

Greetings Tuscany Travelers!

This letter will provide some insight into what to pack, what you'll experience on the tour, and little things you should know to enhance your travel to Tuscany.

There's a lot of information here over a wide range of topics. Please read it over as soon as you can.

Airport Check in

Please check in for your flight at least 2 hours prior to flight time. I always recommend an early check in for a trip like this. You'll need to have your passport and confirmation/ticket number for your flight. It's a good time now to verify that your passport has 3 months validity left after your return home. If not, your passport must be renewed.

Remember your passport

Make a couple of photocopies to place in your baggage and another with a friend at home. If lost or stolen, passports are much easier to replace if you have a facsimile copy. Take a picture of the signature page as a backup.

No visas are required for Italy (for US or Canadian Citizens), but your passport must have at least 6 months validity remaining from the date you depart Italy for home.

There is some speculation that the EU may place a visa requirement on US Travelers, but this is a long shot. If there are changes to the current situation, you'll get an email from me. **Check your passport expiration date today.**

[The Villa](#)

I'm sure you've all checked out the villa online. Here's your list of features available during the stay. If you haven't yet, you can click the link above or just google Tenuta Villa Rocchi. The owners, Cristina and Giuseppe, will be available to us during our stay.

- Wi-fi** Yes, you'll be able to connect to the outside world. It's a pretty decent connection.
- Pool** There is a substantially sized pool on the grounds. It's solar heated, so may not be for the faint of heart. Towels are provided. The pool is a relatively new addition, so does not show on the google satellite photo.
- Elevator** It's a three-story villa, no stairs required unless you need the workout
- Dining** We're enjoying dinner 3 of our four nights there. Buffet breakfast every morning.
- Laundry** Two washers and dryers are available for our use. These take some time and patience to use.
- Climate** The villa has air conditioning that is similar to other accommodations in Europe. Typically, these systems will cool to a certain temperature but do not operate to the extremes that you find in the USA.
- Cleaning** Refresh cleanings for the villa are scheduled for Monday and Thursday.
- Location** The villa is a short walk from the village where you'll find 2 restaurants, a small grocer, pharmacy, and café.
- Television** sì, c'è una televisione e la maggior parte dei canali ti aiuterà con le tue abilità linguistiche in italiano!
- Telephone** I assume that most of you will bring a phone. See the section below that discusses phone plans and calling. There is a mobile phone on the premises that comes charged with an hour of call time.
- Rooms** Each bedroom comes equipped with hair dryer and wall safe
- Smoking** Smoking is not permitted anywhere in the villa or on the grounds.

24-hour clock

Get used to using the 24-hour clock. Most of Europe works this way. 11:30 pm is noted as 23:30. This is especially important when catching any sort of scheduled transportation. Add 12 to PM times to come up with the correct number. Two PM becomes 14:00. Five AM is 05:00.

Suggested Dress

There is no established dress code for this tour. It's entirely up to you. There are some tasting rooms and restaurants along the route that would expect something a bit dressier than flipflops and cut-offs. Collared shirts, slacks or shorts, sundresses are my suggestions. There is absolutely no reason to pack any formal wear. Be comfortable.

Morning tours may be a bit chilly, with warming as the day goes on. We may also experience some precipitation along the way. Layer up in the morning if it's chilly. Remove layers as the day progresses. Bring a lightweight raincoat and/or a collapsible umbrella with you.

The (unheated) pool will be open throughout the stay, so consider bringing your bathing togs. Towels are provided.

Be certain to bring comfortable walking shoes. Break them in before the trip. Cobbled streets and uneven surfaces are the order of the day.

Tuscany Weather in Springtime

Historical temperatures in and around Siena have been very pleasant for the time we're touring. Highs in the mid 60s to low 70s, and lows around 60. It can be wet, with record rains in April 2023. Plan for some precipitation.

I suggest checking [Accuweather.com](https://www.accuweather.com) or [Weather.com](https://www.weather.com) just before you pack for the most current forecast.

We've got daylight hours to spare during our time in Tuscany with sunrise a little before 7:00 AM and sunset occurring a little after 7:00 PM.

Dining on our tour

We're dining at the villa some of the time. At other times, we'll be dining out. Generally, restaurants require that I pre-select an entrée or two for the group. I will need to know about allergies, sensitivities, and dislikes in that order. If you are vegan, vegetarian, pescatarian, or carnivorous, I need to know. If you've not advised me of issues, I would like to hear from you right away. Rest assured, internal organs are not on my menu.

