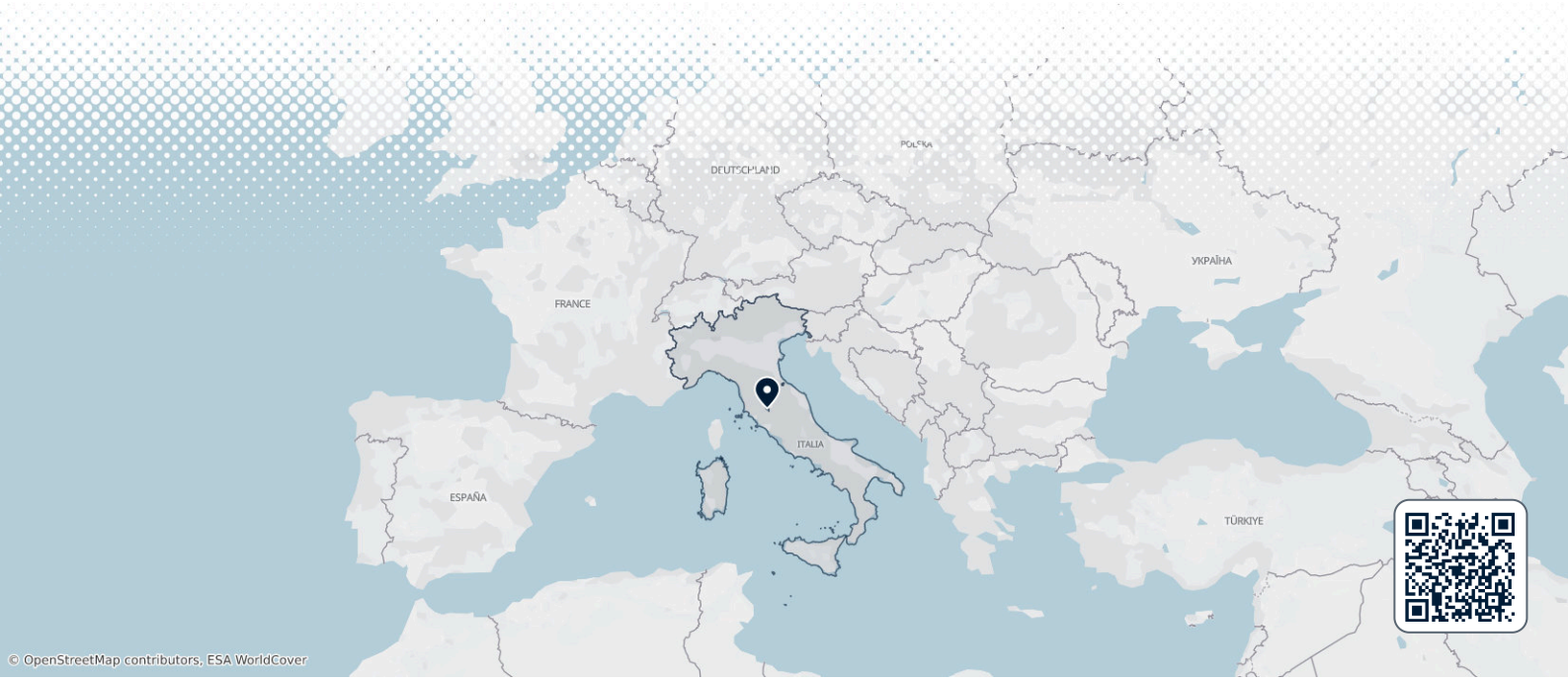


Pienza

Tuscany · Italy

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Pienza is a small Renaissance town on a ridge above the Val d'Orcia in southern Tuscany. In the 1460s, *Pope Pius II* rebuilt his home village as a model town, and its harmonious main square is the result. The historic centre is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the valley below has its own UNESCO listing for its farmed landscape.

The town is tiny and easy to see in half a day, but many travellers stay longer for the countryside. From the walls you look out over rolling wheat fields, cypress-lined roads and farmhouses to the cone of Monte Amiata. Pienza is also famous for its pecorino sheep's cheese. It suits slow travellers, photographers and anyone exploring the Val d'Orcia by car.

When to visit

May, June, September and October are the best months, with mild days and green or golden hills. July and August are hot, and tour groups crowd the small centre in the middle of the day, so arrive early or stay overnight. Winter is cold and quiet.

