes, mushrooms, zucchini, peas, onions, and more). For a secondo, try the *coniglio in salsa di mele* (rabbit in a sort of curry of white wine, saffron, and apples). The wine list is short but the selection good; they even have half-bottles of Umbria's top-rank Lungarotti vintages at wine-shop, not restaurant, prices. The entire family works hard in the kitchen and the stone-walled dining room, and if you take a liking to them, you can stay over in their seven simple but pleasant rooms upstairs for 52€ to 65€.

Vicolo della Fortezza/Piazza del Comune (up the stairs near the Via San Rufino end). ✆ **075-812-418.** www.lafortezzahotel.com. Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–9€; secondi 7€–11€. MC, V. Fri–Wed 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–9:30pm. Closed Feb and 1 week in July.

La Stalla ★★ TRADITIONAL UMBRIAN This is about as rustic as it gets, sort of like a family picnic. It's a series of former livestock stalls made of stone walls and low-beamed ceilings thoroughly blackened by and still filled with smoke. The smoke rises tantalizingly from the open wood-fire grill and will have your mouth watering long before you secure a seat at one of the wobbly long communal tables. It's noisy, it's chaotic, it's not for the fainthearted, but it just may be one of your most memorable and authentic Umbrian meals. It will not be the most elegant. Start with the *assaggini di torta al testo,* small samplers of Assisian flatbread split and stuffed with prosciutto and cheese or spinach and sausage. Next up: the *trittico,* a scooped-out wooden platter laden with a trio of the house specialty primi, usually *strangozzi, gnocchi* (both in tomato sauce), and *bigoli* (a ricotta-and-spinach log dusted with Parmesan). For secondi, you have a wide range of choices: *bistecca di vitello* (grilled veal), *spiedino di cacciagione* (grilled game), or *spiedino di maiale* (grilled pork). Their *salsicce* (sausages) are out of this world. The conversation, generous imbibing, and general good mood can carry on for hours after official closing time.

Via Eremo delle Carceri 8 (1.6km/1 mile east of town). ✆ **075-812-317.** Reservations strongly recommended (but not always accepted). Primi 4€–5€; secondi 5€–8€. No credit cards. Tues–Sun 12:15–2:30pm and 7:15–10pm. Head out Porta Cappuccini; the turnoff is about 1km/⅔ mile along on the right (follow the signs for the Fontemaggio campground/hostel complex).

Medio Evo ★ ITALIAN/UMBRIAN Down a steep S-curve from the center of town, Medio Evo offers well-spaced tables set with flowers beneath magnificent stone-vaulted ceilings that truly deserve the title of medieval. For antipasto, treat yourself to simple but exquisite aged prosciutto di Parma. There are concessions to local ingredients in dishes such as *conchiglie alla Norcina* (shell pasta with black truffles and sausage) but also creations that smack of northern Europe, such as *pennette alla moscavita* (with salmon, vodka, and tomatoes). For your secondo, the Valdichiana beefsteak reigns supreme, and you can order it *alla fiorentina* (grilled with a bit of olive oil and pepper), as an *entrecôte "Madagascar"* with green peppers, or as a flambéed filet *alla moda dello chef.* Pork, mutton, and veal are available for lighter appetites, or try the superb *fritto misto* with fried meats and vegetables, cheese, olives, and salami.

Via dell'Arco dei Priori 4B (a dogleg down from Piazza del Comune). ✆ **075-813-068.** www.ristorantemedioevoassisi.it Reservations strongly recommended. Primi 8€–18€; secondi 10€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues noon–2:30pm and 7:30–10pm. Closed July 1–20.

Trattoria Pallotta UMBRIAN Pallotta's pair of brightly lit stone-and-plaster rooms sees its share of tourists siphoned off from the nearby Piazza del Comune, but it hasn't wavered from serving good Umbrian food at fair prices. The *antipasto misto* is a meal in itself, with Assisi's *torta al testo, crostini,* sliced meats, and more. The *strangozzi alla Pallotta* are served with a pesto of olives, mushrooms, and some peperoncino for kick, and the *ravioloni al burro e salvia* come in a light butter-and-sage sauce. Move on to the *coniglio alla cacciatore* (rabbit in tomato sauce with a side of plain *torta al testo*) or the *pollo arrosto* (roast chicken). Although the *menù turistico* includes wine, the tasting menu offers better food choices.

Via S. Rufino 4 (just through the Palazzo del Comune's large main arch on Piazza del Comune). ✆ **075-812-649.** www.pallottaassisi.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 5€–9€; secondi 7€–15€; menù turistico with wine 16€; tasting menu without wine 24€, 36€ with wine. AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2:30pm and 7:15–9:30pm. Closed 1 week in late Feb.

3 GUBBIO: TOWN OF FESTIVALS

39km (24 miles) NE of Perugia; 170km (106 miles) SE of Florence; 200km (124 miles) N of Rome

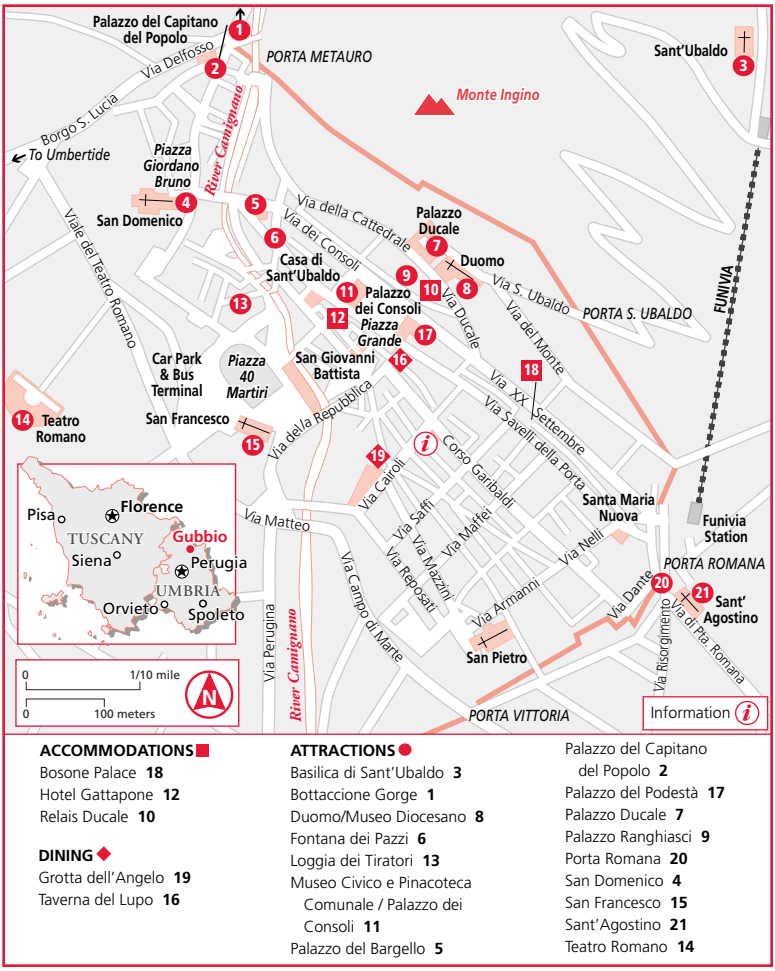
Gubbio looks every inch the no-nonsense town, a central Italian city of distilled medieval fundamentals. Sharp-edged fortresslike buildings of light stone line long roads that are stacked up the base of the monumental tree-covered pyramid of a mountain. Gubbio is proud of its patron saint, medieval palaces, and homespun school of painting. And its hill-town cocoon of Gothic silence occasionally bursts open with the spectacular color and noise of some of the region's most deeply ingrained traditional festivals.

With the romantic ruins of its Roman theater just below the panoramic terrace of its main piazza, Gubbio appears no more than a compact center unimposingly guarding a wide valley filled with farmland. But make your way up the slopes of its overgrown hill, past the temple of the city's patron saint, St. Ubaldo, to the scanty remains of its medieval mountaintop fortress, and you'll see what gives Gubbio its windswept border-town feeling. It's at the edge of a sea of mountains, wood-covered snowcapped Apennines that flow back for dozens of miles, a wild landscape on the cusp of nowhere that seems to have no business being associated with a quaint central Italian hill town.

To many, Gubbio looks as if it slipped off its mountain to settle at the foot, but the city has in fact slowly crept up the hillside. Prehistoric peoples may have lived on the lower slopes of Mts. Ingino and Foce next door—in fact, traces of both Neanderthals and early *Homo sapiens* have been found around here, proving that Gubbio has been prime hominid real estate for well over 30,000 years. But the Umbri tribes that established their city in the 3rd century B.C. probably lived on the valley floor, with their backs against the mountainside. They allied themselves with the Etruscans, then with the encroaching Romans, and, as the Roman municipium Iguvium, lived wholly on the valley floor.

It was a modestly prosperous city during Roman times, but the fact that the Roman Via Flaminia skipped it helped keep Gubbio out of the limelight and free from complete absorption into the empire. In effect, Iguvium managed to remain an autonomous city of the Umbri while many of its Etruscan neighbors were subjected and Latinized in more fundamental ways into Roman towns.

The Eugubium of the Dark Ages suffered its share of Gothic sacking, but by the 11th century it emerged as a bustling trade center. The smooth talking of its incorruptible and wise bishop Ubaldo saved the town from Barbarossa in 1155, and after dutifully sanctifying



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the man soon after his death, the medieval city went about building walls and attacking its neighbors in grand Umbrian style.

Though a worthy antagonist to warlike Perugia down the road, Gubbio never neglected its spiritual side. It welcomed St. Francis, and later his monastic cult, and became particularly beholden to the saintly Assisian after one visit. Francis, on hearing of the problem the Eugubines were having with a voracious wolf, went out into the woods and had a serious tête-à-tête with the offending lupine. Francis returned to town with the giant black wolf trotting at his heels and, in front of the townsfolk, made a pact with the wolf that it would no longer attack the local sheep and men if the town would feed it regularly; the deal was sealed with a paw-shake.

In the early 14th century, riding high, Gubbio built its monumental center and the best of its palaces. In 1387, however, began the long, boring, but basically benevolent reign of the Urbino counts of Montefeltro. During this time, Gubbio became widely known for the high-quality glazed ceramics and majolica that came out of its workshops, especially that of Maestro Giorgio Andreoli (ca. 1465–1552), an innovator and one of the world's greatest masters of the craft. After the Montefeltro line petered out in the early 16th century, the city found itself under the stifling rule of the Papal States. It reemerged at Italian unification in the 1860s.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** The closest **station** is at Fossato di Vico (✆ **075-919-230**), 19km (12 miles) away on the Rome-Ancona line. Ten trains run daily from **Rome** (2¼ hr.), and nine daily from **Spoleto** (40–60 min.). Nine daily buses (six on Sun) connect the train station with Gubbio (30 min.).

By Car The SS298 leads north from Perugia through rugged scenery. The most convenient **parking** lot (pay) is off Piazza 40 Martiri. There's also free parking off Via del Teatro Romano on the south edge of town and at the base station for the *funivia,* outside the east walls.

By Bus **ASP** (✆ **075-922-0918**) has 11 buses Monday through Saturday (four on Sun) from **Perugia**'s Piazza Partigiani (1 hr., 10 min.). ASP also runs a daily 8:10am bus from **Assisi**'s Piazza Matteotti to Gubbio (50 min.).

If you're coming from the north, you'll probably have to change in **Umbertide,** from which there are three daily ASP runs to Gubbio (45 min.). From **Florence,** take the daily 5pm **SULGA** bus (✆ **075-500-9641;** www.sulga.it) to Perugia, where in 40 to 70 minutes (no connection on Sun) there's an ASP connection to Gubbio. The total traveling time is 3 hours. Monday through Saturday, there's a 4pm SULGA bus from **Rome**'s Tiburtina station (3 hr., 20 min.).

Buses to Gubbio arrive at and leave from Piazza 40 Martiri. **Tickets** are available at the newsstand on the piazza or at Easy Gubbio.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** is at Via della Repubblica 15, 06024 Gubbio (✆ **075-922-0693** or 075-922-0790; fax 075-927-3409; www.comune.gubbio.pg.it). It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 1:45pm and 3:30 to 6:30pm, Saturday from 9am to 1pm and 3:30 to 6:30pm, and Sunday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 3:30 to 6:30pm; October through March, afternoon hours are 3 to 6pm.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS Gubbio is a festival sort of town. The biggest annual bash, the pagan **Corso dei Ceri** ★★★ on May 15, is one of Italy's top five traditional festivals. At 10:30am, a dense crowd packs into Piazza Grande to watch the solemn and inscrutable ceremonies atop the steps of the Palazzo dei Consoli. They involve the mayor, the bishop, three teams of burly young men in colorful silk shirts, and the keys to the city. Suddenly the teams go inside the palace and come charging out with three giant wooden battering ram–like objects called *ceri,* or "candles"—possibly after Ceres, the goddess of the harvest, in whose honor this race may once have been run.

With the 15-foot-long candles lined up against the panoramic edge of the square, the teams slip into one end of each a pair of perpendicular poles and attach small statues of St. George, St. Anthony, or the city's patron St. Ubaldo to the other end of each candle. Then each team captain climbs up the poles of his candle and is handed a giant painted ceramic vase full of water. At 11:30am, men hanging directly onto the bell tower's largest

bell use their body weight to start it swinging and ringing—the signal to raise the candles. The three captains give a shout, and as their teams leverage the *ceri* (candles) upright, the captains heave the water-filled jugs as far as they can into the crowd. The mass of people parts briefly to let the vases fall and shatter, then descends on the shards in a mad frenzy to acquire a piece—it signifies good crops and good luck for the next year. The candles, now upright, each topped by a saint, and shouldered by the teams, are run three times around the piazza, and then taken off on a long prescribed route through the city streets.

At 2pm, the teams leave the candles on Via Savelli della Posta and return to the Palazzo dei Consoli, where they sit down to an enormous seafood banquet in the medieval hall. At 4:30pm, there's a solemn religious procession of the relics of St. Ubaldo and the *ceri* as they're carried to Via Dante. At 6pm, the real race begins. The teams grab their candles and make another frenetic run through town. With candles swaying and people cheering, they race again around Piazza Grande and then hightail it up to the gate to the mountain road. After a brief pause, the teams pick up their candles and, perhaps the most stupefying part of the whole day, begin running like the devil straight up the mountainside. It's more than 300m (984 ft.) of vertical elevation along a switchbacked road, but they reach the finish line at the mountainside basilica of Sant'Ubaldo in under 6 minutes. The first one inside the front doors tries to shut them before the losers get there. But—and this is the best part—the whole race is fixed. St. Ubaldo always wins. The real contest is to see how many times the runners let their candle fall; those that touch ground the fewest times are the real winners of the day.

The last Sunday in May marks part one of the annual face-off between the archers of Gubbio and those of rival Sansepolcro in the **Palio della Balestra** ★. At 5:30pm, before the main crossbow competition begins, *sbandieratori* come out to practice their mesmerizing flag-tossing. The accuracy and skill of both Eugubine and Sansepolcran marksmen are legendary, and the city that doesn't win the palio prize banner has a chance in September at the rematch in Sansepolcro. At 7pm, there's a procession through the streets, which are lined with people in colorful medieval costumes.

The **Gubbio Festival** brings performers of international status to town for 3 weeks of mainly classical instrumental music in late July. Also during this period, the city sponsors **classical music concerts** in the grassy ruins of the **Roman theater.** During the **Torneo dei Quartieri** on August 14, the city's crossbow sharpshooters duke it out, and there's flag-tossing and a historic procession—a warm-up for the competition against Sansepolcro 3 weeks later. Gubbio shows off its revered albino tuber at the **White Truffle and Agricultural Fair** from October 29 to November 2.

The *Guinness Book of World Records* votes are in: Gubbio is officially home to the **World's Largest Christmas Tree,** formed by more than 800 lights zigzagging up Gubbio's mountainside to a star at the top. Every December 7, the town's forces of good taste fail to keep someone from throwing the switch on this monstrosity, and it's left on until January 10.

On the last Sunday of every month, there's an **antiques market** on Piazza 40 Martiri, where the regular **weekly market** is also held on Tuesday.

EXPLORING THE TOWN

San Francesco One of the earliest churches built in honor of St. Francis, this bulky structure with three Gothic apses and an octagonal bell tower was raised in the mid–13th century, but probably not on the designs of Perugian Fra' Bevignate, as was once thought. Inside, all three apses were painted with high-quality frescoes by the Eugubine school.

(There's a free light switch behind the speaker next to the confessional on the left aisle to illuminate the chapels.)

The chapel to the right of the main apse was frescoed in the 14th century on two levels with the *Life of St. Francis* in the upper half and a gaggle of saints in the lower. The main apse has some ceiling-scraping, 13th-century frescoes of *Christ Enthroned with Saints,* while the chapel to the left contains a deteriorating but well-painted cycle on the *Life of the Virgin* by Gubbio's early-15th-century master Ottaviano Nelli. Some fine 17th-century altarpieces line the right aisle, and a 16th-century *Crucifixion* by Benedetto Nelli hides in the sacristy. A cloister behind the apse (enter around the back at Piazza 40 Martiri no. 4) preserves a 14th-century *Crucifixion* fresco and pieces of a 3rd-century-A.D. Roman floor mosaic that still show some color.

Across **Piazza 40 Martiri,** named after the 40 citizens who were shot by Nazis in 1944 for aiding the partisan movement, is the squared-off, second-story brick arcade of the **Loggia dei Tiratori.** Built in 1603 as a space where local textile workers could dye wool and stretch it to dry, the loggia is the best surviving example of these structures, which were once widespread throughout the peninsula.

Piazza 40 Martiri. No phone. Free admission. Daily 7:30am–noon and 4–7pm.

Museo Civico e Pinacoteca Comunale (Palazzo dei Consoli and Museum) ★★

Gubbio's main square is the brick-paved terrace of **Piazza Grande,** a medievally minimalist space bounded along one long side by the orange neoclassical **Palazzo Ranghiasci** but open on the other to a panoramic sweep over the lower part of town and across the wide valley beyond. On the southeast end sits the **Palazzo del Podestà,** suffering from the curse of a few too many architectural rearrangements that've left it looking entirely unfinished. Facing it across the piazza is Gubbio's imposing **Palazzo dei Consoli,** whose square Guelph crenellations and off-center 91m (299-ft.) bell tower dominate Gubbio from afar. The tongue of a staircase sprouting from the raised central door to the piazza below adds a touch of delicate grace to the Gothic solidity. Eugubine master architect Gattapone designed the *palazzo* in 1332.

Inside the vast and poorly lit barrel vault of the main hall, used for public assemblies of the medieval commune, is the town's **archaeological museum,** with the largest collection of Roman materials in Umbria. There are dozens of broken statues, stretches of cornice, and other architectural fragments, inscriptions, sarcophagi, and amphorae, all leaning against the walls as if someone just set them down temporarily—it's been this way for decades.

At the base of the staircase are a few rooms with small found objects such as coins and metal implements and, in a back room, the seven **Eugubian Tables** ★. These bronze tablets preserve the most extensive example of the Umbrian language. (The Umbri apparently had no alphabet of their own, so they used first Etruscan and later Latin characters and adapted them to spell Umbrian words phonetically.) The tablets were inscribed from 200 to 70 B.C., and tell a bit about Gubbio's ancient territory and enemies, but mainly detail the finer points of religious divination—they're priestly textbooks to help find the will of the gods through animal sacrifice and watching the flight patterns of birds. These are the single most detailed set of religious instructions and explanations that survive from any antique culture and are of incalculable value for the insights they offer into the religious and social life of the ancient world. A local farmer turned up the tablets while he was plowing his fields in 1444, and the city convinced him to sell them for 2 years' worth of grazing rights.

Upstairs is a small **majolica collection,** including a plate painted by Maestro Giorgio (1527) depicting the *Fall of Phaeton.* (Gubbio, which had no pieces by its own master artisan, bought it at Sotheby's in 1992.) Through a narrow "secret corridor" with slivers of cityscape out the window slits, another stair leads up to the small **pinacoteca** gallery of paintings, mainly 13th- to 16th-century Eugubine works. None of the pictures is overly spectacular, but there is a two-sided gonfalon banner (1503) painted in Perugino's style by Sinibaldo Ibi; a damaged Rutilio Manetti *Flight into Egypt* (1634); a *Madonna and Child* by Sassoferrato; and a 1563 *Pentecost* and odd 1570 *Genealogical Tree of the Madonna,* both attributed to Benedetto Nucci. There's also access to an outdoor **loggia** with views across town. In the **basement** (currently reached by a separate entrance on the *palazzo*'s back side) is a small archaeological collection.