The staff at the villa and restaurants will be made aware of these issues. The servers will be searching for the diners that have special dietary needs. Help them (and me) out by identifying yourself when we gather to dine.

Italiano?

Italian is one of the more fun European languages to test. It becomes easier with each glass of Chianti. Our guide, of course, speaks English and we're traveling to some heavily touristed parts of the country where most of our encounters will be in English. Still, since we're encountering native-speaking Italians during the week, it never hurts to dip your toes into the culture a bit by trying the local tongue.

At the end of this letter I've added a quick key to 22 phrases that will come in handy while you're touring. You may also want to consider a printed translation guide available at book stores or online. Google Translate, Microsoft Translator are but two free apps that you can download to your mobile device. Both have the unique feature of translating photographed text. This comes in handy if you want to avoid some internal organ as an entrée.

Electrical plugs and adaptors

You will need an adaptor and convertor for most US manufactured electrical devices that you take. The convertor changes the voltage, and adaptor allows you to plug it in. US Voltage is 110-120, and Europe runs on 220-240 volts. Battery chargers, curling irons, hair dryers are among these items. You can buy adapter/convertor kits at most drug stores. They come with many adaptors. There is a wide range of plug types. You only need your Type F plug as shown in the diagram. You can also use a C or E type plug, which are similar to the F.



Your computer and/or smart phone, if you bring one, should have already come equipped with a transformer/convertor in the cord. Check the voltage requirements on the transformer portion of the power cord. If it comes with a transformer in the cord, you will just need a plug adapter, not a current convertor. Adaptors/convertors are available at travel stores, Target, Amazon, etc.

Telephones

Call your provider to see what they recommend for phone coverage overseas. Each year it seems that US carriers become more competitive with coverage plans for Europe.

If your current phone isn't equipped to work in Europe, one of the most affordable options is to buy a simple phone over there with pre-purchased minutes. There are many local phone stores in Europe that will sell inexpensive phones with preloaded minutes if you need to have the means to call home. An inexpensive smartphone preloaded with 300 minutes will probably cost you less than \$100.

Whatsapp

This is the app most widely used to communicate in Europe and elsewhere. It's sponsored by Meta (Face Book) and is free. It allows you to text for free (wifi) and to make calls the same way, using the app. The calls can be sketchy in terms of quality. It uses a VOIP technology so that you sometimes get some echo.

I would like you all to download this app if you're not already using it. Send a text to me, using the app, at 425 417 3322 (with your name, please) so that I can add you to the Tuscany Whatsapp group. If you're touring the first week (April 20-27, you are Villa1. Second week guests (April 27-May 4), you are Villa2.

Any changes to schedule during the week will be announced and posted to the whatsapp group. It's a great tool.

Currency

The Euro has been the official currency in Italy since 1999. When I managed this tour in 2019, it took \$1.17 USD to buy 1 Euro. Last year, the Euro was on par with the dollar. As of today (3/23/24), one Euro is worth about \$1.09.

Bear in mind that these are the rates at which banks buy from other banks. The Dollar moves up and down a few pegs in a week's time, but has been mostly stable the past month or so.

Spending overseas

The ATM or Bancomat is the best way to obtain cash in Italy. They are easy to find along the route. Plan on a trip to the ATM every other day to withdraw Euro. You get the best exchange rate and won't have to worry about whether a vendor will accept a credit card.

Credit cards give you a fairly good exchange rate and most card offer consumer protection on your purchase. You also have a record of your purchase. Some bank cards charge 1-2% for purchases made in foreign currency, which offsets the beneficial rate somewhat. Chase Bank and a few others offer cards that do not charge the foreign exchange fee. Check with your bank to see about foreign currency fees. Make sure you keep your receipts.

I have found that Visa cards seem to have the widest acceptance, followed by Mastercard. It is sometimes difficult to get a vendor to accept American Express, perhaps because of their fee structure. Most smaller shops will not want to accept your card. They get hit with fees that make cash a much more attractive alternative for them.

Chip and pin cards have become the standard for most European card processing. This works just like the ATM system in that you enter a 4-digit PIN to complete your transaction. This is the system that Europe has been converting to and that the US has been somewhat slow to adopt. The USA has opted for the "chip and sign" program which most vendors across Europe are familiar with. I've found that the chip and sign cards most widely offered by banks in the USA have been perfectly adequate in my overseas travels.

The only place that a non-pin card poses a problem is with automated machines such as highway toll plazas or rail ticket machines. These are virtually impossible to use without a pin.

