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Andiamo! Tuscany's Chianti Country

BY ANDREW COTTO

This will be a unique “Andiamo” as I, Editor-in-Chief of the magazine, usually defer to a travel professional, an expert in the area, to write the article. It occurred to me, upon choosing Tuscany for this issue, that I’m an expert on Tuscany who has written about the region extensively as both a journalist and novelist. I also decided to openly share some of my favorite places to eat, drink, stay. Here we go...

On my first trip to Italy, over 20 years ago, I was in Florence for less than a day before I decided to live there and pursue my dream of becoming a writer. A few years later, I quit my corporate job and moved to the hills south of Florence to work on my first novel. I returned to New York, as intended, after a year, but my heart has remained in Tuscany ever since. In fact, two of my subsequent novels, *Cucina Tipica: An Italian Adventure* and its sequel, *Cucina Romana: Another Italian Adventure*, take place in the very environs where I lived for that glorious year and have visited regularly ever since.



What I discovered during that year, and am reminded of with each return, is that Tuscany is nearly endless in its splendor. There are mountains, a coastline, numerous wine regions, major cities, minor cities, villages of various sizes, boundless natural beauty, and more. There’s simply not enough space in this section to cover all of Tuscany, so I will focus on the area that holds my heart and where my love of Tuscany began: Chianti country.

For my purposes, Chianti country is not just the wine region between Florence and Siena, as it is generally rec-



The view of the vineyards from Dievole Wine Resort

ognized, but also those border cities themselves, since they are such an important part of the town & country experience I recommend when in Italy. And what I recommend doing is as follows:

Start in Florence: Nothing immerses one quicker in the magic of Italy than the city that birthed the Renaissance. The city itself is a museum, with quite a few world-class museums within its modest circumference, full of architectural marvel among the quaint streets and serpentine lanes. I love the churches and the piazzas and the markets, the artisan shops and cafes and food stands. I understand there’s a few places to sit down and eat as well...Here’s where I like to eat and sleep:

Antica Torre Tornabuoni - A gorgeous, luxury accommodation in arguably the best location in Florence, right on Via Tornabuoni by the Arno, with views across the river from the suites and views of the skyline from the spacious, rooftop terrace and restaurant. www.tornabuoni1.com

Hotel Laurus al Duomo - A hidden gem among Florentine accommodations with its affordable rates, complemented by four-star hospitality, lovely rooms, and a great location in the city center. www.guestreservations.com/hotel-al-laurus/booking

Italy Perfect - If you are looking for a flat for any size group, this company has many options at various price points, all offering comfort, location, and artful decor. www.italyperfect.com



The river Arno from the hotel Antica Torre Tornabuoni

Ristorante Cafaggi - This classic eatery, frequented by locals, has been operated by the same family for 101 years. Think traditional Tuscan fare with an emphasis on beef in a casual, friendly atmosphere. Via Guelfa, 35 Rossa

These three trattorias, each distinct but similar in approach, on the first blocks in from the banks on the Oltrarno side of the river, epitomize ageless Tuscan eateries:

Carmine: Piazza del Carmine, 18r

Camillo: Borgo San Jacopo, 57r

L'Angiolino: Via Santo Spirito, 36r

Il Magazzino - In my favorite, tiny piazza, this osteria features offal at its best (if you're into tripe, lampredotto, etc.), but they also do the classics and other plates beautifully, like a pan-fried steak in an anchovy-enhanced coating (il mio preferito!). Piazza della Passera 2/3

Explore Chianti Country through Wine Resorts:

This particular wine region is as well-known as it is stunning, and is best explored via the Chiantigiana Highway that rolls straight through the heart of a countryside blessed with epic valleys, swooning landscapes, winding roads, verdant pastures, and quaint villages among olive groves and vineyards. Even better known than the beauty of this region is that the once dismissed Chianti has been transformed into a world-class wine, with the Chianti Classico variety being the most prestigious and the best sub-region to visit. Here's where I go to stay and eat and drink all under the same roof:

Fontanelle Estate - This ancient farmhouse and its annex has been lovingly configured into an elegant accommodation with an emphasis on wellness, wine, and gourmet food. The same owners operate nearby Vallepiciola Winery, a large, modern operation offering numerous varieties, distinct tour options (including a jeep-guided "Safari" tour through the vineyards), and an array of tasting opportunities. www.fontanellestate.com/en

Dievole Wine Resort - Home to makers of a prestigious Chianti Classico since 1090, this resort is a gracious compound of 28 modern rooms, running from suites to apartments, with many wellness options, an infinity pool, and a gourmet restaurant among the pastoral beauty. www.dievole.it

Borgo San Felice - A Medieval hamlet hidden in the middle of the Tuscan countryside has been transformed into a luxury accommodation with rooms and suites,



The cypress trees of Tuscany

two restaurants, a swimming pool, a spa, and an *enoteca* featuring the estate's award-winning wines. www.borgosanfelice.it

Stay Overnight in Siena: Like a lot of tourists, Siena was a day trip for me, before discovering an enchantment that comes with spending a few days within the walls. Beyond the Campo and Cathedral and Duomo are marvelous museums that reflect the often-overlooked role of Siena's important Renaissance history. There are also many quaint and curved lanes to wander, lined with charming shops and eateries, offering the many distinct delicacies of Siena and the nearby hills that surround the lofted city. Here's some recommendations for cuisine and lodging:

Grand Hotel Continental - The only 5-star luxury hotel in the heart of Siena deserves every star for the exquisite accommodations (try to get the Tower Suite), Michelin-star restaurant, and world-class hospitality. www.collezione.starshotel.com

Relias degli Angeli - Also in the city center, this former palace - featuring travertine stairwells and parquet floors, ceilings adorned with frescoes and public spaces for lounging - has rooms and suites at competitive rates. www.reliasdegliangeli.com

Ristorante Numero Unico - Between the Campo and the Duomo is this elegant eatery (since 1932) with the best of Sieneese cuisine on full display, along with a light-filled decor dedicated to the city's *Contrade* (neighborhoods) and the *Palio* (horse race around the Campo) in which they compete every year. Via di Città, 125

Ristorante Da Guido - A few steps from the Campo is this spacious *ristorante* with the historic vibe, signed pictures of celebrities on the exposed-brick walls, and an encyclopedic menu of Sieneese staples. Vicolo Beato Pier Pettinaio, 7