



ALUMNI/COMMUNITY AT LARGE
TRIP TO ITALY
FALL 2023 ALBUM

By Dr. Paola Basile



LAKE ERIE
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Alumni

A wonderful and personalized trip to Italy organized & accompanied by the LEC professor of Italian Studies: Dr. Basile (a native of Italy).



October 2023 - Seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites

- 1) Outstanding **4-star resort hotel with thermal baths + SPA** immersed in a dream landscape (in the **Val d'Orcia** in Tuscany, a UNESCO World Heritage Site). Same hotel for the full trip.
- 2) **Private Bus** with A/C + Local chauffeur for the entire trip
- 3) Rich **Breakfasts**
- 4) **Dinners** with prosecco/wine...
- 5) Welcome and Goodbye **Cocktails**
- 6) **Cooking class**
- 7) Wine Cellar Tour & Tasting
- 8) **Agriturismo** tour
- 9) Guided tour in **Florence** and entrance in *Galleria dell'Accademia* and in the Duomo. (A UNESCO World Heritage Site).
- 10) Entrance into **Villa d'Este** (the gardens and the palace) in **Tivoli**. (A UNESCO World Heritage Site).
- 11) Tour in **Montepulciano**, and in **Pienza** (A UNESCO World Heritage Site).
- 12) Tour in **Siena** and entrance in the Duomo. (A UNESCO World Heritage Site).
- 13) Tour in **Monteriggioni**, **San Galgano Abbey**, and **San Gimignano** and entrance in the Torre Grossa and Palazzo Comunale (A UNESCO World Heritage Site).
- 14) Tour in **Assisi** and entrance in the Basilica San Francesco with a Franciscan friar as a tour guide. (A UNESCO World Heritage Site).

Arrival in Rome at the end of September. Great photos from Jim and Jeanne, grazie!





Looking for a taxi!

Departure day from Rome to Tuscany, on October 1st at 11:00 am.
Mauro is our driver for the entire trip.





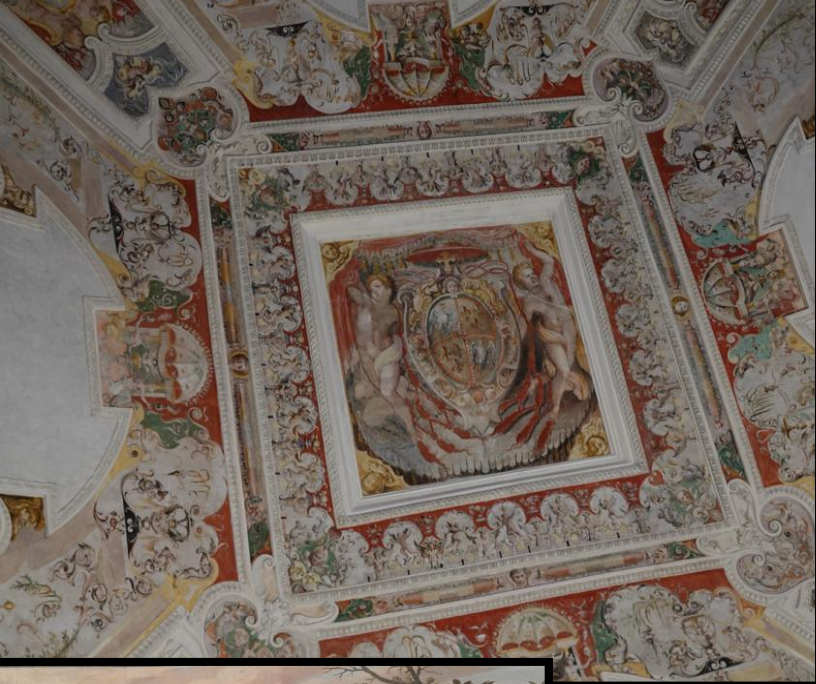
On the way to Tuscany, we stopped in **Villa d'Este** in Tivoli, a UNESCO world heritage site. The gardens of the Villa d'Este are among the earliest and finest of the Italian *giardini delle meraviglie* and symbolize the flowering of Renaissance culture. With its impressive concentration of fountains (500!), nymphs, grottoes, troughs and pools, cascades, plays of water, and music, it constitutes a much-copied model for European gardens. A magic place filled with beauty, myths, genius, and peace. One fountain periodically surges to splash unsuspecting visitors; a water organ fountain plays music at set times; a long row of 100 different "face" fountains offers an intimate place to take a stroll... The rooms of the Palace d'Este built on the ruins of an ancient Roman villa (stunning!) were ambitiously decorated under the tutelage of the stars of the late Roman Mannerism, such as Livio Agresti, Federico Zuccari, Durante Alberti, Girolamo Muziano, Cesare Nebbia and Antonio Tempesta.

