

## 1 – PIETRASANTA

Marble from the Apuan Alps provided the stone for the construction of the churches in the centre of Pietrasanta, a town of medieval origin and the historic capital of Versilia, a coastal strip of some twenty kilometres stretching from the sea, through hills planted with olive trees and vines, to Lake Massaciuccoli and the Apuan Alps. Versilia, with its golden beaches, a hinterland of small villages and nature parks, a mild climate and a nightlife rich in shows and entertainment... But it is also a crossroads between Northern and Southern Europe, a passage on the Via Francigena which – on its 26th leg – passes through Pietrasanta; a form of “slow tourism” – that of the Pilgrimage Routes – which allows the many pilgrims on their way to Siena and Rome to immerse themselves in the history and art of the area.

Marble working has an ancient tradition and has, over time, attracted artists from all over the world, transforming Pietrasanta into an open-air museum, so much so that it has earned the nickname “Little Athens”. Strolling through the centre, we can visit the artisan workshops where techniques and secrets of the craft are passed down; workshops that allow us to discover the origins of a work of art and the process leading to its creation. The International Park of Contemporary Sculpture offers a permanent open-air exhibition, featuring dozens of works displayed within the urban fabric where the life of the people of Pietrasanta (*piastrini* – in the local dialect) thrives.

It’s not just about sculpture in Pietrasanta: in the beautiful Piazza Duomo stands the 14th-century Cathedral of San Martino, with its splendid marble façade and a large, richly decorated rose window. It is flanked by the 16th-century Bell Tower, an unfinished structure 36 metres high, featuring a splendid spiral staircase, which hosts art and sculpture exhibitions in the summer. There is also the Teatro Comunale and the Church of Sant’Agostino, now home to the Museo dei Bozzetti, a collection of 700 sketches created by over 350 international artists who worked in the marble workshops and bronze foundries of Versilia. Not far away, the Church of San Francesco and the adjoining convent, built in the 16th century by the Franciscan Fathers, feature a cloister and a brick bell tower.

In the surrounding area, the village of Valdicastello was the birthplace of Giosuè Carducci and is home to a house-museum dedicated to him, with furnishings and display panels illustrating his work. But the artistic references are reinforced by the nearby Torre del Lago Puccini, a hamlet in the municipality of Viareggio, where the famous composer lived for thirty years, composing his major works in his lakeside home. The Puccini Festival, the only one in the world dedicated to the musician, takes place every summer in the places that inspired the maestro to create the unforgettable melodies of *Madama Butterfly*, *Turandot*, *Tosca*, and more.

From art to gastronomy (*but isn't that an art in itself?*) with tordelli – a rich stuffed pasta typical of Versilia on festive days – game and, among the desserts, Pietrasanta marzipan.

It is prepared on 3 February to mark the feast of Saint Blaise, patron saint and protector of the “throat”; with its classic round shape, it has an intense flavour, derived from simple ingredients such as sugar, almonds and eggs. To be enjoyed strictly with a glass of Candia dei Colli Apuani DOC!

A typical product of the Apuan region, the best known (*perhaps too well known?*) is undoubtedly Lardo di Colonnata. It should be savoured cut into thin slices, with toasted bread, paired with full-bodied wines; it is produced from the back fat of selected pigs, salted and cured with aromatic herbs inside special marble vats; originally a food to sustain the hard work of the marble quarrymen and now sought after by refined (or so-called...) *gourmets!*

## 2 – SIENA

Legend tells of the city's foundation by Senio and Ascanio, the sons of Remus who fled Rome to escape the murderous intentions of their uncle Romulus; the brothers took with them the statue of the Capitoline Wolf, which became, as the Sienese Wolf, the emblem of the city – *Senatus Populusque Senensis*. Historical sources tell us that the city actually developed during the reign of Augustus as a Roman military colony (called Sena Julia).

