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TUSCANY REGION UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN PRIVATE DAY TOUR FROM ROME



TOUR DESCRIPTION

Dear friends, Tuscany is one of the most loved regions by foreign tourists, proliferating of exceptional artistic and food & wine inspirations thanks to the dense network of **"Strade del Gusto- Roads of Taste"** scattered throughout the territory and masterpieces of strong international appeal, one above all the **"David"** by Michelangelo, one of the most famous sculptures in the world. Cradle of the Italian Renaissance, Florence and its historic center, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, would be enough to retrace the history of the entire country.

This excursion partly draws inspiration from the novel by the writer Frances Meyer, *Under the Tuscan Sun*. After buying the villa Bramasole in Cortona to spend the holidays there, she begins to write her stories of days spent between the renovation of the house and his walks in the medieval town in search of typical local products. Thus the book was born.

But this excursion will also allow you to get to know another city in Tuscany, the beautiful Montepulciano, with its Renaissance palaces and the Nobile wine that distinguishes it and makes it famous all over the world.

-CORTONA-

The city, perched on the steep slopes of a hill of olive trees on the Val di Chiana,(Chiana Valley) near Lake Trasimeno, occupies a splendid panoramic position. Before passing to the Romans, it belonged to the League of the Twelve Etruscan Cities. The Etruscan city walls were replaced in medieval times, by the ramparts, which still exist today and are dominated by an imposing fortress.

The city, absorbed by Florence in 1411, retains its Renaissance appearance as evidenced by some buildings, the steep cobbled streets and irregular squares flanked by arches and monuments.

Its great fame derives from having given birth to great masters. In painting, Luca Signorelli (1450-1523), revealed himself as the precursor of Michelangelo for the dramatic temperament and sculptural plasticity of the paintings. He died falling from the scaffolding he was using to fresco Villa Passerini at east of Cortona.

Among the architects the name of Domenico Bernabei, known as Boccadoro, stands out. Yet, Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669), painter and architect, one of the greatest masters of the Roman Baroque. He was a decorator with great imagination and technical ability. He was responsible for the façade of the church of Santa Maria della Pace in Rome and the decoration of the Pitti Palaces in Florence and Palazzo Barberini in Rome.

The inhabitants of Cortona are particularly devoted to St. Francis who founded the hermitage of the cells, to Santa Margherita, the Magdalene of the thirteenth century, and to Friar Elia, the first companion and disciple of St. Francis.

Palazzo Comunale- In the central Piazza della Repubblica on the east side is the Palazzo Comunale, dating back to the 14th century with its characteristic clock tower now symbols of Cortona and that was erected in the 16th century; according to tradition, the building stands where the ancient Roman Forum was once located, exactly where the Cardo and the Decumano (the two main streets) met. The bell tower was built together with the imposing access staircase to the building. Also in the square we find the Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo, (the highest in the square), a splendid building used as the residence of Cardinal Passerini in the 16th century.

Piazza Luca Signorelli- Then you can move to the communicating Piazza Signorelli, where the Palazzo Casali (XVI century) resides. To the right of Palazzo Casali stands the Teatro Signorelli (XIX century), in neoclassical style, enriched by a beautiful loggia with seven arches.

The Duomo- The history of the co-cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, Cathedral of Cortona, begins as early as the year 1000, when it was built

as a parish church on the remains of an ancient pagan temple. The facade still shows signs of the original Romanesque style, while the interior, divided into three naves, is decorated in Renaissance style.

The Cathedral keeps a very rich artistic heritage, including *L'Adorazione dei Pastori* (The Adoration of the Shepherds) by Pietro da Cortona, the *Discesa dello Spirito Santo* (Descent of the Holy Spirit) by Tommaso Bernabei, and other fine paintings, also attributed to Signorelli's workshop.

Some furnishings and canvases from the co-cathedral are now kept in the nearby Museo Diocesano (Diocesan Museum).

In the south-eastern part of Cortona we find Piazza Garibaldi where the obelisk dedicated to Giuseppe Garibaldi is located in its center; from here you can enjoy a unique view of the Val di Chiana that comes to scrutinize the edges of Umbria where you can see the Lake Trasimeno, Montepulciano and on clear days Mount Amiata. Stop here to enjoy this breathtaking view.