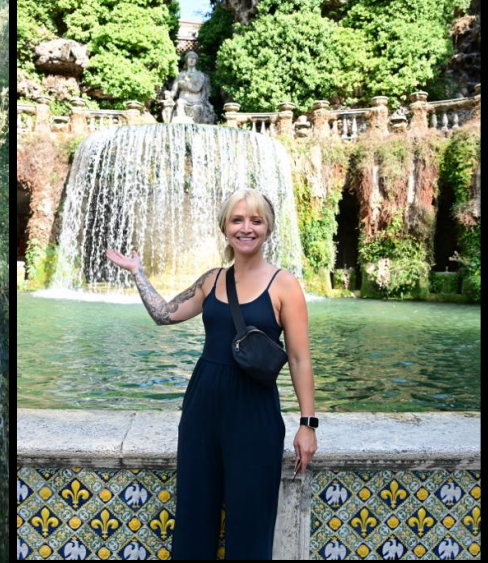
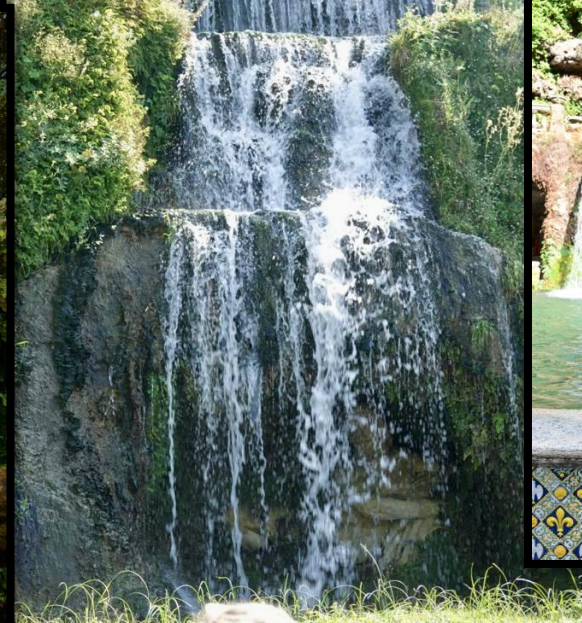
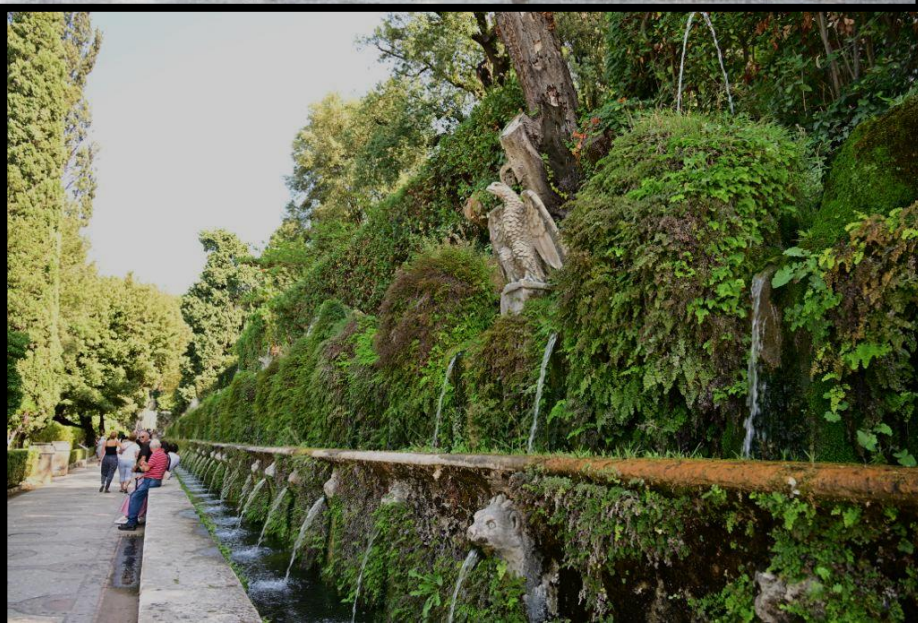












After spending a few hours in Tivoli (for lunch and visiting Villa d'Este), we went to our hotel in Tuscany and enjoyed a "welcome Italian Spritz cocktail", *alla salute!*



Dinner Time! Antipasti (appetizer), Primo (first course), Secondo (second course),
Dolce (dessert)... Spumante (like champagne)
and red wine...
Buon appetito!