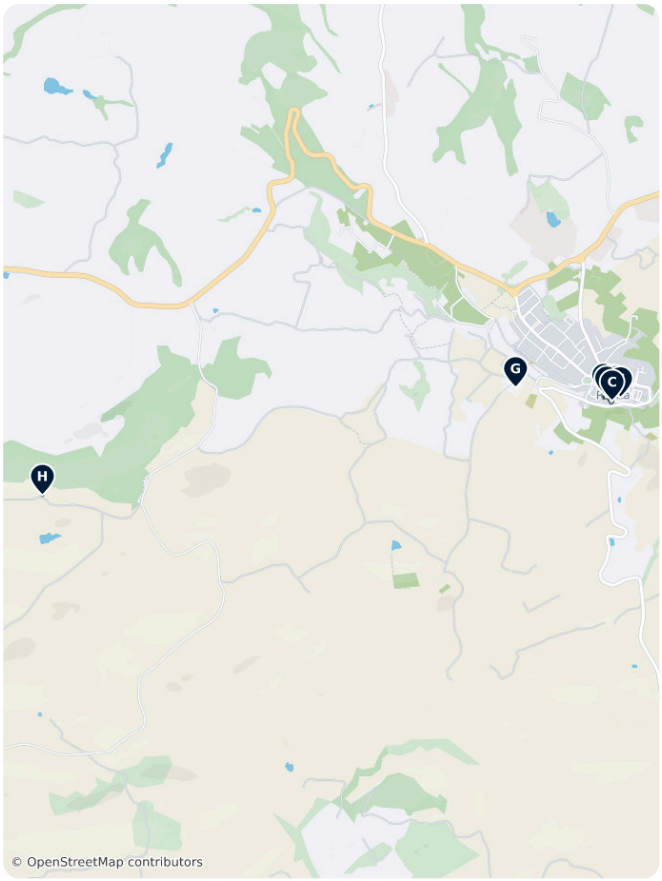
The biggest annual event is the **Fiera del Cacio**, a cheese fair that runs for about a week at the start of September. Stalls sell local pecorino. On the first Sunday, teams from the town's districts compete in the Gioco del Cacio al Fuso on the main square, rolling whole cheeses towards a wooden spindle.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Fair Fair for cycling	8° / 13° Feels like 4°	1° / -4°	Dry air
February	Fair Fair for cycling	10° / 14° Feels like 5°	1° / -5°	Dry air
March	Good Good for cycling	13° / 18° Feels like 9°	3° / -3°	Dry air
April	Good Good for cycling	17° / 23° Feels like 14°	6° / 1°	Dry air
May	Great Great for sightseeing	22° / 28°	10° / 6°	Dry air
June	Great Great for sightseeing	27° / 34°	15° / 10°	Calm winds
July	Good Good for sightseeing	31° / 37°	17° / 13°	22 sunny days · Calm winds · Up to 5 days above 35°
August	Good Good for sightseeing	31° / 37°	18° / 13°	20 sunny days · Calm winds · Up to 5 days above 35°
September	Great Great for sightseeing	25° / 31°	13° / 8°	Dry air
October	Great Great for sightseeing	20° / 25°	10° / 4°	Dry air
November	Good Good for cycling	14° / 19° Feels like 10°	5° / -1°	12 rainy days · Dry air
December	Poor Poor for cycling	9° / 14° Feels like 5°	2° / -4°	Dry air

Best months: May, June, September, October

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights



A Piazza Pio Secondo is the heart of the Renaissance town. The architect *Bernardo Rossellino* designed it for Pius II, with the cathedral, the papal palace, the bishop's palace and the town hall arranged around one small space.

B Palazzo Piccolomini was the pope's own residence. You can visit the furnished rooms, but the highlight is the loggia and hanging garden at the back, with wide views over the Val d'Orcia.

C Cattedrale dell'Assunta has a pale travertine facade and an unusually bright interior, as the pope wanted large windows. Its side chapels hold altarpieces by Sienese painters of the 15th century.

D Palazzo Borgia Museo Diocesano is the former bishop's palace on the square. The museum inside shows Sienese paintings, Flemish tapestries and a rare medieval English embroidered cope. A combined ticket with the papal palace is available.

E Palazzo Comunale faces the cathedral across the square. The Renaissance town hall has an open loggia with three arches and a brick bell tower.

F Chiesa di San Francesco is a plain Gothic church on the main street with 14th-century frescoes inside.

G Pieve di Corsignano stands in the fields about a 10-minute walk below the town. This Romanesque church with a round bell tower is where Pius II was baptised.

H Cappella della Madonna di Vitaleta is a small stone chapel alone in the fields towards San Quirico d'Orcia, framed by cypress trees. View it from the path.

