

## IL CHIANTI SENESE (about 340 km)

Take the A1 Highway and get out at the exit **Valdarno**, then follow the indications to **Montevarchi-Cavriglia**. Once past through **Cavriglia**, after 7 km, you arrive at **La Badia a Coltibuono**, an enchanting small fortified village, where an old monastery was turned into a farm. The Badia was built in 1049 and belonged to Benedictine Vallombrosian monks for over a century. After the suppression of the monastery and the monks' departure, following the Napoleonic edict issued on 29 September 1810, the complex was radically transformed. It was first turned into a villa-farm and then into a prestigious organic farm with a restaurant. The church of San Lorenzo, part of the religious complex and which, according to some documents, could have been built even before the monastery, shows a typically Romanesque Vallombrosian style with one nave and an octagonal dome between the nave and the transept. The only works of art kept there are the precious stucco decorations of the vaults.



We continue in the direction of **Radda in Chianti**.

### RADDA IN CHIANTI



**Radda in Chianti** is a lovely medieval village enclosed inside imposing walls. Located on a small hill between the valleys of the Arbia and Pesa rivers, it has very ancient origins. Inhabited since the 9th century B.C., it was mentioned in a manuscript in 1002. Under Florence domination, Radda hosted the headquarters of the Chianti League and of the Podestà, the magistrate sent by Florence. On the façade of the splendid **Palazzo del Podestà**, from the 15th century, are displayed the coats of arms of various families. The village has kept its **medieval structure** with small narrow streets leading to the square where stands the Romanesque **Chiesa di San Niccolò**, keeping a venerated *Crocifisso ligneo* from the 15th century. Not far away is the **Ghiacciaia Granducale** which was built at the end of the 19th century to keep snow and transform it into ice. The **Museo d'Arte Sacra del Chianti** is also worth visiting. It is situated inside the **Franciscan convent di Santa Maria in Prato**. Inside are displayed various works of art coming from neighbouring churches, among which is a polyptych depicting the Madonna with Child and Saints by **Neri di Bicci** from 1474.

In Radda's surrounding countryside there are many castles and magnificent medieval churches. Those worthy of a visit are the **Castello di Volpaia**, from medieval origins and perfectly maintained, and the Romanesque church of **Santa Maria in Prato** with its characteristic Romanesque capitals decorated with zoomorphic and floral motives. Today Radda and its surroundings have become a renowned touristic destination for those who love good wine and nature. In fact, this lovely village counts many excellent restaurants and *enoteche* where it is possible to taste the typical produce of the area.



**Volpaia**, like Radda, was much involved during the 15th century in the fights between Florence and Siena. The village has only kept a part of the old surrounding walls and a beautiful dungeon in the middle of the small square. The streets lined by palaces still look like those of a medieval fort. The houses are perfectly kept and the superposition of the streets and their arches is perfect. The gem of the village is the church of **Sant'Eufrosino** erected in 1443 for Pietro della Volpaia who wanted this religious building to be used as a hospital for pilgrims. The structure of the building follows the best models of the Florentine Renaissance style. Before it was moved to the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, an altar piece by Cosimo Rosselli was kept inside. At present, the church is used for cultural events.

## **GAIOLE IN CHIANTI**

The town of **Gaiole in Chianti** is another important centre in the Chianti Classico territory. It is situated along the Massellone torrent, on the road which links the Chianti to the Valdarno. Thanks to this position, it has always played the role of a market place for the villages and the castles of the surrounding hills.

The attraction of Gaiole is in fact due to the **wine-making farms** and the splendid countryside. As a market place it was never fortified; the busy centre of the city was renovated many times and only a few buildings from the old village are still there. It is a pleasant place for a stroll and a coffee. Nevertheless, the real attraction of Gaiole, in addition to the **Chianti Classico wine** is its surroundings, with beautiful medieval castles and churches to visit.

**La Pieve di Spaltenna**, to the west of Gaiole, is a simple but beautiful church preserving a precious wooden crucifix from the 15th century. The **Castello di Vertine** is an enchanting small fortified village. Dated from the year 1000 it is almost intact as it was only sporadically besieged. It is possible to see a part of the oval structure of the walls as well as the door in the north dominated by a tall and elegant dungeon with its sets of three arched windows per side.

