

MUGELLO



Land of nature, history and villages, uncontaminated landscapes, typical flavours and culture

In Tuscany, a few kilometres away from Florence, here is what the **Mugello** region has got to offer: happy scenery, friendly, quiet and hard-working people, genuine food, Medici castles and villas, museums, traditional trades and crafts, medieval churches and old convents. History, culture, quality, a renewed relationship with nature.

The name **Mugello** seems to derive from the Ligurian tribe **Mugelli**, first inhabitants of this territory, who lived in the highest part of the Mugello when the lowest part was still flooded. The **Etruscans** followed the Ligurians and then the **Romans** came. A land of **fiefs** during the Middle Ages, it is only from 1300 onwards that the area started to develop economically and socially, thanks to the rising of the Medici, the powerful Florentine family who originated from Mugello and played a major role in the history of Florence from the 14th century until the beginning of the 18th century.



The presence of the Medici in Mugello is demonstrated by a great number of villas, castles, fortresses and convents, expressing economic power as much as cultural and artistic ferment.

Many great artists were born in the region such as **Giotto, Beato Angelico, Benvenuto Cellini, the poet Dino Campana, the Chini family, the Della Casa family**. History, art and nature are the strength of Mugello making it an ideal destination for those who love excursions, thanks to a great number of walking trails and itineraries leading to waterfalls or springs at the top of mountains.



The uncontaminated natural environment and the way its inhabitants take care of it to maintain authentic traditions explain the great quality of produce such as milk and cheese (*raveggiolo*, *ricotta*, *pecorino*), the **Chestnuts of Mugello I.G.P.**, **organic potatoes**, **spelt wheat**, **mushrooms**, high quality **beef and pork meat**, **game**, **honey**, all ingredients for simple and delicious cooking including the famous *tortelli di patate* (pasta stuffed with mashed potatoes).



Attractive countryside, friendly people, authentic cooking, good wine and in addition a great craft tradition such as the **making of cutting tools in Scarperia** or the work done by the **stonemasons with pietra serena** in High Mugello.



The traveller will be able to detach himself from the city stress to take advantage of the great hospitality offered by cool farms renovated with admirable taste, in villages once abandoned but resurrected and in villas and palaces where noble Florentine families used to live. He will be able to explore on foot, on bicycle or on horse-back, the remains of a road network which did not know about wheels. He will be happy to play golf, go canoeing, do archery or sport fishing to enjoy his free time to the fullest.

The territory of Mugello is made up by a large valley, in the north of Florence, bounded in the north by the **Apennine Mountains**, in the west by the **Calvana Mountains** and in the south by **Mount Morello** and **Mount Giovi**. Its landscape is made of thick bushes in the summits, territory of wild boars, roe-deers and foxes, and of areas with chestnut and olive groves; you can also find large flat terrains and old terraces enclosed by escarpments where wheat and sunflower are grown. The main towns and roads are set in the bottom of the valleys.



Here we find the villages of **Vaglia**, **San Piero a Sieve**, **Barberino di Mugello**, **Scarperia**, **Borgo San Lorenzo** and **Vicchio**. High Mugello or Tuscan Romagna, with **Firenzuola**, **Palazzuolo sul Senio** and **Marradi**, is located in the north between the summits of the Mugello mountains and the passes going down towards Bologna and Romagna, in the high part of the Santerno, Senio and Lemone river basins.

The Mugello region is easy to get to with the A1 highway, exiting at the Barberino di Mugello sign. The **old and fascinating railway track of la Faentina** allows access to Mugello from the Romagna side, departing from Faenza, or from the Tuscan side, departing from Florence.



VICCHIO



Located on a small hill near the **Sieve** river, Vicchio can take pride in having **one of the most beautiful countrysides of the whole Mugello**. Here were born very famous artists like **Giotto** and **Beato Angelico**. It is possible to enjoy lovely walks around the small Montelleri lake, near the village. On the main square stands the church of **San Giovanni Battista**, from the 14th century. The edifice was rebuilt several times, the last one being in 1830. The church has the shape of a Latin cross with a Renaissance portico; it keeps interesting paintings from the 16th century: a *Madonna con Bambino e Santi Giovanni Battista e Sebastiano* by **Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio** and a *Madonna del Rosario* by **Alessandro Fei**.

