SOUTHERN TUSCANY

Southern Tuscany



The south of Tuscany, bordering the neighbouring region of Lazio, is a land of lush rumpled hills, distant smoky mountains and ancient hill-top villages. Inland are several of Tuscany's most important Etruscan sites, including the enigmatic *vie cave*, or sunken roads, over whose significance archaeologists still puzzle. For pure drama, the medieval town of Pitigliano is inimitable, looming above a mountainous cliff face pitted with the caves of former Etruscan tombs. Sovana too, just along the road, is rich in Etruscan remains. When you've had your fill, you can dunk yourself in the hot natural pools of Saturnia, only a short drive away.

Grosseto's old town provides an atmospheric setting for the *passeggiata* (traditional evening stroll), while Massa Marittima, the only other inland town of any size, has an equally small, equally charming old quarter and a couple of worthwhile mining museums.

Back on the coast, the Monte Argentario peninsula has smart marinas, good beaches, shady pine groves ideal for a picnic, and a craggy interior, beckoning cyclists and walkers to enjoy a strenuous day out. To its north, the quiet Parco Regionale della Maremma embraces the most varied and attractive stretch of the Tuscan coastline, protected at its rear by the Monti dell'Uccellina range. The park is threaded with signed walking trails or you can hire a mountain bike. You can even join a guided canoe trip along its quiet backwaters. Then again, you could just flop on one of its long, sandy beaches.

Tuscany's southern tip has a couple of delights. The saltwater Lago di Burano teems with bird life, especially in winter. Nearby, and all the more extraordinary for being implanted in such a natural setting, the Giardino dei Tarocchi (Tarot Garden) is an astounding sculpture park on a grand scale, created over the years by Franco-American artist Niki de Saint Phalle.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Try to take a bad picture of breathtaking Pitigliano (p290), then delve into its tiny Jewish quarter
- March through the extraordinary vie cave (sunken roads) used since Etruscan times in the necropolises around Sovana (p292)
- Bathe in the natural hot springs of Saturnia (p290)
- Tramp through the diverse, unspoiled surroundings of the sprawling Parco Regionale della Maremma (p285)
- Dine on top-value seafood then join the passeggiata on the picturesque waterfront in Porto Santo Stefano (p287)



GROSSETO

pop 75,100

TUSCANY

SOUTHERN

With the notable exceptions of Bastardo and Schito, Grosseto has the most uninviting, Anglicised ring to its name in all of Italy. On a possibly related note, its public relations efforts have failed to excite significant visitor interest. Yet it's these shortcomings that have contributed to the city's obscure charm. The old walls, raised in 1559, form a near-perfect hexagon. Within, where refreshingly few tourists penetrate, the historic old town has unpretentious enticements and genuinely friendly, good-value eating and sleeping options. It's also one of the rare places in Tuscany where the oft-proclaimed 'no car zone' means almost that. *Passeggiata* anyone?

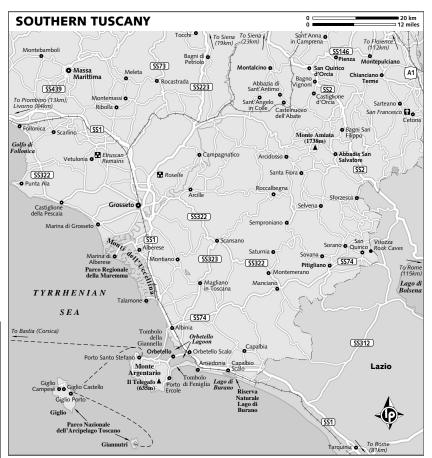
Grosseto was one of the last Siena-dominated towns to fall into Medici hands in 1559. Once in control, Florence had the walls, bastions and fortress raised in order to protect what was then an important grain and salt depot for the grand duchy.

lonelyplanet.com

Information

Seasonal tourist office (%0564 42 78 58; Via Gramschi; 9.30am-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) At the entrance to the old town.

Tourist office (\$6564 46 26 11; www.lamaremma.info; Via Monte Rosa 206; \$\infty\$ 9.30am-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Sat) Outside the old quarter, it's well informed about the town and region, including the Parco Regionale della Maremma.



Sights

Within the city walls, Grosseto's cathedral (7.30am-noon & 3.30-7pm), started in the late 13th century, has a distinctive Sienese air. It has been added to and much of the façade was renewed along neo-Romanesque lines during the 19th century. Once inside, the choc-ice painted white-and-brown bands can be an assault on your eyes, but to make up for it there is a lovely tabernacle altar and an elaborate sculpted font. Next door, on Piazza Dante, the Palazzo della Provincia seems to be Sienese Gothic, which is exactly what its early-20th-century architects hoped you might think.

Sharing common premises, Museo Archeologico e d'Arte della Maremma and smaller Museo d'Arte Della Diocesi di Grosseto (%0564488750; Piazza Baccarini 3; adult/child €5/2.50; 10am-1pm &5-8pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Sun) are well worth a visit. On the ground floor are Etruscan and Roman artefacts unearthed from Roselle. Room 11 in particular has some imposing statues and fragments, ingeniously jigsawed together. The next floor displays items recovered from Vetulonia and other Maremma sites, while the top storey is mainly devoted to Grosseto's rich ecclesiastical heritage. Ask for the guide sheet in English. Opening hours change frequently (and whimsically).

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Mulinacci (%0564 2 84 19; Via Mazzini 78; s/d incl breakfast €45/70; p) This is a well-priced choice, right in the heart of the old town. With traditional green shutters and a friendly welcome, it has small but comfy rooms like you'd find at your auntie's. Its ground-floor Ristorante l'Italiana is popular with locals – always a good sign.

Bastiani Grand Hotel (%0564 2 00 47; www.hotelbastiani.com; Piazza Gioberti 64; s/d incl breakfast €84/146; p a) A smart hotel within a grand old building, complete with a *Gone with the Wind*-type, dance-me-down staircase. Rooms are woody and elegant, with bathrooms – most with a bathtub – that are tiled, gold-fixtured and gleaming. The buffet breakfast is vast. Parking is €18.

Danubio Blu (♣0564 222 16; Via Cavour 6; meals €25) This is a hugely popular, noisy restaurant with cheery, frazzled staff and a dizzying choice of dishes, including the traditional polenta and risotto – and occasional surprises like chichen (sic) curry.

Ristorante il Canto del Gallo (%0564 41 45 89; Via Mazzini 29; meals €32; In dinner Mon-Sat, lunch bookings only) This is a long, thin tunnel of a place. The Cock Crow is decorated with every possible variant upon the cockerel (rooster) theme, even down to the stoppers used on the rich choice of grappas. The genial, beaming chef emerges from her kitchen, clucks an order or two, greets her guests, then retires to prepare another delicious platter, while the sole waiter darts up and down like an Olympic sprint finalist.