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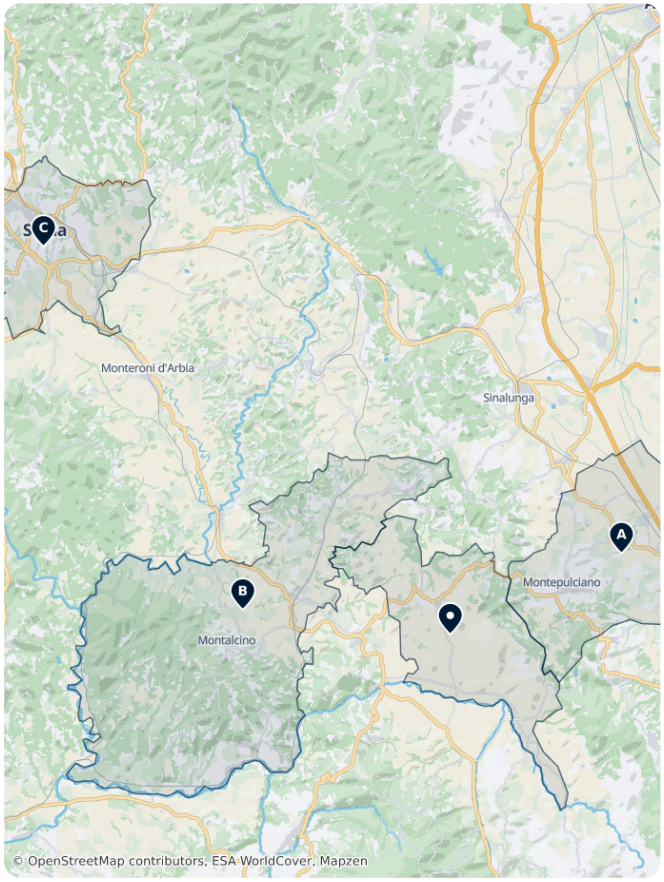
What to experience

The best moments here come from the views, the countryside and the town's traditions.

- **Walk the walls at sunset**: follow the path along the southern walls behind the cathedral as the evening light turns the Val d'Orcia gold.
- **Watch the cheese rolling**: on the first Sunday of September, see the district teams roll pecorino wheels at the Gioco del Cacio al Fuso on Piazza Pio Secondo.
- **See the Teatro Povero of Monticchiello**: every summer, the villagers of Monticchiello write and perform their own play about their lives, staged in the village square.
- **Walk or cycle to the Vitaleta chapel**: take the gravel roads through the fields to Cappella della Madonna di Vitaleta, ideally early in the morning when the light is soft.
- **Find the Gladiator field**: scenes of the film *Gladiator* were shot in the fields around Pienza, and fans still come to see the wheat fields below the town.

Day trips

Pienza sits in the middle of the Val d'Orcia, so several famous towns are less than half an hour away. Buses between them are infrequent, so a car gives the most freedom.



- **San Quirico d'Orcia** — ≈15 min by car. A quiet walled town with a Romanesque church and the formal Horti Leonini gardens.
- **Monticchiello** — ≈15–20 min by car. A tiny walled village of the Pienza municipality, with a Gothic church and its own summer theatre.
- **Bagno Vignoni** — ≈20 min by car. A small spa village whose main square is a large pool of steaming thermal water.
- Ⓐ Montepulciano — ≈20 min by car. A hilltop wine town with a long main street of palaces and the domed church of San Biagio below the walls.
- Ⓑ Montalcino — ≈30 min by car. The home of Brunello wine, with a fortress at the top of the town. The Romanesque Abbey of Sant'Antimo is a short drive further south.
- Ⓒ Siena — ≈1 hour by car. The great Gothic city of the Campo square and the striped Duomo.

Where to explore

Pienza combines well with other classic stops in southern and central Tuscany.

- **Nearby hill towns**: Montepulciano, Montalcino and Cortona.
- **Cities**: Siena and Florence.
- **Further afield**: San Gimignano and Volterra.

Getting there

Pienza has no railway station, and public transport is limited. Most visitors arrive by car.

- **By air**: Perugia Airport (PEG) is the closest, about 1 hour 15 minutes by car. Florence Airport (FLR) is about 1.5 hours by car, and Rome Fiumicino (FCO) about 2 hours 20 minutes. Rent a car at the airport.
- **By train**: the nearest main-line station is Chiusi-Chianciano Terme, on the line between Florence and Rome, about 40 minutes away by car. Continue by taxi or rental car, as bus links from the station are few. Trenitalia
- **By bus**: Autolinee Toscane buses link Pienza with Montepulciano and San Quirico d'Orcia. From Siena you need to change buses, and the trip takes about 2 hours. Services are infrequent, especially on Sundays, so check times before you travel. Autolinee Toscane
- **By car**: from the A1 motorway, leave at Chiusi-Chianciano Terme and drive through Montepulciano. From Siena, take the Via Cassia south to San Quirico d'Orcia, then turn east to Pienza.