Nearby, in a street lined with trees, you find the **Museo di Arte Sacra e religiosità popolare Beato Angelico** (Museum of Sacred Art and Popular Devoutness). Here are collected paintings and liturgical objects coming from churches of the area which were closed or unsafe. There are also crosses, religious documents and reconstructions of religious spaces of devotion like sacristies or tabernacles. Sacred ornaments and candelabras are displayed inside original pieces of furniture. The visit ends in a space in which various works are displayed as they were originally: in the entrance, a font and a 13th century bell, on the sides, altars with various objects and paintings. Brother **Giovanni da Fiesole**, at the time **Guido di Piero**, known as **Beato Angelico**, was born in Vicchio between 1395 and 1400. He started to work as a painter at the beginning of the 15th century when Florence was ruled by the Medici family. Brother Giovanni da Fiesole is a really unique character in the History of Art. And he is as singular in the History of Art as he is in the History of the Church. The widespread reputation of holiness which distinguished him in his lifetime, enough to give him nicknames such as “**Angelicus**” (angelic) or “**Beatus**” (blessed), was officially recognized through his beatification: the Dominican monk and painter is the only artist in the History of the Church to have been beatified.

Opening Hours: from 1 October to 31 May: Saturday and Sunday 10.00-13.00 and 15.00-19.00
 from 1 June to 30 September: Thursday 10.00-13.00 and Friday, Saturday, Sunday 10.00-13.00 and 15.00-19.00

On the way through Mugello in the direction of **Borgo San Lorenzo** we come across **Vespignano** with the **Casa natale di Giotto** (Giotto’s native house) and the church of San Martino dated from the 13th century.



Giotto's House where according to a 12th century tradition the artist who revolutionized the art of painting was born is a museum inviting the visitor to enter deeply into the painter's creative mind. The main three thematic areas are **Giotto's life, his relationship with the territory and his practical activity**. They are developed through **interactive multimedia spots, videos and workshops** allowing to investigate every aspect of the great master's figurative art.

Opening Hours: from 1 October to 31 May: Saturday and Sunday 10.00-13.00 and 15.00-19.00

From 1 June to 30 September: Thursday 10.00-13.00 and Friday, Saturday, Sunday 10.00-13.00 and 15.00-19.00

Biographic details about **Giotto's** first years are rather fragmented and not very reliable. His birth is set between **1266-1267** at **Colle di Vespignano**, a village in the municipality of Vicchio. His father belonged to the Bondone family and he was a peasant, a **"skilled farmer, using tools with gentleness as if he were a talented goldsmith or woodcutter"** (Vasari). His name could be a diminutive for Angioletto, Ambrogiotto or Biagiotto. Very little is known about his childhood and his youth. In fact, historic sources must be consulted with prudence: Vasari mentioned **a child with good manners, rather lively and gifted with an extraordinarily quick mind**, charming his family and acquaintances around the village. It is said that he was about 10 years of age when he met Cimabue before moving to Florence. This episode is mentioned by **Vasari** and also by **Ghiberti**.

Not far from Vespignano at the bottom of the valley on the **Ensa** torrent, we find the elegant **bridge of Ragnaia**, built in the 16th century to replace the medieval one where, according to the legend, **the meeting between Cimabue and young Giotto drawing a sheep on a stone** took place. The Florentine master amazed by this prodigious young shepherd is said to have taken him to his workshop in Florence later on.



BORGO SAN LORENZO



This is the main town in Mugello, where is located the **pieve romanica di San Lorenzo**, the oldest Romanesque church in the region. It is very pleasant to walk through the small characteristic streets in the centre of town, lined with many shops. The **Fiera Agricola Mugellana** (Mugello Agricultural Fair) is held during the second week-end in June.

As we enter Borgo San Lorenzo, we see the **Oratorio del Santissimo Crocifisso dei Miracoli**, built in the 18th century to keep a painted wooden cross, probably made by **Giovanni Pisano** and left there in 1440 by some German pilgrims escaping the plague.



The plan is in the shape of a Greek cross with a semicircular apse, the central area is covered by a big dome and the aisles are vaulted. The floor is made out of **marble from Carrara**, the walls and the altars are also lined with precious marble.

Above the main altar there is a painting by **Bezzuoli** depicting l' *Angelo Consolatore*, the angel comforting the inhabitants stricken by the 1835 earthquake. This painting hides a deep niche containing the *Crocifisso miracoloso* from the 14th century and displayed to be worshipped by the believers only on very specific occasions. On the side altars we find the *Battesimo di Costantino* (*Constantine's Baptism*) by Ignazio **Husford** and the *Transito di S. Giuseppe* (*Saint Joseph's death*) by **Folchi**. Hanging on the top part along the walls are found eight big paintings from the 19th century, depicting other scenes of the **Passion of Jesus**. To the right of the altar, above a small marble baptismal font, a picture of *Saint John the Baptist* is represented in "liberty style" on ceramic tiles, a work by **Gabriele Chini**. The façade and the archway were completed in 1754. Recent renovations have totally suppressed all signs of damage made by the 1919 earthquake, including the pulling down of the bell tower which was irreparably cracked.

