

Tuscan Herbal Journey

May 25 ~ June 5, 2024

Itinerary Subject to Change

11 am Saturday, May 25th Rendezvous in Firenze (Florence) Airport Richard will greet you at the airport with our bus for the journey to Villa Certano. Our private bus will be taking us to our various excursions around Tuscany, always meeting in front of the villa. At the airport is a good chance to use the ATM to get Euros.

2 Arrival at Villa Certano & Lunch Located just minutes from Siena, this 450 year-old villa is owned by the Baldassarrini family. Get settled into your room. A hearty lunch will be offered in the “Parlor” next to the ancient Villa kitchen.

3 Rest Time

4 Opening Circle & Introductions

7 Italian Feast at the villa. After dinner our host Annalisa Baldassarrini will present an informal talk on Siena and Villa Certano.

Sunday May 26th

7:30 Join Natalie for an hour of stretching, Pilates & yoga.

8 Breakfast at the Villa

9:30 Hike the Tuscan countryside. This morning’s walk will depart from the villa and wind through the beautiful Tuscan countryside to a beautiful old chapel. We’ll plan our hike in time to arrive for the noon mass and experience the angelic singing in the chapel. Along the route we will explore the many familiar and unfamiliar plants of Tuscany.

1 Lunch at the Villa There will be an Italian speaking table for those wishing to converse with Annalisa.

2 Tour Villa Certano Join Annalisa for a tour of the 100-acre Villa Certano. This ancient setting has 20 acres of olive trees, 20 acres of grape vineyards, a 1200 year-old church nestled between the villa & the winery, a formal rose garden and much more.

4 Edible and Medicinal Herbs of Tuscany Join Penny for a walk around the villa discovering Italy’s rich herbal heritage.

7 Dinner at Costafabbri We will be dining together in one of Tuscany’s traditional eateries.

Monday May 27th

7:30 Join Natalie for an hour of stretching, Pilates & yoga.

8 Breakfast at the Villa

10 Plant Walk and Talk with Zora. Walk into the wild around the Villa grounds discovering Italy's rich herbal heritage with local Tuscan herbalist Zora Keller. Zora is an Italian herbal specialist who has studied Tuscan plants and herbs from her parents/grandparents and many Tuscan elders. Penelope will join us, of course!

12:30 Lunch at the Villa

2:30 Depart for Guided Tour of Lavanda del Chianti We travel for 45 minutes on our private bus through the center of the Chianti wine region.

The picturesque Chianti countryside of Lavanda Del Chianti in Casalvento is known world-wide for its Chianti wine. It's also a paradise of essences and perfumes. Lorenzo Domini, a medical doctor by profession with his wife Donata, a medical doctor and his son Alessandro, a pharmacist, operate this Essential Oil farm and distillery. The estate was acquired in 1950 by his father Giovanni, a Siena university professor. In 1962, he began the cultivation of lavender, helichrysum, roses, iris, and many other medicinal plants. He purchased the first distiller to extract essential oils and "hydrolates" (hydrosols). At Casalvento, among the typical Galestro of Chianti (schist based soil), they cultivate nine types of lavender, as well as thyme, rosemary, sage, helichrysum, hyssop, broom, Damascus rose, and the iris orris root. Dr Domini will guide us through his fields of medicinal plants, into the distillery and give us a presentation with demonstrations in his classroom. You'll even have an opportunity to purchase Casalvento essential oils and preparations (Cash only).

7:30 Dinner Together at Country Restaurant in the Chianti Hillside

Tuesday, May 28th

8 Yoga Join Natalie for an hour of stretching, Pilates and yoga.

8:30 Breakfast

10 Free morning

12 Lunch at the Villa Annalisa will host an Italian only speaking table for those interested.

1:30 Depart for San Giovanni Terme A 45 minute ride on our private bus.

