

Welcome to... San Miniato!



Città di
San Miniato





San Miniato is a town and municipality in the province of Pisa, in Tuscany. The town is situated on top of three hills and dominates the Lower Arno Valley. It is located at the intersection of the streets that join Florence, Pisa, Lucca, Siena and the famous Via Francigena, which was the main connecting route between Northern Europe and Rome in the Middle Ages. The landscape is enchanting with old boroughs, ancient churches, amazing Medici villas, castles and tobacco mills.



History



San Miniato is a land of Etruscan and Roman settlements. The town was founded by the Lombards in the 8th century when they built a church dedicated to the martyr Miniato. The town has, therefore, Germanic origins and in the Middle Ages it became known as San Miniato al Tedesco.

In the 10th century, under Otto I, Duke of Saxony, San Miniato became one of the centres of the Imperial administration and in the 13th century, under Frederick II of Swabia, who built his castle in San Miniato in 1218, the town was fortified with walls and other defensive works, including the Fortress. San Miniato became a free Commune at the end of the 13th century. Great monasteries, schools, institutions and hospitals were built during this period. In the 13th and the 14th centuries, San Miniato was drawn into the ongoing conflict between the Ghibellines and the Guelphs. By 1370 the town was under Florentine control. Later it became part of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and it was still part of it when it was absorbed into the Kingdom of Italy in 1860. At the end of the 19th century San Miniato had become a town in its own right. During the Second World War the German Army mined and destroyed Frederick II's Fortress but it was rebuilt in 1958.



Itinerary



Our walking tour starts with Piazza del Popolo with its **Church of the Saints Jacopo and Lucia**, also called **San Domenico's Church**, with its adjacent **Cloisters of the Convent**. This church dates back to 1330 so it is very old, as we can see from its façade. Inside the church we can admire some works of art such as Giovanni Chellini's tomb, attributed to Bernardo Rossellino, a fresco depicting "Scenes from San Domenico's Life" by Antonio Domenico Bamberini, "The Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus and the Saints Cosmas, Damian, John the Evangelist and Thomas" by Domenico di Michelino and "The Deposition" by Francesco Morandini called "Il Poppi".



Next to the church we can see the amazing **Via Angelica**, which is an ancient path that runs along the right wall of the Church of the Saints Jacopo and Lucia. In the past it was the connecting route between the town and the countryside. Along this ancient path there are three chapels decorated with 14th-century frescoes and 18th-century decorations. In one of these chapels, Saint Urban's Oratory, we can see frescoes depicting "Scenes from the Way of the Cross" and "Saint Urban Pope".



Going along Via Conti, we reach an important square, **Piazza del Seminario**, where we can admire the **Palace of the Seminary**. The square has an asymmetric shape. The palace dates back to 1713 and it is characterized by its concave façade decorated with 18th-century frescoes and phrases in Latin. In the Middle Ages there were houses and shops whose wooden doors can still be seen. On the other side of the square we can see the rear façade of the Bishop's Palace.



From here it is easy to reach **Piazza del Duomo**, where we can admire the **Cathedral**, which is dedicated to Santa Maria Assunta and San Genesio. It was built in the 12th century and has a beautiful Romanesque façade, which also exhibits Gothic and Renaissance architectural elements.

The Church has a Latin cross plan with three naves and houses many works of art such as a 17th-century wooden crucifix by Iacopo di Giuliano Sani, Giovanni Battista Sandrini's baptismal font, four marble busts of famous men from San Miniato: Iacopo Buonaparte, Pietro Bagnoli, Giovacchino Taddei and Francesco Maria Poggi and frescoes by Antonio Domenico Bamberini and Francesco Lanfranchi. Its **Bell Tower**, called **Matilde Tower**, has an asymmetrical clock and dates back to the 12th century. Its name refers to the Countess Matilde of Canossa, who was probably born in San Miniato.

Next to the Cathedral there is the **Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art** housing paintings by famous artists such as Iacopo Chimenti called "L' Empoli", Francesco Morandini called " Il Poppi", Lorenzo Lippi, Giovanni Bilivert, Cenni di Francesco di Ser Cenni, Neri di Bicci, Iacopo di Mino del Pellicciaio and Lorenzo Monaco.



The building in front of the Cathedral is the **Bishop's Palace**. It is the residence of the Bishop of San Miniato. Inside the Palace, there is a chapel, which is dedicated to the Assumption and St. John the Baptist.

In Piazza del Duomo we can also admire the **Imperial Vicars' Palace** dating back to the 12th-century and its **Tower**, which was used as a prison.