Getting There & Around

Rama (%056425215; www.griforama.it in Italian; Piazza Marconi) buses cover destinations throughout the province of Grosseto. Most services leave from the train station. Buses for Siena, where you can connect with either Tra-in or SITA buses to Florence, run roughly every hour. Alternatively, there are three direct services.

There is only one direct bus a day to Massa Marittima ($\mathfrak{S}3.40$). Other destinations include Piombino ($\mathfrak{S}5.1\%$ hours, three daily), Magliano in Toscana ($\mathfrak{S}2.60$ minutes, two to five daily), Follonica ($\mathfrak{S}3.40$, one hour, three daily), Castiglione della Pescaia ($\mathfrak{S}4.40.50$ minutes, 15 daily), Porto Santo Stefano ($\mathfrak{S}3.40.50$, one hour, three daily) and Pitigliano ($\mathfrak{S}6.60$, two hours, five daily).

Grosseto is on the main coastal train line between Rome ($\[mathebet]$ 4.80, two hours) and Livorno ($\[mathebet]$ 6.10, 1½ hours). For places such as Pisa ($\[mathebet]$ 8.20, two hours), Florence ($\[mathebet]$ 1.70, three hours) or Siena ($\[mathebet]$ 6.10, 1½ hours), the train is probably a smarter bet.

There's plenty of parking, albeit paying, beneath the exterior of the city walls.

AROUND GROSSETO Roselle

Populated as early as the 7th century BC, Roselle was a middle-ranking Etruscan town that came under Roman control in the 3rd century BC.

Although there are no great monuments left standing, the extensive historic site (%0564 40 30 67; admission €4; ▶ 9am-sunset) retains its Roman defensive walls, an oddly elliptical amphitheatre, traces of houses, the forum and streets. You will also find remains of an abandoned medieval village. There are wonderful views down to the plains and out to the sea.

Vetulonia

This windswept mountain village seems to rise out of nothing from the surrounding plains. It retains elements of the ancient surrounding wall and has a small Museo Archeologico (♠0564 94 80 58; Piazza de Vetulonia; adult/child €4.50/2.50; ► core hours 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sat, to 8pm Jun-Sep) that contains a rich display of artefacts revealed by excavations at the two nearby Etruscan sites (♠0564 94 95 87; admission free; ► 10am-7pm Apr-Sep). The more extensive area, known as Scavi Città (Town Excavations), is just below the village as you leave by the only road.

More interesting are four unearthed Etruscan tombs (Via dei Sepolcri: 10am-7pm), a couple of kilometres further downhill and along a turn-off to the right. Best is the last, about 1km down a rough dirt track.

Taverna Etrusca (%0564 94 98 02; www.tavernaen trusca.it; Piazza Stefani 12; s €50-60, d €55-70; h Easter-Oct; a s) has 10 large rooms with fantastic panoramic views, some with terraces. The views will successfully distract from the Spartan furnishings – that money was shrewdly put into the new beds. There is an onsite

restaurant that serves satisfying meals for about €24.

A daily bus runs to/from both Grosseto and Castiglione della Pescaia.

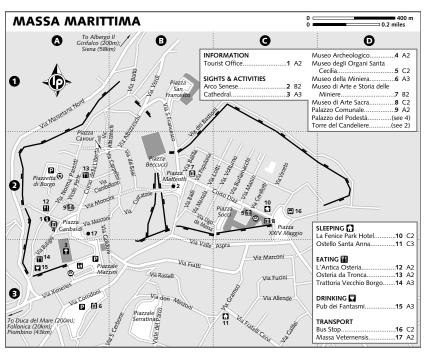
MASSA MARITTIMA

pop 8840

Massa is a compelling place with a pristine and comparatively serene medieval centre by Tuscan standards. Briefly under Pisan domination, it thrived on the local metal mining industry, even becoming an independent *comune* (municipality) in 1225, only to be swallowed up by Siena a century later. The plague in 1348, and the end of mining 50 years later, reduced the city almost to extinction. Not until the 18th century, with the draining of marshes and reestablishment of mining, did Massa Marittima finally come back to life.

Orientation

The centre is split in two; the twisted and scenic old quarter and – up a steep hill, through the massive Arco Senese – the curiously grid-pattered new part, where attractive photo-ops are in short supply.



Information

Sights

The heart of medieval Massa is Piazza Garibaldi, watched over by the imposing bulk of the cathedral (St Cerbone's Cathedral; 8am-noon & 3-5pm) and the several dozen loiterers sitting on its steps at any given moment. Cleverly set asymmetrical to the square to better show off its splendour, the cathedral is a commendably assembled, snap-on conglomeration of enlargements and renovations supplementing its first, pre-Romanesque incarnation from the 12th century. The Pisan-Romanesque façade includes a central door flanked by two lion heads and topped by five panels depicting scenes from the life of St Cerbone. Blind arcades of 13th-century Pisan design line the sides and the roof was crowned with a polygonal dome in the 15th century. The lower half of the attached Gothic campanile (bell tower) dates from around 1400, while the upper part was redone at the beginning of the 20th century.

The cathedral's interior is a standard basilica-plan layout with rib vaults in both the aisles (17th century) and nave (15th century), highlighted by the Arca di San Cerbone (St Cerbone's Ark; 1324) carved by Goro di Gregorio and adorned with bas-relief episodes of the saint's life. A wooden crucifix (early-14th century) by Giovanni Pisano hangs over the huge marble altar by Flaminio del Turco (1626). The remainder of the interior is graced with an assortment of sculpted panels from the 12th and 13th centuries, substantial remnants of frescoes and several paintings, including an ailing Madonna delle Grazie attributed to Siena's Duccio di Buoninsegna. There's also a fine 14th-century total immersion baptismal font.

Öpposite is the Palazzo Comunale, the city's historic seat of government. The coat of arms of Florence's Medicis is less aesthetically moving than the symbol of rival Siena's one-time ascendancy here – the wolf with Romulus and Remus.

The 13th-century Palazzo del Podestà houses the Museo Archeologico (%0566 90 22 89; www.coop collinemetallifere.it/musei: Piazza Garibaldi 1: adult/child

€3/1.50; ► 10am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Nov-Mar). A monkey fossil from the Miocene era and a simple, but compelling stele dating from the 3rd millennium BC are the hands-down highlights of the ground floor's archaeological collection. The upper levels have a modest collection of ancient Roman and Etruscan artefacts recovered from around town.

Music-lovers will enjoy the Museo degli Organi Santa Cecilia (%0566 94 02 82; www.museodegliorgani.it; Corso Diaz 28; adult/child £4/2: 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Apr-0ct, 10.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) with its collection of antique organs, harpsichords and clavichords, which, if you strike it lucky, the curator will play for you.

Museo della Miniera (%0566 90 22 89; Via Corridoni; adult/child €5/3; ☐ guided visits 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-noon & 3-4.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) relates the city's long mining history. The display includes a replica of a length of mine. Guided tours in Italian and optional English last around 45 minutes.

