



David McGuffin's
EXPLORING EUROPE

VOLTERRA
DESTINATION GUIDE



INDEX

Clickable links below

Overview and Orientation - pg 2

Practical Information - pg 3

Chart of opening days, hours, costs, discounts, tel, advanced reservations, online booking, etc - pg 6

Sights in Volterra - pg 6

Tours and Tour Guides - pg 21

Shopping - pg 22

Entertainment and Outdoor Activities - pg 23

Traditional Cuisine and Vino - pg 23

Dining Suggestions - pg 25



Overview and Orientation

Volterra is my favorite Tuscan hill town and the perfect place for a visit. Not too big, not too crowded, and certainly not loaded with tacky tourist shops; it is authentic in every way. It is a beautiful town surrounded by ancient fortifications, guarded by an impressive fortress, and perched high on a hill overlooking the fertile fields of western Tuscany. Visiting here tends to make you forget about touring and focus on settling into the laid-back lifestyle of the local folks.

It's hard not to “go local” with a visit to the market or a stop at the neighborhood bar to knock down an espresso. Engage in conversation with the shopkeepers and get lost wandering the narrow, cobbled streets. On the town square, enjoy a crisp glass of wine at a café and then hang out for the late afternoon passeggiata where everyone gets out to visit. Finally, enjoy

a tasty dining experience featuring some of the best restaurants in Tuscany. Embrace Volterra and experience la dolce vita!

Practical Information

Getting to and from Volterra

By Plane

There are two major airports in Tuscany: Galileo Galilei International Airport in Pisa and Amerigo Vespucci Airport in Florence. From either, you can take a bus or train or rent a car to get to Volterra.

In Pisa, take the PisaMover to the Pisa Centrale train station.

In Florence, take the “Vola in bus” shuttle to the bus station near the Santa Maria Novella train station.

By Train

The closest train station to Volterra is on the Cecine-Volterra railway line. The stop is Volterra Saline – Pomarance. It is 6 miles from Volterra. The closest larger train station is Pontedera. From either station, it is possible to take a bus to Volterra.

By Bus

From Pisa (from Pisa Centrale train station), take a bus to Pontedera and then change to the bus to Volterra (line 500).

From Florence (from Santa Maria Novella train

station), take the bus to Colle de Val d'Elsa (line 131), which will take you to the train station in Colle, where you will change to the bus to Volterra (line 770).

From the Volterra Saline – Pomarance train station, take bus line 780 to Volterra.

By Car

There are a number of parking lots outside the city walls. Only residents can drive within the city. You can park at: Porta Fiorentina (small paid lot), along Viale F. Ferrucci (paid street parking. The lot in front of this is for residents), Porta Docciola (RVs can park here. It is at the bottom of the hill and you need to climb lots of steps to get to town), at Giocon-ovo (paid, along viale Porretti), Porta Marco-li (paid, some spots are reserved for residents), and Piazza M. della Libertà (underground paid lot, the entrance is before the piazza on the right).

Getting around Volterra

Walking

Volterra is a compact town and very easy to walk. It is only half a mile from one end of the walled city to the other.

Tourist Information

Volterra Card

The Volterra card is valid for 72 hours and includes access to a number of the city's top destinations: Guarnacci Etruscan Museum, the

Pinacoteca, the Alabaster Ecomuseum, Palazzo dei Priori, the Acropolis and the Roman The-atre. It costs €16 and can be purchased at any of the locations mentioned, in addition to the tourism office (Piazza dei Priori).

Other Useful Information

Doctors/Hospitals/Clinic

Pharmacy

There are several pharmacies near the Piazza dei Priori.

One is just past the Cassa di Risparmio, across Via Roma. Address: Via Ricciarelli, 2. Hours: Monday-Friday 9 AM to 1 PM and 4 PM to 8 PM and Saturday 9 AM to 1 PM.

The other is in the opposite direction. Address: Via Porta all'Arco, 1. Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 9 AM to 1 PM and 4 PM to 8 PM and Saturday 9 AM to 1 PM

Post Office

There is a post office in Piazza dei Priori. Open Monday-Friday 8:20 AM-7:05 PM, Saturday 8:20 AM-12:35 PM

Laundry

Lavandria Azzurra 2000

Via Roma, 7

Open daily 07:00-11:00

Self-Service.

