

20 SEPTEMBER 2013 CATERINA POMINI 9495

RENT A CAR AND UNEARTH SOUTH TUSCANY'S UNIQUE DESTINATIONS

This tour starts in Arezzo, once a thriving Etruscan centre and best known today for its medieval buildings, churches and antique flea market. The city is a good base for exploring Monterchi - whose greatest attraction is a fresco by Piero della Francesca - Anghiari - the site of a famous 15th century battle - and the Sanctuary of La Verna, where it is believed that St. Francis received the stigmata.

If you're planning a trip to Italy, you should consider spending at least one day in Southern Tuscany; if you rent a car, you can reach striking places that would otherwise be inaccessible.

This Tuscany tour starts in **Arezzo** and will take you to:

- **Monterchi** – where you can admire Piero della Francesca's fresco *Madonna del Parto*

- **Anghiari** - where you can enjoy a typical Tuscan lunch
- the **Sanctuary of La Verna** – perched in a fairy tale setting.

A little bit underestimated by visitors, Arezzo is believed to have been one of the twelve most important **Etruscan dodecapolis**; archaeological evidence is represented by some parts of walls, a necropolis and two spectacular bronzes discovered in the 16th century (now housed in Florence's National Archaeological Museum): the **Chimera** and the **Minerva**. The city is filled with beautiful Medieval buildings and every first weekend of the month, since 1968, a good **antique flea market** is held in **Piazza Grande**: more than 500 vendors from all over the country! If you're in town any of those days, you can't miss the opportunity.

On the way to Anghiari (via SS73), take a detour to **Monterchi**: the Museo della Madonna del Parto holds the most famous depiction of the Virgin Mary shown as pregnant. Painted by the Italian Renaissance master **Piero della Francesca**, the fresco plays an important role in **Andrei Tarkovsky** 's film *Nostalghia*, 1983.

Anghiari, whose famous 15th century battle was commemorated in a **lost Leonardo da Vinci painting**, is a fantastic place to have lunch: situated on the border between Umbria, Emilia-Romagna and Marche, its cuisine is a mixture of various traditions. Venture in the old town alleys, look for a restaurant that best suits your needs and taste some *crostini toscani*, fresh pasta with game sauce (fresh truffles or mushrooms) or a **big juicy Chianina steak**... you won't be disappointed!

The last stop on this tour is the charming **Sanctuary of La Verna** located 50 minutes from Anghiari: perched on a high rocky promontory and surrounded by timeless forests, it sits on the site where it is believed that **Saint Francis of Assisi** received the stigmata. The Complex includes a monastery, a church, a museum, some chapels and the cave where the friar had his cell; in addition, it offers **astonishing views over the valleys below**.