The smaller Museo di Arte e Storia delle Miniere (%0566 90 22 89; Piazza Matteotti 4; adult/child €1.50/1;
→ 3-5.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) has more mining material and a strong photographic collection.

At the far end of Corso Diaz is the Museo di Arte Sacra (\$60566 90 19 54; Corso Diaz 36; adult/child €5/3; ■ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Apr-Sep, 11am-1pm & 3-5pm 0ct-Mar), the new home for Ambrogio Lorenzetti's magnificent *Maestà* (Majesty) as well as a collection of alabaster bas-reliefs, sculptures, a wooden crucifix by Pisano, paintings by Sano di Pietro and Stefano di Giovanni, and other items collected from local churches.

Festivals & Events

Balestro del Girifalco This medieval festival, punctuated by a crossbow competition, takes place in Piazza Garibaldi. Held on the fourth Sunday in May and the second Sunday in August.

Toscana Foto Festival (www.toscanafotofestival.com in Italian) Held in the first two weeks of July, the festival attracts international professional photographers, whose works are displayed all over town until mid-August.

Sleeping & Eating

Many hotels and restaurants in Massa take a long winter break between January and

Albergo II Girifalco (%0566 90 21 77; Via Massetana Nord 25; s €50-70, d €55-75, all incl breakfast) This lowkey place is just outside the walls. It's family friendly, with a playground and picnic area. Rooms are clean and bright, and many have sweeping views.

Ostello Santa Anna (%0566 90 26 65, 339 278 62 72; Via Gramsci 3; per person €15; reception 9am-12pm & 5-7.30pm;) A quiet, budget option, a 1km uphill walk from the centre, with six-bed dorms each with bathrooms. Breakfast is €1.50.

Duca del Mare (%0566 90 22 84; www.ducadelmare.it; Piazza Dante Alighieri 1/2; s €50-60, d €85-100, all incl buffet breakfast; pas) Duca del Mare is about 10 minutes' walk from the historic centre. This modern, sunny hotel has a Scandinavian air with lots of shiny light wood and Ikea-style furnishings. All rooms have terraces, some party-sized, with tree-obscured views of the countryside.

La Fenice Park Hotel (%0566 90 39 41: www .lafeniceparkhotel.it: Corso Diaz 63: s €90-110. d €150-200. all incl breakfast; **a** i **s**) This is a seductive marble-clad hotel (bathrooms are a gleaming, sensual delight) where all rooms have a minikitchen. The junior suites (€170 to €225) are essentially roomy, fully equipped apartments, and there's a croquet-quality lawn and raised pool. Wi-fi in lobby. The hotel has wheelchair access.

Osteria da Tronca (%0566 90 19 91; Vicolo Porte 5; meals €23-28; Tue-Sun) Squeezed into a side street, da Tronca is an intimate stone-walled restaurant. There's lots of antipasto (€3) to choose from. For mains, try anything with cinghiale (wild boar).

L'Antica Osteria (%0566 90 26 44; Via Norma Parenti 19; meals €25; Thu-Tue) This osteria (restaurant focussing on wine) is great value, offering several lip-smacking vegetarian options, including cheese-filled ravioli with mushrooms, and it also has an inexpensive pizza menu.

Trattoria Vecchio Borgo (%0566 90 39 50; taverna .vecchioborgo@libero.it; Via Norma Parenti 12; meals €30-40: In Tue-Sun) A brick-clad restaurant with a cavernous barrel-vaulted interior where a welcoming fire roars away in winter. There's a set menu and a good variety of dishes, and its gnocchi al pomodoro (gnocchi in a tomato sauce) is hard to beat.

Drinking

Pub dei Fantasmi (%0566 94 02 75; Via Norma Parenti 2/4; 9.30pm-2am or 3am Thu-Tue) This is the place to head if you're feeling frisky after dinner; it's about the only place in town big enough to hold a crowd. There's occasional live jazz.

Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

Getting There & Away

There are two daily buses to Siena (€4.40) at 7.05am and 4.40pm, and around four to Volterra (changing at Monterotondo). The nearest train station is Massa-Follonica, served by a regular shuttle bus (€2). All buses call at the stop on Piazza XXIV Maggio. Massa Veternensis (%0566 902 20 62; Piazza Garibaldi 18) sells both bus and train tickets.

THE COAST

There are no great swaths of sand as you cruise the coast south from Piombino, where occasional stretches of pine-backed beach are pleasant without being breathtaking. What does deserve a detour along this southern stretch of mainland Tuscan coast is the Parco Regionale della Maremma.

Golfo di Follonica

Maintaining an industrial tradition that dates back to Etruscan times, the gulf these days is mostly chimney stacks and factories - all necessary, to be sure, but no reason to hang about. Heading south, the first town you will reach is Follonica, with its cheap and scruffy high-rises. The outlook improves a few kilometres further around the gulf with a pleasant pinewood backdrop to the beaches; look for the turn-off signs inland for Scarlino.

Some sadistic committee in Punta Ala succeeded in devising the most Kafkaesque road system for this leafy but rather fake getaway for the seriously moneyed. On the plus side, the promontory is green and sparingly brutalised by building development, and, along the northern flank, there is a pleasant pine-backed sandy beach.

Castiglione della Pescaia

The modern sprawl around the foot of the hill on which this medieval stone village sits lives harmoniously enough with its more venerable antecedent.

The walled old town has no monuments of interest, but is pleasant to stroll through - and views out to sea are majestic.

The tourist office (%0564 93 36 78; www.castigli onepescaia.com; Piazza Garibaldi 6; 969am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat) is in the main square of the lower

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Bologna (%/fax 0564 93 37 46; Piazza Garibaldi 8; s with/without bathroom €36/29, d with/without bathroom €68/53; a) This is a no-frills small hotel whose rooms have surprisingly comfortable beds, while the remaining furniture's dated and retro-plastic. Doubles with bathrooms are worth the upgrade. The location, however, is five-star superb – across from the harbour, with great views from the corner breakfast room and some bedrooms.

Hotel Lucerna (%0564 93 36 20; www.hotellucerna. it; Via IV Novembre 27; s €46-65, d €78-100, all incl breakfast; pa) An attractive traditional hotel that's been run by the same family for three generations. Rooms are cheerful and large, and have balconies with sea or old-town views. The adjacent restaurant and pizzeria is handy for staving off hunger pangs. Parking is free. but limited.

L'Andana (%0564 94 43 21: www.andanahotel.com: d incl breakfast €332-460; p i s) To sum this place up - mamma mia! Down a gated, kilometre-long, tree-lined dirt track flanked by vineyards, olive trees and 50 sq km of rolling hills, is this once summer abode of Duke Leopold. Opened in 2004 and designed with the help of French, three-star Michelin chef Alain Ducasse, this 16th-century property is the last hotel you'll ever want to stay in. And you can bet your tongue that the onsite Trattoria Toscana (open dinner only, Tuesday to Sunday) won't disappoint. Avail yourself of the indoor and outdoor swimming pools, spa with signature treatments, tennis court, 18-hole golf course, lobby wi-fi and the largest showers in Tuscany – maybe Europe.