Bathroom Facilities

There are clean and monitored toilets just off Piazza dei Priori. With your back to the door of the palace, walk to the corner that is at about 2

o'clock. Look down the small street, via del-le Prigioni. The toilets are on the left about 20 meters, just across from the bread shop al Vi-colino.

Chart of opening days and hours, and costs, discounts, tel, advanced reservations, online booking, etc

Sights in Volterra

Piazza Martiri della Libertà

Most likely, this busy square will be your first look at Volterra. It is here all vehicular traffic halts and the town becomes a pedestrian-friendly zone. Tour buses and regional buses stop here as well.

Porta all' Arco (Etruscan Arch)

This massive, yet eroded, arch was originally constructed in the 4th century BC as one of many entrance gates into the city.

Notice the oldest stones resemble those that can be seen throughout Italy, like in the Colosseum in Rome. This stone is known as tuffa and is found all over the Italian peninsula. Essentially, the stone is a result of volcanic eruptions where water, lava, and ash meld together to form these huge chunks.

The three almost indistinguishable heads were placed in the tuffa stone arch in the 1st century BC, more than 2,000 years ago! The other more uniform stones date from the 13th centu-

ry when the Etruscan walls were incorporated into some of the newer fortifications. Many believe this is the only remaining Etruscan round arch with a keystone in place. Many local experts believe the Romans used this arch as the model for their rounded arch and keystone construction technique, which can be seen almost anywhere in the former Empire.

Not only is the Porta all' Arco famous as an ancient relic, but it also has a WWII connection. It seems that on June 30, 1944, Nazi forces were planning to blow up the arch to slow down the advancing Allied forces. Heartbroken Volterrans quickly conceived a plan to avoid the travesty by ripping up all the stones that paved the via Porta all' Arco and using them to plug up the gate. Hence, they were able to convince the German commander that the now unusable gate was no longer a threat.

Palazzo dei Priori (City Hall)

Back in the Middle Ages, when Volterra was an independent city-state, it held no allegiance to a pope, an emperor, or other city-states. Therefore, it was important to put their unique “stamp” on things in the form of ornate public buildings.

Volterra's City Hall, constructed around 1209, was just such a structure. It served as a fortress, a palace, the court, and a public hall of records for centuries. It is believed to be the oldest of any Tuscan city-state and to have served as the model for the famous Palazzo Vecchio in Flor-

ence.

The many coats-of-arms embedded in the palace walls chronicle the ruling families of Volterra, dating back a thousand years. The horizontal “staff” carved into the wall, near the doorway, served as the official “rule” or yardstick for Volterrans who gathered in the palace courtyard to conduct trade.

For €1, it is possible to visit the city council chambers (when not in use) to experience the opulently painted room and its dragon light fixtures.

[Il Duomo \(La Cattedrale di Santa Maria Assunta\)](#)

You can see a portion of the Duomo from the Piazza dei Priori, just to the right of City Hall. There are horizontal black and white stripes on the rear façade, where a little doorway often opens into the Duomo.

To get the full experience of the Cathedral, walk around the block and enter from the cathedral square. The present Cathedral was completed in 1120 and dedicated to Mary and her Assumption into Heaven.

Before entering, look around the square. Here you will find a typical Italian arrangement of a bell tower, a baptistery, and the church. As in Pisa, Florence, Siena, and other towns, this was important because people could not enter the church without being baptized. Hence, a newborn would enter the baptistery from the west-

ern door, participate in baptism, exit through the east door, enter the church through the west doors, and finally, participate in worship facing the altar on the eastern end of the cathedral.

The Church

The entrance is flanked by two solid marble columns supporting a rounded arch. Higher up, more decorative marble is strategically placed to add detail and ornamentation to the austere stone façade.

Stepping inside, notice the highly polished granite columns symmetrically supporting decorative round arches. In contrast, the floor provides an array of geometrical shapes tying together the interior. Although the cathedral was constructed in the 12th-century Romanesque style, much of the interior dates from a remodeling job completed in the late 16th century by the Florentine Medici family. The ornate and highly decorative gilded ceiling depicts the Assumption.

Notice the various coats of arms from Volterra families and that of the Medici (the Medici coat of arms contains six “pills” representing their original profession as doctors or medici). The chapel to the left of the entry door houses several richly painted statues depicting Biblical scenes. They are hundreds of years ahead in their artistic development.