Bringing US Currency and hoping to exchange notes is a mistake. Banks keep shorter hours. Some don't offer foreign exchange, and many others won't like the condition of the notes you want to change. It certainly couldn't hurt to bring some US Dollars (new bills, \$50 or \$100 denomination) to use as a back up in case your card gets compromised or your banks security department locks it down.

You should be able to order some Euros from your bank if you want to arrive there with some (though really not necessary). There is usually a fee and you have to allow time for your bank to secure the currency. It's easiest just to hit the ATM at the airport or the nearest one to your destination. At each ATM Stop, get enough cash to last you for a couple days. Please note that airport and rail station ATM machines charge a higher fee. The last note related to ATMs is to use one that's associated with a bank. The "stand-alone" machines can charge more.

Traveler's checks are a thing of the past. They are a distant third to Cash (ATM), followed by credit card.

It used to be that your bank wanted to you advise them regarding overseas destinations and dates. Their loss management departments now find it easier to simply shut down your account at the first sign of irregularity than to manage individual travelers. Chase Bank won't even take the information online or over the phone. Be aware that your credit card may be suspended with overseas use. If generally takes a call to your bank to rectify the problem. You should be sure to get the toll-free international number for your bank in the event of an over-reaching security algorithm at your bank.

You should still make an attempt to contact your bank with your schedule and dates. Some banks allow you to make these notifications online. Otherwise get in touch with the customer service section of your bank.

Another Note: I have a wallet that is **RFID protected**. Some credit and debit cards can be read remotely using a portable reader. Add a level of protection by purchasing RFID sleeves for your cards. You can also find RFID wallets online.

Packing your bags

There are a few excellent websites dedicated to the art of packing for a trip. I have reproduced some of that information here, but you may want to visit some of these sites yourself. The links are www.oratory.com/travel, and <https://happytowander.com/suitcase-packing-tips/>. Please do what you can to reduce the size of your bag and remember that laundry is available at the villa.

Make sure you have a bag with wheels. Don't take too much. Leave some room for the wine you'll be taking home.

Laundry

There are two washing machines and at least one dryer available to use, free of charge, at the villa.

Security/Safety

There is very little violent crime toward tourists in Italy. There is, however, a great deal of pickpocketing and scams in which tourists are a prime target.

Be particularly aware of your belongings and surroundings in crowded places. Markets, churches, restaurants are places where a lack of attention can lead to a snag in your holiday fun.

Take a photo of your passport with your phone. It's also a good idea to photocopy the data page and zip it into a suitcase pocket. Leave a copy with a friend or relative that is able to fax or email that copy should you need it. It's much easier to replace a lost or stolen passport if you have a facsimile to present.

Rick Steves and people that have used them, swear by a money belt. I've always found them to be somewhat uncomfortable, but you may want to give it a try. Please! No wallets in back pockets! Purses and backpacks should always be zipped closed and held in front of you in crowded situations. See the section on RFID protection under Banking.

Buddy up! If you're going out, don't go alone. There is safety in numbers.

Suggested Gratuities

You do not typically tip at restaurants in Italy. There is typically an added service fee on the bill of 1-3 euros.

Taxis are generally offered an extra 1-2 euro in the city. If you get help with your bags and you have an exceptional driver, then 5% is a nice addition.

Hotel porters-generally 1 € per bag.

Our guides are compensated for their time, but work hard for a little extra gratuity at the end of the week. If you enjoyed the service provided by our resident guide and driver, show your appreciation. Guidelines are €3-€5 per person, per day for the guides, and €2-€3 per person, per day for the driver. I'll pass an envelope close to the end of the tour for contributions.

Transportation from Florence to the villa

Transportation times are listed on the schedule for the individual week.

Traveler Name list

I don't usually send guest name lists in advance of travel. Using the Whatsapp phone/text program will provide you with contact details for other tour members.

Weekly itinerary

DAY 1: SATURDAY, APRIL 20: ARRIVE FLORENCE AIRPORT

Meet your driver at Florence Airport and travel 90 minutes to your Tuscan Villa. The afternoon is free to wander the village. We have a late afternoon wine tasting arranged prior to the welcome dinner at the villa in the early evening. Overnight Torrita di Siena (D)

Pick up point for transportation to the villa will be at Florence Airport in the Arrivals area at 1:00 PM. The villa is being cleaned and prepped for our arrival. We'll be there about 3:00 PM. I'm not sure if I will be there or not. If I cannot get there by that time, the guide will meet you. You'll all be on the same text group to coordinate the meet up.

