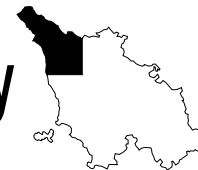


Northwestern Tuscany



There's mountains more on offer here than just Italy's iconic Leaning Tower. Usually hurtled through at breakneck speed en route to Florence and Siena's grand-slam queue-for-hours sights, this northwesterly chunk of Tuscany is a place to take your foot off the accelerator and go slow – on foot or by bike.

Take 'love at first sight' Lucca, a true lady of a city ageing gloriously. Ensnared by 16th-century walls made for a lazy *passaggiata* (evening stroll), butter-coloured buildings languish in a labyrinth of narrow streets, Romanesque palaces and gracious piazzas, all within a catwalk strut or wheel spin of stylish shops, cafés and boutique hotels. On the city's eastern fringe a twinset of elegant old villas stand tall, testimony to the ring of several hundred-odd villas that crowned Lucca from the 16th to 19th centuries.

Then there are those mountains – peeping down on the sea and made of marble in the case of the foothills hugging Carrara, an old town where sculptors, *David's* creator included, have flocked for aeons in search of the perfect block of *marmo bianco*. Touring a marble quarry and tasting *lardo di Colonnata* are northwestern Tuscan essentials, as is a dive deeper into the Apuane Alps. Protected as a nature park, there is little to do in this playground of soaring peaks, pine valleys, subterranean caves and chestnut groves than hike, bike and feast on the fruits of the forest over long lazy farmhouse lunches. Oh, and go slow.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Climb to the top of **Pisa's Leaning Tower** (p185) at night and take in great big gulps of Piazza dei Miracoli's natural beauty, free of crowds and vendors
- Pedal round **Lucca** (p191) to understand why Lucchese say their town was built from pure beauty
- Have a ball at Viareggio's springtime Rio-style **Carnevale** (p202)
- Delve inside **Marble Mountain**, near Carrara and taste the world's most famous marble in Colonnata, an Apuane Alp village where *lardo* lounges for months in vats of spiced oil (p207).
- Sit beneath stars and watch *Madame Butterfly*, *Tosca* or another Puccini opera at Torre del Lago's soul-stirring **Festival Puccini** (p203)
- Marvel at crystal-encrusted lakes, alabaster drapes, stalactites and stalagmites in the Garfagnana's chilly **Grotto del Vento** (p210)
- Feast on fruits of the forest in one of Tuscany's wildest, least-touched pockets, **Lunigiana** (p211)



PISA

pop 87,700

Briefly a maritime power to rival Genoa and Venice, Pisa draws its fame from an architectural project gone terribly wrong. But the Leaning Tower is just one of a trio of Romanesque splendours on the green carpet of Piazza dei Miracoli. This unforgettable square is bequeathed with one of Europe's earliest hidden collections of Oriental art, amassed by feisty Pisans that flitted from piazza to bazaar to piazza in the 11th and 12th centuries.

Pisa is an old university town and swarms with students, yet for many an off-the-coach, snap, back-on-the-coach visitor, its charms are far from apparent. On the main square, the crowds and pesky pedlars flogging knock-

off bags can be mind-numbing. Throw in a four- or five-hour wait to scale the tower and you could well leave not scaling the tower and wondering what all the fuss is about. To avoid disappointment book your tower slot well in advance.

History

Possibly of Greek origin, Pisa became an important naval base under Rome and remained a significant port for centuries. The city's golden days began late in the 10th century, when it became an independent maritime republic and a rival of Genoa and Venice. A century on, the Pisan fleet was sailing far beyond the Mediterranean, successfully trading with the Orient and bringing home new ideas

in art, architecture and science. At the peak of its glory days, which continued well into the 13th century, Pisa controlled Corsica, Sardinia and the Tuscan coast. Most of the city's finest buildings date from this period, when the distinctive Pisan-Romanesque architectural style, with its overtly Arab influence, flourished.

Pisa's support for the Ghibellines during the tussles between the Holy Roman Emperor and the pope brought the city into conflict with its mostly Guelph Tuscan neighbours, including Siena, Lucca and Florence. The real blow came when Genoa's fleet inflicted a devastating defeat on Pisa at the Battle of Meloria in 1284. After the city fell to Florence in 1406, the Medici court encouraged great artistic, literary and scientific endeavours and re-established Pisa's university. The city's most famous son, Galileo Galilei (see p35) taught at the university.

The medieval city changed under the grand dukes of Tuscany who began a process of demolition to make way for wider boulevards to ease traffic problems. During WWII about 50% of old Pisa was destroyed.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet Planet (☎ 050 83 07 02; Piazza Cavallotti 3-4; per hr €3.50; 𠄎 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun)

Internet Surf (☎ 050 83 08 00; Via Carducci 5; per hr €2; 𠄎 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 3pm-midnight Sun) If all the machines are taken, cross the road to the internet outlet opposite.

LAUNDRY

Onda Blu (☎ 800 861 346; Via San Francesco 8a; 𠄎 8am-10pm)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Train station (Piazza della Stazione; per 12/24/48hr €3/6/9; 𠄎 6am-9pm) *Deposito bagagli* signposted off platform 1.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Farmacia Nuova Fantoni (Lungarno Mediceo 51; 𠄎 24hr)
Hospital (☎ 050 99 21 11; Via Roma 67)

POST

Post office (Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office Airport (☎ 050 50 37 00; 𠄎 10.30am-4.30pm & 6-10pm); Duomo (☎ 050 56 04 64; www.pisa.turismo.toscana.it; Piazza dei Miracoli; 𠄎 9am-6pm Mar-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct-Feb); Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II 16 (☎ 050 4 22 91; 𠄎 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1.30pm Sat) The Duomo branch is the main tourist office, situated near the Leaning Tower, inside Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.

Sights

No Tuscan sight is more immortalised in kitsch souvenirs than the iconic tower piercing Piazza dei Miracoli, also called Campo dei Miracoli (Field of Miracles) and Piazza del Duomo. One of the world's loveliest and busiest squares, with its sprawling green lawns and crowds propping up the tower for the camera, this piazza showcases one of Europe's most extraordinary concentrations of Romanesque splendour – the cathedral, baptistry and tower. Predictably, the square is protected as a Unesco World Heritage Site. Less obvious is the fact that all three monuments do, in fact, lean.

South of Piazza dei Miracoli, tourist swarms give way to the real Pisa: quiet back alleys and



TOP FIVE COURSES

- Shop for antiques with an expert, learn the difference between Empire and Direttorio and discover the best dealers with **Ars Antiquaria** (www.arsantiquaria.it) at Villa Franca, 5km from Lucca.
- Often with a spring or autumnal horticultural theme, the gardening courses at Costa d'Orsola (p211) are a true 'back to nature' experience.
- Sculpt the world's most famous marble at sculpture studio **Arco Arte** (☎ 0585 77 70 00; www.sculturar carrara.com; Via Carriona di Colonnata 10) in Carrara; there are two-week courses for all levels.
- Learn the ancient art of handweaving at **Castel du Gargagnana's Scuola Tessile** (☎ 339 190 47 50; www.scuolatessilegargagnana.it; Via Vannugli 61) in the Garfagnana.
- Tuscan garden design is what the half-day gardening courses run by passionate landscape designer **Simone** at **Villa Lucca** (www.frangleeson.com), 5km from Lucca, are all about.

