

PODERE VIGNONE, LOC. VIGNONE 2, SEGGIANO (GR) 58038 Tel: (0039) 0564 950 569

Podere le Vignone, Seggiano, Province of Grosseto, Italy

-A traditional Tuscan farmhouse and olive farm owned by Peri & David-

GENERAL INFO

The medieval hilltop village of Seggiano lies at a height of 550m on the slopes of Monte Amiata, an extinct volcano and sacred mountain of the Etruscans, in Tuscany. The summit, about twenty minutes by car from the farmhouse, is covered with snow during winter months and used to be a regular ski resort before the weather became so unreliable; the mountain is always good for walks through the beech forests and mushroom hunting in the appropriate season.

The area in general is wonderfully unspoilt and still a habitat for wild flowers and animals such as boar, porcupine, hare and deer; fresh water crab have been spotted in the stream which borders the land of Podere Vignone. Seggiano is well known for its excellent extra virgin olive oil and ewes' milk cheese, or 'pecorino' and good locally produced wine is also to be found.

Despite being 'off the beaten track' the famous centres of Italian Renaissance culture are within easy reach by car; Siena is sixty kilometres and Florence, Arezzo and Assisi are about one and a half hours away for day trips. Towards the coast (75k) one can find more Roman and Etruscan sights. Grosseto, the modern provincial capital is the nearest large commercial centre with national and international rail connections. The easiest airport to fly into is Pisa (with hire cars right outside the airport) and a simple drive out of town; Rome is the same distance.

In terms of the immediate vicinity the surrounding villages have shops for all non-specialist supplies, good fresh (often locally produced) traditional food, a cinema, gym and many restaurants - some of which are excellent. The only period in which the area gets crowded is August when mostly Italian tourists escape the heat in the cities for the refreshing mountain walks and air of Amiata.

The weather in winter months -November through March can be crisp and sunny or stormy, depending on the wind. The thermal hot pools, which can be found around the mountain due its volcanic history, are fantastic in cold weather. The nearest, Bagno Vignone (20 minutes) is a calcium spa swimming pool, whilst Saturnia and Petriolo are sulphur spas. For summer bathing there are swimming holes in local streams, the seaside and hotel pools. A day trip for lake swimming in the Lago di Bolsena, eating on the lakeside in the evening is also very pleasant.

THE HOUSE

The old stone farmhouse is set within ten acres of working certified organic olive grove, a short walk away from the village of Seggiano (two bars, P.O, two grocery and butchers shops, plus a bakery). Its location is beautiful and views over the olive groves to distant hilltop villages are really stunning.

We, the owners of twenty years - Peri Eagleton and David Harrison - run a London-based business selling our own excellent olive oil and other culinary delights for which the area is famous. We stay in the downstairs of the main building at various times throughout the year. You can buy the extra virgin olive oil produced on the property and a complimentary bottle is provided for your stay.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE AREA

Welcome to our home. Here are a few suggestions and some practical information about the area.

EATING OUT

It's recommended to book during August - especially around the 13th/14th/15th holiday and at weekends.

Recommended wines to try: either a Montecucco Sangiovese, Brunello di Montalcino, a Morellino di Scansano or stick to the cheaper 'vino locale' which will usually be a Montecucco, a Rosso di Montalcino or Rosso di Montepulciano. Good years: 1998, 2000, 2004.

EATING IN SEGGIANO AND PESCIANA - THE BAR / REASTAURANT AT SEGGIANO (restaurant closed Wednesdays) is a short walk and just opposite the lane which leads to our house; it's good for morning cappuccino or an aperitivo and lovely Stefania, the cook, does some really good soup, meat and seafood dishes at lunch and dinner. She also bakes her own bread and cakes. **THE OSTERIA AT SEGGIANO** offers fixed menu at €12 - soups and prosciutto (ham) salami

The SILENE in Pescina: Tel 0564 950 805 (closed Mondays) really exquisite fresh home-made pasta made by the bosses mum, our neighbour. Their speciality is porcini mushroom and truffle and we recommend the tortelli al tartufo (pasta with truffle) and the parma dolce pasta. Plenty of choice for meat eaters and vegetarian options always on the menu too. Also worth a taste: porcini arrosti when fresh. Roberto (our friend the boss with the curly hair) will be happy to know you are staying with us - some of the salad veg and his oil come from his grandmother Marina's farm, just down from Vignone. Best to book ahead during August and holiday weekends. About 7 minutes by car (one hour uphill by foot) taking the dirt track up from the house, turn right at the T junction and then left onto the main road : carry on until you reach the junction in Pescina. The Silene's on the left. Or take the main road for Castel del Piano and the first left.