DAY 2: SUNDAY, APRIL 21: SIENA

We start the day in [Siena](#) where we'll meet a local guide in the city center for a walking tour of the city and a visit to a local [Pasticceria](#) for a sampling of the pastries and cakes Siena is known for. You'll have some free time for shopping or more food sampling after our tour. Lunch is on your own, but you might just want to enjoy a gelato since we've got a food and wine pairing at our afternoon wine producer.

We'll set a time to meet up to rejoin the coach for a short drive to [Azienda Agricola Montechiaro](#), just outside the city of Siena. We'll enjoy a tasting of 6 wines and some local bites.

Suggestions for your afternoon include a visit to the Duomo, see the Frescoes and climb the tower at Palazzo Pubblico, or shop for locally made leather goods at Casa Della Pelle. Dinner is scheduled at a fantastic restaurant just a few miles from the villa called Fondo Ristorante at 7:30 PM. Overnight Torrita di Siena (BSD)

DAY 3: MONDAY, APRIL 22: MONTALCINO & PIENZA

We've got a late morning tour and tasting at the winery [Canalicchio di Sopra](#) located just outside the town of Montalcino. This is a special vertical tasting of 6 of their wines, including Rosso and Brunello.

After tasting, we'll spend a little time in the town of [Montalcino](#) for a quick lunch on your own. Next, we'll travel to the town of [Pienza](#) for a visit to [Taverna del Pecorino](#) for a sampling of fresh and aged cheeses, salumi, prosciutto, and balsamico, followed by free time in the historic center.

From Pienza we're scheduled for a short tour of the farm by the owner at [Podere il Casale](#) followed by our 5:30 pizza making class and subsequent pizza eating session. We'll return to the villa later in the evening about 8:30 PM. Overnight Torrita di Siena (BSD)

DAY 4: TUESDAY, APRIL 23: SAN GIMIGNANO

This morning we visit [Podere la Marronaia](#), a family owned biodynamic estate set in the hills north of [San Gimignano](#), for a morning truffle hunt in the estate forest with a certified Cavatore, or truffle hunter. The hunt ends and a light truffle lunch begins featuring wines from the estate. Following this lunch, we'll have a bit of free time in San Gimignano for shopping, photos, and exploring. San Gimignano is home to [Dondoli Gelato](#), arguably the best in Tuscany.

In the late afternoon, we visit La Rocca, the fortress at the top of the town, and home to The [Vernaccia Wine Experience](#). We'll enjoy a tasting of this unique white wine local to the area.

We'll depart from San Gimignano about 5:30 for return to Torrita di Siena. We've got dinner booked at 7:30 just a short walk from the villa this evening at Piccolo Ristorante. Overnight Torrita di Siena (BLD)

DAY 5: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24: MONTEPULCIANO

We depart the villa after breakfast for our shortest day of touring in that we're only 17 km from the town of [Montepulciano](#). Our first visit in the morning is at [Avignonesi](#) at 11:30 AM for a tour of their Vin Santo production, tasting of wine and buffet lunch.

We'll travel from there to spend time in the town of Montepulciano before our second appointment of the day at a small family-run winery called [Tenuta Valdipiatta](#). We've got time to tour and taste here before continuing for a dinner appointment at 7:30 PM at [Il Covo](#), a small restaurant on the outskirts of Montepulciano. Overnight Torrita di Siena (BLD)

DAY 6: THURSDAY, APRIL 25: CHIANTI

Our day in Chianti with a departure at 9:00 AM for the 11th century abbey and gardens at [Badia a Coltibuono](#) for a tour and wine tasting. We then travel on to Radda to the [Casa Chianti Classico](#) for a lunch and tasting there.

We'll return the villa about 5:00 this afternoon with time for a drink by the pool. Dinner tonight is at the villa at 7:30 PM. Overnight Torrita di Siena (BLD)

DAY 7: FRIDAY, APRIL 26: PERUGIA

We're departing Tuscany for the day to visit Umbria with a walking tour of the city of [Perugia](#). You'll have some free time after the tour before we travel on to a family-owned winery near Lake Trasimeno, [Cantine Goretti](#). Goretti has been making wine for 8 generations, and is now run by sisters Sarah and Julie. You'll have the chance to sample a few wines unique to this region along with a great sampling of local foods. We should arrive back at the villa by 4:00 PM. Farewell dinner is at the villa tonight at 7:30. Overnight Torrita di Siena (BSD)

DAY 8: SATURDAY, APRIL 27: ARRIVEDERCI!

Transportation is provided from the villa to accommodate early flights home. Guests departing early will be provided with a boxed breakfast. Later morning transportation is provided for guests with later flights from Florence.

