



# The Hills of Tuscany

*Ferenc Máté*

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## **The Hills of Tuscany** Ferenc Máté

The true-life adventure of a couple who did what most of us only dream of doing, Ferenc Mate's enticing, beautifully written memoir of their first year in this enchanted place brings to life the real Tuscany: the neighbors, the spectacular hills where *The English Patient* was filmed, country life, the farm family down the road who virtually adopt them and with whom they relive centuries-old traditions of the harvest, grape picking, wine making, mushroom hunting, woodcutting, holidays, and, of course, the almost never-ending, mouthwatering feasts. Mate also captures the neighboring medieval town of Montepulciano, its tiny shops, open markets, squares, cafes, festivals, food and wine, and above all, its people. Steeped in that mesmerizing landscape and full of unforgettable characters, "The Hills of Tuscany" is a celebration of life, an affirmation of traditions, friendship, and neighborly ties.

## **The Hills of Tuscany Details**

Date : Published October 12th 1999 by Delta (first published November 2nd 1998)

ISBN : 9780385334419

Author : Ferenc Máté

Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : Travel, Cultural, Italy, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography

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# From Reader Review The Hills of Tuscany for online ebook

## Negin says

This memoir was a bit slow in that there wasn't much in the way of plot and dialog, yet the descriptions were wonderful. I mean it is Tuscany after all! I enjoyed reading this shortly before our recent visit there. I always enjoy reading books about places that I'm about to visit. To be honest, I would only recommend this book if you're planning on visiting Tuscany. Again, it is quite tedious otherwise. Tuscany will forever have a special place in my heart.

Here's one of the pictures we took in the Tuscan countryside.

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## Daver says

OK, I guess I'm with the minority on this one...

I would re-read this book before I EVER read another book by Francis Mayes! Pardon me for not preferring that every descriptive paragraph end on a negative note.

I read this book while laying flat on my back hoping I could recover in time for a family trip to, yes, Tuscany. Mate encouraged me to get myself back in form and ready for the trip. He painted a wonderful, inviting picture for me, which did come true for us in our travels.

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## Nicholasdm says

A pleasant insightful stroll into an era (1980s) which has now disappeared!

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## Michelle says

This was just what I wanted in a summertime, pool-side read: the story of "regular" people who fulfill their dream of living in a Tuscan farmhouse. Makes one think that anyone can do it! Loved the descriptions of the surrounding countryside, the interesting neighbors, and especially...the FOOD!

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## Jackie Wayman says

Enjoyed it. Montepulciano rocks. Maté

Italian phrased:

ciambelline - donuts

assolutamente: absolutely

a più tardi: a little later

mi sento come un bambino:i feel like a kid  
che bello! how beautiful  
domani si fa festa: tomorrow is a holiday  
giusto: just right  
vendemmia: grape harvest  
bigonzi: grape basket on back  
ciambella: broad ring of bread  
mille foglie: custard with thin pastry

## FOOD

pollo in umido: chicken stewed in piquant tomatoe sauce  
oso buco  
crostata with preserves

## PLACES

Pienza: Piazza Piccolomini, volcano outside of town  
Montepulciano: sits below Montalcino  
An hour from: Florence-Sienna-Perugia-Assisi-Arezzo-Orvieto-seaside Talamone  
Piazza Grande  
Teatro Provero Montechiello (6 mi) walled town of 100 people, leaning watchtower, folk theatreplays performed in the piazza by locals  
Concert at Castel Luccio: an estate in Val D'Orcia (late summer)  
Sant Anna im Camprena (English Patient): monastery from 14th century  
two week festival called Il Cantiere (lots of music)  
Montalcino: 12th century fortress guarding the town-steep staired vicoli  
local BrunelloSpremuta: orange juice squeezed fresh  
San Biagio: not too impressive but acoustics for concerts fabulous  
Saint Francis of Assisi...from Peruggio (back 8 centuries (see movie)  
Benedictine Library wall (movie) 1400 overlooking valley  
Mezzadria: land owner 13th century to 1940's primary land owner provides land and house and pays for half of all that is needed to work the land, half of the cost of the seeds and beasts.  
Contadino pays the other half plus sweat and toil...when harvested vendemmia (grape picking)comes or animal is killed each get half (mezzo)  
"Inaldo was a thin, mid fifties, intense, croaky-voiced, chain-smoking, philosophizing, insightful humanist and the town's last angry Marxist. He would welcome us to his shop with open arms, and he would rave about the world going to hell, about the stupidity that was more and more in unlimited supply, illustrated almost daily at the intersection near his shop by the screeching of brakes then the thud of cars slamming into each other. And we would mull over the ills of Italy and the ills of the world, and conclude at the end that everyone was crazy so what's the use, let's go have some lunch and a little wine."

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## Maribel says

Ok I know I say I LOVE THIS BOOK for just about every other book I read but I really do LOVE this book. I have been in love with Tuscany/Umbria and Provence for a while now and I love reading travel essays/memoirs. Most of them have been ok and I've enjoyed reading them but nothing like The Hills of Tuscany. Mate really really captures the essence of the region without wearing you out. Hard to explain. His

writing is evocative and eloquent but still simple.

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### **Zuzana says**

Ty hv?zdi?ky jsou jen tak, aby byly. Nedokážu to hodnotit, tuším, že úpln? dob?e by to nedopadlo. Francouzské a italské venkovské (p?íp. vina?ské) p?íb?hy jsou m?j oblíbený ký?, takže mn? se to líbilo :)

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### **Jim Cabaj says**

I loved when I traveled to Italy. Explored the cultural treasures of Tuscany. Enjoyed big glass of wine accompanied by the most amazing food you ever tasted. After an amazing trip you wondered what life would be like to live in Tuscany.

