

Tuscan Events Diary

Spring

February/March – Viareggio Carnival which lasts for almost a month. Includes football tournaments, fireworks and spectacular floats. www.ilcarnevale.com

First Sunday after Easter – San Miniato Kite Festival (Festa degli Aquiloni): Kites flown from fortress esplanade, followed by historic pageant through the streets of the town and launch of hot air balloons.

30 April – May in Castiglione d’Orcia: Madrigals performed in the open air.

Late April running into July - Maggio Musicale Fiorentino: The undisputed highlight of Florence's cultural diary, the festival has seen Florence become host to one Europe's foremost festivals of opera and classical music. (www.maggiofiorentino.it)

1 May – Prato: presentation of the Holy Girdle.

May – Fucecchio: Palio delle Contrade.

On the last weekend of May: Cantine Aperte: Across Tuscany/Italy, wineries open their doors and cellars to all comers, with free tastings, tours, offers and local delicacies to try. Most wine shops and tourist offices should have details well in advance.

Ascension Day – Florence: Festa del Grillo.

May and June – Florence Maggio Musicale (music in the month of May).

Summer

June and July – Art courses with Carlo Romiti famous local artist who lectures in Florence and makes his own paints from natural materials.

16th June – Pisa: Luminaria di San Ranieri. Pisa is an atmospheric place to be during June, and the night of the 'Luminaria' is a particularly special one, when 50,000 plus candles and blazing torches illuminate and define the buildings on both sides of the Arno.

June (Sunday of Corpus Domini and Saturday night beforehand) - Camaiore, near Lucca – “Sawdust Carpets”: Perhaps losing something in translation the 'tappeti di segatura colorata' are an absolutely wonderful sight. The long central street of Camaiore is bedecked with dozens of incredibly detailed designs fabricated entirely from 'sprinkled' coloured sawdust. Work starts the evening before and continues all night long, with the procession of Corpus Domini passing over (and destroying) them the next day. The Sunday of Corpus Domini and the Saturday night beforehand.



3rd Sunday in June – San Quirico d’Orcia: Festa del Barbarossa.

Last Sunday in June – Arezzo: mediaeval custom and costume, with the ancient Giostra di Saracino. Jousting, marching and costumed processions.

Last Sunday in June – Pisa: The 'Gioco del Ponte', as with many of these intra-town traditions, is fiercely contested, with the pride of the various sectors of the town at stake. Mediaeval costumes, horseback parades and 12 teams of 20 people attempting to push a 7 ton 'trolley' onto the opposite side of the bridge.

Last week in June – Montelupo Fiorentino: International Ceramics festival.

July to September – San Gimignano: Summer Fair on Piazza Duomo (lyrical works, prose, ballet, concerts, and cinema).

2 July and 16 August – Siena: Palio delle Contrade

Horse racing in Siena’s famous square, one of Italy’s most famous and passionate events, this week long festival culminating in the race itself sees the local Contrade pitted against each other for the ultimate prize and glory.

Second week in July – Pistoia: Pistoia Blues Festival. Previous participants include everyone from BB King, Chuck Berry and Fats Domino, to David Bowie, Jethro Tull, Deep Purple, Van Morrison, Goldfrapp and Ry Cooder. Held in the main square of Pistoia. www.pistoiaiblues.com

July – Lucca: 'Summer Festival'. Series of open air concerts, mainly taking place in the Piazza Napoleone (AKA Piazza Verde) throughout July. This event has grown in popularity in a very short time and now attracts some big names such as Jamiroquai, Youssou N’Dour and James Brown. www.summer-festival.com

July – San Miniato: International puppet theatre festival. Siena music week.

Last week in July to early August – Montepulciano: International Arts Workshop (music and theatre).

Autumn

September (every even year) – Pescia: Biennial flower show.

7th September – Florence: Festa della Rificolona. The 'Festival of the Lanterns' on the night of the 7th sees the children of Florence running through the streets with their *rificolone* (paper lanterns), and there are street parties, theatre and a huge market in the square.

2nd Sunday in September – Sansepolcro: Crossbow contest.

Last Sunday in September – Impruneta: One of the largest grape festivals in the Chianti region with procession of floats.

Week of 18 October – Impruneta: Fieri di San Luca.

18th – 26th October – Artelier D'Artista: over twenty artists from around the globe exhibit both paintings and sculptures in the farmhouses and villas around Il Castagno

Last Sunday in October – Montalcino: Thrush festival (historic pageant, traditional costumed ball, archer competition and evening banquet).

October and November: Mushroom Time. If you see people in the woods looking furtive then they're probably collecting *funghi*, preferably porcini. If you know a good spot for them then you're a lucky man, and you won't be telling anyone about it until you are on your deathbed. There are all sorts of mushrooms to collect, but the wonderfully rich and pungent porcini are the prize, and it is these that you'll see for sale by the side of the road.

Winter

Autumn/Winter – Empoli: Busoni piano festival.

November – Organised food and wine tasting tours with Toscana-In

November – Amiata: Amiata a Tavola – Annual autumn gastronomic festival promoting the typical products from the Tuscan mountains. www.amiataturismo.it.

Last three weeks in November – San Miniato: Grand white truffle fair.

First two full weekends of November - San Giovanni d'Asso near Siena: White truffle tastings, truffle-hound contests, music and exhibitions.

Weekend nearest 8 December – San Quirico d'Orcia: Olive Oil fair

Last week in January – Florence: Fiera del Cioccolato Artigianale (www.fieradelcioccolato.it) – Handmade chocolate fair

End of January – Bologna, Emilia-Romagna: ArteFiera Art First (www.artefiera.bolognafiere.it) – International exhibition of modern and contemporary Italian art