PISA

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Baptistry.....	8	A2
Camposanto.....	9	A2
Cathedral.....	10	B2
Chiesa di San Nicola.....	11	B3
Chiesa di Santa Caterina.....	12	C3
Chiesa di Santa Maria della Spina.....	13	B4
Chiesa di Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri.....	14	C3
Ecovoyager.....	15	B3
Il Navicello.....	16	D5
Leaning Tower.....	17	B2
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.....	18	B2
Museo delle Sinopie.....	19	A3
Museo Nazionale di San Matteo.....	20	D5
Palazzo dei Cavalieri.....	21	C3
Palazzo dell'Orologio.....	22	B3
Ticket Office.....	23	B2
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SLEEPING

Hotel Astor.....	25	B5
Hotel Francesco.....	26	B3
Hotel Il Giardino.....	27	A2
Hotel Relais dell'Orologio.....	28	B3
Hotel Villa Kinzica.....	29	B3
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EATING

Antica Trattoria il Campano.....	31	C4
Caffè Federico Salza.....	32	C4
Food Market.....	33	C4
La Bottega del Gelato.....	34	C4
La Clessidra.....	35	C3
La Grotta.....	36	C4
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Pannetteria Focacceria.....	38	B3
Trattoria della Faggiola.....	39	B3
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DRINKING

Bazeel.....	41	C4
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Club Dr Jazz.....	46	D6
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Internet Planet.....	3	B3
Internet Surf.....	4	C3
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Tourist Office.....	7	B6

6

shopping streets where Pisans go about their daily business; a 14th-century university (1343) attended by 51,000 students; and colourful San Martino, the old Arab and Turkish merchant quarter of medieval Pisa on the Arno's south bank where contemporary design studios do business alongside Russian delicatessens, retro music shops and some of the city's best clubs and bars.

LEANING TOWER

No matter how many postcards you've seen, nothing prepares you for the real thing. The **Torre Pendente** (Torre Campanaria; ¼ ticket reservations 050 387 22 10; www.opapisa.it/boxoffice; admission €15, with advance reservation €17; 11 8.30am-8.30pm Apr-mid-Jun & last 2 weeks Sep, 8.30am-11pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-7pm Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar) is gravity defying; see the boxed text, p186.

Admission to the tower is limited to 40 people at a time and is by guided tour (in Italian or English). If you don't want to wait for hours, book in advance (online or by telephone); otherwise run to a ticket office on Piazza dei Miracoli when you arrive to book your slot for later that day.

Visits – a breathless climb up 300 occasionally slippery steps – last 30 minutes; late-evening visits in summer proffer enchanting views of Pisa by night. All bags, including handbags, must be deposited at the free left-luggage desk next to the ticket office and children aged under eight are not allowed in.

CATHEDRAL

Pisa's **duomo** (Piazza dei Miracoli; admission Mar-Oct incl audioguide €2, free Nov-Feb; 11 10am-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Oct, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb, 10am-6pm or 7pm Mon-Sat Mar, from 1pm Sun year-round) was paid for with spoils brought home after Pisans attacked an Arab fleet entering Palermo in 1063. Begun a year later, the cathedral, with its striking cladding of alternating bands of green and cream marble, became the blueprint floor for Romanesque churches throughout Tuscany. The elliptical dome, the first of its kind in Europe at the time, was added in 1380.

The cathedral's proportions are breathtaking. Its main façade – not completed until the 13th century – has four exquisite tiers of columns diminishing skywards, while the vast interior, 96m long and 28m high, is propped up by 68 hefty granite columns in classical style. Sheer size aside, the early-14th-century

PIAZZA DEI MIRACOLI COMBINED TICKETS

Tickets to the Leaning Tower and cathedral are sold individually, but for the rest of the Piazza dei Miracoli sights cost-cutting combined tickets are available. A ticket covering one/two/three sights costs €5/6/8 and you can take your pick from the baptistry, Camposanto, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and – for two or three sights – the cathedral. Tower aside (no under eights), children aged under 10 are free.

Tickets are sold at three **ticket offices** (www.opapisa.it) on the main square: the central ticket office behind the Leaning Tower is the busiest; those inside the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and entrance hall of the otherwise-closed Museo delle Sinopie rarely have painfully long queues.

octagonal pulpit sculpted by Giovanni Pisano (father Nicola sculpted the pulpit in the baptistry – compare the two) from Carrara marble in the north aisle is extraordinary. His depth of detail brings a new pictorial expressionism to Gothic sculpture. A fusion of Christian (nine panelled scenes from the New Testament, including the life of John the Baptist and the betrayal, mocking and flagellation of Christ) and classical (personifications of Prudence, Fortitude and a naked Hercules which can be directly compared with Nicola's pulpit Hercules in the baptistry), it is no wonder it took Pisano 10 years to complete.

Staring down from the altar is the striking mosaic of *Christ in Majesty*. Completed by Cimabue in 1302, it is one of the few interior decorations to survive the raging fire that swept through the cathedral in 1596.

Visitors enter the cathedral through the Portale di San Ranieri – late 12th-century bronze doors of the south transept (facing the Leaning Tower) depicting the life of Christ in 20 panels and named after Pisa's patron saint Rainerius whose mummified body is inside. Palm trees, Moorish buildings and other Arab sculpted elements on the doors demonstrate just how influential the Islamic world was on Pisa at this time; the magnificent 11th-century bronze griffin that stood as a victory trophy atop the cathedral (see it in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo) until 1828 was booty, probably Egyptian in origin.

But it is the three pairs of firmly closed, 16th-century bronze doors of the main entrance (west), designed by the school of Ghibellino to replace the wooden originals destroyed (along with most of the cathedral interior) by fire in 1596, which the crowds ogle over. Quite spellbinding, hours can be spent deciphering the biblical scenes illustrating the immaculate conception of the Virgin and birth of Christ (central doors), the road to Calvary and crucifixion of Christ etc (right) and the Ministry of Christ (left). Kids can play spot the rhino.

BAPTISTRY

The unusual round **battistero** (Piazza dei Miracoli; admission incl audioguide €5; 1 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) has one dome piled on top of another, each roofed half

in lead, half in tiles, and is topped by a gilt bronze John the Baptist (1395). It was started in 1153 by Diotisalvi, notably remodelled and continued by Nicola Pisano and son Giovanni more than a century later and finally completed in the 14th century – hence its hybrid architectural style. The lower level of arcades is Pisan-Romanesque, while the pinnacled upper section and dome are Gothic.

Inside, the beautiful hexagonal pulpit (compare it with Giovanni's notably more ornate one in the cathedral) carved by Nicola Pisano in 1260 is the undisputable highlight. Inspired by Roman art, Pisano used sarcophagi from Pisa's Camposanto as models for his powerfully nude Hercules – Christian fortification personified inspiration – and other strong allegorical figures. Five panels on the pulpit illustrate Christ's life.

BRACE, BRACE, BRACE

When architect Bonanno Pisano undertook construction work on the bell tower in 1173, he was on shaky ground. Barely 2m above sea level, what lay below the deep green lawns of the Campo dei Miracoli – a treacherous sand-and-clay mix atop a series of alternate strata of clay and sand to a depth of more than 40m – was hardly ideal for one of Italy's most monumental icons.

Pisano had barely begun to build when the earth below started to give. By the time construction ground to a halt five years later, with only three storeys completed, Pisano's stump of a tower had a noticeable lean.

In 1272 a new band of artisans and masons set to work on it again, attempting to bolster the foundations but failing miserably. Yet their solution was to simply keep going, compensating for the lean by gradually building straight up from the lower storeys, creating a subtle banana curve. The bell chamber at the top was built in 1370. At some point the process came to a halt and until the 18th century the lean remained stable.

Over the following centuries, the banana solution proved no solution, as the tower leaned a further 1mm each year. By 1993 it was 4.47m out of plumb, more than five degrees from the vertical.

In addition to the problems on the ground floor, the structure – a hollow cylinder, cased on the inside and out with layers of marble – was dodgy. Between its layers was a loosely packed mix of rubble and mortar. Some observers fear that one day the stresses caused by the lean will make the casing crack and crumble.

Finally, in 1990 the tower was closed to the public. Two years later the Italian government in Rome assembled a panel of experts to debate a solution. In 1993 engineers placed 1000 tonnes of lead ingots on the northern side in a bid to counteract the subsidence on the southern side. Steel bands were wrapped around the 2nd storey to keep it all together. For a while it seemed to have worked, until in 1995 it slipped a whole 2.5mm.

