

Colle

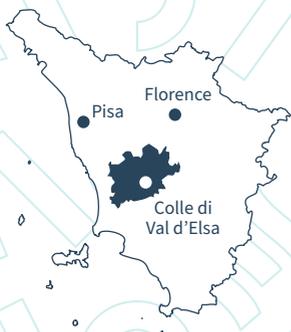


**City of Crystal, art and nature
along the “Via Francigena”**

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Tuscany

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Colle di Val d'Elsa

*City of Crystal, art and nature
along the “Via Francigena”*

Strategically located for reaching the major tourist attractions in the area, although slightly off the beaten track, “Colle”, as it is popularly known, offers an authentic Tuscan experience, set among the gently rolling hills of the Valdelsa countryside. Known as the birthplace of the illustrious Arnolfo di Cambio, here art and nature come together. History is intertwined with the bold vision of contemporary art, and religious and secular elements exist side-by-side offering a unique wealth of cultural riches. These range from the Etruscans, crystal glass master craftsmen, and the fortified medieval centre, to contemporary art, Renaissance buildings, industrial heritage, the turquoise waters of the river Elsa and ancient pilgrim sites, Colle di Val d'Elsa is many different things all at one and the same time ...*in one word*, “Colle”.

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Comune di
Colle di Val d'Elsa



Valdelsa
Valdicecina



Discover Colle

Standing on a long ridge surrounded by nature, *Colle Alta* looks like a ship sailing the verdant Tuscan countryside. Take a trip through history as you enter the ancient 'Castle' sector, historic palazzi, churches and towers, until you reach the Baluardo terrace, with its stunning panoramic view over *Colle Bassa* and the Valdelsa countryside. Then descend to the nearby river Elsa, with its famous turquoise waters.

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Colle



Colle di Val d'Elsa



Numbers

With its many ancient and modern features, its fine art and architecture, and its craft heritage and unspoilt nature, Colle di Val d'Elsa is a small town with some impressive statistics.

21.700
Inhabitants

4 km
"SentierElsa"
Riverside Trail

14 %
Amount of world's
crystal glass produced
in Colle

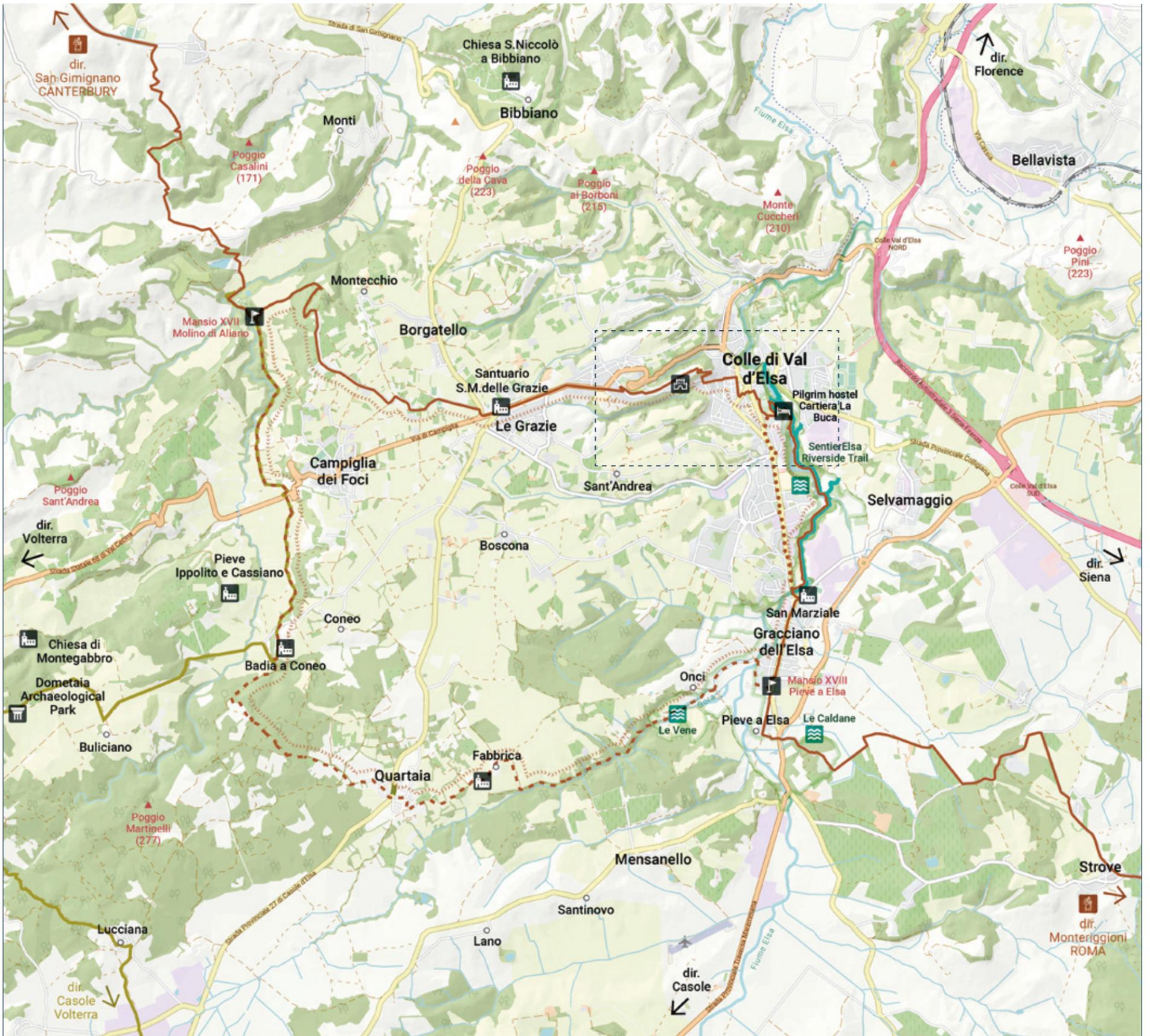
1592
Colle receives the
status of Diocese
and "City"