3 Visit to San Giovanni Terme Tuscany has a rich tradition of taking the waters. We will be visiting an authentic hot-springs resort in Rapolano. Here where we will be soaking in the healing mineral waters. The spa has a wide assortment of hydrotherapy modalities. For those who wish, optional treatments of massage, beauty treatments and hydrotherapy will be available. (You'll need to sign up with Richard before the trip for spa treatments). The spring waters which bubble up from the ground at San Giovanni and the clay has notable therapeutic properties, recognized by the Italian Ministry of Health. They are particularly effective in dealing with complaints relating to articulation

of the joints, the respiratory system, dermatological ailments, and muscular problems. You will have a locker to store your clothes. Please bring a light covering like a sarong for lounging on the recliner, and a towel from the villa and slippers. There is a small bar and cafe to purchase refreshments.

7:30 Dinner We will dine together at the lovely restaurant L'Olivo right at the San Giovanni Terme spa. This is an informal, but upscale spa and restaurant, so you'll want to bring something to wear that evening.

Wednesday May 29th.

7:30 Yoga Join Natalie for an hour of stretching, Pilates and yoga

8 Breakfast

Starting at 9 am Siena Market. You'll choose a departure time on a list in the dining room and Richard will shuttle groups via taxi on a 15 minute ride to the Siena market. Enjoy a morning in a bustling local market selling clothing, kitchen gadgets, linen tablecloths, you name it. Free time at the market to shop as you like!! Siena is a Gothic walled city with the same number of people today as 700 years ago. Its red brick lanes cascade everywhere. It was the first European city to eliminate autos from its main piazza (square). Sitting atop a hill, the IL Campo, is Siena's great central piazza. Its gently tilted cobblestone floor provides the perfect invitation to sit and people watch. Wandering the streets and "loitering" in the square is magical. Grom's at Piazza Salimbeni has first rate gelato. The Orto Botanico gardens we visit later today used to provide the herbs for the 14th century Santa Maria della Scala hospital on the plaza across from the Duomo. It's now a museum with walls covered with Medieval frescos. Siena has over a dozen museums.

12 Lunch on your own in Siena. After lunch We will all meet together at 1:45 in the main square, the Piazza Il Campo by the fountain to walk to the Orto Botanico of Siena and enter as a group.

2 Visit to the Orto Botanico of Siena. We will walk together for 20 minutes to Siena's Botanical Gardens "Orto Botanico". It has over 3000 species and is contained within the walls of Siena. It was established in 1545 to grow medicinal herbs for study and then supplied the local hospital. It is the oldest "Horto Medicinale" garden in the world. At nearby Siena's university we will listen to a presentation on medicinal plants and tour the gardens and museum. Dr. Claudia Perini curator and plant and mushroom researcher will guide us through this garden focusing on medicinal plants. We will also ask her to show us the most amazing mushroom display you'll ever see in the museum's archives section. The university is on Mattioli Drive, a salute to Siena's famous herbalist. We'll see his statue at the entrance.

5 Guided tour of Siena's Duomo (cathedral) Siena's Duomo is as Baroque as Gothic gets. A work of art itself, as well as a museum, there's art from floor to vaulted ceiling. The heads of 172 Popes peer down from the ceiling over the famous inlaid art on the floor. It's a spiritual experience to simply stand in this cathedral. It has paintings, frescos, sculpture, and the famous stained glass rose window. Our guide will entertain us with

stories about Siena's history and culture and then point out amazing aspects within the Duomo.

7 Dinner We will be dining at one of Siena's traditional eateries. We will walk directly from the botanical garden. After dinner, taxis will ferry us home.

Thursday May 30st

7 Early Breakfast

8 Depart for Day Excursion to Florence This is a 2 hour travel on our private bus and public tram.

We will take our private bus from the villa to the train station. (There's a line to (pay) restrooms at the station and also restrooms at our garden destination.) The train goes directly into the heart of Florence, then we walk through the bustling downtown about 1/2 mile. We need to stick together at a steady pace. Save taking photos and ducking into shops for free time. We don't want to be late for the garden appointment or lose you. Keep your eye on Serena who keeps track of everyone following Richard in the lead. Let Richard know ahead of time if this may be too much walking for you.

10 Florence and a Guided Tour of Semplici Botanical Gardens. IL Giardino dei Semplici was started in the 1500's. It was originally the teaching gardens for the medical doctors of that time. It serves today as an education and research facility as well as a repository of rare and endangered plants and trees. The Director Dr. Paolo Luzzi will share his passion for healing plants of Tuscany with us.

