Valdelsa
Valdicecina

FOOD & WINE

# Flavours, hues and fragrance: the elements of taste.

*www.valdelsavaldicecina.it*

VISITTUSCANY

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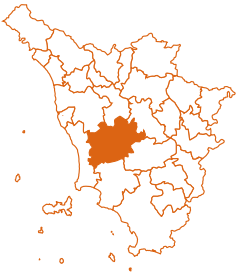
## Tuscany



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# Valdelsa Valdicecina

*One journey, thousands of years to be discovered*

The Via Francigena and the Salt Road, two of the main communication routes of Mediaeval times, delineate an area in the centre of Tuscany where one's gaze travels over grapevines, fields, and olive groves that glitter silver in the sunshine. The towns preserve the memory of ancient flavours, and the countryside produces certified products of excellence. Prized wines and genuine varieties of olive oil bring cheer and goodness to any table, while the land offers precious gifts, such as truffles and saffron. Discover Valdelsa Valdicecina through sight, soul and flavour.

**Tourist Area Terre di Val d'Elsa e dell'Etruria Volterrana,**
Municipalities of Casole d'Elsa, Castelnuovo Val di Cecina, Colle di Val d'Elsa, Montecatini Val di Cecina, Monteriggioni, Monteverdi Marittimo, Poggibonsi, Pomarance, Radicondoli, San Gimignano, Volterra.

Casole d'Elsa | Castelnuovo Val di Cecina | Colle di Val d'Elsa | Montecatini Val di Cecina | Monteriggioni | Montevertdi Marittimo | Poggibonsi

Pomarance | Radicondoli | San Gimignano | Volterra

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FSC Fondo per lo Sviluppo e la Coesione | Regione Toscana | TOSCANA PROMOZIONE TURISTICA

CICLICA DESIGN

# Pathways of taste, from flavours to fragrance

**@ValdelsaValdicecina**
Share your experiences with our official hashtag. Discover travel tips on our social media.

Art, history and multifaceted nature bring all the marvels of Valdelsa Valdicecina to life. The strong, ancient identity of this area is reflected in a wonderful culinary tradition, including numerous PDO certified products, as well as Slow Food outposts and small high-quality niches.

Great wines are the stars of the table, and extra virgin olive oil enhances every dish. Cheeses, cured meats and wood-fired bread reign the cutting boards, and delicious local meat can be found in the short supply chain markets.

Love for the land and its fruits is shown with festivals and local fairs: the air is full of fragrances and communities celebrate their culinary traditions.

## Facts and Figures

From ancient towns to valleys where the Elsa and Cecina rivers flow.

**1**
World Heritage Site

**11**
municipalities in the tourist area

**91.682**
total inhabitants

**1.500** m²
surface area

**358** m
average altitude

# Flavour in a glass

*The beauty of the landscape is accompanied by the bounty of its tastiest fruits. This is the birthplace of renowned wines, excellent varieties of olive oil and surprising craft beers.*

WINE

## Vernaccia. The elegant white amongst the oldest Tuscan wines

Vernaccia di San Gimignano, the 'white queen' in a reign of celebrated reds, is a wine with many 'firsts' in wine-making. It was the first Italian wine to obtain the prestigious DOC denomination in 1966, as well as the first white wine to achieve the ultimate acknowledgement, the **DOCG** seal, due to its outstanding excellence.

The history of this wine is a fascinating tale of centuries, with roots that go all the way back to the year 1200: this is when the first traces of the 'vernaccia' vine emerged in San Gimignano. During the fourteenth century, especially in the first decades of the 1300s, Vernaccia reached an important role in Italian history: it was the only wine mentioned in the most famous literary work of all time, the **Divine Comedy**. In his Purgatory, Dante Alighieri condemns Pope Martin IV to atone for his sins of gluttony, brought on by excellent food and accompanied by Vernaccia (XXIV, vv. 23-24).