In 1999 a new solution was tried that consisted of slinging steel braces around the 3rd storey of the tower. These were attached to heavy hydraulic A-frame anchors some way from the northern side. The frames were later replaced by steel cables that were attached to neighbouring buildings. The tower thus held in place, engineers began gingerly removing soil from below the northern foundations. After some 70 tonnes of earth had been extracted from the northern side, the tower sank to its 18th-century level and, in the process, rectified the lean by 43.8cm. This process was quite a success according to the experts as it guarantees the tower's future (and a fat tourist income) for the next three centuries.

TOP FIVE FACTS YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT THE TOWER

- In 1160 Pisa boasted 10,000-odd towers – but no bell tower for its cathedral. Loyal Pisan Berta di Bernardo righted this in 1172 when she died, leaving a legacy of 60 *soldi* (money) in her will to the city to get cracking on a *campanile* (bell tower).
- The Leaning Tower – a whimsical folly of its inventors – was built to lean: hotly debated in the early 19th century, this theory was blown to shreds in 1838 when a clean-up job to remove muck oozing from its base revealed the true nature of its precarious foundations.
- It is not the only tower in Pisa to lean: the octagonal bell tower of Chiesa di San Nicola (Via Santa Maria) by Nicola Pisano and that of Chiesa di San Michele degli Scalzi (Via San Michele degli Scalzi), a wonky red-brick square tower north of the centre, both lean too – as does the baptistry to a noticeably less visible degree.
- Moscow will help restore the city of Pisa, shipping in construction workers by train from Odessa, Tashkent and Dushanbe to build skyscrapers around the cathedral and a vast car park beneath the Leaning Tower to resolve traffic congestion around one of Italy's most visited sights – the April Fools story run by *The Moscow Times* on 1 April 2004.
- Seven bells, each sounding a different musical note and rung from the ground by 14 men, were added to the completed tower in 1370 but silenced in the 1950s for fear of a catastrophic collapse.

Pisan scientist Galileo Galilei (who, so the story goes, came up with the laws of the pendulum by watching a lamp swing in Pisa's cathedral), was baptised in the octagonal font.

Don't leave the baptistry without (a) admiring the Islamic floor, (b) climbing up to the gallery for a stunning overview and (c) risking a whisper and listening to it resound. Alternatively, the custodian demonstrates the double dome's remarkable acoustics and echo effects every half-hour.

CAMPOSANTO

Soil shipped from Calvary during the Crusades – and reputed to reduce cadavers to skeletons within days – is said to lie within the white walls of this hauntingly beautiful cemetery (Piazza dei Miracoli; admission incl audioguide €5; 1 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb), a beautiful final resting place for many prominent Pisans, arranged around a garden in a cloistered quadrangle. Many of the more interesting sarcophagi are of Greco-Roman origin, recycled in the Middle Ages.

During WWII, Allied artillery destroyed many of the cloisters' precious frescoes. Among the few to survive was the *Triumph of Death* – a remarkable illustration of Hell – attributed to an anonymous 14th-century painter known as 'The Master of the Triumph of Death'. Fortunately, the mirrors apparently once stuck next to the graphic, no-holds-

barred images of the damned being roasted alive on spits have since been removed – meaning a marginally less uncomfortable visit for visitors who would have once seen their own faces peering out of the cruel wall painting.

MUSEO DELL'OPERA DEL DUOMO

No museum provides a better overview of Piazza dei Miracoli's trio of architectural masterpieces than the **Museum of the Cathedral** (Piazza dei Miracoli; admission €5; 1 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb). Home to cathedral canons between the 12th and 17th centuries, it has a profusion of works of art once displayed in the tower, cathedral and baptistry. Highlights include Giovanni Pisano's ivory carving of the *Madonna and Child* (1300) carved for the cathedral's high altar and his *Madonna del Colloquio* (Madonna of the Colloquium). Legendary booty includes various pieces of Islamic art including the griffin that once topped the cathedral and a 10th-century Moorish hippogriff.

PIAZZA DEI CAVALIERI

From Piazza dei Miracoli, head south along Via Santa Maria and turn left at Piazza Cavallotti for Piazza dei Cavalieri, the city's centre of temporal power remodelled by Giorgio Vasari in the 16th century. **Palazzo dell'Orologio**, north of the piazza, occupies the site of a tower

where, in 1288, Count Ugolino della Gherardesca, his sons and grandsons were starved to death on suspicion of helping the Genoese enemy at the Battle of Meloria, an incident recorded in Dante's *Inferno*.

Palazzo dei Cavalieri, on the northeastern side of the piazza, was redesigned by Vasari and features remarkable sgraffito (see the boxed text, p44) decoration. Both palace and piazza are named after the Knights of St Stephen, a religious and military order founded by Cosimo I de' Medici. Vasari designed their church, **Chiesa di Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri** (☎ 050 58 08 14; Piazza dei Cavalieri 8; admission €1.30; 11am-6pm Apr-Sep, 11am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-5.30pm Sun Oct-Mar).

A block east, **Chiesa di Santa Caterina** (Piazza Martiri della Libertà; 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-6.30pm Sun), a fine example of Pisan-Gothic architecture, has works by Nino Pisano.

MUSEO NAZIONALE DI SAN MATTEO

Wander southwards to the area around Borgo Stretto, the city's medieval heart. East along the waterfront boulevard, Lungarno Mediceo, is the **Museo Nazionale di San Matteo** (☎ 050 54 18 65; Lungarno Mediceo; adult/concession €5/2; 11am-7.30pm Tue-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun), a fine gallery that journeys from the ceramics adorning the façades of medieval churches to 12th- and 13th-century Pisan painting (including on crosses) and early Renaissance sculpture. Don't miss the exquisite sculptures in wood by Valdambrino and Giovanni; paintings by Buonamico Buffalmacco who decorated Comasanto with frescoes; and Giovanni and Nicola Pisano's *Madonna del Latte* (Our Lady of Milk) sculpted for the Chiesa di Santa Maria della Spina.

CHIESA DI SANTA MARIA DELLA SPINA

Cross Ponte di Mezzo and head west to reach this gem of a church, **Chiesa di Santa Maria della Spina** (Lungarno Gambacorti; adult/concession €1.50/1; 10am-5.45pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6.45pm Sat Mar-Oct, 10am-2pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb). A fine architectural example of Pisan-Gothic style, it was built in the early 14th century to house a thorn from Christ's crown and is refreshingly intimate after the heavyweights of Piazza dei Miracoli. Its ornately spired exterior cluttered with tabernacles and statues exudes richness but the interior is simple. Highlight: Andrea and Nino Pisano's *Madonna of the Rose*, a masterpiece of Gothic sculpture.

DO IT YOUR WAY

Pedalling Pisa using two or four wheels is the way to do it: **Ecovoyager** (☎ 050 56 18 39, 339 760 76 52; www.ecovoyager.it; Via della Faggiola 41 & Piazza dei Miracoli in front of Museo dell'Opera del Duomo; 11am-midnight Mar-Oct) rents romantic canopied *riscio* (rickshaws) made for two (€15 an hour) – or indeed up to six people (€20 an hour) – as well as conventional bicycles (€12 a day) and rollerblades (€2 an hour). Hire an English radio-guide (€1 per 30 minutes) at the same time and you are all set to explore Pisa your way.

TORRE GUELFA

Enchanting rooftop-views spill out from **Torre Guelfa** (☎ 050 2 14 41; Piazza Tersanaia; admission €2; 11am-7pm Fri-Sun Mar-Oct, 2-5pm Sat & Sun, every 2nd Sun of month 10am-1pm & 3-5pm Nov-Feb), part of the old citadel a few paces west of Chiesa di Santa Maria della Spina (a combined ticket covering admission to both costs €2.50 for adults, €2 concession). Built in the 15th century, the tower was destroyed during WWII and rebuilt in 1956. Trawl up 200 steps to get to the top.