Getting around

- **On foot**: the old town is small and mostly flat, about 500 m from end to end. The main sights are all within a few minutes of the main square.
- **Buses**: Autolinee Toscane buses stop just outside the old town. Pay by contactless card or phone on board ("tip tap"), or buy a ticket in the Autolinee Toscane app or at a tobacconist. Autolinee Toscane
- **Cycling**: the gravel country roads around Pienza are popular with cyclists, but the hills are long and steep. E-bikes are a good choice for most visitors.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

High

The old town is small and mostly flat, about 500 m end to end, and closed to visitors' cars.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Moderate

Popular gravel country roads, but long steep hills; e-bikes suit most visitors.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?** Yes. A car is the easiest way to reach Pienza and to explore the Val d'Orcia. You will not need it in the old town.
- **Restrictions**: the historic centre is a **limited traffic zone (ZTL)**, closed to cars around the clock. Do not drive through the gates. If you sleep in the old town, ask your hotel about a permit.
- **Parking**: use the paid car parks just outside the old town and pay at the machines. They fill quickly on summer weekends and during the cheese fair week, so arrive early.

Food & drink

Pienza is famous for pecorino, a cheese made from sheep's milk on the farms around the town. You can try it fresh and soft, aged and hard, or matured in ash, hay or walnut leaves. Local menus also feature thick hand-rolled pici pasta, ribollita bread soup in winter and Chianina beef. The local red is Orcia DOC, and Brunello and Vino Nobile come from the neighbouring towns.

The best place to taste is Corso Rossellino, the main street, which is lined with cheese shops and delis that offer samples. For a meal with a view, look for restaurants along the walls on the southern side of town. Many farms in the valley sell cheese directly and serve long lunches.

What to eat & drink

LUNCH

Pizza Margherita
Thin-crust pizza topped with tomato, mozzarella, and basil, invented in Naples and still best there.

DINNER

Spaghetti alla Carbonara
Pasta with egg, cured pork cheek (guanciale), pecorino cheese, and black pepper, a Roman classic.

Risotto alla Milanese
Creamy saffron-infused rice dish from Milan, often served alongside braised veal shank.

Lasagna · Lasagne al Forno
Layered baked pasta with ragu, bechamel, and cheese, a staple of Emilia-Romagna cooking.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Prosciutto and Cheese · Prosciutto e Formaggio
Cured ham paired with regional cheeses, a common antipasto plate found nationwide.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Gelato
Dense, slow-churned Italian ice cream, traditionally lower in fat and air than American-style ice cream.

Tiramisu · Tiramisù
Layered dessert of coffee-soaked ladyfingers and mascarpone cream, dusted with cocoa.

DRINKS

Espresso · Caffè
A short, strong shot of coffee drunk quickly, usually standing at a bar counter.

Wine · Vino
Italy is one of the world's largest wine producers, with regional styles from Piedmont's Barolo to Tuscany's Chianti.

Aperol Spritz
A bittersweet orange aperitif mixed with prosecco and soda water, a staple of the early-evening aperitivo.

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Safety & health

Pienza is very safe, and serious crime is rare. The only common nuisance is crowding in the narrow streets at midday in summer, so keep an eye on bags and phones.

Summer days are hot, and there is little shade on country walks, so carry water and a hat. Country roads are narrow and winding, and gravel roads can be dusty or muddy. If you taste wine on a farm visit, do not drive afterwards, as Italian drink-driving limits are strict.

History

The town was once a village called Corsignano. *Enea Silvio Piccolomini* was born here in 1405 and became *Pope Pius II* in 1458. He decided to rebuild his birthplace as an ideal Renaissance town.

From 1459, the architect *Bernardo Rossellino* built a new centre in only a few years. Piazza Pio Secondo, Cattedrale dell'Assunta and Palazzo Piccolomini date from this time. The cathedral was consecrated in 1462, and the village was renamed Pienza in the pope's honour. Pius II died in 1464, and the building work stopped, so the town never grew beyond its small core.