22,5 km
Colle's
"Francigena
Circuit"

95 %
Amount of Italy's
crystal glass produced
in Colle

Located in a valley dotted with Etruscan sites, Colle di Val d'Elsa flourished during the Middle Ages where the Elsa river meets one of the most beautiful sections of the Via Francigena. It was also the scene of fighting between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. Indeed, the 'Battle of Colle' in 1269 is also mentioned by Dante in his Purgatory (XIII canto). Over the centuries, all around the medieval castle, the land has changed becoming an important economic and cultural centre, leaving a rich and perfectly preserved artistic and architectural heritage. Thanks to motor power pro-

vided by special channels, 'Gore', running off from the river, water and paper mills, ironworks and glassworks sprang up ever since the Middle Ages. These were followed by lead-crystal workshops in the 1900s, making the town famous worldwide. Known as the "City of Crystal", Colle accounts for almost all of Italy's crystal glass production, thanks to the skills of its master craftsmen, who mould this precious material into forms of rare beauty. This vitality has attracted many contemporary artists and architects to the town, which boasts works by Jean Nouvel, Daniel Buren, Giovanni Michelucci, Sol LeWitt and many more.



Along the Via Francigena



Colle is right in the middle of Leg 32 of the Via Francigena, the well-known pilgrims' way followed by Sigeric, the 10th century Archbishop of Canterbury, which had become a major route for pilgrimage and trade through the years. In his diary he recorded two stopovers (*mansiones*) in the area of Colle: *San Martino in Fosse* (Molino di Aiano) and *Aelse* (Pieve a Elsa). The main route passes through the old town center, allowing pilgrims to appreciate all the town's main attractions and the SentierElsa river trail, until you reach *Le Caldane*, a thermal spring already used in the Etruscan-Roman period. An alternative route, especially suited for cyclists, immerses you in the local Valdelsa countryside, passing by the *Abbazia di Conèo*, an ancient abbey. Taken together, the two paths form Colle's "Francigena Circuit", a day trip around Colle's territory (22 Km).



Dometaia Archaeological park

The site of 56 tombs (underground chambers, simple or with cinerary urns) the Archaeological park is one of the most important Etruscan necropolis located on an ancient trade route between Valdelsa area and Volterra.



Water Springs

Le Vene and *Le Caldane* are natural springs already used during the Etruscan-roman period. Today they still flow into the Elsa river, at a point where it changes its name, from *Elsa Morta* ("dead" river) to *Elsa Viva* ("alive" section).



