

## Useful hints

### How to get there

**By car:** Firenze-Mare (Florence-Sea) motorway, Lucca exit.

**By train:** Viareggio-Firenze (Florence) state railway line, Lucca station.

**When to get there** – all seasons

### Cartography

Town maps to be obtained from the Municipality tourist information centres  
IGM Map 1:50.000 Sheet 261 – Lucca



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**TREKKING**  
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**LUCCA TREKKING**  
Strolling among churches, towers and old shops in one  
of Italy's most charming historical centres.



Lucca's link with trekking goes back a long way: in fact, the Tuscan centre was one of the main halting places along the route of the Francigena Way, the destination of pilgrims who stopped in the town to pay homage to the "Volto Santo" (the Holy Face), the legendary wooden crucifix that is still kept in Saint Martin's Cathedral.

Since those days, nothing very much has changed in the structure of the old town, which has survived the centuries more or less intact, thanks to the defences of an impressive city wall. Today, as then, only those who explore the alleyways and squares of the historical centre can understand its fascination and learn something about its history.

### The fascination of history in a town with ancient roots.

The attentive and patient visitor can easily pick out on the map the Cardo and Decumano, the two main roads that cross the old Roman city from north to south and east to west, intercepting perpendicularly near the Forum that today is known as Piazza San Michele.

The city wall of that time was completely dismantled so that its stones could be used as building material, while the amphitheatre, dating back to the II century A.D., was used as the supporting structure for the construction of houses during the middle ages . a stratification that was to give one of the most original squares in Italy: an ellipse sur-



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rounded by houses on the back of which some of the 54 arches that supported the ancient building can still be seen.

The harmony between different periods and styles and the stratification of the buildings is a constant in the city centre, as can be seen, for example, in the two gates of the Borghi (at the beginning of via Fillungo) and the SS. Gervasio and Protasio. They belong to the second circle of calls, built between the XII and XIII century, which instead of being destroyed, were incorporated in the surrounding buildings.

The excellent preservation of the city centre is surprising if you consider the numerous conflicts fought by the citizens of Luca, especially during the middle ages, when the Guelph Lucca was clashing with the Ghibelline Pisa. The struggle reached its peak in 1314, when 11,000 soldiers penetrated the walls, abandoning themselves to massacres, rape and looting.

This was the beginning of the flight of some of Lucca's best brains for the cities of Bologna, Florence and in particular Venice, where they were welcomed with open arms, especially because they exported the extraordinary skills learned in processing silk and wool, sectors in which Lucca was on the cutting-edge.

Time, however, healed the wound and "the instinct of preservation", the intelligence and far-sightedness of the people of Lucca and their governors reached a climax with the decision to keep intact the third city wall, built between the XVI and the XVII century.

### **Amazing routes within the perimeter of the ancient walls**

During the nineteenth century, when many cities were pulling down their bastions to make room for new districts, Maria Luisa di Borbone decided to listen to the advice of the brilliant architect Lorenzo Nottolini, and transformed the walls of Lucca into a splendid avenue lined with trees, also keeping intact a wide green belt outside the walls.

This decision was crucial for conserving the structure of the historical centre and it is thanks to this that the visitor today is able to enjoy the soft atmosphere of former times within the walls.

The walk around the walls today is the focal point of trekking in Lucca: a ring that can only be explored using "gentle" means of transport, along which the wonders of the centre can be

see how much greenery there is inside the courtyards of the town centre and on the ramparts of the walls that become real public gardens. Passing through porta Elisa and the Baluardo della Libertà we can see the Botanical Garden from above.

At the rampart of San Regolo, we start descending alongside the canals, until we reach the gate of SS. Gervasio and Protasio; at the gate, the garden of villa Bottini is well-worth a visit. After going through the gate, we take via Santa Croce and walk alongside the church of Maria Foris Portam (thus called because it is outside the ancient Roman walls). At the end of piazza Bernardini we turn left into via del Gallo, and at the end, left into via del Battistero.

Then we take via San Donnino, entering the pretty piazza San Martino, dominated by the cathedral that contains both the Holy Face and the tomb of Illaria del Carretto, the prematurely deceased wife of Paolo Guinigi.

Leaving the Square by via del Molinetto, we turn left into corso Garibaldi and climb back onto the walls, walking towards the right. Just a few hundred metres after passing porta San Pietro, we arrive at Piazza Verdi, our starting point.



shoulders with ancient shops and historical cafés, after a few dozen metres we turn right into piazza dei Mercanti, and then into via Sant'Andrea. After a short distance, if we look up, we can see the holm-oaks that shade the top of the Guinigi tower, another splendid point from which to view the city.