Piazza Grande. ✆ **075-927-4298.** Admission 5€ adults, 2.50€ ages 7–25, free for children under 7 and seniors over 60. Apr–Sept daily 10am–1pm and 3–6pm; Oct–Mar daily 10am–1pm and 2–5pm.

Duomo On your way up Via Montefeltro toward the cathedral, peek through the grate over the basement storeroom of the Palazzo dei Canonici, where sits a rather large **15th-century wine barrel,** boggling the mind with its 19,760-liter (5,200-gal.) capacityThe interior of the 13th-century **cathedral** is striking for its "wagon vaulting," a receding series of pointed arches defining the graceful bulk and space of the single central nave. Most of the art on the nave altars is by local talent, including multiple works by Virgilio Nucci, Benedetto Nucci, Sinibaldo Ibi, and Antonio Gherardi. In the fourth niche on the right is a *Pietà* by Dono Doni, who also painted the *Way to Calvary* in the seventh niche. In between the two, the fifth chapel on the right is a florid baroque contraption (1644–72). The fine stained glass in the presbytery is a 1913 opus, and don't miss the *Nativity* in the left aisle's sixth niche, a work by a follower of Pinturicchio (perhaps Eusebio di San Giorgio).

The restored Palazzo dei Canonici next door contains a small **Museo Diocesano,** with paintings by Sassoferrato and Il Pomarancio.

Via Montefeltro and Via della Cattedrale. ✆ **075-922-0904.** www.museogubbio.it. Admission 4.50€ adults, 2.60€ children. Winter daily 10am–6pm; summer daily 10am–7pm.

Palazzo Ducale While Renaissance-era Gubbio was under the fairly benevolent ducal rule of nearby Urbino, Duke Frederico di Montefeltro commissioned Francesco di Giorgio Martini to build him this palace in the 1470s. Although the sumptuous decorations have mostly been stripped away—the entire studio of *intarsia* wood paneling was moved to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art—a few furnishings, painted ceilings, and simple terracotta flooring survive. The ground-floor rooms are hung with **long-term exhibits.**

You enter through a Renaissance courtyard of red brick accented in gray *pietra serena.* Past the ticket booth, a spiral stair leads down to **excavations** of the structures that stood on this site as long ago as the 10th century, along with countless ceramic shards. The old outdoor support vaulting for the Palazzo Comunale that once stood on this site can be entered to the left of the palace off Via Montefeltro. A gate leads into the palace's **hanging gardens,** open in summer. There's bar service and views over medieval Gubbio to the valley floor.

Via Montefeltro and Via della Cattedrale. ✆ **075-927-5872.** Admission 2€ adults, 1€ ages 18–25, free for children under 18 and seniors over 60. Thurs–Tues 9am–7pm. Ticket office closes 30 min. before museum.

Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo This 13th-century *palazzo* was restored by its occupant, a kind of modern-day shaman and one of Gubbio's more eccentric characters. He's assembled a collection of medieval torture instruments but uses them merely as a

draw for visitors so he can show off his homemade charts. These, he claims, prove the sky quadrants drawn by the ancient Umbri soothsayers and codified in the Eugubian Tables (housed in the Palazzo dei Consoli) were focused on this spot. Stop by only if you're interested in rusty chastity belts, backbreaking racks, and other torture devices.

The neighborhood here around the city's **Porta Metauro** is picturesque, a snarl of narrow alleyways that occasionally spring onto a bridge to cross the Carmignano stream. Via T. Gabrielli leads across the stream and onto a path that runs uphill, skirting the city's north walls and a mountainside public park.

Via Capitano del Popolo at Via Gabrielli. ✆ **075-922-0224.** Admission 3€ adults, 1€ children. Daily 10am–8pm.

Teatro Romano ★ South of the city walls toward the west end of town, in an overgrown grassy park where Eugubines walk their dogs, the remains of a large Roman theater sprout weeds. Although mined during the Middle Ages for its limestone blocks, the theater's *cavea* has been restored, and several arches that once ringed the back remain. Normally closed to visitors, the theater is used in summer for classical music performances under the stars, with the illuminated buildings of medieval Gubbio as a backdrop. On the gravel of the parking lot, between the theater and the main road, old men gather to play *bocce* in the late afternoon.

Off Via del Teatro Romano.

Porta Romana The 13th-century Porta Romana is the only survivor of the six identical defensive towers that guarded Gubbio's entrances. Its private owners are serious history buffs who have restored the gate tower and set up an eclectic but worthy museum inside. The museum's most valuable installation is a collection of more than 250 majolica pieces spanning local production from 1500 to 1950. In the central display case are two Maestro Giorgio plates signed and dated 1530, another one attributed to him, and eight pieces by his son and workshop. (The city itself owns only one of Maestro Giorgio's works.)

The old guard tower above is equipped with lances, crossbows, axes, and a 19th-century suit of armor. The owners are inordinately proud of their chastity belt collection, and preserve an odd crossbowlike sling with which nobles once stoned birds. The gaping hole in the floor was defensive, used to pour boiling water down on attackers—hot oil, Hollywood siege scenes notwithstanding, was much too expensive to waste in this manner.

Porta Romana (Via Dante 24). ✆ **075-922-1199.** Admission 2.60€ adults, 1.50€ children 8–16. Daily 9am–1pm and 3:30–7:30pm (until 8pm in summer).

Sant'Agostino ★ The entire interior of this 13th-century church was once covered with frescoes. Remaining today are the exquisitely detailed and colored **cycle of the *Life of St. Augustine,*** covering the walls and vaulting in the apse, and a *Last Judgment* on the arch outside it. The work was carried out by Eugubine master Ottaviano Nelli and his assistants in the 1420s. (If you ring the *parocchio* bell at the door to the left of the apse, a friendly priest from Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania [or one of his colleagues], will come out to flip on the lights so you can see better.) Nelli's brush also whipped up the *St. Ubaldo and Two Saints* fresco on the fifth altar of the right aisle, while Felice Damiani took care of *St. Ambrogio Baptizing St. Augustine* at the third altar.

Just outside Porta Romana. Free admission. Daily 7:30am–noon and 4–7pm.

San Domenico Via dei Priori crosses the river into Piazza G. Bruno and the 14th-century church of San Domenico. The interior was remodeled in 1765, but some 15th-century frescoes remain in the first two chapels on the right and the first on the left. Piles

of books were left lying around in wood intarsia on the 16th-century lectern in the choir. The left aisle has a run of good baroque works, including Giovanni Baglione's early-17th-century *Mary Magdalene* in the sixth chapel, *St. Vincent Ferrer* in the fifth chapel by Ottaviano Nelli's follower Tomasso, and a *Madonna and Child* fresco (1546) attributed to Raffaellino del Colle in the fourth chapel.

Piazza G. Bruno. No phone. Free admission. Daily 7:30am–noon and 4–7pm.

EXPLORING IN THE MOUNTAINS

BOTTACCIONE GORGE Out the Porta Metauro, the road toward Scheggia winds above the Carmignano stream in the **Bottaccione Gorge** between Mts. Ingino on the right and Foce on the left, a steep and rocky landscape spotted with ilex trees. The 390m (1,280 ft.) of folded geologic strata here recorded a 50-million-year slice of time, including the evidence that led to the popular theory that a huge asteroid impact caused the extinction of the dinosaurs. (American scientists found radioactive minerals—uncommon on Earth but not in asteroids—in the geological layer here corresponding to 65 million B.C.)

On Mt. Foce, off a path reached by backtracking down Via del Fosso from Porta Metauro, are the remains of prehistoric **Cyclopean walls** and the 13th-century **Hermitage of Sant'Ambrogio,** with some frescoes inside and a 14th-century aqueduct nearby.

MONTE INGINO Outside Porta Romana, a left up Via San Gerolamo leads to the base of the *funivia,* a ski-lift contraption that dangles you in a little blue cage as you ride up the side of Mt. Ingino (see below for hours and cost; you can also walk up steep Via San Ubaldo from behind the Duomo, a vertical elevation of 300m/984 ft.). It lets you off just below the **Basilica di Sant'Ubaldo.** The current structure is a 16th-century incarnation over whose high altar the withered corpse of the local patron saint, Ubaldo, is preserved in a glass casket. Stored in the aisle are the three giant wooden *ceri* used during the annual Corso dei Ceri (see "Festivals & Markets," earlier in this chapter).

You can take a path leading from the sanctuary farther up the mountainside to the traces of the 12th-century ***rocca*** fortress, sitting on the pinnacle of the 900m (2,952-ft.) mountain. The virtually unspoiled wide Saonda Valley lies beyond Gubbio, but even more spectacular is the **panorama** ★★ that opens up east across the surprisingly wild Apennine Mountains and the snowy peaks of Monte Cucco National Park at the Marches' border in the distance. A few trails run off here if you want to do some backwoods exploring.

The *funivia* (✆ **075-927-3881**) lift runs daily, but with excruciatingly complicated hours: November through February from 10am to 1:15pm and 2:30 to 5pm; March from 10am to 1:15pm and 2:30 to 5:30pm (Sun 9:30am–1:15pm and 2:30–6pm); April through May from 10am to 1:15pm and 2:30 to 6:30pm (Sun 9:30am–1:15pm and 2:30–7pm); June from 8:30am to 1:15pm and 2:30 to 7pm (Sun 9am–7:30pm); July through August from 8:30am to 7:30pm (to 8pm Sun); September from 9:30am to 7pm (Sun 9am–7:30pm); and October from 10am to 1:15pm and 2:30 to 5:30pm. Round-trip tickets are 5€ adults, 4€ children 4 to 13; one-way tickets are 4€ adults, 3€ children.

WHERE TO STAY

The **Hotel Gattapone,** Via Ansidei 6 (✆ **075-927-2489;** fax 075-927-2417; www.mencarelligroup.com), is a solid, centrally located medium-range choice; doubles go for 83€ to 99€.

Bosone Palace ★★ This 14th century palace counted Dante among its esteemed guests. (He stayed here after getting booted out of Florence on trumped-up embezzlement charges.) The hotel still evokes the feeling of Dante's era. Splurge on one of the Renaissance suites, which have 17th-century frescoes. (Try for no. 212, which has the larger bathroom and frescoes in both rooms.) Even if you opt for the standard doubles, you aren't sacrificing. The breakfast room sports 18th-century grotesques and stuccoes. The hotel's official restaurant isn't the recommendable Bosone Garden underneath, but the Taverna del Lupo (see "Where to Dine," below), a few blocks downhill.

Via XX Settembre 22 (near Piazza Grande), 06024 Gubbio (PG). ✆ **075-922-0688.** Fax 075-922-0552. www.mencarelligroup.com. 30 units. 103€ double; 145€ 4-person junior suite; 181€ 4-person Renaissance suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking nearby. **Amenities:** Concierge; room service. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Relais Ducale ★★ You simply can't get more central than Gubbio's (and the Mencarelli family's) newest hotel, the former medieval and Renaissance guest quarters of Duke Montefeltro's palace. The mansard rooms, with their sloping ceilings, are a bit cheaper, but I'd spring for a room on the upper floors of the Foresteria with a panorama over the jumble of rooftops and Piazza Grande to the stitched-together fields of the green valley beyond. But even Foresteria rooms on the first and second floors are memorable—a pair inhabits long barrel-vaulted rooms of rough ancient stone. The Caffè Ducale attached to the hotel opens directly onto the center of Piazza Grande, and on summer mornings guests can breakfast on the square. You can even take summer dinners by candlelight on a small hanging garden—or opt for a half-pension deal at the Taverna del Lupo (see below).

Via Galeotti 19/Viale Ducale 2 (can also enter from the cafe in the center of Piazza Grande), Gubbio. ✆ **075-922-0157.** Fax 075-922-0159. www.mencarelligroup.com. 32 units. 168€ double; 270€ junior suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking free in public lots nearby. **Amenities:** Restaurants (family owns 3 nearby, including Taverna del Lupo, recommended below, for which pension plans are available); babysitting; bike rental; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, VCR on request, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Grotta dell'Angelo ITALIAN/UMBRIAN This cavernous space of tunnels and wine caves has been a thriving osteria for about 700 years. And if you descend into the musty, 13th-century grottos beneath the dining rooms you get the impression that some of the bottles are at least that old. The Cecchini family has run the restaurant for the last half-century and rarely deviates from the tried and true Umbrian favorites. Local meats are grilled on a wood fire, such as *anatra e porchetta,* a goose and pork combination served with fennel, and homemade gnocchi are the house specialty. In the winter time, grab a seat in the long, barrel-vaulted dining room and ask for a tour of the cellar; in summer, reserve a table in the vine-shaded terrace. The adjacent hotel offers bright, rustic doubles for 60€.

Via Gioia 47. ✆ **075-927-3438.** www.grottadellangelo.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 7€–10€; secondi 8€–15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–3pm and 7–11pm. Closed Jan 7 to Feb 7.

Taverna del Lupo ★ UMBRIAN Each of the five tunnels of vaulted stonework that make up this 30-year-old Eugubine culinary landmark feels like a little medieval trattoria. This is where Rodolfo Mencarelli launched in 1968 what has become a small Umbrian hospitality empire—it includes the hotels Bosone, Relais Ducale, and Gattapone (see "Where to Stay," above). Begin with the *delizie tipiche Umbre,* "typical Umbrian delicacies" that may include a *rosa di arista* (a cold salad of roast pork topped with thinly sliced

pears and pecorino cheese). The *frittatina gentile con lamelle di tartufo* (cheese omelet under a shower of white truffle flakes) is excellent, as is the *sfogliatina del Lupo con tartufo* (a light lasagne made with cheese, bits of ham and mushrooms, tiny cubes of tomato, and white truffle shavings). To stay with the precious white mushroom, you can order as a secondo the *scallopina affogato di tartufo* (a tender veal scallop "drowning" in truffles) or the simple and juicy *agnellino* (charcoal-grilled Umbrian lamb). The ever-changing desserts are inventive and delectable.

Via Ansidei 21 (on the corner of Via Repubblica, a few blocks uphill from Piazza 40 Martiri). ✆ **075-927-4368.** www.mencarelligroup.com. Reservations strongly recommended. Primi and secondi 7€–18€; tasting menus without wine 18€–46€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:15–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

13

Spoleto & Southern Umbria

Umbria's southerly reaches border on Lazio, the province of Rome. The flat plains of the Tiber and other rivers are interrupted only by the green swath of long-sacred mountains (national parkland today) to the east and outcroppings of volcanic tufa to the west, atop which are perched towns that were already ancient when Rome was founded. Within an hour's drive of Rome's outskirts, **southern Umbria** boasts a heritage deeper, more complex, and more jumbled than its Latin neighbor, having served for millennia as a buffer zone between Rome and its expansion up to central Europe—and the barbarians' later push south to conquer Rome. The popular culture and architectural legacy of this region draw threads from its many epochs, from the Stone Age through early Umbri settlers, powerful Etruscan colonists, haughty Roman conquerors, iron-fisted Lombard dukes, and centuries of politically active scheming popes who used Spoleto and Orvieto as homes away from the Vatican.

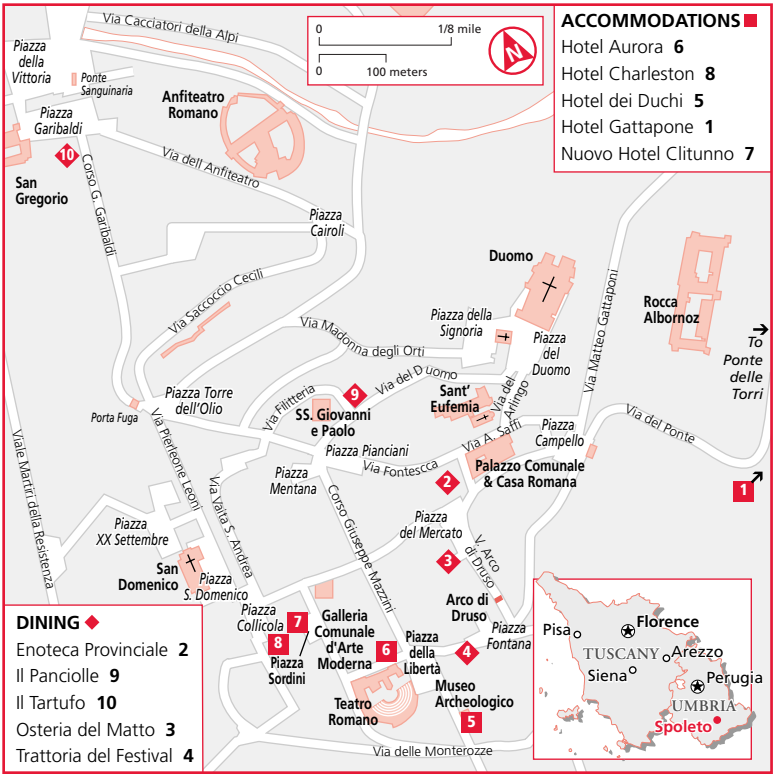
Orvieto tempts with brilliant Signorelli frescoes and cool white wine, while **Todi** offers the stoniest medieval town within Rome's reach. **Spoleto** plays down its Roman theater, medieval remains, and Renaissance art to promote instead its urbane attitude—exemplified by the annual **Spoleto Festival,** one of Europe's most important and anticipated carnivals of contemporary music, art, dance, and theater.

1 SPOLETO & THE SPOLETO FESTIVAL

63km (39 miles) SE of Perugia; 212km (132 miles) SE of Florence; 126km (78 miles) N of Rome

Spoleto is a split-level town, a sleepy repository of Roman ruins and medieval buildings terraced from the valley floor up a high hill backed by the deep-green forested slopes of a sacred mountain. It springs dramatically to life toward the end of June when the festival hits town. Dreamed up in 1958 by the Italian-American composer Gian Carlo Menotti, the Spoleto Festival (formerly known as the Festival dei Due Mondi/Festival of Two Worlds) brings heavy-duty culture to Spoleto in the form of music, dance, and theater showcased by premier Italian and international performers. The celebration of modern works, both conservative and experimental, draws thousands of visitors annually.

Although it often seems to revolve around it, Spoleto doesn't begin and end with the festival. A forgotten small city in the 1950s when Menotti chose it as the festival site, Spoleto started out as a Bronze Age Umbri settlement. And as a Roman town in the 3rd century B.C., it repelled the fierce invader Hannibal. Strategically situated on the ancient Via Flaminia from Rome to the late imperial capital of Ravenna, Spoleto became the stronghold of many powers during the Dark Ages. The Lombards made it the capital of their empire in the 8th century A.D., and the duke they installed here governed all of Umbria and much of the rest of central Italy. At the turn of the 12th century, Spoleto fell into papal hands, and its twilight began.



In the 12th century, Spoleto was the birthplace of Alberto Sotio, the earliest known Umbrian painter, and Lo Spagna, a pupil of Perugino. But the city's main nonmusical treasures are Roman and medieval. Though nothing other than the Duomo, containing Filippo Lippi's last fresco cycle, and the graceful Ponte delle Torri really stands out, the town as a whole makes for a good day's diversion.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

By Train Spoleto is a main station on the Rome-Ancona line, and all 16 daily trains from **Rome** stop here (about 1½ hr.). From **Perugia,** take one of the 20 daily trains to Foligno (25 min.) to transfer to this line for the final 20-minute leg. The C bus heads from the **station** (✆ **0743-48-516;** the huge sculpture out front is a 1962 work by American artist Alexander Calder) up to Piazza Libertà in the upper town. (Bus D stops at Piazza Garibaldi in the lower town.) Ask the driver if the bus is going toward the *centro storico.*

By Car Spoleto is literally on the SS3 (the road tunnels under the city), the old Roman Via Flaminia running north from Rome and connecting in Foligno with the SS75 from Perugia. Parking in the Old Town is free *only* along Via Don Bonilli next to the soccer

stadium and off Viale dei Cappuccini. (Turn left off the SS3 onto Viale G. Matteotti, then left again.) There's also a parking lot off Piazza della Vittoria on the north end of lower Spoleto. Parking in the metered *"zona blu"* spaces in the center generally costs .60€ an hour.

By Bus Spoleto's bus company, **SIT** (✆ **0743-212-211;** www.sitbus.com), runs buses into Piazza della Vittoria (connected to Piazza Garibaldi) from **Perugia** (two afternoon runs, weekdays only; 1 hr.) and **Rome** (an early-morning and midafternoon run to Terni, where you can switch to many Spoleto-bound coaches; 2½ hr. total). If you can reach Foligno by other means, you can take one of the many buses from there.