Nowadays, Vernaccia remains an enchanting wine for convivial moments. Its delicate colour, a canary yellow, is enveloped in a decisive perfume and a dry taste, making this wine perfect for ***aperitivo*, tuscan starters** and **white meat**. It can be enjoyed in the current vintage or in the Reserve, which further enhances its elegance.

Although Vernaccia DOCG and the Consortium that protects it are the undisputable wine production gems of San Gimignano, the town also boasts a wide range of red wines harvested under the **San Gimignano DOC** label. Furthermore Vinsanto is also locally produced, which is a traditional wine liqueur, the closing sweetness after each authentic Tuscan meal.
As well as San Gimignano's extraordinary wine production, the whole Valdelsa Valdicecina is fertile land for **greatly prized local wines**, perfect for any meal. For example the wines of Casole d'Elsa, as well as those from Volterra, Pomarance and Castelnuovo Val di Cecina: these places are steeped in Etruscan history and fascinating geothermal formations.

The art of **extra virgin olive oil** productions is at its peak here: Tuscan **Oil PGI** is made all across the land. While exploring the towns and countryside, visitors will find niches of excellence, such as 'Olio Radicondoli', which are a testament to the passion and mastery of local olive growers.

### Cities of Olive Oil: green gold

From the silvery olive trees that each year offer their fruit for the harvest, Tuscany's green gold is obtained: ever-present at each meal, Olio Toscano PGI is one of the unmissable regional excellences, which finds its highest expression in the 'Cities of Oil'. In Valdelsa Valdicecina this unites four towns: in Monteriggioni, Poggibonsi and San Gimignano visitors can sample genuine oil, as well as in Radicondoli. In this specific location the oil mill produces the organic and high-quality 'Olio Radicondoli'. It is mainly utilised for dressing sides and soups, but the purest taste of Valdelsa Valdicecina olive oil is simply on a slice of traditional Montegemoli bread, baked in Pomarance.

### Beer and landscape, an unexpected pairing

The craft beers of Valdelsa Valdicecina, inspired by the landscape and closely tied to the territory, tell a story of history and nature. In the Birrificio di San Gimignano (San Gimignano's Brewery), organic and local products are used to create a genuine beer, that tells the tale of a journey: made on the Via Francigena route, these beers have charming names like 'The wanderer' and 'Sigeric', the latter in honour of the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose travel diaries describe the current itinerary of the Via Francigena. In Sasso Pisano, among the geysers and lakes of the nearby Valle del Diavolo (Devil's Valley), the Vapori di Birra brewery runs on geothermal energy, and names its beers in honour of this; here visitors can sample beers such as the 'Geyser', 'Sulphurous' and 'Magma'. This brewery is also part of the Community of Renewable Energy Food.
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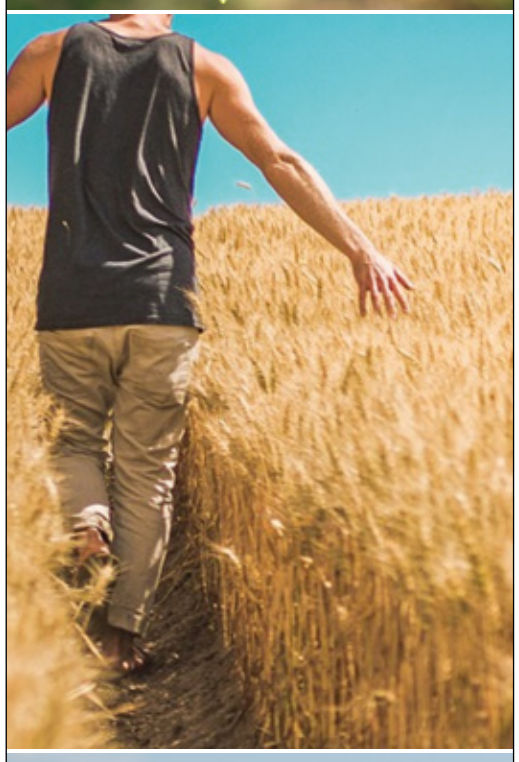
### Discover Montecastelli IGT wines

A glass of Montecastelli IGT, a label that brings together white and red wines, is a must on any fine Valdelsa Valdicecina table. The vines where Montecastelli grapes ripen extend throughout the territories of Castelnuovo Val di Cecina, Volterra and Pomarance, where Etruscans walked long ago, and now evocative geothermal vapours rise. Traditional fare is well accompanied by local reds: with their intense ruby red colour and dry flavour, Montecastelli IGT wines present a bouquet of fruity aromas, and are therefore perfect to enhance the flavours of first courses and meat entrees.