Ristorante La Fortezza (%0564 93 61 00; Via del Recinto 1/3; meals €33; daily Mar-Oct, Tue-Sun Nov-Feb) La Fortezza is just beyond the massive gate leading to the old town. You can dine outside or within the cavelike interior and savour typical dishes of the Maremma, including pasta with lobster.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Rama buses run to/from Grosseto (€4.40, 50 minutes, 15 daily) and connect with other places on the coast, such as Marina di Grosseto (€2.50).

Marina di Grosseto

The beach is broad and sandy, but the resort is modern, with slapped-together housing and an anonymous gridlike street system. At least it's predominantly low-rise and well camouflaged by the umbrella pines typical of the Maremma coast. It's a favoured spot for locals to come and splash in the sea, but there are more interesting places close by.

SOUTHERN TUSCANY .. The Coast 285

Parco Regionale della Maremma

The Maremma extends along the Tuscan coast from just north of Grosseto to the southern border with Lazio, embracing the Parco Regionale della Maremma and Monte Argentario. Fronting the coast, it's an area of long, sandy beaches and reclaimed marshland, crisscrossed by dykes and drainage ditches. This nature park (admission €6-9) protects its most spectacular parts and incorporates the Monti dell'Uccellina, which drop to a magnificent stretch of unspoiled coastline. Native wild boar, wild cats and porcupines share the area with cowboy-supervised herds of oxen and horses, all spread out over a string of adjacent ecosystems: agricultural, forest, humid, rocky and dune landscapes.

The park's main visitor centre (%0564 40 70 98; www.parcomaremma.it; 8am-5pm mid-Mar-Sep, 8.30am-1.30pm Oct-mid-Mar) is in Alberese, at the park's northern edge. It has shelves of information on the park and activities, including guided horse tours. There's a small seasonal centre (%0564 88 71 73; 8am-noon & 5-8pm Jul & Aug, 8am-1pm Sep-Jun) at the park's southern extremity, 400m up a dirt lane about 1km before Talamone. Talamone itself is a little coastal village, surmounted by a plain, functional blockhouse of a fortress, from whose base there's a great sea view.

Entry to the park is limited and cars must be left in designated areas. Walking is the best way to explore its riches on 11 unique, signed walking trails, varying from 2.5km to 12km long. Within surprisingly shorts distances, walks lead through thick pine forests into beaches, past caves, around bays, through marshes and bushland, skirting ponds and along coastline. There's also a guided night tour. Entry (by ticket bought at one of the visitor centres) varies according ests into beaches, past caves, around bays, to whether a minibus transports you to your chosen route. Depending upon your trail, you stand a chance of spotting deer, wild boar, foxes and hawks.

The Centro Turismo II Rialto (%0564 40 71 02), 600m north of the main visitors centre, offers guided canoe outings (adult/child €16/8; two hours) and rents mountain bikes (per hour/day €3/8). It doesn't have set core hours, so call ahead or risk finding the place abandoned.

Between July and September, when the park gets very crowded, a couple of routes are closed and two others can only be undertaken in a guided group because of the high risk of forest fire. There are no shelters within the park, so make sure you wear sun block and carry water.

To restore your energy after a walk, there are a couple of simple, good-value eating options. Situated beside the Centro Turismo II Rialto is Il Mangiapane (%0564 40 72 63; meals €15), but the service can be patchy here. The better option is Trattoria e Pizzeria Mancini e **Caduro** (**%**0564 40 71 37; Via del Fante 24; meals €19; Tue-Sun Apr-Sep), located in nearby Alberese. It has a short, affordable menu of homemade Tuscan standards - tortelli ricortta espinace (pasta with cheese and spinach), aquacotta (soup with bread, onion, tomatoes, celery

and egg) - and pizzas served on the small

Osteria la Nuova Dispensa (%0564 40 73 21; Via Aurelia Vecchia 11; meals €28-32; Thu-Tue) occupies the old village store and also offers local specialities. If you like your food spicy, fire up on the *peposo*, a peppery stewed beef dish with vegetables and Tuscany's answer to a vindaloo. The restaurant's 4.5km south of Alberese, just before the junction with the SS1.

MONTE ARGENTARIO

pop 13,000

Once an island, this rugged promontory came to be linked to the mainland by an accumulation of sand that is now the isthmus of Orbetello. Further sandy bulwarks form the Tombolo della Giannella and the Tombolo di Feniglia to the north and south. They enclose a lagoon that is now a protected nature reserve.

Intense building, poor urban planning and stunning mobs of people have spoiled the northern side of the promontory (Porto Santo Stefano and around), but the south and centre have been left in peace (forest fires

COWBOY CULTURE

The fascination Europe held for the cowboy culture of the American West was never more apparent than in the late 1800s when Colonel William Cody (alias Buffalo Bill) took his fabulously successful Wild West show on two grand European tours.

Buffalo Bill brought the show to Italy, complete with the sharp-shooting Annie Oakley and bands of real Sioux warriors, many the very same braves who had fought Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn. The troupe was invited to the Vatican to attend the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the coronation of Pope Leo XIII. Then, in Verona, Cody fulfilled his ambition of exhibiting his Wild West in the ancient Roman amphitheatre, where the high point was a bronco-busting challenge match between Buffalo Bill's cowboys and the butteri. These were Tuscany's legendary cowboys, who survived the harsh conditions of the Maremma, its swampland a breeding ground for malarial mosquitoes. The Maremma was divided among landowners of vast estates where the butteri tended herds of Cajetan horses, one of the most unmanageable and wild breeds in Europe. In front of a crowd of some 20,000 spectators, the butteri challenged the American cowboys to break the Caietans. The Rome correspondent of the New York Herald wrote: 'The brutes made springs into the air, darted hither and thither in all directions, and bent themselves into all sorts of shapes, but all in vain. In five minutes the cowboys [butteri] had caught the wild horses with the lasso, saddled, subdued and bestrode them. Then the cowboys rode them around the arena while the dense crowds applauded with delight.'

Today, longhorn cattle and horses still graze free in the Maremma, the swamps have all been drained, the grass is lush, and malaria a menace of the past. On the first Sunday in August, the butteri gather and brand the cattle. The Equinus Association (%0564 2 49 88; www.cavallomar emmano.it) organises butteri shows and equestrian tourism, and even provides information on buying - presumably tamed - Maremma horses. There is also an official organisation, Butteri di Alta Maremma (www.butteri-altamaremma.com), which protects and promotes the remaining butteri and also arranges rodeo-style events.

aside). The area is generally up-market-leaning and a favourite summer weekend getaway for Romans, when it gets packed to the gunwales. Ambitious hotel prices make this poor value in high season and parking, particularly in Porto Santo Stefano, is cut-throat. Late April to early May and late September to early October are optimum times to visit, when warm days, cool nights, reduced crowds and lower prices dramatically improve the atmosphere.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Frequent Rama (%0564 86 79 29) buses connect most towns on Monte Argentario with downtown Orbetello (€1.50, 20 minutes) and continue to the train station. They also run to Grosseto (€3.40, one hour, up to four daily).

