

VALDISIEVE (around 130kms)

The mountains of the Sieve Valley are the closest to Florence and include the municipalities of **Dicomano, Londa, Pelago, Pontassieve, Rufina** and **San Godenzo**. This green and non polluted territory, which expands from the **Valley of the Sieve river** to the Mugello border, presents a great natural value with several reserves and protected areas. In the Sieve Valley, we find parts of the National Park of the Casentino Forests, Vallombrosa Biogenetic Reserve, the Forest of Sant'Antonio in the Regello territory with beech and chestnut groves as far as the eye can see. There are the summits of Mount Giovi and Consuma mountains at the edge of the Mugello and, in the lower part, gentle hills are planted with olive groves and vineyards. For centuries, the Valdiseive has been the traditional region dedicated to the cultivation of the fruit and vegetables sold in Florentine shops and markets. It is also where their oil and wine are produced. It is worthwhile to drive along the small roads winding around the hills in the Valdiseive to discover villas, medieval churches, villages and wine cellars.



The extraordinary natural heritage of the Valdiseive is illustrated by invaluable historic and artistic testimonies, providing information on a very ancient human settlement in this area. Starting from the Etruscans, who were the first to start the cultivation of vine and olive trees, to the Romans who created villages and “colonies”, up to the medieval dioceses replacing the Roman *Civitas* to control the territory. All these various civilizations left splendid signs of their presence in the Valdiseive. In the Middle Ages, the **lordships of the Pazzi, Guidi and Ubaldini** built castles, fortified villages and roads. Later on, during the Florentine domination, which started in the 14th century, the rich Florentine bourgeoisie had villas and gardens built to provide a restful place in the countryside. In the 15th century, lots of fortified villages and roads were commissioned by Florentine authorities, following the course of history which led to the **Grand Duchy of Tuscany** and to the entry into unified **Italy**.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

Sandstone, wood and wood-related products are largely available in the territory of Valdiseive and they have determined, from the Middle Ages, the birth of specific crafts. Modern craft workshops allow to bring back to life the history of the **ancient craft industry** which is still performing, adjusting to today's consumers' ever renewed demands. In the Valdiseive, there are still lots of wind and water **mills** where it is possible to watch demonstrations of the traditional **grinding of wheat and chestnuts**. Stonemasons are also very active in the region, as they create real works of art with *pietra serena*, be they artistic objects, architectural finishing and furniture pieces. Just as admirable are the **blacksmiths'** skills to hammer iron on the anvil, the making of barrels and the **woodwork**. Some craftsmen in the Valley continue the tradition in **covering wine bottles with straw** which is also **braid to make baskets**, hats and other daily objects.

TYPICAL PRODUCE

Valdiseive's most essential produce is linked to agriculture and falls under the same protection as the territory, with its meadows and cultivated fields as far as the eye can see. **The Strada dei Vini Rufina and Pomino** goes across territories where the Chianti Rufina DOCG and Pomino DOC are produced, two wines with different personality and characteristics, both known and appreciated for centuries. Including visits to wineries and cellars, the wine road offers a journey through beautiful villages such as Pontassieve, Pelago, Rufina, Londa and Dicomano.



The **Strada dei Vini Colli Fiorentini** goes also through parts of the Valdisieve territory and through the municipalities of Pelago, Pontassieve and Reggello. The production zone of the Chianti Colli Fiorentini wines was identified in 1932 and includes a number of hills traditionally dedicated to the production of excellent wines. **The distinctive label of the wineries belonging to the consortium is represented by the lion of Palazzo Vecchio's tower symbolically united to the chalice of Colli Fiorentini.** In the hilly part of the Valdisieve is also produced an excellent **extra virgin olive oil**, with great taste and high nutritional value. Here are also cultivated delicious beans such as the *fagiolo zolfino*, typical from Pratomagno and the *fagiolo nano*, white or black. Among the typical varieties cultivated for a long time on the hills surrounding Florence can be included local chick peas (*ceci nostrali*) and pink chick peas (*ceci rosa*), which are smaller and with a pink skin. On the sunny hills between Dicomano and Londa is produced a type of peach called **Regina di Londa**, with a white pulp and an excellent taste; it comes to maturity late in the season, so you can still find it in Florence markets till the end of September.



San Godenzo and Castagno d'Andrea, situated at the border with the **Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi**, are in the centre of areas covered with splendid chestnut groves. In this part of Valdisieve are produced delicious chestnuts, distinguished in some places by the sign **Marrone del Mugello I.G.P.** Among the *salamis*, the most typical is the *bardiccio*, a type of sausage made with pork offals and wild fennel seeds. The best way to appreciate its distinctive taste is to charcoal grill it and drink a glass of local red wine. The *finocchiona* is just as good. It is made of lean and fat pork belly meat and seasoned with fennel seeds. Not to be missed is the local honey and the various cheeses among which are the *pecorino stagionato in grotta*, the yogurt and the *ricotta*.

