

Frommer's Florence, Tuscany & Umbria

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Santa Maria delle Grazie al Calcinaio ★ Just below the city walls, on the hillside carpeted with olive trees, sits Cortona's tribute to High Renaissance architecture: Santa Maria delle Grazie al Calcinaio. It was built between 1485 and 1513 and is the masterpiece (and only definitely attributable work) of Francesco di Giorgio Martini. He designed it on a Latin cross plan to mark the spot where a worker in a limekiln (*calcinaio*) saw a miraculous image of the Virgin appear on the rock wall. The harmonious Brunelleschian interior has a rose window in stained glass by the French master of that art, Guillaume de Marcillat, as well as a late-16th-century *Madonna and Saints* by Florentine artist Alessandro Allori in the right transept.

Loc. Calcinaio 227. ☎ **0575-604-830**. Free admission. Daily 9am–noon and 3–5pm.

Where to Stay

Besides the hotels below, Cortona contains some real B&B gems. **Casa Chilenne B&B** ★★★, Via Nazionale 65 (www.casachilenne.com; ☎/fax **0575-603-320**), and **Casa Bellavista** ★★★, Località Creti 40 (www.casabellavista.it; ☎ **0575-610-311**), both offer stunning accommodations, friendly hosts, and free Internet. Casa Chilenne is located in the heart of town (rooms for 100€), while Bellavista offers a more rustic experience a short drive west in the village of Creti (120€–140€). Book way in advance, as rooms in both are limited (four rooms are available in Bellavista and five in Casa Chilenne).

If you really want to soak up the sun in this now-famous countryside, you can also try an *agriturismo* outside of town. The tourist office publishes a list of them, or visit www.apr.arezze.it for additional choices. A luxurious option is the **Villa di Piazzano** ★★, Località Piazzano (www.villadipiazzano.com; ☎ **075-826-226**), 6km (3 ¾ miles) southeast of Cortona. This fabulous property dates back to 1464, but boasts modern amenities, large rooms, a pool, and flowery gardens—breakfast includes a huge spread of homemade cakes, fresh fruit, and baked goods, served on a sun-swept terrace. Rates in high season range from 205€ to 340€.

Finally, fans of *Under the Tuscan Sun* will be thrilled to learn that the actual house that served as “Villa Bramasole” in the movie is now a rental property known as **Villa Laura**, just outside town. Originally built in 1504, the site contains the main villa and adjacent farmhouse, with nine bedrooms with en suite bathrooms, air-conditioning, a swimming pool and hot tub, and Wi-Fi. Contact Villa Vacations (www.villavacations.com; ☎ **800-261-4460**) for more details.

Hotel San Michele ★ This 15th-century palace offers High Renaissance Brunelleschian style with off-white plaster walls and vaulted ceilings accented by arches in gray *pietra serena*. It's the best place to stay in the center of town. None of the rooms are overly spacious, but that just renders ones like no. 250, in the tower, more cozily romantic (and it has great views to boot). The breakfast spread is generous, with fruit and ham, and there are two bar lounges, one of them frescoed, to relax in after dinner at Ristorante Preludio next door (under separate management; see below).

They also run the excellent **Residence Borgo San Pietro** (www.borgo.sanpietro.com; ☎ **0575-612-402**), 4km (2½ miles) outside town in San Pietro a Cegliolo, with 14 rooms and 5 apartments each with a kitchenette. Doubles start at around 130€, including free Wi-Fi.

Via Guelfa 15 (just off Piazza della Repubblica), 52044 Cortona (AR). www.hotelsanmichele.net. ☎ **0575-604-348**. Fax 0575-630-147. 43 units. 89€ standard double; 98€ superior double; 109€