

HORSE RIDING AND RELAXATION IN TUSCANY

4 days of la dolce vita between Siena and Montalcino

In mid-July, I set off on a short break to the ever-beautiful Tuscany. If you're not sure where to go, Tuscany is always a good choice and offers so many possibilities that you'll never get bored.

July is the season of blooming sunflower fields and harvested grain fields. The gentle yellow hills stretch as far as the eye can see, dotted with avenues of cypress trees, farmsteads, picturesque villages and castles. Towards Monte Amiata, there are also extensive wooded areas that provide shade for horses and riders in summer.

After landing in Pisa, I take the train

on a comfortable and very affordable train to Siena. Here, friends pick me up by car and we drive together through the magnificent summer landscape to the farm. The final 2 km take us along a gravel track through the hills. Passing an idyllic lake, we tackle the final steep climb to the agriturismo, which enjoys a beautiful panoramic location. The driveway is lined with huge cacti, followed by an avenue of cypress trees leading in true style to the buildings. The first thing that catches the eye is the pool, which we'd love to try out straight away. There are at least 10 sun loungers on the large lawn by the water.

But first, we head to our rooms. These are located in the main house above the reception and are all freshly renovated and tastefully decorated. There are just three rooms and three apartments. For us, the guests staying in the rooms, there's a lavish breakfast buffet in the morning with frothed milk, homemade cake and jam, juice, fresh fruit, as well as cheese and ham, so that our German guests don't have to miss out on their hearty breakfast.



The next day is all about the Tuscan mineral springs. So we spend the morning at the natural hot springs of Bagno San Fillippo. By a stream in the woods, there are small waterfalls and lots of little pools where you can relax to your heart's content. Some of these are set within a massive rock face, which is coloured snow-white by the minerals. A wonderful wellness experience in the heart of nature!

At midday, we visit the pretty village of Bagno San Vignoni, consisting of a few houses nestled around a historic Roman bathhouse. There are numerous small restaurants and shops here. In a quaint

wine shop, we put together a platter of delicious antipasti and cheeses – a perfect lunch accompanied by a typical Brunello.



Afterwards, we head back to the agriturismo, where my friends head for the pool whilst I get ready for a leisurely horse ride. A lovely country lane takes you to the riding stables in no more than 10 minutes on foot. The owner, Gaby, moved from Germany to Tuscany around 20 years ago and offers riding lessons here, and above all trail rides on her 20 or so reliable horses. My three fellow riders have already been on several rides with her and are absolutely thrilled. A well-behaved bay gelding of Spanish descent is waiting for me. Once the horses are saddled and Gaby has briefly told us the best order to ride in, we're ready to set off. We ride

along fields, heading first towards the woods. Gaby knows the local farmers and winegrowers well and is allowed to ride through the fields, so we never have to ride on a road. During the roughly 3½ hours, we do cross a small country road a few times, but otherwise we ride undisturbed through the beautiful countryside. We trot and gallop a few times. The horses are absolutely reliable and enthusiastic right to the end. That's the way to enjoy riding. The ride takes us through vineyards, clover and grain fields, along cypress-lined avenues and through Mediterranean woodland, and every now and then we catch a glimpse of a castle or a manor house – Tuscany straight out of a picture book!



We round off the evening in nearby Buonconvento. With its city walls and mysterious alleyways, this historic town offers a wonderful medieval backdrop. There are several restaurants and bars to stop at, and there's even a live band playing this evening. When we return to the farm, we gaze up at a stunning starry sky above the towering black cypress trees – what a day!



The following day, we want to soak up some culture and visit Montalcino, which is perched on a high hill about 20 minutes' ride. To the side lies a large wooded area, whilst on the other there is a picturesque panorama of the Val d'Orchia with vineyards, fields, small lakes and farmsteads. The town itself is breathtaking too: at the very top stands a stately castle with city walls, whilst at the other end of the old town are two large churches. In between lie the historic alleyways and squares. Every other shop is a wine bar or wine shop. For lunch today, we stock up on *piedine*, *tramezzini* and other delicacies, which we enjoy in the shade whilst taking in the magnificent view of Tuscany. For dessert, we treat ourselves to a generous portion of ice cream before we sadly have to say our goodbyes.

In the evening, we set off once more on a leisurely, roughly two-hour ride through the surrounding countryside, which is also well suited to beginners. The route initially follows a wide track between vast grain fields, past the occasional farmstead. The view over the hills and as far as the Crete Senesi is magnificent! The way home takes us past fields of sunflowers and clover. As there was plenty of rain this spring, the landscape is a lovely green and the small lakes, created here and there for irrigation, are well filled. Back at the farm, we release the horses to rejoin their herd in the huge paddock with the best view over the valley and two idyllic lakes.



Afterwards, we visit a country restaurant and treat ourselves once more to the regional delicacies.

The next day, it's already time to say goodbye. Before heading home, we decide to visit one of the many vineyards around Montalcino for a tasting of the typical Brunello.

We ring ahead to arrange a wine tasting at Azienda Tornesi, where we are warmly welcomed a short while later by the junior manager. The family's estate is set in a stunning location on the slopes of Montalcino, where wine and olive oil of the finest quality have been produced since the mid-19th century. After tasting the various red wines, the father invites us on a tour of the wine cellar. We were particularly impressed by the Brunello and the Rosso di Montalcino, so naturally a few bottles find their way into our luggage...

But now it's time to say a final goodbye to Tuscany. Until next time! Jessica Kiefer, July 2018

Link to the programme: <https://www.equitour.com/pegasus/d/reisen/europa/italien/monsta.htm>



