

## **The Hilltowns of Tuscany, Umbria and the Marche,**

**May 27 – June 8, 2018**

### **Sunday, May 27**

Travelers arrive at our hotel in Florence. In the evening, we gather for a Welcome Reception and a brief orientation before dinner.

### **Monday, May 28**

In the morning, we gather for a preparatory lecture and slide program to introduce some of the major artists, cultures and monuments that we shall encounter in the days ahead. Later, we visit the historic center of the city including experiencing the art of Giotto, Masaccio, Donatello, Lippi and Michelangelo. The evening is at leisure.

### **Tuesday, May 29**

Leaving Florence, we travel across western Tuscany, enjoying splendid panoramas as we approach the ancient Etruscan City of Volterra. There we will find one of the finest museums of Etruscan culture in Italy, together with the important Romanesque cathedral and the architectural predecessor of the Florentine Palazzo Vecchio. The land around Volterra is rich with minerals, especially the highly prized alabaster from which craftsmanship have produced objects of rare beauty for centuries. In a short stop before leaving the town, we take in the panorama from the rapidly eroding edge of the cliffs on which Volterra has stood for century, where in clear weather one can catch a glimpse of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Later in the afternoon, we visit San Gimignano, the medieval city of skyscrapers and the outstanding fresco cycle in its main church and end the day at our hotel in the countryside near Siena.

### **Wednesday, May 30**

This morning, we travel to the home of the Palio, the majestic city of Siena. In the course of the day, we will visit the dramatic black and white cathedral which, even when viewed from miles away, seems to watch over the city and its passionate contrade; the famous Piazza del Campo and the Palazzo Pubblico with its soaring tower and the extraordinary frescoes by Simone Martini. Time for shopping or an aperitif before returning to our hotel.

### **Thursday, May 31**

Departing our hotel, this morning we travel into the heart of the gorgeous Val d'Orcia, making our way to the beautiful, luminescent 9th century church of Sant' Antimo. Originally part of a Benedictine monastery, the alabaster and travertine church, one of the most beautiful in Italy,

was according to legend founded by Charlemagne. After our visit we will have lunch, paired with the famous wines of the region at one of the loveliest and most noble wineries in Tuscany. Later, we visit the beautiful walled city of Montalcino, home of the famous Brunello di Montalcino wine. We conclude the day with a short trip to our hotel in Pienza.

### **Friday, June 1**

Today is devoted to Pienza, the tiny jewel of Renaissance urban planning, perched atop the most breathtaking landscapes in Italy. Here we will visit its splendid Gothic cathedral, as well as the Piccolomini Palace all built with the support of Pope Pius II (1405-1464) one of the great proponents of humanism who undertook the project of creating an ideal city to embody the vision of Renaissance humanistic principles. Beyond its historic importance, Pienza is a delightful town to enjoy at leisure - the gorgeous views, the wine, the wonderful food (since the time of the Etruscans, Pienza has been the capital of Pecorino cheese), pici, the thick, round Tuscan pasta, beautiful locally produced linens, and the charm that makes Pienza one of the best loved cities in Italy.

### **Saturday, June 2**

This morning we travel to Arezzo, our first stop on the Piero della Francesca Trail to view that artist's magnificent fresco cycle The Legend of the True Cross perhaps the most important fresco cycle of the 15th Century. In the afternoon we will visit the bustling Etruscan hill town of Cortona. Long before it became popularly known for the setting of Under the Tuscan, Cortona was an important medieval and renaissance cultural center. Fra Angelico traveled here to do two important altarpieces including his famous The Annunciation of Cortona now in the Museo Diocesano. The artist Luca Signorelli (1441-1523) was born in Cortona and several of his paintings remain here. Another native painter, Pietro Berrettini (1596-1669) known as Pietro da Cortona was born here. We will visit the museum and other historical sites while still having time to experience the town's charms, before returning to Pienza for the night.