VISITOR INFORMATION The large **information center** at Piazza della Libertà 7, 06049 Spoleto (✆ **0743-220-773** for hotels and such, 0743-238-920 for sightseeing and events; fax 0743-46-241; www.visitspoleto.it) hands out scads of info and an excellent, if oversized, map. It's open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 4 to 7pm, Saturday and Sunday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 4 to 7pm.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS Spoleto's be-all and end-all annual event bridges the end of June and early July. The **Spoleto Festival** ★★ (www.spoletofestival.it) is 3 weeks of world-class drama, music, and dance held in evocative spaces like an open-air restored Roman theater and the pretty piazza fronting the Duomo. For details, see the "Calendar of Events," in chapter 3. The festival's cultural beacon keeps the arts alive here for part of the rest of the year. A secondary **"Spoleto Estate"** season of music, art, and theater runs from just after the festival ends through September. (Contact the tourist office for info.) The "A. Belli" **opera and experimental musical theater** season runs from late August to October (✆ **0743-221-645;** fax 0743-222-930; www.tls-belli.it). May and June are full of organ concerts in local churches, and the **theater season** runs November through March. (Call the Communal Cultural Office at ✆ **0743-218-202** for details.) The **weekly market** is held Fridays on Piazza del Mercato and Piazza Garibaldi.

EXPLORING SPOLETO

The Duomo and the Ponte delle Torri are Spoleto's only real attention-grabbers, so if you're pressed for time, skip the lower town (most of which was rebuilt after extensive bombing during World War II) and head straight up to Piazza della Libertà to see the highlights of upper Spoleto.

THE LOWER TOWN On the east side of the SS3, a 15-minute hike northeast of Piazza Garibaldi and separated from the real world by a cemetery, **San Salvatore** ★ gathers dust (✆ **0743-49-606**). It's one of Italy's oldest churches, built in the late 4th or early 5th century A.D. The simple facade shows Oriental influences and the remains of what must once have been spectacularly carved doorways. Much of the musty interior incorporates scavenged materials taken from Roman temples, including Corinthian columns and a presbytery fitted together in a complicated late classical architectural fantasy. The patches of frescoes date from the 13th to 18th centuries. It's open daily from 7am to 5pm (until 7pm May–Aug), and admission is free.

The thoroughly unattractive bus depot and gathering spot called Piazza Garibaldi flows seamlessly into **Piazza della Vittoria,** under which you can glimpse portions of two massive travertine arches that belonged to the old Roman **Ponte Sanguinaria.** (The stairs down are cordoned off by a low fence with a gate that is open erratic hours.) The 1st-century-B.C. bridge, which once helped Via Flaminia cross the tiny Tessino torrent, was named for the human blood that stained the river red during particularly enthusiastic evenings at the amphitheater upstream (see below).

At the end of the piazza is the 11th-century Romanesque **San Gregorio** (✆ **0743-44-140**), which replaced an earlier oratory here in a cemetery of Christian martyrs. (You'll see bits from the 700s incorporated into the structure.) The church's namesake saint was killed in a spectacle at the nearby amphitheater in A.D. 304, as were a supposed 10,000 lesser-known martyrs whose bones symbolically reside beneath the altar. The bell tower is a cobbled-together affair with a base dating from at least the paleo-Christian period and upper reaches refined in the 1500s. Passing under the portico (a 16th-c. addition), you'll see how a 1950s restoration carefully returned the interior to its medieval state, removing most baroque additions to reveal the Romanesque architecture and 14th-century frescoes by local artists. The presbytery, full of architectural *spoglio* (salvage) from differing epochs—a 6th-century Byzantine capital here, some medieval cosmatesque pavement there—is raised above an antique crypt of slender mismatched columns. It opens daily from 8am to noon and 4 to 6pm, and admission is free.

The quickest route to the upper town is up the arrow-straight, shop-lined *passeggiata* drag, **Corso Garibaldi,** which becomes the steeply curving medieval **Via di Porta Fuga** before ducking under the 13th-century **Porta Fuga** into Piazza Torre dell'Olio.

A diversion off Piazza Garibaldi up Via dell'Anfiteatro gives you a few glimpses of Spoleto's more ancient origins. The long, featureless wall of a former military barracks on the left is broken by a gatehouse. As long as you do it quietly and quickly, you may nip in here and head to the right to see the crumbling arcaded ambulatory in the outer wall of the old **Anfiteatro Romano (Roman Amphitheater).** In its heyday, this 1st-century-A.D. arena's ingenious gutter system siphoned so much blood into the Tessino that the river ran red. Totila the Goth turned it into a fortress in 545, and until Cardinal Albornoz ordered Gattapone to sack it for stones to build the *rocca* in 1355, the arcade housed artisan workshops and stores. On Via Santa Cecilia are the best remnants of the **ancient walls,** where 4th-century-B.C. master masonry from the Etruscan circuit forms the base for the Roman fortifications and for 15th-century defenses. This road eventually takes you into **Piazza Torre dell'Olio,** with its slender 13th-century defensive tower, and the upper town.

THE UPPER TOWN Straight up Via Leone Pierleone from Piazza Torre dell'Olio is the pink- and white-banded 13th-century **San Domenico.** The first altar on the right preserves an early-15th-century fresco of the *Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas,* with tiny monks, prelates, and scholars discussing the theologian's writings. There are more 15th-century frescoes in the presbytery and transept chapels, plus a painted crucifix from the 1300s above the main altar. The Cappella Benedetti di Montevecchio in the left transept conserves not just any nail from the True Cross but one that pierced the Lord's hands. On the left wall is a moving 14th-century fresco of the *Pietà.*

The road uphill doubles back on itself to continue to the tiny **SS. Giovanni e Paolo,** with a bit of 13th-century fresco on the outside. The church was consecrated in 1174, and its interior conserves on the left wall, near a fresco of the *Dance of Salome,* a damaged fresco of the *Martyrdom of Thomas Becket of Canterbury.* The latter was painted by Antonio Sotio just a few years after the saint's death in 1170. Other paintings in the church date from the 12th to 15th centuries. Unfortunately, the charming little church no longer has set hours; you have to get the keys from the Ufficio Culturale del Comune in Via della Cerquiglia (call them at ✆ **0743-232-511**).

Spoleto's other main drag, **Corso Giuseppe Mazzini,** leads up to the first of the three main squares, **Piazza della Libertà.** Along the way, contemporary art fans might want to sidestep to the right down Vicolo III and pop into the **Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna,** Palazzo

Spada (✆ **0743-45-940** or 0743-46-434). Alexander Calder's models for his 1962 sculpture *Teodelapio* (outside the train station) are here, as is a tiny 1960 Pomodoro sculpture. Admission is 3€; it's open Tuesday through Sunday (daily in summer) from 10:30am to 1pm and 3 to 6:30pm.

At the edge of Piazza della Libertà, Via Apollinare leads down to the entrance to the 1st-century-A.D. **Teatro Romano** ★ (✆ **0743-223-277**). The theater was partly destroyed and buried over the ages and all but forgotten before 1891, when local archaeologist Giuseppe Sordini began excavating. Extensively restored in the 1950s, it now serves as the most evocative stage for performances during the Spoleto Festival. It retains some of the original spectators' benches as well as a remarkably intact vaulted passageway under the *cavea* behind the seats.

The attached **Museo Archeologico** ★ preserves relics from a 7th-century-B.C. warrior's tomb and materials recovered from the theater area, including the torso of a young boy and 1st-century-A.D. portrait busts of Julius and Augustus Caesar. The final main room contains the *Lex Spoletina.* These two tablets, inscribed after 241 B.C., were set up as markers to protect the *lucus* ("sacred groves") of the wooded Monteluco behind the city from woodcutters. In no-nonsense terms, they warn, "These sacred woods, no one may violate. Do not remove or strip away that which belongs to the forest. . . . Whosoever transgresses will offer to Jupiter an ox as placation. If one does it knowingly and with evil intent, to Jupiter he must offer a placating ox plus pay a 300 assi fine." Although modern-day ecologists may not be able to get the ox clause written into the local codes, the tablets do provide one heck of a 2,000-year-old precedent for environmental laws. The theater and museum are open daily from 8:30am to 7:30pm. Admission is 4€ for adults and 2€ for children under 18 and seniors over 65.

Via Arco di Druso passes under the eponymous A.D. 23 **Roman archway.** (The ground level has risen considerably since its construction.) **Piazza del Mercato,** the second main piazza in town and probable site of the old Roman forum, is a bustling spot lined with grocers and fruit vendors' shops. The **Palazzo Comunale** hulks alongside the narrow bi-level Piazza del Municipio. Inside is the **Pinacoteca Comunale** (✆ **0743-45-040** or 0743-218-270). A guide usually follows you about the sumptuously decorated apartments, inhabited until the 19th century and hung with a collection of paintings spanning the 13th to 18th centuries. There are long-term plans to move the city's painting collections to the restored *rocca* (see below), and during work on the building, the entrance to the gallery is sometimes on Via A. Saffi. The museum is open Wednesday through Monday from 4 to 7pm. Admission is 3€ adults, 2€ those over 60, 1.50€ ages 7 to 14, and free for children under 7.

Under the Palazzo (a right onto Via di Visiale) is the **Casa Romana** (✆ **0743-234-350**), a 1st-century-A.D. patrician house that supposedly belonged to Vespasia Polla, the mother of the Emperor Vespasian. The intricate monochromatic patterns in the mosaic floors are well preserved, and you can also see the marble well cap and the bases of a few carved columns supporting the display cases of smaller excavated materials. Its hours are Wednesday through Monday from 10am to 6pm. Admission is 2.50€ adults, 2€ those over 60, 1€ ages 7 to 14, and free for children under 7.

Take another right onto Via A. Saffi to enter (at no. 13 on the left) the courtyard of the **Palazzo Arcivescovado,** built atop the 8th-century palace of the Lombard dukes. The courtyard incorporates the facade of the 12th-century **Sant'Eufemia** ★ (for admission and hours, see the Museo Diocesano, just below). The calm and simple Romanesque stone interior has a second-story *matroneum* (women's gallery), 15th-century frescoes on some of the columns, and a 1200s cosmatesque altar, inherited from the Duomo. The

double stairs in the courtyard lead up to the **Museo Diocesano** (✆ **0743-231-022**). Room 1 has a *Madonna and Child with Angels* (1315) and a 15th-century triptych lifted from Sant'Eufemia and attributed to Bartolomeo da Miranda. In room 2 is the Sienese Domenico Beccafumi's 16th-century baroque *Adoration of the Child,* and among the sculptures in room 3 is a 14th-century *Madonna del Cholera.* Room 5 has one of Filippino Lippi's less inspired paintings, a 1485 *Madonna and Child with Sts. Montano and Bartolomeo,* and Neri di Bicci's damaged *Madonna della Neve with Sts. Sebastian and Nicholas.* There's also an exhibit on 18th-century weaving. The church and the museum are open daily from 10am to 12:30pm and 3 to 6pm (2:30–6pm in winter); admission is 3€.

A bit farther along Via Saffi, the low graded steps of Via dell'Arringo flow down to the left into **Piazza del Duomo,** the third and most beautiful main square, with the cathedral backed by the *rocca*-crowned green hill behind it. It makes a fitting stage for the Spoleto Festival finale and, on a more daily basis, a fine soccer field for local children. A 3rd-century-A.D. Roman sarcophagus serves as a public fountain at the base of the stairs, and the small octagonal-roofed **Santa Maria della Manna d'Oro** is to the left. (Sometimes the Duomo sacristan will unlock it on request.) But the main attraction is the unique facade of the 12th-century **Duomo** ★★ (✆ **0743-44-307**), with a 1207 mosaic by Solsterno surrounded by eight rose windows. The bell tower was pieced together using stone looted from Roman temples, and the porch is a 1492 addition.

The cathedral was built to replace a church razed by Frederick Barbarossa in 1155, when the emperor destroyed Spoleto for refusing to pay him tribute. The Duomo's interior retains its original pavement, but the rest was baroqued in the 17th century for Pope Urban VII, who's commemorated with a Gian Lorenzo Bernini bust high above the central door inside. The first chapel on the right has a not-quite-finished **fresco** (1497) by a 17-year-old Pinturicchio lit by a light box, which also illuminates the early-16th-century frescoes adorning the chapel next door. The right transept is home to a *Madonna and Child with Saints* (1599) by baroque master Annibale Carracci as well as the empty tomb of Filippo Lippi, designed by his son, Filippino, at the request of Lorenzo de' Medici. According to Giorgio Vasari, Lorenzo couldn't convince the Spoleteans, who "lacked any great marks of distinction and especially the adornment of eminent men," to give the body back to Florence when the irascible painter died just before completing his fresco cycle here. Though technically a monk, Filippo was quite the womanizer, and when he died, rumors ran wild that he'd been poisoned by the enraged family of a local girl whose honor he had compromised. Filippo's bones mysteriously disappeared a few centuries later, and some say they were removed and scattered by her still-indignant descendants.

Another small coin in a light box will buy you enough time to admire the ***Life of the Virgin*** ★ fresco cycle covering the apse. Begun by Filippo Lippi in 1467, the frescoes were almost finished by 1469 when the master suddenly died, at the height of his powers. The cycle was finished by his assistants, Fra' Diamante and Pier Matteo d'Amelia. The first scene on the left, the *Annunciation,* is believed to be almost entirely from the master's hand, as is the magnificently colored *Incoronation of the Virgin* in the curving space above, with God taking the place of Jesus and a rainbow of saints and Old Testament figures surrounding Mary's richly patterned gown. The central panel, the *Dormition of the Virgin,* is also mainly from Lippi's brush and contains on the right several portraits by way of signature. Filippo is the man in the black hat, turned toward us and wearing for the last time the white monk's habit that seemed so inappropriate throughout his sensualistic philandering life. Lippi placed portraits of his assistants behind him and that of his

11-year-old son Filippino Lippi, who was already becoming a painting prodigy, in front as a candle-holding angel. The final *Nativity* scene was completed by Filippo's assistants.

As you leave the Duomo, you'll pass the entrance to the **Cappella delle Reliquie (Reliquary Chapel)** on the left aisle, restored in 1993. They include 16th-century intarsia wood cupboards, a 14th-century painted wooden *Madonna and Child,* and a letter written and signed by St. Francis. (Assisi has the only other bona fide signature.) The last altar before the exit has a colorful *Crucifix,* painted and signed in 1187 by Alberto Sotio. The cathedral opens its doors daily from 8am to 12:30pm and 3 to 5:30pm (until 7pm Mar–Oct).

Up Via A. Saffi from the Duomo is the shady car park **Piazza Campello,** with its Oz-like wall fountain, the 1642 **Fontana del Mascherone,** a bit of baroque silliness marking the end of the old Roman aqueduct (see the Ponte delle Torri, below). Also here is the entrance to the **Rocca Albornoziana** ★ (✆ **0743-43-707** or 0743-223-055), a well-preserved fortress built from 1359 to 1362 by Gubbio's master architect, Gattapone, for the pope's watchdog, Cardinal Albornoz, who governed this leg of the Papal States. In 1499, it served as home to the beautiful Lucrezia Borgia, sent here by her father, Pope Alexander VI, to get her away from her second husband, Alfonso of Aragon. Various popes later holed up here when visiting Spoleto. The *rocca* rests atop the site of the oldest prehistoric settlement in Spoleto and was used as a prison until 1982—celebrity inmates included members of the Red Brigades terrorist organization and Mehmet Ali Agca, who tried to assassinate Pope John Paul II in 1981. It's now open to the public as a museum (and space for exhibitions and performances), and eventually will include the city's painting collections and an exhibit on the Lombard and medieval Duchy of Spoleto. Admission is 4.65€ adults, 3.60€ for children 7 to 14 and seniors over 60. It's open (though these hours may change) from March 15 to June 10 and September 16 to October Monday through Friday from 10am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 7pm; from June 11 to September 15 daily from 10am to 8pm; and from November to March 14 Monday through Friday from 2:30 to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 5pm.

Walk along the right flank of the fortress, Via del Ponte, and around the bend will swing into view the stately **Ponte delle Torri** ★★. This bridge's nine tall pylons separating graceful, narrow arches span the sheer walls of the valley behind Spoleto, a gorge swimming in the dense green of an ilex forest. The 80m-high (262-ft.) and 228m-long (748-ft.) bridge was most likely raised by Eugubine architect Gattapone in the 13th century, though the two most central pylons contain traces of older masonry, supporting the long-held theory that the bridge was built on a Roman aqueduct. The span received the hard-won praise of Goethe in 1786 (apparently because he thought the whole shebang was Roman) and is named after the 13th-century towers that are crumbling at its opposite end.

You can circle all the way around the *rocca* back into town from here, enjoying fine views of the valley and bridge, but a far more rewarding afternoon can be spent hiking the slopes of **Monteluco** ★ at the bridge's other end. As the *Lex Spoletina* cippus stones in the Archaeology Museum record, the Romans held these woods sacred, as did the medieval Christians—St. Francis and St. Bernardino were both fond of meditating in the holy greenery. Michelangelo himself came here to unwind from the pressures of Rome's papal court, writing to Vasari in 1556, "I found great pleasure in visiting those hermits in the mountains of Spoleto . . . indeed peace is not to be found elsewhere than in the woods." The left path at the bridge's end puts you on the road toward the 795m (2,608-ft.) summit, passing the

12th-century **San Giuliano** (someone at the restaurant next door will let you in to see the remains of the 6th-c. paleo-Christian church), the small convent St. Francis founded, and the tiny old resort village of **Monteluco.**

The right trail at the tower will take you along a tree-shaded path that eventually branches off toward the ancient **San Pietro** ★. Its latest reconstruction dates from the 13th century, but the facade incorporates reliefs full of medieval symbolism from its 12th-century Lombard predecessor. The interior, much less interesting since it was subjected to a baroque overhaul in 1699, is occasionally open in the mornings, or you can try to hunt up the custodian, Sig. Pincanelli Evandro (✆ **0743-44-882**).

WHERE TO STAY

Accommodations are tight during the Spoleto Festival (reserve by Mar), so here are a few places to try in addition to the choices below if you have trouble finding a room. The **Hotel dei Duchi,** Viale G. Matteotti 4 (✆ **0743-44-541;** fax 0743-44-543; www.hoteldeiduchi.com), has 49 bland rooms in a bland 1959 brick building just south of Piazza Libertà. All the amenities are offered, but at 100€ to 180€ per double, are nothing special. Rates go even higher during the Spoleto Festival.

Cheaper and simpler, but for my money more pleasant, are the seven spacious doubles above the restaurant (under separate ownership) **Il Panciolle,** Via del Duomo 3–7 (✆/fax **0743-45-677**). They have tile floors, soft beds, relatively new bathrooms, TVs, phones, and minibars, and cost 55€.

Hotel Aurora ★ The Aurora is on a quiet courtyard just off Corso Mazzini, where it exits Piazza Libertà, with amenities and a level of comfort surprisingly high for its two-star rating and low prices. The modern rooms have been refitted with faux 19th-century cherry-veneer furniture, new beds, and rich, quasi-Renaissance-style fabrics on the cloth headboards, coverlets, and window curtains. A few rooms have balconies. The hotel is allied with the **Apollinare,** a restaurant below that's famed for its fine Umbrian cuisine (add 16€ per person for half-board option and 26€ for full-board plan).

Via Apollinare 3 (near Piazza Libertà), 06049 Spoleto (PG). ✆ **0743-220-315.** Fax 0743-221-885. www.hotelauroraspoleto.it. 23 units. 65€–100€ double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking on streets nearby. **Amenities:** Restaurant Apollinare; concierge; outdoor pool; room service (breakfast). *In room:* TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Hotel Charleston ★★ Finds Many of the rooms in this friendly hotel—nestled in a medieval district next to the new modern art museum—are quite large and have a 1970s artist's loft feel, with good use of available space and mismatched but tasteful furnishings (though the new owners have replaced most with antique-style pieces). Rough-hewn chestnut-beam ceilings mirror the wood-plank floors (some are carpeted), and the walls are hung with modern art prints and original works. The firm beds are spread with Black Watch plaid coverlets. If you're feeling particularly hedonistic, you can cough up 10€ for a trip to the basement sauna, or just cozy up on a cushy sofa before the wintertime fire crackling between the TV and sitting lounges. The room TVs come with VCRs, and the front desk always has a movie or two in English. They also organize all sorts of specialized tours (cooking classes, horseback rides, truffle hunts, and so on).