That is why Pienza still looks much as it did in the 15th century. The historic centre became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996. The 2000 film *Gladiator* shot its farm and wheat-field scenes in the Val d'Orcia around Pienza, in 1999.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Italy at a glance:

CURRENCY
EUR €

EMERGENCY
112

ELECTRICITY

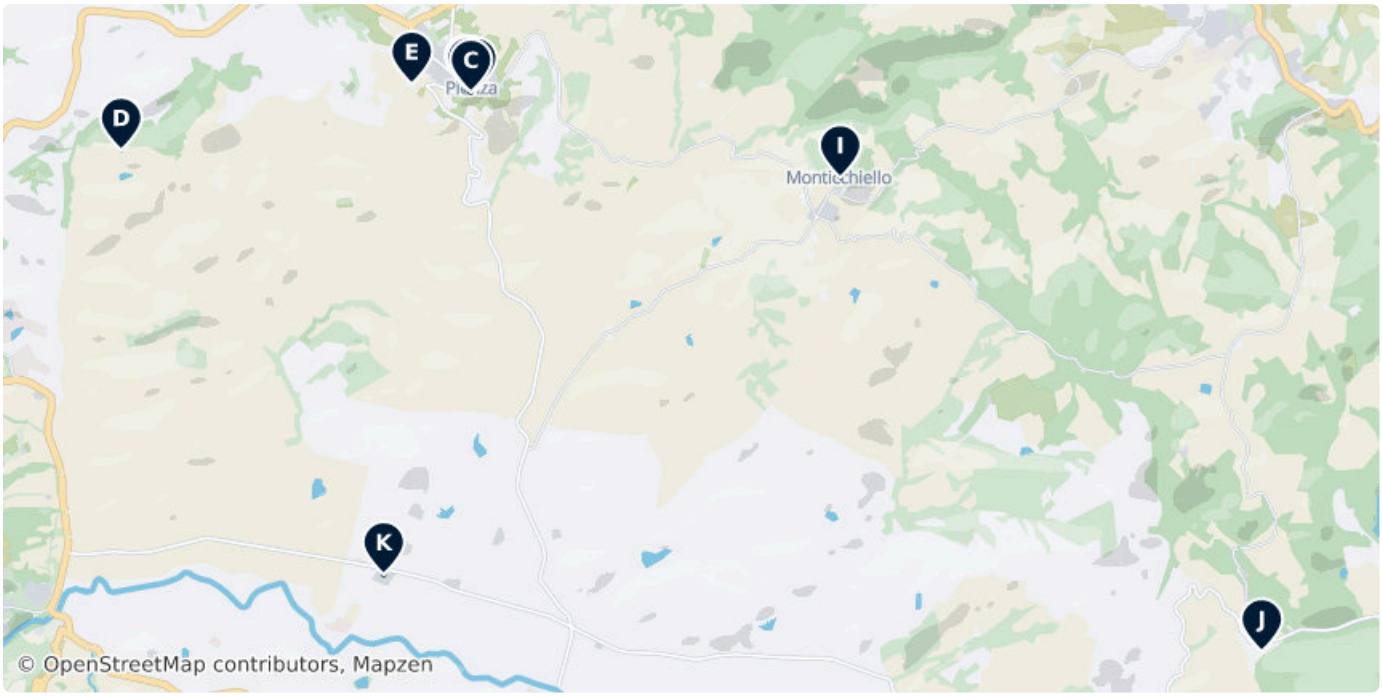
Type C / Type F / Type L
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES
Italian

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Pienza Essentials

Pope Pius II rebuilt his birthplace in the 1460s as a model Renaissance town, and its centre around Piazza Pio II is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This list covers the square and the palaces and cathedral that frame it, the Romanesque Pieve di Corsignano where the pope was baptised, and the famous countryside sights nearby: the Vitaleta chapel, the walled village of Monticchiello and the gardens of La Foce.





A Piazza Pio Secondo

Pienza's main square, laid out by Bernardo Rossellino for Pope Pius II and framed by the cathedral, Palazzo Piccolomini, Palazzo Borgia and the town hall.

Corso Il Rossellino, 53026 Pienza SI, Italy (43.07653, 11.67890)



B Palazzo Piccolomini, Pienza

The papal residence of Pius II, begun in 1459, with period rooms, a three-storey loggia and a hanging garden that looks out over the Val d'Orcia.

1 Via del Balzello, Pienza 53026, Italy (43.07646, 11.67843)

Mo	10:00–16:30
Tu	Closed
We–Su	10:00–16:30

palazzopiccolominipienza.it/index.htm, +39 0577 286300



C Pienza Cathedral

Rossellino's bright Renaissance cathedral, consecrated in 1462, with a travertine facade and altarpieces by leading Sienese painters.

