

Len's 57th letter from the Via

Date: 29/08/17

Location	San Gimignano	KM's to Rome	458	Steps Today	29,426
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Commentary on today's walk comes from Carol, Len's trusty walking companion. Len asked me to do the blog today because he knows how much I love the walk from Gambassi Terme to the tourist honey pot, San Gimignano - or maybe he's just blog weary and needs a day off.

We walked this path in 2015. The two towns that bookend this walk are opposites in many ways; Gambassi is characterised by its low key, subtle delights - winding little stone laneways with people's domestic lives only a metre away from pedestrians; there's a treed park in the centre of town and some unexpectedly stunning views over the countryside. San Gimignano on the other hand is adorned by medieval palaces, its elegant piazza, the renowned landmark seven towers and, to this tourist's chagrin, hordes of other tourists - all of them eating ice creams!

The walk today was a stroll in the park for Len; an easy 15 kms with no lunch to carry. Yay, that's walker heaven! The only mitigating factor was the hot weather; the temperature climbed quickly in the morning and reached 33 by noon. I've been very keen to get started early on the walks to beat the heat and when brekky is served at 8am (which is often the case) this means hitting the trail after early bowl of cereal in the room. Never fear, Len always has a supply of provisions, just in case. We both knew that the lovely hotel 'Villa Bianca', provides a bountiful fresh breakfast. But alas, brekky is served at 8am! What we have here, are the horns of a dilemma. Against Boucher rules, brekky won today and the best laid plans of Lenny and Carol to hit the track by 7.30, went slightly awry. But true Pilgrims must adapt and take each day's bounty as it comes.

We knew we were in for a hotty when we left the hotel at 8.30 and immediately headed for the shady side of the road. Len wasn't fussed though; he's acclimatised and has the brown legs to prove it. He has that look of the seasoned walker about him. I was only slightly fussed because the views as we walked along a ridge at reasonably high altitude provided us with more picture postcard views of the Tuscan landscape. In this part of Tuscany there's also lots of forest to add some scale to the farmland and it looks so perfect.



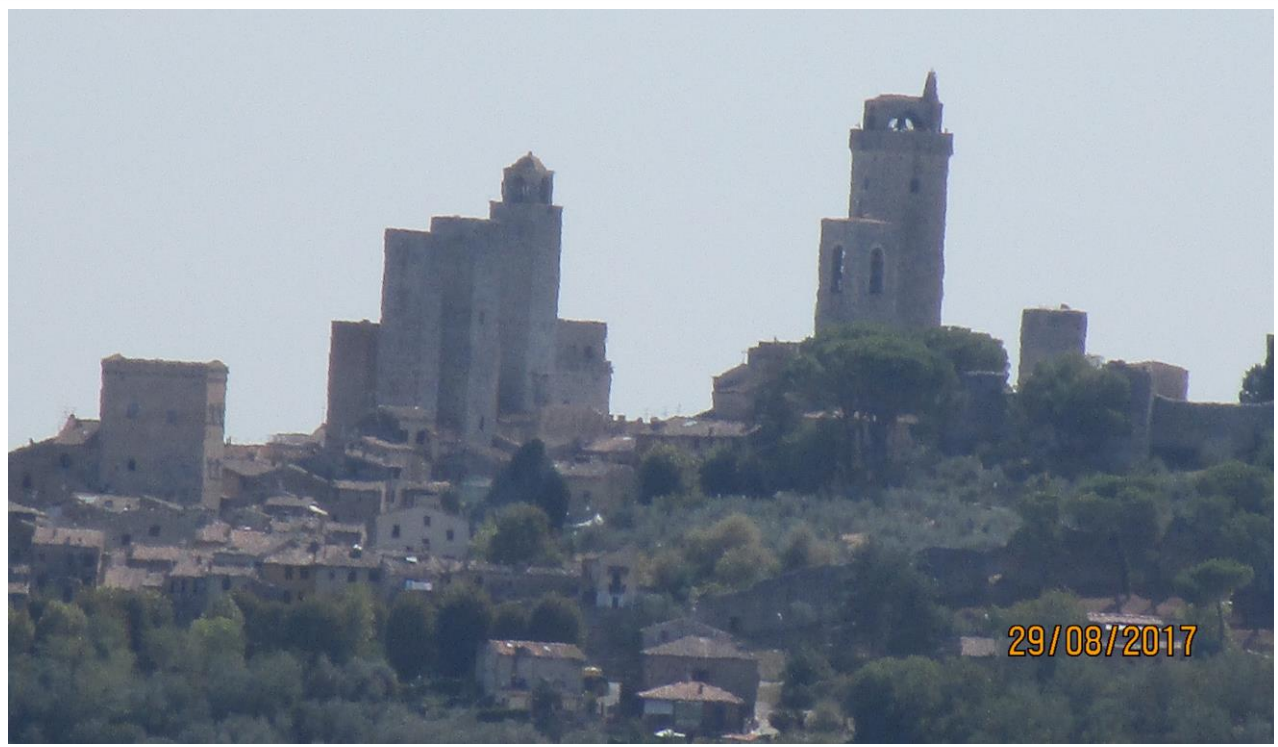
Of course, this region is well heeled so the general appearance of the farms and quality of the buildings visibly represent this prosperity. There were several Agriturismo (farm stays) on the road to San G., all offering what looked like very comfortable accommodation. Len thought

there should be a book, listing all these places offering bed, breakfast and dinner along the Via. If one's passion for walking were only lukewarm, an easy two kms walking would lead to a more than adequate 'home' for the night. The accidental pilgrim might take five days to get from Gambassi to San G, but I'm sure that great views, dining, good wine and general relaxation would make the slow journey worthwhile.

Our first rest stop along the way didn't meet with one local's approval. He stopped his car and, in that appealing way some Italians have of adding 'a' at the end of every word, he recommended a better place to put our feet up. We chatted for a while (until another car came up the road) and he asked us if we'd noticed his Agriturismo, describing its features with pride. I told him that he lived in paradise and he responded by pointing to his head and saying, 'Paradise is here. If not, then you won't be happy anywhere. I'm old so I know this'.

'Oh', I thought 'if only I could be like that', and was reminded of good old Mr Emerson from EM Forster's novel, 'A room with a view', who offered his room to the disgruntled Lucy Honeychurch who had a room in Florence with no view. 'I don't care what I see outside.' sang Mr Emerson, pointing at his chest, 'My view is within. Here is where the birds sing! Here is where the sky is blue!'

Such lovely images, but no, no, no. I'm with the sullen, repressed, yet-to-be-awakened Lucy - I want an external view not an internal one. San Gimignano is where the birds sing today.



Postscript: I forgot to mention crucial information about San Gimignano. Remarkably, it remains intact because it was neglected as a trading centre from the 13th Century onwards. Source; Via Francigena walk notes.

Pilgrim Tips; Don't make friends with random dogs you meet along the way, they treat it as an invitation to join the pilgrimage.