**Siena**

The story of Siena provides a nice opportunity to bring in geography, political science, and biology into the mix of art, architecture, and history. Siena’s mythological origins lie in the flight of Remus’ sons after his murder by Romulus (and hence [the suckled she-wolf imagery](http://www.medievalhistories.com/medievalmosaics-in-siena/) presently seen across the city). However, the town did not develop as a significant Roman settlement, as it did not lie along any of Rome’s major roads or water courses (Siena sits on the center of three converging ridges). After the fall of Rome, frequent Byzantine raids along the traditional routes north from Rome (the Via Cassia and the Via Aurelia) forced the conquering Lombards to reroute through Siena. When the Lombards surrendered to Charlemagne, Frankish rule followed, and Siena became an important point on the Frank’s main trade route between Rome and France, the Via Francigena.

Feudal powers waned by the mid-twelfth century, to be replaced by Siena’s republic. Banking, as well as textiles, contributed to Siena’s rising influence making it an obvious competitor to Florence with whom Siena frequently [fought](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Montaperti). Siena was at the height of its power during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, so it is not surprising that some of Italy’s greatest Gothic-influenced structures are found here. By the late thirteenth century, the city-state was controlled by a unique form of oligarchical government, the Council of Nine, whose members were elected every two months from the merchant class rather than nobility. During this time, some of its greatest artistic and architectural works were produced. In 1348, the bubonic plague epidemic ([possibly the result of climatic variation in Asia 15 years previous](http://www.pnas.org/content/112/10/3020.full.pdf)) struck Siena particularly hard, killing nearly two thirds of its population. [As a result of this demographic upheaval (and limited access to water) Siena never fully recovered its influence and pow](http://www.montana.edu/historybug/yersiniaessays/davis.html)er, and by 1555 the Duchy of Florence had gained control.

**Churches:**

[Siena Cathedral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siena_Cathedral) (with its amazing façade) is associated with the baptistery, the crypt, and the Museo dell'Opera. A massive lone frame to the south was the beginning of an addition to create a new nave that would have more than doubled the size of the Duomo, but its construction was halted by the plague outbreak in 1348 and subsequently left unfinished. If you plan to visit the Cathedral and one or two of the above sites, it is convenient to get the Opa Si Pass. (€13). Otherwise, each single ticket costs: Cathedral €4 (€7 when floor is uncovered), Baptistery €4, Crypt €6 and Museum dell’Opera including the climb to the Panorama €7.

[Basilica Cateriniana San Domenico](http://www.basilicacateriniana.com/storia_en.htm) is a largely Gothic structure with relics of St. Catherine.

[Sant’Agostino](http://www.sienaonline.com/sant_agostino_church.html) is mostly 13th century. It has been deconsecrated and houses a crucifix by Perugino and paintings by Lorenzetti, Sodoma, and others.

**Museums**

[Museo dell'Opera del Duomo](http://www.operaduomo.siena.it/) displays numerous works of architecture and art including  the [*Maestà*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maest%C3%A0_%28Duccio%29) of [Duccio di Boninsegna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duccio_di_Boninsegna). The museum is the point of access to the Panorama, the top of the giant wall of the never completed addition of the Duomo.

[The Water Museum](http://www.enjoysiena.it/en/attrattore/Water-Museum/) tells the story of Siena’s system of [bottini](http://www.aboutsiena.com/underground-waterways-of-Siena.html) that supplied water for the [fountains](http://www.aboutsiena.com/underground-waterways-of-Siena.html) of this hilltop city.

[Complex of Santa Maria della Scala](https://www.discovertuscany.com/siena/santa-maria-della-scala.html), what was once one of the oldest "hospitals" in Europe.

[Accademia dei Fisiocritici Museo di Storia Naturale](http://www.aboutsiena.com/museums-in-Siena.html)

Pinacoteca Nazionale (National Picture Gallery) with masterpieces by [Duccio di Buoninsegna](http://www.aboutsiena.com/famous-artists-of-Siena.html#ducciodibuoninsegna), [Simone Martini](http://www.aboutsiena.com/famous-artists-of-Siena.html#simonemartini), [Pietro](http://www.aboutsiena.com/famous-artists-of-Siena.html#pietrolorenzetti) and [Ambrogio](http://www.aboutsiena.com/famous-artists-of-Siena.html#ambrogiolorenzetti) Lorenzetti and other artists of the Sienese School here.

[And several other museums](http://www.aboutsiena.com/museums-in-Siena.html)

**Civic structures**

[Palazzo Pubblico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palazzo_Pubblico) houses the Museo Civico containing, among other works, the frescos known as [*The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Allegory_of_Good_and_Bad_Government) (an unusual departure for the time from religious subject matter, and a statement on the value of government).

**Tickets:** € 9 without reservation and € 8 with reservation. Reduced € 8 without reservation and € 7,50 with reservation (groups over 15 people). You can also purchase a cumulative ticket for two city museums valid for two days (Civic museum and S. M. della Scala) for € 13 and for € 20 if you also include a climb up the Tower del Mangia.

### [Torre del Mangia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torre_del_Mangia), adjacent to the Palazzo Pubblico, reflects the success of the government of the Council of Nine. It is the same height as the Duomo’s tower, said to be a statement concerning the equal importance of church and state. A climb to the top provides an appreciation of the landscape upon which Siena sits (€ 8).

[Piazza del Campo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piazza_del_Campo) in front of the Palazzo is “regarded as one of Europe's greatest medieval squares”, and contains the [*Fonte Gaia*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fonte_Gaia), an endpoint of the complex system of underground channels distributing water to Siena. The Piazza is where the biannual horse race, [Palio di Siena](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palio_di_Siena), is held.

**Maps of Siena**

[Map with description of major sites](http://www.planetware.com/tourist-attractions-/siena-i-to-si.htm)

[A more detailed map](http://ontheworldmap.com/italy/city/siena/siena-tourist-attractions-map.jpg)

[And less helpful, but cool map](https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/enlarge/26965)