The Rosary Chapel is on the left, just before

the Pulpit. The painting is by Fra Bartholomew, completed in 1497. It depicts the Annunciation. Take note of the rich colors and attention to detail, especially in the Virgin Mary.

The ornately carved Pulpit was completed in the 12th century. Its carved scenes detail Jesus' Last Supper. All the disciples are present, although Judas is down under the table with an evil spirit.

To the right of the altar is the Chapel of the Deposition. Here, richly painted wooden figures depict the removal of Jesus from the cross in three-dimensional form. This work, completed in 1228, is an amazingly realistic representation that shows action and emotion in the figures. It was centuries ahead of its time.

The incandescent windows above the altar, instead of the typical stained glass, are actually made of sheets of alabaster.

The Baptistry

The Baptistry is constructed on an octagonal base and dates to the 12th century. The façade consists of the characteristic green and white stripes of marble. There are few decorations inside, but there are two baptismal fonts. The one in the center is by Vaccà in 1760. The octagonal font in the corner is by Sasovino (1502) and depicts the baptism of Christ, with the virtues of Faith, Hope, Charity, and Justice.

The Tower

The bell tower was built in 1493 after the original one collapsed. There is an inscription around the base that recalls this fact.

Museo di Arte Sacra (Sacred Art Museum) The museum is housed in the Bishop's palace, right next to the Duomo. It contains the collected works of art taken from neighboring churches that have been deconsecrated or left untended.

Museo Etrusco Guarnacci (Etruscan Museum)

The museum houses a treasure trove of Etruscan artifacts tucked away in “old school” display cases. This is the perfect example of artwork that is stashed away and only available for those who take the extra effort to go out of their way (to Volterra) for the experience. Often dusty and neglected, the artifacts chronicle the history of the Etruscan culture dating from 1500 BC.

There is very little English explanation, but you don't really need it to appreciate the works.

Perhaps the most famous work of art is Ombra della sera (Shadow of the evening), pictured here. This bronze statue has come to symbolize Etruscan society.

Just as important are the numerous funeral urns which were designed to contain the ashes of loved ones who passed away. Each urn is

carved with a scene specific to the deceased in hopes that it would present the gods with a favorable impression on their life on Earth.

The museum also contains loads of finely crafted jewelry designed to adorn the Etruscan people. Evidently, they had good taste and plenty of gold with which to work! The artisan on the road above the Roman theater handcrafts fine replicas of the jewelry.

Pinacoteca e Museo Civico (Art Gallery and Civic Museum)

The museum is located in the 15th-century Palazzo Minucci-Solaini. It houses a collection of paintings, initially taken from churches and monasteries that have fallen into disuse. The most notable work is The Disposition by the Florentine Renaissance painter Rosso Fiorentino. The painting depicts Christ's removal from the cross, done in an extreme mannerist style with characteristic elongated limbs and bodies. Other noted works include: a Pietà by the Volterranean artist Francesco Neri and the Annunciation by Luca Signorelli.

Additionally, there is a fine altar piece by Domenico Ghirlandaio known as Christ in Glory.

Palazzo Viti

The palace offers an authentic look into the private residence of the nobility. Twelve rooms display ornate decorations, frescoes, fine woven rugs, collectibles, and furniture from the 15th through 20th centuries. The palazzo is actually occupied by the Viti family, so it has a

“live-in” appeal. Many say this is the finest residential building in Italy.

Teatro Romana (Roman Theater)

Until the 1950s, this Roman theater and adjacent baths were covered in a pile of dirt, garbage, and debris that had accumulated in the 1,500 years since the fall of Rome.

The story goes that in the 1950s, a local resident noticed the rounded indentation in the Middle-Ages-era wall and sought funding and permission from the government to excavate. The government, bound by bureaucracy, gave permission to dig but offered no funding. It just so happened the local resident had an association with the “mental hospital” occupying the old Medici-era fortress, so he commissioned the patients to dig at no cost to anyone. The result of their labors revealed the perfectly preserved 1st-century BC teatro and 3rd-century AD Roman baths.

The theatre stage is typical Roman design with three levels from which the actors would appear: level 1 for mortals, level 2 for heroes, and level 3 (at the top) for gods. All Roman theatergoers knew this design, and thus, the playwright had an easy way to present the cast to the audience.