More Tips

1- The MAEC museum

It is currently divided into two main sections dedicated respectively to the Etruscan Academy and to the Etruscan and Roman city of Cortona; the first contains the testimonies of the life and no stop activity of the city's most famous cultural institution, starting from the first bequests arranged by the academics of the 18th and 19th centuries or from the purchases gradually made: among the most valuable works, real symbols of "Cortonese culture" are the Etruscan Bronze Chandelier, the so-called *Musa Polimnia*, the collection of Etruscan and Roman ceramics and bronzes, the Corbelli collection of materials from the Egyptian civilization; there is no lack of more recent testimonies, such as the impressive collection of art and furniture objects already held by the Tommasi Baldelli family, one of the most famous families in the city, or the series of works by the Cortonese painter Gino Severini, one of the founders of futurism, sold to Cortona by the Maestro himself. Furthermore, many

archaeological materials from the city and the territory are presented, which connect with the most modern section dedicated to their development.

2- The Diocesan Museum

It is located in Piazza del Duomo, inside the former church of the Gesù, and collects various objects and works of art from local churches belonging to the diocese. The art collection was founded in 1945 and preserves important works by Pietro Lorenzetti, Beato Angelico, Bartolomeo della Gatta, Sassetta and Luca Signorelli, as well as sacred furnishings of considerable value. The exhibition itinerary begins with the only ancient object present of the highest quality, the Roman sarcophagus with the battle between Dionysus and the Amazons, datable to the 2nd century AD and found near the Cathedral.

3- The Girifalco Fortress.

The ancient fortified fortress was completely renovated in the 1500s, in the Medici era. We are at an altitude of 651m above sea level in an area that dominates the entire Valdichiana Valley below and whose occupation has occurred since the Etruscan-Roman age, first as a sacred and defensive area then as an area of only control and defense. From survived documents, we know that the first example of a fortress was found here as early as 1258, of which only sporadic visions remain in fourteenth-sixteenth century paintings, especially in the tondo by Luca Signorelli preserved in the Museum of the Etruscan Academy and sporadic remains of masonry in the base of the present tower. The Renaissance building has a trapezoidal four-sided base and is set on four angular bastions of different shapes to better adapt to the roughness of the ground. Currently the fortress, owned by the municipality, is open to the public in the summer and is about to become an important center for contemporary art as well as a space used for cultural events and demonstrations.

4- The Basilica of Santa Margherita

The sanctuary is dedicated to the figure of Santa Margherita, patron saint of Cortona and a Franciscan tertiary (the Secular Franciscan tertiary is generally a layman, called to make his earthly journey by adhering to Franciscan spirituality) and to the subsequent cultural and spiritual activity of the Observant Franciscans. On the death of the Saint (February 22, 1297) it was decided to build a church in her honor, next to the ancient church of San Basilio that Margaret herself had restored after choosing it as a place of penance and prayer. In 1304 the sacred building was already built, but it continued to be embellished with important frescoes throughout the fourteenth century. Only a few fragments of this mural cycle have survived, preserved in the Diocesan Museum, but evidence of this is preserved in a seventeenth century code that documents the murals lost in 1653 with twenty-one watercolor scenes when, due to their poor state of conservation, they were dull. The analysis of the surviving fragments leads us to date them around 1335 and to attribute them to the workshop of one or both of the Lorenzetti brothers. In 1385 the church was entrusted to the Olivetan monks, replaced in 1389 by the Minori Osservanti who still care for it and welcome visitors today. In August 1927 it was elevated to the dignity of a minor basilica.

5- Church of Santa Maria Nuova

Just 15 minutes walk from Piazza della Repubblica is the church of Santa Maria Nuova, which is part of the diocese of Arezzo-Cortona-Sansepolcro. The church was built in the mid-sixteenth century by Giorgio Vasari. The building is extremely interesting as regards the floor plan, conceived according to a centralized scheme, with a greek cross inscribed in a square and dominated by the main dome (completed only in the seventeenth century). Internally, the four mighty pillars rise on which the drum of the dome is set. On the sides, the four arms of the cross are covered by a barrel vault, while four small domes rise over the corner spaces. Among the works of art, the Nativity by Alessandro Allori, San Carlo Borromeo bringing Communion to the plague victims by Baccio

