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VOLTERRA, ETRUSCAN TOWN PERCHED HIGH ON TOP OF A HILL

Velathri was one of the 12 city-states that formed in Etruria a powerful economic, religious and military alliance; perched high on top of a hardly accessible hill and defended by magnificent walls, it reached its highest splendour when the southern city-states began to decay, because of their closeness to the Eternal City.

When also *Velathri* was forced to join the **Italic Confederation** (around the half of the 3rd century BC) it continued to maintain a certain degree of independence, until the outbreak of the war between Mario and Sulla, that ended up bringing Volterra to its knees. In the 5th century AD, the city became **the seat of a diocese** but the bishops rose to power only around the 9th - 10th century. The episcopal power reached its climax under **Galgano Pannocchieschi** but the despotism of the latter laid also the foundation for the **anti-episcopal riot**, that was soon leaded by the local lords and the emerging middle classes. In 1208, the bishops started to lose their power and the beautiful **Palazzo dei Priori**

became the **emblem** and the **seat** of the **free commune**. Surrounded by Florence, Siena and Pisa in the midst of their territorial expansion, **Volterra** clearly found itself struggling to maintain its independence from its fierce neighbours, until it finally fell prey to the Florentine rule (1472)... Although independence was formally conceded, the city was finally subdued to Florence.

Volterra is the perfect Tuscany tour destination for families and couples, the city has preserved its **medieval charm** thanks to its relative geographical isolation; high upon its hill, almost entirely surrounded by its beautiful 13th century walls, Volterra can be easily reached from Florence in approximately 1 hour... all you need to do is to choose your favourite Florence car rent and leave!

Once there, you can visit the **Cathedral** of course, the **Baptistery of San Giovanni**, **Piazza** and **Palazzo dei Priori** and the wonderful **Porta all'Arco**; other attractions are surely the **Medici Fortress** , the **Roman Theatre** (1st century BC) and the font named **Fonte di Docciola** which in the past centuries was used as public washtub. The **Guarnacci Museum** preserves one of the most beautiful collections of **Etruscan art**, but also lots of **Villanovan** and **Roman relics**; besides that, you can look for the **Pinacoteca** and the **Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art**, **Palazzo Viti**, the **Torture Museum** and the **Ecomuseum of Alabaster**. The surroundings offer a lot of attractions too: the impressive **cliffs of Volterra** for example are located on the southwestern side of the hill, between the Cecina Valley and the Valdera; if you have more time you can also visit the **Natural Park of Sasso Pisano** with its **thermal springs** and **fumaroles**.

P.S. Volterra has become recently famous also for being the home of the **Volturi** in the **New Moon book**, the second chapter of the **Twilight series** by **Stephenie Meyer**.