### The 'Etruscan' grapevines of Casole d'Elsa

In the countryside around Casole d'Elsa visitors will find local grapevines, with some of the most ancient roots in history. Several historical records show that this area was already populated in etruscan times, and the Etruscans themselves began tending and farming the grapevines. In the burial grounds spread over the land, archeologists discovered containers for collecting the wine made by pressing the grapes; this technique was then perfected by the Romans. Today, Casole d'Elsa produces the Terre di Casole DOC, which can be enjoyed in both red and white; the final note is the 'passito', a wine liqueur made from white berry grapes.



# Tasting the territory

*Festivals, fairs, local markets. Discover the territory through its most famous flavours, and meet the people who create and celebrate them every year.*

FOOD

## From starters to dessert: travelling at the table

*Local specialities from Valdelsa Valdicecina start and end every meal, shining on local tables.*

Valdelsa Valdicecina is an eclectic land, with many different historical and naturalistic facets. The many specialties of the land come together in a **vast and ancient culinary tradition**, where genuine products and agricultural excellences are the main stars of the table. The journey through the authentic flavours of this region guides visitors through tastings of culinary delights that have made this land famous, all made of the highest quality ingredients.

An institution amongst the cheeses is the **Balze Volterrane Pecorino PDO**. Production of this cheese goes back at least to the first half of the fifteenth century; thanks to this long history it's also known as the 'Etruscan pecorino'. One of its special attributes is that it is produced with only vegetable rennet, which gives it a delicate flavour with hints of herbs and flowers intensifying its irresistible taste. This cheese, protected by a consortium, owes its name to the Balze, the stunning landscape of erosions in the clay soil that make up the landscape of Volterra. However, it is also produced in the territories of Pomarance, Montecatini Val di Cecina, Castelnuovo Val di Cecina and Monteverdi Marittimo.

On any local cheese board visitors will also find the cured meats of the **Cinta Senese PDO**, a local swine breed existing since 1300, recognisable by its characteristic black skin interrupted on the back by a pink belt-like band. Raised all over the land, the Cinta is used in delicious plates and entrees: truly a local excellence amongst meats.
Less well-known but just as well-loved is the ***pomarancino* lamb**, a breed raised in Pomarance which has been protected and valorized in recent years, even obtaining the **Slow Food presidio** certification.

Amongst other niche meat productions, visitors can try the unmissable **Gota Cotta**, a real culinary gem made by butchers in Colle di Val d'Elsa, and served by restaurateurs. This traditional recipe is only traced back to last century and has quickly made its way into the hearts of the locals. It is prepared by slow-cooking the pig cheek - known as 'gota' in local dialect - and then seasoning it with aromas and spices.

Accompanying all of this is the **bread of Montegemoli**, an authentic tradition that is present on all tables all over Tuscany. These rustic homemade loaves are baked in wood-fired ovens, giving them a taste of history, and are made with unrefined flour and yeast starter. This bread lends itself well to all the delights of the table, from bruschette with olive oil to croutons for soup.

The sweet closing notes of any meal also boast local specialities, such as the **Ricciarello *pomarancino***, a small oval-shaped delight made of almond flour. Legend has it that this recipe was brought to Volterra by a commander returning from the Holy Land, who discovered this treat and fell in love with it.

In Casole d'Elsa, the land gives us two natural gifts: **honey**, produced by local beekeepers, and the **Casole apple**, known since the Middle Ages and even mentioned in **Boccaccio's Decameron**, which has now been included in the regional PAT list, an archive that lists Tuscany's traditional agricultural products.