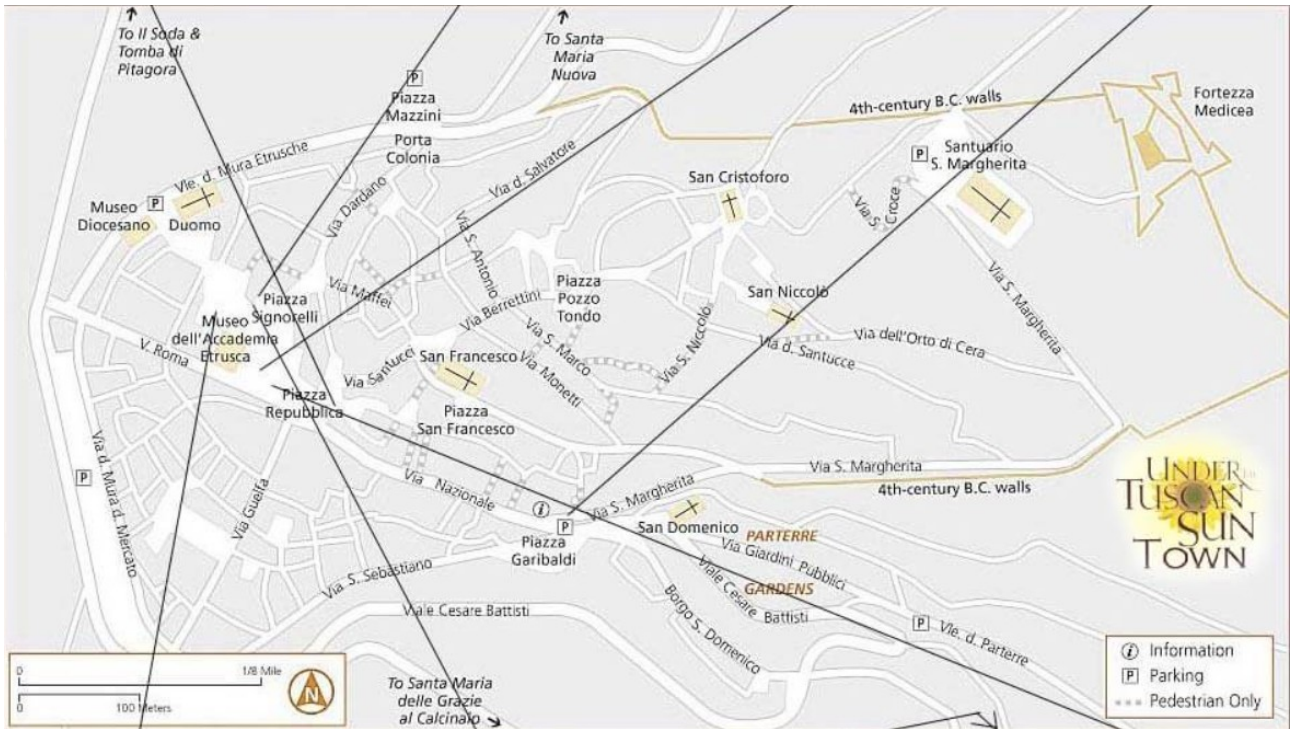
Ciarpi, the Annunciation by Empoli. From the church square you can enjoy a fantastic view over an unspoiled valley.

6- Villa Bramasole

An American writer, Frances Mayes, buys and renovates a farmhouse in the Tuscan countryside, near Cortona, and there she begins to spend the summers. The landscape is enchanting, the climate very sweet, the food delicious. And from the charms of an ideal life, punctuated by the rites of the countryside, the memoir is born, which has fascinated America for the beauty of the environment, but also for the quality of the writing that describes it, evocative, intense, capable of convey with almost tangible evidence the pleasure of life among the colors, aromas, flavors, cooking recipes collected and proposed by the author, of an Italy to discover or rediscover. Today the villa is a destination for foreign tourists from all over the world in search of that atmosphere that reigns in the best-selling book "Under the Tuscan Sun".

The map below highlights the locations used for filming the movie within the town of Cortona. The scene of the fountain was filmed at Piazza Signorelli, however, it is important to note that the fountain was a prop created specifically for the movie. The original fountain of Cortona is located at the Parterre Park.

Clearly visible, among the movie's locations, are Piazza della Repubblica, Piazza Luca Signorelli and the homonymous theater, via Santa Margherita, piazza Garibaldi.



Michelin Restaurants in Cortona

Restaurant Osteria del Teatro, via Maffei 2 Cortona- from 38 to 50€

Tuscan Cuisine. A number of rooms with open fireplaces combine to create this trattoria's warm and lively atmosphere that is unmistakably reminiscent of a love for the theatre.