Activities

BOAT TRIPS

April to October, **Il Navicello** (☎ 050 50 31 01; www.ilnavicello.it) runs various boat cruises along the Arno; check its website for updated schedules and prices.

Tours

Great for families and tired legs is the London-style open-top double-decker red **Sightseeing Bus** (☎ 328 809 02 05; www.pisa.city-sightseeing.it; adult/child/family €15/7/44; 11am hourly 10am-6pm Mar-Oct) that cruises around town following a circular route; stops include Viale Gramsci in front of the train station, Via Corsica (for Piazza dei Cavalieri) and Piazza Arcivescovado (for Piazza dei Miracoli). Passengers are equipped with an English-language audio commentary and can hop on/off as they please. Tickets are valid for 24 hours.

Festivals & Events

Gioco del Ponte (Game of the Bridge) Two teams in medieval costume battle it out over the Ponte di Mezzo; last Sunday in June.

Luminaria Some 50,000 candles and blazing torches light up the night sky during the Luminaria; 16 June.

Palio delle Quattro Antiche Repubbliche Marinare (Regatta of the Four Ancient Maritime Republics) The four historical maritime rivals – Pisa, Venice, Amalfi and Genoa – meet each year in June for a procession of boats and a dramatic race; the next in Pisa will be in 2010.

Regata Storica di San Ranieri The Arno comes to life with a rowing competition commemorating the city's patron saint; 17 June.

Sleeping

Hotel Astor (☎ 050 445 51; www.hotel-astor.com; Via Manzoni 22; d/tr/q with bathroom €80/105/13, d without bathroom €65) Something of a sore-thumb concrete block in an otherwise flowery neighbourhood, this good-value, two-star family hotel is an easy walk from the train station. Breakfast is not served but a small bar in reception sells cappuccino (€1.50) and croissants (€1.20). Night owls note Astor has a strict 'close the door at midnight' policy.

Hotel Villa Kinzica (☎ 050 56 04 19; www.hotelvillakinzica.it; Piazza Arcivescovado 2; s €70-95, d €90-108, tr €100-124, q €110-134, all incl breakfast; p a) A tad too close to the Piazza dei Miracoli crowds for comfort, this revamped villa with sweet apricot-coloured façade and emerald-green shutters is a useful option for those seeking a restaurant in-house. Spot the tower from some rooms.

Hotel Francesco (☎ 050 55 41 09; www.hotelfrancesco.com; Via Santa Maria 129; s €75-90, d €85-100, tr €115-135; a i) Don't let the knight in armour next door put you off: this hotel on Pisa's main bar/restaurant drag boasts a great terrace with pretty purple wisteria and – if you sit on a far-end table – a Leaning Tower view! Rooms 201 and 202 open onto a shared balcony facing the cathedral. Breakfast costs €3 but internet access is free.

Royal Victoria Hotel (☎ 050 94 01 11; www.royalvictoria.it; Lungarno Pacinotti 12; s/d/tr/q with bathroom €118/138/147/152, s/d without bathroom €70/80, all incl breakfast; p a) This doyen of Pisan hotels, run with love and tender care by the Piegaja family for five generations, offers old-world luxury accompanied by warm, attentive service. As part of its ecologically friendly policy, it rents bicycles to guests for €5 per day. Garage costs parking €18.

Hotel Il Giardino (☎ 050 56 21 01; www.hotelilgiardino.pisa.it; Piazza Manin 1; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €80/100/110/120; p a) A gaggle of souvenir traders might hit you the second you walk out the door but the

Garden Hotel – an old Medici staging post the other side of the cathedral square wall – does have the advantage of a peaceful garden terrace to breakfast on while enjoying the view of the baptistry dome. Décor is contemporary and art happy.

Hotel Relais dell'Orologio (☎ 050 83 03 61; www.hotelrelaisorologio.com; Via della Faggiola 12-14; d incl breakfast €200-800; p a) Something of a wedding reception and honeymoon venue, Pisa's dreamy five-star hotel occupies a tastefully restored 14th-century fortified tower house in a quiet street. Some rooms have original frescoes and the flowery patio out back makes a welcome retreat from the crowds. Garage parking costs €20.

Eating

Being a university town, Pisa has a good range of eating places, especially around Borgo Stretto, near the university on Piazza Dante Alighieri, and south of the river in the trendy San Martino quarter. Near Piazza dei Miracoli, along Via Contessa Matilde, a multitude of places tout €12 *menu turistici* (fixed lunch menus).

La Bottega del Gelato (☎ 050 57 54 67; Piazza Garibaldi 11; 1/2/3 scoops €1.30/1.80/2.50; 11am-8.30pm Thu-Tue) Sit at Garibaldi's feet and lick a seriously creamy gelato from the most popular ice-cream parlour in town. Feeling truly decadent? Scrap the *cono* or *coppa* for a chocolate-lined *cestino* (basket).

Caffè Federico Salza (☎ 050 58 02 44; Borgo Stretto 46; salads €7, pasta €7, mains €8.50-13.50; 11am-8.30pm Apr-Oct, variable hours Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) Cakes, chocolates and sweet creations to die for are the house speciality of this long-established café and *chocolatier* popular with Pisa, sophisticates since 1898. Be it coffee and cake, a light lunch or afternoon tea, tastebuds will be seriously titillated; a cake sitting down costs €1.90 more than eaten at the bar.

Trattoria della Faggiola (☎ 050 55 61 79; Via della Faggiola 1; meals €20; 11am Fri & Sat, lunch Mon-Thu) An excellent-value, locally loved spot, this traditional trattoria, with brick interior and a line-up of lovingly tended potted plants outside, is delightful for lunch. The menu, chalked up on a board outside, is strictly Italian and offers a straightforward choice of three or four dishes per course.

Trattoria San Omobono (☎ 050 54 08 47; Piazza San Omobono 6/7; meals €22; 11am Wed-Sat, dinner Mon & Tue) A handful of tables, one Roman column and

a refreshingly short 'n' sweet menu form a winning combination at this family-run bistro near the market. Main-course staples include roast beef, tripe and stockfish.

La Clessidra (☎ 050 54 01 60; Via Santa Cecilia 34; meals €25-35; 𠄎 dinner Mon-Sat Sep-Jul) At the upper end of Pisa's dining scale, La Clessidra cooks up a clutch of themed menus, including a *menu tipico di Pisano* (minimum two people) featuring wholly local fare, and a seafood equivalent, in a formal setting. *Dolci* (desserts) are girth-widening and the tourist-free green lawns of neighbouring Piazza Martiri della Libertà are a postlunch siesta delight.

Antica Trattoria il Campano (☎ 050 58 05 85; Via Cavalca 19; meals €30; 𠄎 Fri-Tue, dinner Thu) The adventurous Tuscan menu – pasta with leeks in cod sauce, octopus salad, or beef marinated with tomatoes, almonds and hazelnuts – at this long-time trattoria has the added advantage of being translated in English. Of the dining areas – under vaulted arches down or beneath bare rafters up – downstairs is the more elegant. *Tagliere del Re* (€15 per person, minimum two people) – a wonderfully rich platter of 12 kinds of Tuscan antipastos – is a meal in itself.

La Grotta (☎ 050 57 81 05; Via San Francesco 103; meals €30; 𠄎 Mon-Sat) As its name suggests, rustic La Grotta is a cavelike place with sackcloth curtains that serves up hearty portions of good old-fashioned Tuscan fare. The menu is simple but changes monthly to reflect the season; produce is fresher than fresh.

Osteria dei Cavalieri (☎ 050 58 08 58; Via San Frediano 16; meals €35; 𠄎 Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) The Slow Food recommendation for central Pisa, this *osteria* (wine bar) serves a high-speed, one-dish only – but what a dish – lunchtime special (€11) alongside an enticing array of other tasty morsels, including *carpaccio di pulpo* (octopus carpaccio). Although the size of portions may mean a siesta afterwards, the set meals (€26 to €32) are worth it and the wine list is impressive.