DA LUCA in Pescina: Tel 0564 950 687 . (closed Mondays) Luca and Maria Louisa run a good and friendly all-round family restaurant/ pizzeria. Their thin crust pizza is cooked the traditional way in a wood burning oven, prices are reasonable and there's a covered outside terrace area. Restaurants generally only make pizza in the evening. Pasta is home made and the house red is a young Montecucco rosso. It is likely to be crowded on weekends and every evening in the last half of August. Follow the directions to Silene; turn left and after 300m you find Da Luca.

LA SCOTTIGLIA in Pescina. Another good family restaurant / hotel with home made pasta, though getting a bit pricier....the TV is usually on -nice basic food in a relaxed atmosphere. Follow directions for Silene and turn right: Scottiglia is 250m on the left.

LA TERRAZZA / COUNTRY BAR Tel 0564 955 602 . A large menu. Good pizza to eat in and take-away. Half way on the left between Seggiano & Castel del Piano.

IL CACCIATORE Tel 0564 950 913. Closed Tuesday. Large restaurant with outside eating area and space for kids to run around outside. They've just got a new chef and have got more than a bit fancy, but they serve some unusual combinations and seafood in the summer. We've had mixed reports. Take the road for Castiglione d'Orcia (right at the piazza on the main road where our lane joins it) and it's on the left at the top of the hill.

EATING IN CASTEL DEL PIANO - SERGIO has opened a little restaurant (the TAVERNA DELLE LOGGE 0564 973 249) in Castel del Piano, just on the left through the little archway by the Pizza Pazzo takeaway, in front of the church. You can rely on his lovely fresh cooked food at unpretentious prices. Tell him Peri and David sent you and have a look down in his cantina - Castel del P is full of these cave cellars, perfect for storing oil, cheeses and wine.

Breakfast, nice wines and healthy organic snacks at Angela's little bar IL CANTUCCINO.

The ANTICO FRANTOIO, 0564 957 089 is a pizzeria/restaurant with a garden area at the back. There's also a trattoria on the green where the fountain is.

FISH Newly opened, LA BARCHETTA (0564 968436) in Arcidosso serves a large selection of fresh seafood at reasonable prices: take the road downhill from the roundabout at Arcidosso and on uphill for Zancona at the next roundabout - La Barchetta is on the right. Stefania's restaurant in Seggiano and the PERGOLA, on the road towards Grosseto the also serve fish.

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS - apart from Sergio's in Castel del Piano, Stefania's in Seggiano and the SILENE which is just up the track from Vignone, further afield the BARILOTTO (0564 977089) off the main piazza in Santa Fiora has a very good reputation. I DUE CIPPI in Saturnia is sublime and the MULINO (0564 987117 only open Fridays and weekends) in Semproniano is also really good. Nearer at Triana, book with Clara and Augusto at Osteria da Clara on 0564 989228 for a special napolitan culinary treat.

The TAGLIOLA (0564 967354) in Bagnoli (nr Arcidosso) is good for funghi (when in season) and meats.

COLD WATER

SWIMMING POOLS There's a good pool in Castel del Piano, sign posted 'Piscina' or "Piscina Val del Sole" to the left past the gas station on the way from Castel del P. to Arcidosso. There is a kids pool as well as a deep one, good facilities, reclining chairs and sun shades etc.

The "Capenti" hotel also has pools, pony rides and a restaurant. The Capenti is off to the left on the bend as you take the road out of Arcidosso towards Bagnore & Santa Fiora.

Dipping pools can be found along the stream in Seggiano....but my directions are no longer good. I used to go right, along the track just down from Vignone and take one of the tracks on the left down to the stream.

LAGO DI BOLSENA This is a massive fresh water lake on the SS Cassia route down to Rome. It's great for a day trip, about 1hr 20mins drive: there's shade and good swimming. We usually drive via Arcidosso, Santa Fiora and reach the Cassia via Piancastagnaio. As you reach the bottom of the hill after passing through San Lorenzo

Nuovo on the Cassia, take the right turn for Gradoli and then fork off to the left to reach the lake along a dirt track. There's a good fish restaurant right on the lake (da Gigetto) which is great for an evening meal, but to find a more tranquil spot to swim, follow the track to the right of the restaurant for about 1km until you see a stretch of beach with trees.

