

Destination: Serravalle pistoiese - The mediaeval village and the open-air Museum, the “Tower of Barbarossa”. **Monsummano Alto** - The village and the castle. **Larciano Castello** - The castle and the Civic Museum. **Buggiano Castello** - The village. *We also advise visits to:* **Monsummano Terme** - The Museum of the City and the Territory. **Buggiano** - Villa Bellavista. **Pescia** - The historic villages of the Svizzera Pesciatina (little Switzerland above Pescia).

The mediaeval village, the open-air Museum, the “Tower of Barbarossa”, Serravalle pistoiese



Situated on a hill in a strategic position, on the borders between the plain of Florence-Prato-Pistoia and the Nievole Valley, Serravalle pistoiese is one of the most important mediaeval villages in Tuscany: as it has remained almost intact in time, it contains the traces

of an important historical evolution, which can still easily be seen in the various stratigraphic elements. The castle became particularly important in the 12th century when the City Council of Pistoia decided to fortify it in order to better control the pass. The tower, known as the Barbarossa tower, dates from this period and is the only one to have survived from the eastern fortress. The fortress, formed of a hexagonal tower and two corner bastions, is situated to the far west of the village and instead dates from the 14th century. The city of Lucca had built it from 1302 onwards after capturing the castle. The remains of an ancient cistern can still be seen in the centre of the fortified area.

The village also boasts some important religious buildings,

like the Church of S. Michele and the Church of S. Stefano, which contains sculptures attributed to the della Robbia school and a priceless organ dating from the early 19th century, and the Oratory of S. Maria Assunta, decorated with frescos of the 14th-15th century.

How to get there:

by car, from the Pistoia motorway exit: keep to the left to enter the Tangenziale Ovest (west bypass). Leave it from the exit for the city centre. Turn right here in the direction of Montecatini-Lucca. Pass right through the village of Stazione Masotti and, after about 400 m, take the right hand turning into Via Corta and then turn left into Via Roma. We advise you to leave the car in this area and then continue on foot to visit the mediaeval village.

Info and reception: Town Library of Serravalle pistoiese

- tel. 0573 917414 - Cultural Office, Town Council of Serravalle pistoiese - tel. 0573 917404 - Tourist Information Office - tel. 0573 917308 and 0573 917204

informazione@comune.serravalle-pistoiese.pt.it

Opening hours and prices: as this is an open-air route it is advisable to visit these sites by day and in fine weather - free guided visits have been organised to visit the “Tower of Barbarossa” - for further info and reservations contact the Town Council of Serravalle Tourist Information Office - entrance free

Monsummano Alto



The hill of Monsummano Alto rises on the northern lower slopes of Montalbano, in a dominating position above the ancient Via Cassia that connected Florence with the sea. The castle's position on top of the rugged hillside determined the characteristic extended

“spindle-shaped” configuration of ring of walls surrounding it, of which a stretch of about 2 km is still almost completely intact. The powerful pentagonal tower, which could be entered through a small door situated about 7 m from the ground and probably up a retractable ladder, is attached to the walls higher up, in the far western corner. The castle could be entered through two gates that stood either at end of the village: the Gate of “Nostra Donna” (Our Lady) and the “Porticciola” or “Market Gate”.

The ruins of the Hospice of S. Bartolomeo, where pilgrims

travelling along the ancient Via Francigena found refuge, and the group of buildings composing the Church of S. Nicolao, can also be seen inside the walls.

How to get there:

by car, from Serravalle pistoiese: turn immediately into the Via provinciale Lucchese/Sr435 in the direction of Montecatini Terme. Turn left at La Colonna to take Via Francesca Nord/Sp14 towards Monsummano Terme and carry straight on as far as obligatory turning. Turn left into Via Marconi. Turn left at the stop sign into Via di Gragnano and then follow the directions for Monsummano Alto.

Info and reception: Montecatini Terme-Nievole Valley

Tourist Information Office (open daily 9am-1pm and 3-7pm) - Viale Verdi, 66/68 - Montecatini Terme tel. 0572 772244

Info point - Auditorium S. Carlo - Piazza Giusti - Monsummano Terme - tel. 0572 954412

Opening hours and prices: as this is an open-air route it is advisable to visit these sites by day and in fine weather entrance free

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Larciano Castello and the Civic Museum



For the duration of the Middle Ages, Larciano was the main town in the area thanks to a road that climbed up Montalbano from here and led to Serravalle.

The Castle of Larciano is the synthesis of a series of interventions carried out between the 11th and the 12th century. Sold by the Counts Guidi to the City Council of Pistoia in the 8th century, its strategic position soon made it Pistoia's main defensive stronghold on this side of the mountain. The walls encircling the village and around the powerful fortress were in fact strengthened in this period. When it was at the height of its splendour

the castle was surrounded by a fortified ring of walls, interrupted by three gates, that also incorporated the church, the palace, the tower and the donjon, the last resource should all the other defence systems be forced to surrender. The mighty fortress, that tops a rocky outcrop, boasts the imposing curtain walls that also incorporated the house of the Podesta. The very high square-built battlemented tower rises on the far corner of the wall where the fortress stands; it can be visited by taking the small, easy-to-climb inner staircase that leads up to the top, giving onto a view that sweeps from the Nievole Valley to the lower Arno Valley.