EVENTS

## Festivals, traditions and taste

*Food stands, tastings and festivals: when taste and excellence come together in a celebration for all.*

All over Valdelsa Valdicecina, local foods are celebrated in festivals and sagre that bring communities together in the streets and squares of towns, in the name of taste and conviviality. From October to November, when the Tuscan countryside is bathed in golden sunlight and the aroma of white truffle fills the air, the town of Volterra celebrates **Volterragusto**, an event with traditional appointments like the **White Truffle Exhibition Market** and the historical Palio dei Caci (Cheeses' Palio). Throughout all of the historical old town, in the shade of the imposing ancient buildings, food stands offer delicious tastings. In the same period, San Gimignano hosts the **Festival della Terra** (Earth Festival), promoted by the local Bio-district. With craft stalls and musical shows, local farmers proudly present the fruits of their land: in the town of many towers, culture, history and culinary art come together in a single experience. And San Gimignano is the very place where the year starts with one of the most hotly anticipated events: the **Preview of the Vernaccia**, a wine event where new vintages of this famous white wine are presented and tasted.
In all the towns of the land, sagre and festivals are a fundamental moment in the life of the town. For example, the Sagra della Miseria (Local Poor Cuisine) in Colle di Val d'Elsa, which occurs at the beginning of the summer, and the Sagra of the Mushroom in Pievescola, small locality near Casole d'Elsa, which comes alive in autumn to celebrate the return of this fruit of the forest.

## Local flavours

*Love for the land and respect for its natural rhythms are the ingredients of real genuine products, to be served on the table in every season.*

LOCAL MARKETS

### Mercatale of Valdelsa

The Mercatale of Valdelsa is the local-produce market that takes place in Monteriggioni, San Gimignano and Poggibonsi. This is where visitors can find strictly locally grown and raised seasonal products. The stands are full of fruits and vegetables, cured meats and cheeses, as well as legumes, grains, flour, honey and jams.

COMMUNITY

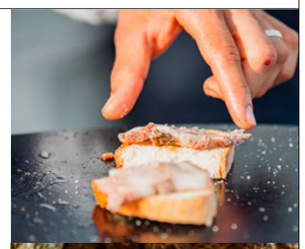
### The Community of Renewable Energy Food

The Community of Renewable Energy Food brings genuine culinary flavours to life: these producers are brought together by their use of renewable energy sources, such as geothermal energy, as well as their use of local materials; they are based in Pomarance, Castelnuovo Val di Cecina, Volterra and Radicondoli.

FARMING

### The San Gimignano Bio-district

The farmers of the San Gimignano Bio-district share a love for the land and a respect for its natural rhythms. In these local farms, vegetables, grains, olives and grapevines are grown with great care and attention. Great wines and fine spices such as saffron are made here.



Valdelsa
Valdicecina

# 'Special' flavours, beyond excellence

*Truffle varieties, brightly coloured spices, a pure nationally prized salt. In Valdelsa Valdicecina visitors will find products that go beyond simple excellence and transform into true institutions of taste.*

FINEST QUALITY PRODUCTS

## Saffron, truffle and a pinch of salt

Cultivated fields, a sea of rolling hills as far as the eye can see, and craggy clay formations make up the landscape of Valdelsa Valdicecina, home to veritable culinary treasures. The specialities that come from this land and from under it too - such as truffle, salt and spices - are deeply rooted in local tradition, part of an identity which is not simply culinary. The history of these products, indeed, often has roots in a very old story which begins with the dawn of civilization.

