

PIENZA

Pienza (2.000 inhabitants, located in Val d'Orcia, in the province of Siena) maintains the identity of an **ideal city**, on a human scale. Ancient Etruscan village, called Corsignano from Roman times, is mentioned in a novel of Boccaccio.

The turning point is due to **Enea Silvio Piccolomini** (1405-1464), noble and cultured humanist who in the mid XV century ascended to the papal throne with the name of Pio II and as a pagan priest of classical antiquity wanted to rebuilt his native village, redesigning its heart in modern key, taking into consideration astronomical and musical references, with the help of the Florentine architect Bernardo Rossellino and maybe of Leon Battista Alberti.

This is how Pienza, the city of Pio, was born. The first Italian perspective square, where the landscape assumes the same importance of the architecture. Not much as changed since then, also because the pope threatened an excommunication. Over the following centuries Pienza fell into oblivion, up until the XIX century, when the German travellers and the last Piccolomini of the family, Count Silvio, operated for its **rediscovery**. The square, the cathedral and the papal palace were restored.

A detailed visit of the village, starts from Santa Maria Assunta's Cathedral, temple of light, with the underlying baptistery, goes on to the papal palace with the hanging garden and to the diocesan museum which hosts a precious collection of paintings and statues of the Tuscan and Sienese school and Flemish tapestries. **The intimate courts of the palaces and ancient convents** host, in fine weather, concerts, floral expositions and a literary festival.

A few steps away from the old town you can descend into the landscape discovering, between the scents of the Mediterranean scrub, the symbolic reliefs of the Romanesque parish church of the Saints Vito and Modesto and the white streets captured in the movies *The Gladiator* and *The English Patient*.

An excursion to the fraction of Monticchiello is also recommended, ancient medieval fortress, symbol of resistance, enlivened in August by the "*Teatro Povero*".

In the golden light of sunsets, seated among the elongated cypresses' shadows, in one of the bars on the city walls that dominate on the valley, **a platter of pecorino cheese and cold meats, bruschette with olive oil and a glass of DOC Orcia red wine**, will complete the experience of the five senses.

Ilaria Bichi Ruspoli