View the Teatro for Free

Via Lungo le Mure runs atop the Middle Ages-era wall, just above the Roman Theatre.

From here, you will have a great view of the ancient Roman ruins and the surrounding countryside to the north. This is also a great place to enjoy a glass of wine, a moonlit evening, and the quiet side of Tuscany. No wild after-hours parties! All is quiet in Volterra after 21:00. Go to La Vena di Vino if you want to kick up a ruckus.

Also, from here you can see portions of the four-mile Etruscan city wall, dating from the 4th century BC. Look to the left and find the distant church, then notice the stone (wall) just below. These are traces of the Etruscan wall that encircled Volterra and the surrounding valley fields more than 2,500 years ago.

Amphiteatro Romana (Roman Amphitheater/Colosseum)

Today is September 19, 2019 - In 2015 a previously undiscovered Roman-era amphitheater was discovered just inside the ancient Etruscan city walls of Volterra. No one quite understands why there was no historical account of its existence, but apparently it is for real. Crumbing Roman-era stones dating back to the 1st century B.C. were pinpointed in a farmer's field (perhaps from working the soil) near the Volterra cemetery property.

Over the last few years archaeologists have brought in ground-penetrating radar devices to locate and define the structure lying 20 to 32

feet under dirt and vegetation. There appears to be three levels of seating and enough room to accommodate 10,000 people. This is very much a smaller version to the famous Colosseum in Rome! The structure is laid out in an oval shape measuring 262' by 196' and so far, tunnels, passageways, and seating have been unearthed.

The land has been purchased by the government and just this month the first real excavations began. Today, I dropped by the site and observed a few men covering the newly excavated soil with white tarps, some digging around stones, and a few bringing in a port-a-potty.

The Bank of Volterra has put up some seed money to get the excavation going, however an estimated 5 million euros are needed to totally



reveal the amphitheater.

This site is not open to the public and is a difficult walk from Volterra town center. As work progresses, I'll update you on its progress.

Update May 2024 - Worked stop for awhile during the pandemic, but by 2022 the unearthing continued.

Brief History of Volterra

Volterra has been around a long time. The first evidence of a settlement in the area was during the Neolithic Age when settlers moved from “low ground” to the more defensible “high ground” of Volterra. The town sits on a hill about 540 meters above sea level, making it one of the highest spots in Tuscany.

Beginning in the 8th century BC there is evidence that the Etruscans settled here and founded the town as Veletthri. It eventually became one of the twelve city-states of Etruria and by the 4th century BC, a great stone wall was constructed to fortify the city. As you walk through the town today, notice all the references to the Etruscans: your hotel is named for them, there is a museum dedicated to them, the jeweler near the Roman theatre fashions jewelry after Etruscan artifacts and the great stone gate, Porta all' Arco, dates from the Etruscan era.

The Etruscans were forced to “join” the Roman Empire in 3rd century BC after the Romans defeated them in several battles. The town's name changed to Volatarræ and after several centu-

ries of good relations with Rome, the inhabitants were granted the right to Roman citizenship in 90 BC Unfortunately, Volatarræ got caught up in a civil war between two Roman generals and sided with the losing fellow. A two-year siege ensued (82-80 BC) and finally Volatarræ had no choice but to surrender. This was followed by a terrible sacking of the town and its inhabitants stripped of their citizenship.

Even with this terrible defeat, Volatarræ seemed to prosper into the 1st century BC. Historical artifacts and archeological evidence suggest there was new construction and a rebuilding of the city. The Roman Theatre dates from the 1st century BC and the nearby baths date from the 4th century A.D.

After the fall of Rome in the 5th century, Volterra became a diocese of the rapidly growing Church and a small temple dedicated to Mary was the city's first Duomo. Giusto became the first bishop and patron of Volterra. Legend has it that Bishop Giusto miraculously saved the city from a terrible siege in the 6th century. Being under siege for months, the townsfolk were to the point of starvation and exhaustion. Giusto persuaded the townsfolk to throw all their remaining bread over the walls in clear view of the invaders. Seeing this, the Barbarian invaders simply gave up the siege because they thought if the Volterra people could afford to throw away their bread, they were surely ca-

pable of fending off the long siege. The Barbarians gave up, went home and the city was saved!