The story of the **miraculous Cross** goes back to 1440 when a group of German pilgrims had to go through Borgo San Lorenzo as they were carrying a wooden cross. They were put up by the **Compagnia dei Battuti**, who drew their name from their practice of flogging. The pilgrims had to leave the village in a hurry because of the plague, leaving behind the sacred image. When the plague stopped, **the Cross was given the credit for it** as well as when Borgo was spared other scourges. It was therefore decided to keep the sacred wood in a small chapel which was made bigger in 1690 and then replaced by the current building.

The **Cappella della Compagnia dei Neri** is located on the left hand side of the church. The apse is illuminated by a beautiful stained-glass window, made by the **Chini factory**, with the Company's coat of arms in the centre. Also found there is a painting from the second half of the 15th century depicting *l'Incoronazione della Vergine fra S. Giovanni Battista e S. Jacopo*. Precious reliquaries are hanging on the sides.

The **Pieve di San Lorenzo** stands in the middle of Borgo San Lorenzo. Dated from 941 it is one of the biggest Romanesque buildings in the Florentine countryside. It seems that the church was built on the ruins of a Roman temple from the 4th century dedicated to Bacchus. Architectural and decorative details inserted in the stonework would back up this assertion. It is anyway indisputably one of the oldest Romanesque churches around.



The building, with large dimensions, has the plan of a basilica with three naves lined, on the left hand side, by imposing monolithic columns and stone arches. On the right hand side, there are pillars and two columns with brick arches. Capitals and bases show different conformations, some of them being very simple, almost primordial. In various places, the stonework structure shows signs of the renovations that occurred following devastating earthquakes.

The naves also differ in the way they are covered: on the left and in the centre they are covered with beams and trusses, whereas on the right hand side they have vaults, obviously asymmetrically set according to the arches.

The oldest part includes the colonnade on the left, the apse and the first column on the right and could go back to the 12th century. The whole wall on the right was rebuilt in 1263 after the collapse of the first bell tower which was probably set on this side of the building.

The biggest of the six bells weighs 15 quintals. During the period between All Saints' Day and the last day of Carnival, this bell, called "the big one", revives a medieval custom ringing every night at 9 pm. The current façade is the result of controversial renovations made in the first half of the 20th century.

Inside, the visitor will feel attracted by the majesty of the apse decorated by **Galileo Chini**, with the Byzantine inspired picture of *Cristo benedicente fra i Santi Lorenzo e Martino*. There are numerous other works of art to be admired there as well. On the internal façade, a painting by **Jacopo Vignoli**, a student of **Matteo Rosselli**, depicts the *Vergine con Santi e fedeli*. At the top of the left wall, a lunette embossed on stone consoles keeps a 14th century fresco painted by **Sebastiano Misuri** as if it were in a tabernacle; it portrays the *Madonna col Bambino e i Santi Domenico e Lorenzo*. Other paintings are *S. Antonio Abate e S. Antonio di Padova* (17th century Florentine school); *La Madonna, S. Domenico e S. Francesco che intercedono presso Cristo* by **Matteo Rosselli** (1578-1650); *I Santi Benedetto, Sebastiano e Domenico* by **Francesco di Umbertino** called **il Bacchiacca**, whose style stands between Classicism and Manierism (16th century); *La Madonna in gloria fra i Santi Antonio, Giovanni, Margherita e Caterina* by **Vignali**.



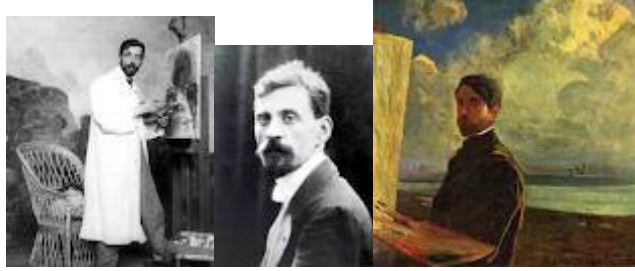
On the main altar there is a very beautiful wooden Crucifix from the 16th century, coming from the church of San Francesco. A 16th century Crucifix painted on canvas is hanging on the right wall at the bottom of the nave. On the first pillar on the right hand side one can see a *Madonna* on a canvas attributed to **Giotto**, dated around 1290. It was part of a bigger icon and was found in the Oratory of Saint Omobono. It was nicknamed the “*Madonna Nera*” because several layers of colours had been applied on it. One can also see a 14th century *Madonna col Bambino* by Niccolo di Pietro Gerini.