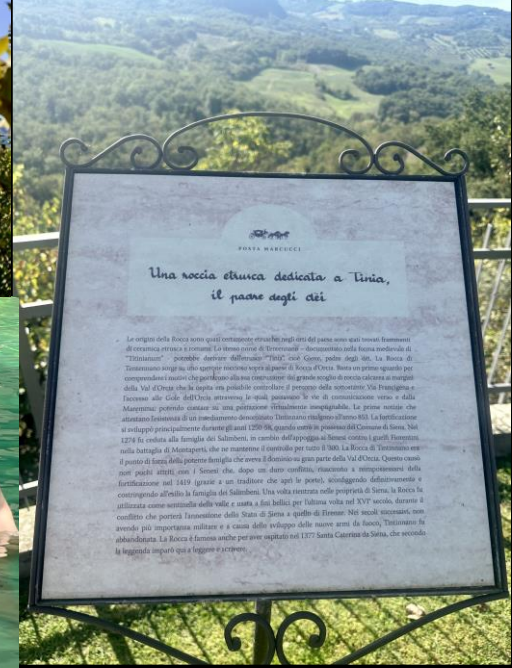


Beautiful night walk under the moon-
rest - and it's time for breakfast!

Our beautiful resort hotel with thermal baths and SPA immersed in the Val d'Orcia, WOW!

"Val d'Orcia is a beautiful land which stands out for its centuries-old landscape. It strikes the perfect balance between history, memory, and poetry. A land of graceful rolling hills: being part of it is a privilege we want to share with all our guests."





Val d'Orcia: Medieval castles, sinuous gills, ancient villages, gorgeous farmhouses, isolated homesteads, roads lined with cypress trees, fabulous vineyards and olive groves and golden fields of grain and sunflowers: these are just some of the elements that form the fantastic and harmonious landscapes of the Val d'Orcia. This rich green valley, which encompasses the Orcia river is in southern Tuscany. The entire area is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Next day, Trip to Pienza, a small town located amidst gentle undulating hills and wonderful natural landscapes. It enjoys a strategic position standing high atop a hill, dominating all the Orcia Valley with extraordinary views. This small town is widely known as the **"ideal city of the Renaissance"**, the creation of the great humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini who later became Pope Pius II, and the town was transformed into what he considered the Utopian city, exemplifying the principles and philosophy of classical times and of the great Italian Renaissance. Thus, Pienza became the realization of a dream! The project was designed by the architect Bernardo "il Rossellino" under the guidance of the great humanist Leon Battista Alberti. In only 3 years, a group of amazing and harmonious buildings were completed: the Cathedral, the Papal or Piccolomini Palace, the Town Hall, and the lovely central square onto which all of these buildings look upon. They say that Pienza is the perfect mix of architecture, food & tradition built to represent the "Utopian City". Pienza is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.