Phone +39 0575 630556

Restaurant La Bucaccia, via Ghibellina 17, Cortona- from 29 to 45€

Regional Cuisine. Housed in an old 13th century palace built on a Roman road (part of which can still be seen in the main dining room), this restaurant serves exquisite regional cuisine including an excellent selection of cheeses and Chianini beef dishes. Romano offers all guests a warm welcome and also organises cookery classes.

Phone +39 0575 606039

-MONTEPULCIANO-

From Cortona it takes about 40 minutes to Montepulciano.

According to legend, **Montepulciano** was founded by the Etruscan King Lars Porsena from Clusium (modern Chiusi). Recent findings prove that a settlement was in existence in the 4th -3rd centuries b.C. In Roman times it was the seat of a garrison guarding the main roads of the area.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, it developed as a religious center under the Lombards. In the 12th century it was repeatedly attacked by the Republic of Siena, which the Poliziani (it is the name of the inhabitants of Montepulciano) faced with the help of the towns Perugia and Orvieto, and sometimes Florence. The 14th century was characterized by constant struggles between the local noble families, until the Del Pecora family became rulers of the town. From 1390, Montepulciano was a loyal ally (and later possession) of Florence and, until the mid-16th century, lived a period of splendour with architects such as Antonio da Sangallo the Elder, Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola, Baldassarre Peruzzi, Ippolito Scalza and others, building luxurious residences and other edifices here. In 1559, when Siena was conquered by Florence and Montepulciano lost its strategic role, its importance declined.

After the unification of Italy and the drying of the Val di Chiana, the town remained the most important agricultural centre in the area, while the industrial activities moved mostly next to Chiusi, which was nearer to the railroad being built in that period.

A competitive "barrel race through the city" called the Bravio delle botti has been held on the last Sunday of August since the 14th century.

The "Vino Nobile" of Montepulciano, of the color of ruby, has even been celebrated by poets.

Montepulciano, famous for the wine to which it gives its name, stands on a hill 600 meters above sea level: from this height it is easy to get lost with the look between the green Tuscan hills, the cultivation of olive trees and vineyards and the cypress trees that mark pleasantly the whole

landscape. From the Town Hall the view reaches as far as the Sibillini and the Cimone Mountains and when the air is particularly clear the Gran Sasso of Italy in Abruzzo as well.

"" Poliziano, Sir, was born in Montepulciano in 1454 and died in Florence in 1494. Agnolo Ambrogini, known as Poliziano, was one of the greatest poets of the Renaissance, linked by great friendship to Lorenzo the Magnificent, whom he called "Lauro". Next to the great lord of Florence he composed most of his masterpieces, perhaps the result of pleasant conversations between the two in the beautiful villa of Fiesole, then given it away to him by Lorenzo in gratitude for having saved his life in the Pazzi conspiracy, in which his brother had been murdered. Poliziano is the author of a short poem "Stanze" which was soon joined by the "Rime". His equivalent in painting can be considered Botticelli. ""

The historical center of Montepulciano, winds along a single main road called "**The Corso**" which starts from the lower part of the city and reaches "**Piazza Grande**", the main square. Outside the walls, there is the **Church of Sant'Agnese with the original Gothic portal and the Balzana (type of architecture) façade by Viviani, the Medici Fortress of Sangallo and the fourteenth-century Gate of Gracciano restored by Sangallo in the early 1500s.**

Access to the characteristic historical center is from the **Porta (Gate) di Gracciano** and a little further on, to the left of the Marzocco column, precisely in Piazza Savonarola, is the small church of **San Bernardo**. On the right side of this street is the **Avignonesi Palace** built by Vignola, but also other Renaissance palaces including the **Bucelli**, in whose base-board there are many cinerary urns and several Etruscan and Latin inscriptions and stones.

The Corso, a street with the appearance of a refined 16th century charming street and home to many patrician palaces, consists of the three segments of the streets of Gracciano, Opio and Voltaia.

In Via Gracciano, on a stairway with a balustrade, the lovely fifteenth-century **Church of St. Augustine** stands out with the façade of

Michelozzo. Inside the church we highlight the "*Resurrection of Lazarus*" by Alessandro Allori, "*San Nicolas from Tolentino*" by Giovanni di Paolo, a polychrome wooden "*Crucifix*" by Antonio da Sangallo, and a "*Crucifixion*" painting by Lorenzo di Credi.

Still in Piazza Michelozzo we can see the **Tower of Pulcinella** with the typical mask that beats the hours. It is still a working watch but it is unknown exactly the reason why a classic symbol of Naples is located in the heart of Montepulciano. The stories around this watch are different: according to some, the idea came in the 17th century to a bishop or more likely to a priest of Neapolitan origins. A different story tells that it was chosen as a mask to represent the theater. The statue of Pulcinella certainly makes this watch unique in Italy.