Santa Maria a Conèo

Nestled in the green countryside stands the Abbazia di Conèo, a Vallombrosan abbey dating back to 11th century. It was built in Pisan and Volterra Romanesque style, and adapted to baptismal church in 1714.

Legend

- Churches, Parishes and Abbeys
- River trail and springs
- Archaeological site
- Accommodation
- Sigeric's stopovers
- Old town centre
- Via Francigena Trail
- Via Francigena Leg 32
- Via Francigena Alternative route
- Via Francigena Detour in case of river floods
- Colle's "Francigena Circuit"
- "SentierElsa" Riverside Trail
- "The Etruscan Way" trail



COLLE BASSA

Piazza Arnolfo, the heart of the town

Piazza Arnolfo is the heart of life in the lower town, and the place where people like to meet and greet. It also has many shops and businesses. It was redesigned in 2009 by a group of international artists led by Jean Nouvel, becoming an important work of civic art, with numerous references to the local area: the pavement design by Daniel Buren; the "crystal shutter" that lights up in the evening on the clock building; and the accent on the theme of water, in the form of the fountain and the *gora* (canal). A few steps away there is the Crystal Museum, built on the site of the former Boschi glassworks, where evocative, hands-on exhibits reveal the history and secrets of the art of crystal glass. The display continues inside local glassworks, which can be visited on request.



COLLE ALTA

The Borough and the Castle

Colle Alta, consisting in the 'Borough' and the 'Castle', is built on a steep ridge set in a verdant valley. A popular destination for travellers and pilgrims since the Middle Ages, today it retains many of its original features, with ramparts, defensive walls, towers, churches and historic palazzi, offering panoramic views over the surrounding countryside. Among the attractions worth seeing are: Porta Nova, Palazzo Campana, Palazzo Pretorio, the Cathedral with its famous relics, the Sacro Chiodo (one of the nails of the crucifixion), Palazzo dei Priori, Teatro dei Vari, one of the world's smallest theatres with box seating, S. Maria in Canonica Church, the Arnolfo di Cambio tower house and the Baluardo with its panoramic views, where a glass-fronted lift, designed by Jean Nouvel, takes you down to the lower part of the town, Colle Bassa.



NATURE

Upper Valdelsa Riverside Trail

SentierElsa is a 4 Km-long path among lush vegetation, famous for its deep blue water and the fact it is located inside a spectacular canyon with breathtaking scenes, waterfalls and wooden bridges. It is accessible directly from the town centre and stands along the Via Francigena: a full immersion in nature, just a few steps away from the town. During summer you can go canoeing or rafting on the river here, or take part in one of the guided tours on offer. A walk along the nature trail allows you to admire the local wildlife, and also to understand the deep historical connection between the river and the town, especially thanks to the hydraulic engineering works such as *la steccaia*, *il collone reale* and *le gore*, which had played a crucial role in the town's economic success.

MUSEUMS

From the Etruscans to Contemporary art

Lose yourself in the ancient history that comes to life in the Archaeological Museum inside *Palazzo Pretorio*, and the Dometaia Archaeological Park, or else get a feel for life and art in the Middle Ages, with a visit to the Tower House of Arnolfo, and enjoy the wonderful views over the town below. In the San Pietro Museum, a former monastery, important works of religious and modern art illustrate the artistic production in Valdelsa from 6th to 20th centuries, from the renowned "Galognano Treasure" to the literary works in the Romano Bilenci Collection. The Crystal Museum, a must-see attraction, highlights the expertise of Colle's master craftsmen, while the ground-breaking UMoCA ("Under Museum of Contemporary Art"), displays contemporary artworks underneath the arches of San Francesco footbridge.



