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Tuscany, featuring two nights in Florence

April 26-May 5, 2011

Approximately \$2,795 per person, plus airfare and V.A.T., based on double occupancy.

From the innovations of the Etruscans to the enlightenment of the Renaissance, **Tuscany** is a region steeped in history and human achievement. Let the charming village of **Cortona** be your base as you travel through the surrounding **Tuscan hill country**, admiring the beauty of the land. In **Siena**, navigate narrow cobblestone streets lined with Gothic buildings, visit the magnificent Duomo, and stroll the Piazza del Campo, one of the loveliest squares in Italy. In the **Umbria** region, explore medieval **Assisi**, home to the exquisite Basilica of St. Francis, and **Perugia**, an ancient Etruscan city-state. Then, journey to tiny **Montepulciano**, set in the heart of Chianti Country, and the delightful town of **Pienza**. Conclude with two nights in **Florence**, the *Cradle of the Renaissance*, and experience its brilliant artistic and architectural heritage.

Day-By-Day Itinerary:

DAY 1 ~ IN TRANSIT

Depart your gateway city for **Florence** aboard scheduled jet service.*

DAY 2 ~ CORTONA

Upon arrival, transfer* to **Cortona** and the *Hotel San Luca*. Tonight, attend a *Welcome Reception*.

DAY 3 ~ CORTONA

Educational Focus: *Cortona and Environs*.

Excursion: *Cortona*. Delight in the town's exceptional Etruscan features as you stroll past historic palazzi and through charming piazzas. Visit the Romanesque cathedral and the Diocesan Museum.

Independent Exploration: The afternoon is at leisure to pursue your own interests.

DAY 4 ~ ASSISI/PERUGIA

Excursion: *Assisi*. Visit the magnificent city of Assisi. Admire the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli and the Basilica of St. Francis.

Excursion: *Perugia*. From the splendid Piazza IV Novembre, set out on a walking tour through this Golden Age capital with walls from the Etruscan and Roman periods. See the striking 13th century Fontana Maggiore and the Prior's Palace, which houses the National Gallery of Umbria.

DAY 5 ~ CORTONA

Local Flavor: Attend a presentation of Tuscan cooking and cuisine.

Excursion: *Museum of the Etruscan Academy*. Cortona's Museum of the Etruscan Academy will astound you with archeological finds and important Etruscan, Greek, Roman and Egyptian works of art. A walking tour showcases the 13th-century Praetorian Palace.

Excursion: Winery Visit. This afternoon, travel to a local winery for a tour. Afterwards, sample some of its delicious vintages.

DAY 6 ~ PIENZA/MONTEPULCIANO

Excursion: Pienza. See the magnificent Duomo, impressive Palazzo Piccolomini and other sites in this idyllic Renaissance town.

Excursion: Montepulciano. Stroll along the main street and chat with artisans in their workshops. Peek into centuries-old wine cellars filled with famous Vino Nobile.

Educational Focus: Meet the People.

DAY 7 ~ SIENA

Educational Focus: Renaissance Art.

Excursion: Siena. Like a crown atop three converging clay hills, the magical city of Siena has remained remarkably unchanged throughout the centuries. Visit the Gaia Fountain, the Mangia Tower, which houses magnificent art, and the Duomo.

Tonight, attend a *Farewell Reception, Graduation Ceremony* and *Farewell Dinner*.

DAY 8 ~ FLORENCE

After breakfast, depart Cortona for **Florence** and the *Grand Hotel Baglioni*.

Excursion: Florence. A guided tour from the festive façade of Il Duomo to the churches, palazzi and libraries commissioned by Medici dynasty founder, Cosimo il Vecchio, features the city's famous art and architecture. Admire the cupola of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, a symbol of Tuscany.

View the spectacular bronze doors of the Baptistry. See the Old Palace and Ponte Vecchio, then visit the Accademia to see Michelangelo's famous statue, *David*.

DAY 9 ~ FLORENCE

Independent Exploration: Your final day in Italy is at leisure for sightseeing or shopping.

DAY 10 ~ IN TRANSIT

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for the return flight to your gateway city.*

NOTE: Itinerary sequence and/or scheduled events may change. Many excursions in this program involve an element of walking.