Piazza Grande is the heart of the city where tourists and locals meet every day. In summer it comes alive in an extraordinary way thanks to the theatrical performances of the "**famous international art yard**" and on the last Sunday of August it hosts the competitors of the **Bravio delle Botti**, with the representatives of the eight districts of the area that have the task of pushing the large barrels for the village. It takes place through the streets of the historic centre from the Colonna del Marzocco to the finish on the Piazza Grande, the cathedral square. The total distance is approximately 1800m and is uphill for nearly the entire course. As the streets are narrow and the barrels cumbersome to manoeuvre, collisions are frequent. The word "bravio" derives from the Latin Bravium meaning "to be won". It refers to the prize given to the winning Contrada - a painted cloth bearing the image of the patron saint of the city.

This area, made harmonious in the 1400s by Michelozzo, consists of many prestigious buildings such as the 14thc. **Palazzo Comunale or Town Hall**, which resembles the Palazzo della Signoria in Florence, the **Palazzo Contucci**, begun in 1519 by Antonio da Sangallo the elderly and completed by Baldassarre Peruzzi, and the **Nobili-Tarugi Palace**, covered in travertine. Next to the latter, there is the typical fourteenth-century structure of the **Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo** in bricks, in front of which is situated the **well of Griffins** and the **Lions** with their elegant

renaissance forms. The south side of the square is occupied by **the great unfinished façade of the Cathedral, called the Duomo**. This imposing building was built according to the project of Ippolito Scalza between 1592 and 1630, restored later, in 1880. Inside you can admire the *Triptych of the Assumption* by Taddeo di Bartolo, the *Madonna with Child* by Sano di Pietro and to the left of the central portal, the reclining statue of *Bartolomeo Aragazzi*, poet and secretary of Martino V, by Michelozzo.

History of the Duomo

The cathedral was built between 1586 and 1680 on a design by Ippolito Scalza from Orvieto and dedicated to Santa Maria Assunta.

The church was solemnly consecrated June 19th , 1712 by Francesco Maria Arrighi, bishop of Montepulciano.

The only surviving structure of the ancient **Pieve** (church with annexed baptistery which, in the early Middle Ages indicated the baptized community and to which, other churches without baptistery, were dependent) is the massive bell tower in ashlar and brickwork, built in the third quarter of the fifteenth century by Jacopo and Checco di Meo da Settignano: the upper level, highlighted by the slender bell-shaped mullioned windows, was never completed. The salient façade is also unfinished, while the sides, terminated by brick and travertine ashlar, are enlivened by Tuscan pilasters between which round arches are inserted.

The inner, whose architecture is clearly of Florentine ancestry, is austere and elegant due to the sharpness of the plaster surfaces that alternate with the stone facing walls. The plan is a Latin cross divided into three naves by powerful pillars supporting round arches. In the central nave, in the transepts and in the apsidal *scarsella*, reported entablatures support a barrel vault; at the intersection of the two orthogonal bodies the angular plumes support the drum on which the dome is set. The aisles are covered by cross vaults; on the walls, in correspondence of each bay, there are barrel-vaulted chapels. The pulpit supported by ionic columns is placed against a right-hand pillar.

Works of art - The vast spaces of the temple are adorned with a huge number of works of art. Some come from the ancient Pieve and from other local churches.

Among these, one of the most important is the monumental Triptych of the Assumption, painted by Taddeo di Bartolo in 1401, which dominates the high altar. The central panel of the triptych shows the monumental figure of the Assumption Madonna surrounded by Angels, while below are the twelve apostles who crowd around the empty tomb of the Madonna. Above the Assumption we see the Coronation of the Virgin. The three scenes must be read as a temporal sequence from the bottom up with the Death of the Virgin, his Assumption and his Coronation. The two side panels depict various Saints in the attitude of worshipping the central figure of the Madonna, while on the four pillars that frame the various panels we see twelve small figures of Doctors of the Church (three per pillar). Above the two side panels, to the left, is the Angel announcing and the Madonna Annunziata is to the right. The predella below depicts nine scenes from the life of Jesus Christ while above the predella we have some very small scenes from the Old Testament.

Another monument of primary importance is the fifteenth-century funeral monument of Bartolomeo Aragazzi, in Carrara marble, made by Michelozzo between 1427 and 1436. Today the monument is divided into nine fragments of which seven are walled up in different places in the church.