ARCHITECTURE

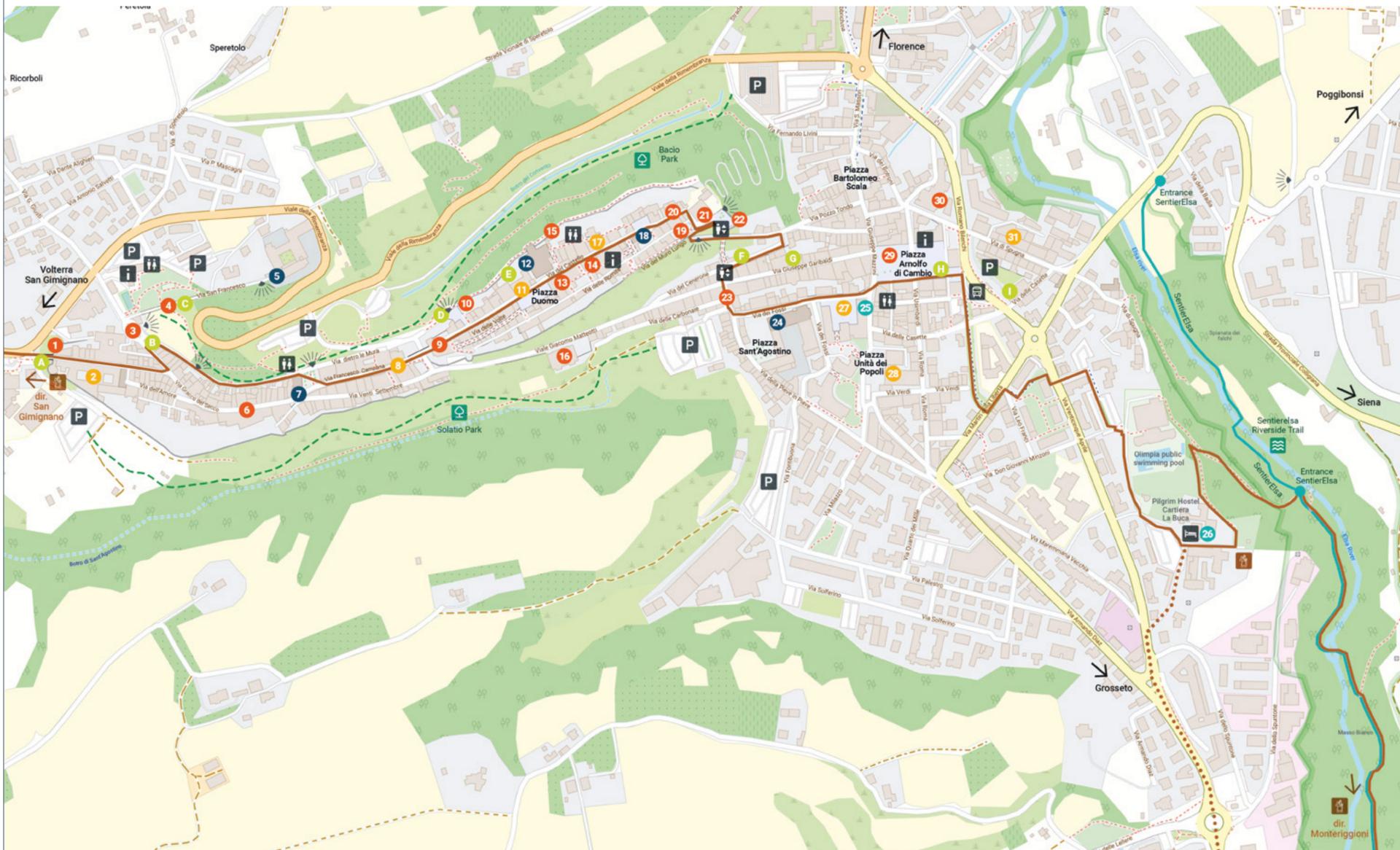
Ancient and modern styles, side-by-side

Arnolfo di Cambio's town has produced great works in every period of history. In the 15th century Giuliano da Sangallo built the impressive Porta Nova, the old town gate. Later, Giuliano di Baccio d'Agnolo built *Palazzo Campana*, now an important local landmark. The Giovanni Michelucci Bank, named after the great 20th century architect, embodies a vision of an "open city": its volumes, hanging from the iconic structure painted bright red, float above a covered public space, whilst the contrast between stone and steel symbolizes Colle's dual identity, historical and industrial. Sol Lewitt's sculpture "Concrete Blocks", in the Archaeological Museum's garden, represents the skyline of the towers once dominated *Colle Alta*, while the "Red Girl", by Kiki Smith, has dreams in the form of crystal glass bulbs.