By the 9th century the leaders and Bishop of Volterra became so powerful they formed their own government independent from any other jurisdiction. Things remained in check for several decades and then the power went to the leaders' heads causing envy, strife and discord. By the 12th century there was great division between the bishop's rule and the nobility. It all came to a head in 1150 when a new bishop took charge. The feudal lords and middle classes united to oust the bishop. As a symbol of unity, construction began in 1208 on the Palaz-zo dei Priori and was completed in 1257. This "city hall" became an outward symbol of civic pride and unity of the newly formed free commune.

It was during this time that Volterra took on the appearance we see today. The town went to great expense to construct massive fortified walls and the wealthy nobles constructed many tower houses (like you see in San Gimignano). One such tower remains in Volterra and is known as the "Tower of the Little Pig." Look up and around while in Volterra and see if you can find it. It was also during this time that the façade of the cathedral was embellished with the black and white marble you see today.

The middle ages were fill with wars and squabbles between neighboring city-states and from foreign invaders. Volterra was constantly exhausting its resources to defend against the ever-powerful folks in Florence, Siena and Pisa. Around 1361, after much feuding between two powerful families, Volterra came under Florentine control. In the Renaissance, Florence imposed new land taxes on Volterra. The people of Volterra revolted and Lorenzo de Medici (Florence’s ruler) sent in troops and the city was once again sacked in 1472. In the same year, Lorenzo ordered the fortress built to control the city and send a “message” to all that Volterra was now under Florentine rule.

The Importance of stone

Look anywhere in Volterra and you will find stone. The streets, palaces, churches, and city walls are made of it. Upon close inspection, you’ll find little seashells embedded into this unique stone known as panchino. Volterra, on the western frontier of Tuscany, has always been isolated from society and had to make do with what they had.

Alabaster

Early on, alabastro (alabaster) was discovered in and around Volterra. Previously, this stone was known only in Egypt around the town of Alabastron, famous for antique vases and perfume bottles. Once it was discovered in Volterra, the local craftsmen began duplicating the ancient relics from Egypt.

The alabaster of Volterra is known as chalky alabaster and is particularly soft and easy to carve. It comes out of the ground as a white chunk of stone that is eventually divided into smaller pieces. The Etruscans used only the best alabaster to carve funerary urns and sarcophagi decorated with ornate imagery of the deceased, scenes from their daily life and imaginary journeys beyond the tomb. The Etruscan craftsmen colored the white alabaster with minerals, turning them into richly colored and decorated works of art.

Apparently, the use of alabaster dropped out of vogue during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. It was not until the 17th century that it once again gained popularity. By the 18th century, Volterra's alabaster was world-famous. According to records, there were sixty alabaster workshops in little Volterra.

Today, even though alabaster does not play an important role in world art, craftsmen still thrive in Volterra. You will find several workshops managed by aged craftsmen passing down their trade to future generations. There are several alabaster workshops in Volterra. All welcome visitors and are happy to have you watch as they sculpt and work the raw alabaster stone.

My favorite is *Alab'Arte* (gallery and showroom) where alabaster is crafted by locals Roberto Chiti and Giorgio Finazzo. *Alab'Arte* is just across the street from the Etruscan Museum. Their real-live workshop is across the

street and down the hill at the Porta Marcoli.
Stop in and watch them in action!

Tours and Tour Guides

Walking Tours

Much of the information contained here has been gleaned from numerous visits and guided walks with my friend and local resident, Annie Adare. Annie showed up in Volterra some years ago, fell in love with the place, decided to stay, and, eventually, fell in love with a local young man as well. She and Francesco married, have two wonderful children, and live just outside the town walls. Through their agency, Tuscan Tour, they arrange American weddings and guided tours of Volterra and the surrounding countryside. Read more about it on their website tuscantour.com.

Wine Tasting

La Vena di Vino (see below for more information on this wine bar).

Shopping

Alab'Arte (gallery and showroom), just across the street from the Etruscan Museum.

Alabaster is crafted by locals Roberto Chiti and Giorgio Finazzo. Visit their workshop across the street and down the hill at the Porta Marcoli to watch them in action.

Markets

The Punto Simply Market is in the center of

town on Via Gramsci, 12. Open Monday to Saturday 07:30-13:00 & 16:00-20:00. Sunday 08:30-13:00.

There is also a weekly market on Saturday mornings in the Piazza dei Priori.