Leaving Piazza del Duomo behind us, we head off to the **Sanctuary of the Most Holy Crucifix**. This Baroque church, which stands between the Fort, the Cathedral and the Town Hall, was built in the 18th century. While the decoration of the façade is very simple, the walls inside the church are completely painted with "Scenes from Jesus Christ's Life" by Antonio Domenico Bamberini. On the main altar there is a tabernacle containing the famous "Holy Crucifix", which is venerated and thought to be miraculous.





In front of the Sanctuary there is the **Town Hall**, which was built at the end of the 13th century. Inside we can admire two beautiful rooms decorated with amazing frescoes: **La Sala delle Sette Virtù** and **La Sala Consiliare**.

The frescoes in **La Sala delle Sette Virtù** were painted between the 14th and the 16th centuries. The most important fresco is the "Virgin Mary nursing her Child surrounded by the Theological and Cardinal Virtues", attributed to Cenni di Francesco di Ser Cenni. In the middle of the painting, you can see the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus. Around her there are some female figures, symbols of the Seven Virtues. "Justice" is holding a sword in her right hand and scales in her left hand; "Prudence" is pointing to a mirror with her right hand; "Temperance" is holding a phial of wine mixed up with water in her right hand; "Fortitude" is holding a sword and is wearing a helmet; "Hope" is praying; "Charity" has got a flame in her right hand and a piece of paper in her left hand and "Faith" has a cross on her left shoulder.





La Sala Consiliare is situated next to the "Sala delle Sette Virtù" and it contains Francesco Maria Galli Angelini's famous frescoes depicting the history of San Miniato during the Middle Ages. In one of these frescoes we can see a knight riding a horse and holding a sword in his right hand. On the right there is a parchment and on the left there is the knight's Coat of Arms. Next to this fresco, we can see a man holding a green book in his left hand and a quill in his right hand. He is wearing a red robe and a red hat. In the corner there is his family's Coat of Arms. In another fresco we can see the Virgin Mary talking to San Miniato, San Genesio, Sant'Agostino and San Francesco. The room is decorated with frescoes depicting the Coats of Arms of famous noble families from San Miniato and famous leaders such as Franco Sacchetti, Francesco Sforza and Barone de' Mangiadori.

We next visit the **Oratory of Loretino**, which was built inside the Town Hall as the governors' private chapel at the end of the 13th century. It became an important place of worship in the 14th century when the Most Holy Crucifix was placed there. The Oratory contains decorations by Francesco Lanfranchi called "Spillo", a magnificent altar attributed to Noferi di Antonio di Noferi and a wooden statue of the "Madonna di Loreto", which gives the chapel its present name. The walls are decorated with 14th-century frescoes illustrating "Episodes from Jesus Christ's Life".



After visiting the Oratory of Loretino, we head off to the **Tower of Frederick II**, called the **Fort**, which is a 37-metre tall tower, built by Frederick II of Swabia in 1217. It was the central core of the Imperial defensive system. It is the landmark of the town. The tower was destroyed during the Second World War and rebuilt in 1958. From its top you can admire the special ribbon-like layout of the town and stunning landscapes such as the area of the Lower Valdarno, Volterra's hills, the Apennines and the sea. Pier delle Vigne, Frederick II's Chancellor, was imprisoned here for treason until his death, as Dante writes in "Inferno"("13th Canto") in his "Divine Comedy".





Leaving the Fort behind us, we reach the 14th-century **Convent and Church of Saint Francis**. Saint Francis stayed in San Miniato for a short time and founded this Convent. For many centuries it was one of the main Franciscan centres in Tuscany.

Inside the church there are twelve altars dedicated to Franciscan saints and famous families from San Miniato such as the Buonaparte family, 16th and 17th-century paintings and frescoes

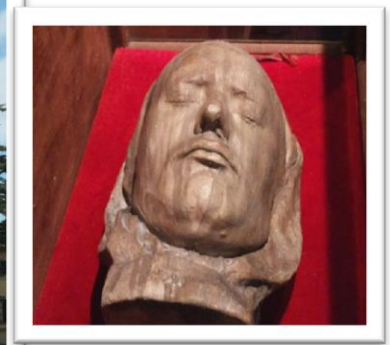
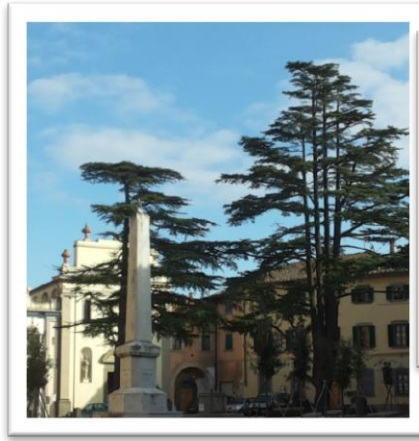
depicting Saint Francis and other Franciscan saints, Saint Francis's statue by Luca and Piero Bonicelli and a 16th-century wooden crucifix.