Panetteria Focacceria (Via Santa Maria 66) is the spot for well-filled *panini* (€1.50), pizza slices (€1) and pastries to picnic on. There's an open-air morning **food market** (Piazza delle Vettovaglie) off Borgo Stretto.

Drinking

Stylish bars flank Via Oberdan and Borgo Stretto. Otherwise, head south of the river where casual student hangouts abound.

Caffetteria Betsabea (Piazza Dante Alighieri 7; 𠄎 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) Students from the political sciences faculty luurvvy this simple café which dishes out 20 types of well-stuffed sandwiches, meal-sized salads and loads of differently dressed pasta – all served on wicker platters – as well as drinks from dawn to dusk.

Op Art Café (www.opartcafe.it; Via San Francesco 90; 𠄎 7pm-1am Wed, Thu & Sun, to 2am Fri & Sat) Art exhibitions add another dimension to this modern wine bar where a designer set meets for cocktails (€4 to €5), bruschetta (€3.50) and meal-sized salads (€5.50 to €8). It buzzes come *aperitivo* time – great buffet!

Bazeel (www.bazeel.it in Italian; Lungarno Pacinotti 1; 𠄎 5pm-2am) On the corner of atmospheric Piazza Garibaldi, this music bar is a smart choice for that all-essential early-evening *aperitivo* from 6.30pm to 9pm when a feast of a buffet is rolled out. Otherwise, it serves food and bands play late.

Temple Bar (Piazza Cairoli; 𠄎 6pm-1am Mon-Thu, 6pm-2am Fri & Sat) This popular Irish pub paying homage to Dublin's cultural quarter touts tables and chairs on one of Pisa's cutest squares and conveniently neighbours a fine *yoghurteria*, open pub hours, in the shape of Coppella.

Lounge Caffè (Via delle Belle Torri 52; 𠄎 4pm-1am Tue-Thu, 4pm-2am Fri, 6pm-2am Sat, 6pm-1am Sun) Directly opposite Temple Bar, this venue is worth a late-hour slug.

Entertainment

Teatro Verdi (☎ 050 94 11 11; www.teatrodipisa.pi.it in Italian; Via Palestro 40) Has opera, dance and theatre.

Club Dr Jazz (☎ 339 86 19 298; www.drjazz.it in Italian; Via A Vespucci 10; 𠄎 Wed-Sun) Seriously hot jazz club perfectly tuned for those keen to discover student Pisa: jam sessions Wednesday, blues and R & B Thursday and concerts at the weekend. Yes, it is that low-lying warehouse with corrugated-iron walls, entrance marked by steel gates next to the parking meter (opposite No 17).

Leningrad Caffè (www.leningradcafe.com in Italian; Via Silvestri 5; 𠄎 8pm-late Wed-Sun) Another hip venue, this café-club down a quiet alley in the San Martino quarter of town pelts out everything from garage, punk and indie rock to rock 'n' roll, swing and soul. DJs spin during the week and Saturday sees cabaret steal the show.

VESPA TOUR

There's a certain romance to touring Tuscany on the back of a Vespa, Italy's iconic scooter that revolutionised travel when Piaggio launched it from its Pontedera factory, 25km southeast of Pisa, in 1946. The 'wasp', as the two-wheeled utility vehicle was affectionately known, has been restyled 120 times since, culminating most recently in Piaggio's vintage-inspired GTV and LXV models. Yet the essential design remains timeless.

The complete Vespa story, from the Genovese company's arrival in Tuscany in 1921 to its manufacturing of four-engine aircraft and hydroplanes, WWII destruction and rebirth as Europe's exclusive Vespa producer, is grippingly told in Pontedera's **Museo Piaggio** (☎ 0587 2 71 71; www.museopiaggio.it; Viale Rinaldo Piaggio 7; admission free; 𠄎 10am-6pm), in a former factory building. Ogle at custom-made Ferraris, and eco' and fantasy Vespas, alongside 1948's three-wheeler Ape (meaning 'Bee'), 1963's Vespio and other classics. In 2007 Piaggio produced a limited line of the Ape with blue bodywork, cream seats, striped tyres and wooden finishings: the 1950s cult vehicle cost €8590.

If Vespa's free-wheeling, carefree spirit bites, hook up with Chianti-based **Bella Scooter** (☎ 051 695 71 04; www.scooterbella.com; Loc Bricciano 41, Gaiole in Chianti) for your very own Hepburn-style tour of Tuscany by Vespa.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei (☎ 050 84 93 00; www.pisa-airport.com), located 2km south of town, is Tuscany's main international airport and handles flights to most major European cities.

Daily destinations in the UK include London Gatwick (British Airways and Easyjet); London Stansted, Liverpool and East Midlands (all Ryanair); Bristol (Easyjet); Edinburgh, Glasgow/Prestwick, Leeds/Bradford Manchester and Newcastle (all jet2.com); and Coventry, Doncaster/Sheffield and Bournemouth (all Thomsonfly).

BUS

From its hub on Piazza Sant'Antonio, Pisan bus company CPT (Compagnia Pisana Trasporti; ☎ 800 012 773; www.cpt.pisa.it in Italian; Piazza Sant'Antonio) runs buses to/from Volterra (€4.80, two hours, up to 10 daily) and Livorno (€2.40, 45 minutes, half-hourly). To get to Florence, Lucca and Pistoia take the train.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Pisa is close to the A11 and A12. The FI-PI-LI is a toll-free alternative for Florence and Livorno, while the north-south SS1, the Via Aurelia, connects the city with La Spezia and Rome.

Car-rental agencies include the following: **Europcar** (☎ 050 220 01 82; Viale F Crispi) **MaxiRent** (☎ 050 220 00 53; Via Cesare Battisti 13) Good-value car and scooter rental.

TRAIN

Pisa is connected by rail to Florence and is also on the Rome-La Spezia train line. Destinations include Florence (€5.20, 1¼ hours, 40 daily), Rome (€24, three to four hours, 20 daily), Livorno (€1.70, 15 minutes, hourly), Pistoia (€4.20, 1¼ hours, five direct daily) and Lucca (€2.20, 25 minutes, around 20 daily).

Getting Around

For Pisa airport, take a train to/from Stazi-one Pisa Centrale (€1.10, five minutes, 15 per day) or the LAM Rossa (red) line (€0.90, 10 minutes, every 10 minutes) run by local bus company CPT (see left) which passes through the city centre and the train station on its way to/from the airport.

Car parks (www.pisamo.it in Italian; per hour €1.50) abound around the heart of Pisa. There's a free one about 2km north of Piazza dei Miracoli, with shuttle buses to the centre. Cross fingers that the cavernous subterranean car park being gouged out beneath Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II – a building site of several years already – will be up and running by 2009.

Pick up two wheels from **MaxiRent** (☎ 050 220 00 53; Via Cesare Battisti 13; 𠄎 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat); bikes cost €10 a day.

For a taxi, call ☎ 050 54 16 00.

LUCCA

pop 84,000

Lovely Lucca is gorgeous, a beautiful old city that sparks love at first sight thanks to its rich history, handsome churches and smattering of

excellent restaurants. Hidden behind imposing Renaissance walls, this serene city is an essential stopover on any Tuscan tour and a charming base for exploring the Apuane Alps and Garfagnana.

Founded by the Etruscans, Lucca became a Roman colony in 180 BC and a free *comune* (self-governing city) during the 12th century, when it enjoyed a period of prosperity based on the silk trade. In 1314 it briefly fell to Pisa but, under the leadership of local adventurer Castruccio Castracani degli Anterminelli, the city regained its independence and began to amass territories in western Tuscany, including republic for almost 500 years.

Napoleon ended all this in 1805, when he created the principality of Lucca and placed one of the seemingly countless members of his family in need of an Italian fiefdom (this time his sister Elisa) in control of all of Tuscany. Twelve years later the city became a Bourbon duchy before being incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy.

