

## Sleeping near Pienza

While I wouldn't hang my hat in sleepy Pienza itself, some fine countryside options sit just outside town—including one of my favorite Italian *agriturismo* experiences, Cretaiole. Location-wise, this is an ideal home base: midway between Montepulciano and Montalcino, and immersed in Tuscan splendor. Three or four of the iconic Tuscan landscape vistas are within 10 or 15 minutes' drive of Pienza; you'll make your sightseeing commute along extremely scenic roads with plenty of strategically located pullouts.

**\$\$\$ Agriturismo Cretaiole**, in pristine farmland just outside Pienza, is a terrific value if you want to call Tuscany home



for a long stay. It's warmly run by reformed city-slicker Isabella, her country-boy husband Carlo, and their family. This family-friendly farm welcomes visitors for week-long stays (generally Sat-Sat) in six comfortable apartments. Eager to share their local traditions, they offer travelers a rich cultural educa-

tion. Carlo is a professional olive-oil taster. Carlo's father, Luciano, is in charge of the grappa and tends the vegetable garden (take your pick of the free veggies). And Isabella is a tireless Jill-of-all-trades, who prides herself on personally assisting each of her guests to find exactly the Tuscan experience they're dreaming of. While there's no swimming pool—for philosophical reasons—many thoughtful touches and extras, such as Wi-Fi, mountain bikes, and loaner mobile phones, are provided. Isabella also organizes fairly priced optional activities such as pasta-making and olive-oil tasting classes, family-style Tuscan dinners, winery tours, truffle hunts and grape and olive harvesting (in season), visits to the studios of local artisans, side-trips to Siena, watercolor classes, dinner at a local monastery, and more (Db-€825/week, small Db apartment-€990/week, large Db apartment-€1,290/week, same apartment for four-€1,595/week, these prices promised with this book in 2014, fewer activities and lower prices mid-Nov-mid-March, tel. 0578-748-083, Isabella's mobile 338-740-9245, [www.cretaiole.it](http://www.cretaiole.it), [info@cretaiole.it](mailto:info@cretaiole.it)). It's on the Montalcino-Pienza road (S-146), about 11 miles out of Montalcino, and about 2.5 miles from Pienza. While they prefer weeklong stays, when things are slow they may accept guests for as few as three nights (for this you must book less than a month in advance, Db-€120, 3-night minimum). The same family runs two other properties, with the same activities and personal attention as the main *agriturismo*: **Le Casine di Castello** is a townhouse with two units and the same prices as Cretaiole, but guests

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have more independence. The more upscale **Casa Moricciani** is a swanky villa featuring dreamy views, plush interiors, loads of extras, and pure Tuscan luxury (€2,900/week upstairs or €3,900/week downstairs, each with 2 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms). Both properties are in the untouristy medieval village of Castelmuzio, five miles north of Pienza; for details, see [www.buongiornotoscana.com](http://www.buongiornotoscana.com).