In September (on the Monday following the third Sunday of the month), there is a fair with stalls set up in Piazza dei Priori, Piazza Dan Giovanni and along Via Roma selling a smorgasbord of sweets.

Entertainment and Outdoor Activities Festivals

Volterragusto is held in March, October and November. It is meant to assist showcase the region's famed white truffle, but you can sample all kinds of local produce including wine, cheeses, oil, chocolate and salami. There are also historical reenactments. You won't want to miss the districts of Volterra competing in a cheese rolling competition along Via Fran-ceschini.

Volterra AD 1398 is celebrated on the second and third Sundays in August, takes visitors back to the middle ages with shows, events, markets, craftsmen, musicians, jugglers, peasants and noblemen, with everyone in costume.

Traditional Cuisine and Vino

Being in Tuscany, Volterra shares many of the traditional dishes from the region. You'll find cured meats, sausage, and cheese on the antipasti plates. Chefs are proud of their home-

made liver pate which is served atop a grilled piece of bread (crostini). Hand-made pastas with truffle or wild boar (cinghiale) sauce are a staple of every restaurant. The T-Bone steak (bistecca alla Fiorentina) comes thick and cooked medium-rare. A dish unique to Volterra is Zuppa alla Volterrana, a rich vegetable soup with day-old bread which becomes moist and soaks in all the ingredients.

Growing grapes is difficult here in western Tuscany. The soil is mostly grey gumbo clay which makes maintaining the vines a chore. Nevertheless, there are a few vintners in Volterra who have, against all odds, begun to produce some excellent wines. There are no DOC or DOCG designations here. Most of the wine is classified as table wine, but don't let that fool you... it can be very good!

The local white wine is vermentino, a grape variety which is usually grown near the seaside. The resulting wine offers a crisp feel on the tongue with floral and fruity flavors. It often possesses some salty undertones, especially from the grapes grown at the seaside. This is a very drinkable wine that pairs well with fresh fish, roasted vegetables or goat cheese.

From nearby, San Gimignano, you'll find VERNACCIA DI SAN GIMIGNANO, a DOCG white wine produced from the Vernaccia grape grown in the vicinity of San Gimignano. Many experts agree that this is the oldest grape vari-

ety in Italy, dating back to 1276. According to DOCG regulations, Vernaccia di San Gimignano must contain at least 90% Vernaccia.

Vintners may add up to 10% of other approved white grape varieties. In order to achieve ris-erva status, it must be aged at least 12 months. The wine is crisp with lots of acidity and laced with tart apple and citrus flavors. Serve it chilled. It makes a good easy-drinking and refreshing wine for everyday use or to drink on a hot summer's day.

Red wine is produced locally from mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Sangiovese grapes. The resulting wine takes on a taste that differs from that of the more famous wines produced farther to the east.

Dining Suggestions

I find that cuisine in Tuscany mainly consists of heavy and hearty rustic home cooking. It's all about simple food prepared to taste great. You'll find fresh vegetables, superb olive oils, grilled meats, fresh bread, and all the cured ham, salami, and sausage you'll care to eat.

Finding a place to eat is not difficult because there are a slew of restaurants, sandwich shops, and wine bars in every town. Add tourism to the mix and the places to dine multiply. Culling out the best from the just "ok" takes some research. Here are a few of my favorite dishes.

Antipasti

Tuscan Bread is made without salt. This tradition continues from the days when salt was very expensive and poor Tuscan farmers could not afford to use salt on bread.

Tuscan bread drenched in olive oil and sprinkled with salt is a common antipasti.

Bruschetta- toasted Tuscan bread brushed with olive oil and garlic and topped with tomatoes or mushrooms or whatever fresh vegetable is available that day.

Crostini – Smaller pieces of Tuscan bread, toasted and topped with various pâtés. Crostini alla fiorentina is topped with chicken liver pâté.

Dried meat and cold cuts – Try a selection of mixed salami, prosciutto, pancetta, or finoc-chiona. Add a few pieces of local cheese, such as pecorino, and you’ve got a wonderful start to any meal. By the way, you’ll not find a true Tuscan sitting around drinking red wine with nothing to eat. Any of the above cold cuts or cheeses make a perfect match for a good glass of red wine from Tuscany.