SEASIDE TRIPS: The beach always crowded in the summer, but for the essential Italian seaside experience we recommend the following beaches:

Punta Ala or Le Rochette: nice sandy beaches with umbrellas, chairs and pedallo boats etc. to the north of Grosseto (you should by-pass Grosseto) The road at Punta Ala runs parallel to the beach which is a short walk through the trees. We usually park in a pay-to-park area in the woods on the right.

Albarese: a nature reserve just south of Grosseto: take the Aurelia coast road direction Rome and exit at Albarese town to buy the entry permit for the PARCO NATURALE DELL'UCELLINA. Get there very early to park near the beach. There's a shuttle bus from Albarese town when the beach car park is full. Very little shade actually on the beach. Around 1hr 15 mins by car from Seggiano.

HOT WATER

There are a number of hot mineral water swimming pools/ spas, or "terme" which exploit Monte Amiata's hot springs: great for cooler summer days and throughout the rest of the year.

BAGNO VIGNONI: 0577 887 112. Calcium water pool located at the Hotel La Posta Marcuccio. There's a hot shallow pool and the main swimming pool is cool enough from September till June for laps. Open 9.30-13.00, 14.30-18.00 (no swimming over lunch period). Closed Thursday afternoons. 15€ per adult whole day, 12€ afternoon only. You have to wear bathing hats which they have on sale at the desk. Ask for "gettoni" for hot showers. They ask 15€ refundable deposit for locker keys.

About 20 mins drive along the Castiglione d'Orcia road until you reach the Cassia; turn left - Bagno Vignoni is the first turning on the left. Park and pay in the car park area and sharp left down to the hotel. Later walk up through the town to see the old Roman bath.

TERME DI SATURNIA : Tel 0564 601 061 Large touristy development of pools and costly entrance fee, closes at 5pm. It's about 1hr drive away : don't take the right turn for Saturnia town but turn left a little further on for the hotel "Terme". Carrying on along the mail road you reach the turning for the wild pools, at times very crowded. For a full day out combine a picnic /swim at Saturnia with sightseeing at Pitigliano & Sovana and a meal at I Due Cippi in Saturnia village.

BAGNO SAN FILIPPO Tel: 0577 872982. Less of a health spa atmosphere :great sulphur/calcium water swimming pool, more populated by Italians than foreigners. It's part of a hotel but you can go directly to the pool - follow the road down past the village until you see the pool car park on the right. 8.30-18.00, early closing Tuesdays. Closed from November through to April. It's around 45 mins away; turn left at the junction in Pescina and carry on until you reach Vivo d'Orcio (good food at "Il Castagno" in Vivo tel : 0577873508). At Vivo go right and up over the mountain, then left onto the main road and follow signs to Terme or Bagno San Filippo. For the adventurous, visit the free natural hot and cold water pools (take the footpath on the right before you reach the main hotel entrance). Combine this trip with a visit to Abbadia San Salvatore?

TERME DI PETRIOLO The really hot wild pool bordered by a river for cold plunges. Drive down towards Paganico and turn right before Paganico on the sign for Siena which links directly to the Grosseto / Siena road. Continue towards Siena and exit at the small yellow sign indicating Terme di Petriolo; you'll arrive at a natural hot pool source, the site of an ancient monastery, which consists of very hot bath tub size pools in the rocks and borders on a river. Pleasant and least crowded at meal times, though it's very rarely unpopulated . Combine with a visit to San Galgano (beyond Monticiano), site of a sword-in-the-stone story, or with a day trip to Siena. Petriolo is about a 50min drive from our house. There's a tiny trattoria in Casal di Pari.

SIGHTSEEING

FLORENCE, PERUGIA, ARREZZO and ASSISI are all one and a half to two hours by car and difficult to reach by bus or train. Day trips with an early start are advised. For the Uffizi gallery in Florence you can avoid queuing and book entry several weeks in advance(00 39 055294883) www.uffizi.firenze.it.

TRIPS TO ROME OR PISA BY TRAIN Most relaxing to go to Rome by train, leaving your car at ,or near Grosseto station. Free call number for train info 848 888088. Use the fast intercity trains which take about 2 hours. You must have a ticket when you board, with supplement for intercity trains; the tickets must be date stamped / validated in the small yellow machines found at the entrance and on the platforms.

