

{tab=Arezzo, Cortona and ..}

Luckily enough I live and work in a beautiful, Tuscan province which is rich of green areas such as **Parco delle** Foreste Casentinesi, of breathtaking views and history... nearly every place is a clear example of historical stratification: firstly the Etruscans, secondly the Romans
, thirdly the Early Middle Ages, then the free Communes, Renaissance and all the rest before us!

In my province there are imposing monuments and small and hidden works of art which often speak to the visitor's soul: I think of the Valdarno Pievi, of Camaldoli Hermitage and Monastery, of La Verna Sanctuary
, of Cerbaiolo
,
Le Celle and Montecasale Hermitages
...
all plunged into a green silence.

There are archaic feasts such as **La** Maggiolata di Lucignano and ancient tournaments such as Arezzo's Giostra del Saracino, Sa
nsepolcro's Palio della Balestra
,
Cortona's Giostra dell'Archidado
and they have been talking about
Carnival
at
Foiano
della Chiana
for almost five hundred years! There are fairs all year round and nearly everywhere: the ones called "
Perdoni
" in

Valdarno

,
the fairs of the Steak and of Copper in Cortona

,
the fairs of the Dressed Stone and of Wrought Iron in Casentino
, the ancient

St. Catherine's Fair

in

Monte S. Savino

, also called "of the horse and of the whistling hand-warmer",
Sestino's Fair of the Chianina Breed

in

the Upper Tiber Valley

,

the

Antiques' Fair in Arezzo

.

Apart from all that, there are places which are both beautiful and evocative such as Ponte
Buriano

also called

Monna Lisa Bridge

,

Poppi

Castle

with

Simone da Battifolle's ghost

and

Sorci

Castle

with

Baldaccio d'Anghiari's one

; there is

Sansepolcro's Aboca Museum

which is about

herbs and ancient cultures

, it is really a sensorial museum; there is

Cortona's Melone 2 del Sodo

, an Etruscan hypogeum with a terrace-altar telling about the 6thc. bC

rites

and architecture and there are also the “

F

airies' Mountains

” in

Valdarno

which, apart from their name and fascinating look, only echo the toil of our peasants who lived there till about the 1960's.

Our gastronomy is still very much influenced by their ancient culture and therefore our food is simply prepared, extremely tasty and always matches with excellent oil and wine

which are still made as peasants used to. At

Anghiari

there is

Molino Ravagni

which has been producing oil for at least 500 years and there is also

Manifattura Busatti

where beautiful fabrics have been woven since the mid-nineteenth c. with first quality yarns and ancient patterns. And then there are the ceramics made in Valdichiana, the extremely colourful and warm woollen cloth named “

Panno

” from

Casentino

and

Piero della Francesca's works

...

**there is colour and
beauty everywhere**

!

Once a tourist wrote to me: *"I envy you the beauty that surrounds you!"*. I also believe that living here is a privilege, which I would like to share...

as a guide I know I can!

{tab=Siena, Pienza and ..}

Curiosity has made me find out and deeply know also Siena and its province where I have always discovered something surprising: a view, a painting, a sculpture ...

Siena, a Unesco site since 1995, is a very special town indeed: not only is there a noticeable number of imposing Renaissance buildings such as **Palazzo Spannocchi, Loggia della Mercanzia**,

Palazzo del Magnifico

Palazzo di San Galgano

Logge del Papa

; Siena really lets you plunge into the Middle Ages too. The names of many streets and alleys echo the medieval activities which were carried out in this rich and lively town:

Vicolo dei Borsellai

dei Pollaioli

Via di Beccheria

with a lot of butchers' and

Via di Pian

d'Ovile

where shepherds used to live;

Via dei Pittori

where workers used to die cloths which were later dried in

Vicolo del Tiratoio

or

Via della Stufa Secca

. In Siena you can find the largest collection of gothic paintings with a golden background:

therefore, there is

Vicolo degli Orefici

dedicated to Siena's goldsmiths, and

Vicolo dell'Oro

reminding us of the pure gold used for 14

th

and 15

th

c. paintings. There is

Costarella dei Barbieri

, because there used to be several

barberie

where the owner acted both as a barber and a general practitioner. Last but not least, there are Via Banchi di Sopra and Via Banchi di Sotto along which you should imagine the Sienese money changers' stalls waiting for the foreign pilgrims going to Rome through the Francigena Road ; actually, there is still Via dei Pellegrini .

There are streets reminding us of the most popular Sienese saints (Via di Santa Caterina, Via del Sasso di San Bernardino who, together with the four patron saints and the Blessed, are all gathered around the Madonna to whom the Sienese people are deeply devout and asked for protection many times: the first on the occasion of Montaperti battle and the last in 1944. The two Palio races (on July 2nd and August 16th) are also dedicated to the Madonna and the big bell on top of *Torre del Mangia* is called **Sunto** after *l'Assunta* that is Our Lady of Assumption!