23 Via di Circonvallazione, Pienza 53026, Italy (43.07624, 11.67885)



D Cappella della Madonna di Vitaleta

A small stone chapel alone in the fields between Pienza and San Quirico d'Orcia, framed by cypress trees and one of the most photographed views in Tuscany.

53027, Italy (43.07085, 11.63436)



E Pieve, Corsignano

A Romanesque country church just below the town with a round bell tower, where Pope Pius II and Pope Pius III were baptised.

(Unnamed Road), 53026, Italy (43.07700, 11.67131)



F Museo Diocesano di Pienza

The former bishop's palace on the main square, now a museum of sacred art with Sienese paintings, Flemish tapestries and a rare medieval English embroidered cope.

Via del Casello, 53026 Pienza SI, Italy (43.07649, 11.67915)

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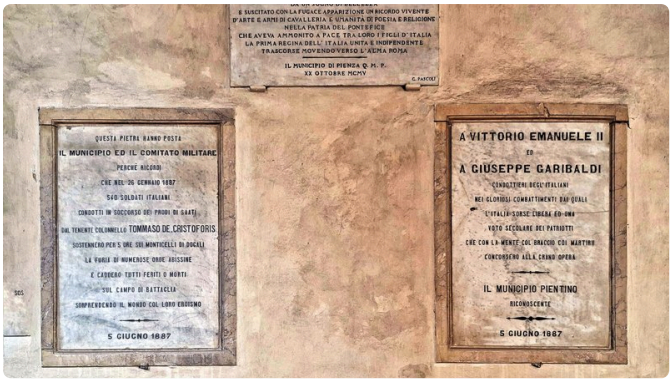


G Palazzo Comunale

The Renaissance town hall facing the cathedral, with an open three-arched loggia and a brick bell tower.

12 Via dell'Angelo, Pienza 53026, Italy (43.07642, 11.67952)



H San Francesco, Pienza

Pienza's oldest church, a simple Gothic Franciscan building on the main street with 14th-century frescoes.

1 Via del Balzello, Pienza 53026, Italy (43.07661, 11.67821)



I Pieve dei Santi Leonardo e Cristoforo

A 13th-century Gothic church in the walled village of Monticchiello, with a rose window and Sienese frescoes.

15 Piazza Commenda, Monticchiello 53026, Italy (43.06831, 11.72579)



J La Foce Villa

A historic estate above the Val d'Orcia known for its formal Italian garden and the famous zigzag road lined with cypresses.

Strada della Vittoria 63, 53042 Chianciano Terme, Siena, Italy (43.02430, 11.77941)

lafoce.com, +39 057 869 101



Agriturismo Castello di Spedaletto

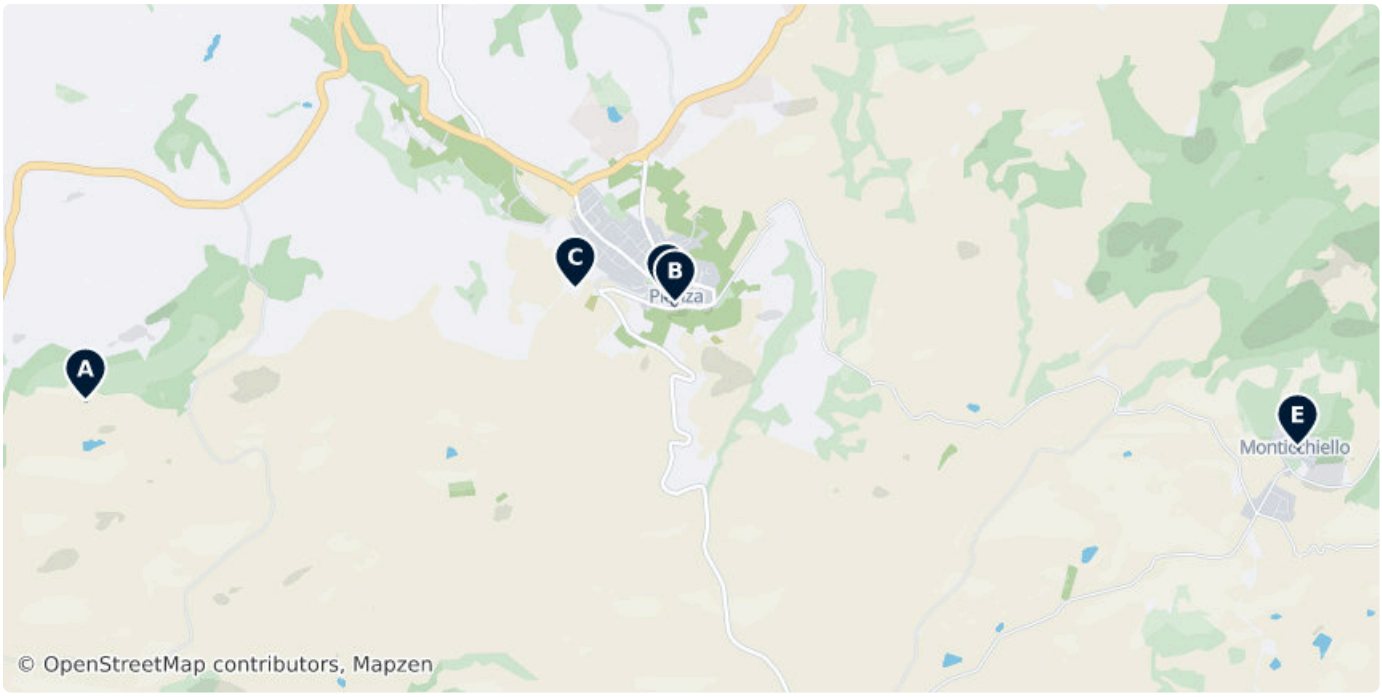
A medieval fortified complex in the valley that once sheltered pilgrims on the Via Francigena, with a defensive tower and a small church.