Walking up the right aisle, the visitor can find a *Madonna in trono col Bambino e Angeli* from **Agnolo Gaddi school** (14th century); a *S. Michele* by **Paolo Colli** from 1822; a *Lamentazione su Cristo Morto* by **Cesare Velli** (16th century). On the hexagonally shaped baptismal font made of stone there is an oil painting on canvas by **Galileo Chini**, from 1950, depicting *S. Giovanni Battista*. At the top of the fifth pillar, a 16th century fresco portrays a *Madonna col Bambino*.



The **Manifattura Chini** was created in Mugello more than two centuries ago and it provides a great example of artistic craft specializing in ceramics. At the beginning of the 19th century, **Pier Alessio Chini**, who worked as a decorator, passed on his passion for art to his sons and nephews who, from being apprentices, became very creative and eclectic artists. In 1906 **Galileo Chini**, an outstanding member of the family, set up with his cousin Chino the **Manifattura Fornaci San Lorenzo** (factory of ceramics) in Borgo San Lorenzo, producing ceramics and stained-glass windows with great success. At the beginning of the 20th century, Galileo Chini became one of the major exponents of the Liberty style in Italy. In 1906 his fame reached the Orient and he was called to Bangkok to decorate the throne room of the Royal Palace with frescoes. Later on, the factory was commissioned to make a sandstone ceramics coating for the spa baths at **Salsomaggiore**. As of 1925 the factory took part in various national and international exhibitions and **Galileo Chini** distinguished himself successfully applying various work techniques as a decorator and as a craftsman. The factory functioned until 1943 when a terrible bombing on Borgo San Lorenzo caused so much damage that it was impossible to regain a regular activity. Today we can admire what Pier Alessio Chini’s descendants created at the **Museo della Manifattura Chini in Borgo San Lorenzo** or from various decorations of buildings found in Italy and around the world.



Il Museo della Manifattura Chini has been located in **Villa Pecori Giraldi** since 1748. The façade is in the style of the Renaissance and the rooms were decorated with medieval style frescoes composed of geometric and floral patterns. These frescoes were made by various members of the Chini family from Piero Alessio to Galileo. In the main room the cycle about Saint George is especially beautiful. The display of ceramics, objects, sandstone vases and polychrome stained-glass windows is very impressive.

In Viale IV Novembre we find the **Villino Chini**, a small villa that Chino Chini had built in 1923 for his family who still resides there today. The headquarters of the famous ceramics factory (**Fornaci San Lorenzo**) is next to the villa. The firm **Franco Pecchioli Ceramica** is now set up there; **Vieri Chini** and his sons **Mattia** and **Cosimo** are its artistic directors and they make precious tilings and coatings as well as producing small works of art in ceramics such as vases, plates, jewellery boxes and dishes. (**Pecchioli & Chini – viale IV novembre 71**)

Getting closer to the historic centre, we go through **via della Repubblica** lined with small **villas in Liberty style** reminding us of buildings from seaside towns like Viareggio or thermal spas like Montecatini Terme.

In Piazza Dante we find the town hall (municipio) where the mayor's study was entirely decorated by the Chini. Not far from there, the Oratory of Misericordia was built in neo-Gothic style; its portal is decorated with a *Pietà* in ceramics by **Galileo Chini**. The rose-window above the entrance as well as various works of art inside the building were also made by the Chini.

Near the Palazzo Comunale, it is possible to admire a touching curiosity: il **Monumento eretto al cane Fido** (Monument to the dog Fido), a dog who continued for many years to go to the bus stop where he used to wait for his master who had died during the 1943 aerial bombing.



The **Palazzo Pretorio** or **dei Podestà** was built in the 13th century but destroyed during the 1919 earthquake (when it was still used as Court and jail) and it was totally rebuilt in 1935. Today the building is used as the town library and only the entrance hall has been kept from the original structure. The remarkable façade is decorated with coats of arms of *Podestà*, in stone and in ceramics. Inside, a lunette of the Della Robbia school depicts *Gesu fra due angeli*; the decorations and the painting renovations were made by Dino Chini.