CRYSTAL

Master glassmakers and the Museum

The year 1820 saw a new rise in glass production, which in Colle dated back to the Middle Ages. This reached a new peak in 1961, with the arrival of the formula for making lead-crystal glass, giving Colle the name of "City of Crystal". Indeed, crystal glass from Colle accounted for 95% of all Italy's output, and 14% of the global output. Today, the fascinating art of crystal glass, can still be seen at the local crystal-works and glass-cutter workshops that you can visit on request. They represent an extension of the Crystal Museum, which tells the magical history of local glassware production, from its origins to the great masters, including the work of important designers such as Sottsass, Enzo Mari, Joe Colombo and Cini Boeri. Meanwhile, up in the 'Castle', you can find *il fornino*, a working furnace for live demonstration of crystal-making.



Legend

- MONUMENTS AND TOURIST ATTRACTIONS
 - 1) PORTA NOVA (OLD CITY GATE)
 - 3) TORRIONE - PORTA VECCHIA (OLD CITY GATE)
 - 4) PONTE DI SAN FRANCESCO
 - 6) PALAZZO USIMBARDI
 - 9) PONTE E PALAZZO DEL CAMPANA
 - 10) BASTIONE DI SAPIA
 - 13) BISHOPS'S PALACE
 - 14) PALAZZO DEI PRIORI
 - 15) FORNINO - LAB FOR LIVE DEMONSTRATION OF CRYSTAL MAKING
 - 16) PALAZZONE
 - 19) ARNOLFO DI CAMBIO'S TOWER HOUSE
 - 20) TORRE DEI PASCI
 - 21) PALAZZO MASSON
 - 22) BALUARDO - PANORAMIC VIEW
 - 23) PORTA GUELFA (OLD CITY GATE)
 - 29) PIAZZA ARNOLFO
 - 30) GIOVANNI MICHELUCCI MPS BANK
- PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND MUSEUM
 - 2) SAN PIETRO MUSEUM
 - 8) PALAZZO RENIERI - TOWN HALL
 - 11) ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM - PALAZZO PRETORIO
 - 17) TEATRO DEI VARI
 - 27) CRYSTAL MUSEUM
 - 28) TEATRO DEL POPOLO
 - 31) MARCELLO BRACCAGNI PUBLIC LIBRARY
- RELIGIOUS BUILDING
 - 5) SAN FRANCESCO CHURCH
 - 7) SANTA CATERINA D'ALESSANDRIA CHURCH
 - 12) SANTI ALBERTO E MARZIALE CATHEDRAL
 - 18) SANTA MARIA IN CANONICA CHURCH
 - 24) SANT'AGOSTINO CHURCH
- INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY
 - 25) 'LO SPEDALE' PAPER MILL
 - 26) 'LA BUCA' PAPER MILL - PILGRIM HOSTEL
- CONTEMPORARY ART AND ARCHITECTURE
 - A) Tadashi Kawamata - Wooden gate, Porta Nova
 - B) Marisa Merz - Copper door, cisterna di Porta Nova
 - C) Cai Guo-Qiang - U.M.o.C.A., Ponte di San Francesco
 - D) Ilya Kabakov - The Weakening Voice, Bastione di Sapia
 - E) Sol Lewitt - Concrete Blocks, Archaeological Museum's garden
 - F) Kiki Smith - Red Girl, public lift
 - G) Alberto Garutti - Façade of Premiata Società Corale V. Bellini
 - H) Jean Nouvel e Daniel Buren - Pavement and fountain, Piazza Arnolfo
 - I) Jean Nouvel - Building, former goods yard, Via Bilenci

Info

- i Tourist information
- P Car parking
- ♿ Toilets
- ⬆️ Lift
- 🏠 Hostel
- 🌳 Parks
- 👁️ Panoramic view
- 👉 "SentierElsa" Riverside Trail
- 👉 Via Francigena - Leg 32
- ⋯ Via Francigena alternative route in case of river floods

Useful Numbers

Tourist Information

Pro Loco +39 0577 920389
Town Hall tourist office
+39 0577 912257

Public transport

Bus Info - Piazza Arnolfo di Cambio 8,
53034 Colle di Val d'Elsa
Telephone - 800 142 424
Bus Station Via Bilenci

Emergency

+39 112

Ambulance

+39 118

Traffic wardens

+39 0577 920831

Credits

A project by Colle di Val d'Elsa Town Hall. Designed by Ciclica Srl in collaboration with Terre di Siena Lab. Map data taken from Geoscope, Regione Toscana e Openstreetmap. Photographs by Tiziano Pieroni, Mario Llorca, Sofia Taiti, OKS Architetti and various authors.