But it was the trade routes, linked to its location, that fostered its development over time, further aided by the medieval Via Francigena. Coming from Monteriggioni, the 34th leg of the Francigena arrives in the city at Porta Camollia, and continues south from Porta Romana (*nomen omen...*) towards Ponte d'Arbia.

Siena, a city of the highest artistic nobility, boasts a heritage ranging from the Etruscans to the Baroque, yet it is the Middle Ages that represent its period of greatest splendour, shaping the city and giving the historic centre a skyline identical to that of the 14th century. In the collective imagination, Siena is synonymous with Piazza del Campo (which hosted the Mille Miglia motor race), the Mangia tower and the Duomo, with its rich floor described by Giorgio Vasari as “*the most beautiful..., grand and magnificent... that had ever been made*”. But also with iconic frescoes such as Simone Martini's Guidoriccio da Fogliano, or Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Allegory and the Effects of Good and Bad Government – both housed in the Civic Museum; or Duccio di Buoninsegna's Maestà in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. Not to mention the tradition of the Palio, which galvanises the contradaoli (and others...), the only event that has been repeated for centuries on 2 July – in honour of the Madonna di Provenzano – and on 16 August – dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. But Siena is also evoked by the verses of the divine poet that have followed us since our school days, with the refrain: *Siena mi fè, disfecemi Maremma ...* recalling the ill-fated Pia dei Tolomei.



In a city of noble traditions, artisanal production is inevitable, supported by painters, potters, photographers and metalworkers. The techniques used in painting are ancient, such as egg tempera, where the yolk acts as a binder for powdered pigments. But there is also terracotta work, which uses clay from the nearby Crete Senesi; among the typical products are the Campanine di S. Lucia; hand-decorated with the colours of the Contrade, they are traditionally sold on 13 December in the markets to celebrate the saint's feast day.

The cuisine is also of the highest standard: it begins with starters such as crostini with chicken livers, pecorino cheese and cold cuts, followed by first courses: *pici* – thick handmade spaghetti made with water, flour and a drizzle of oil, *gnudi* – ravioli without the pasta wrapper, *ribollita*, and *pappa al pomodoro*. But “*in Siena, we eat the good stuff!*” and so there's Chianina beef with hearty grilled steaks. But also, pork; Cinta Senese pork is ideal for roasts and ragù, but is also used in traditional cured meats such as salami, *rigatino*, *capocollo*, *prosciutto* and *guanciale*. There is also a robust selection of desserts, some now well-established, including *ricciarelli*, *panforte*, *pan cò santi* and *cavallucci*; strictly to be paired with Vin Santo. Finally, the province is renowned for its wine production, particularly reds, with five DOCG and numerous DOC wines: from Chianti Classico to San Gimignano, and on to Montalcino and Montepulciano.

The surroundings are wonderful, mentioned here only to avoid sounding like a tourist guide: San Gimignano – the town of towers; Monteriggioni – famous for its intact city walls; Asciano – for the landscapes of its Crete; Pienza – with its regular urban layout, founded at the behest of Pope Pius II Piccolomini; ...

Finally, for sports enthusiasts competing in classic cars, the Eroica is not to be missed: a race featuring historic bicycles on dirt roads; winding through Chianti, the Crete Senesi and Val d'Orcia, it recreates the ancient essence of cycling, combining the beauty of exertion with the thrill of achievement.

### 3 – RADICOFANI

Perched high above the Paglia and Orcia valleys, Radicofani is striking from afar due to its position on a high geological formation: a drum of hard volcanic trachyte resting on Pliocene-era sandy-clay marine sediments. Once situated on the border between the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Papal States, its fortress, built in the 12th century, looms over the village below and has been contested over the centuries by the Papacy, Siena and the Medici due to its strategic position, controlling traffic and pilgrimages along the Via Francigena, the route linking Northern Europe and Rome.

Radicofani from RACHIS HOFFEN – the land of Rachis, likely named after the fiefdom of the Lombard king Rachis, who had a vision of the Saviour in the woods of Mount Amiata. It is also linked to the memory of Ghino di Tacco, mentioned by Dante and Boccaccio,



who has remained in the collective imagination as a sort of Robin Hood, a brigand albeit one guided by his own code of ethics.

