



## After Visiting Florence, Head To This Medieval Village To Experience The Tuscan Countryside



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I write about travel destinations and the people I meet along the way.

The countryside of Tuscany is littered with small, gorgeous medieval villages, such as [Castelfalfi](#)... [+] (pictured here) and San Gimignano.

### [Castelfalfi](#)

Italy has long been the darling of American travelers, ranking at or near the top of the most popular European destinations for folks traveling from the States.

It makes sense, given that nearly 18 million Americans identify as having Italian heritage, with a majority living in and around the cities of the northeast, where direct flights across the Atlantic are easy to come by.

Rome has traditionally been the go-to city in Italy, but Florence has been climbing the list of late, not only for its Renaissance history and arts, but for its easy-to-access (and gorgeous) countryside.

The Tuscan countryside is home to rolling hills, vineyards, castles, and medieval villages, and it's just an hour or two's drive from Florence, depending on your exact destination.

While the city has much to offer in the way of arts and culture, it has grown crowded and busy. The optimal combination, in my view, is to spend a couple days in Florence to check it out, then jet off to the countryside for a more relaxed pace.

Couples and families alike will appreciate the space, as well as the myriad activities and lodging that incorporate food, wine, art, history, and relaxation.

### **How to Structure Your Trip**

Whenever you're planning a trip that contains both city and countryside visits, always hit



the city first. Do it the other way, and the crowds, noise, and density of the city can be a big shock when returning from the countryside.

Land in Florence, check it out for a few days, then head out to the countryside of Tuscany. Rent a car on the day you plan to leave Florence - you'll definitely want a car to explore the countryside, but you won't need it your first few days in the city.

The village of **Castelfalfi**, set atop a hill and surrounded by agricultural land in the countryside ... [+] of Tuscany.

**Castelfalfi** Overview of Tuscany

Tuscany refers to an entire region in western central Italy. Overall, it is a prosperous agricultural area, famous for its wine, olives, and local food products.

Its capital city, Florence, is known as a hub of Renaissance art and culture, including the Statue of David and the Uffizi Gallery. There are about a million people living in the greater Florence metropolitan area.

Once you get outside of Florence, the region is comprised of smaller cities and villages, some dating well back to the Middle Ages. You may recognize some other infamous areas of Tuscany, such as Pisa and its leaning tower. But you will also discover many other gems that are relatively unknown to American travelers.

#### **Things to Do/Places to Visit in Tuscany**

Tuscany as a region is very large - about 9,000 square miles in total. So, you can't expect to visit all of it in one trip. However, by using Florence as a hub, you have the chance to make a pretty good dent and see what makes the region so special.

**Florence:** Capital city of Tuscany with endless arts, history, and culture surrounding the Italian Renaissance period. Great place to sample a wide variety of Tuscan food and wine from some of the region's best chefs.

**Pisa:** Known to Americans for its famous leaning tower, the city of Pisa is less than 90 minutes from Florence. Built around the Arno River, it is located just six miles from the coast (Ligurian Sea). While inland you may focus on pasta and meat, here you can experience many Italian seafood dishes.

**San Gimignano:** This medieval village is surrounded by a 13th-century wall and is a wonderful introduction to the "hill towns" of Tuscany. That is, small villages built and positioned on the top of hills for their sense of security and defensive positioning. Today, that translates into peaceful and restorative views in every direction. Hill towns are found all throughout this area of Tuscany, but the services found in them vary greatly. San Gimignano is great for first-time visitors due to its abundance of historic buildings, museums, restaurants, shops, and tours.

**Wine Tours and Tastings:** If you make it out of Tuscany without touring a wine castle or doing a tasting from atop a hillside, then you've probably tried pretty hard to avoid it. Serious wine drinkers will map out a route to visit all their favorites; more casual tasters just looking for the local experience can throw a dart and end up happy.

**Farm Tours:** There are a wide variety of farms to visit, many offering unique and special experiences that go well beyond a simple farm tour. From hiking with alpacas to "pasta farms," olive orchards, and cheese manufacturers, visiting a farm not only gives you the chance to see the process, but to taste it fresh from the source as well. Check out these farm tours as examples and inspiration.

After the truffle hunting experience, **Castelfalfi** can prepare the truffles you find and incorporate ... [+] them into your evening dishes.