We next head to **Piazza Bonaparte**, flanked by ancient palaces built by noble families from San Miniato between the 16th and the 18th centuries. In this square we can admire a marble monument dedicated to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, **Leopoldo II** also called **Canapone**, **Palazzo Bonaparte** and the **Saints Sebastian and Rocco's Church**, which was the Bonaparte family's chapel and houses Saint Rocco's relics and a Gothic water soup.

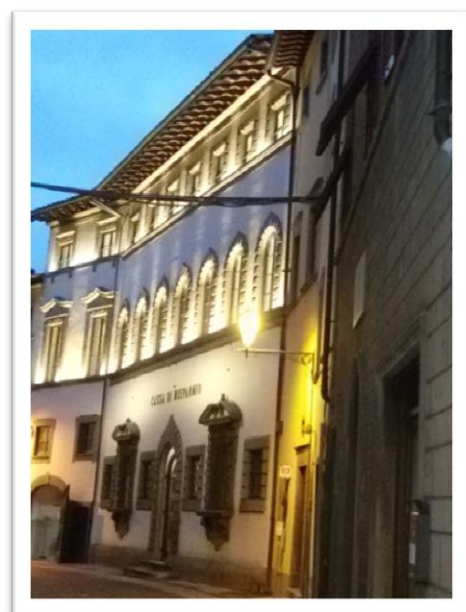


Our walking tour continues towards **Piazza XX Settembre**, where you can visit **Santa Caterina's Church** dating back to the 13th century and the **Euteleti Academy**, which is housed in **Palazzo Migliorati** and contains Napoleon Bonaparte's funeral mask and ancient documents.



Leaving this square we head for **Piazza Dante Alighieri**, also called "Il Piazzale", where San Miniato's market is held on Tuesday mornings. Here you can see **Giosue' Carducci's Statue**. Giosue' Carducci was a famous Italian writer, who lived in San Miniato from 1956 to 1957.

We next head off to **Palazzo Formichini**, seat of "Cassa di Risparmio di San Miniato". The palace was built in the 16th century and contains works of art by famous artists such as Benedetto Bigordi called "Il Ghirlandaio", Ludovico Cardi called "Il Cigoli", Iacopo Chimenti called "L'Empoli" and Giovanni Bilivert.





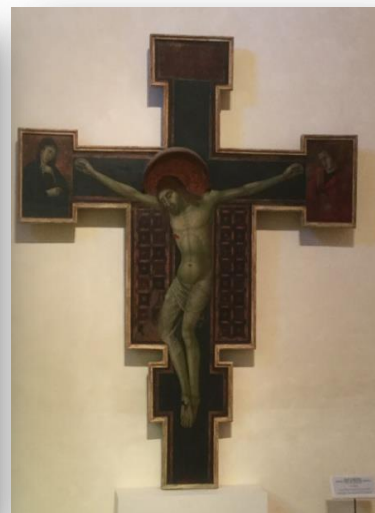
On the right we can admire **Grifoni Palace**. This Renaissance Palace was built by Giuliano of Baccio d'Agnolo for Ugolino Grifoni, Secretary of the Grand Duke Cosimo I of the Medici Family, in 1555. The building was destroyed during the Second World War, later it was restored and regained its original splendour. Now it is the headquarters of "Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di San Miniato".

Our tour proceeds along via Giosue' Carducci, where you can visit **The Most Holy Annunziata's Church**, containing Saint Augustine 's statue, Saint Dorothea 's relics and some frescoes .



From here it is easy to reach the **Conservatory of Santa Chiara**. The Monastery of Santa Chiara was built in the 13th century but the present building dates back to the 14th century. The nuns of Saint Clare's order stayed there until the end of the 18th century when it was transformed into a Conservatory for girls' education. Later it became a school premises.

The building is arranged around a cloister with arcades and it has a chapel dedicated to Saint Mary Magdalene. The Conservatory houses "Noli me Tangere", a wonderful painting by Ludovico Cardi, on which Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene is represented. There are also paintings by Jacopo Chimenti and Antonio Domenico Bamberini and a magnificent medieval cross painted by Deodato Orlandi in 1301.



If you are interested in ancient history, we suggest you visit **San Genesio's Archaeological Site**.

