

***Every Day in Tuscany* Readers' Guide**

Frances Mayes

About This Guide

Celebrating friendship and the pleasures of life in a beloved corner of Italy, *Every Day in Tuscany* is a book that is meant to be shared. Gather your friends for a special reading-group experience, feasting on the recipes as well as Frances Mayes's evocative reflections on the timeless beauty of Cortona. We hope that the following topics and questions will enhance your journey.

Introduction

In 1990, Frances Mayes made a daring decision to restore an abandoned thirteenth-century villa in the lush Tuscan countryside. Approaching the twentieth anniversary of that life-changing experience, she began to write a sequel to her previous bestselling memoirs, offering a deeply personal narrative of the changes she has experienced since *Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Bella Tuscany* first appeared. One incident, in particular, becomes a touchstone for memory, forgiving, and surprise. The result is a captivating tour of renewal among the townspeople of Cortona as the seasons unfold. From the treasures of the garden to the enduring triumphs of Renaissance painters, Mayes writes of a place where beauty thrives.

No longer a newcomer, she welcomes us back to her other homeland, where strangers become cherished friends, communities thrive by resisting the hectic pace of the modern world, and families honor their rich history. And always there is succulent cooking: a hearty seafood stew, a seasonal plum tart, and much more, in recipes captured in each chapter. You don't have to cross the Atlantic to relish the daily joys of Tuscany. Its enchanting hillside landscape and the vibrant people who inhabit it are brought vividly to life on the pages of *Every Day in Tuscany*, a book that beckons you to savor it again and again over the years—just as Frances Mayes has done in her twenty-year love affair with one of the world's most endearing locales.

Questions for Discussion

1. Frances Mayes explores the process of “taking” a decision (rather than making one) and being taken by decisions as well. Italy, she writes, took hold of her and shaped her in its image. How has she been transformed by her second home over the past two decades? What impact has she made on the community of Cortona? What decisions have “taken” you in your own life?
2. In the opening pages of *Every Day in Tuscany*, Frances Mayes describes an unsettling dream she's had in which she must choose between her house, Bramasole, and her right arm. How does she grapple with her sometimes conflicting feelings about Bramasole? What spurs her to occasionally consider living without it? What makes our relationships to our homes very different from relationships with other material possessions?

3. From cold spring rains to the lavish scent of lemon trees at their peak, Mayes describes a community that is constantly aware of nature. Discuss the seasonal aspects of life in Tuscany. Is your life in tune with the seasons? What can we gain by listening to the natural world?

4. Much has changed on the world stage since Mayes's early days in Cortona. How do her Italian friends perceive her American identity? What are some of the cultural challenges of her expatriate life?

5. Discuss the many kinds of love that are captured in *Every Day in Tuscany*: between Ed and Frances; among their friends and family members; of place; and of life itself, in all its everyday joys. What does it take to bring more love into a life?

6. Mayes describes the economic factors she encounters in decisions large and small, and in the lives of those throughout Cortona. How does she measure "costs" (financial and emotional) as she and Ed prepare for the next chapter of their lives? How is security measured and defined in a world that is not driven by materialism?

7. What were your reactions as Frances and Ed discussed major renovations for Bramasole? Would you have simply replaced the roof, or would you have said yes to the extensive changes? To what extent is the imperfect state of Bramasole part of its charm?

8. Hospitality is a key component to life in Cortona. Does your community emphasize hospitality to the same degree? Why do you suppose this is so? Why is it revitalizing for Tuscan families to host many friends?

9. *Every Day in Tuscany* unfolds as a series of beautiful images and powerful memories. How did Mayes's voice as a poet shape the format of this book? How does it mirror the way life unfolds?

10. Mayes describes the threats she received after signing a petition against a proposed swimming pool near her property. What does this incident tell us about the encroaching modern world and Cortona's attempts to remain unspoiled? Compared to Americans, how do Italians handle resistance? What are the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches?

11. Mayes's memoir includes several recollections of threats and sorrows she and Ed have experienced in the United States and abroad. What does she offer as the best antidote to fear and tragedy? How have she and Ed created "safety" in their lives?

12. Discuss the children who visit Bramasole. What is Mayes's legacy to them? What aspects of life in Tuscany do you predict will remain unchanged for many generations to come?

13. As you read about Lucas Signorelli's works, what timeless aspects of his culture came to mind? Would he feel at home in Frances Mayes's Tuscany, just as she feels at home immersed in his art?

14. What universal truths did Mayes learn from Willie Bell? What aspects of a southern childhood does Mayes carry with her, no matter where she lives? What aspects of your childhood are forever part of your own identity?

15. Renewal and moving forward are primary quests in this book. What tactics and solitary pursuits described here might you adopt?

16. In addition to *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Frances Mayes's previous nonfiction includes *Bella Tuscany* and *A Year in the World*, as well as the illustrated books *Bringing Tuscany Home* and *In Tuscany*. Discuss the ones you have read. What are the constants in her life? At the same time, how do her books inspire us to constantly reinvent ourselves?

About the Author

In addition to her Tuscany memoirs, *Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Bella Tuscany*, Frances Mayes is the author of the travel memoir *A Year in the World*; the illustrated books *In Tuscany* and *Bringing Tuscany Home*; *Swan*, a novel; *The Discovery of Poetry*, a text for readers; and five books of poetry. She divides her time between homes in Italy and North Carolina.