



Church of Santa Maria a Chianni

Maybe it's because of the sandstone, which gives it an ochre light, that the parish church of Santa Maria a Chianni seems like it's always being kissed by the sun.

Maybe it's because of the pines that hide it like a curtain, the sombre Romanesque rhythm of its façade, the cleanliness of its plain blind arches, or the road that passes below and forces you to gaze up at it. Or maybe it's for all these reasons combined that the church, **a symbol of Gambassi**, emerges as a solid monad on the stage of this corner of Tuscany.

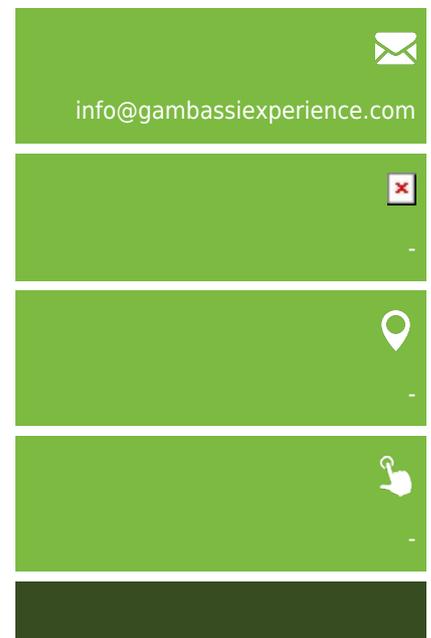
Along the **Via Francigena**

It's a hushed sight. The church holds a controlled elegance, typical of the Pisan Romanesque style that is reinterpreted here with the modesty of the means of a country church. It was first mentioned at the end of the 10th Century, when **Sigeric**, the most renowned chronicler of the **Via Francigena**, reported on its existence in his travel diary: **Sancte Maria Glan, XX submansio**.

The church as we know it today must be a later version, built along with the foundation of the Castle of Gambassi around 1200. It may not have been finished in 1224, since the inhabitants of Gambassi were called upon to pay a tax that would fund its completion.

The Romanesque sobriety and a pinch of decorative creativity

Workers from Volterra were almost certainly employed. The feudal citizenship



that linked Gambassi to the city of alabaster explains why and we even know the name of one, Johannes Bundivulus, who probably engraved his name himself on one of the capitals inside the church.

And our gaze falls straight onto these **capitals**. In the church's dim light, the austerity of the lines, the monotony of the sandstone and the simplicity of the space with three naves are interrupted by the variety of decorative, geometric and iconographic motifs at the base of the Roman arches. The more careful observer will also notice that, although the capitals give way to the arches at the same height, between the right and left rows, the columns that support them are not symmetrical. The ones on the left rest on a rather high plinth, while those on the right do not.

Nevertheless, the church stands out for its typical **Romanesque sobriety**, including its very narrow windows that allow little light through. When you enter on a bright summer day, you have the sensation of finding yourself in the dark, as your eyes need time to adjust while the atmosphere calls for quiet reflection.