The site was considered one of the main stops along **the Via Francigena**, which was the pilgrimage route from Canterbury to Rome in the Middle Ages. It was used not only by pilgrims, but also by Kings, Popes and Princes. Inns, hospitals, monasteries, boroughs and castles were built along its path; therefore it became an important trade and cultural route. In San Miniato the **Via Francigena** runs through the old town centre and touches the old borough of San Genesio at the foot of the hill. Bishop Sigeric stayed there during his journey back to Canterbury and Popes, Emperors and Bishops chose this site to host councils in ancient times. Nowadays San Genesio is one of the most important archaeological sites in Tuscany. Here you can see the ruins of a cemetery dating back to the 3rd century B.C. and remains of a 7th-century village consisting of wooden buildings and a small stone church with its 11th-century crypt and cloister. You can also visit the **Archaeological Museum**, located in the town centre and home to archaeological findings from the excavations carried out in Fontevivo and San Genesio areas.



San Miniato & its White Truffles

The white truffle of San Miniato is known as the "Food of Kings" and it populates the tables of the best restaurants in the world. The white truffle found in San Miniato hills is the "Tuber Magnatum Pico" and is the most valuable type of truffle. It is very expensive because it is found in moderate quantities in particular periods of the year. You can find it only for three months: in October, November and December. The largest truffle ever found was given to the President of The USA, H. Truman, in 1954. It weighed 2 kilos and 540 grams.

The **National White Truffle Exhibition** is held in San Miniato in the month of November every year. It is a market which attracts thousands of Italian and foreign visitors and transforms the city into a huge open-air tasting workshop. All the squares have their own markets where truffles and other typical flavours of San Miniato hills are offered together with specialities from other Italian cities.



Slow Food & Mercatale

San Miniato is a "Slow Town" and it is famous for its wines, extra-virgin olive oil, pork products and many other local agricultural products used by craftsmen in order to create high-quality products, which have become the basis of "Slow Food". Typical products include **Spuma di Gota**, **Sopressata** and **Mallegato**.



The **Slow Food Association** together with other associations organises a market called **Mercatale**, where consumers can buy local fresh products such as milk, eggs, fruit and vegetables directly from farmers and local producers. This market is held in Piazza Dante Alighieri on Sunday once a month. The **Mercatale** is part of a project called "filiera corta" ("short distribution chain"), a regional network for the promotion of fresh agricultural products in Tuscany.



Theatre & Events



Theatre, plays and all types of performances have very old roots in San Miniato, perhaps ever since San Genesio, an actor, was chosen as its Patron Saint many centuries ago. The famous **Istituto del Dramma Popolare** (Folk Drama Institute), which collaborates with "Accademia di Arte Drammatica" (Dramatic Art Academy) in Rome, has had its headquarters in San Miniato since 1947 and they put on an open-air performance of a religious drama in July every year. This performance attracts international dramatists, directors and actors.

San Miniato also hosts **La Luna e' Azzurra**, an international puppet theatre festival, **Prima del Teatro**, the European School for the "Art of the Actor" theatre season attracting the best acting teachers and young talents in Europe, and **San Martino Summer**, a competition for Italian amateur theatre companies. The town is also home to **Centro Studi Fratelli Paolo and Vittorio Taviani**, dedicated to the two famous film directors from San Miniato.

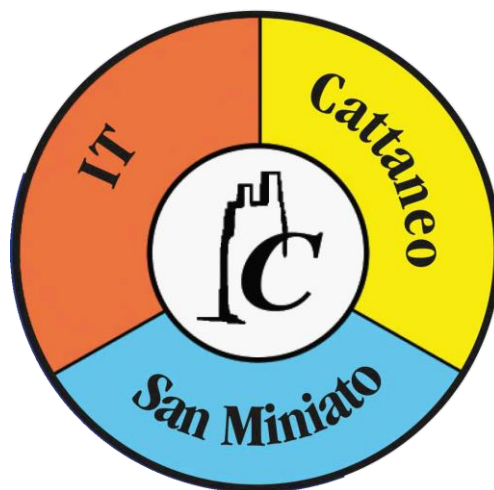
The Leather & Tanning District

The area of Santa Croce sull'Arno and Ponte a Egola, in the municipality of San Miniato, is a very famous tanning and leather manufacturing district. This area is also one of the most important tanning districts in the world, producing about 85% of Italian leather, with the brand "Vero Cuoio Italiano" (Real Italian Leather) and vegetable-tanned leathers. About one hundred companies offer the national and foreign markets top-quality products for shoes and every type of leather goods. Innovation, technological development and constant attention to the environment led this district to build one of the first and most efficient centralized depuration plants in Italy in 1980.



Bibliografia: Fondazione San Miniato Promozione, "San Miniato Terra d'Eccellenza"; "Sistema Museale San Miniato"; G. Nanni, I.Regoli, "San Miniato. Guida storico-artistica della città e del suo territorio".

Sitografia: San Miniato, www.wikipedia.org



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