Piazza Collicola 10 (near San Domenico), 06049 Spoleto (PG). ✆ **0743-220-052.** Fax 0743-221-244. www.hotelcharleston.it. 21 units. 52€–135€ double; 99€–150€ triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 8€–10€ in garage. **Amenities:** 2 bars; winery; bike rental; concierge; massage; room service (breakfast and bar); sauna. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar, Wi-Fi.

Hotel Gattapone ★★★ Spoleto's most stratospheric hotel is a clutch of 17th-century buildings clinging to the cliff behind the *rocca*—isolated and surrounded by nature but still only a 3-minute stroll from the Duomo. It was formerly an artist's home, and its interiors were remodeled to maximize views of the valley and the remarkable 14th-century arched bridge nearby. Most of the wood-floored accommodations have plenty of elbow room, and while the styling dates from the hotel's birth in the 1960s, it has aged well. The superior rooms have large picture windows, big bathrooms with tubs, and often a dais separating the beds from the sofa-and-desk living area. The standard rooms aren't as large or well appointed but are still recommendable. The small terrace off the conference room overlooks the full splendor of the bridge, and terraced gardens off the other end of the buildings, where the view, alas, is marred by a highway.

Via del Ponte (near the rocca at the top of town), 06049 Spoleto (PG). ✆ **0743-223-447.** Fax 0743-223-448. www.hotelgattapone.it. 15 units. 120€–170€ standard double; 170€–230€ superior double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking on road. **Amenities:** Babysitting; bike rental; concierge; massage; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Nuovo Hotel Clitunno ★ Little is left from the time when this 19th-century *palazzo* was a firehouse. But the Tomassoni family's welcome augments the comfort and warmth of the public area's fireplace, beam ceilings, and gold-plaster walls. To accommodate disparate tastes, some guest rooms were left in "standard" style, with stylish contemporary furnishings in warm pastel colors, while 10 were refitted as *"camere in stile,"* or "old-style rooms." Request one of the latter and you'll get parquet or terra-cotta floors, antique iron beds and sconces, armoires, and rough-hewn ceiling beams. All have new bathrooms but only 15 of the standard-style rooms offer a handsome view over the Vale Spoletino. The friendly Tomassoni brothers, Francesco and Filippo, really put themselves out for guests.

Piazza Sordini 6 (just west of Piazza della Libertà), 06049 Spoleto (PG). ✆ **0743-223-340.** Fax 0743-222-663. www.hotelclitunno.com. 45 units. 140€ standard double; 150€ executive double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Feb. Bus from station A, B, C. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bike rental; nearby children's playground; concierge; room service (bar); smoke-free rooms; spa; nearby tennis court; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C in some units, TV, VCR on request, Internet (Wi-Fi in executive), minibar on request, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Enoteca Provinciale ★ SPOLETINA/UMBRIAN This wine–store-cum-*osteria* replaces the livestock stalls of a medieval tower with a handful of wooden tables and a radio locked on the Italian pop station. Some regulars drop by just for a sandwich; others swill the day away with dozens of Umbrian wines. *Strengozzi* is handmade spaghetti served *alla Spoletina* (with spicy-hot tomato sauce), *al tartufo,* or in a game-based ragù. The standout soup is *zuppa di farro* (with crushed baby grains enlivened by veggies and meat). The secondi suit all appetites: simple panini, delicately flavored *frittata al tartufo* (an omelet for the indulgent in all of us), and daily specials such as wild boar cooked in Sagrantino red wine and truffled *agnello* (mutton). Order your wine by the glass so that you can sample a cross section of the best Umbria has to offer, and finish with the local bitter liqueur *amaro di tartufo.*

Via Aurelio Saffi 7. ✆ **0743-220-484.** Reservations not necessary. Primi 5€–10€; secondi 6€–13€; wine 1€–6€ per glass; menù turistico with wine 15€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 11am–3pm and 7–11pm (until midnight in summer).

Il Pancielle ★★ SPOLETINA The flagstone terrace out back is scattered with tables in summer, lorded over by a spreading pine, and affords a panorama of rooftops that

spills into the valley below. Inside the stone walls, under wood ceilings, you can hear the meat of your secondo sizzling over the large open fire. This former cheap trattoria has lately put its waiters in suits and nearly doubled its prices, but the cooking remains excellent. The *strangozzi alla montanara* is topped with minced veggies and a hint of peperoncini and the *spaghetti al rancetto* is served in a marjoram-scented tomato sauce with pork cheek (like bacon). Put the open fire to good use for your secondo and order *carne alle brace* (grilled meat)—the *spiedino misto* gets you a sampler of sausage, steak, lamb, and beef filet flavored with bay leaves. Vegetarians might enjoy a grill of the smoke-cured cheese *scamorza,* and anyone too stuffed to move afterward can rent one of the fine doubles upstairs (see "Where to Stay," above).

Via del Duomo 3–5. ✆ **0743-45-598.** www.ristoranteilpanciollespoleto.com. Reservations recommended. Primi 6.50€–14€; secondi 6.50€–17€. AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 12:30–2:30pm and 7:45–10:45pm. Closed Aug 1–12.

Il Tartufo ★★★ ITALIAN/UMBRIAN Get your appetite and credit card ready for a night at Spoleto's oldest restaurant in the company of Umbria's quasi-divine fungal tuber. The chefs work all seasons of truffle: the coveted white in autumn and early winter and the black *pregiato* the rest of the year. The small dining room is an intimate arrangement of reddish veneer paneling and tables accessorized with pink roses. As Mozart wafts over your table, you can inaugurate the evening with a *terrina di polenta* (slices of truffle-flake polenta in sauce covered with large shavings of truffle). *Strengozzi al tartufo* is the classic truffled pasta primo, or take a *tartufo* break with the strong-flavored *orecchiette alla polpa di olive* (tiny handmade pasta shapes served in a sauce of Gorgonzola and crushed olives). The *petto di faraona* is a guinea hen breast stuffed with a mix of potato and truffles. The simplest dish is often exquisite, as is the case with the veal *scaloppa al tartufo.*

Piazza Garibaldi 24. ✆ **0743-40-236.** Reservations required. Primi 9€–15€; secondi 13€–26€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 12:30–3pm and 7–10:30pm; Sun 12:30–3pm. Closed last 2 weeks in July.

Osteria del Matto ★ UMBRIAN Though it only opened in 2000, this is truly an old-school *osteria* serving simple, solid food and good wines. There's no menu to choose from, just a blackboard telling you what you're going to eat, and waiters telling you when you're going to eat it. It's a sort of gastromasochism that is currently in style, but perhaps is not for everyone. Various *salumi* hang in the little kitchen area alongside a prosciutto slung in its holder, ready to be carved by hand by the gregarious Filippo Matto (a former butler to Gian Carlo Menotti at his Scottish estate) for your antipasto—a mix of meats, onion frittata wedges, artichokes, and *crostini.* Afterward, there's just a single pasta dish (if you're lucky, the farro stew made with sausage, wine, peperoncini, and soup veggies).

Vicolo del Mercato 3 (under the big arch on the south side of Piazza del Mercato). ✆ **0743-225-506.** Reservations not necessary. Full meal 14€–16€ without wine. MC, V. Wed–Mon 11am–3pm and 5pm–2am.

Trattoria del Festival Kids UMBRIAN The cavernous pair of vaulted brick rooms here are large enough to host the festival hordes yet still leave room for die-hard locals who come for the best fixed-priced menus in town. The two more "expensive" of these are the ones to order, because they let you sample a pair of primi (chef's surprise, but one is assured to involve truffles) and include all the incidentals, save wine. Start with a foot-long *bruschetta al pomodoro* with a couple of cream-stuffed veal rolls before sinking your fork into the *tagliatelle tartufate* (a particularly successful use of the elusive black mushroom) or the *penne all'erbe* (in a hot-and-spicy tomato sauce laden with chopped herbs).

The secondi also tend to be very simple but good. If you don't care for the excellent *frittata al tartufo* (mixed meat fry with truffles), try the *salsicce alle brace* or the *pollo arrosto.*

Via Brignone 8. ✆ **0743-220-993.** Reservations recommended. Primi 4.65€–8€; secondi 7€–9€; fixed-price menus without wine 12€–22€. AE, DC, MC, V. Sat–Thurs 11am–4pm and 6pm–midnight. Closed Feb.

2 TODI: A TASTE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

43km (27 miles) W of Spoleto; 40km (25 miles) S of Perugia; 203km (126 miles) S of Florence; 130km (81 miles) N of Rome

If you had to use the word "quaint" to describe any Italian town, Todi would be a front-runner. It's one of the most picturesque hill towns, a warren of narrow medieval streets twisting and plunging off at every angle, with many alleys whose graceful sets of shallow stairs flow down the center. It's a cobble of mottled grays accented with brick, all surrounding a picture-perfect central square celebrated as one of the finest medieval spaces on the peninsula.

Seemingly frozen in the Middle Ages, aside from its almost Swiss cleanliness and pristine condition, Todi actually has much deeper roots. A backwater for the past 500 years or so, it headed its own small Umbrian empire for a while in the early 13th century, and during the long Dark Ages of Lombard rule in central Italy, the *comune* apparently maintained its independence from the Lombard dukes in Spoleto. Todi claims a 2nd-century-A.D. martyr to prove it was Christianized early; while only a few bits of the 42 B.C. Roman Tuder survive, traces of the Etruscan border town Tutare are scarcer still. Even the Etruscans were relative newcomers, having conquered the city from an Umbri tribe that probably had displaced the Iron Age squatters who occupied the site in 2700 B.C.

Todi doesn't harbor much great art, with the exception of one jewel of High Renaissance architecture; the wine and cuisine aren't particularly outstanding; and its long heritage is more in the history books than in plain view. People come here mainly just to look; to drink in the vistas from the town's terraces and the medieval character of its alleyways; to nap, picnic, and play in the public gardens; and to sit on the Duomo steps and stare at the Gothic public palaces across the way. Todi's once-upon-a-time atmosphere hasn't gone unnoticed. It sees its share of film crews and has gotten press in America as one of the world's eminently livable cities; English-speaking expats have taken notice, and mortgages. Property speculators and Italian businessmen have taken advantage of its relative proximity to Rome to buy medieval *palazzi* and commute from Todi to the city. But notwithstanding the disproportionate number of Alfas, Mercedes, and even Range Rovers purring down the constricted medieval streets, Todi remains a showcase hill town, and a refreshing break from a culture-heavy Italian tour. ***Note:*** The best time to visit is in the morning, when churches are likely to be open and you can get a photograph of Santa Maria della Consolazione with the sun at your back.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** Todi is on the private FCU train line (www.fcu.it), not the state-run FS rail routes. There are about a dozen trains daily from **Perugia**'s FCU stations (45 min.). From **Spoleto,** take the train to Terni (22 daily) and transfer to the FCU line (14 per day; about 1 hr. total travel time). There are about eight runs daily from **Rome** to Terni that meet up with an FCU train (about 2 hr. total). At Todi, get off at Ponte Rio (not Ponte Naia) station (✆ **075-894-2092** or 075-882-092), where a bus

will be waiting to take you the 5km (3 miles) up to town. If you're staying at Villa Luisa, tell the driver and he'll let you off at the first stop.

By Car Todi is off Umbria's central highway, the E45, which branches off the A1 Autostrada heading north from Rome at Orte and continues past Todi to Perugia. The SS79bis makes its winding way between Todi and Orvieto, but the less scenic SS448 is quicker. You can park free in lots just south of the Porta Romana and along the west side of town either below Porta Amerina or behind Santa Maria della Consolazione. Pay parking in the town's center is available in front of the Nicchioni.

By Bus There are two bus terminals in town. From Piazza della Consolazione, there are four to eight runs daily to and from **Perugia** (40–60 min.); and one early-morning run to and early-afternoon run from **Orvieto** (2 hr.). From Piazza Jacopone, a bus runs daily to and from **Rome** center and Fiumicino airport (2–2½ hr.), and there's a Friday-only midday tourist run to and from **Orvieto** (2 hr.).

VISITOR INFORMATION The central **tourist office** is under the arches of the Palazzo del Popolo 38/39, 06059 Todi (✆ **075-894-2526**). It's open Monday through Saturday 9:30am to 1pm and 3:30 to 7pm, Sunday 10am to 1pm and 3:30 to 7pm (in winter it closes at 6pm, and is not open Sun afternoons). The administrative APT branch has offices at Piazza Umberto I 6 (✆ **075-894-3395** or 075-894-2686; fax 075-894-2406) and Via Ciuffelli 8 (✆ **075-894-3867;** fax 075-894-4311).

FESTIVALS & MARKETS For a decade, the town has put on the classy **Todi Festival,** 10 days at the end of August showcasing theater, music, and ballet, often surprisingly cutting edge. For information, contact **Teatro Comunale,** Via Mazzini (✆ **075-894-3430** or 075-894-3933). An antiques fair is held around Easter. The weekly **market** is Saturdays at the sports fields south of the center, while an annual **antiques fair** is held in the Palazzo del Vignola the second week of April.

STROLLING THROUGH TODI

Piazza del Popolo ★★ is not only the center of Todi but also the center of an ideal: A balance of secular and religious buildings in transitional Romanesque-Gothic style that epitomizes the late medieval concept of a self-governing *comune.* On the south end of the piazza squats the brick-crenellated marble bulk of the **Palazzo dei Priori,** started in 1293 and finished in 1339 with the crowning touch of a bronze eagle, Todi's civic symbol. Some lunching Umbri (or Etruscans, depending on which version of the legend you choose) supposedly founded the town after an eagle nicked the picnic blanket out from under them and then dropped it on this hill. (Historically, though, the eagle as city symbol makes its first appearance in 1267.)

The paired Gothic structures running along the piazza's side are the battlemented **Palazzo del Popolo** (1213) and the **Palazzo del Capitano** (1290). They're linked in the middle by a grand medieval staircase onto which you might expect Errol Flynn to come swashbuckling down at any moment. Todi's **Museo/Pinacoteca** (✆ **075-894-4148**), on the Palazzo del Popolo's fourth floor (elevator under the central arches), stars a modest lot of local 16th- and 17th-century pictures, plus an *Incoronation of the Virgin* (1507–11) by Lo Spagna that copies a Ghirlandaio work; Lo Spagna (nickname for the Spanish-born Giovanni di Pietro) seldom bothered coming up with anything original. Also here are a tiny **Etrusco-Roman Museum** and a 1592 canvas by local painter Sensini in which a gaggle of saints carry a scale model of 16th-century Todi on a plate. It's open Tuesday through Sunday (also Mon in Apr) as follows: April through August 10:30am to 1pm

Mad Monks & Christmas Carols: Fra' Jacopone

Jacopone (1230–1306) started out in grand Franciscan style, living a fun, sometimes debauched, materialistic life. But when his young wife died in his arms, he had a spiritual crisis. He started going about on all fours like a dog, eating filthy food, and acting like such a nut that the Franciscans didn't at first accept his ecstasies as religious. For quite a while they refused to let him don their robes. He is chiefly remembered for telling off, in verse form, Dante's old nemesis, the reprehensible Pope Boniface VIII (the written jibes got him 5 years in a Roman dungeon). He also wrote catchy late-medieval poetry set to music that became, for all intents and purposes, the world's first Christmas carols.

and 2:30 to 6pm; March and September 10:30am to 1pm and 2 to 7pm; and October through February 10:30am to 1pm and 2 to 4:30pm. Admission is 3.50€ adults, 2.50€ ages 15 to 25 and over 60, and 2€ children 6 to 14.

At the north end of the main piazza rises the **Duomo**'s facade, which ran the stylistic gamut from Romanesque through the Renaissance but still came out blessedly simple in the end. Inside on the entrance wall is a *Last Judgment* frescoed by Ferraù di Faenza in 1596 that owes about 80% of its figures and design directly to Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in Rome's Sistine Chapel. (Ferraù also lifted a few figures directly from Michelangelo's inspiration: Signorelli's version in Orvieto's Duomo.) In the right aisle, under the sprightly thin-columned Gothic arcade added in the 1300s, are a 1507 marble font, what's left of a *Trinity* (1525) by Lo Spagna (here he's cribbing from Masaccio), and an early-16th-century tempera altarpiece by Giannicola di Paolo.

Across the Piazza del Popolo, go around the right side of Palazzo dei Priori, and a right at Piazza Jacopone will take you to Todi's second major sight. The massive Franciscan shrine of **San Fortunato** ★ was begun in 1291, but finishing touches dragged on to 1459. Rumor has it that the Tuderti, basking in medieval wealth, commissioned Lorenzo Maitani for a sculpture on the facade that would top even his own masterpiece on nearby Orvieto's Duomo. Jealous Orvietan authorities, not to be outdone by rival Todi, decided the most expedient way to prevent this was to have the artist killed. Cross the gardens to see the central doorway carvings, testament to the greatness the rest of the facade could have had. It's a late-Gothic tangle of religious, symbolic, and just plain naked figures clambering around vines or standing somberly under teensy carved Gothic canopies. The *Annunciation* statues flanking it are so pretty that several authorities have recently decided they must be Jacopo della Quercia works. Inside, the church is remarkably bright, as Italian churches go, and the whitewashed walls of the chapels sport many bits and pieces of what must once have been spectacular, colorful 14th- and 15th-century frescoes. The best of the surviving fragments are Masolino's 1452 *Madonna and Child with Angels,* the damaged Giottesque cycle, and the 1340 *Banquet of Herod.* The bones of Todi's main Franciscan mystic, Fra' Jacopone (see the box, "Mad Monks & Christmas Carols: Fra' Jacopone"), lie in the crypt. The **bell tower** with its view over the city is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10am to 1pm and 3 to 6:30pm; tickets are 2€.

To the right of the church facade, a little path leads up to the town's public **park,** bordered by a low rambling wall and featuring a large round tower stump—all that

remains of Todi's 14th-century **Rocca** fortress. At the other end of this park starts the winding path that wends down to Todi's High Renaissance masterpiece, the **Temple of Santa Maria della Consolazione** ★★★. Like its cousins in Prato and Montepulciano, this 90-year effort of Renaissance architectural theory is a mathematically construed take on a classical temple, a domed structure on a Greek-cross plan. Construction began in 1508 under Cola da Caprarola, who may have had Bramante's help in the design. Before it was finished in 1607, its register of architects included Antonio Sangallo the Younger, Vignola, and Peruzzi, among others. It reposes in quiet, serious massiveness on a small, grassy plot. Although huge, it carries its mass compactly, with all lines curving inward and the domes and rounded transept apses keeping the structure cubically centered. The interior, however, is nothing special.

The walk back into town is along Viale della Consolazione, on the left as you head away from the temple (not the SS79 hwy. to the right). The road becomes Via **Santa Maria in Camuccia** as it passes the church of that name on the right. Stop in to see the wonderful 12th-century wood statue of the *Madonna and Child* in the third chapel on the left. At Via Roma, take a left, then an immediate right, just before the arch of **Porta Marzia** (a gate in the Etruscan walls, but this version is probably a medieval reconstruction). After the road curves to the left you'll see remnants of Roman-era Todi in the form of the **Nicchioni,** four deep travertine niches more than 10m (33 ft.) high that might have once formed the wall of an Augustan basilica.

The best remnants of the Roman era, however, can be found in the newly excavated **Roman wells,** which you can enter just behind Piazza del Popolo and which extend under the square. Descending below ground, you walk through a few of the two dozen parallel water-storage cells. There's not a whole lot to see, per se, but rainwater enthusiasts will appreciate the ingenious way in which runoff was collected and stored for future use.

WHERE TO STAY

Fonte Cesia ★★ The first hotel to open in Todi's historic center, the Fonte Cesia successfully melds modern architectural glass and wood elements with a 13th-century *palazzo.* Each of the suites has a small balcony or terrace and is unique—and worth the splurge, especially when the high-season cost of a double brings the prices close. The "Novecento" has 19th-century antiques, the "Jacopone" has Wassily chairs and a claw-foot tub, and the "Venturini" has a canopy bed. In summer, breakfast is served in a nook of the huge palm-shaded terrace that sits atop the hotel's 17th-century namesake fountain.

Via Lorenzo Leon 3 (off Piazza S. Jacopo), 06059 Todi (PG). ✆ **075-894-3737.** Fax 075-894-4677. www.fontecesia.it. 37 units. 140€–172€ double; 209€–219€ suite. Rates include breakfast. 33€ supplement per person for half pension, 53€ supplement per person for full pension. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; concierge; room service (during restaurant hours); Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Villa Luisa Although Todi has a hotel in its center, this remains a favorite (and much cheaper) alternative among the modern inns in the valley. The well-maintained rooms are of a thoroughly uninteresting brand of contemporary standardized comfort, but it's quiet, with a pleasant tree-filled park behind the building.