### **Sunday, June 3**

This morning, we depart Pienza and travel through the ruggedly beautiful Casentino to Mount La Verna, the wooded retreat of St. Francis and his followers. It was at La Verna that Saint Francis prayed to receive the Stigmata. In the chapel of the Stigmata we view some of the most magnificent and beautiful of Andrea della Robbia's works. Then, we travel a few miles down the road to the charming and historic town of Sansepolcro, Piero della Francesca's birthplace, where we spend the night.

### **Monday, June 4**

In Sansepolcro, we will visit the small museum housing perhaps Piero's most famous work, The Resurrection, as well as his stately altarpiece the Madonna della Misericordia. After lunch, we travel a very short distance to Monterchi to see Piero della Francesca's haunting fresco the Madonna del Parto, portraying the rare image of a heavily pregnant Virgin Mary.

Later that afternoon, we travel to the austere beautiful medieval town of Gubbio, where we will spend three nights in a lovely former Cappuccian convent that has been restored and turned into a modern, comfortably appointed hotel. The evening is at leisure to explore the haunting, evocative character of Gubbio, a small city nearly wholly intact from the medieval period

### **Tuesday, June 5**

While still residing in Gubbio, today we will venture into the Marches region to what was once one of the great cultural centers of Europe, the small fairytale like city of Urbino. Urbino was the birthplace of Raphael and Bramante, but it is most famous for the creation of the ideal, humanistic court under the rule of Federico da Montefeltro and his wife Battista Sforza, the Duke and Duchess of Urbino - a court which inspired Castiglione's influential Book of the Courtier. The Palazzo Ducale, a careful articulation of Neo-Platonism and one of the most beautiful palaces in Europe, is still considered an architectural wonder. The palazzo also holds our final stop on the Piero della Francesca Trail: The "world's greatest small painting" – The Flagellation by Piero della Francesca as well as his Madonna della Senigallia. After lunch and a stroll through the city, we return to again to Gubbio.

### **Wednesday, June 6**

A short trip takes us to Assisi, birthplace of St. Francis and itself one of the loveliest of hill towns. Here we shall visit the famed Basilica of San Francesco, built in the mid-13th century and decorated by many of the most renowned painters of the Gothic period, Giotto and Cimabue. St. Francis' beliefs, his humility, his love of his "brothers and sisters" as well as his celebration of nature, while having a tremendous influence on religion, gave rise to a wholly new humanistic vision in art and literature. As Francis transformed traditional notions of religious and spiritual values, Giotto was the master who transformed the rigidity of Byzantine painting to the very human yet spiritually inspiring image that are seen in to the upper basilica depicting the life of the saint.

After lunch we will enjoy the opportunity to visit first the "Carceri," the retreat high up on Mount Subasio used by St. Francis and his companions for contemplation and then the little church of San Damiano where St. Francis received his mission from God to rebuild His Church. Later it was here that St Francis composed the Canticle of the Creatures and where St Clare founded the Sisters of the Poor Clares and where she died in 1253. We return to Gubbio for an evening at leisure.

### **Thursday, June 7**

In the morning, we travel to Orvieto, home of Orvieto Classico wine, and certainly one of the most striking of the hill towns for its dramatic setting atop a plateau of volcanic rock. It is easy to see why Clement VII fled to Orvieto when Rome was sacked by the French King Charles VII in 1527. We will visit the famed cathedral with its golden facade of mosaics and carvings, and within it the dramatic frescoes, among the first of the modern age (1499-1503) of Luca Signorelli's apocalyptic Last Judgment. The city was also an important Etruscan center and there are still 1000 caves in "underground Orvieto" which can be visited in the afternoon.

This evening we will gather for our Cena Addio, our farewell dinner bidding “Arrivederci” to Bell’Italia and to one another.

**Friday, June 8**

After breakfast, our motor coach will transport the group to Leonardo da Vinci Airport where our tour will officially end.

**\*\*N.B.** to allow participants greater flexibility in planning their travels, the tour does not include hotel accommodations in Rome for Friday night, June 8. Participants wishing to spend the night in Rome should make hotel reservations independently in advance.