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The most colourful village in Italy is hidden in the Tuscan hills

A mix of contemporary artworks, heritage, enchanting landscapes and culinary delights makes Ghizzano a joy to visit

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With a population of just 350, Ghizzano is a perfect Tuscan getaway Credit: Moment RF

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Rosaria Giorgi

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As I changed gear, the road began to climb and the turns became sharper. Rows of vines gave way to olive groves and lines of cypress trees escorting me along the path towards the edge of town. At the top of a ridge, a sea of hills awaited, their green waves rippling towards the horizon.

I had arrived at Ghizzano, a town in central [Tuscany](#) with just 350 residents. My home town. Nestled between the provinces of Pisa, Florence and Siena, Ghizzano's colourful houses, stunning gardens and Renaissance-like vistas are a hidden secret. Until a few years ago, tourists were a rare sight.

Today, Ghizzano has transformed from the sleepy village of my childhood into a vibrant destination where ancient artefacts, historic buildings and a rich heritage coexist with contemporary art installations. Search the location on Instagram and you'll find some 10,400 tags.



Ghizzano's curious transformation from sleepy hilltop town to contemporary art destination began after the British artist David Tremlett visited in 2018. Tremlett was invited, the local tourist board told me, as a guest by the municipality. A clever move, it turned out. Of the town's three main thoroughfares, it was Via di Mezzo (middle street) that captured Tremlett's attention. Slicing through the residential core, the street's slightly shabby homes – some vacant with crumbling walls – stood in stark contrast to the breathtaking scenery surrounding the town. Inspired, Tremlett embarked on a year-and-a-half-long regeneration project that saw the street reimaged a year later in an explosion of primary colours, its facades painted with the artist's signature acrylic monochrome blocks mirroring the shades of the surrounding countryside. As the natural landscape and the built environment merged, Via di Mezzo – and Ghizzano – went viral.

“We have a busker now! Is this [New York](#) or Ghizzano?” says Antonio, who has lived here all his life. The tourist office pointed me to an article published by the [Florence](#)-based newspaper *La Nazione*, which reported a 71 per cent rise in visitor numbers since before the pandemic.

Ghizzano's embrace of contemporary art didn't stop there. Polish-born Alicja Kwade unveiled her first Italian permanent work here. Made of *azul macaubas*, a Brazilian marble with ethereal blue hues, it manifests in two sculptures – a blue sphere graces the square before the parish church and its hollowed original block rests in a public garden adjacent to the red-bricked Santuario della Santissima Annunziata.



Polish artist Alicja Kwade's blue sphere holds court in front of the town's parish church Credit: Fondazione Peccioliiper

The sanctuary's origins can be traced to a local legend, the rescue of two wooden statues (Mary and the angel) depicting the Annunciation. When the oxcart that carried the two 14th-century figures halted unexpectedly at the edge of town, the community chose the spot to build a chapel, where they remain.

Three arresting artworks by Italian artist Patrick Tuttofuoco are scattered around the village. Inspired by a Renaissance fresco, the pink neon head of San Sebastian illuminates the village entrance, Archangel Michael's lance is perched high beside Via di Mezzo, and the hands of St John, a marble and iron marvel that lights up the night, emerges from a wall at the town's summit.

Iron also runs through the heart of Daniele Nencioni, a third-generation blacksmith, whose nearby workshop nudges an intriguing dialogue with Tuttofuoco's output. Daniele continues to craft everything by hand and the intricate curls, charming motifs and graceful leaves that adorn his creations are magically born from fire and the skilled strikes of his hammer.



The Tenuta di Ghizzano estate produces both wines and olive oils Credit: RF

The story of Ghizzano is intertwined with the history of the Venerosi Pesciolini family and their nearly 700-year-old estate. Renowned for producing award-winning wines and olive oils, [Tenuta di Ghizzano](#) has pioneered organic farming in the area and is one of only two in the province to achieve biodynamic certification. Tastings offer a delightful opportunity to savour the region's unique wines while exploring the historical cellars, a famed Italian garden and medieval tower inside the family villa.

The bustling Via Mercantino (small market street) recalls an era when this ridge road served as a vital commercial artery, offering a safer passage than the perilous marshes and plains of central Tuscany. Excavations on a remote hill along this route have uncovered a rare Roman cistern and the burial site of a young woman still wearing her engraved bronze belt, now found at the [Archaeological Museum of Peccioli](#). The site is open to the public on special summer nights. Book ahead: 0039 0587 936423.



Patrick Tuttofuoco's artwork features prominently throughout the town Credit: Andrea Testi

The best way to enjoy the lush countryside and bask in the Tuscan sun is to wander along the paths surrounding the town. These vary in difficulty and welcome cyclists and hikers. [Irene Strati](#) is a local naturalist and geographer who runs hiking trips and highly recommends exploring the magnificent Mediterranean scrub forests around Ghizzano, a fairytale landscape of oaks, poplars, firs and diverse wildlife including roe deer, foxes, squirrels, porcupines, wild boars and hares. You may stumble upon shells and other marine fossils – evidence that a vast sea once covered these lands.

The woodlands are also an ideal habitat for [truffles](#), which I discovered on a hunting trip with [Matteo Giuliani](#) and his dog Bianca, whose intense focus led us to a find, her tail wagging as she dug. The excitement peaked when I held the gnarled piece of edible gold, the soil seeped in its earthy scent. A humble lunch of *uova al tegamino* (fried eggs) was transformed by thin slices of the tuber, but the standout for me was dessert – delicious swirls of creamy gelato decorated with truffle shavings.

Since Ghizzano lacks a traditional restaurant, for the past 40 years, the task of feeding the hungry has fallen to Eligio Campani, publican extraordinaire of Bar Campani (0039 0587 630039). Connected to a grocery shop with a well-stocked deli counter, it's the place to get a cappuccino or an *aperitivo* and an overstuffed *panino*. Eat it al fresco, while admiring the panorama and the soundtrack of melodious songbirds.



Ghizzano is surrounded by stunning Tuscan scenery Credit: Moment RF

As a child in Ghizzano, my favourite playgrounds were cobweb-filled tunnels and half-abandoned granaries, chasing tales of mysterious rooms and secret passages. Inevitably, many of those stories have found their way into my mystery novel, *The Less Unkind*. Wandering through the village on my last visit, I was delighted to discover that this slice of authentic Tuscany remains unspoiled.

The contemporary twist introduced by modern artists has served to amplify the beauty of Ghizzano and ensured the town's legacy lives on. There was a renewed sense of community pride when I visited, an astonishing achievement for a place that, when I was little, was barely recognised even by residents of a city 20 kilometres away – it is like something out of fiction.

Rosaria Giorgi is the author of [The Less Unkind](#) (Troubadour, £19.99)

Getting there

BA, Ryanair and easyJet fly to Pisa from London and regional airports. For the 40-minute-drive to Ghizzano, a car is essential. Car rental services are available at Pisa airport.

Where to stay

B&B da Baba, a gem found at the heart of Via di Mezzo. Andrea and his mother Erica take immense pride in pampering guests. Freshly baked sweets and cakes are served daily at the communal breakfast table. Doubles from €84 (£70). Booking: 0039 349 319 9203 or dababa.tuscany@gmail.com.

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