

TUSCANY 2008

July 1-6, August 2-8



“Chiantis and Contrade”

Tuscany is about the senses: smelling fine wines, savoring freshly made pasta, touching the mortar of ancient churches, hearing the roar of the crowds during Siena’s palio race (pictured here). With Spyns, experience a week of pure Tuscan delights at your own pace. Explore ancient villages known worldwide for their splendid *Chianti* reds while staying in unique luxury hotels like the five-star Relais La Suvera. Starting in Florence, join our guided week-long romp through the region to show you *la dolce vita*. As with all of our tours, we simply set the scene but you ultimately decide what to do and how. For the avid rider, enjoy daily spins and challenging climbs along deserted Tuscan roads. For the occasional rider, take light morning rides with full van support or simply relax poolside and shuttle to meet up with the group for the day’s activity.

IN BRIEF: July 1-6, August 2-8, 2008 (7 days / 6 nights) with hotel stays in Arezzo, San Gimignano, and Siena. Activities include optional cycling (3 days), wine tastings, walking tours, optional cooking classes, and the Palio Horse Race in Siena. Start/Finish in Florence (international airport). **PRICE: US\$3500** per person (double occupancy) + 6% GST. Please see our “Terms and Conditions” for further details.

DETAILED ITINERARY



Sunday: The tour begins at 12 p.m. with complimentary van transfer provided from Spoleto to Arezzo. (a 90 minute drive). Whisking along Cypress-lined roads, home for two nights is Arezzo, the capital city of Tuscany’s easternmost region. This is one of the few areas in Tuscany almost untouched by tourism where warm and friendly townspeople are only interested in sharing their region’s rich wine culture. A private villa awaits, the Villa i Bossi, a rambling, solid, stone-built villa surrounded by the sort of formal gardens that any self-respecting noble needs to distance a residence from the vines and olives to pay for it. The villa has been in the Albergotti family for the better part of eight

centuries and is expertly run by our good friend Francesca. Two options for the afternoon: Dinner in the hotel’s excellent restaurant: Gragone.



Monday: After breakfast on the terrace overlooking the villa’s beautiful gardens, take the morning off with a bit of shopping in nearby Arezzo, a treasure trove of fine shops selling everything from antiques to jewelry. There is also a Prada outlet for the fashionistas. For the less fashion conscious, it’s back on the bikes to explore one of many

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natural parks around Arezzo; home to wild boar, porcupine, deer, and rare song birds. This full-day ride will take us through endless untouched forest. For both riders and non-riders, there is the option of visiting nearby Monterchi, home of Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto*. This fresco is of the virgin Mary 9 months pregnant and is one of the earliest depictions of a pregnant Madonna, a rare subject in Italian art. Before dinner, have a drink with your guides before joining a lively cooking class with Francesca, the hotel's charming owner in a kitchen large enough to land a plane in.



Tuesday/Wednesday: Cycling west, we cycle head towards San Gimignano and the Hotel Pescille. This family hotel has been expertly managed by our good friends the Gigli family since 1886. San Gimignano is a UNESCO world heritage site known for its 13 medieval towers that rise majestically from the town's square. Two options for getting to San Gimignano: cycle or shuttle through the spectacular vine-covered hills and valleys of eastern Chianti with a stop in Radda to taste wine in the Castello di Ama estate followed by a guided visit of the monastery of Santa Maria Novella. Gourmet picnic lunch in Radda following our tasting and tours. After lunch, choose to shuttle or cycling on the San Gimignano and our next hotel. Dinner in an authentic local restaurant inside the walls of the old town. On Wednesday, choose to join a private walking tour of town or hop on your bike for the day's ride to nearby Volterra, an imposing village filled with Etruscan, Roman, Medieval and Renaissance art. Both riders and non-riders will meet in Volterra for a gourmet picnic lunch that affords spectacular views along the entire Valle d'Aosta (or Aaston Valley).

Thursday/Friday: After *ciao*s to the hotel and staff, we set off for Siena and its famous palio horse race. Although Florence is the region's political capital, proud Tuscans still refer to Siena as its *cultural* capital and for good reason. Siena is a medieval city of brick with dozens of Gothic palaces, pastry shops galore and unseen neighborhood (called *contrade*) rivalries.



No other festival in Italy is as colorful, as intense, or as spectacularly corrupt. Ten *contrade* are chosen by lot each year to ride in the two palio races: a preliminary race on July 2nd followed by a championship race on August 16th. Choose to ride or shuttle to our final hotel of the tour: the luxurious *Relais la Suvera*. The ancestral home of the Marquis Guisepppe Ricci and his wife Princess Elenora Massimo. The castle itself was constructed in the late Middle Ages by the Countess Eva Matild de Franzesi but was eventually gifted to Pope Julius the Second. Julius is famous for having

granted Michelangelo a commission to paint the Sistine Chapel. It passed to the current owners through marriage, inheritance, and acquisition. They have painstakingly recreated an extraordinary five-star country hotel for guests seeking something between a museum visit, spa and elegant restaurant hotel. Conveniently located within cycling distance from Siena, the hotel is the perfect base to experience the festival. Siena's many *Contrade* (districts) compete in this annual no-holds-barred race around the city's central square. On the eve of the race, the city's streets are filled with tables, food and song (pictured here) as each district

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eagerly anticipates a win (or loss) the following day. On race day, watch the medieval procession, blessing and frenzied race from the safety of our balcony and cheer on your favorite district, complete with wine glass in hand. Drinks and dinner at *La Suvera's* gourmet restaurant following the race.