12:30 Lunch We will all take a short walk to dine together in one of Florence's delicious ristoranti. After lunch we will all walk together for 30 minutes through Florence to the Boboli Gardens.

2:30 Guided Tour of the Boboli Gardens Directly behind Pitti Palace are the marvelous Boboli Gardens. The Medici family established the layout of the gardens, creating the Italian garden style that would become a model for many European courts. The vast green expanse with a regular layout is a real outdoor museum, populated by ancient and Renaissance statues. The Gardens are also adorned with grottos, the most important of which is the famous grotto created by Bernardo Buontalenti, as well as large fountains, such as the Fountain of Neptune and the Fountain of the Ocean.

4 Free time to shop and sightsee and have dinner on your own: Visit the famous outdoor markets of Firenze. Wander the streets, sample the gelato, rub the bronze pig's snout fountain for good luck, and stand on the Ponte Vecchio, Firenze's most famous bridge. Discover a small eatery on your own or join members of our group to dine together. We'll give you a map of Florence so you can also find everything on your own.

8:30 Travel Back to Villa Certano We will meet back at the SMN train station to take the tram together back to our bus for the ride back to the villa.

Friday May 31st

8 Join Natalie for an hour of stretching, Pilates & yoga.

8:30 Breakfast at the Villa

10 Aromatherapy Facials We will prepare for facials in the villa kitchen using herbs from the villa garden, wild picked herbs, healing clay from the San Giovanni Terme, and essential oils and hydrosols from Lavanda del Chianti. Then, give yourself or a friend a spa facial and come to the party with a glowing face!

1 Lunch at the Villa Annalisa will host an Italian only speaking table for those interested.

3 Free Time, Pick Herbs and Pack up. Italians considered the time between the Summer Solstice and Saint John's Day a potent time to harvest medicinal plants as they are at their peak potency. This is an excellent opportunity to harvest Solstice herbs like lavender and linden flowers at the villa. Relax and savor our time at Villa Certano. Sit under the 450 year-old Cedar of Lebanon tree, breathing in deeply the richness and diversity of scents of this treasured land

7 Celebration Dinner at Villa Certano

9 Talent Show We will share our songs, skits, poems, and more with the group.

Saturday June 1st

7 Early Breakfast Today we will depart Villa Certano and head off on our next adventures. Be sure to have all your belongings packed and ready to go. Remember to hand in your apartment key.

8 Depart on our bus for Sansepolcro and Aboca

10 Guided Tour of Aboca Herbal Museum Aboca Herbal Museum is a great cultural project housed in the magnificent 18th century Palazzo Bourbon Del Monte in the quaint 11th century town of Sansepolcro. Its mission is to recover and spread the traditional use of medicinal herbs. Displays and exhibits showcase the history of the relationship between people and medicinal plants on the theological, philosophical, mythological, magical, and literary levels. The botanical library, Bibliotheca Antiqua is a remarkable collection of valuable ancient books dealing specifically with the subject of the use of medicinal plants over the ages. There are separate rooms of exquisite displays dedicated to History, Pottery, Weighing Scales, Glassware, Herbs, an Apothecary Shop, a Phytochemical Laboratory, Poison Cellar and a 19th century Pharmacy. There are herbal products for sale and a bookstore after the tour. Check out the (pricey) copy of Mattioli's Herbal.

11:30 Explore Sansepolcro We will have time for a glimpse of this ancient walled city.

1 Lunch We will dine together at one of Sansepolcro's local pizzerias just a short distance from the Aboca Herbal Museum.

2:30 Depart for Assisi We depart the herb gardens and fields for a 60 minute pleasant drive through the Umbrian countryside to Assisi.

4 Check into Domus Laetitia Monastery. The "Domus Laetitia" of Assisi is a religious house of hospitality. It is located a few steps from the fourteenth-century walls of the city, just 10 minutes walk from the Basilica of Santa Chiara and a 20-minute walk from the Papal Basilica of San Francesco.