A TOUR IN THE VALDISIEVE

DICOMANO

Dicomano was set up in Roman times but very few documents can testify the origins of the village. To be seen are the **Loggiati del Seicento**, an archway lining the via Alighieri, the elegant palaces Delle Pozze and Della Nave, on Piazza Buonamici, and the Oratorio di Sant'Onofrio, dated from the 18th century. Close to the centre is found the **Pieve di Santa Maria** which is worthy of a visit. Set on a small hill, this medieval church enjoys a panoramic position. Its interior has kept almost completely intact its original Romanesque structure and inside we can find precious paintings from the 16th and the 17th centuries, a bas-relief and a **tondo from the Della Robbia school**. The church was erected on the remains of an old castle and the tower serving now as bell-tower was part of it.



SAN GODENZO

In San Godenzo, the visitor is greeted by the elegant **Palazzo dei Conti Guidi**, standing in the main village square. In the heart of the village stands the splendid **Abbazia**, the abbey dedicated to San Gaudenzio and built in 1028 for Fiesole's bishop, Jacopo il Bavaro. In 1070, Bishop Trasmondo, instigator of new works of embellishment, consecrated the church and placed it under the care of Benedictine monks. A meeting which remained famous in the history of the Italian literature was held in the abbey on 8 June 1302: the meeting between Ghibelline Florentine exiles and White Guelphs among which was **Dante Alighieri**. The purpose of the meeting was to find an agreement with the Ubaldinis to allow their return to Florence at the time dominated by Black Guelphs. The deliberations failed and were followed by a hard battle between **Whites and Blacks**, leading to the defeat of the Whites. In the meantime, Dante was thinking of leaving his Florentine friends to stay on his own (as he mentioned it in the **Divine Comedy**). In the following years, the Benedictine presence was reduced and the abbey suffered a slow decline. In 1482 it was taken in by the *SS. Annunziata of Florence* and a religious community of *Servites* was constituted, headed by a Prior. The *Serviti* remained in San Godenzo until 1808, when the French suppressed the Order. The church regained the title of *Abbazia* in 1922 and it is today part of the diocese of Fiesole.



The **Abbazia** represents one of the most relevant examples of Romanesque architecture in Tuscany. Externally, its clean stone façade presents a big staircase. The interior is vast and solemn: three naves with quadrangular pillars and a raised choir with three apses. In the course of its history over the centuries, the

abbey was subjected to a lot of modifications and restorations which changed its aspect but kept intact its holy atmosphere and geometric fluidity. Artists and religious people from the past saw in these characteristics a threshold for the human mind to reach God. An initial renovation project started in 1907. It regarded the façade and the interior and gave back its splendour to the abbey. Other renovations took place in 1947 after World War II when San Godenzo was totally destroyed, apart from the abbey which still remained very damaged. A few years ago, in 1998, the last renovations provided a static consolidation of the supporting structures, the remaking of the roof, recovering its seven timber trusses, and the recovery of walls and apse. A new outdoor lighting was also installed to enhance the characteristics of the abbey.

There are also many precious works of art preserved in this church. For a start, the wooden sculpture of *Saint Sebastian* by **Baccio di Montelupo**, restored during nine years and displayed again in the church in 1989. Then a *polyptych* by **Bernardo Daddi** from 1333 shows the usual composition of many of them: the *Virgin* in the centre holding in her arms her *Son* stroking her chin; on the sides are *Saint Benedict*, *Saint John the Baptist*, *Saint Nicholas* and *Saint John the Evangelist*. The polyptych arrived in San Godenzo in 1922 but got back its original beauty only in 2002, following restoration works made by the *Sovrintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Fiorentino*. Among the paintings should be mentioned a *Vergine annunziata* from Andrea del Sarto school (16th century), a *Madonna con Bambino e Santi* by an anonymous painter (16th century), a *S. Antonio Abate*, a *San Francesco che riceve le stimmate* and a *S. Luigi* also by unknown artists from the 16th century. The pulpit from the XVth century is of great interest. In the 20th century the abbey was enriched by several works like the big mosaic inspired by Dante's work in the calotte of the apse, the pipe organ, the baptismal font and the bell tower. The structure of the abbey was not changed at all during the last renovations and it still looks like it was in 1302: an architectural gem set in the green landscape of San Godenzo.

IL CASTAGNO D'ANDREA

Il Castagno d'Andrea, a resort located at 725 metres above sea level and 7 kms from San Godenzo, is one of the most beautiful villages of the centre-north Apennine mountains. Like everywhere around here and from the beginning of the year 1000, Castagno was dominated by the Counts **Guidi family**; in 1335, the hamlet was destroyed by a big landslide and it was rebuilt further down where it is today. In 1366, it became the property of the Florentine Republic but, later on, it became a free village with legislative power until 1796-98 when the **Grand Duke Ferdinand III** joined it to San Godenzo to make a single *comune* of both villages. From the end of the 14th century until the first half of the 15th, the village economy was linked to woodwork activities for the Opera del Duomo in Florence.