The shuttle van back to the airport will depart with most of the group at 8:00 AM to get you back at before 10:00 AM. For the guests that are on the KLM flight at 6:30, you will leave by car at 3:00 AM. The couple that are departing at 10:20 on Air Dolomiti, your car will depart at 7:00 for the 90-minute ride to the airport.

THE TOWNS

- [Montepulciano](#)
- [Montalcino](#)
- [Siena](#)
- [San Gimignano](#)
- [Perugia](#)
- [Torrita di Siena-Villa site](#)

THE VINO

- [Vino Nobile di Montepulciano](#)
- [Brunello di Montalcino](#)
- [Chianti Classico](#)
- [Vernaccia di San Gimignano](#)
- [Super Tuscans](#)

If you have any questions about this tour, please contact Brad Cilley at brad@nwtravel.com or by phone at 425 375 2676.

Greetings and Farewells in Italian

If you want to greet people correctly throughout the day in Italy, there are a handful of basic Italian phrases to learn. Some of these basic Italian words are more casual, others are more formal.

If you're wondering how to say hello in Italian, there are multiple options. When in doubt, listen to what the locals use to greet you and repeat what they've said.

1. Hello/Goodbye – Ciao

Ciao is a casual greeting that can be used at any time of day. To be more formal with strangers, use the Italian phrases below instead

2. Good morning. – Buongiorno

How to say good morning in Italian? Say Buongiorno in the morning and until lunch.

3. Good afternoon – Buona sera

This Italian phrase is used in the afternoon, after lunch and before dinner.

4. Boa noite – Buona notte

From 6pm onwards, use this one. You can also use it as a generic way of saying goodbye.

5. Goodbye – Arrivederci

Arrivederci is the formal way of saying goodbye in Italian. You can also say ciao.

Being polite

Now that you have Italian greetings down pat, try these common Italian phrases that are respectful and polite. Whenever you travel to a new country, it's polite to learn how to say hello, thank you, and excuse me in the local language. If you're visiting Italy soon it's essential to memorize these Italian words for your trip.

6. Thank you – Grazie

7. Please – Per favore

8. You're welcome – Prego

9. Excuse me – Mi scusi

10. I'm sorry – Mi dispiace

Getting Around in Italian

Lost in the maze of charming streets? Don't fret! A polite "Mi scusi, come arrivo a...?" (Excuse me, how do I get to...?) can point you in the right direction.

If you choose to travel with Trafalgar, you'll have an Italian-speaking Travel Director on hand to navigate the language. And yes, it's still important to learn some basic Italian words so if you're at a restaurant alone or visiting a city in Italy without the group you can find your way around.

11. Excuse me, how do I get to...? – Scusi, come arrivo a...?

If you get lost, ask a shopkeeper for directions. Follow their hands!

12. Where is the bathroom? – Dov'è il bagno?

This is one of those common phrases that you should learn in any language! At least memorize the word “bagno”.

13. How much does it cost? – Quanto costa?

This Italian phrase is useful while shopping, visiting flea markets, or asking about specials at a restaurant.

14. One ticket, please – Un biglietto, per favore

15. I understand – Capisco

Or “non capisco” if you don’t understand.

Dining out

In Italy, dining out is an experience – not just a meal. It’s not something you want to rush through as you linger over rich antipasti, savor fresh pasta, and sip local wine – ideally on an ancient piazza or overlooking the vineyards of Tuscany. Italy embodies the Italian phrase “dolce far niente” – the sweetness of doing nothing – where you embrace long, laughter-filled conversations, and don’t rush off once the meal is done. That can be a tricky adjustment for foreigners visiting Italy.

16. The bill, please – Mi dia il conto, per favore

We’re used to fast service and getting the bill the moment we clear the plate. If you’re in a hurry, memorize this Italian phrase so you can hail your waiter and get the bill.

17. I would like... – Vorrei...

18. Can I have...? – Posso avere...?

19. Can I reserve a table? – Posso prenotare un tavolo?

20. Do you accept credit cards? – Accetta carte di credito?

Often in Europe, it’s helpful to carry some cash, especially if you plan to visit small mom-and-pop trattorias or shop at market stalls.

21. I am allergic to... – Sono allergico a... / Sono allergica a...

If you have allergies, it’s important to learn how to express that in Italian. While you might think Italy – the land of pizza and pasta – is a nightmare destination for gluten-free folk, it’s actually incredibly understanding and easy to find gluten-free meals, pasta and more.

22. Enjoy your meal! – Buon appetite!