By car, follow signs for Monte Argentario from the SS1, which connects Grosseto with Rome.

Orbetello

pop 15.000

Set on a balance-beam isthmus running through the lagoon, Orbetello is an easily digestible, less-raucous regional destination. Its modest, main attraction is the cathedral (Piazza della Repubblica; 9am-noon & 3-6pm), which has retained its 14th-century Gothic façade despite being remodelled in the Spanish style during the 16th century. Other reminders of the Spanish garrison that was stationed in the city for nearly 150 years include the Viceroy's residence located on Piazza Eroe dei Due Mondi, the fort and the city walls, parts of which are the original Etruscan fortification.

The tourist office (%0564 86 04 47; n 9.30am-12.30pm & 4-7pm Apr-Sep, to 8pm Jul & Aug, 9am-12.30pm & 4-7pm Oct-Mar) is opposite the cathedral.

The best place for observing bird life (as many as 140 species have been identified) on Orbetello's lagoon is out along the Tombolo di Feniglia, the southern strip of land linking Monte Argentario to the mainland. It is blocked to traffic, but you can park your car near the camp site and continue on foot or bicycle. The beach on the seaward side is one of the best on the peninsula.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel I Presidi (%0564 86 76 01; Via Mura di Levante 34; s €100-110, d €130-160, all incl breakfast; **D a** i This is an airy, thoroughly modern hotel,

wedged between the lagoon-side road and the old quarter. The striped wallpaper in the rooms is offset by a floral frieze and flowery coverlets. Those on the 4th floor have a small balcony, and there's a peaceful interior patio. Off-street parking is €10 per day.

Osteria il Nocchino (%0564 86 03 29; Via Furio Lenzi 64; meals €30; ► Wed-Mon Mar-Oct, Fri-Sun Nov-Feb) Another excellent choice, albeit with about as much seating capacity as a glorified matchbox (supplemented in summer by outdoor seating). Prices are moderate and the food is like mamma used to make.

Osteria del Lupacante (%0564 86 76 18; Corso Italia 103; meals €35, tourist menus €21; Thu-Tue) This osteria is run by a Sicilian family. You really must begin with one of the splendid soups, which is almost a meal in itself. The spaghetti alla messinese (Messina style, with swordfish, tomato, peppers, sunflower seeds and spices) is only one of the imaginative creations.

Porto Santo Stefano

Porto Santo Stefano's linked, crescent waterfront layout divides the objectionable port from the fashionable harbour. Both sides are equally chaotic, though the Ferraris, yachts and scantly clad bodies on the harbour side are significantly more enthralling. From the waterline, the city shoots up the mountainside on ultrathin streets, devoid of parking and sidewalks, where one lingering vehicle can back up traffic all the way down to the port in an instant.

The harbour, however, is a passeggiata dream: spacious and lined with restaurants, cafes, gelatarie, and plenty of places to sit and observe this endearing social phenomenon.

INFORMATION

Il Galeone (Lungomare dei Navigatori 40; per hr €6; 8am-midnight) A bar with a couple of internet points. Tourist office (%0564 81 42 08; www.lamaremma .info: Piazzale Sant'Andrea: 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) Is appallingly located at the eastern end of the port.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Fortezza Spagnola (%0564 81 06 81; Piazza del Governatore; adult/child €3/2; ► 6pm-midnight Jun-Sep, 10.30am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Sat & Sun Oct-May), several uneven streets and stairways above the harbour, houses a small collection of underwater archaeological finds and an exhibition of wooden boat-making. It affords breathtaking views of Porto Santo Stefano – if you've any breath left after the steep ascent.

If you've wheels, follow signs for the narrow and sometimes dangerously overcrowded Via Panoramica, a circular route offering great coastal views over the water to the hazy whaleback of the Isola de Giglio. For another spectacular drive, take a right turn 6km east of Porto Santo Stefano, up the signed road leading to Convento dei Frati Passionisti, a convent with sensational views across to the mainland.

There are several good beaches, mainly of the pebbly variety.

SLEEPING

Pensione Weekend (%0564 81 25 80; www.pensioneweekend.it; Via Martiri d'Ungheria 3; d €50-80; p) This pensione is a true gem and the only pseudo-budget option in town. Rooms are small and scrubbed, with eccentric components like the intercom surviving from an upgrade done in the '60s. New bathrooms have been recently shoehorned into every room. The friendly, polyglot owner can give you a parking permit for the tiny lot across the road.

Hotel La Caletta (%0564812939; www.hotelcaletta it; Via del Fortino 51; s €50-120, d €60-164; p a) This is a three-star hotel whose prices seasonally swing from good value to dubious value. The floral and white décor may be a bit girly for some, but the private beach is a nice perk. Half-board is compulsory in August, when prices peak.

Albergo Belvedere (%0564 81 26 34; Via del Fortino 51; s 660-70, d 690-100, all incl breakfast; h Apr-Oct; p a) Just 1km east of the harbour, overlooking the water, this is a nondescript, but peaceful option with a private beach. Some rooms have balconies with sea views.

Hotel Torre di Cala Piccola (%0564 82 51 11; www.torredicalapiccola.com; Cala Piccola; s €170-310, d €200-370, tr €270-500, all incl breakfast; Mar-Oct, paiss)
This hotel is a self-contained complex in splendid isolation, built around an old Spanish watchtower, 8km southwest along the Via Panoramica. There are spectacular seascapes from the balcony of the luxury rooms, and the dining setting in the garden is particularly glorious. A minibus transports you down the hillside to the hotel's private beach. The onsite restaurant (meals €45 to €50) has a celebrated chef with a seafood fixation.

EATING

Il Moletto (%0564 81 36 36; www.moletto.it; Via del Molo 52; meals €28-32; Thu-Tue) Among several enticing quayside seafood restaurants, this place wins for its location. At this wooden cabin, set apart from the rest at the end of a mole, you can dine beside a picture window or on the jetty as the evening breeze cools your pasta.

Lo Sfizio (%0564 81 25 92; Lungomare dei Navigatori 26; pizzas from £6, meals £30-35; hadaily May-Oct, Tue-Sun Nov-Apr). Its corny fish-theme décor and bar of blinking lights looks unpromising, but what draws in diners is the very reasonably priced fish and seafood dishes and the friendly informality of its youthful staff.

Trattoria Da Siro (%0564812538; Corso Umberto 100; meals €32-37; Tue-Sun) Overlooking the waterfront, this trattoria also manages a good mix of well-prepared fish and seafood, spiced with an impressive seascape.

Il Veliero (%0564 81 22 26; Via Panoramica 149-151; meals €35-40; In Tue-Sun Feb-Dec) An excellent restaurant, high above the port, that serves the freshest of fare from the sea – the owner's father runs a fish shop in town. It's a steep climb (head up the steps, guarded by a terracotta lion, just above Pensione Weekend) but well worth the exertion. The pasta fresca alla chitarra (guitar-string pasta with a light tomato-lobster sauce) is heavenly.

