

Tuscany Touristi

Tuesday, 2 October 2007

Day 9 of 11

In Tuscany

Driving across Tuscany, hill town to hill town

Before there were Italians, before there were Romans, there were Etruscans, who began building cities and towns from the peninsula's west coast into the central hills almost 3,000 years ago.

They left their name on the region of Tuscany (Toscana in Italian) and their bones in small tombs scattered across the countryside, along with their eating utensils, furniture and other necessities of the after-life.

Although the Romans overthrew their Etruscan king about 2,500 years ago, the Etruscans were the original civilization here, and the province of Tuscany is now considered the most Italian of all.

Saying something is more Italian than something else means Tuscany's grapes make better wine (we are staying in the Chianti region), its hills are more beautiful, its weather sunnier and its alleyways darker and
Continued on next page



Entering Siena's Piazza Il Campo and its 330-foot tall Torre del Mangia, the tallest secular tower in Italy.

Here's our full itinerary

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Sept 23	24 Fly to Italy	25 Arrive in Venice	26 Vicenza Dedication of Margaret Williamson Memorial Garden	27 Vicenza to Lake Como	28 Lake Como	29 Lake Como to Rome
30 Rome	Oct 1 Rome to Florence & Tuscany	2 Tuscany	3 Tuscany to Milan	4 Fly to United States	5	6

Siena to San Gimignano

Continued from Page 1

narrower than anyone else's. Coming from a group that has seen, tasted and walked some of Italy's best, we concur.

We spent today in two of Tuscany's hill towns, Siena and San Gimignano (swallow the second "g" and say jim-in-YA-no), places built when Italy was a land of warring city states and defense determined city planning.

They are built on hilltops to spot the enemy from far away. They are surrounded by thick walls and battlements. The buildings within them are multi-storied and crowd crooked streets that are fully sunlit only at midday.

But each has its character. Siena, dedicated to its republican government, made the city hall and its tower the focal point of the town. San Gimignano's central piazza is more traditional with the duomo (cathedral) at the center. Its wealthiest residents built tall towers in which they could barricade themselves when the enemy came.

The towns are still different today.

Siena is now a city, having overflowed its walls into the surrounding valleys. We tourists park at the bottom of the hill and ride escalators through tunnels that emerge within the fortress. Medieval as it was, you can turn your laptop on in the middle of almost any narrow alley and pickup half a dozen or more wireless



signals. It is a university town that wears its age like Rome, beneath a patina of Middle Age dust.

San Gimignano with its 14 skyscraper towers was successfully invaded some years ago by either the Walt Disney Company or Switzerland. The alleys and exteriors were washed clean, garbage cans installed every few hundred feet and interiors modernized to house gelaterias and ristoranti.

You park atop the hill just outside the walls and walk in through the gate.

But San Gimignano is nevertheless a fun afternoon. Because Beth's knees are nearly shot, it was the only town she visited because there was much less uphill walking.

Today's picture page



From the hilltop town of San Gimignano, dusk settles over the land of the Etruscans.



Beth and Nan on their piazzas in S Gimignano



Gelato!



The dome of Siena's duomo can be seen over the Piazza Il Campo



Entering the gate to San Gimignano



A typical street in Siena



Lunch on the side of the road beneath Castel Monteriggio. Meat, cheese, olives and tomatoes you can taste. "Stop" has no meaning in Italian.