To drive to Grosseto station, leave Castel del Piano on the back road near the hospital, and turn left at Paganico. Right hand lane at lights at Grosseto, go straight ahead and turn right at the fountain, then left at the end of that street.

WALKS For serious trekkers there are brilliant possibilities as the Amiata countryside is so wild and unspoilt. Some people visit us for the spring wildflowers - mid April to early May. In hot weather walks on Monte Amiata are also cool and pleasant; drive up via Pescina following signs to "Vetta Amiata" and park along the way. The summit - nice when there's snow - is touristy and to be avoided in summer, so try and stop in an isolated spot on the way up.

SAN ANTIMO A wonderful abbey situated in open countryside. Services and plainsong (Sundays at 16.00 - 18.00 we think). The abbot's quarters (entrance in the courtyard) have been closed for restoration for 8 years.....perhaps the restoration is finished now ? The place is enchanting. Take the road to Castiglione d'Orcia and bear left at the outrageous hairpin bend towards Castelnuovo dell'Abate, where you'll see the abbey signposted. The restaurant you pass sells nice local wine (2L rosso di Montalcino for 10 € in 2004)

PITIGLIANO: Seat of the Orsini family, a spectacular cliff-top town which is nice to wander through. All historical sights are marked with yellow signposts. Lovely surrounding countryside.

SOVANA: Etruscan tombs and temple are located all around this village. Lovely church on the Piazza and wonderful Byzantine influenced church if you walk right up beyond the last houses.

ROSELLE: Etruscan site later used by Romans high above Grosseto.

PIENZA: Papal residence and home of Piccolomini family. See the Palazzo dei Piccolomini and views of Southern Tuscany behind the church. A delightful town.

SIENA: It's about fifty minutes by car. Plenty to see; climbing the tower on the main piazza is fun. Nice frescos in the Palazzo Civile, in the same building as the tower. Don't miss the Pinacoteca - a fine collection of the Sieneese painting school plus, recently opened Ospedale opposite the Duomo, a hospital until 1997, which contains frescos of everyday life at the Catholic hospice for the poor and sick in the 15th.

USEFUL INFO

NEAREST HOSPITAL / emergency use the "pronto soccorso" unit at Castel del Piano Hospital. (See map)

SHOPPING – Our favourite supermarket: Sma in Castel del Piano, opposite the hospital; it's a family run shop and they stock some organic and local produce. From there walk left and go to the end of the first street on the left to find a good butcher which specialises in wild boar ham (prosciutto di cingiale). Another very good butcher is opposite the bio-bar, 'Il Cantuccio' - where you can get breakfasts, a good glass of wine and organic nibbles. The Cantuccio also makes 3 types of wholemeal bread on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Fresh fish from a mobile shop in Seggiano Thursdays. Listen for the vendor advertising himself with loudspeaker sometime mid / late morning. He stops at the parking area (La Fonte) at the bottom of our road before going up to the Piazza at the top of Seggiano.

Really good local veg. & fruit in Castel del Piano at the small shops down from the church direction Seggiano.

SHOP OPENING TIMES : 8.30 am- 1.00pm & 5.00 - 7.30pm, general market day the first Wednesday of every month. Small market in Arcidosso every Tuesday.

The local equivalent to the 7-11 can be found up at the Da Luca restaurant. Also there's 'Begname'. a bar//food shop where the Castel del Piano/ Grosseto and Arcidosso / Grosseto roads converge. (Good inexpensive organic country wine made by the couple who run the place.; the white is very good chilled, costs little. Ask for 'vostro vino bianco')

PETROL at Castel del Piano roundabout. 8.30 - 12.30, 15.30 - 18.30. (Automatic pump takes 10 Euro or 20 euro notes.) The petrol station just out of Castel del Piano on the road to Grosseto is open longer hours.

BANKS: Castel del piano and Arcidosso for foreign exchange M_F, 8.30 - 13.00 and hole-in-wall for credit card. There's also a cash machine by the shop in Seggiano.

Seggiano has one hardware shop, a minimarket store, a bakery, pharmacy, a post office and two bars. There is also a bank at the top of the village for cashing travellers cheques only.

RUBBISH AND RECYCLING: Please take rubbish bags and leave them in any of the many refuse bins which you will see on the road sides. Batteries, glass bottles and paper can be recycled in the appropriate collection containers. Raw organic waste (no meat or flour based things though) is welcomed on our compost heap.