Viale A. Cortesi 147 (1km/⅔ mile outside town), 06059 Todi (PG). ✆ **075-894-8571.** Fax 075-894-8472. www.villaluisa.it. 42 units. 80€–120€ standard double; 100€–130€ superior double. Half and full pension available for stays of 3 nights or more. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. If arriving by train, take the bus that meets trains at the station; tell the driver you're staying here and he'll let you off in front. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting; bike rental; concierge; outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV, hair dryer, Internet connection (in superior doubles), minibar.

The local Grechetto di Todi white wine accompanies lunch just fine but is otherwise fairly nondescript. Any pasta served here *alla boscaiola* is likely to have a carbonara sauce of egg, cheese, and bacon with asparagus added.

That said, apart from the very nice but fairly pricey Umbria listed below, good and affordable restaurant options in Todi proper are slim. If you're only passing through, you might want to do as the locals do and pick up a tasty slice of pizza and a Coke for 2.50€ at **Rosso Pomodoro,** at the western entrance of town on Piazza Jacopone 7. There are a few shaded tables outside where you can munch through your *capricciosa* and watch the small town happenings.

Umbria ★★★ UMBRIAN Not only does the Umbria have some of the best food in Todi, it also has one of the best views—call ahead in warm weather to reserve a table on the vine-shaded outdoor terrace. In winter you can warm yourself by the huge fireplace and dine in the 15th-century interior under wood-beam ceilings and wagon-wheel chandeliers. The *spaghetti alla boscaiola* is so scrumptious you almost needn't bother considering the *polenta con fungi e tartufo nero* (truffle shavings and bits of their poorer fungal relatives atop creamy polenta). Enjoy a steak grilled over the open fire, or try the popular *fritto di mozzarella, olive, e carciofi* (fried mozzarella mixed with olives and artichokes) or the tender *anatra stufata con lenticchie* (duck cooked, but not covered, with tomatoes and spices served with a side of tiny lentils).

Via S. Bonaventura 13 (through arch between the Palazzi del Popolo and Capitano). ✆ **075-894-2737.** Reservations strongly recommended. Primi 12€–15€; secondi 10€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10:30pm.

3 ORVIETO: ETRUSCAN RUINS & FINE WHITE WINE

45km (28 miles) W of Todi; 87km (54 miles) W of Spoleto; 86km (53 miles) SW of Perugia; 152km (95 miles) S of Florence; 121km (75 miles) N of Rome

The Paglia and Tiber rivers have spent eons washing away most of the volcanic layer of porous tufa that once covered the area around **Orvieto** ★. But they left a plug of it jutting some 315m (1,033 ft.) above the plain, and its sheer walls are so defensible humans have been scurrying about atop it for thousands of years. The Etruscans probably called the city they inherited from Bronze and Iron Age tribes here Velzna (some scholars render it Volsinii), a major player in the Etruscan confederation of 12 cities and perhaps its religious center.

It was a close enough threat to the Romans that they attacked and leveled it in 265 B.C., driving the Etruscans to settle on the shores of nearby Lake Bolsena. The Romans built a port on the Tiber to ship home a steady supply of the famous wine produced in the area—still much in demand today as Orvieto Classico, one of Italy's finest whites (see "Orvieto's Liquid Gold," p. 429). As a medieval *comune,* the city expanded its empire in all directions until the Black Death decimated the population in the 14th century. Soon after, Orvieto became part of the Papal States and a home away from home to some 32 popes.

The city seems not so much to rise as to grow out of the flat top of its butte. The buildings are made from blocks of the same tufa on which Orvieto rests, giving the disquieting feeling that the town evolved here of its own volition. A taciturn, solemn, almost

cold feeling emanates from its stony walls, and the streets nearly always turn at right angles, confounding your senses of direction and navigation. It's as if, somehow, Orvieto resents the humans who have overrun it. Of course, a goodly dose of wine with lunch can make the whole place seem very friendly indeed, and the stoniness is greatly relieved by the massive Duomo rising head and shoulders above the rest of the town, its glittering mosaic facade visible for miles around.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** Fourteen trains on the main **Rome-Florence** line stop at Orvieto daily (1¾ hr. from Florence; 1 hr., 20 min. from Rome). From **Perugia,** take the train to Terontola (16 daily) for this line heading south toward Rome (1¼ hr. total

train time). From **Todi,** it's easiest to take the bus (see below) or perhaps a bus to Perugia and train from there (see "Todi: A Taste of the Middle Ages," earlier in this chapter). If you must ride the rails, take the FCU line to Terni, transfer to a Rome-bound train that stops in Orte, and hop on the main line heading north to Orvieto (2 hr. plus layovers).

Orvieto's station is in the boring new town of Orvieto Scalo in the valley. To reach the city, cross the street and take the **funicular** (www.atcterni.it), a modern version of the steep cog railway that ran on hydraulic power in the 19th century. You can buy a funicular-only ticket for .80€ or a combined funicular-and-bus ticket for .90€ that lets you hop on a minibus at the top of the funicular run (Piazza Cahen) and ride into the center of town: The "A" bus heads to Piazza del Duomo, the "B" bus to central Piazza della Repubblica via Piazza XXIX Marzo (it then doubles back to the Duomo). Or you may wish to get the ***Carta Unica*** cumulative ticket covering the funicular, bus, and museums (see "Exploring the Cathedral & Other Sights," below). From in front of the train station, you could also grab the no. 1 bus that runs to Piazza XXIX Marzo in the city (get two tickets—one for the return trip—at the bar inside the station, as they're hard to come by in town).

By Car If you're coming from **Todi,** the SS448 is the fastest route, but the twisty SS79bis is more scenic; from **Perugia,** shoot down the SS3bis through Deruta to Todi and branch off from there. The SS71 runs here from just east of **Chiusi** in southern Tuscany, and the A1 autostrada between **Florence** and **Rome** has an exit at the valley town Orvieto Scalo.

The most convenient **free parking** is in Orvieto Scalo outside the train station (take the funicular to town; see "By Train," above); at the top of the funicular run on Piazza Cahen (with both free and pay spaces); and, if you can find room, the free lot off Via Roma.

By Bus From **Todi,** there's one bus daily in the early morning (a scenic twisting ride; about 2 hr.). There's one daily to (3:15pm) and from (8am) **Rome**'s Tiburtina station (1½ hr.). From other cities, it's best to take the train. For bus information, call ✆ **0763-301-234** or visit the tourist office.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** is opposite the Duomo at Piazza Duomo 24, 05018 Orvieto (✆ **0763-341-772;** fax 0763-344-433; www.comune.orvieto.tr.it, www.regioneumbria.eu, or www.orvienet.it). It's open Monday through Friday from 8:15am to 1:50pm and 4 to 7pm, Saturday from 10am to 1pm and 3:30 to 7pm, and Sunday from 10am to noon and 4 to 6pm.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS Florentines are wimps—they use a little fake bird to set off the cart of fireworks in front of their cathedral at Easter. The Orvietani use the real thing in **La Palombella** ★. On Pentecost Sunday, an unlucky white dove is tied to a frame encircled with flares, which slides down a steel cable and, amid much cheering and doubtless a few animal-rights protests, ignites the fireworks and sparklers strapped to a giant Gothic canopy placed outside the Duomo. Assuming the poor thing doesn't have a heart attack, the dove is then given to the couple last married in the Duomo to be cared for until its natural death.

Umbria Jazz moves from Perugia to Orvieto for the winter, celebrating the last 5 days of the year with wine tastings and jazz artists from around the world. Call ✆ **075-573-3363** or visit **www.umbriajazz.com** for info. There are weekly **morning markets** on Thursday and Saturday in Piazza del Popolo.

EXPLORING THE CATHEDRAL & OTHER SIGHTS

The useful ***Carta Unica*** cumulative ticket for 13€ adults and 11€ students and seniors over 60 gets you into the Duomo's Cappella San Brizio, the Musei Archeologici Faina e Civico, the Torre del Moro, and the Orvieto Underground tour—plus either one funicular plus one bus ride *or* 5 hours in the ex–Campo della Fiera parking lot. It's available at the tourist office, the above-mentioned sights, and the funicular depots.

Duomo ★★ Orvieto's most striking sight is, without a doubt, the **facade** of its Duomo. The overall effect—with the sun glinting off the gold of mediocre 17th- to 19th-century mosaics in the pointed arches and intricate Gothic stone detailing everywhere—has led some to call it a precious (or gaudy) gem and others to dub it the world's largest triptych. It is, to say the least, spectacular.

The Duomo was ordered built in 1290 by Pope Nicholas IV to celebrate the miracle that had occurred 27 years earlier at nearby Bolsena. Work was probably begun by Arnolfo di Cambio, but the structure ran through its share of architects over the next few hundred years—including Florentine Andrea Orcagna; a couple of Pisanos; and, most significantly, Sienese Lorenzo Maitani (1310–30). Maitani not only shored up the unsteady structure with his patented buttresses but also left a Gothic stamp on the building, especially the facade. Here he executed, with the help of his son, Vitale, and Niccolò and Meo Nuti, the excellent carved marble **relief panels ★★** in the lower register (protected by Plexiglas after many vandalism incidents). The scenes on the left are stories from Genesis; God fishes around inside Adam's rib cage with an "I know I left an Eve in here somewhere" look on His face. The far right panels are a Last Judgment preamble for the Signorelli frescoes inside. The most striking is the lower-right panel, a jumble of the wailing faces of the damned and the leering grins of the demonic tormentors dragging them to eternal torture. The anguish and despair are intense, possibly because the damned didn't realize Hell would contain quite so many snakes. The controversial (mainly because they're contemporary) **bronze doors** were cast in 1970 by Sicilian sculptor Emilio Greco. Parts of the facade, including the mosaics, were damaged by the 1997 Umbria earthquakes (see "Assisi: An Artistic Pilgrimage," in chapter 12, for more information).

Save for the 1426 ***Madonna*** fresco by Gentile Fabriano just inside the doors on the left, there's nothing to grab you in the boldly striped interior until you get to the altar end. The **choir** behind the main altar was frescoed by Ugolino di Prete Ilario in the 14th century, but it's been covered with restoration scaffolding for years. The left transept houses the **Cappella del Corporale** (1357–64), also by Ugolino and his workshop. The left wall depicts various miracles performed by communion wafers throughout the ages, and the right wall pulls out the Sacrament's biggest moment, the Miracle of Bolsena.

In 1263, a young priest who doubted the miracle of transubstantiation—the transformation of the communion wafer and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ—was saying Mass at Bolsena, on the shores of a lake a few dozen miles south of Orvieto. As he raised the Host toward the heavens, it began dripping blood onto the *corporale* (cloth covering the altar). The altar cloth instantly became a relic and was rushed to Pope Urban IV, who was cooling his heels in Orvieto in the company of Thomas Aquinas, a visiting professor at the city's theological seminary. They quickly cranked out a papal bull proclaiming the feast day of Corpus Christi. The relic resides in a huge gilded silver case designed in 1339 to mimic the cathedral facade and set with scenes of the Miracle of Bolsena and life of Christ in enameled panels inlaid with silver.

To the right of the high altar is the recently restored **Cappella San Brizio,** containing one of the Renaissance's greatest **fresco cycles ★★★**. Fra' Angelico started the job in

1447 but finished only two of the vault triangles: Christ as Judge and a gold-backed stack of Prophets. The Orvietan council brought in pinch-hitter Pinturicchio in 1490, but the Perugian painter inexplicably cut out after just 5 days. It wasn't until 1499 that Cortonan Luca Signorelli strode into town, with the council hailing him Italy's most famous painter and practically throwing at him the contract to finish the paintings. After completing the ceiling vaults to Fra' Angelico's designs, Signorelli went into hyperdrive with his own style on the walls. By 1504, the Duomo had some of the most intense studies ever seen of the naked human body, plus a horrifically realistic and fascinating rendition of the ***Last Judgment.*** Michelangelo, master of the male nude, who was most impressed, made many sketches of the figures, and found a prime inspiration for his own *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel.

The first fresco on the left wall is *The Preaching of the Antichrist,* a highly unusual subject in Italian art. The Devil-prompted Antichrist discourses in the center, Christians are martyred left and right, soldiers scurry about a huge temple in the background, and the Antichrist and his followers get their angelic comeuppance on the left. The prominent whore in the foreground reaching back to accept money for her services is a bit of painterly revenge—it's a portrait of a girlfriend who had recently dumped Signorelli. On the far left is Signorelli's "signature": two black-robed figures bearing portraits of Signorelli and his skullcapped predecessor Fra' Angelico standing behind.

On the right wall, the first fresco shows the *Resurrection of the Flesh,* in which the dead rise from an eerily flat, gray plane of earth—Signorelli apparently didn't want any background detailing to clutter his magnificently detailed anatomical studies of nudes. The muscular bodies struggling out of the ground seem oblivious to the bright-winged angelic trumpeters standing on the clouds above.

In the arch to the left of the altar, angel musicians summon the lucky ones in the *Calling of the Chosen.* Italian last judgments tend to have infinitely more interesting "damned in Hell" scenes than "blessed in Paradise" ones, and Signorelli's is no exception. His *Crowning of the Chosen* on the left wall, however, is one of the few versions worth pausing over, again mainly because of its studies of nudes. This is a painterly festival of well-turned calves, modeled thighs, rounded bellies, and firm buttocks.

Then there's how the other half dies. To the right of the altar is *The Entrance to Hell,* filled with Dantean details such as a group of the indolent being led off by a devil bearing a white banner, a man raising his fists to curse God as he sees Charon rowing across the Styx for him, and a would-be escapee downstage whom Minos has captured by the hair and is about to thrash. Two rather militant angels oversee the whole process as if to make sure no one scrambles over the arch to the "Chosen" side. This fresco sets you up for the last and most famous scene: the writhing, twisting, sickly colored mass of bodies, demons, and horror of *The Damned in Hell.* Signorelli didn't pull any punches here. Tightly sinewed, parti-colored demons attack and torture the damned while a few of their comrades, menaced by heavily armed angels in full plate mail, toss humans down from the sky. One winged devil is making off with a familiar blonde on his back—the jilted artist's ex-mistress again—but there's also a gray-haired electric-blue devil in the very center of the squirming mass, grasping an ample-bosomed woman and looking out at us from the chaos with a rather sad expression (another self-portrait?).

Piazza del Duomo. ✆ **0763-341-167.** Admission to Cappella San Brizio (✆ **0763-342-477**) is 3€ adults, free for children under 10. Tickets available at tourist office across the piazza. Daily 7:30am–12:45pm and 2:30–7:15pm (5:15pm Nov–Feb and 6:15pm Mar and Oct; Cappella San Brizio opens 10am but is closed Sun morning).

Orvieto's Liquid Gold

When the matter of Luca Signorelli's payment came up in his contract to paint the Cappella San Brizio of Orvieto's Duomo, the Cathedral Works Committee decided the best way to compensate the master painter for his work was to pay him 575 ducats, provide him with an apartment, and give him "as much as he wanted of that wine of Orvieto."

The plains and low hills around Orvieto grow the grapes—verdello, grechetto, and Tuscan varietals trebbiano and malvasia—that go into one of Italy's great wines, a pale straw-colored DOC white called simply **Orvieto Classico.** A well-rounded and judiciously juicy white (often with a hint of crushed almonds), it goes great with lunch and has one of the longest documented histories of any wine in Italy. The Etruscans traded it to the farthest reaches of ancient Gaul centuries before the French were competent at winemaking, and the Romans were so fond of the stuff they raised a port on the river nearby in order to slake the Eternal City's thirst by floating amphorae-laden barges down to Rome. One of the myths on the origin of the city's name is even tied to the intoxicating spirit. In the Dark Ages, barbarian invaders looted the town and were triumphantly carrying off chalices stolen from the temples when the gold suddenly melted to a pale liquid in their hands, causing the sackers to run off in fear, shouting, "Aurum vetitum, aurum vetitum!" The "forbidden gold" was, in fact, Orvieto's famous wine, on which the barbarians subsequently became so roaring drunk the Orvietani had no trouble running them out of town.

Orvieto's wine trade is still a cornerstone of the area's economy. Most Orvieto Classico you'll run across is *secco* (dry), but you can also find bottles of the more traditional *abboccato* (semidry/semisweet), *amabile* (medium sweet), and *dolce* (sweet) varieties. The *secco* was created for export to satisfy the general public accustomed to the taste of bad chardonnay, and the sweeter varieties are treats seldom exported, so try them while you can. You may want to steer clear of big-name labels like Bigi—a perfectly fine wine, but one widely exported abroad—in favor of the smaller producers you can get only here.

To sample a glass (or buy a bottle) with a pastry or *panino,* or to try the zestier white called Est! Est! Est! that's produced on Lake Bolsena's shores in nearby northern Lazio, drop by the **Cantina Foresi,** Piazza Duomo 2 (✆ **0763-341-611**). Ask to see the small, moldy cellar carved directly into the tufa. You can also tipple on a visit to one of Orvieto's friendliest shopkeepers at his enoteca/trattoria above the Pozzo della Cava excavations (see "Tunnels in the Tufa," p. 431) at **La Bottega del Buon Vino,** Via della Cava 26 (✆ **0763-342-373;** www.pozzodellacava.it). To **visit a vineyard,** pick up a copy of the brochure ***Andar per Vigne*** at the direct sales/tasting office for the **Barberani** vineyard at Via Maitani 1, bang at the corner with Piazza del Duomo (✆ **0763-341-532** or 0763-341-820; www.barberani.it); it lists the wineries open to visitors along with the hours of tours and contact numbers.

Musei Archeologici Faina e Civico The core of this Etruscan museum dates from a private collection started in 1864 and contains almost as much material from Chiusi and the Perugia area as it does finds from Orvieto area tombs. The highlights of the museum include a good collection of **Etruscan black *bucchero* ware** from the 6th and the 5th century B.C., and some **Attic black-figure** (6th-C.-B.C.) and **red-figure** (5th-C.-B.C.) vases and amphorae that originated in Athenian workshops and were bought by discriminating Etruscan collectors. The museum even has three black-figure **amphorae by Greek master Exekias** (540 B.C.) that were fished out of the Crocifisso del Tufo necropolis (see review below). Of local manufacture is a celebrated group of 4th-century **pots depicting Vanth,** the Etruscan winged goddess of the netherworld, who has snakes wrapped around her arms and carries keys, a torch, or a scroll inscribed with her name.

On the ground floor is the Civic Museum, with Etruscan material from the Cannicella tomb and Temple of Belvedere. These include a famous marble **"Venus"** (530–520 B.C.) of dubious sex appeal, the remarkably realistic **head of a bearded old man** (4th C. B.C.), a well-turned **warrior's torso** (late 5th C. B.C.), and a genuinely frightening **Gorgon's head.** The last room contains an enormous helmeted warrior's head carved in the late 6th century B.C. with some Etruscan script scrawled across it, and a 4th-century-B.C. **polychrome sarcophagus** found in nearby Torre San Severo. Its reliefs depict soldiers leading naked prisoners to be garroted and winged women carrying scepters and snakes (Vanth again).

Piazza Duomo 29 (across from the Duomo). ✆ **0763-341-511** or 0763-341-216. www.museofaina.it. Admission by cumulative ticket, or 4.50€ adults, 3€ ages 7–12, seniors over 65, and families of 4 or more. MC, V. Apr–Sept Tues–Sun 9:30am–6pm; Oct 1–Mar 30 Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Mon in Jan–Mar.

Museo Archeologico Nazionale Housed in the yellow tufa 13th-century papal palace to the right of the Duomo (walk down the slope toward the picture windows), this collection currently occupies four cavernous medieval rooms. They contain finds from Etruscan tombs in the area dating from the 7th to 4th centuries B.C. Among the treasures are a **soldier's armor** from a 4th-century-B.C. burial site at Settecamini and the detached **frescoes** ★ (open and lit on request) from his neighbors' tombs. There are also bits of Greek vases and some black *bucchero* ware.

In the part of the *palazzo* that sticks out into the piazza is the **Museo Emilio Greco** (✆ **0763-344-605**), dedicated to the sculpture of the sometimes controversial contemporary artist who cast the Duomo's bronze doors. Admission is 2.50€ adults, 1€ ages 18 to 25 and seniors; cumulative tickets with the Pozzo di San Patrizio are 4.50€ and 2.50€ respectively. It's open Tuesday through Sunday from 10:30am to 1pm and 2 to 6:30pm (2–5:30pm in winter).