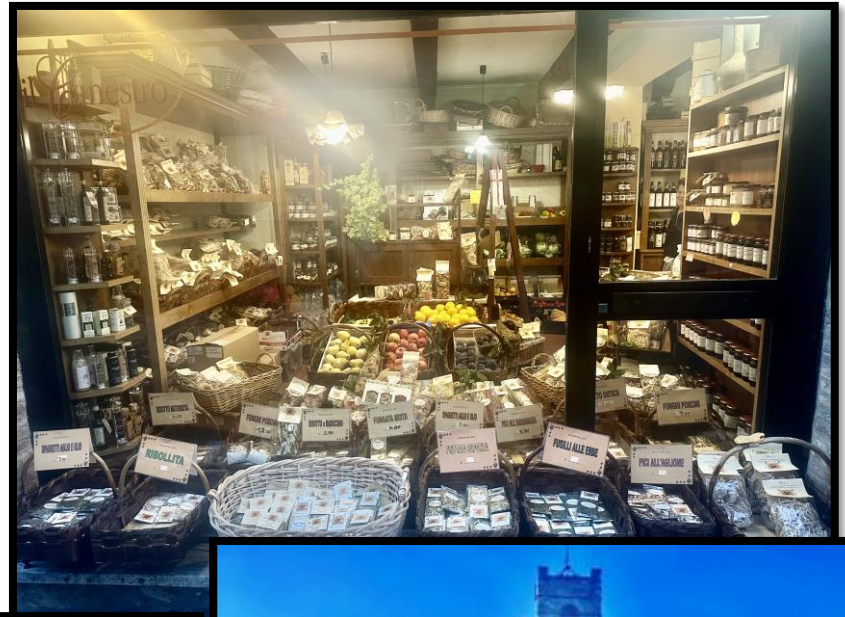


We then went (on the same day) to the picturesque town of Montepulciano, toured an old wine cellar with a guide, and enjoyed some wine/cheese/salami/crostini tasting. At the end of the day, we had a wonderful dinner at the restaurant La Grotta, a Michelin guide restaurant! **Montepulciano**: standing high atop a hill in southern Tuscany, is a medieval town of rare beauty recommended visiting in Tuscany. The city, full of elegant Renaissance palaces, ancient churches, charming squares and hidden corners, boasts vast panoramas all over the wonderful Val d'Orcia and Val di Chiana valleys that surround it. Montepulciano has received great attention following the filming of the vampire saga *Twilight* sequel *New Moon*. Piazza Grande is the heart of Montepulciano and the setting for its main events. A walk-through Montepulciano is the best way to view the town and its beautiful landmarks as well as enjoy stunning views of the surrounding countryside covered by **vineyards** producing the famous Nobile wine!











Dinner at *La Grotta* in Montepulciano, as usual: antipasto, primo, secondo and dolce! *La Grotta* hosts you in an authentic and charming sixteenth century building, directly opposite the Church of San Biagio, one of the best examples of Tuscan Renaissance architecture. *La Grotta* strives to offer a perfect balance between traditional Tuscan cuisine and modern gastronomy - its aim is to blend the authenticity of the region with innovation while, at the same time, respecting the centuries-old traditions.



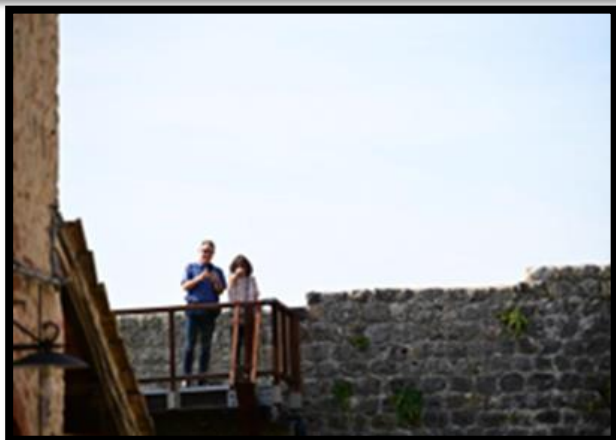
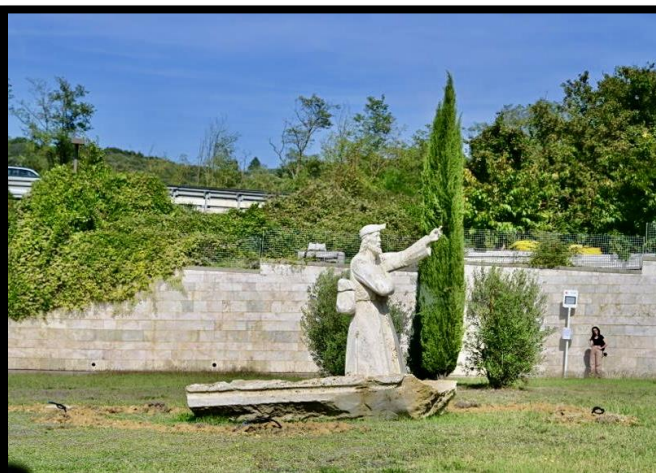


Another beautiful morning... photos of our hotel.





Our hotel is in **Bagno Vignoni** , an enchanting and charming small village. For millennia, the small hillside settlement of **Bagno Vignoni**, has been renowned for its volcanic springs. The Romans built baths and villas in the area. However, it was during the Middle Ages that the village took on its current, unique shape. Its centerpiece is a deep, steaming pool of hot water — sitting right where its main square ought to be. The **Etruscans** were probably the first to exploit the area's thermal waters. Their reputed health benefits include soothing arthritis, rheumatism and skin complaints. But Bagno Vignoni really boomed as a rest stop for weary Christian pilgrims treading the Via Francigena to Rome.