Lucca remains a strong agricultural centre. The long periods of peace it has enjoyed explain the almost perfect preservation of the city walls, which were rarely put to the test.

Information

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 0583 44 27 27; Viale Cavour 38)

INTERNET ACCESS

Surfing the internet in the Piazza Santa Maria tourist office costs a pricey €3.50 for 15 minutes, €10 for 60 minutes.

Mondochiocciola (☎ 0583 44 05 10; Via del Gonfalone 12; per hr €5.50; 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-8pm Mon-Sat) Irregular hours and no sign outside.

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.in-lucca.it Practical listings guide to the city.
www.luccagrapewine.com Online version of Lucca's English-language monthly mag; buy the fuller paper version (€2) in newsagents.

LAUNDRY

Lavanderia Niagara (Via Michele Rosi 26; per wash €4; 8am-10pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital (☎ 0583 97 01; Via dell' Ospedale) Northeast of the city walls.

POST

Post office (Via Vallisneri 2)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office Piazza Napoleone (☎ 0583 91 99 41; 10am-7pm Apr-Oct, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar); Piazza Santa Maria 35 (☎ 0583 91 99 31; 9am-8pm Apr-Oct, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar); Piazzale Verdi (☎ 0583 58 31 50; 9am-7pm Easter-Oct, to 5.30pm Nov-Easter) The Piazzale Verdi branch rents bicycles (€2.50 an hour) and excellent city audioguides in English (one/two persons €9/15), sells concert tickets, and has a left-luggage service (€1.50 an hour).

Sights & Activities

Lucca's biggest attraction is its robust city walls, built 12m high snug around the old city in the 16th and 17th centuries, defended by 126 canons and crowned with a wide silky-smooth footpath just made for a leafy *Passeggiata della Mura*. Be it strolling, cycling, running or rollerblading, this legendary 4km-long circular footpath above the city proffers shot after shot of local Luccese life. Children's playgrounds, swings and picnic tables beneath trees add a buzz of activity to Baluardo San Regolo, Baluardo San Salvatore and Baluardo Santa Croce – three of the 11 bastions studying the way – while older kids kick balls around on the vast green lawns of Baluardo San Donato.

Down in the city, coloured *itinerario turistico* (tourist itinerary) panels map out routes for cyclists. For bike hire see p199.

CATHEDRAL

Lucca's mainly Romanesque **Cattedrale di San Martino** (☎ 0583 95 70 68; www.museocattedralelucca.it in Italian; Piazza San Martino; 9.30am-5.45pm or 6.45pm Mon-Sat, 9.30-10.45am & noon-6pm Sun Mar-Oct, 9.30am-4.45pm Mon-Sat, 9.30-10.45am & noon-5pm Sun Oct-Mar), dedicated to San Martino, dates to the 11th century. The exquisite façade was constructed in the prevailing Lucca-Pisan style and designed to accommodate the pre-existing *campanile*. Each of the multitude of columns in its upper part is different. The reliefs over the left doorway of the portico are believed to be by Nicola Pisano.

The interior was rebuilt in the 14th and 15th centuries with a Gothic flourish. Lucca-born sculptor and architect Matteo Civitali (1436-1501), who spent most of his life working on churches and villas (such as Villa Oliva,



p199) in and around in his hometown and refused to be influenced by his counterparts in Florence, is considered the leading exponent of a strictly Luccese Renaissance art. He designed both the cathedral pulpit and the 15th-century *tempietto* (small temple) in the north aisle that contains the *Volto Santo*. Legend has it that this simply fashioned image of a life-sized Christ on a wooden crucifix, in fact dated to the 11th century, was carved by Nicodemus, who witnessed the crucifixion. A major object of pilgrimage, it's carried in procession through the streets each 13 September at dusk during the *Luminaria di Santa Croce* (p196).

The cathedral's many other works of art include a magnificent *Last Supper* by Tintoretto above the third altar of the south aisle and the cool marble tomb of Ilaria del Carretto, a masterpiece of funerary sculpture, in the sacristy (adult/concession €2.50/1.50). Ilaria del Carretto, the young second wife of the 15th-century Lord of Lucca, Paolo Guinigi, died in childbirth aged 24. Distraught, her husband commissioned Jacopo della Quercia, perhaps the most accomplished sculptor of his day, to carve her tomb. Or so the story goes. Recent research has suggested that the reclining marble form in fact represents Caterina Antelminelli, one of four maidens engaged to Paolo – all of whom died before their wedding day.

MUSEO DELLA CATTEDRALE

A well-displayed collection of mainly 15th- and 16th-century religious art, sculptures from the cathedral and illuminated manuscripts fill the *Cathedral Museum* (% 0583 49 05 30; Piazza Antelminelli; adult/concession €4/2.50; 10am–6pm Apr–Oct, 10am–2pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat & Sun Nov–Feb, 10am–5pm Mar).

CHIESA DI SS GIOVANNI

Lucca's earliest cathedral, the haunting venue for the Puccini e la sua Lucca opera festival (p196), safeguards over 1000 years of his-

tory. The 17th-century façade of the adjacent *Battistero San Giovanni & Chiesa di Santa Reparata* (% 0583 49 05 30; Piazza San Giovanni; adult/concession €2.50/1.50; 10am–5pm or 6pm mid-Mar–Oct, by appointment only Nov–mid-Mar) crown a vast archaeological area, which has been dated to the 2nd century and has traces of Roman construction below floor level. Today's church is largely the 12th-century remodelling of its early-Christian 5th-century predecessor. You can see traces of this in the present Gothic baptistry.

CHIESA DI SAN MICHELE IN FORO

Equally dazzling is this Romanesque church (% 0583 4 84 59; Piazza San Michele; 7.40am–noon & 3–6pm Apr–Oct, 9am–noon & 3–5pm Nov–Mar), built on the site of its 8th-century precursor over a period of nearly 300 years, beginning in the 11th century. The exquisite wedding-cake façade is topped by a figure of the Archangel Michael slaying a dragon. Inside, the serene *Madonna and Child* in the first chapel of the south aisle is one of many *Madonna and Child*s by Florentine sculptor Luca della Robbia (there are several more in Florence's Museo Nazionale del Bargello).

EAST OF VIA FILLUNGO

Threading its way through the medieval heart of the old city is Lucca's busiest street, *Via Fillungo*. It's a fascinating mix of smart boutiques, restaurants and buildings of great charm and antiquity – often occupying the same space; just look up, above the street-level bustle.

Just east of here is one of Tuscany's loveliest squares, oval-shaped *Piazza Anfiteatro*, so-called after the one-time Roman amphitheatre. Today houses, pavement cafés and restaurants now stand, jostling for space on the lovely ellipse.

A short walk further east is *Piazza San Francesco* and the attractive 13th-century *Chiesa di San Francesco*. Nearby is the *Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi* (% 0583 49 60 33; Via della Quarquonia;

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

There are great views of the city from its walls, yes, but for a sweeping overview head up 207 steps to the top of *Torre delle Ore* (% 0583 31 68 46; Via Fillungo; adult/concession €4/2.50; 9am–7pm, to 5pm Oct–Feb), a 13th-century clock tower hotly contested by rival families in medieval Lucca. Alternatively, attack the 230 equally steep stairs of *Torre Guinigi* (% 0583 31 68 46; Via Sant'Andrea 14; adult/concession €4/2.50; 9am–midnight May–Sep, to 7.30pm Mar & Apr, to 5pm Oct–Feb), where a tiny copse of holm oak trees offers welcome shade. A combined ticket covering both towers costs €6/4.

CASA DI PUCCINI

There the maestro still sits, cast in bronze, languidly lording it over Piazza Cittadella, a cigarette dangling from his slender fingers. Just north of the piazza is *Casa di Puccini* (% 0583 58 40 28; Corte San Lorenzo 9; adult/concession €3/2; 10am–5pm currently closed for renovation, check with tourist office), the modest house where one of the 20th century's greatest composers was born in 1858. He lived there until studies at Milan's music conservatory beckoned him aged 22.