Fairly enough, in Siena there is the Street of Wisdom (Via della Sapienza) because it is definitely a cultured town where a Doctor of the Church was born (Saint Catherine) and many university students lived since the mid-13th century; just the ones who had imported an archaic tennis which was played with a ball thrown by the players' palms beyond a rope tied across Vicolo della Pallacorda .

In Siena there are streets named Costa dell'Incrociata, Via del Costone, Vicolo del Costaccino and Costa Larga :

all these synonyms stand for “short, steep street” and are all certainly avoidable, but I must admit that Siena is a most irregular hill town! In fact, in 2003 Siena started to organize walking tours away from the most renowned corners in order to favour slow tourism which is good both for people’s body and mind: the initiative meets with great success on 31 October of each year and is largely imitated all over Italy.

Piazza del Campo is an unusually steep square which is partly bordered by the largest gothic public palace in Italy and is the fantastic setting for a wild race, the **Palio**, organized by the fiery Sienese people: after all, only in Siena there is an alley named

Dog and Cat

! I like to remember

Via dei Pispini

too, where a beautiful fountain was placed in the mid-16

th

c. and the people liked it so much that they named the street after its jets (

pispini

).

Yes, the Sienese people are straightforward, lively and passionate persons who are fond of their town. Surely enough, both your eyes and heart will be filled with Siena’s art and passions; you may even take a bit of its

culture

home ... if you buy its delicious

panforte

!

You can also find a lot of culture at **Pienza**, formerly called *Corsignano*, where the Piccolomini family had large properties.

Enea Silvio Piccolomini

was born there in 1405 and, after a successful diplomatic career, he became a priest who was very soon appointed bishop, later cardinal and finally Pope as Pious II in 1458. He was a humanist and a writer who has left us his autobiography,

I Commentarii

, with a lot of information about the restoration works which were carried out in his native town in order to make the first Italian Renaissance square with the help of a famous architect: Bernardo Gambarelli, nicknamed

il Rossellino

.

Piazza Pio II is just magic: if you look at the cathedral you may have the feeling that it is proceeding towards you; if you turn against it, the square seems even larger with its perfect perspective. The **Piccolomini Palace** and all the other buildings around it give their contribution to its beauty and harmony which are also the qualities of the spacious **Cathedral** where the gold of the five altar-pieces glitters in the sunset light.

Pienza too is a Unesco site where you can also visit a most interesting Diocesan Museum and the Pieve di Corsignano which is full of fascinating primitive sculptures, crawling snakes included. Last but not least, from Pienza you can have a unique view of Val d'Orcia which is made of *beauty* and *harmony* again.

Apart from that ... the whole Sienese province impresses any visitor with its most various landscapes: there are the lunar **Crete** and the volcano dominating **the Amiatino**, the rough **Chi anti** hills and the smooth and mellow **Valdichiana**; there are the green **Val di Merse**, **Val d'Elsa** and **Val d'Orcia**, a valley which is so beautiful to be protected by Unesco as a rare jewel.

A widespread, deep religious feeling has produced unique temples such as *San Biagio* at Montepulciano and the abbeys at Monte Oliveto, Sant'Antimo and San Galgano; the Middle Ages tower above San Gimignano, Monteriggioni and Colle Val d'Elsa, while elsewhere the green serpentine and the white and yellow marbles of Siena cathedral crop out.

There are spas all over the Sienese province, which have been known for some 2,000 years: there are forty-two of them at San Casciano only and some maintain that "they are the most beautiful spas in the world"; there are the ones at P *etriolo* where Pope Pious II used to go, differently from Lorenzo de' Medici who preferred *Bagni di San Filippo* on Mount Amiata. Saint Catherine plunged herself into the warm waters of *Bagno Vignoni*, while at *Radicondoli* you can find a 19th c. spa inside a natural reserve. *Rapolano* offers waters of different temperatures and roman baths, but Emperor Augustus' personal practitioner recommended *Fontes Clusinae* which were very close to Chianciano Terme. Apart from wine, Montepulciano has recently found out that it can offer first quality thermal waters as well.

A glass of *Chianti Classico*, *Brunello di Montalcino* or *Nobile di Montepulciano* can easily express the spe

cial flavour of this territory, especially if it is matched with
salumi di cinta senese

,
pecorino di Pienza

or with

pici

, the delicious homemade spaghetti, the best of which can be tasted at
Celle sul Rigo
May Fair.

Anyway, I think that the real magic of the Sienese province can be found at **Sarteano** where
one can meet a frightening demon and the sweetest soaring angel ...

{tab=Why a licensed tourist guide?}



Why choose a licensed tourist guide?

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