The **Castello di Brolio** is another important castle to visit. With Lombard origins, it has belonged since the 12th century to the **Ricasoli** family who has been producing their famous **Chianti Classico** ever since. Do visit the gardens of the castle and enjoy the stunning **panorama** with Siena in the horizon. Wine tasting in the *enoteca* is included in the ticket.



**Il castello del Chianti Classico** <http://www.ricasoli.it/>

**Address**

località Brolio  
53013 Gaiole in Chianti (SI)

**Entrance**

Gardens euro 5,00  
Gardens and Museum euro 8,00  
wine tasting included

**Hours**

From Tuesday to Sunday 10.30 - 12.30 and 14.00 - 17.30

For more than ten centuries, the beautiful Castello di Brolio has been dominating the surrounding valleys in the south part of the Chianti Classico. Located on a high and solitary hill a few kilometres from Gaiole, the castle has been property of the Ricasoli family since 1141.



Despite its proximity to Siena, only 20 km away and standing out on the horizon, Brolio has always been linked to Florence as a strategic defensive outpost. It suffered many sieges and destructions and was therefore rebuilt several times according to the style of the time. It was last attacked during World War II and the bombings have left various marks on its façade.

The castle we see today is the result of the reconstruction undergone by **Bettino Ricasoli**, in the 19th century, matching the fashionable neo-Gothic style. The Italian gardens with geometric-shaped bushes and the park surrounding the castle are magnificent. From there we can enjoy a breath-taking view of the Ricasoli estate. On the horizon in clear days, one can even see Siena.

Inside the castle you can visit the **Cappella di San Jacopo** with the family crypt, and the small **museo della Collezione Ricasoli** which keeps some family weapons as well as documents and some of Bettino Ricasoli's personal belongings including a part of his fossil and mineral collection.

**There is an admission fee to visit the Castello di Brolio.** The "classic tour" is a free visit to the gardens around the castle. The "historic tour" includes a guided visit of the castle. The tour "research and experimentation" includes a visit to the cellars and experimental vineyards and it requires booking. **Wine tasting** at the castle's *enoteca* (wine shop) **is included** in the ticket for any of these tours.

Brolio is amazingly beautiful beyond its thousand year old history closely linked to the territory and the production of Chianti Classico. Ricasoli wines were already exported all around the world in the 1940s.

## The Iron Baron

### The ghost of Brolio

According to a local legend, the ghost of Bettino Ricasoli walks around the castle when the moon is full. Some saw him walking alone or riding a horse followed by a pack of hunting dogs. It is said that on several occasions after his death, the Baron's bed was found rumpled as if someone had slept in it.

**Bettino Ricasoli**, called "il Barone di Ferro" because of his strong determination and the conviction of his ideals, was one of the most important Italian politicians of the 19th century. He was a **promoter of the Unification of Italy** and also the **mayor of Florence**.

His name is closely related to Brolio and **Chianti wine**. He was in fact **the first to create the ideal formula to make the Chianti wine**, mixing three different grape varieties in specified quantities. His recipe was used until 1967 to produce the Chianti Classico DOC. He travelled a lot and brought back to Chianti new equipment and knowledge. One could say that he actually contributed to the "risorgimento" of the Italian wine making industry.

We continue the road in the direction of **Castelnuovo Berardenga** and come across the very special village of **San Gusmè, a rare gem**.

### SAN GUSMÈ



**San Gusmè** is a **small fortified village**, a few kilometres away from Castelnuovo Berardenga. The visitor will be fascinated by the **uncontaminated village** with its low houses surrounding and

almost protecting the small main square. Here you have to feel the ancient spirit released through the narrow lanes, interrupted by unexpected openings on the green surrounding landscape. From the top of the hill where it is built, the village dominates the valley below. In the distance one can see Siena with the unmistakable silhouettes of the Torre del Mangia and the Duomo.