(Unnamed Road), 53026, Italy (43.03145, 11.66775)

+39 0578 748517

Historic Churches & Religious Sites

This collection highlights the architectural evolution of religious sites in the Val d'Orcia, ranging from the 7th-century Romanesque foundations of the Pieve di Corsignano to the 15th-century Renaissance design of Pienza Cathedral. The list includes the Gothic Church of San Francesco and the Pieve dei Santi Leonardo e Cristoforo in Monticchiello, notable for its Sienese school frescoes. Also featured is the Cappella della Madonna di Vitaleta, a 19th-century rural chapel that serves as a landmark of the Tuscan countryside.





A Cappella della Madonna di Vitaleta

A secluded rural chapel located between Pienza and San Quirico d'Orcia. Rebuilt in 1884 by architect Giuseppe Partini, the stone structure features a late-Renaissance style facade and is famously framed by rows of cypress trees.

53027, Italy (43.07085, 11.63436)



B Pienza Cathedral

Pienza Cathedral is a Roman Catholic cathedral dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Pienza, in the province of Siena, Italy.

23 Via di Circonvallazione, Pienza 53026, Italy (43.07624, 11.67885)



C Pieve, Corsignano

The Pieve di Corsignano is a Romanesque-style, Roman Catholic pieve, that is rural parish church, located in the frazione of Corsignano,...

(Unnamed Road), 53026, Italy (43.07700, 11.67131)



D San Francesco, Pienza

San Francesco is a gothic-style, Roman Catholic church on Corso Rosellino in the town of Pienza, province of Siena, region of Tuscany,...