The day after his birth Puccini was baptised Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria in nearby Chiesa di SS Giovanni. He was a church organist during his teenage years, enjoying his first public performance as a piano accompanist at Lucca's Teatro del Giglio (p198) – the 17th-century theatre where the curtain later rose on his best-known operas: *La Bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900) and *Madame Butterfly* (1907). He wrote 12 in all.

Inside Casa di Puccini, everyday objects tell the tale of the composer's life. Specs and pen lay poised on the desk next to the Steinway piano on which Puccini, the last in a line of celebrated Lucca musicians, wrote much of *Turandot* (1926) while staying at his seaside villa in Viareggio in 1921. The opera, unfinished when he died, was the last before throat cancer got the better of him after last-ditch surgery in Brussels failed in 1924.

Letters, photographs and sketches in the family home portray Puccini's wife, Elvira, a sparky, savvy, hot-headed woman – already married – who eloped with Puccini to Milan in 1886 and had a son, Antonio, out of wedlock. In 1891 the couple moved to Torre del Lago (p203), where Puccini spent the bulk of his life. In 1904, following the death of Elvira's husband, the couple wed. They travelled widely, spending the summer of 1908 in Cairo for example, only to return to Torre del Lago and became embroiled in yet more scandal: Elvira accused one of their maids, Dora, of having an affair with her husband, only for Dora to poison herself, be declared a virgin and Elvira charged with defamation.

Die-hard fans can see the bed in which Puccini was conceived, situated in *Celle de Pucini*, the village 27km north of Lucca (follow the S12 north then bear east from Dacimo towards Colognora). Puccini summered as a child in his ancestral home, *Villa Puccini* (% 0583 35 91 54; admission €3; 10am–5pm by appointment only).

adult/concession €4/2; 8.30am–7.30pm Tue–Sat, to 1.30pm Sun), a vast early-15th-century villa built to supplement the Guinigi family's smaller townhouse in the city. A shadow of its former self, the still-splendid villa showcases the city's works of art. Archeological remnants from Roman Lucca and various sculptures (medieval lions from Lucca's city walls included) pinprick the grounds and ground floor of the museum, while the upper floor looks at sculpture and painting from the 13th to 17th century. Domenico Beccafuma's Mannerist *The Continnence of Scipio* hangs here, as does the odd Correggio, Vasari and Tintoretto. Two rooms zoom in on the work of local lads Pietro Paolini (1603–81) and Girolamo Scaglia (1620–86).

For a leafy stroll or picnic accompanied by birdsong head for Lucca's peaceful *Orto Botanico* (Botanical Garden; % 0583 44 21 60; Via San Michele; adult/concession €3/2; 10am–5pm Apr & mid-Sep–Oct, to 6pm May & Jun, to 7pm Jul–mid-Sep, by appointment Nov–Mar), ensnared in the southeast corner of the city walls.

WEST OF VIA FILLUNGO

The façade of the *Basilica di San Frediano* (% 0583 49 36 27; Piazza San Frediano; 8.30am–noon & 3–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 9–11.30am & 3–5pm Sat & Sun) has a unique (and much-restored) 13th-century mosaic in a markedly Byzantine style. But that's not the only anomalous feature: unlike just about every other church this side of Jerusalem, the apse faces *west*, away from the Holy City. The main feature of the beautiful basilica's interior is the *Fontana Lustrale*, a 12th-century baptismal font decorated with sculpted reliefs, just to the right as you enter. Behind it is *An-nunciation* by Andrea della Robbia. Note too the fine capitals, many of them recycled from the nearby Roman amphitheatre.

A wonderful retreat from Lucca's excess of churches and Renaissance splendour is 17th-century *Palazzo Pfanner* (% 340 923 30 85; Via degli Asili 33; palace or garden adult/concession €3/2.50, both €4.50/3.50; 10am–6pm Thu–Tue Mar–mid-Nov), the palace where parts of *Portrait of a Lady* (1996) with Nicole Kidman and John Malkovich was shot, not to mention a clutch of other

films. A staircase leads to the sumptuously furnished living area, or you can dip into the ornate 18th-century garden, the only one of substance within the city walls, guarded by statues representing Greek and Roman deities. (Incidentally, Felix Pfanner, may God rest his soul, was an Austrian émigré who first brought beer to Italy – and brewed it in the palazzo's cellars.)

The 17th-century **Palazzo Mansi** (Via Galli Tassi 43), a wonderful piece of rococo excess (that elaborate, gilded bridal suite must have inspired such high jinks in its time), houses the smallish **Pinacoteca Nazionale** (☎ 0583 5 55 70; adult/concession €4/2; ʒ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun). It has paintings of the same period and some lively frescoes.

Festivals & Events

Puccini e la sua Lucca (www.puccinielasualucca.com) Concert series dedicated to Puccini, with opera recitals and concerts taking place in the Chiesa di San Giovanni; March to June.

Lucca Summer Festival (www.summer-festival.com) Top performers like Norah Jones, Jamiroquai, Van Morrison and Elton John have played at this pop festival in July; information and ticket office on Piazza Napoleone from early June.

Puccini festival The city that gave birth to both Puccini and Boccherini has admirably Catholic musical tastes. For more than 50 years the nearby village of Torre del Lago has been holding this annual festival, spanning July and August.

Festa di San Paolino Torch-lit procession and crossbow competition; third Sunday in July.

Luminaria di Santa Croce Solemn torch-lit procession marking the miraculous arrival in Lucca of the Volto Santo; 13 September.

Sleeping HOSTELS

○ **Ostello San Frediano** (☎ 0583 46 99 57; www.ostellolucca.it; Via della Cavallerizza 12; dm with/without bathroom €19/17.50, d/tr/q with bathroom €48/92/115, r for 5 people €135; i) **Flags flutter outside as if you're entering a five-star hotel at this staggeringly historic, atmospheric and magnificent...hostel.** Top notch in comfort and service, this **Hostelling International**-affiliated hostel with 141 beds in voluminous rooms is serviced with a bar and grandiose dining room (breakfast/packed lunch/two-course dinner €1.60-5/7/9.50). Non HI-members can buy a €3 one-night stamp. Internet is €5 per hour.

B&B

Those seeking the intimacy of a B&B will like **Lucca: B&B 'n' Guesthouses** (www.welcomeinlucca.it), a website with links to bed and breakfasts within the walls, 1km out and in the surrounding hills; several are listed under midrange. Prices listed in this section include breakfast.

○ **Locanda Buatino** (☎ 0583 34 32 07; www.leosteriedilucca.com; Via Borgo Giannotti 508; d/tr with shared bathroom €40/60) There are few tastier places to sleep than in the trio of rooms above one of Lucca's oldest and most locally loved trattorie. Original patterned tiled floors and beamed ceilings add an authentic air.

San Frediano Guest House (☎ 0583 46 96 30; www.sanfrediano.com; Via degli Angeli 19; s/d with bathroom €60-86/€70-90, s/d without bathroom €35-48/€45-68; i) This smartly painted salmon-pink townhouse, built in 1600, is the venue for this appealing six-room guesthouse. It has meat hooks in the beams of reception where butchers once strung their hams. Less expensive rooms – far from bare-bones – share a bathroom. If full, ask about its sister guesthouse.

Casa Alba (☎ 0583 49 53 61; www.casa-alba.com; Via Fillungo 142; s with/without bathroom €70/55, d with bathroom €80, extra bed €15; a) **Antipodean travellers will feel at home here; the delightful owner has spent many years in Australia.** Her five rooms, with fridge, are small but sunny, washed in pastel colours and decorated with arty prints. Winter prices are substantially lower.

La Boheme (☎ 0583 46 24 04; www.boheme.it; Via del Moro 2; d €90-120; a) **A hefty dark-wood door located on a peaceful back street marks the entrance to this five-room B&B, run with charm and style by former architect Ranieri.** Rooms 11 and 12 are topped by breathtakingly high, beamed wooden ceilings and are the colour of red wine. Romantics might like the four-poster bed.