#### **Castelfalfi**

**Truffle Hunting:** Last but definitely not least, make sure to experience a truffle hunt



while in Tuscany. The hunts take place all year round for the most part; however, the type of truffle you find will vary throughout the year. The infamous black truffle, for example, is found between June and November, while the prized white truffle is September to December. All hunts are conducted with dogs and are extremely family friendly, offering a glimpse of this highly-competitive industry and the chance to meet local characters who have mastered the art of the hunt.

### **What to Eat in Tuscany**

Don't overthink this question - you're in Italy, after all. Eat everything you come across, and you'll end up happy in the end. Tuscany is a region bursting with farms and local producers, and you can taste the heart and soul that goes into the local products, whether it's fresh pasta, cheese, bread, vegetables, olive oil, truffles, or gelato.

That said, there are some regional dishes to try. Check out these specialties in Florence, and these staples out in the countryside. Game meats are also very popular throughout Tuscany, so keep an eye out.

### **What to Drink in Tuscany**

The countryside outside of Florence is the home of Chianti, one of the most notable wines of Italy. Here you will find a few different growing regions centered around Chianti, especially to the west and south of the city.

Chianti is a very traditional wine, and its appeal in this region continues today. It is not a grape itself; rather, Chianti refers to a unique blend, made mostly of the Sangiovese grape, which grows abundantly in this part of Tuscany.

The Sangiovese grape is also used to create other local favorites, such as Brunello di Montalcino (red) and Vin Santo (dessert wine). You can read the full list of grapes and wines produced in this region here.

### **Where to Stay in Tuscany**

There are many, many options when it comes to where to stay, from inns in small villages to wine resorts and everything in between. If you're looking for something with a good mix of it all - location, amenities, nearby activities, and scenic beauty - consider basing yourself in the village of [Castelfalfi](#) > [Castelfalfi](#).

Located a little more than an hour from both Florence and Pisa, [Castelfalfi](#) offers a great location in the heart of Chianti country. Day trips to Pisa, San Gimignano, and nearby local wineries and farms are easy, with scenic drives up and over beautiful vistas.

Perhaps the best attribute of [Castelfalfi](#) is that you can experience many of the discussed Tuscan offerings without getting in your car.

View of the terrace and sunset from the rooms in the main building of [Castelfalfi](#).  
Wake and Wander Media

[Castelfalfi](#) is itself a medieval village, with cobblestone streets, stone buildings, gardens, vistas, a castle, and a church. Also in the village are small shops and apartments. While it does not have the buzz of a larger village like San Gimignano, many consider this ideal for its relaxed, peaceful setting. In total, the property sprawls more than 2,700 acres across several hillsides.

Wine tasters will like [Castelfalfi](#)'s 25-hectare vineyard and barrel room, accessible via a hotel shuttle, where you can taste a lineup of local estate wines (as well as house-made olive oils). Also on property are multiple pools (including a brand-new infinity pool), spa, golf course, hiking trails, and adventure park for kids.

Amongst the myriad activities arranged by the hotel with local partners are truffle hunting and pizza making. Both are a must-do for everyone, but especially families. After you gather truffles, the kitchen at [Castelfalfi](#) can then prepare and incorporate them into



your dinner that night.

The rooms and common areas of **Castelfalfi** are incredibly scenic, a well-earned respite for those who spend time in the busy streets of Florence prior to visiting the countryside.

The back terrace of the hotel features plenty of green space and gardens, along with panoramic views and many areas to sit and enjoy a drink or meal. Windows are a plenty, which pay homage to the village's roots as an old tobacco factory in the years after World War II (lots of windows were needed to dry the tobacco leaves).

The pool at **Castelfalfi**.

#### **Castelfalfi**

The on-site restaurants make trying local Tuscan favorites easy; many dishes are prepared using ingredients grown on property, including pasta, wood-fired pizza, fresh Tuscan bread, Florentine steak, and of course, organic wine and olive oil.

**Castelfalfi**, like many places, was closed during the pandemic, and soon after it went through a series of renovations, including new and refreshed rooms, a spa partnership with Thailand-based Rakxa, and a small, 22-seat restaurant inside the village's castle. The property just fully reopened at the end of March.