Here was born in 1421 **Andrea del Castagno**, a great Renaissance painter. According to **Vasari** he was as tough in his daily life as when he was drawing or fresco painting. During the following centuries, the life in the village went on, following the rhythm of the mountains, exposed to natural and human trials such as earthquakes, landslides and famines. At the dawn of the 19th century, the village was incorporated to San Godenzo for good. After World War I, in 1919, a violent earthquake destroyed it. Not long after, in 1944, since Castagno was right on the Gothic Line, it was razed to the ground by the Germans. Today it is the access door to the National Park of the Casentino Forests, to Mount Falterona and Mount Campigna. Any visitor in search of mountains and nature is welcome at the Visitors Centre, an information centre built thanks to testimonies about the history, the culture and the nature of the place. The village's economy is reliant on ecotourism. **Chestnuts** are an important resource, regarded by our grand-parents as the “**bread of the mountain**”, and still the indispensable ingredient for dishes cooked all through Autumn. Among the many possible excursions starting from Castagno d'Andrea, let's indicate the one leading to the **Cascata dell'Acquacheta**, which is 130 metres high. Located in the vicinity of San Benedetto in Alpe, this is the point where the torrents Troncalosso and Acquacheta merge. In the area we also find large green meadows, perfect for a rest.

POMINO

Before arriving at the village of Rufina we take a turn to the left and follow a small road winding through superb panoramas. We get to Castiglioni where the **Pieve di Santo Stefano** is worthy of a visit as it is a typical example of 12th century Romanesque architecture in the Florentine countryside. On the same road, after the village of Rimaggio, we enter **Pomino** where we find the **Pieve di S. Bartolomeo**, dated from the 12th-13th centuries. Inside the vast and solemn church various artworks are kept: a precious glazed terracotta by **Luca della Robbia** and a 15th century painting depicting the *Madonna col Bambino e santi*, attributed to the **Maestro di San Miniato**. Still in Pomino is found the **Castello di Pomino**, a 16th century villa with a **portico** attributed to Bartolomeo Ammanati. Today one part of the castle has been transformed into a luxurious villa and another one into a cellar for the production of the **Pomino DOC**. It belongs to the **Frescobaldi** family. We take the road back to Rufina.



RUFINA

In the historical centre of Rufina, the splendid **Villa di Poggio Reale** deserves a visit. It was built at the end of the 16th century with a structure inspired by Michelangelo's style and restored in the 18th century when the cellars were built. Today we find there the **Museo della Vite e del Vino** and the **Enoteca del Chianti Rufina e Pomino**. Among the most original events in Rufina, the **Bacco Artigiano** stands out, held in September, from the last Thursday of the month to the Sunday. Displaying local typical produce, it focuses on the production and selling of wine and crafts. During the fair, on the last Saturday in September, there is also a significant event which takes place in Florence: "the blessing of the wine". In the streets of Florence, parading from Piazza Santa Croce to Piazza della Signoria, the guild of the wine-growers is represented in the **Corteo storico** with the *Carro Matto* (a cart made of 2000 flasks of Chianti Rufina and pulled by white oxen) which, according to an old tradition, comes to offer blessed wine to the Signoria of Florence.



PONTASSIEVE



It is the most important town in the Valdisieve, dealing with district services and administrative activities. There are still lots of vestiges of the past in Pontassieve, especially in the historic centre. We can see parts of the fortified walls built by the Florentine Republic in the 14th century, some palaces, the heart of the old village and a **monumental bridge** built upon the Sieve by the **Medici** in the 16th century.



Nearby Pontassieve we can visit the **Castello del Trebbio**, built in the 13th century by the **Pazzi** family and enlarged during the following century. Here is kept a precious *fresco* by **Andrea del Castagno**. Of interest is also the **Castello di Torre a Decima**, turned into a palace by the **Pazzi** family in the 14th century.



Among the medieval parish churches in the area, the **Pieve di San Martino a Lobaco** must be seen as it is a splendid example of **Romanesque architecture** from the end of the 10th century. We can also find the church of **San Giovanni Battista a Remole**, built in the 12th century and which regained its original Romanesque appearance thanks to renovation works completed in 1950. From Pontassieve, following for about 6 kms along the Arno river, the road SS 67 in the direction de Florence, we find the village of **Sieci** and its Romanesque church of **San Giovanni Battista**, with its fine and elegant bell-tower and where a **Crocifissione** by **Botticelli** is kept. Past Sieci, we turn left in the direction of Molin del Piano and, after about 10 kms, we find on the left the turn off to get to the **Santuario della Madonna del Sasso**. On the slopes of Mount Giovi, the **Sanctuary** dated 1490 was built on two floors on a rock where the Virgin is said to have appeared to three young shepherds. Inside there is a painting with the *Madonna and Saints* attributed to **Ceraiolo**. We then continue the road in the direction of Olmo to find road SS 303 for Borgo San Lorenzo.