5:30 Explore Assisi and Dine On Your Own Grab a taxi for the short ride up the hill into Assisi. Around 1200 a simple friar from Assisi challenged the decadence of the church with the powerful message of non-materialism, simplicity, and to 'slow down and smell the flowers. Francis' message of love and sensitivity to the environment has a broad and timeless appeal. The Basilica of St. Francis, the centerpiece of the "Hill of Paradise" is one of the artistic highlights of medieval Europe.

Sunday, June 2nd

8 Breakfast at Domus Laetitia Monastery

9 Depart for St. Francis of Assisi's Mountain Retreat

9:30 Silent Pilgrimage to St. Francis of Assisi's Mountain Retreat We will pause outside the gates for a poem to St. Francis. We will visit the Grotto and the original Chapel of St. Francis. As pilgrims, we will travel up into the hills of Assisi, experience a silent pilgrimage, and walk to the caves in which St. Francis meditated. Be prepared to experience the profound and sacred. This hilltop chapel with its live oaks is the true shrine to St. Francis. Peaceful trails through herbs and greenery meander up the hill.

12 Lunch together at the Domus Laetitia

2 Guided Tour of the Il Lavandeto Di Assisi

On the plains directly below Assisi is the Il Lavandeto Di Assisi, a working farm and nursery. In June, fields of lavender are at their height of bloom and fragrance. Lorena Fastellini, founded Il Lavandeto di Assisi more than ten years ago. From a small plot of lavender, Il Lavandeto now grows dozens of types of herbs and medicinal plants – including a vast variety of lavender. We will be guided on a tour of this magical place.

5 Free Time in Assisi

7:30 Dinner together in Assisi We will walk together from the Hotel to a local osteria for a typically delicious Umbrian dinner.

Monday June 3rd

7 Early morning breakfast We will be departing Assisi and need to be sure we are packed and ready to go.

7:30 Depart Assisi and travel to Camaldoli for a full day hike through ancient beech wood, oak and fir forests. This is one of the highlights for many of us on previous trips. Camaldoli, one of the great monastic centers of the forest, is tiny and set in densely wooded mountains. The austere hermitage houses monks who live under the vow of silence. The monastery contains a 16th century ancient pharmacy where the monks prepare and sell herbal preparations. The walk starts through ancient beech and fir woods. It then ambles through high mountain meadows and mixed woods. It offers one of the most panoramic views of Tuscany. We'll spend the day hiking, ending up at the Granduca Lodge in Campigna for dinner. For those who don't wish to hike, the bus will take you to the Granduca for a relaxing day at this beautiful mountain lodge set deep in the forest (short day hikes, jacuzzi and spa facilities available at the Granduca).

7:30 Dinner Together at the Granduca Lodge.

Tuesday, June 4th

7:30 Yoga After hiking our muscles are so ready for a good stretch

8 Breakfast in the lodge

9 Relax, sleep in, enjoy the peace and quiet of this mountain lodge. Optional morning activity; Penelope will be offering a class on Traveler's First Aide from 10:30 until 12 noon. *Bring your first aide kits with you

1 Lunch together at the Granduca

2 Group Discussion TBD

4 Free Time to Pack, take a short hike, write those last postcards and/or just relax.

5:30 Closing Circle An opportunity to reflect on our time in Italy 'living the good life' and our journey together, highlights, blessings, and lessons. Let's rejoice and create ceremony and honor this magical time we have shared.

7:30 Final Dinner Celebration

Wednesday, June 5th

8 - 9 Breakfast at the Hotel

9:30 Depart for the Florence Airport A 2.5 hour ride on our private bus with a pit stop on the way.

12 Noon Arrive Florence Airport

Tuscany

“Birthplace of the Renaissance, the region gets its name from the Etruscans, the most powerful civilization of pre-Roman Italy. Its walled cities, cypress lined roads, and patchwork hills have been written about and photographed with such unrivaled enthusiasm that the image of the place seems to have insinuated itself in the public consciousness, even in the minds of those who have yet to set foot on its fertile soil. A cynic might expect the ‘real’ Tuscany to disappoint, for how could it ever live up to all the attention it received? And yet whenever I come home to the Tuscany ~ even after the shortest absence ~ its startling beauty, its richness and abundance strike me with a freshness that belies the many years I have spent here” ~ Lori de Mori

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