Piazza Duomo (to the right of the Duomo). ✆ **0763-341-039.** www.archeopg.arti.beniculturali.it. Admission 3€; free for children under 12 and seniors over 65. Daily 8:30am–7:30pm (June–Sept until 11pm Sat).

Grotte della Rupe (Etruscan Orvieto Underground) ★ The Orvieto *comune* has finally laid its hands on some caves of its own and leads groups down into them to try and explain the network of tunnels honeycombing the tufa subsoil. The visit can be overly didactic and explanatory, but you do get to see an underground medieval olive press (the constant temperature was great for oil making) probably recycled from an Etruscan structure, perhaps a temple. You can also peer down a few claustrophobically narrow Etruscan-era wells, wander around a subterranean quarry for *pozzolano* (a volcanic stone powdered to make cement mix) in use as late as the 19th century, and tour a series of Etruscan pigeon coops (no, seriously) carved out of the cliff-side tufa.

Tunnels in the Tufa

The Orvietani have been burrowing into the soft tufa and *pozzolano* stone under their feet for thousands of years. The problem of providing the skyscraping city with water has been tackled since Etruscan times by digging in the ground. The Etruscans hollowed out cisterns to collect rainwater, sank wells to seek out groundwater, and carved public plumbing systems into the rocky foundations of Velzna. The practice was continued by the Romans, the people of the Middle Ages (who also used some defunct wells as rubbish dumps), and even Renaissance Pope Clement VII.

Through the ages, the man-made cavern system has also been used for wine and oil production and storage, artisan workshops, escape tunnels for nobility, and quarries for tufa building blocks and the *pozzolano* dust to cement them with. The official position seems to relegate this peculiar molelike tendency to the past, dating the last tunneling and the closing of the last *pozzolano* mine to the late 19th century. But what everyone appears to ignore are the elevator shafts the city sank through the cliff in 1996 to connect the new parking lots with Orvieto proper—the Orvietani are still tunneling.

Besides the *comune*-run **Grotte della Rupe** caverns (see listing above), many shops and other private buildings sit atop underground excavations—scholars suspect the military base covering a fifth of the city (and closed to visitors) hides some of the finest. Perhaps the best accessible ones are under an enoteca, the **Pozzo della Cava,** Via della Cava 28 (✆ **0763-342-373;** www.pozzodellacava.it), whose personable owner used to invite his customers to poke around his Etruscan tunneled basement gratis. Then the town decided to excavate, discovered an important historic well, set it up as an official tourist sight, and started charging admission. (Sometimes, when no one's looking, the amused shopkeeper still lets you scurry down for free.) The excavations consist of six caves containing, among other things, a few medieval refuse shafts and a kiln from 1300, an Etruscan cistern, and, of course, a well almost 4.5m (15 ft.) in diameter and more than 30m (98 ft.) deep, first used by the Etruscans and later enlarged by Pope Clement VII. It's open in the summer Tuesday through Sunday from 8am to 8pm. Admission is 3€ adults and 2€ for students, seniors, and holders of tickets to Grotte delle Rupe, Pozzo Patrizio, or the funicular.

Piazza Duomo 24 (tourist info office). ✆ **0763-344-891.** www.orvietounderground.it. Admission (by guided tour only) by cumulative ticket, or 5.50€ adults, 4.50€ students and seniors. Tours daily at 11am and 12:15, 4, and 5:15pm (other times can be arranged). Closed Feb.

Torre del Moro This 45m-high (148-ft.) civic project from the late 13th century was built to keep on eye on Orvietan territory. In the 19th century it served as a main cistern for the city's new aqueduct system, then became the bell-ringing communal timekeeper when a mechanical clock was installed in 1876. You can clamber up for a sweeping view of the city and, on clear days, the countryside as far as Mts. Cetona and Amiata.

At the intersection of Via Duomo and Corso Cavour. ✆ **0763-344-567.** Admission by cumulative ticket, or 3€ adults, 2€ children. Nov–Feb daily 10:30am–1pm and 2:30–5pm; Mar–Apr and Sept–Oct daily 10am–7pm; May–Aug daily 10am–8pm.

Pozzo di San Patrizio (St. Patrick's Well) ★ Kids While Emperor Charles V was sacking Rome in 1527, the Medici Pope Clement VII took advantage of a dark night and the disguise of a fruit vendor to sneak out of his besieged Roman fortress and scurry up to Orvieto. Convinced that the emperor would follow him, Clement set about fortifying his position.

Orvieto's main military problem throughout history has been a lack of water. Clement hired Antonio Sangallo the Younger to dig a new well that would ensure an abundant supply in case the pope should have to ride out another siege. Sangallo set about sinking a shaft into the tufa at the lowest end of town. His design was unique: He equipped the well with a pair of wide spiral staircases, lit by 72 internal windows, forming a double helix so that mule-drawn carts could descend on one ramp and come back up the other without colliding.

Although Clement and Charles V reconciled in 1530, the digging continued. Eventually, workers did strike water—almost 10 years later, at which point Clement was dead and the purpose moot. The shaft was nicknamed St. Patrick's Well when some knucklehead suggested that it vaguely resembled the cave into which the Irish saint was wont to withdraw and pray. What you get for descending the 248 steps is a close-up view of that elusive water, a good echo, and the sheer pleasure of climbing another 248 steps to get out.

In a small park just north of the well are the moss-covered foundation, the staircase, and a few column bases of the so-called **Tempio di Belvedere,** an Etruscan religious building from the early 5th century B.C. It miraculously never had a Roman temple or Christian church grafted onto it, as most temples throughout Tuscany and Umbria did. (Both the Romans and the early Christians recycled holy sites regularly, just changing the name of the honored divinity.)

South of the well, off Piazza Cahen, is a large millstone old men use as a card table. It lies next to a tall gatehouse that, aside from a few of the thicker defensive walls, is all that remains of the 1364 **Albornoz Fortress.** The remnants are laid out as a public **park** with fine views of the valley beyond Orvieto's wall.

Viale San Gallo (near the funicular stop on Piazza Cahen). ✆ **0763-343-768.** Admission 3.50€ adults; cumulative ticket with Museo Emilio Greco 4.50€ adults, 2.50€ children. Mar–Sept daily 9:30am–7pm; Oct–Feb daily 10am–6pm.

Crocifisso del Tufo ★ This 4th-century-B.C. necropolis of houselike stone tombs lies about halfway around the north edge of town off Viale Crispi (leading out of Piazza Cahen). On some tombs you can still see Etruscan script, written from right to left, on the door lintels, but the funerary urns and other relics found inside have long since been carted off to museums. What makes this site unique compared to similar necropolises in Etruria is that Etruscan Velzna, at least for a sizable period, apparently practiced some measure of democracy. None of the tombs is larger or otherwise set apart to denote the status of the occupants; rather, the whole affair is laid out in neat rows of uniform measure, indicating that citizens of differing ranks and occupations were interred side by side.

Viale Crispi. ✆ **0763-343-611.** www.archeopg.arti.beniculturali.it. Admission 3€ adults, free for children under 18 and seniors over 60 if they're citizens of E.U. countries. Apr–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–7pm (June–Sept until 11pm Sat); Oct–Mar Mon–Sat 8:30am–5:30pm.

SHOPPING

Ceramics shops line Via Duomo. They do cater to tourists, but you can still find some quite lovely pieces. You'll see the **Michelangeli** clan's **wood sculptures,** puppets, and stacked-contour reliefs all over town (the Osteria dell'Orso and Caffè Montanucci, recommended below, are decorated by them). Several Michelangeli showrooms (✆ **0763-342-660;** www.michelangeli.it) line either side of Via Gualverio Michelangeli. One of the top **antiques shops** in town is **Carlo & Cesare Bianchini,** Via Duomo 37 (✆ **0763-344-626**), which is filled with gorgeous *pietra dure* tabletops inlaid with semiprecious stones and marbles. But whether antique or made by a local artisan, they don't come cheap!

WHERE TO STAY

The hotel situation in Orvieto is pretty grim. Most inns are of a consistently bland modern motel style, and the price doesn't come close to justifying the accommodations. The more pleasant choices are profiled below. You might also want to try the **Hotel Aquila Bianca,** Via Garibaldi 13 (✆ **0763-341-246** or 0763-342-271; fax 0763-342-273; www.hotelaquilabianca.it), a modernized 19th-century palace whose 115€ to 125€ doubles are modern and comfortable, with little to displease but little to excite.

Hotel Duomo ★★ This board-rated three-star hotel offers an excellent price for the location, with comfortable rooms and amenities. A few rooms overlook the cathedral's striped flank. There's a small garden out front for alfresco breakfasts in summer.

Vicolo di Maurizio 7 (near the Duomo), 05018 Orvieto (TR). ✆ **0763-341-887** or 0763-393-849. Fax 0763-394-973. www.orvietohotelduomo.com. 18 units. 100€–130€ double; 120€–160€ junior suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 10€ in garage. **Amenities:** Concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

Hotel La Badia ★★ This 12th-century abbey has been a hotel since 1968 and is one of Orvieto's best accommodations, albeit out of the town proper (and the prices have risen alarmingly lately). The harmonious blend of wood and solid tufa-block walls helps the place retain a strong medieval air. The furnishings are a mix of modern and antiques that came from the Badia itself or the houses on its property, including some beautiful inlaid wood pieces. While the decor varies widely, it's singularly tasteful, with amusing touches like TVs fitted into old stone niches. Some rooms are palatial, others quite cramped; a few have lofts and can sleep families without crowding. The suites are roomy, and those in the outbuilding connected to the church have Jacuzzis and a view of Orvieto up on its rocky perch. Bathrooms on the first floor have been renovated, but the older ones elsewhere throughout La Badia carry their age well. Make sure you duck into the Romanesque church to see the frescoes and gorgeous cosmatesque-style floor.

Loc. La Badia 8 (about 3km/2 miles south of town off the road to Bagnoregio), 05019 Orvieto (TR). ✆ **0763-301-959.** Fax 0763-305-396. www.labadiahotel.it. 28 units. 172€–228€ double; 252€–304€ junior suite; 288€–344€. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Jan–Feb. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; massage; outdoor pool (June–Sept); room service (bar); outdoor tennis court. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

Hotel Maitani Overrated Just yards down from the front of the Duomo, this was ostensibly the top board-rated four-star hotel in town until the much friendlier Piccolomini (see below) opened up. The public spaces' modern art and a few Victorian chairs in the smallish rooms liven things up a bit, but the relatively high price tag, questionable comfort, and consistently surly service put me off. Although the location is key, it's still

 disappointing that, less than a block from the cathedral, only a few rooms are blessed with a sliver view of the facade; the breakfast terrace has a better view of it.

Via Lorenzo Maitani 5 (½ block from Duomo), 05018 Orvieto (TR). ✆ **0763-342-011.** Fax 0763-342-012. www.hotelmaitani.com. 39 units. 124€ double; 147€–168€ suite. Breakfast 10€. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 12€ in garage. Closed Jan 7–31. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; room service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, Internet, minibar.

Palazzo Piccolomini ★★★ Converted from a 16th-century *palazzo,* the family-run Piccolomini is the best hotel in town. It's quite a sight nicer (and far, far friendlier) than the Hotel Maitani (see above), and the price is excellent for the level of quality. It retains some palatial grandeur in echoey salons and the remnants of decorative frescoes, but the rooms tend toward the elegantly simple, with missionary-style wood furnishings, compact bathrooms, and modernized comforts (some suites have plush touches like heated towel racks and canopied beds). The ground-floor rooms have high vaulted ceilings, while those on the upper floors often have views across lichen-splayed roof tiles to the countryside. The basement breakfast room is carved out of the living tufa, and in late 1999 the owners of **Le Grotte del Funaro** (p. 434) opened a restaurant, La Taverna de' Mercanti, affiliated with the hotel underneath.

Piazza Ranieri 36 (2 blocks down from Piazza della Repubblica), 05018 Orvieto (TR). ✆ **0763-341-743.** Fax 0763-391-046. www.hotelpiccolomini.it. 32 units. 154€ double; 196€ triple; 244€ suite. AE, MC, V. Rates include breakfast. Parking 10€ in main public lot next door. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting; concierge; room service; smoke-free rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Orvieto's unofficial pasta is *umbrichelli,* simple flour-and-water spaghetti rolled out unevenly by hand and somewhat chewy—similar to the *pici* of southern Tuscany, but not as thick.

If you're in a hurry or on a budget and want to skip the restaurants below, try the cafeteria-style **Al San Francesco,** Via B. Cerretti 10 (✆ **0763-343-302**), off Via Maitani near the Duomo. It's hard to imagine, but the 450 seats actually fill up during lunch in summer, perhaps because you can get a full meal with wine for 12€ to 20€. The restaurant serves pizza in the evening and is open daily from noon to 3pm and 7 to 10:30pm (in winter, it closes Sun evenings).

La Palomba ORVIETANA A giant wooden Pinocchio marks the entrance to this unpretentious place, where sticking to the *"La Casa Consiglia"* ("The House Suggests") part of the menu will guarantee a memorable meal of good home cooking. After putting away a plate of warm *crostini misti,* try one of the specialty homemade *umbrichelli* dishes, either *tartufati* (in light butter-and-truffle sauce with fresh truffle grated on top) or *all'arrabbiata* (if it isn't *piccante* enough for you, add peperoncini-spiked olive oil). You can cool your mouth afterward with a simple omelet stuffed with cheeses or order the divine *filetto alla cardinale* (beef filet cooked in cardinal-colored red wine).

Via Cipriano Menente 16 (1st left under the arch at Piazza della Repubblica). ✆ **0763-343-395.** Reservations recommended. Primi 5€–9€; secondi 6€–10€. AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 12:30–2:15pm and 7:30–10pm. Closed 20 days in July and/or Aug.

Le Grotte del Funaro ★ UMBRIAN Dating from at least the 1100s, when the eponymous *funaro* (rope maker) had his workshop here, these grottoes carved into the tufa are filled with delectable smells of Umbrian cooking that draw Italians and tourists alike. The *bruschette miste Umbre* give their Tuscan *crostini* cousins a run for the money,

Tips A Cappuccino Break

On the main drag, **Caffè Montanucci,** Corso Cavour 21–23 (✆ **0763-341-261**), has since 1913 sold excellent local marmalades, chocolates, and homemade pastries against a backdrop of Michelangeli wood reliefs in an area teeming with locals in the morning and during the evening *passeggiata*. It's open Thursday through Tuesday from 6:30am to midnight and has public computers for Internet access.

The big selling point of **Hescanas,** Piazza del Duomo 31 (✆ **0763-342-578;** www.hescanas.it), is the outside patio of tables directly across from the cathedral's glittering facade. Its self-serve bar and *tavola calda* inside offer a good variety of panini, hot dishes, and packaged gelato.

Though otherwise an unremarkably normal Italian bar, tiny **Bar Duomo,** Largo L. Barzini 14 (✆ **0763-341-623**), is where locals invariably take me for a coffee break. It has a few tables scattered on the cobbles of its wide spot along Via Duomo, and to just about anyone aside from the unknown tourist who stops by, *barrista* Mario usually just glances up and asks "The usual?" as he starts preparing the cappuccino or Campari and soda; he already knows what his visitor wants. They make a sinful *cornetto fritto,* fried, sugar-encrusted, cream-stuffed croissant. It's open Tuesday through Sunday from 6am to 9pm.

but save room for the *ombrichelli del Funaro* (in a heavy sauce of tomatoes, sausage, artichokes, and mushrooms). For a sampling platter of the best grilled meats, order the *grigliata mista* (suckling pig, lamb, sausage, and yellow peppers) or a fish dish. The wine cellar offers just about every Orvieto Classico, including a good selection of half-bottles. After 10pm, the restaurant transforms into a piano bar; if you're here for lunch, retire outside to digest with the aid of the spectacular view from the terracelike piazza.

Via Ripa Serancia 41 (at the west end of town near Porta Maggiore; well signposted). ✆ **0763-343-276.** www.grottedelfunaro.it. Reservations recommended. Primi 9€–15€; secondi 10€–13€; pizza 5.50€–8.50€; fish-tasting menu without wine 32€; minimum 2 people. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight. Closed 1 week in July.

Tipica Trattoria Etrusca ★ ORVIETANA Squirreled away under a 15th-century palace, this trattoria was a workers' lunch hangout early in the 20th century. The vaulted ceilings are divided by magnificent tufa arches with a massive column at the center and modern art on the walls. Start with *umbrichelli dell'Orvietana* (in a spicy hot tomato sauce mixed with *pancetta*) or the homemade gnocchi. The *coniglio all'Etrusca* (rabbit in a green sauce of herbs and spices) is the house special secondo, but don't rule out the *abbacchio a scottadito* (lamb so piping hot it'll "burn your fingers"). Desserts tend toward antique Orvietan sweets, including fresh ricotta dusted with sugar, cinnamon, and a sweet berry sauce. Ask to see the wine cellars, carved from the living tufa beneath.

Via Lorenzo Maitani 10 (1 block from the Duomo). ✆ **0763-344-016.** Reservations recommended. Primi 4.50€–14€; secondi 6€–16€. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–3pm and 7:45–10pm. Closed Jan 7–Feb 7.

Trattoria dell'Orso ★★ UMBRIAN Chef Gabriele di Giandomenico uses the freshest local ingredients and traditions (mixed with those of his native Abruzzo) to create

memorable dishes that change daily, which is why his Neapolitan partner, Ciro Cristiano, prefers to recite them to you in delectable detail rather than break out the printed menu. In the tiny rooms surrounded by Michelangeli wood sculptures—including a remarkably realistic "lacy" curtain—you can sample primilike fresh homemade tagliatelle served perhaps with mushrooms and truffles, with broccoli, or with Neapolitan baby tomatoes, basil, and shredded scamorza cheese. The local specialty secondo is chicken with olives, or you can try Gabriele's *faraona* (game hen) stuffed with truffles.

Via della Misericordia 18–20. ✆ **0763-341-642.** Reservations recommended. Primi 6€–12€; secondi 6€–15€. AE, DC, MC. Wed–Sun 12:30–2:30pm and 7:30–10pm. Closed Feb, July, and Nov.

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Fast Facts

1 FAST FACTS: FLORENCE, TUSCANY & UMBRIA

AREA CODES Every city and its surrounding towns have a separate city code. The code for most of the Florence area is **055.**

AUTOMOBILE ORGANIZATIONS Italy's equivalent of AAA is the **Automobile Club d'Italia** (**ACI;** www.aci.it), a branch of the Touring Club Italiano. They're the people who respond when you place an emergency call to ✆ **116** for road breakdowns, though they do charge for this service if you're not a member. For information on how to become an ACI member see "By Car" under "Getting to Florence, Tuscany & Umbria" in chapter 3 (p. 55).

BUSINESS HOURS General open hours for **stores, offices,** and **churches** are from 9:30am to noon or 1pm and again from 3 or 3:30pm to 7:30pm. That early-afternoon shutdown is the *riposo,* the Italian *siesta.* Most stores close all day Sunday and many also on Monday (morning only or all day). Some shops, especially grocery stores, also close Thursday afternoons. Some services and business offices are open to the public only in the morning. Traditionally, **museums** are closed Mondays, and though some of the biggest stay open all day long, many close for *riposo* or are only open in the morning (9am–2pm is popular). Some churches open earlier in the morning, but the largest often stay open all day. **Banks** tend to be open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 1:30pm and 2:30 to 3:30pm or 3 to 4pm.

Use the *riposo* as the Italians do—take a long lunch, stroll through a city park, cool off in the Duomo, travel to the next town, or simply go back to your hotel to regroup your energies. The *riposo* is an especially welcome custom during the oppressive afternoon heat of August.

DRINKING LAWS There is no legal drinking age in Italy in the sense that a young person of any age can legally consume alcohol, but a person must be 16 years old in order to be served alcohol in a restaurant or a bar. Similarly, laws in other countries that exist in order to stamp out public drunkenness simply aren't quite as necessary in Italy where binge-drinking is unusual. (In fact, it doesn't take a very keen observer in Florence to note that most of the loud drunks at night aren't Italian.) Noise is the primary concern to city officials, and so bars generally close at 2am at the latest, though alcohol is commonly served in clubs after that. Bars in Florence will stop take-out sales at midnight. Supermarkets generally carry beer, wine, and sometimes spirits.

DRIVING RULES See "Getting There & Getting Around," p. 54.

ELECTRICITY Italy operates on a 220 volts AC (50 cycles) system, as opposed to the United States' 110 volts AC (60 cycle) system. You'll need a simple adapter plug (to make our flat pegs fit their round holes) and, unless your appliance is dual-voltage (as some hair dryers, travel irons, and computer devices are), an electrical currency converter. You can pick up the hardware at electronics, travel specialty

stores, luggage shops, airports, and from Magellan's catalog (www.magellans.com).