Once passed the town we turn left into via Guinigi, and at the end into via Mordini and then immediately right into via Canuleia. At this point we can see at the end of the road the ancient stones of the Roman amphitheatre that we can still recognise in the facades of the buildings that have incorporated it. We walk around the external perimeter of the amphitheatre and enter the square through a characteristic gate. After admiring the square, which is one of the most interesting and original in Italy, we go out through the first gate on the right (towards a tavern) and turn into via Fil-lungo. We walk along it towards the left and after a few metres piazza San Frediano opens up before us, with the church of the same name, one of the finest in the city.

We walk around the church and across piazza del Collegio, where there is an opening in the walls, reserved for pedestrians and cyclists.

We walk through it to reach the ring roads that we follow as far as porta Santa Maria. We cross the road and take a subway that brings us out onto via Borgo Giannotti that we walk along until we reach the bridge of Monte San Quirico.

We walk towards Sant'Alessio, climbing up the road that leads to the church of Monte San Quirico, from where we can admire a fine view of the city. We retrace our steps and after crossing the river, turn right at Terrazza Petroni, into via della Scogliera that follows the Serchio and brings us into the river-side Park.

Passing the riding stables, on the left we see a gate leading to a dirt track that we follow for a few hundred metres.

We climb up a slope over the bank and reach an enormous parking area. After a subway we turn right, through another parking area, and at the next stop sign we go straight on towards piazza della Croce, at the centre of the characteristic Borgo Giannotti.

When we reach the end of the road we take the cyclist-pedestrian subway and enter the city through porta Santa Maria. We then climb to the left onto the walls up the first available ramp. During this section of the route we can

admired from on high - a belvedere along about four kilometres, from which some of the characteristics of the urban structure of Lucca can be appreciated.

For example, the numerous churches, more than a hundred within the walls alone, that are proof of the Guelf nature of Lucca.

Or the many towers that were not only a symbol of power and wealth but often became proper homes, *ante litteram* skyscrapers that made up in height for the little space available within the city walls. Today, two of these buildings, the Hours tower (torre delle Ore) and the Guinigi Tower, the latter with centuries-old holm-oaks growing on its top, offer a splendid view of the city.

Observing the city from the top of the towers or walls, one of the most striking features for visitors is the amount of greenery in the historical city. For example, the eighteenth century gardens of the palazzo Pfanner and the botanical



gardens, established in 1829 for the Royal University of Lucca, home to rare plants and ancient trees, stand out; or, the parks of Viale Bottini or Villa Guinigi, headquarters of the National Museum.

But the most charming gardens, perhaps because they are secret, are the many to be found inside the courtyards of the buildings, contributing significantly to the charm of Lucca's centre.

A city that you must take your time to get to know, accompanied only by the noise of your own footsteps, peeping into the semi-closed doorways, nosing beyond their gates and going into the old shops.

A city whose pace you must adopt, dedicating to it all the care and attention worthy of a grand lady who allows herself to be discovered bit by bit and shows her beauties only to those who have the patience to win her over slowly.



**Departure and arrival:** Lucca . **Tourist information centre in Piazza Verdi**

**Level of difficulty:** T

**Difference in level:** 50 metres

**Time:** About 3 hours, without taking into consideration the inevitable visits to museums, churches and monument.

**Dirt path:** 30%



From the tourist information centre in Piazza Verdi take via San Paolino, along which we meet the first church with the same name and then, in piazza Cittadella, the monument to Giacomo Puccini. Not everyone knows that the composer was born in the very centre of Lucca, even though he lived for a long time in Torre del Lago, on lake Massaciuccoli, between Lucca and the sea.

Then, we reach the splendid Piazza San Michele, city centre dating back to Roman times, in which we can admire the original facade of the cathedral, much higher than the main structure of the building. Turning right, we walk towards the neighbouring Piazza Napoleone, dominated by the facade of Palazzo Ducale, today the headquarters of the Province. Turning left and left again into via Beccheria, we walk again alongside the back of the cathedral and turn right into Chiasso Beccheria. At the end of the road, where it crosses via Fillungo, we find, on the left, the Torre delle Ore, from which we can admire one of the finest views of the city centre.

Walking along via Fillungo, the main shopping street in Lucca, where boutiques selling designer clothes rub