The picturesque hills of Volterra, with their fascinating villas and the artwork of Mauro Staccioli gracing the landscape, are home to a real culinary treasure: this is where the **Truffle** reigns supreme over the land and the table, lending its aroma to traditional farmers' dishes as well as modern gourmet recipes. This product of the earth is considered an authentic excellence; truffle harvesting is an ancient art, and the time period in which they can be found - accompanied by trusty truffle dogs - changes according to the different varieties. The Marzuolo Truffle, with its persistent flavour, is a winter and springtime delicacy. The Scorzone variety, with its decisive aromatic flavour, is enjoyed in the hot summer and autumn seasons. The White Truffle is surely the most prized variety, known for how hard it is to find and the remarkable size it can reach. Traditional tuscan recipes, like pasta, eggs and meat, are enriched by this earthy treasure, which is harvested in the autumn months.

The **Salt of Volterra** is known as the purest in Italy. This mineral, essential in every kitchen, is extracted from the rich deposits of rock salt that have been in the subsoil of the Volterra area for over 3000 years. The Etruscans were the first to trade the Salt of Volterra, and its importance remained untouched throughout the following centuries: loads of salt travelled along commercial routes centuries ago that then became the so-called 'salt roads'. In Mediaeval times, the Via Salaiola (salt road) connected Volterra to San Gimignano, allowing trade of this precious mineral and other local products. Today, the Salt of Volterra is still one of the region's productions of excellence.

**San Gimignano PDO Saffron** has historical roots that go back to the thirteenth century. During mediaeval times, trade of these spices and especially of this 'red gold' reached ports all across the peninsula and even further, reaching all the way to the Middle East. The blooming trade for saffron became the fortune of many merchants for a long time, bringing great shine to the city of San Gimignano. Still grown today in the fields around the city, this precious ingredient is obtained from the flowers of Crocus sativus, known for their beauty which paints the autumn fields in shades of purple. The saffron spice is obtained from the pestles: the charming bright red stigmas are dried, and when they are used in cooking they magically release the typical yellow colour. The Saffron of San Gimignano is used in delicious local recipes and more; it also has a place of honour in the making of bread, schiacciata (flatbread), biscuits and even ice cream, lending its unique aroma and its golden colour to many culinary creations.

GET INSPIRED

## Colours and aromas in the Santa Fina Spezieria

In the heart of San Gimignano, a fragrant discovery awaits visitors fascinated with historical and spice traditions. The Santa Fina Spezieria, part of the ancient Hospital of Santa Fina complex dating to 1200, is an authentic historical gem and a unique experience to visit.

Originally, the Spezieria included a shopfront where exotic spices and ancient remedies were sold and kept, as well as a workshop where expert spice masters would mix and prepare ingredients for remedies and perfumes of the time.

Nowadays, this fascinating corner of history is located in the complex of Santa Chiara, and visitors can see it along with the Civic Museums of San Gimignano, which also include the prestigious Sala Dante in the Palazzo Comunale (Town Hall) and the climb up the imposing Torre Grossa.

In the ancient halls of Santa Chiara visitors can learn about the spices that have been enchanting people for centuries, and discover the work of the apothecaries, their secret knowledge and the instruments they used, as well as ancient pharmacy vases.

With this journey through fragrance and history, the Santa Fina Spezieria opens a window onto the daily life of the past, when spices were an important ingredient, not only for the kitchen, but mainly also for perfumes and medicinal remedies.

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GET INSPIRED

## The Nervi Warehouse in Saline di Volterra

Salt production has its epicentre in the area of Saline di Volterra, where there is an important facility that opens its doors to the public: this is where traditional salt working and contemporary architecture come together for a unique and surprising experience, in the footsteps of local industrial archeology.

Extracted and traded since Etruscan times, the salt produced here is the purest in Italy. To learn all about its various properties, there is a guided tour of the saltworks, including the emporium and the museum, which also has multimedia projections.

The most fascinating part of the visit takes place inside the Nervi Warehouse, an extraordinary building topped by a pointed ceiling. It was designed by the famous Italian architect Pier Luigi Nervi, who was then still at the beginning of his long career. The inside of the warehouse holds an unexpected surprise: an enchanting waterfall of salt descends through an opening in the roof, landing in a candid mountain.

The complex also hosts a space dedicated to contemporary art, an experimental language and material workshop;
in the hands of visionary artists, salt takes on a new dimension, transforming into works of art.