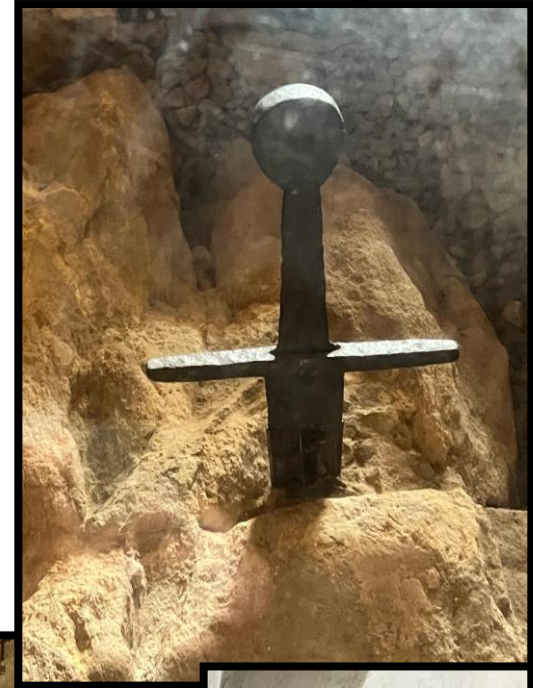


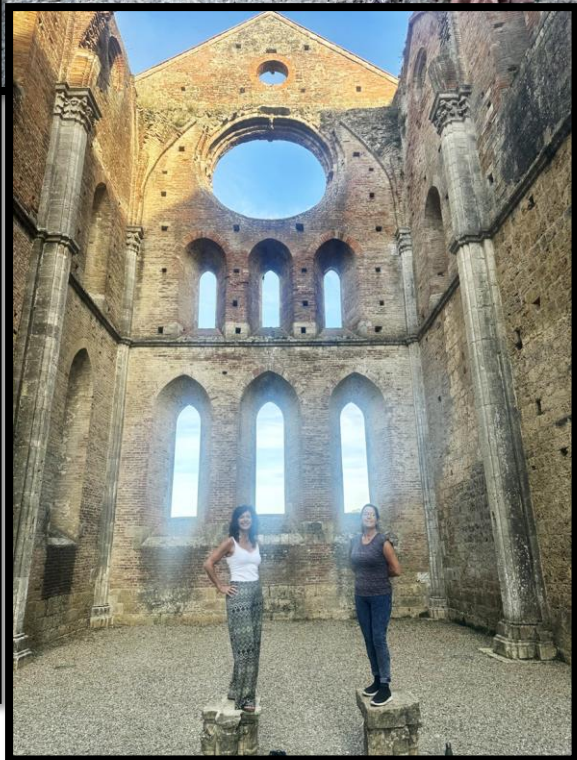
Trip to **Monteriggioni**. **Monteriggioni Castle**: it represents one of the most important walled castles in the territory. It has incredibly preserved an intact structure as if time had never passed on the hill from which it elegantly dominates the surrounding landscape. Its perfect circular perimeter makes one suppose it to be an artificial construction while it was created by just following the curves in the natural ground. The castle was built by the Sienese between **1213 and 1219** for defensive purposes: its strategic location atop a hill overlooking the Cassia Road allowed the castle to control the cities of the Val d'Elsa and Staggia and be on the lookout for any armies approaching Siena. The intact fortified wall presents 14 towers along which the guards used to walk and patrol the walls and 2 gates, one called the *Franca* or *Romea Gate* which faces Rome and the other known as the *Florentine Gate* since it heads toward Florence.





Afternoon trip - on the same day - to see San Galgano. Chiusdino, near Siena, is famous for the Abbey of San Galgano, a ruined hermitage that preserves a mysterious sword in the rock! The Abbey was built in the 13th century by the Cistercian monks who usually built their monasteries close to rivers (the Merse). The sword of St Galgano, said to have been plunged into a rock by a medieval Tuscan knight, has been authenticated, bolstering Italy's version of the Excalibur legend. Galgano Guidotti, a noble from Chiusdino, allegedly split the stone with his sword in 1180 after renouncing war to become a hermit. The sword in the stone in Tuscany was proven real and was most likely the inspiration for Excalibur.















Trip to Siena: it is likely Italy's loveliest medieval city, another UNESCO World Heritage site! Siena's heart is its central piazza known as *Il Campo*, known worldwide for the famous *Palio* run here, a horse race run around the piazza two times every summer. The *Campo* is dominated by the red *Palazzo Pubblico* and its tower, *Torre del Mangia*. Along with the *Duomo* of Siena, the *Palazzo Pubblico* was also built during the same period of rule by the Council of Nine. The civic palace, built between 1297 and 1310, still houses the city's municipal offices much like *Palazzo Vecchio* in Florence.