Salami – Salt-cured and air-dried cold cut sausages

Prosciutto – prized salt-cured leg of a pig

Pancetta– salt-cured pork belly, kind of like our

rustic bacon

Finocchiona – salami with fennel

Lardo— pure cured pork fat

Primi piatti

Hearty pasta dishes with meat sauce usually make up the traditional first plates. There are hundreds of pasta types, but some of my favorites are:

Pappardelle- wide flat pasta usually served with wild rabbit (lepre) or wild boar (cinghiale) sauce.

Ravioli – stuffed with local cheeses and served with meat sauce, black or white truffles (tartu-fĩ) or a simple butter sauce.

In the winter you will often find ribollita, a soup made from whatever’s left over in the kitchen and “re-boiled” with day-old Tuscan bread slices.

Secondi piatti

Bistecca alla Fiorentina – a T-bone steak grilled over an open fire and cooked very rare. After cooking it is seasoned with a little olive oil and salt. Typically the meat comes from the pure white Chianina cattle grazing in the fields of Tuscany.

You’ll also find various types of wild game:

wild boar, rabbit, pheasants, and such. Often these are included in an assortment of grilled meats done up on a skewer.

Dolci

Cantucci is often served with a small glass of Vin Santo. You might know cantucci as bis-cotti, a twice-baked crunchy almond cookie. Vin Santo is a sweet almond/raisin wine. Check out my blog for more information on Tuscan cuisine.

davidmcguffin.com/spot-light-on-italian-cuisine-tuscany/

Restaurants, Cafés and Bars

Ristorante Da Beppino features ingredients from their organic farm near Volterra. Chef Angelo Senes insists on only fresh in-season ingredients and locally sourced meats, fresh local fish, homemade pasta. Angelo's son, Antonio and his wife, Sara divide their time between the farm and the restaurant. Their restaurant features comfortable indoor and outdoor dining with a knowledgeable and friendly staff. Open daily 12:00-22:00. Via delle Prigioni, 13. T. 0588-86051. dabeppino.com

Ristorante Ombra della Sera offers elegant dining in their inside dining room and a more relaxed atmosphere at their street-side tables. Regardless of where you choose to dine, the food will be excellent featuring homemade pasta, truffle dishes, local cheeses and salami. The owner, Massimo, is a wonderful host and will treat you well. Closed Monday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:00. Via Gramsci

70. T. 0588-86663.

Ristorante Il Sacco Fiorentino is another family-run restaurant featuring mostly inside tables, a local crowd, and really good fresh food. Closed Wednesday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:00. Via Guisto Turazza 13. T. 0588-88537.

Pizzaria Ombra della Sera This place is always busy and is a hangout for teenagers and locals who know good pizza. Step up to the counter, order your pizza and watch the pizzaiolo (pizza making guy) prepare your pizza right in front of your eyes. Closed Monday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:00. Via Guarnacci 16. T. 0588-85274.

Pizzaria Tavernetta has great pizza too, plus an upstairs dining room featuring a ornate frescoed ceiling. Good food and good ambiance, what more could you want? Closed Tuesday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 18:30-22:30. Via Guarnacci 14. T. 0588-88155.

La Vena di Vino (The Vein of Wine) Some years ago, my friends introduced me to this unique wine bar. That first night, I was instantly welcomed by owners Bruno and Lucio and a cast of characters from the town. We spent the evening drinking wine and grappa, singing karaoke, and trying out our Italian and English on each other.

Since that night, I've held a bond of

friendship with the folks I met at this unique enoteca. Each day, Bruno and Lucio open a few bottles of good Tuscan wine and serve it up with tasty antipasti. Decorating the ceiling is a 1960s vintage Volkswagen Beetle adorned with bras donated by ladies who probably had too much vino!

This is THE place to hang out, especially in the late evening when the rest of the town sleeps. Closed Tuesdays. Open other days 11:00-01:00. Via Don Minzoni, 30. Tel. 0588 81491. www.lavenadivino.com

Café Etruria is located in a hidden garden with grand views across the rooftops of Volterra. It is a wonderful place for an appetitivo and light snacks. Owners Paola and Daniele are friendly and helpful. In the summer, they put on a BBQ on Friday evenings. Open daily 11:00-20:00. Via di Castello, 11. T. 0588-87377. al-bergoetruria.it

Picnicking Locations

The hilltop archeological park is a great place for a picnic. There are several markets around town when you can pick up drinks, meats, cheeses, and other ingredients to assemble your outdoor feast (see above).



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