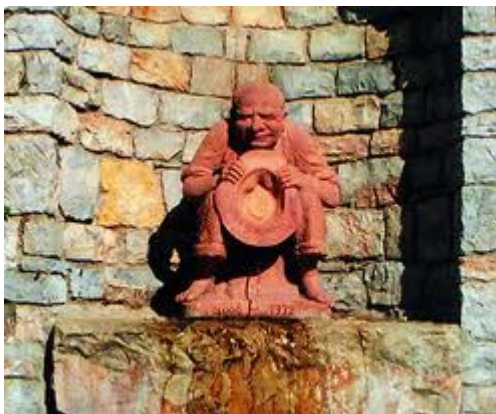
Its name derives from **San Cosma**, a saint whom the old church of Campi was dedicated to. Founded in the late Middle Ages, at the end of the 1300s, San Gusmè always remained under Siena's influence and suffered the same fate like the annexation to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

Today from the original structure remain only parts of the strong fortified walls which were integrated in the buildings and both entrance doors. The **Porta Senese** still holds the "Balzana di Siena" (Roman sign) and is made of limestone and sandstone. To be seen are also the **Chiesa dei Santi Cosma e Damiano**, patron saints of the village and the **Compagnia della SS. Annunziata** with a characteristic campanile.

Here there are no museums or monuments; there are only a few shops, two restaurants and a post office. And this is the beauty of it, a charming old village where time seems to have stopped.

## Il "Luca Cava"

At the entrance of the village, there is an interesting statue in terracotta depicting a man about to relieve himself. Next to the statue one can read: "**Re, imperatore, papa, filosofo, poeta, contadino e operaio: l'uomo nelle sue quotidiane funzioni. Non ridete, pensate a voi stessi**". (*King, emperor, pope, philosopher, poet, peasant or workman: a man in his daily functions. Do not laugh, think of yourself*)



The legend associated to the statue seems to go back to the late 1800s, when the village innkeeper, tired of cleaning the mess left by rude customers, built a room outside the inn with the sign "Public Toilets" on it. But since the customers were illiterate, nobody used the facilities and there remained the problem of filth and bad smell. The innkeeper then decided to make a statue representing a man crouching to relieve himself. People understood the purpose of the cabinet and the place became clean. The statue was nicknamed 'Luca Cava'.

Every year, the last two weeks in September, San Gusmè celebrates this friendly character with the "Festa del Luca" with outdoor live music, food and craft stands.

We continue the itinerary in the direction of **Castelnuovo Berardenga**, the foothill of the Chianti.

## CASTELNUOVO BERARDENGA



The village of **Castelnuovo Berardenga** is situated at the south border of the Chianti Classico less than 20 km from Siena. The territory is set between the rivers Ombrone and Arbia. The name Berardenga derives from that of Berardo of Frankish stock, who lived in the second half of the 10th century.

The village was built as “Castel Nuovo” by Siena in **1366** to be a precious outpost and it followed Siena’s destiny when falling under the domination of the Medicean Grand Duchy after 1555. Today only the high tower in Piazza Petrilli remains from the ancient walls. It has been used as a clock tower since 1755.

In the centre of the village, the beautiful **vicolo dell'Arco** with its steep stone stairway is topped by a spandrel arch decorated with an elegant bas-relief. Nearby stands the **Chiesa di San Giusto e Clemente**, built in the mid-1800s in neoclassical style. Inside is kept a *Madonna con Bambino e angeli* painted in 1426 by a Renaissance artist from Siena, Giovanni di Paolo.

Not far away, we find the **Chiesa della Madonna del Patrocinio** which preserves a much venerated Madonna in glazed terracotta, from the 14th century, discovered among the ruins of the castle which was once standing where today is located the vicolo dell'Arco. Another attraction in Castelnuovo Berardenga is definitely the **Villa Chigi Saracini**, built in the mid-1800s and surrounded by an Italian garden and an English park. The villa was built for Count Guido Saracini, a music lover who founded the Accademia Musicale Chigiana di Siena.

To be seen also is the **Museo del Paesaggio**, offering a rich documentation in texts and images on the history of the Siena countryside. In addition, an archaeological section keeps archaeological pieces found in the area.

### **La Certosa di Pontignano.**

Dated from the 14th century, the imposing Certosa di Pontignano, with its three cloisters, the large chapter house and the church, is one of the biggest and richest charterhouses in Tuscany. Although passing through various hands, it always kept works of art by great artists of the past from Bernardino Poccetti to Orazio Porta and Stefano Cassini. In the 1950s it was acquired by the University of Siena to provide accomodation for the students and to host science and cultural events.

At this point we can take the leg Bettole-Siena in the direction of Siena, to continue towards Firenze up to the entrance of the *Autostrada A1* at the end of the *Raccordo Siena-Firenze*, also called *Superstrada del Palio*. Follow the A1 up to Barberino di Mugello and then the road to Gattaia.