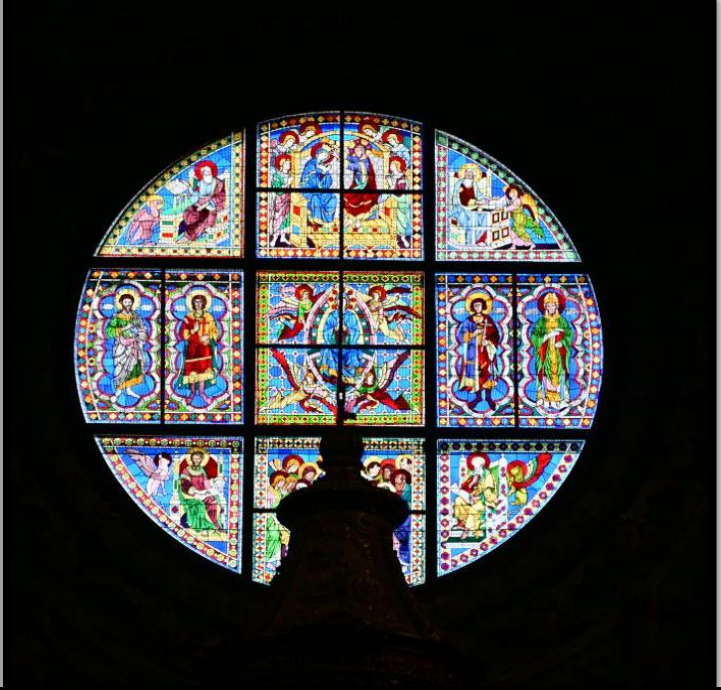


















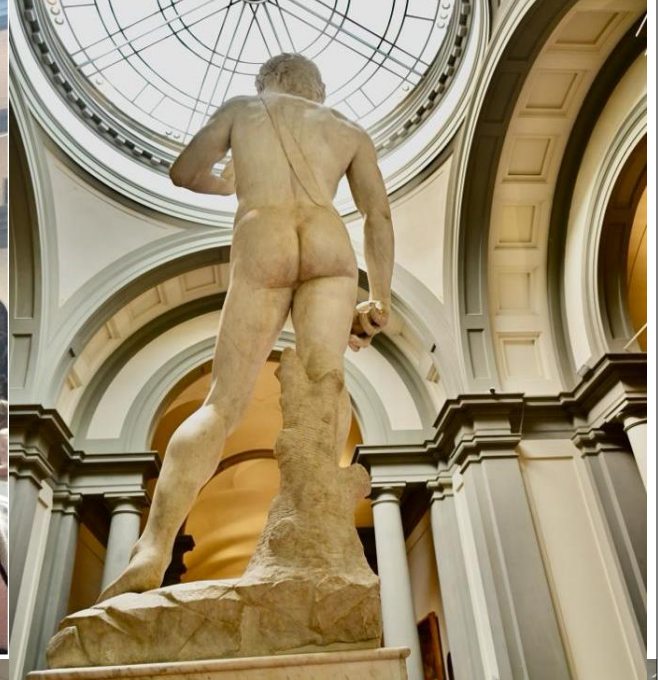
Trip to Florence. Another UNESCO world heritage site. Florence makes art-lovers' hearts beat double time. Fans of Renaissance art will feel giddy touring The *Galleria dell'Accademia*, which is bursting with works by Michelangelo. Architecture buffs can admire the ancient *Ponte Vecchio* bridge and many other architectural wonders, while serious shoppers can spend a blissful afternoon wandering the shops of *Piazza Santo Spirito*. We toured the city with a guide, first stop *Santa Maria Novella*, then we visited the *Galleria dell'Accademia*, the *Duomo*, *Piazza della Signoria*, and some of us had a cocktail there, we saw *Ponte Vecchio*, and walked to *Santa Croce Basilica*.

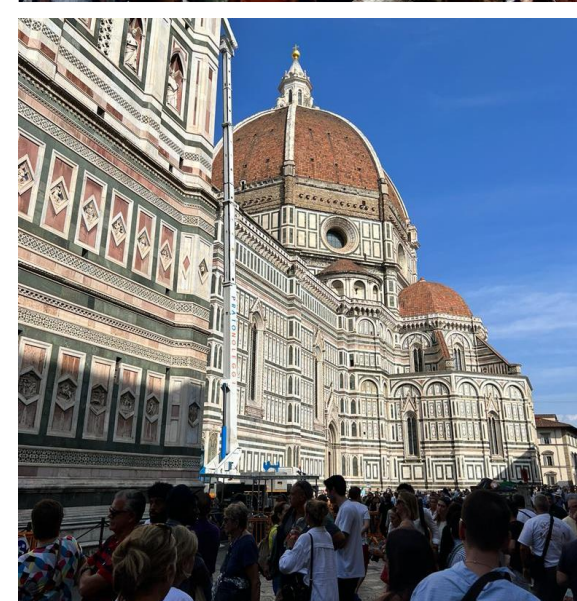


With its huge, almost outsized, bulk, the Florence cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore (*// Duomo*), makes its presence felt, framed by the spectacular surroundings of the religious center of the city, complete with the Baptistry and Giotto's bell tower. When it was finished, in the 1400s, it was the largest church in Europe. As with all the other great European cathedrals, this too, is dedicated to the Madonna, with the name "Santa Maria of the flower": the attribute refers not only to the cloverleaf floor plan, with the three large chapels opening onto the apse, but is an homage to Christ, the "flower" growing from the divine "stem" and, naturally, is also a reference to the flower that is the symbol of the city, the fleur-de-lis. The long, difficult work on the facade went on for centuries. For the sumptuous exterior decorations, it was used white marble from Carrara, green from Prato, red from Siena. The Duomo is also rich in stained glass windows: out of a total of 55 windows, there are a good 44 that are magnificently decorated and are among the most important works of their kind in Italy. They were based on designs of the principal artists of the period – among them Donatello, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Paolo Uccello and Andrea del Castagno.