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES The **U.S. Embassy** is in Rome at Via Vittorio Veneto 119a (✆ **06-46-741;** fax 06-488-2672 or 06-4674-2217; www.usembassy.it). The **U.S. consulate in Florence**—for passport and consular services but *not* for visas—is at Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci 38 (✆ **055-266-951;** fax 055-284-088), open to drop-ins Monday through Friday from 9am to 12:30pm. Afternoons 2 to 4:30pm, the consulate is open by appointment only; call ahead. The **U.K. Embassy** is in Rome at Via XX Settembre 80a (✆ **06-4220-0001;** fax 06-4220-2334; www.britain.it), open Monday through Friday from 9:15am to 1:30pm. The **U.K. consulate in Florence** is at Lungarno Corsini 2 (✆ **055-284-133;** fax 055-219-112). It's open Monday to Friday 9:30am to 12:30pm and 2:30 to 4:30pm.

Of English-speaking countries, only the United States and Great Britain have consulates in Florence. Citizens of other countries must go to their consulates in Rome for help: The **Canadian** consulate in Rome is at Via Zara 30, on the fifth floor (✆ **06-445-981** or 06-44598-2905; www.canada.it), open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 4pm. **Australia**'s consulate in Rome is at Via Alessandria 215 (✆ **06-852-721;** fax 06-8527-2300; www.australian-embassy.it). The consular section is open Monday through Thursday from 8:30am to noon and 1:30 to 4pm. The immigration and visa office is open Monday to Thursday 10am to noon; telephone hours are from 10 to 11:30am. **New Zealand**'s Rome consulate is at Via Zara 28 (✆ **06-441-7171;** fax 06-440-2984), open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 12:45pm and 1:45 to 5pm.

EMERGENCIES Dial ✆ **113** for any emergency. You can also call ✆ **112** for the *carabinieri* (police), ✆ **118** for an ambulance, or ✆ **115** for the fire department. If your car breaks down, dial ✆ **116** for roadside aid courtesy of the Automotive Club of Italy.

GASOLINE (PETROL) *Benzina* (gas or petrol) is even more expensive in Italy than in the rest of Europe. Even a small rental car guzzles 40€ to 60€ for a fill-up. Unleaded gas is *senza piombo.* For more information see "Gasoline" in chapter 3 (p. 58).

HOLIDAYS Banks, government offices, post offices, and many stores, restaurants, and museums are closed on the following legal national holidays: January 1 (New Year's Day); January 6 (Epiphany); Easter Sunday and the following Monday (called *Pasquetta,* or Little Easter); April 25 (Liberation Day); May 1 (Labor Day); August 25 (Feast of the Assumption); November 1 (All Saint's Day); December 8 (Immaculate Conception); December 25 and December 26 (Santo Stefano). Florence also celebrates the feast of San Giovanni on June 24.

For more information on holidays see "Calendar of Events," in chapter 3.

HOSPITALS Thanks to socialized medicine, you can walk into almost any Italian hospital when ill and get taken care of speedily with no insurance questions asked, no forms to fill out, and no fee charged. They'll just give you a prescription and send you on your way. In Florence, the most central hospitals are the **Arcispedale di Santa Maria Nuova,** a block northeast of the Duomo on Piazza Santa Maria Nuova (✆ **055-27-581**), and the **Misericordia Ambulance Service,** on Piazza del Duomo across from Giotto's bell tower (✆ **055-212-222** for ambulance).

The **Tourist Medical Service,** Via Lorenzo il Magnifico 59, north of the Florence city center between the Fortezza del Basso and Piazza della Libertà (✆ **055-475-411**), is open 24 hours; take bus no. 8 or 80 to Viale Lavagnini, or bus no. 12 or night bus no. 91 to Via Poliziano.

For a **free translator** to help you describe your symptoms, explain the doctor's instructions, and aid in medical issues in general, call the volunteers at the **Associazione Volontari Ospedalieri** (**AVO; ✆ 055-425-0126** or 055-234-4567) Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 4 to 6pm and Tuesday and Thursday from 10am to noon.

INSURANCE Italy may be one of the safer places you can travel in the world, but accidents and setbacks can and do happen, from lost luggage to car crashes.

For information on traveler's insurance, trip-cancellation insurance, and medical insurance while traveling please visit www.frommers.com/planning.

INTERNET ACCESS Cybercafes are in healthy supply in most Italian cities. In smaller towns you may have a bit of trouble, but increasingly hotels are offering Wi-Fi throughout the rooms, although those in rural areas are not as likely to have a high-speed connection. In a pinch, hostels, local libraries, and, often, pubs will have some sort of terminal for access. For getting online in Florence, see its own "Fast Facts" section in chapter 5.

LANGUAGE Italians may not be quite as polished with their English as some of their European counterparts, but they've been hosting Anglophones for a long time now, and English is a regular part of any business day. In very rural parts, slow and clear speech, a little gesticulating, and a smile will go a long way. In Florence and other cities, you will probably be the twentieth English-speaking tourist they've spoken with that day. In a pinch, please refer to the phrasebook at the back of this book for some vacation essentials.

LEGAL AID Your embassy or consulate can provide a list of foreign attorneys should you encounter legal problems in Italy. In criminal cases, if you cannot afford an attorney, the local court will provide one for you.

MAIL At press time, the cost of sending a postcard or letter up to 20 grams, or a little less than an ounce, was .65€ to other European countries, .85€ to North America, and 1€ to Australia and New Zealand. Prices go up incrementally to 5.70€/8.70€/11.70€ for letters weighing up to 500 grams, or nearly one pound. For a full table, visit www.poste.it; there is an English version.

NEWSPAPERS & MAGAZINES The *International Herald Tribune* (published by the *New York Times* and with news catering to Americans abroad) and *USA Today* are available at just about every newsstand, even in smaller towns. You can find the *Wall Street Journal Europe,* European editions of *Time* and *Newsweek, The Economist,* and just about any major European newspaper or magazine at the larger kiosks. For events guides in English, see each individual city's "Visitor Information" listing.

PASSPORTS See www.frommers.com/planning for information on how to obtain a passport.

For Residents of Australia Contact the **Australian Passport Information Service** at **✆ 131-232,** or visit the government website at www.passports.gov.au.

For Residents of Canada Contact the central **Passport Office,** Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G3 (**✆ 800/567-6868;** www.ppt.gc.ca).

For Residents of Ireland Contact the **Passport Office,** Setanta Centre, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 (**✆ 01/671-1633;** www.irlgov.ie/iveagh).

For Residents of New Zealand Contact the **Passports Office** at **✆ 0800/225-050** in New Zealand or 04/474-8100, or log on to www.passports.govt.nz.

For Residents of the United Kingdom Visit your nearest passport office, major post office, or travel agency or contact the **United Kingdom Passport Service** at **✆ 0870/521-0410** or search its website at www.ukpa.gov.uk.

For Residents of the United States To find your regional passport office, either check the U.S. State Department website or call the **National Passport Information Center** toll-free number (✆ **877/487-2778**) for automated information.

POLICE For emergencies, call ✆ **113.** Italy has several different police forces, but there are only two you'll most likely ever need to deal with. The first is the urban *polizia,* whose city headquarters is called the *questura* and can help with lost and stolen property. The most useful branch—the cops to go to for serious problems and crimes—is the *carabinieri* (✆ **112**), a national order-keeping, crime-fighting civilian police force.

SMOKING Smoking has been eradicated from all restaurants and bars in Italy, as well as most hotels. That said, there are still smokers in Italy, and they tend to take the outside tables. Be aware that if you are keen for an outdoor table, you are essentially choosing a seat in the smoking section, and requesting that your neighbor not smoke may not be politely received.

TAXES There's no sales tax added onto the price tag of your purchases, but there is a 19% **value-added tax** (in Italy: IVA) automatically included in just about everything. For major purchases, you can get this refunded. Some five-star and four-star hotels don't include the 13% luxury tax in their quoted prices. Ask when making your reservation.

TELEPHONES See "Staying Connected," p. 71 in chapter 3.

TIME All of Italy is in the same Western European time zone; that is, GMT plus 1 hour.

TIPPING In **hotels,** a service charge is usually included in your bill. In family-run operations, additional tips are unnecessary and sometimes considered rude. In fancier places with a hired staff, however, you may want to leave a .50€ daily tip for the maid, pay the bellhop or porter 1€ per bag, and a helpful concierge 2€ for his or her troubles. In **restaurants,** 10% to 15% is almost always included in the bill—to be sure, ask *"è incluso il servizio?"*—but you can leave up to an additional 10%, especially for good service. At **bars and cafes,** a generous gesture is to leave a 1€ coin per drink on the counter for the barman, though it is hardly expected; if you sit at a table, leave 10% to 15% only if the service is good. **Taxi** drivers expect 10% to 15%.

TOILETS Public toilets in Tuscany and Umbria are practically nonexistent except at the train stations and highway gas stations, where they are sometimes pay toilets (.50€ usually does the trick). Standard practice in Italy is to pay for a .80€ cup of coffee at a bar and then ask to use the toilet—although, it's best to ask for both simultaneously as the restrooms in heavily touristy parts of Florence, Tuscany, and Umbria are sometimes "out of order."

VISAS Travelers from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.S., and the U.K. can visit Italy for up to 90 days without a visa, and can enter Italy with a valid passport. Visits of more than 90 days may require a visa, but the requirements vary depending on the purpose of your visit.

For more information on visas to visit or stay in Italy, go to the Foreign Ministry's English-language page at **www.esteri.it/visti/index_eng.asp**.

VISITOR INFORMATION See "Visitor Information" in each of the chapters for local websites and resources.

WATER Although most Italians take mineral water with their meals, tap water is safe everywhere. (Unsafe sources will be marked *"acqua non potabile."*) In fact, many cities are now urging their citizens to cut back on their plastic-wasting ways and turn back to the tap. If the water comes out cloudy, it's only the calcium or other minerals inherent in a water supply that often comes untreated from fresh springs. Also, the water from fountains in public parks is not only potable, it's often the best water you've ever tasted.

2 AIRLINE, HOTEL & CAR-RENTAL WEBSITES

MAJOR AIRLINES

The following airlines service Rome, Florence, and/or Pisa airports:

Air Canada
www.aircanada.com

Air France
www.airfrance.com

Alitalia
www.alitalia.com

American Airlines
www.aa.com

Austrian Airlines
www.austrianairlines.com

British Airways
www.british-airways.com

China Airlines
www.china-airlines.com

Continental Airlines
www.continental.com

Delta Air Lines
www.delta.com

EgyptAir
www.egyptair.com

El Al Airlines
www.elal.co.il

Emirates Airlines
www.emirates.com

Finnair
www.finnair.com

Iberia Airlines
www.iberia.com

Japan Airlines
www.jal.co.jp

Lufthansa
www.lufthansa.com

Olympic Airlines
www.olympicairlines.com

Swiss Air
www.swiss.com

Turkish Airlines
www.thy.com

United Airlines
www.united.com

US Airways
www.usairways.com

BUDGET AIRLINES

The following budget airlines service Rome, Florence, and/or Pisa airports:

Aegean Airlines
www.aegeanairlines.com

Aer Lingus
www.aerlingus.com

BMI Baby
www.bmibaby.com

easyJet
www.easyjet.com

Germanwings
www.germanwings.com

Ryanair
www.ryanair.com

SkyEurope
www.skyeurope.com

MAJOR HOTEL CHAINS

Best Western International
www.bestwestern.com

Four Seasons
www.fourseasons.com

Hilton Hotels
www.hilton.com

InterContinental Hotels & Resorts
www.ichotelsgroup.com

Sheraton Hotels & Resorts
www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton

Westin Hotels & Resorts
www.starwoodhotels.com/westin

CAR-RENTAL AGENCIES

Alamo
www.alamo.com

Auto Europe
www.autoeurope.com

Avis
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15 Useful Terms & Phrases

Tuscan, being the local lingo of Dante, is considered the purest form of Italian. (In Siena they will tell you that, actually, it's Sienese dialect that's perfect; proud Perugians in Umbria disagree, but the academics give the nod to Siena.) That means travel in Tuscany will help you learn the most letter-perfect Italian there is. Here are some key phrases and words to get you started.

1 BASIC ITALIAN VOCABULARY

English	Italian	Pronunciation
Thank you	**Grazie**	*Graht*-tzee-yey
Please	**Per favore**	*Pehr* fah-*vohr*-eh
Yes	**Si**	See
No	**No**	Noh
Good morning or good day	**Buongiorno**	Bwohn-*djor*-noh
Good evening	**Buona sera**	*Bwohn*-ah *say*-rah
Good night	**Buona notte**	*Bwohn*-ah *noht*-tay
How are you?	**Come sta?**	*Koh*-may *stah?*
Very well	**Molto bene**	*Mohl*-toh *behn*-ney
Goodbye	**Arrivederci**	Ahr-ree-vah-*dehr*-chee
Excuse me (to get attention)	**Scusi**	*Skoo*-zee
Excuse me (to get past someone on the bus)	**Permesso**	Pehr-*mehs*-soh
Where is . . . ?	**Dovè . . . ?**	Doh-*vey?*
the station	**la stazione**	lah stat-tzee-*oh*-neh
a hotel	**un albergo**	oon ahl-*behr*-goh
a restaurant	**un ristorante**	oon reest-ohr-*ahnt*-eh
the bathroom	**il bagno**	eel *bahn*-nyoh
To the right	**A destra**	Ah *dehy*-stra
To the left	**A sinistra**	Ah see-*nees*-tra
Straight ahead	**Avanti** (or **sempre diritto**)	Ahv-vahn-tee (*sehm*-pray dee-*reet*-toh)
I would like	**Vorrei**	Voh-*ray*
Some (of)	**Un po (di)**	Oon poh (dee)

English	Italian	Pronunciation
This/that	**Questo/quello**	*Qway*-sto/*qwell*-oh
A glass of	**Un bicchiere di**	Oon bee-key-*air*-ay-dee
(mineral) water	**acqua (minerale)**	*ah*-kwah (min-air-*ahl*-lay)
carbonated	**gassata** (or **con gas**)	gahs-*sah*-tah (kohn gahs)
uncarbonated	**senza gas**	*sen*-zah gahs
red wine	**vino rosso**	*vee*-no *roh*-soh
white wine	**vino bianco**	*vee*-no bee-*ahn*-koh
How much is it?	**Quanto costa?**	*Kwan*-toh *coh*-sta?
It's too much.	**È troppo.**	Ay *tro*-poh
The check, please.	**Il conto, per favore.**	Eel *kon*-toh *pehr* fah-*vohr*-eh
Can I see . . . ?	**Posso vedere . . . ?**	*Poh*-soh veh-*dare*-eh?
the church	**la chiesa**	la key-*ay*-zah
the fresco	**l'affresco**	lahf-*fres*-coh
When?	**Quando?**	*Kwan*-doh
Is it open?	**È aperto?**	Ay ah-*pair*-toe
Is it closed?	**È chiuso?**	Ay key-*you*-zoh
Yesterday	**Ieri**	Ee-*yehr*-ree
Today	**Oggi**	*Oh*-jee
Tomorrow	**Domani**	Doh-*mah*-nee
Breakfast	**Prima colazione**	*Pree*-mah coh-laht-tzee-*ohn*-ay
Lunch	**Pranzo**	*Prahn*-zoh
Dinner	**Cena**	*Chay*-nah
What time is it?	**Che ore sono?**	Kay *or*-ay *soh*-noh
Monday	**Lunedì**	Loo-nay-*dee*
Tuesday	**Martedì**	Mart-ay-*dee*
Wednesday	**Mercoledì**	Mehr-cohl-ay-*dee*
Thursday	**Giovedì**	Joh-vay-*dee*
Friday	**Venerdì**	Ven-nehr-*dee*
Saturday	**Sabato**	*Sah*-bah-toh
Sunday	**Domenica**	Doh-*mehn*-nee-kah

Numbers

1 **uno** (*ooh*-noh)
2 **due** (*doo*-ay)
3 **tre** (tray)
4 **quattro** (*kwah*-troh)
5 **cinque** (*cheen*-kway)
6 **sei** (say)
7 **sette** (*set*-tay)
8 **otto** (*oh*-toh)
9 **nove** (*noh*-vay)
10 **dieci** (dee-*ay*-chee)
11 **undici** (*oon*-dee-chee)
20 **venti** (*vehn*-tee)
21 **ventuno** (vehn-*toon*-oh)
22 **venti due** (*vehn*-tee *doo*-ay)
30 **trenta** (*trayn*-tah)
40 **quaranta** (kwah-*rahn*-tah)
50 **cinquanta** (cheen-*kwan*-tah)
60 **sessanta** (sehs-*sahn*-tah)
70 **settanta** (seht-*tahn*-tah)
80 **ottanta** (oht-*tahn*-tah)
90 **novanta** (noh-*vahnt*-tah)
100 **cento** (*chen*-toh)
1,000 **mille** (*mee*-lay)
5,000 **cinque milla** (*cheen*-kway *mee*-lah)
10,000 **dieci milla** (dee-*ay*-chee *mee*-lah)

2 ITALIAN MENU TERMS

FOODS & DISHES

Acciughe or Alici Anchovies.

Acquacotta "Cooked water," a watery vegetable soup thickened with egg and poured over stale bread.

Affettati misti Mix of various salami, prosciutto, and other cured meats; served as an appetizer.

Agnello Lamb.

Agnolotti Semicircular ravioli (often stuffed with meat and cheese together).

Amaretti Almond-flavored macaroons.

Anatra Duck.

Anguilla Eel.

Antipasti Appetizers.

Aragosta Lobster.

Arista di maiale Roast pork loin, usually served in slices, flavored with rosemary, garlic, and cloves.

Baccalà (alla livornese) Dried salted codfish (cooked in olive oil, white wine, garlic, and tomatoes).

Bistecca alla fiorentina Florentine-style steak, ideally made with Chianina beef, grilled over wood coals, and then brushed with olive oil and sprinkled with pepper and salt.

Bocconcini Small veal chunks sautéed in white wine, butter, and herbs. (Also the word for ball-shaped portions of any food, especially mozzarella.)

Bollito misto Assorted boiled meats.

Braciola Loin pork chop.

Branzino Sea bass.

Bresaola Air-dried, thinly sliced beef filet, dressed with olive oil, lemon, and pepper—usually an appetizer.

Bruschetta A slab of peasant bread grilled and then rubbed with a garlic clove, drizzled with olive oil, and sprinkled with salt; often served *al pomodoro* (with tomatoes).

Bucatini Fat, hollow spaghetti. Classically served *all'amatriciana* (with a spicy hot tomato sauce studded with pancetta [bacon]).

Cacciucco Seafood stew of Livorno in a spicy tomato base poured over stale bread.

Cacio or Caciotto Southern Tuscan name for pecorino cheese.

Calamari Squid.

Calzone Pizza dough folded with a number of stuffings, usually cheese and ham, before baking—like a pizza turnover.

Cannellini White beans, the Tuscan's primary vegetable.

Cannelloni Pasta tubes filled with meat and baked in a sauce (cream or tomato). The cheese version is usually called manicotti (though either name may be used for either stuffing).

Cantucci Twice-baked hard almond cookies, vaguely crescent-shaped and best made in Prato (where they're known as biscotti di Prato). The generic Italian word for them is *biscotti.*

Capocollo Aged sausage made mainly from pork necks.

Caprese A salad of sliced mozzarella and tomatoes lightly dressed with olive oil, salt, and pepper.

Capretto Kid.

Caprino Soft goat's-milk cheese.

Carciofi Artichokes.

Carpaccio Thin slices of raw cured beef, pounded flat and often served topped with arugula and parmigiano shavings.

Casalinga Home cooking.

Cavolfiore Cauliflower.

Cavolo Cabbage.

Ceci Chickpeas (garbanzo beans).

Cervelli Brains, often served *fritti* (fried).

Cervo Venison.

Cibrèo Stew of chicken livers, cockscombs, and eggs.

Cinghiale Wild boar.

Cipolla Onion.

Coniglio Rabbit.

Cozze Mussels.

Crespelle alla fiorentina Thin pancakes wrapped around ricotta and spinach, covered with tomatoes and cheese, and baked in a casserole.

Crostini Small rounds of bread toasted and covered with various pâtés, most commonly a tasty liver paste (or in Umbria *milza,* which is spleen).

Dentice Dentex; a fish similar to perch.

Fagioli Beans, almost always white cannellini beans.