1 Via del Balzello, Pienza 53026, Italy (43.07661, 11.67821)



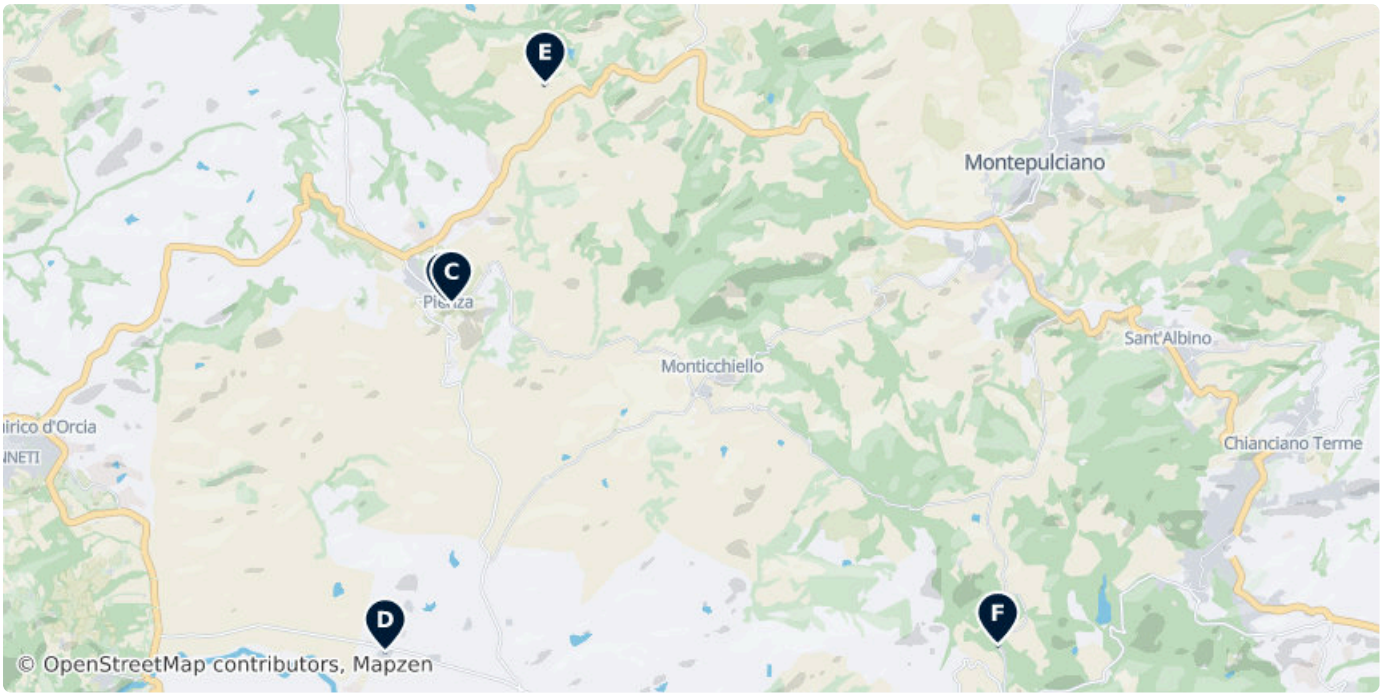
E Pieve dei Santi Leonardo e Cristoforo

A 13th-century Gothic-style church in the village of Monticchiello. It houses significant 14th and 15th-century frescoes of the Sienese school, including a notable depiction of Saint Christopher and works attributed to the circle of Pietro Lorenzetti.

15 Piazza Commenda, Monticchiello 53026, Italy (43.06831, 11.72579)

Renaissance Palaces and Castles

Pienza's centre was rebuilt in the 1460s by Pope Pius II and his architect Bernardo Rossellino. Three palaces frame the main square: the papal Palazzo Piccolomini, the bishop's Palazzo Borgia and the Palazzo Comunale. In the countryside around the town, fortified complexes such as Castello di Spedaletto and the towered Palazzo Massaini show the region's older defensive past.





A Palazzo Piccolomini, Pienza

The papal residence of Pius II, begun in 1459 to a design by Bernardo Rossellino, with a three-storey loggia and a hanging garden over the Val d'Orcia.

1 Via del Balzello, Pienza 53026, Italy (43.07646, 11.67843)

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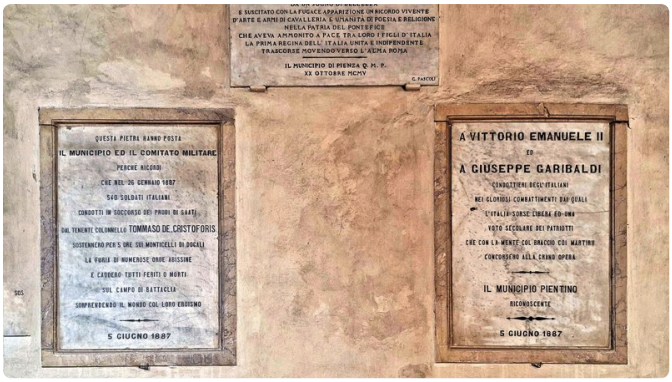
B Museo Diocesano di Pienza

The former bishop's palace on the main square, now home to the Diocesan Museum of sacred art.

Via del Casello, 53026 Pienza SI, Italy (43.07649, 11.67915)

pienzacittadiluce.it, +39 0577 286300



C Palazzo Comunale

The former residence of the Priori, a Renaissance town hall with a three-arched loggia and a brick belfry, facing the cathedral.

12 Via dell'Angelo, Pienza 53026, Italy (43.07642, 11.67952)



D Agriturismo Castello di Spedaletto

A fortified complex that once served as a refuge for pilgrims on the Via Francigena, with crenellated walls and a gateway decorated with coats of arms.

(Unnamed Road), 53026, Italy (43.03145, 11.66775)

+39 0578 748517

E Palazzo Massaini

A hilltop complex with a prominent stone tower, originally defensive and now the centre of a farming estate.

(Unnamed Road), 53026, Italy (43.10476, 11.69605)

F Castelluccio

A historic castle and fortified residence in the countryside south-east of Pienza, near La Foce.

SP88, 53026, Italy (43.03229, 11.77616)

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