At the center of the first side chapel on the left, which constitutes the baptistery, is the fourteenth-century **Baptismal Font**, attributed to Giovanni di Agostino or Tino di Camaino. On the back wall, the so-called altar of the Gigli, polychrome glazed terracotta by Andrea Della Robbia; the artifact dates back to around 1512 and is placed between two statues of an unknown author depicting St. Peter (left) and St. John the Baptist (right)

Via Ricci, between wine and art!

This street is the commercial center of Montepulciano, along which renaissance and medieval residences of the Polizian bourgeoisie line up. At number 10, in the **Gothic Palazzo Neri-Orselli**, there are the Civic Museum and the Crociani Picture Gallery. The museum includes the Crociani collection and paintings from churches and convents. A collection of paintings from the Sienese and Florentine schools from the XIII to the XVIII centuries and a rich collection of glazed terracottas belonging to Andrea della Robbia are exhibited. At number 11 there's the **Palazzo Ricci**, whose construction is attributed to Baldassarre Peruzzi; it welcomes the Historical Archive and the Municipal Library which has an ancient collection of 15,000 volumes. The **Rodi Winery**, in which the Noble wine of Montepulciano is preserved, occupies the basements of this building and is considered one of the most spectacular wineries among those found under the city's historic buildings.

The church of San Biagio

Outside the walls of the historic center, towards the slopes of the Montepulciano hill, in the middle of a spacious and verdant lawn, there is the Church of San Biagio, a masterpiece by Antonio da Sangallo. This temple is considered the highest point of Renaissance architecture on buildings with a Greek cross plan.

Wine at Montepulciano

The **Vino Nobile** di Montepulciano, together with Chianti and Brunello di Montalcino, is one of the 3 most famous Italian wines in the world. In Montepulciano they produce the "Nobile" DOCG and the DOC Rosso di Montepulciano, Vin Santo, Chianti Colli Senesi and Bianco Vergine Val di Chiana. **Il Nobile** is the ideal wine to accompany the local cuisine, offering simple but robust and tasty products and dishes: ham, tasty croutons with spleen and fegatielli, pansanto and crunchy bruschetta. The typical dish is the picci: handmade spaghetti, which once were prepared by

farmers who could not afford meat or other more expensive foods, dressed with meat sauce. You should also try the pappardelle with hare sauce, the bread soup, the roasted porcini mushrooms accompanied by the ciaccia, crushed bread dough seasoned with oil, or fresh bread, strictly without salt to leave room for all the other flavors. As for the desserts delighted with the cantucci, almond biscuits, to be dipped in the Vinsanto.

Our favorite spot for lunch in Montepulciano is “Ristorante Gattavecchi”.

Apart from the excellent quality of food, you also have the chance of tasting the wines while eating. It is a good option they offer so that afterward you can also buy some bottles from their own production.

Their restaurant is the refectory of the monastery of the 13th century church dedicated to Santa Maria de’ Servi. The wine cellars below are found within grottoes of 1200s, and one more level down is an Etruscan tomb of 5th century b.C.

Michelin Restaurants in Montepulciano

Le Logge del Vignola, via delle Erbe 6, Montepulciano. (A good resource for this small restaurant in the historic center, with tables that are a little close together, but covered and very well kept regional raw material. The wine list is also interesting)

La Grotta, San Biagio 16, Montepulciano. (In front of the church of San Biagio, inside a 16th-century building, rustic-elegant room, with a nice summer service in the garden. Excellent cuisine: Tuscan, expertly revisited.)

Trattoria Toscana al Vecchio Forno, via Poliziano 18, San Quirico d 'Orcia (Pure Tuscan cuisine, simple and savory, in a genuine environment with hanging cold cuts and bottles of wine on display. Pleasant summer service

in the garden full of historical memories: between an old porch and a well still working)

Fonte alla Vena, via Dante Alighieri 137, San Quirico d 'Orcia (Just outside the nearby historic center, new management in the hands of an experienced entrepreneur in the sector and a chef selected by him. Cuisine of the generous, tasty and well presented territory, in a simple but clean and welcoming environment Specialties: handmade picci with garlic - grilled Cinta Senese capocollo - artisan cantucci and Vin Santo)

Tripadvisor Restaurant in Montepulciano

L'Altro Cantuccio, via delle Cantine 1, Montepulciano. From €40 to €140
Fish, Italian, Contemporary, Tuscan, Vegetarian, Gluten Free.