For a great view without paying panoramic prices, grab a pizza from Pizzeria da Gigetto (%0564 81 44 95; Via del Molo 9) and munch it on the waterfront terrace, then finish off with an ice cream from Bar Gelateria Chioda, right next door.

Porto Ercole

Situated in a picturesque position between two Spanish forts, Porto Ercole still manages to retain some of its fishing village character. Far less hectic than the north side of the island, you can wander the hillside historic centre, past the sandwiched Chiesa di Sant'Erasmo-final resting place of painter/hellion Caravaggio (1571–1610) – and sometimes wonder if you're the only person in town. The climb to the ho-hum fortress is a steep one. Down by the water, the beach is serviced, so it's clean but cluttered with deck chairs and umbrellas. Further away, it becomes less crowded but, as with most public beaches in Italy, also dirtier.

You can camp at Camping Feniglia (%0564 83 10 90; www.campingfeniglia.it; per person/site €9/13,

bungalow per week d €220-700; hyear-round) In Feniglia, about 1.5km north of Porto Ercole, and just 50m from the sea. Trouble is, most of it is occupied by permanently planted caravans and family tents. It also has bungalows at weekly rates.

Gatto e la Volpe (%0564835205; Via dei Cannoni 3; meals €38; In Tue-Sun) is the last stop on the right as you sweep down the road to the far end of the harbour. The views are wonderful. Try the speciality *linguine all'astice* (lobster linguine), leaving room for the homemade desserts.

THE ISLANDS

More than a few locals skip Monte Argentario altogether and choose to head off on excursions to one of two islands off the coast. The islands of Giglio and Giannutri are both part of the Parco Nazionale dell'Arcipelago Toscano.

Giannutri

This tiny island, just 5km long, has a grand old ruin of a Roman villa (1st century AD) but not much else, aside from a pleasant shady bay, Cala Spalmatoio, on the eastern side. In summer you can get there by a ferry service run by Mareqiqlio (www.mareqiqlio.it).

Gialio

The hilly island of Giglio is Tuscany's second largest after Elba. Some 14km off Monte Argentario, its pristine waters are increasingly popular with divers. Regular boat services from Porto Santo Stefano make getting to this pretty little spot easy. You arrive at colourful Giglio Porto, once a Roman port and now the best spot to find accommodation. A local bus service will take you 6km to the inland fastness of Giglio Castello, dominated by a Pisan castle.

Aside from a couple of patches of sand the size of a beach towel, the only beaches are on the western side of the island, in and around the modern resort of Giglio Campese, built around the old watchtower.

Toremar (%0564 81 08 03) and Maregiglio (%0564 81 29 20; www.maregiglio.it) run several daily ferries (adult/child return €10/5) between Porto Santo Stefano and the island.

LAGO DI BURANO & AROUND

Little more than 10km further east along the coast from Monte Argentario, this saltwater flat is a nature reserve, Riserva Naturale Lago

di Burano (%0564 89 88 29; Capalbio Scalo; admission €5.25; nguided visits 10am & 2.30pm Sun Sep-Apr), run by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Covering 410 hectares and stopping about 5km short of the regional frontier with Lazio, it is typical of the Maremma in its flora, but interesting above all for its migratory bird life. Tens of thousands of birds of many species winter here, including several kinds of duck and even falcons. Among the animals, the most precious is the beaver. A path with seven observation points winds its way through the park.

About 8km south of the lake turn-off, you can see the terraces of II Giardino dei Tarocchi (%0564 89 51 22; www.nikidesaintphalle.com; Località Garavicchio-Capalbio; adult/child €10.50/6;

2.30-7.30pm May-mid-Oct), a fantastic collection of oversized Antoni Gaudí-influenced sculptures tumbling down a hillside. This theme park-scale profusion of dreamy, mosaic-covered sculptures skilfully merges with surrounding nature. The colossal effort, by Franco-American artist Niki de Saint Phalle (1930–2002), depicts the main players from the tarot card pack, such as the Moon, the Fool, the High Priest of Feminine Intuitive Power - and the Empress, within whose innards the artist lived for months during construction. Your interest in divination notwithstanding, these pleasing exhibits transcend age and aesthetic leanings and are the kind of roadside fun that Midwestern American tourists drive 20 miles out of their way to see.

For both, take the Capalbio Scalo exit from the SS1.

INLAND & ETRUSCAN SITES

The deep south of Tuscany is home to thermal springs, medieval hill towns and Etruscan archaeological finds.

Magliano & Scansano

From Albinia, at the northern tip of the Orbetello Lagoon, take the SS74 in the direction of Manciano and make a detour left (north) up the SS323.

The first stop is Magliano in Toscana, impressive above all for its largely intact city walls. Some date from the 14th century, while most were raised by Siena in the 16th century. The town is a little scrappy on the inside.

Lunch at Antica Trattoria Aurora (≫0564 59 20 30; Via Chiasso Lavagnini 12/14; meals €40; ☐ Thu-Tue) is a good idea, and there's a pretty sheltered

garden, open for dinner. Cutting-edge menu concepts include cinghiale al finocchio selvatico (wild boar tortellini with wild fennel).

Next, continue up to Scansano. Although there are no monuments of great importance, the old centre, all narrow lanes and archways, is a pleasure to wander around and offers some great views over the surrounding countryside.

Montemerano, Saturnia & Manciano

Continuing from Scansano towards Manciano along the SS322, you first hit the small, walled medieval town of Montemerano. Pick up a bottle of the excellent local Morellino di Scansano wine at La Vecchia Dispensa (Via Italia 31), a richly scented delicatessen that presses its own olive oil, then drop into Chiesa di San Giorgio, decorated with 15th-century frescoes of the Sienese school. Finally, stroll up to harmonious, oh-so-photogenic Piazza del Castello.

Claiming to be among the first farmhouse stays in Tuscany, Agriturismo Le Fontanelle (%0564 60 27 62; www.lefontanelle.net; s/d incl breakfast €47/78: i) is a wonderfully rustic place 1.2km down a turn-off 2.5km south of Montemerano. A large variety of cabin and chalet accommodation allows you to choose your optimum level of exposed wood and/or modern bathrooms. The massive, zoolike property has a duck pond, plenty of shady trees, geese, mallards, herons, goats and deer. Daughter Daniella is a sparkling hostess for dinner (€20), taken alfresco with other guests around a large communal table.

From here it's 6km to Saturnia, with its Etruscan remains, including part of the town wall. A tomb at Sede di Carlo, just northeast of the town, is one of the area's best preserved.