Buggiano Castello



The ancient mediaeval village of Buggiano, mentioned in documents from the 10th century, was built in a strategic position on a hill that allowed it to dominate the plain of the Nievole Valley and control a stretch of the Via Cassia. The square-shaped fortress was built on the very top of

the hill. Its walls incorporated several towers, some of which still survive to this day; one in the east, partly in ruins, the base of one in the west and the central tower, where a clock was installed at the beginning of the 16th century. The village itself was also protected by walls, some stretches of which are still visible today. Two buildings of particular importance stand in the upper part of the village: Palazzo Pretorio and the Church of the Madonna della Salute. Palazzo Pretorio, a typical example of mediaeval civic architecture, has numerous coats of arms attached to the façade that recall the various podestas who served at Buggiano, while the overall aspect of the ancient Parish Church, founded in 1038, still retains its Tuscan Romanesque characteristics.

Buggiano Castello is moreover known for the gardens attached to its houses where the ancient tradition of cultivat-

We also advise visits to:

For further information on the Castle of Monsummano Alto and the surrounding territory we advise you to visit the **Museum of the City and the Territory of Monsummano Terme** (tel. 0572 954463), which contains a reconstruction of the lay-out of the original settlement of the ancient village and its castle, together with numerous finds recovered during the archaeological excavations.

Villa Bellavista (info and reservations tel. 0572 32026), a monumental Baroque building, which the Marquis Feroni had constructed from 1696, can be found in the Borough of Buggiano, on the road to Chiesina Uzzanese. It was at

VILLAGES AND CASTLES IN THE NIEVOLE VALLEY

The interior of the castle hosts the Civic Museum, a small collection that includes finds discovered in the territory of the eastern Nievole Valley and that cover a period that goes from Prehistoric times to the modern era. These are mainly objects of daily use, like majolica and ceramics for cooking, building materials and objects in metal.

How to get there:

by car, from Monsummano Alto to Larciano castello: go back down the hill again to reach Monsummano Terme. Turn right at the end of Via di Gragnano into Piazza Martini. Continue straight on into Viale Mazzini. Carry on along the road turning to the left into Via Toti and then turn right into Via Matteotti. Carry straight on along Via Francesca, following indications for Larciano. At Castelmartini turn left into Via Bartolini. Turn left into Via Stradella at Biccimurri and then go straight on to reach Piazza del Castello.

Info and reception: Civic Museum of Larciano Castello
Piazza Castello - Larciano Castello - U.O.S. Culture and Public Education - Town Council of Larciano - tel. 0573 837722 - Ufficio URP Office Town Council of Larciano - tel. 0573 858129

Opening hours and prices museum: Oct 16th-Apr 14th: Sat Sun and holidays 9-12am and 2.30-5pm - Apr 15th-Oct 15th: Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri 9-12am; Sat Sun 9-12am and 4-7pm - entrance free to the castle and museum

ing precious species of citrus fruits has been maintained. These private gardens are open to the public once every two years, thus transforming Buggiano Castello into the "village of citrus fruit".

How to get there:

by car, from Larciano Castello to Buggiano Castello: go back to Monsummano Terme and, on arriving in Piazza Giusti, turn left into Via Martini. Carry straight on through two sets of traffic lights to reach Montecatini Terme. On arrival here, continue straight on into Viale Foscolo, Via Bassi and Viale Da Vinci and after passing the racecourse, turn left at the traffic lights into Via Lucchese/Sr435. Carry on along this road and on arrival at Buggiano, turn left into Via Falciano. Turn left again at the end of the street into the Sp Colligiana. Buggiano Castello is about 1 km further on.

Info and reception: Montecatini Terme-Nievole Valley Tourist Information Office (open daily 9am-1pm and 3-7pm) - Viale Verdi, 66/68 - Montecatini Terme - tel. 0572 772244 - Buggiano Castello Cultural Association - tel. 0572 30362 and 393 6252313

Opening hours and prices: as this is an open-air route it is advisable to visit these sites by day and in fine weather entrance free

one time considered the most beautiful villa in Italy after the Royal Palace of Caserta thanks to its beautiful gardens, decorated with fountains and statues. The villa now hosts an exhibition of historic mementoes of the Fire Guard.

The **Valleriana**, renamed by Sismondi from Geneva as the "little Switzerland above Pescia" for its similarity with the mountains of his native land, lies in the northern part of the Borough of Pescia. It is a particularly suggestive valley, overlooked by some ancient and fascinating villages that are steeped in history, like **Pietrabuona, Medicina, Fibbialla, Aramo, S. Quirico, Castelvechio, Stiappa, Pontito, Sorana and Vellano.**