

19 OCTOBER 2016 CATERINA POMINI 15120

THE MUGELLO REGION – AN UNCONVENTIONAL TOUR OF TUSCANY

Besides being famous for the heterogeneity of its natural landscapes, the Mugello area is also very much appreciated for its small towns and villages, Medicean villas, castles, traditional events and fairs. This brief article provides information about the main attractions & sights in Borgo San Lorenzo, Barberino di Mugello, San Piero a Sieve, Scarperia, Firenzuola, Palazzuolo sul Senio, Marradi, Vicchio and Vaglia.

The **Mugello region** is a big green valley in Northern Tuscany located about 20 km north of Florence; very well known for the heterogeneity of its natural landscapes, it is also very much appreciated for its

small towns and villages, Renaissance villas, castles, traditional events and fairs. If you want to explore Florence in depth and spend some time far from the madding crowd, Mugello may be the right destination for you; in case you want to take an unconventional Tuscany tour, you can simply rent a car and drive to **Borgo San Lorenzo**, from which you can easily reach **Barberino di Mugello**, **San Piero a Sieve**, **Scarperia**, **Firenzuola**, **Palazzuolo sul Senio**, **Marradi**, **Vicchio** and **Vaglia**. This brief article will provide some information about the main attractions and sights for those who intend to travel to this part of Tuscany.

How do I reach the Mugello region from Florence?

Mugello can be reached through various roads: 1) the quickest way is via the **A1 motorway** to Barberino di Mugello 2) the most scenic road is the **Bolognese** (SP65) 3) the **Faentina** (SS302) and 4) the **SS67 + SP551**, longer but very popular among bikers.

Borgo San Lorenzo was severely damaged by an earthquake in 1919 and heavily bombed between 1943 and 1944, so, very little has remained of its 14th century walls and original buildings; however, it is the biggest town in Mugello and represents **the perfect place from which to explore the Valley**. The town center is pretty, large enough to offer all amenities, moreover, it hosts a lot of festivals and events.

San Piero a Sieve (about 5 km from Borgo San Lorenzo) has grown around a parish church from the 11th century and has the largest concentration of **Medicean buildings** in the area (e.g. the **Fortress of San Martino** and the **Villa del Trebbio**); in the immediate surroundings there is also a beautiful convent called **“Bosco ai Frati”** where you can admire a dying Christ by **Donatello**.

On the other side of **Lake Bilancino** – a large, artificial dam that is great for swimming, sailing, windsurfing, kajaking and fishing – stands **Barberino di Mugello**, where you can visit the amazing **Villa Medicea di Cafaggiolo**, the old market place (**Loggiato Mediceo**) and a lot of churches from the 13th century. The town is also very well known for its Designer Outlet, where you can find over 90 shops with all the famous brands at very convenient prices.

Scarperia is famous worldwide for its production of **hand-crafted knives** and for being one of the **Most Beautiful Villages in Italy** (see www.borghitalia.it), it was founded at the beginning of the 14th century and is home to a lot of interesting buildings such as:

the **Palazzo dei Vicari**, the **Church of Saints Jacopo and Filippo** and the **Parish church of Santa Maria a Fagna**. Don't forget to pay a visit to the small village of **Sant'Agata**, 3,5 km north-east of Scarperia.

Very close to the border with Emilia-Romagna, Medieval **Firenzuola** was dramatically destroyed on September 12th, 1944; the **Germanic Cemetery** (at the Futa pass) and the **Santerno Valley War Cemetery** were built in memory of the fallen soldiers and as a warning to the next generations. Despite its sad past, Firenzuola is a very happy town today, a **nature lovers' paradise** deep in the heart of the Apennines.

The best time to visit **Palazzuolo sul Senio** is Autumn, when the **Festival of chestnuts and other typical products** is held; just like Firenzuola, this municipality is entirely surrounded by beautiful woods, so it is perfect for those who want to spend their holidays going on nature walks or simply relaxing.

Marradi is where the visionary poet **Dino Campana** was born in 1885; it is a small town, very quiet and romantic, famous for its scenic hiking trails with picturesque views. Besides nature, Marradi has several noteworthy buildings too, such as the **Town Hall**, **Palazzo Fabbroni**, the **Church of San Lorenzo** and the **Abbey of Santa Reparata** (very beautiful!).

In **Vicchio** were born two famous Italian painters: **Giotto** and **Beato Angelico**; it is a nice town with a lot of things to see, rich in natural attractions and remarkable monuments. Don't miss the **Beato Angelico Museum**, the hamlet of **Barbiana**, **Giotto's Home** and **Cimabue's Bridge**.

If you travel to Mugello from Florence, **Vaglia** is the first district you will meet; its main attractions are surely **Villa Demidoff** (with its huge park full of sculptures and fountains) and the **Sanctuary of Monte Senario** (one of the most important convents in Tuscany). The municipality also includes the **Parish Church of San Pietro in Vaglia**, one of the oldest in Mugello, which dates back to the 8th century.

It is certainly complicated to summarize in a few lines all the things you can do and visit in this beautiful area of Tuscany; however, the best option you have is always to choose the Florence car rent you prefer and go discovering by yourself!

Wish you a great trip.