The author and his wife Candace get to explore what life is like living as a local in Tuscany. First renting a place to find the farm home they have always wanted. To finding food out in nature and purchasing the best of towns around them.

You encounter the people of Tuscany along the way. Living life they want to and have been taught. All the interesting agents bringing the author around for the property of his dreams. To his incredible neighbors that indoctrinate both the author and his wife in all the local customs, foods, and other great things about the lifestyle.

My partner read the book before me and told me it was a must read. After he spent a couple of summers escorting students to the region, he now wants an apartment for summer.

I craved certain simple foods as I read each chapter. It will attack your senses like the simple pleasures of eating a tomatoes or drinking a good glass of wine.

A must read for those who love travel and the desire to live in another world other than what they know. Pour a good couple of glasses of Montepuciano wine and enjoy the journey with the author thru the seasons.

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### **Glenda says**

First time reviewer. I am totally fascinated with Tuscany. Not having been there yet, I am filling this absence with books and movies of this bucolic region. Ferenc Máté allowed me to feel as if I have already visited it with his wonderful descriptions. “Skylarks hovered and trilled their solitary tune. The wind ripples the wheat like long waves of the sea”; “ A despot heat fettered the valley” are all examples of his style. I have never seen the adjective word “despot” used with heat before but it really captures and gives depth to the intensity of the heat that permeated and penetrated the valley. So thank you, Ferenc for allowing me to travel there in my mind.

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## **Mary Wallace says**

Interesting that there is so much repetition of words, to the point of annoyance... 'autumn' is in so many of the first paragraphs, autumn light, autumn this, autumn that. I know it's autumn.

A friend picked this up and read the first few pages and said there was a lot of 'shiny language'. In this book is a lovely day to day story of living within a closed community in Italy. I loved it for that. I liked the characterizations of the locals and the descriptions of daily wanderings over hills and thru vales. I'm just surprised the editor didn't clean it up a bit.

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## **Clara Ellen says**

I enjoyed this book so much. So much of it was just perfect - the likable couple finding a home in a rural area, the lovely countryside, the kind neighbors - all of that together makes for a mental escape into Tuscany! The descriptions were great, too. I remember how the author took the reader with him on a walk in the countryside and how I felt I was really there in the lovely woods by a stream. All in all one of my favorite books on 'finding a house in Italy.'

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## **Shawna says**

After slogging through the first 50 pages, which are slow, this was a pleasure. The slower pace of life, friendships, beautiful Italy, all made this a delight to read.

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## **Anna says**

I was really prepared to hate this - the soft-focus mid-menopause cover contributed to a sense of dread about it. But as I'm writing about Tuscany, I've had to plow through all sorts of sentimental drivel about the perfect Eden that is the contado of Tuscany, inhabited by peasants who are the salt of the earth and live in utter harmony with the hedgehogs.

I kept thinking as I read this book of an amazing cookbook I own called *La Rocca*, which is a record by a WA Italian woman of her life and recipes of her town, a tiny rocky place in the deep south of Italy. Everything is much, much harder to grow and shepherd down there - those Tuscans have soil good enough to eat.

So Mate and his gorgeous painter wife RISK EVERYTHING by trying to live in Italy - diving in after a 4 week vacation on a whim, without the language and a limited budget (this only possible some time ago). Please. If only most people had such hard choices to make.

Humbug aside - engagingly written without too much treacle. Particularly the grounded imagery of working farm landscapes and the cycle of toil that marks the year, and wonderful relish about food, without being too Batali about it. I did get sick of Candace always saying how hungry she was, and the post-prandial gloating.

Scratch the review. I want to kill this Hungarian and take his pretty farmlet.

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### **Michael Huang says**

The author (a writer) and his wife (a painter) wanted to live in Tuscany (in 1987) despite that they speak very little Italian. They arrived and started to hunt for a house. Part I of the memoir is just house hunting. The only thing worth noting is a small village having no old people because SS killed everyone in town due to the resistance blowing up armored cars killing their officer. Nobody there was born before the war. They finally found a dream house and settled in.

The book then talked about the slow life there. There is the description of seafood salad; a bull running away; going to the church and finding a captivating priest; hunting for mushrooms; going grape harvesting; corking wine; killing a pig; the first snow. They learned to live life the Tuscan way: piano, piano, con calma. (Slowly, slowly, with calm).

If you turn on slow music, you may enjoy the vibe a bit better: The town shop being open but the owner is not around: they are a social lot. They wander off to another shop to chit-chat. In Tuscany, buying hardware is not easy: you are always confronted with questions of “for what”. Then comes the advice and not in simple phrases but detailed anecdotes: my brother-in-law tried it, the fool, and in the end had to replaster the house. A concert in a church with only candle lights: that’s how the church is lit for hundreds of years before. 15 minutes after the scheduled start, people start to show up. Half an hour later (that is precisely on time in Tuscany) the concert began.

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### **Audrey Dale says**

In the top 10 of my favorite books! A beautifully written non-fiction story about a couple who go to live in Italy. Throughout the book, and through all their misadventures fixing up the house they buy, the love they have for each other shines through. Funny, touching, beautiful...and the descriptions of the Italian countryside and the food are wonderful.

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