San Sano is a quaint little village of stone structures that lies on the Tuscan hill in Gaiole in Chianti. We had dinner there at the *Trattoria's Grotta della Rana* that means literally, "The Cave of the Frog", a one big family affair of 3 generations. The kitchen serves simple and rustic but wholesome and genuine ingredients of ancient *Chiantigiana* or Tuscan traditions. A surprised hidden gem in a secluded and off-the-beaten-path location. The story of the 'boozy frog' is based on a true story, here it is: *Once upon a time an elementary teacher from San Sano, Ferdinando Anichini, enrolled himself to a game show program called "Il Tappabuchi" on the Italian television. It was April 1967. The host of the show, Corrado, offered prizes to contestants who could sing, dance, recite a poem or imitate the sound of an animal. Anichini chose to imitate the sound of the croaking of a frog, because in Gaiole (San Sano lies in the comune of Gaiole in Chianti), the inhabitants were called "ranocchia" (frog people) in ancient times due to the large number of frogs on the banks of the Masellane. According to Corrado, the frog imitation from Anichini was rather shoddy, however, the contestant went on to justify himself with a cheeky statement, "Our frogs sing like that, because they drink Chianti wine!" Having said that, the elementary teacher won the show with one condition that he devolved his winning prize of 200k Italian Lira (equivalent to Euro 103.29 today) in favor of the tiny village of San Sano. The most interesting thing was the contestant mentioned "Chianti" four times on national television – in an era where such outspoken promotions were unimaginable. With his prize money, the winner of the TV show commissioned Siena-born sculpture, Plinio Tammaro to build a frog statue (fountain), gulping down wine and spewing water. That was the day, the drunken frog of San Sano was born...*













On the next day, cooking class in the beautiful Poggio Alloro Agriturismo: *“Sharing is the basis of our philosophy. We like our guests to get familiar with old country traditions, to experience the beauty of nature, enjoy the genuine and organic products of our land, and fully appreciate the true spirit and essence of Tuscan culture and tradition.”* That was a lot of fun! And then we had an incredible lunch there.



















Afternoon Trip to San Gimignano

San Gimignano is a small walled medieval hill town in the province of Siena. Known as *the Town of Fine Towers*. San Gimignano is famous for its medieval architecture, unique in the preservation of about a dozen of its tower houses, which, with its hilltop setting and encircling walls form an unforgettable skyline. Locals say that they are the oldest towers in Europe! Within the walls, the well-preserved buildings include notable examples of both Romanesque and Gothic architecture, with outstanding examples of secular buildings as well as churches. The *Palazzo Comunale*, the Collegiate Church, and Church of Sant' Agostino contain frescos, including cycles dating from the 14th and 15th centuries. The "Historic Centre of San Gimignano" is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The town is also known for the white wine, Vernaccia di San Gimignano, produced from the ancient variety of Vernaccia grape which is grown on the sandstone hillsides of the area. The locals are very friendly, artists and musicians welcome the visitors in the picturesque streets and squares, and in the local shops it is easy to get free food and wine tasting!

Some of us decided to go up in the *Torre Grossa*, we completed 218 steps ... it was worth it! What a view from the top! And we also visited *Palazzo Comunale*.























Trip to Assisi: Pilgrims have been coming to Assisi, since the 13th century to venerate St. Francis, who was born and buried here, but you don't have to be religious to enjoy the beauty of this postcard-perfect town. Framed by the long, undulating hills of Umbria and the forests of Monte Subasio, Assisi is one of the best-preserved medieval towns. Assisi isn't just home to UNESCO World Heritage sites; it *is* a UNESCO World Heritage site. The entire town basks in this coveted status because of its plethora of art and historically significant buildings, like the Basilica di San Francesco. The basilica has such a collection of frescoes and paintings that it rivals many art museums. According to the UN, the town has a singular importance for its role in the diffusion of the Franciscan Order and for its "continuity of a city-sanctuary" from its Umbrian-Roman origins to today. Construction on the Basilica was started immediately after St. Francis' death in 1228 and it was officially completed after the addition of the upper church in 1253. It is divided into the upper church and the lower church, and regardless of which one you're in, you're looking at incredible frescoes. The upper church, or *Basilica Superiore*, is covered with 28 frescoes by Giotto. Each fresco is a scene from St. Francis' life. Though completed centuries ago, the frescoes are still fabulously vibrant. The lower church, or *Basilica Inferiore*, houses frescoes by Cimabue, Pietro Lorenzetti, and Simone Martini, who were heavily influenced by Giotto's work. Also in the lower sanctuary is the *Cripta di San Francesco* – that is, the monumental tomb of St. Francis of Assisi. While the upper church seems to be a celebration of beauty and life, the lower church's dark rooms and sparse decoration reflects the spirit of St. Francis and his Franciscan order.