In the churches of San Pietro and Sant'Agata, we can admire the glazed terracotta works by Andrea della Robbia and his workshop, resplendent in white, sky blue and green, with symbolism linked to devotion and the welcoming of pilgrims, bearing witness to the strong connection with the devotional pilgrimage along the Via Francigena. A tradition rooted in the medieval past and revived with the Palio de Bigonzo, held in September, in which the districts compete in the streets of the town centre to carry the ancient grape container.

From the top of the Rocca, the view opens out onto nearby Monte Amiata – an ancient volcano – and the valleys below, carved by the ravines; the beauty of the landscape makes Radicofani one of the five municipalities of the Val d'Orcia Artistic, Natural and Cultural Park, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Radicofani also holds the Bandiera Arancione (Orange Flag), the Italian Touring Club's mark of environmental touristic quality, an accolade awarded to small inland municipalities committed to environmental quality and sustainability.

Vine cultivation yields Orcia DOC wine, and olive groves produce extra virgin olive oil, but large swathes of the land are set aside for grazing, particularly sheep, resulting in the production of the famous cacio di Pienza. The gastronomic offering is rich, featuring handmade pasta: pici – a sort of rustic thick spaghetti, cazzagnoli – similar to the former but with a distinctly square shape and a firmer texture, and tagliatelle; all served with Tuscan ragù or "all'aglione", a giant bulb with an extremely delicate flavour as it lacks alliin, the amino acid that gives ordinary garlic its pungent smell. And then there are roasts, sausages or stews.

A region where the natural landscape blends with human activity, with cultivated fields alternating with dirt tracks, farmhouses and cypress trees. Particularly well-suited to cycle tourism, with the Ghino di Tacco Tour, a 34 km loop suitable for road bikes that passes through the nearby village of Contignano, crossed by the Via Francigena. It can be completed in a day and allows you to appreciate the landscape around Radicofani, protected by the Crete dell'Orcia Nature Reserve.

The Reserve, covering approximately 520 hectares within the Val d'Orcia UNESCO site, is home to endemic plant species and a wealth of wildlife; its topography is shaped by the Orcia River and its tributaries, with intense erosion of the exposed Pliocene clays creating striking landforms such as the ravines. Extensive farming gives rise to a diverse landscape, with dry pastures and arable land providing a refuge for birdlife, alternating with vast expanses of scrubland and areas of sparse vegetation; woodland, on the other hand, is in the minority, distributed along the river valleys and in a large plot in the centre of the Reserve.



## 4 – ROMA

All roads lead to Rome: hands up anyone who, even on a fleeting passage through the city, has missed the Trevi Fountain, St Peter's or the Colosseum?

There are numerous ways to interpret the Eternal City, from Italy's capital to the seat of the Vatican City, creating two states within its urban boundaries. But it is also home to the oldest Jewish community in Europe, established here for over 2,200 years. And since 1995, it has hosted Europe's largest mosque, providing a fitting representation of the three monotheistic faiths. On another level, it is also the capital of cinema, with the Cinecittà film studios—the most important in Europe, opened in 1937 and second only to Hollywood's in the world. While *Roman Holiday* in 1953 was a forerunner of the film tourism phenomenon, films such as Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty* have cemented Rome's image in more recent times, as have TV dramas such as *I Cesaroni* (incidentally: the bar in Garbatella that served as a filming location has recently closed and will become a wine shop with a kitchen, though the future managers assure us the bar service will continue...).

It is therefore difficult to summarise the many facets of a city that spans much of human history, alternating periods of splendour with those of decline. Leaving aside Trinità dei Monti, the Vatican or Trastevere, what alternative itineraries might one suggest for the curious (but not hurried) visitor?

