

[TUSCANY]

connected local, but services are scant (06-699-24-555; doubles, \$252-\$394).

If you prefer to stay a little out of town, the **Villa Mangiacane** has wonderful views of Florence, plus three pools, a spa, a vineyard, and some Michelangelo frescoes (055-829-0123; doubles, \$478-\$638). The painstakingly restored 16th-century **Villa Bordoni**, near Greve, has a good restaurant (055-884-0004; doubles, \$366-\$494; prix fixe, \$72).

In Pisa, the **Relais dell'Orologio** is a remodeled ancient tower five minutes from the Duomo and across the street from the house where Leopardi wrote his famous verses about Silvia. The lovely if pricey inn also has an excellent restaurant (050-830-361; doubles, \$556-\$638; prix fixe, \$70).

Florence is still one of Italy's top dining cities; avoid the tourist traps and stick to simple trattorias where you'll find better, and cheaper, food. Since 1869, locals have flocked to **Sostanza-Troia** for its excellent *bistecca alla fiorentina* and unpretentious, bustling atmosphere (25r Via del Porcellana; 055-212-691; entrées, \$25-\$32). Settle onto the long benches at **Alla Vecchia Bettona** and follow your waiter's recommendations on the daily specials (34r Viale Luigi Ariosto; 055-224-158; entrées, \$16-\$24). The city's most famous chef, Fabbio Picchi, has a formidable empire of restaurants, where he delivers modern takes on Tuscan classics: **Cibrèò** (8r Via Andrea del Verrocchio; 055-234-1100; entrées, \$40-\$50), **Trattoria Cibrèò** (122r Via dei Macci; 055-234-1100; entrées, \$15-\$20), **Cibrèò Caffè** (122r Via dei Macci; 055-234-5853; entrées, \$7-\$12), and **Teatro della Sale** (111r Via dei Macci; 055-200-1492; buffet, \$40, plus a onetime \$8 membership fee).

SIENA AND SOUTHERN TUSCANY

Sienna is a mecca for medieval buffs, with most of the action concentrated around the huge Campo. Nearby Montalcino, Pienza, Montepulciano, and Cortona are exquisite hill towns

with lovely countrysides and vineyards. South of Montepulciano, the gardens of La Foce, established by Iris Origo in the 1920s, are historically interesting and gorgeous. The estate has a few lovely houses available for short stays. It recently opened the **Villa La Foce** for weekly rentals—a 15th-century three-story former tavern with period furnishings that can sleep 21 people (057-869-101; lafoce.com; \$30,777 per week).

Most of Siena's best hotels actually fall outside its wall. **Borgo Santo Pietro**, 35 minutes to the southwest, near the spectacular Abbey of San Galgano, is a renovated 13th-century villa with 6 bedrooms (soon to be 12), landscaped gardens, a bocce court, a pool, and orchards (0577-75-1222; doubles, \$528-\$781). Within the walled city of Cortona, **San Michele** is an imposing 16th-century palazzo with comfortable rooms at reasonable rates (0575-604-348; doubles, \$350-\$398). Near Pienza, the contemporary-styled **La Bandita**, which has views of the Val d'Orcia, is an 8-room inn (also available for weekly rental) owned by *Condé Nast Traveler* contributing editor Ondine Cohane's husband (333-404-6704; doubles, \$470-\$598). In the center of Montepulciano, **La Locanda di San Francesco** has a few well-priced rooms with views, plus a wine bar with local *vino nobili* and Montalcino's brunellos (0973-664-384; doubles, \$112).

Montepulciano's **Acquacheta** is owned by a zany Tuscan who likes his steak rare and won't cook yours any other way. The place is so pop-

ular that he often has to take three seatings a night (22 Via del Teatro; 0578-758-443; entrées, \$20-\$47).

Luciano, the owner of Pienza's **Sette di Vino**, has a similarly impassioned approach, warning tourists as they walk in that there is "no pizza, no pasta, no Diet Coke." At lunch he serves lighter dishes such as grilled meats, pecorino sampling platters, and salads (1 Piazza di Spagna; 0578-749-092; entrées, \$7-\$8). **Latte di Luna**, also in Pienza, has an outdoor terrace and local dishes such as *pici al cinghiale*, or wild boar, and *maialino*, or suckling pig (2/4 Via San Carlo; 0578-748-606; entrées, \$9-\$20). **Il Rossellino**, the fanciest (and tiniest) joint in town, is run by a husband-and-wife team (4 Piazza di Spagna; 0578-749-064; entrées, \$27-\$32).

In the small town of Monticchiello, famous for its Teatro Povera, **La Porta's** highlights include *tagliani al tartufo*, *tagliata*, and the owner, Daria Cappelli, who knows her wines (1 Via del Paino; 0578-755-163; entrées, \$18-\$29). In a former phar-

macy right off Siena's Campo, the well-known **Le Logge** is still one of the city's best restaurants (33 Via del Porriore; 0577-480-13; entrées, \$25-\$27). Most people don't think of eating fish in Tuscany, but **Tre Christi** reminds visitors that they are just 45 minutes from the Mediterranean. Try the excellent *crudo* (17 Vicolo di Provenzano; 0577-280-608; entrées, \$22-\$28).

VINEYARDS

The best way to explore Tuscan vineyards is by sampling vintages. In Montepulciano, **Avignonesi** has one of the best *vino nobile* blends (0578-724-304; avignonesi.it). In Chianti, the wine trail is well marked; stop by **San Giusto a Rentennano** (0577-747-121; fattoriasangiusto.it) or **Isole e Olena** (055-807-2767). Brunellos are Italy's superstars; visit the medieval fortress in Montalcino for a brunello overview—after walking up the rampsarts for marvelous views—and then head to **Castello di Argiano** for a taste of Sesti brunello, an authentic version of the sangiovese



WEB LINK

URLs are given only if they are not immediately obvious or easily Googled.