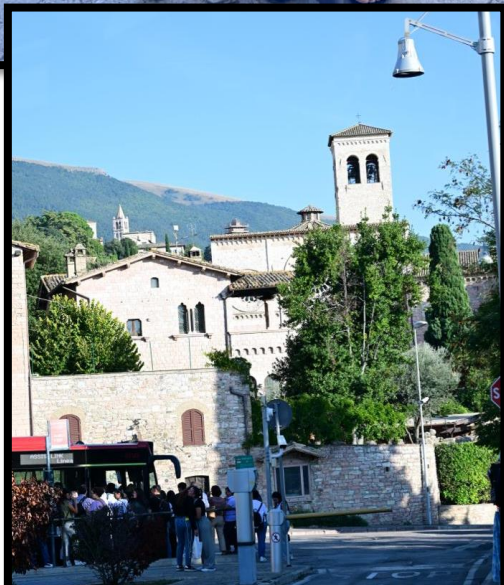


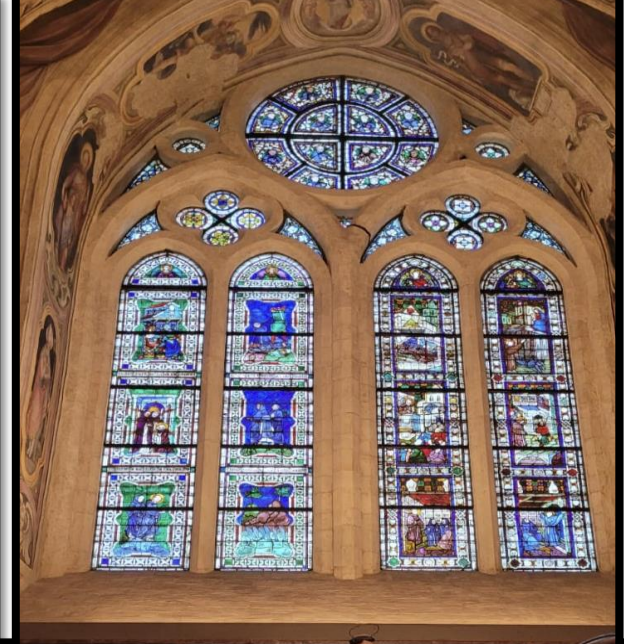
















Goodbye Cocktail and Dinner at our hotel!





Paola,
 Thank you for our wonderful trip in Italy! Grazie mille!
 GRAZIE MILLE PER QUALCOSA! Conchetta Anna Nov
 S. Geminiano - i grandi che guardano il sole... le belle torri
 Grazie mille! ♥ Marcia ♥



Thank you to Jeanne and Jim for sharing their great photos! Here is a gift from Assisi for your wine! A "Franciscan friar" wine cover, haha! 🤪

Grazie Mille for your gift "La Prof" and for your nice words, very much appreciated! Ci vediamo!



Carole Valera
 We just arrived in Miami now. No beach but it's still warm. 9:50 PM
 Glad you arrived safely Paola. Thank you for a spectacular trip. Safe travels and happy landing to all. 9:51 PM
 Buona notte 9:51 PM
 Mon, Oct 9
 Franny Bluhm
 I'm still in transit in Amsterdam... leaving at 8 am. Be home at 6 pm tonight. It was a wonderful trip. Thank you Paola- and also to everyone in our group who made it so. 12:17 AM
 ❤️ 2
 Jim and Jeanne Janette
 So glad you are all home or on the way. What a spectacular time we shared. Thank you Paola!! 2:11 AM
 Carole Valera
 Piacere di conoscervi! Un abbraccio e buon lunedì! 11:55 AM
 Jeanne Jannette
 Mille grazie 3:30 PM



**Arrivederci
al prossimo
viaggio!**



*Dear Paula,
Thank you for planning
a marvelous trip to Italy.
I had a wonderful time
making new friends. I'm
looking forward to another
trip.*

*Sincerely,
Janet Corbett*