An itinerary through the Ghetto in historic Rome, with its (few!) old haberdashery shops, albeit under increasing pressure from the growing food and beverage sector. The stumbling stones remind us of the deportation of Rome's Jews, which took place here and in other parts of the city in October 1943 ("Black Saturday").

More unusual is a visit to the Coppedè Quarter, built between 1915 and 1927; an artistic and architectural experiment that blends Art Nouveau and eclectic styles right through to classical art. From the entrance on Via Tagliamento, a large, richly decorated arch, illuminated by a wrought-iron chandelier, leads us to Piazza Mincio, where we find the charming Fontana delle Rane.

Contemporary to Coppedè, but reserved for the working class and therefore, note well, sufficiently distant from the centres of power, is the Garbatella district, built in 1920.

It consists of small houses and low-rise blocks surrounded by gardens, modelled on English "green cities"; strolling through the historic blocks, one can still sense – at least in part – a village-like atmosphere and a relaxed, old-world charm, where it is not uncommon to see washing hanging out to dry on communal lines in the gardens.

And then there is the EUR, commissioned by the regime as the 1942 Rome Universal Exposition, interrupted by the war and completed in the 1950s as a business and administrative centre. With the Palazzo della Civiltà del Lavoro, the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, the Palazzo dello Sport and, more recently, the Roma Convention Centre

“La Nuvola” by architects Fuksas, it overturns the notion of a Rome anchored solely in its past.

Not only a vast cultural heritage but also a rich Natural Capital: Rome boasts an enviable amount of green space per capita, including both the historic patrician villas (Ada, Borghese, Torlonia, Pamphilj, ...), which escaped post-unification development, and Protected Natural Areas such as Roma Natura and the Appia Antica Park, established following Antonio Cederna’s long-standing campaigns; a green corridor – traversed by the *Regina Viarum* – stretching from the Alban Hills to the Aurelian Walls. A stroll through the Caffarella Valley, traversed by the Almone, Rome’s third river, gives a good sense of the scenic value of what remains of the Roman countryside.

The local cuisine also has its roots in history, with the rich array of Roman Jewish dishes: *aliciotti* and endive, fried courgette flowers, salt cod fillets, artichokes *alla giudia* (not to be confused with those *alla romana*), Jewish pizza, and ricotta and sour cherry tart. Much of this cuisine is linked to the humble “fifth quarter” tradition, using the offal of animals that once came from the former Testaccio slaughterhouse: tripe, tongue, pajata, sweetbreads, ... But it is also represented by pasta dishes now widely accepted, such as *carbonara*, *amatriciana*, *gricia*; or *cacio e pepe*, where Pecorino Romano reigns supreme, a cheese with such excellent keeping qualities that Columella wrote in the 1st century AD in his *\*De re rustica\**: “*this type of cheese can even be sent across the sea!*” And to balance the sharpness of the Pecorino? A delicacy to be savoured the following morning: the *maritozzo con la panna*, a sweet once given by a betrothed to his beloved: hence its name, a playful diminutive typical of a certain Roman irony. Now to be tried in the city’s few bars specialising in artisanal production!



# SOURCES CONSULTED

## Online Sources

[https://www.comune.pietrasanta.lu.it/it/documenti\\_pubblici/turismo-guida-alla-citta](https://www.comune.pietrasanta.lu.it/it/documenti_pubblici/turismo-guida-alla-citta)  
[www.visittuscany.com](http://www.visittuscany.com)  
<https://www.puccinifestival.it/il-festival/>  
<https://www.eroica.cc/>  
<https://www.visitsiena.it>  
[www.visittuscany.com](http://www.visittuscany.com)  
<https://www.confraternitadisanjacopo.it/Vita/Pagine/frameRadicofani.htm>  
<https://visitradicofani.it/>  
<https://www.visittuscany.com/>  
<https://www.turismoroma.it/>  
<https://www.cittametropolitanaroma.it/>  
<https://www.eurspa.it/>  
[www.visitlazio.com](http://www.visitlazio.com)

## Printed texts

TCI (1994): Guida Rapida d'Italia Vol 3