SOUTHERN TUSCANY

The sulphurous spring and thermal baths at Terme di Saturnia (%0564 60 01 11; www.termedisatur nia.it; day admission €22, after 3pm €17; n 9.30am-7.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5.30pm Oct-Mar; p) are 2.5km south of the village. You can happily spend a whole day dunking yourself in the hot pools and signing on for some of the ancillary activities such as the alluring 'four-hand massage shower' or, for that light-as-air feeling, the 'infiltration of gaseous oxygen to reduce excess fat'. Parking here costs €4.

Econo-bathers can avail themselves of the waters running parallel to the road for several hundred metres, starting just south of the Terme di Saturnia turn-off. Look for the telltale sign of other bathers' cars parked on the road, then forage down the dirt path until you find a suitable spot of gratis cascading water, with temperatures at a constant 37.5°C.

Manciano is another former Sienese fortress. Apart from the much-interfered with rocca (fortress), there is not much else to keep you

Pitialiano

pop 4100

Check your mirrors before screeching to a halt outside Pitigliano. This hill-top fastness, organically sprouting from a high volcanic rocky outcrop towering over the surrounding country, is photo-op fodder that will make your blog visitors swoon. The gorges that surround the town on three sides constitute a natural bastion, completed to the east by the manmade fort.

Originally built by the Etruscans, Pitigliano remained beyond the orbit of the great Tuscan city-states, such as Florence and Siena, until it was finally absorbed into the grand duchy under Cosimo I de' Medici.

DETOUR: MONTE ARGENTARIO TO MANCIANO

Travelling from Monte Argentario to Manciano, turn right after 18.8km at the Vallerana sign (if driving the opposite direction, take the second signed turn for Vallerana or you'll regret it deeply). Turn left after 1.4km, in the direction of Pitardi. You'll pass vineyards on your left as the road continues through seamless rolling countryside, with the town of Manciano straddled on a hill top in the distance. After 3.2km, turn into the farm on your left (look for the vendita vino-olio sign) and ask for Rinaldo, the farmer, who has excellent olive oil, and red and white wine for sale. Rinaldo has commenced his retirement, but his son and family are carrying on the wine/oil business while he greets visitors and enjoys a well-earned sit down.

After you've made your purchases, turn left out of the gate, turn left again 700m later and continue on until you rejoin the Monte Argentario-Manciano main road happily weighed down with vino.

In the course of the 15th century, a Jewish community settled here, increasing notably when Pope Pius IV banned Jews from Rome in 1569. They moved into a tiny ghetto, where they remained until 1772. From then until well into the following century, the local community of 400 flourished and Pitigliano was dubbed Little Jerusalem. By the time the Fascists introduced the race laws in 1938, most Jews had moved away (only 80 or so were left and precious few survived the war).

INFORMATION

Tourist office (%0564 61 71 11; Piazza Garibaldi; 10.20am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10.20am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The first glimpse of Pitigliano from the Manciano approach road (arrive at night and you see it lit up) is breathtaking. Within the town, twisting stairways disappear around corners, cobbled alleys bend tantalisingly out of sight beneath arches and the stone houses seem to have been piled up higgledy-piggledy by some giant child playing with building blocks.

The main sights are within a stone's throw of Piazza Garibaldi. Just off the square is an imposing 16th-century viaduct and, keeping watch over interlinked Piazza Garibaldi and Piazza Petruccioli, the 13th-century Palazzo Orsini (%0564 61 44 19; adult/child €2.50/1.50; 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar). Eighteen of its rooms are open to the public and decked out with a cluttered collection of ecclesiastical objects, assembled, you get the feeling, as much to fill the vast empty space as for any aesthetic merit.

Opposite is the altogether more organised Museo Archeologico (%0564 61 40 67; Piazza della Fortezza; adult/child €2.50/1.50; 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar), which has a rich display of finds from local Etruscan sites. They're well displayed, but descriptive panels are in Italian only.

Only the tall bell tower remains as a reminder of the Romanesque original of Pitigliano's cathedral, with its baroque façade and unexceptional interior.

The town's medieval lanes and steep alleys are a delight to wander, particularly around the small **Ghetto** quarter. Head down Via Zuccarelli and turn left at a sign indicating La Piccola Gerusalemme (%0564 61 60 06; Vicolo Manin 30; adult/child €2.50/1.50; 10am-12.30pm &

4-7pm Sun-Fri May-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Sun-Fri Nov-Apr). The area fell into disrepair with the demise of Pitigliano's Jewish community at the end of WWII, and was practically rebuilt from scratch in 1995. A visit includes the tiny, richly adorned synagogue and a small museum of Jewish culture, including the old bakery, kosher butcher and dyeing workshops.

There are some spectacular walks around Pitigliano. The base of the rocky outcrop is stippled with Etruscan tomb caves carved into the soft tufa, many of them recycled as storage cellars. From there, you can follow a signed trail (about 6km) to Sovana.

SLEEPING & EATING

Albergo Guastini (%0564 61 60 65; www.albergoguas tini.it; Piazza Petruccioli 16; s/d/tr €37/62/90; closed mid-Jan-mid-Feb) Pitigliano's only hotel is friendly and welcoming. Perched on the edge of the cliff face, many of its rooms have side views of the bastion that rank among the best hotelroom vistas in Tuscany. Its highly regarded restaurant (meals around €25) also merits a visit. The neighbouring bar has a mournful internet point (per hour €5).

Hotel Valle Orientina (%0564 61 66 11: www .valleorientina.it: Località Valle Orientina: s €50-80, d €90-150: **p s**) In lovely pastoral surroundings about 3km from town, this is a relaxing spot with its very own 7th-century thermal baths and the potential for gentle or more strenuous walking in the surrounding countryside.

Osteria II Tufo Allegro (%0564 61 61 92; Vico della Costituzione 2: meals €27: closed Wed lunch & all Tue) This osteria is just off Via Zuccarelli. The aromas emanating from its kitchen should be enough to draw you into the cavernous chamber, carved out of the tufa foundations. The excruciatingly small-portioned lamb is admittedly succulent and the taglialini with asparagus is a good vegetarian option.

Pick up a stick or two of *sfratto*, a gorgeously sticky local confection of honey and walnuts, from II Forno (Via Roma 16). Counterbalance the sweetness with a glass of the town's lively dryish Bianco di Pitigliano wine from one of the shops lining Via San Chiara, off Piazza Petruccioli.

DRINKING

Jerry Lee Bar (% 0564 61 40 99; Via Roma 28; Tue-Sun;) This place has an entertaining range of patrons from certified drunks to young

hipsters and occasional live music. Internet access is €5 per hour.

Il Ghetto (Via Zuccarelli 47) A smart flagstoneand-brick wine bar, Il Ghetto has cheese and salami snacks to accompany that favourite tipple.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Rama (%0564 61 60 40) buses leave from the train station at Grosseto for Pitigliano (€5, two hours, four daily). They also connect Pitigliano with Sorano (€1.10, 15 minutes, seven daily) and Sovana (€1.10, 20 minutes, one daily). For Saturnia, change at Manciano.

Sovana

Sovana is really little more than a one-street village of butterscotch-coloured sandstone but, gosh, it's pretty and has some fine Etruscan sites nearby.