Saturday: On this, our last day of the tour, take a final walk around the hotel's 18th century gardens, enjoy breakfast on the terrace, or have another swim in the pool before transferring to Florence and on to your final destination.

Included in your tour price:

- All hotels for the duration of the trip (6 nights)
- All breakfasts, 5 dinners and 3 lunches
- Unlimited access to your own 27-speed Trek bike
- Helmets
- Free transfers to and from the start/finish points in Florence
- All maps and route instructions for cycling
- Full van support during the daily rides
- 2 guides on call the entire trip (1 rider with the 2nd providing van support)

What is not included:

- Airfare
- Room minibar, wine or alcoholic beverages with dinner
- Long distance telephone or internet charges
- Lunches Saturday and Thursday, Evening Meals Monday and Wednesday

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HOTEL INFORMATION

Days 1-2 Villa i Bossi
Loc. Gragone 44/46
Arezzo 52100
Tel: +39 0575 365642
Fax: +39 0575 964900

Aristocratic Italy at its most welcoming: a handsome, solid, stone-built villa surrounded by formal gardens. This castle estate has been in the Albergotti family for the best part of eight centuries and the house is full of family heirlooms and ancestral portraits. Excellent location near the town of Arezzo and its Prada outlet (for the serious shopper) and some spectacular national parks (for the serious bike rider). Why we keep coming back: the friendly (yet aristocratic) owner Francesca and her splendid cooking classes.

Days 3-4 Hotel Pescille
Via San Giovanni
San Gimignano, Tuscany
Tel: +39 0577 940186
Fax: +39 0577 943165

This charming Tuscan farmhouse is now an elegant hotel with breathtaking views of San Gimignano's extraordinary skyline of 13 medieval towers. The village of San Gimignano is a UNESCO world heritage site nestled in the heart of Tuscany just 45 minutes southwest of Florence. In addition to the splendid views, two things bring us back to the hotel year after year: the excellent breakfasts and excellent service.

Days 5-6 Relais La Suvera
Pievescola (Siena) 53030
Tel : +39 0577 960300
Fax : +39 0577 960220

This luxury hotel overlooking the river Elsa is just west of Siena and 56 km (32 miles) south of Florence. A papal villa and adjacent building accommodate guests in magnificently furnished rooms and suites appointed with antiques and modern comforts. La Suvera's first-rate facilities, including drawing rooms, a library, an 18th century Italian garden, a park, and the Oliviera restaurant, make it the ideal vantage point to visit Siena.

**TO BOOK THIS TOUR OR FOR FURTHER
INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT SPYNS:
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ABOUT SPYNS



Spyns is an active travel company based in Whistler, British Columbia (Canada). Spyns offers active holidays to France, Italy, Spain, and Ireland. Less of a company and more of a state of mind, Spyns is owned and operated by Ryan King. A native of Toronto, Ryan has lived and worked in Europe for the past 17 years. Following a successful career in finance, Ryan (pictured on the right here with clients) sold his investment business and moved to Burgundy with his French wife. All set to retire, retirement lasted just 72 hours and he soon started leading cycling tours in Burgundy and later

throughout France. The Palio was on his life's "to do" list so he started organizing tours to Italy. Spyns hasn't looked back since. Spyns' tours have received extensive media coverage, most recently from NBC news and the Washington Post. What follows are some testimonials from former clients:

TESTIMONIALS

"Wow what a journey! I can't believe it was last summer that I hit your website – thank goodness we joined your tour. Can't wait for the next one." Sharon & Andy Castro

"This has been by far one of my best travel experiences. Well-planned, great people...I hope to do it again." Sandra Cline

"Thanks for a great trip and memories. It's the best tour I've ever taken...I hope to travel with you again." Bary Hearon

"The trip exceeded all of my expectations. The planning and events were all perfectly executed – and fun. I don't think I've ever crammed so much into 6 days." John Rogers

"Great biking experience through vineyards and perfect way to see Italy." Dennie McCrary

"Thanks again for the best family trip ever. We had such a great time." The Warshawsky Family

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HISTORY OF THE PALIO

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), but in the end visitors are peripheral. The Palio is for the Sieneese.

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. Sieneese 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 Sieneese refer to the *palio* banner offhandedly as *il cencio* (the rag), trying their best to sound flippant about the single greatest object of their

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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.

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