Faraona Guinea hen.

Farro Emmer, a barleylike grain (often in soups).

Fave Broad fava beans.

Fegato Liver.

Focaccia Like pizza dough with nothing on it, this bready snack is laden with olive oil, baked in sheets, sprinkled with coarse salt, and eaten in slices plain or split to stuff as a sandwich. In Florence, it's also popularly called *schiacciato.*

Fontina Medium-hard cow's-milk cheese.

Formaggio Cheese.

Frittata Thick omelet stuffed with meats, cheese, and vegetables; often eaten between slices of bread as a sandwich.

Fritto misto A deep-fried mix of meats, often paired with fried artichokes or seafood.

Frutti di mare A selection of shellfish, often boosted with a couple of shrimp and some squid.

Funghi Mushrooms.

Fusilli Spiral-shaped pasta; usually long like a telephone cord, not the short macaroni style.

Gamberi (gamberetti) Prawns (shrimp).

Gelato Dense version of ice cream (*produzione propria* means homemade).

Gnocchi Pasta dumplings usually made from potatoes or ricotta and spinach.

Gorgonzola A soft, creamy blue-veined cheese with a very strong flavor and famously overpowering aroma.

Granchio Crab.

Granita Flavored ice; *limone* (lemon) is the classic.

Involtini Thinly sliced beef or veal rolled with veggies (often celery or artichokes) and simmered in its own juices.

Lampreda Lamprey (an eel-like fish).

Lenticchie Lentil beans; Italy's best come from Umbria's eastern Castellúccio plains.

Lepre Wild hare.

Lombatina di vitello Loin of veal.

Maiale Pork.

Manzo Beef.

Mascarpone Technically a cheese but more like heavy cream, already slightly sweet and sweetened more to use in desserts such as tiramisù.

Melanzana Eggplant (aubergine).

Merluzzo Cod.

Minestrone A little-bit-of-everything vegetable soup, usually flavored with chunks of cured ham.

Mortadella A very thick mild pork sausage; the original bologna (because the best comes from Bologna).

Mozzarella A nonfermented cheese, made from the fresh milk of a buffalo (but increasingly these days from a cow), boiled and then kneaded into a rounded ball; served as fresh as possible.

Oca Goose.

Orata Sea bream.

Orecchiette Small, thick pasta disks.

Osso buco Beef or veal knuckle braised in wine, butter, garlic, lemon, and rosemary; the marrow is a delicacy.

Ostriche Oysters.

Paglio e fieno Literally, "hay and straw," yellow (egg) and green (spinach) tagliatelle mixed and served with sauce.

Pancetta Salt-cured pork belly, rolled into a cylinder and sliced—the Italian bacon.

Panettone Sweet, yellow cakelike dry bread.

Panforte Any of a number of huge barlike candies vaguely akin to fruitcake; a dense, flat honey-sweetened mass of nuts, candied fruits, and spices.

Panino A sandwich.

Panna Cream (either whipped and sweetened for ice cream or pie; or heavy and unsweetened when included in pasta sauce).

Panzanella A cold summery salad made of stale bread soaked in water and vinegar mixed with cubed tomatoes, onion, fresh basil, and olive oil.

Pappa al Pomodoro A bready tomato soup.

Pappardelle alle lepre Very wide noodles in hare sauce.

Parmigiano Parmesan, a hard salty cheese usually grated over pastas and soups but also eaten alone; also known as *grana.*

Pecorino A rich sheep's-milk cheese; in Tuscany it's eaten fresh and soft.

Penne strascicate Hollow pasta quills in a creamy ragù (meat-and-tomato sauce).

Peperonata Stewed peppers and onions under oil; usually served cold.

Peperoncini Hot peppers.

Peperoni Green, yellow, or red sweet peppers.

Peposo Beef stew with peppercorns.

Pesce al cartoccio Fish baked in a parchment envelope.

Pesce spada Swordfish.

Piccione Pigeon.

Pici or Pinci A delicious homemade pasta made with just flour, water, and olive oil, rolled in the hands to produce lumpy, thick, chewy spaghetti to which sauce clings. This local name is used around Siena and to its south.

Pinzimonio Olive oil with salt and pepper into which you dip raw vegetables. If the oil is flavored with garlic and anchovies, it's called *Bagna cauda.*

Piselli Peas.

Pizza Comes in two varieties: *rustica* or *a taglio* (by the slice) and *al frono* in a pizzeria (large, round pizzas for dinner with a thin, crispy crust). Specific varieties include *margherita* (plain pizza of tomatoes, mozzarella, and basil), *napoletana* (tomatoes, oregano, mozzarella, and anchovies), *capricciosa* (a naughty combination of prosciutto, artichokes, olives, and sometimes egg or anchovies), and *quattro stagione* (four seasons of fresh vegetables, sometimes also with ham).

Polenta Cornmeal mush, ranging from soupy to a dense cakelike version related to cornbread; often mixed with mushrooms and other seasonal fillings, served plain alongside game or sometimes sliced and fried.

Pollo Chicken; *alla cacciatore* is huntsman style, with tomatoes and mushrooms cooked in wine; *alla diavola* is spicy hot grilled chicken; *al mattone* is cooked under a hot brick.

Polpette Small veal meatballs.

Polpo Octopus.

Pomodoro Tomato (plural *pomodori*).

Porcini Huge tree mushrooms, best eaten grilled like a steak.

Porri Leeks.

Rape Turnips.

Ribollita A thick, almost stewlike vegetable soup made with black cabbage, olive oil, celery, carrots, and whatever else *Mamma* has left over, all poured over thick slabs of peasant bread.

Ricotta A soft, fluffy, bland cheese made from the watery whey (not curds, as most cheese) and often used to stuff pastas. *Ricotta salata* is a salted, hardened version for nibbling.

Risotto Rice, often arborio, served very watery and sticky.

Rombo Turbot fish.

Salsa verde Green sauce, made from capers, anchovies, lemon juice and/or vinegar, and parsley.

Salsicce Sausage.

Saltimbocca Veal scallop topped with a sage leaf and a slice of prosciutto and simmered in white wine.

Salvia Sage.

Sarde Sardines.

Scaloppine Thin slices of meat, usually veal.

Scamorza An air-dried (sometimes smoked) cheese similar to mozzarella; often sliced and grilled or melted over ham in a casserole, giving it a thin crust and gooey interior.

Schiacciato See "Focaccia."

Scottiglia Stew of veal, chicken, various game, and tomatoes cooked in white wine.

Semifreddo A cousin to *gelato* (ice cream), it's a way of taking nonfrozen desserts (tiramisù, zuppa inglese) and freezing and moussing them.

Seppia Cuttlefish (halfway between a squid and small octopus); its ink is used for flavoring and coloring in certain pastas and risotto dishes.

Sogliola Sole.

Spezzatino Beef or veal stew, often with tomatoes.

Spiedino A shish kebob (skewered bits of meat, onions, and slices of tomato or peppers grilled).

Spigola A fish similar to sea bass or grouper.

Spinaci Spinach (cooked to death).

Stoccafisso Air-dried cod.

Stracciatella Egg-drop soup topped with grated cheese.

Stracotto Overcooked beef, wrapped in bacon and braised with onion and tomato for hours until it's so tender it dissolves in your mouth.

Strangozzi That *a* can be any vowel; this is the name for *pici* (see above) used around Assisi, Spoleto, and southeast Umbria.

Strozzapreti Ricotta-and-spinach dumplings, usually served in tomato sauce; literally "priest chokers." Also called *strangolaprete.*

Stufato Beef pot roast in wine, broth, and veggies.

Tacchino Turkey.

Tagliatelle Flat noodles.

Tartufo (1) Truffles; (2) An ice cream ball made with a core of fudge, a layer of vanilla, a coating of chocolate, and a dusting of cocoa; order it *affogato* (drowning), and they'll pour brandy over it.

Tiramisù Classic Italian dessert, made by layering ladyfingers soaked in espresso (and often liqueur) with sweetened mascarpone cheese and then dusted with cocoa. Its name means "pick me up."

Tonno Tuna.

Torta A pie. *Alla nonna* is Grandma's style and usually is a creamy lemony pie; *alle mele* is an apple tart; *al limone* is lemon; *alle fragole* is strawberry; *ai frutti di bosco* is with berries.

Torta al testo A flat, unleavened bread baked on the hearthstone and often split to be filled with sausage, spinach, or other goodies.

Tortellini Rings or half-moons of pasta stuffed with ricotta and spinach or chopped meat (chicken and veal). Sometimes also called *tortelli* and *tortelloni.*

Trippa Tripe (cow's stomach lining). Served *alla fiorentina* means strips or squares of it casseroled with tomatoes and onions, topped with grated parmigiano cheese.

Trota Trout.

Umbrichelli Also *ombrichelli,* a slightly thinner version of *pici* (see above) served in Orvieto and southwest Umbria.

Vermicelli Very thin spaghetti.

Vitello Veal. A *vitellone* is an older calf about to enter cowhood.

Vongole Clams.

Zabaglione/zabaione A custard made of whipped egg yolks, sugar, and Marsala wine.

Zampone Pig's feet, usually stewed for hours.

Zuccotto A tall liqueur-soaked sponge cake, stuffed with whipped cream, ice cream, chocolate, and candied fruits.

Zuppa Soup. Popular varieties are *fagioli e farro* (beans and barley), *porri e patate* (potato-leek), *di pane* (bread and veggies; another name for ribollita), and *pavese* (eggs poached in boiling broth and poured over toasted peasant bread).

Zuppa inglese An English trifle, layered with liqueur-soaked ladyfingers and chocolate or vanilla cream.

3 ARCHITECTURAL & ART TERMS

ARCHITECTURE

Ambulatory Continuation of the side aisles to make a walkway around the chancel space behind the main altar of a church.

Apse The semicircular space behind the main altar of a church.

Arcade A series of arches supported by columns, piers, or pilasters.

Architrave The long vertical element lying directly across the tops of a series of columns (the lowest part of an entablature); or, the molding around a door or window.

Badia Abbey.

Baldacchino (also **ciborium**) A stone canopy over a church altar.

Basilica A form of architecture first used for public halls and law courts in ancient Roman cities. Early Christians adopted the form—a long rectangular room, divided into a central nave with side aisles but no transept—to build their first large churches.

Bay The space between two columns or piers.

Bifore Divided vertically into two sections.

Blind Arcade An arcade of pilasters (the arches are all filled in), a defining architectural feature of the Romanesque style.

Caldarium The hot tub or steam room of a Roman bath.

Campanile A bell tower, usually of a church but also those of public buildings; it's often detached or flush against the church rather than sprouting directly from it.

Cantoria Small church singing gallery, usually set into the wall above the congregation's heads.

Capital The top of a column. The classical "orders" (types) are **Doric** (plain), **Ionic** (with scrolls, called volutes, at the corners), and **Corinthian** (leafy). There's also **Tuscan** (even simpler than Doric; the column is never fluted or grooved, and usually has no base) and **Composite** (Corinthian superimposed with Ionic). In many paleo-Christian and Romanesque churches, the capital is carved with primitive animal and human heads or simple biblical scenes.

Cappella Italian for chapel.

Caryatid A column carved to resemble a woman (see also ***telamon***).

Cattedrale Cathedral (also ***Duomo***).

Cavea The semicircle of seats in a classical theater.

Cella The innermost, most sacred room of a Roman pagan temple.

Chancel Space around the high altar of a church, generally reserved for the clergy and the choir.

Chiesa Church.

Chiostro Italian for cloister.

Ciborium (1) Another word for ***baldacchino*** (above); (2) Box or tabernacle containing the Host (the symbolic body and blood of Christ taken during communion).

Cloister A roofed walkway open on one side and supported by columns; usually used in the plural because often four of them faced one another to make interior open-air courtyards, centered around small gardens, found in monasteries and convents.

Collegiata A collegiate church, having a chapter of canons and a dean or provost to rule over it but lacking the bishop's seat that would make it a cathedral.

Colonnaded Lined with columns.

Cornice Protruding section, usually along the very top of a wall, a facade, or an entablature; a pediment is usually framed by a lower cornice and two sloping ones.

Cortile Courtyard.

Crenellated Topped by a regular series of protrusions and crevices; these **battlements** often ring medieval buildings or fortresses to aid in defense.

Crypt An underground burial vault; in churches, usually found below the altar end and in Italy often the remnant of an older version of the church.

Cupola Dome.

Cyclopean Adjective describing an unmortared wall built of enormous stones by an unknown central Italian pre-Etruscan people. The sheer size led the ancients to think they were built by the Cyclopes.

Duomo Cathedral (from *domus,* "house of God"), often used to refer to the main church in town even if it doesn't have a *cathedra,* or bishop's seat—the prerequisite for a cathedral.

Entablature Section riding above a colonnade, made up of the architrave (bottom), frieze (middle), and cornice (top).

Forum The main square in a Roman town; a public space used for assemblies, courts, and speeches and on which important temples and civic buildings were located.

Frieze A decorative horizontal band or series of panels, usually carved in relief and at the center of an entablature.

Frigidarium Room for cold baths in a Roman bath.

Greek Cross Building ground plan in the shape of a cross whose arms are of equal length.

Latin Cross Building ground plan in the shape of a Crucifix-style cross, where one arm is longer than the other three (this is the nave).

Liberty Italian version of Art Nouveau or Art Deco, popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Loggia Roofed porch, balcony, or gallery.

Lozenge A decorative regularly sided diamond (square on its corner), either marble inlay or as a sunken depression, centered in the arcs of a blind arcade on Romanesque architecture.

Lunette Semicircular wall space created by various ceiling vaultings or above a door or window; often it's decorated with a painting, mosaic, or relief.

Matroneum In some paleo-Christian and early Romanesque churches, the gallery (often on the second floor) reserved for women, who were kept separate from the men during Mass.

Narthex Interior vestibule of a church.

Nave The longest section of a church, usually leading from the front door to the altar, where the worshipers sit; often divided into aisles.

Palazzo Traditionally a palace or other important building; in contemporary Italian it refers to any large structure, including office buildings (and has become the common way to refer to a city block, no matter how many separate structures form it).

Paleo-Christian Early Christian, used generally to describe the era from the 5th to early 11th century.

Pediment A wide gable at the top of a facade or above a doorway.

Piano Nobile The primary floor of a palace where the family would live, usually the second (American) but sometimes the third floor. It tends to have higher ceilings and larger rooms and be more highly decorated than the rest of the *palazzo.* The ground floor was usually for storage or shops and the attic for servants.

Pier A rectangular vertical support (like a column).

Pietra forte A dark gray ocher-tinged limestone mined near Florence. Harder than its cousin ***pietra serena*** (see below), it was used more sparingly in Florentine architecture.

Pietra serena A soft, light-gray limestone mined in the Florentine hills around Fiesole and one of the major building blocks of Florence's architecture—for both the ease with which it could be worked and its color, used to accent door jambs and window frames in houses and columns and chapels in churches.

Pieve A parish church; in the countryside, often primarily a baptismal site.

Pilaster Often called pilaster strip, it's a column, either rounded or squared off, set into a wall rather than separate from it.

Porta Italian for door or city gate.

Portico A porch.

Refectory The dining room of a convent or monastery, which, from the Renaissance on, was often painted with a topical Last Supper to aid in religious contemplation at the dinner table.

Sacristy The room in a church that houses the sacred vestments and vessels.

Sanctuary Technically the holiest part of a church, the term is used to refer to the area just around or behind the high altar.

Spandrel Triangular wall space created when two arches in an arcade curve away from each other (or from the end wall).

Spoglio Architectural recycling; the practice of using pieces of an older building to help raise a new one. (Roman temples were popular mines for both marble and columns to build early churches.)

Sporti Overhanging second story of a medieval or Renaissance building supported by wooden or stone brackets.

Stele A headstone.

Stemma Coat of arms.

Stucco Plaster composed of sand, powdered marble, water, and lime; often molded into decorative relief, formed into statuary, or applied in a thin layer to the exterior of a building.

Telamon A column sculpted to look like a man (also see ***caryatid***).

Tepidarium The room for a warm bath in a Roman bath.

Terme Roman baths, usually divided into the caldarium, tepidarium, and frigidarium.

Torre Tower.

Transept The lateral cross-arm of a cruciform church, perpendicular to the nave.

Travertine A whitish or honey-colored form of porous volcanic tufa mined near Tivoli. The stone from which ancient Rome was built.

Tribune The raised platform from which an orator speaks; used to describe the raised section of some churches around and behind the altar from which Mass is performed.

Two-light Of a window, divided vertically into two sections (see also **bifore**). A three-light window is divided vertically into three sections.

Tympanum The triangular or semicircular space between the cornices of a pediment or between the lintel above a door and the arch above it.

PAINTING, SCULPTURE & CERAMICS

Ambone Italian for pulpit.

Amphora A two-handled jar with a tapered neck used by the ancients to keep wine, oil, and other liquids.

Arriccio The first, rough layer of plaster laid down when applying the art of fresco to a wall. On this layer, the artist makes the rough *sinopia* sketches.

Bottega The workshop of an artist. (On museum signs, the word means the work was created or carried out by apprentices or assistants in the stated master's workshop.)

Bozzetto A small model for a larger sculpture (or sketch for a painting); in the later Renaissance and baroque eras, it also came to mean the tiny statuettes turned out for their own sake to satisfy the growing demand among the rich for table art.

Bucchero Etruscan black earthenware pottery.

Canopic vase Etruscan funerary vase housing the entrails of the deceased.

Cartoon In Italian *cartone,* literally "big paper," the full-size preparatory sketch made during the art of fresco.

Chiaroscuro Using patches of light and dark colors in painting to model figures and create the illusion of three dimensions. (Caravaggio was a master at also using the technique to create mood and tension.)

Cinerary urn Vase or other vessel containing the ashes of the deceased; Etruscan ones were often carved with a relief on the front and, on the lid, a half-reclining figure representing the deceased at a banquet.

Contrapposto A twisted pose in a figure, first used by the ancients and revived by Michelangelo; an earmark of the Mannerist school.

Diptych A painting in two sections.

Ex voto A small plaque, statue, painting, or other memento left by a supplicant, signifying either his or her gratitude to a saint or special Madonna, or imploring the saint's help in some matter; particularly revered icons are often surrounded by them.

Fresco The multistep art of creating a painting on fresh plaster (*fresco* means "fresh").

Graffiti Incised decorative designs, usually repetitive, on an outer wall made by painting the surface in two thin layers (one light, the other dark), then scratching away the top layer to leave the designs in contrast.

Grotesques Carved or painted faces, animals, and designs, often deliberately exaggerated or ugly; used to decorate surfaces and composite sculptures (such as fountains).

Illuminated Describing a manuscript or book, usually a choir book or Bible, that has been decorated with colorful designs, miniatures, figures, scenes, and fancy letters, often produced by anonymous monks.

Intarsia Inlaid wood, marble, precious stones, or metal.

Majolica Tin-glazed earthenware pottery usually elaborately painted; a process pioneered and mastered in Italy in the 14th to 17th century.

Pala Altarpiece.

Pietra dura The art of inlaying semiprecious stones to form patterns and pictures; often called Florentine mosaic and increasingly popular from the late 15th century on.

Pinacoteca Painting gallery.

Polyptych A panel painting having more than one section that's hinged so it can be folded up. Two-paneled ones are called ***diptychs*** (see above), three-paneled ones ***triptychs*** (see below). Any more panels use the general term.

Porphyry Any igneous rock with visible shards of crystals suspended in a matrix of fine particles.

Predella Small panel or series of panels below the main part of an altarpiece, often used to tell a story of Christ's Passion or a saint's life comic-strip style.

Putti Cherubs (singular *putto*); chubby naked toddler boys sculpted or painted, often with wings.

Sarcophagus A stone coffin or casket.

Schiacciato Literally "flattened." A sculpture form pioneered by Donatello; figures are carved in extremely low relief so that from straight on they give the illusion of three-dimensionality and great depth, but from the side are oddly squashed.

Sfumato A painting technique, popularized by Leonardo da Vinci, as important as perspective in achieving the illusion of great depth. The artist cloaks distant objects (usually landscape features like hills) in a filmy haziness; the farther away the object, the blurrier it appears, and the more realistic the distance seems.

Stoup A holy-water basin.

Tondo A round painting or sculpture.

Trecento The 14th century (in Italian, literally 1300s), often used to describe that era of art dominated by the styles of Giotto and the International Gothic (see "Florence, Tuscany & Umbria's Art & Architecture" in chapter 2).

Triptych A painting in three sections.

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Isola d'Elba
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Forte dei Marmi
Viareggio
Torre d. Lago
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