INFORMATION

The tourist office (%0564 61 40 74; 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Mar-Dec, 10am-1pm Fri-Sun Jan-Feb) is in the Palazzo Pretorio.

If you plan to visit most of the archaeological sites in and around Sovana and Sorano. invest in a €7 combined ticket. It gives entry to Tomba della Sirena, Tomba di Ildebranda, Fortezza Orsini in Sorano, Necropoli di San Rocco, and the Vitozza rock caves outside San Quirico. Buy a ticket at any of the sites.

SIGHTS

The Chiesa di Santa Maria (Piazza del Pretorio; 🛌 9am-6pm), opposite the tourist office, is a starkly simple Romanesque church (although it was interfered with in parts in later centuries) with some rich Renaissance frescoes and, over the altar, a magnificent 9th-century ciborium, or canopy, in white marble, one of the last remaining pre-Romanesque works left in Tuscany.

Walk west along Via del Duomo to reach the imposing Gothic-Romanesque cathedral (10am-1pm & 3-7pm Mar-Nov, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Dec-Feb). Although largely rebuilt in the 12th and 13th centuries, the original construction dates back to the 9th century. The striking portal on the north wall is pieced together from fragments of this earlier building - or, as some would maintain, from a pagan

Sovana was the birthplace of Pope Gregory VII; at the eastern end of the village are a cluster of medieval mansions and the remains of a fortress that belonged to his family.

Within the Necropoli di Sovana (admission €5; **h** 9am-7pm Mar-Nov, 10am-5pm Fri-Sun Dec-Feb), 1.5km south of the village, are Tuscany's most significant Etruscan tombs. Look for the yellow sign on the left for the Tomba della Sirena, where you follow a trail running alongside a rank of tomb façades cut from the rock face, as well as walk along a via cava.

VIE CAVE

SOUTHERN TUSCANY

There are at least 15 rock-sculpted passages spreading out in every direction from the valleys below Pitigliano. These sunken roads (vie cave) are enormous, up to 20m deep and 3m wide, and are believed to be sacred routes linking the necropolises and other sites associated with the Etruscan religious cult. A less popular, more mundane explanation is that these strange megalithic corridors were used to move livestock or as some kind of defence, allowing people to move from village to village unseen. Whatever the reason, every spring on the night of the equinox (19 March) there is a torch-lit procession down the Via Caya di Giuseppe, which culminates in a huge bonfire in Pitigliano's Piazza Garibaldi. It serves as a symbol of purification and renewal marking the end of winter.

The countryside around Pitigliano, Sovana and Sorano is riddled with vie cave. Two particularly good examples, 500m west of Pitigliano on the road to Sovana, are Via Cava di Fratenuti, with its high vertical walls and Etruscan graffiti, and Via Cava di San Giuseppe, which passes the Fontana dell'Olmo, carved out of solid rock. From this fountain stares the sculpted head of Bacchus, the mythological god of fruitfulness, as the water flows from his mouth. Via Cava San Rocco, near Sorano, is another fine example. It winds its way through the hills for 2km between the town and the Necropoli di San Rocco.

There's a fine walk from Pitigliano to Sovana (8km, three hours) that incorporates parts of the vie cave. Inquire at the tourist office in Pitigliano for routes and the all-important return

CAN YOU CANTER?

II Cornacchino (%0564 95 15 82: www.cornacchino.it; full board per person €63) is about 10km north of Sorano, 3km off the SS2. This horse-fixated agriturismo cum 'village' offers a dizzying variety of all-inclusive riding courses and trekking trips. See our special agriturismi section for more detail

About 300m beyond is the Tomba di Ildebranda, by far the grandest of Etruscan mausoleums and the only surviving temple-style tomb, which still preserves traces of its columns and stairs.

Due east of the village, just outside the tiny hamlet of San Quirico and signposted from the main square, are the Vitozza rock caves (%0564 61 40 74; admission €2; ► 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, by appointment Nov-Feb), more than 200 of them, peppering a high rock ridge. One of the largest troglodyte dwellings in Italy, the complex was first inhabited in prehistoric times.

SLEEPING & EATING

The local hotels have banded together under the same management (www.sovana.eu), including a new four-star 'Romantik' hotel and resort. When booking, specify which property you

Taverna Etrusca (%0564 61 65 31; Piazza Pretorio 9; s/d incl breakfast €70/90; pai) This is a threestar hotel whose simple but attractive rooms have stripped wooden floors. Its restaurant (meals €40; closed Wednesdays), in the hands of a vastly experienced cook, serves mainly 'creative Tuscan' specialities and always has at least one vegetarian option.

Albergo Scilla (%0564 61 65 31; Via R Siviero 1-3; d incl breakfast €90; p a) Scilla has eight terracotta-and-white rooms with marshmallow-soft pillows and attractive wrought-iron beds, mosaic bathrooms and a quiet garden. Across the road you can enjoy fine fare at its glassed-in restaurant, Ristorante dei Merli (meals €30; closed Tuesday), which has vegetarian options.

Sorano

pop 3810

Retrace your route from Sovana, pass the turn-off for Pitigliano and continue northeast to Sorano. Two kilometres before the village are the Necropoli di San Rocco (admission €2; ▶ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, Fri-Sun Nov-Feb), another Etruscan burial site. From here it's possible to walk to Sorano along a via cava.

Sorano is something of a poor relation of the three hill towns. High on a rocky spur, its houses, many unoccupied and forlorn, seem to huddle together in an effort not to shove one another off the precarious perch.

There's a small tourist office (%0546 63 30 99) on Piazza Busati.

The town's main attraction is the partly renovated Fortezza Orsini (%0564 63 37 67; Piazza Cairoli; admission €2; 10am-1pm & 3-7pm mid-Mar–Oct Tue-Sun), with its medieval museum and underground passageways, visited by separate guided tour (€3; every hour).

You could also climb up Masso Leopoldino (admission €2; 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Apr-Nov), a large platform at the top of the village, for spectacular views of the surrounding countryside.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel della Fortezza (%0564 63 20 10; Piazza Cairoli 5; s €90, d €130-150; ► Mar-Dec) The long walk through the fortezza before you even hit the door amplifies the profound historic feel of this 14room hotel and restaurant. Wood-beamed ceilings, tapestries, antique furnishings and fantastic views complete the sensation.

Talismano (%0564 63 32 81; Via San Marco 29; meals €20; ► Wed-Mon) This is a cavernous place highly popular with locals. The menu has an excellent selection of pizzas and Tuscan dishes, so you'll be hard-pressed not to find something to your liking.

Locanda dell'Árco (%0564 63 36 08; Via Roma 22; meals €23) Deep in the historic centre, from inside it looks like someone started to build a church here, then switched to a cellar part way through, then said 'to hell with it' and opened a restaurant. Family owned, with friendly service and a basic menu of filling Tuscan standards. It has rooms too (single/double €20/40).

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'