Also recommended: **Affittacamere Centro Storico** (☎ 0583 49 07 48; www.affittacamerecentrostorico.com; Corte Portici 16; d with bathroom €60-130, d without bathroom €30-90, tr €55-130 with bathroom) Guests get their own front-door key and rooms sport fridge and safe.

La Torre (☎ 0583 95 70 44; www.roomslatorre.com; Via del Carmine 11; s with/without bathroom €50/35, d with/without bathroom €80/50; a i) **Overlooking a red-brick tower on Piazza del Carmine.**

HOTELS

Hotel Puccini (☎ 0583 5 54 21; www.hotelpuccini.com; Via di Poggio 9; s/d €65/90) **Wedged between Puccini**

enjoying a cigarette in style on café-clad Piazza Cittadella and Piazza San Michele with its majestic church, this friendly three-star hotel with 14 modern rooms could not be better placed. No air-con – just ceiling fans.

Hotel La Luna (☎ 0583 49 36 34; www.hotellaluna.com; Corte Compagni 12; s/d €82/112; ʒ Feb-Dec; p a) This is a clean, tidy hotel with a handy pizzeria across the road. Some rooms are old-style with beams and wardrobes, while others are modern but rather bland. Parking and breakfast are each €11.

Hotel Universo (☎ 0583 49 36 78; www.universolucca.com; Piazza del Giglio 1; s €75-120, d €108-190, all incl breakfast; p a) **Flower-power carpets scream 1960s at this venerable old inn, set aplomb a lovely people-busy, tree-lined, carousel-pierced square.** All 60 rooms – a tad weary in furnishings – stare at the equally venerable Teatro del Giglio or cathedral; only some have air-con. Parking costs €26 a night.

Palazzo Alexander (☎ 0583 458 35 71; www.palazzo-alexander.com; Via Santa Giustina 48; d incl breakfast €100-170; p a i) **Service is impeccable at this elegant boutique hotel beautifully nestled in a 12th-century palace-turned-boarding school for girls in the 1800s.** Some bathrooms have whirlpools and the Tosca suite – the best in the house – has a terrace with a sublime rooftop view of Lucca.

La Corte degli Angeli (☎ 0583 46 92 04; www.allacortedegliangeli.com; Via degli Angeli 23; d incl breakfast €120-175; p a i) **Occupying three floors of a 15th-century townhouse, this four-star boutique hotel oozes charm.** Frescoed rooms are named after flowers: lovers in the hugely romantic Rosa room can lie beneath a pergola and swallow-filled sky.

Villa Principessa (☎ 0583 37 00 37; www.hotelprincipessa.com; Via Nuova per Pisa 1616; d incl buffet breakfast €225-250; p a i s) **You will indeed feel like a principessa (princess) at this aristocratic country mansion, residence of Lucca duke Castruccio Castracani in the late 13th and early 14th century.** Smothered with an abundance of foliage outside and full of fine chandeliers, period furnishings and rich wall-papers inside, it really is a stunner. Find it 3km south of Lucca.

Eating

○ **Trattoria da Leo** (☎ 0583 49 22 36; Via Tegrini 1; meals €15; ʒ Mon-Sat) **Ask any Florentine where to lunch in Lucca and this wonderful, bustling, noisy trattoria with mixed clientele of**

students, workers and ladies taking a break from shopping is what they'll say. Save a corner for the *torta di fichi e noci* (fig and walnut tart). In summer the shaded outside seating comes into its own.

Machiavelli (☎ 0583 46 72 19; lucadatorre@tiscali.it; Via Cesare Battisti 28; meals €20; ʒ Mon-Sat) **A much-loved Lucca favourite alongside Leo, this funky old-fashioned osteria has a definite retro air to it.** The walls are pea-green, the bar is painted lavender-blue and the clientele is staunchly loyal, local, fun and of all ages. There is live music some nights and the cuisine – salted cod with leeks, chickpea soup and grilled pork ribs etc – oozes natural flavour.

Gigi Trattoria (☎ 0583 46 72 66; www.gigitrattoria.it; Piazza del Carmine 7; meals €20; ʒ Mon-Sat) **Buzzing by noon, this 1950s cantina on the old market square – revamped by three young Lucchesi in the new millennium – is another hot address among Lucchese.** Recipes are plucked straight out of grandma's cookbook, local contemporary art to buy hangs on the walls and simplicity is the predominant philosophy driving the place.

Locanda Buatino (☎ 0583 34 32 07; www.leosteriedilucca.com; Via Borgo Giannotti 508; meals €20; ʒ Mon-Sat) **A Lucca legend, this age-old trattoria – it is reckoned to be Lucca's oldest – with a fun 'n' funky air of retro wafting through it, has the added advantage of being a short walk from the madding crowds, outside the city walls.** Chef Angelo chalks up a different menu daily – *cionca* (veal's head) is a speciality. Live jazz sets the place jiving on Monday, October to May.

Prosciutto & Melone (☎ 0583 4 88 45; Via Anfitro 13/17; meals €25; ʒ Wed-Mon) **Next door to Osteria Baralla, it's hardly haute cuisine but the fine choice of pizzas and salads alongside the mainstream primi and secondi ensure an easy midday refuel.** Sit within the dark-green stable doors or snag a table on the shaded street outside.

Locanda di Bacco (☎ 0583 49 31 36; Via San Giorgio 36; meals €25; ʒ Wed-Mon) **It is strictly cucina Lucchese e Toscana – albeit of a refreshingly creative nature – at this fine specimen of a restaurant, grandly situated in an old building, with marble-topped tables.** Pappardelle with hare, gnocchi with gorgonzola, honey and nuts, or a side order of cabbage cooked in red pepper wine, garlic and oil are among the many dishes with an imaginative twist.

ALL SWEETNESS & LIGHT

The icing on the cake of the all-sweetness-and-light Lucca experience is, without a doubt, a slice of *buccellato*. A cross between biscuit and bun, this typical Lucchese pastry has been made on the premises at old-fashioned *pasticceria* (pastry shop) **Taddeucci** (☎ 0583 49 49 33; www.taddeucci.com; Piazza San Michele 34; 11 8am-8pm) since 1881. Sample a slice of *buccellato* (€5) with coffee and cream, strawberries and wine, ricotta and rum, or a simple Vin Santo, at one of a handful of tables on the square outside, or buy a small loaf (€3.30) to take away.

Otherwise, cakes, pastries, puff-pastry apple strudels, meringues and a multitude of other killer calorie-rich sweet treats are baked at **Dianda Pasticceria** (☎ 0583 49 26 61; Via della Rosa 9), a delightful cake shop within picnic distance of Lucca's botanical gardens, and with a coffee counter to down an espresso standing up.

Vecchia Trattoria Buralli (☎ 0583 95 06 11; Piazza Sant'Agostino 9; meals €25; 11 Thu-Tue) Once an intimate local favourite now in all the guidebooks, this busy crowd-pleaser is a great for sampling wine from the surrounding Lucchese hills. Fare is wholly traditional and a green parrot sits on the packed terrace outside.

Di Simo (☎ 0583 49 62 34; Via Fillungo 58; meals €28) This formal old-world café-cum-restaurant with much of its original furniture and the world's most subtly camouflaged toilet door was once patronised by Puccini and his coterie (the maestro would tickle the ivories of the piano at the entrance to the dining area). Then known as Antico Caffè del Caselli, contemporary Di Simo spoons out mean ice creams alongside leafy salads and mains to a well-dressed older crowd.

Buca di Sant'Antonio (☎ 0583 5 58 81; Via della Cervia 3; meals €30; 11 Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) An outstanding spot for tasting excellent wines from Tuscany and every other wine-producing region in Italy (Champagne is the only foreigner on sommelier Cristiano Cortopassi's carefully selected wine list), this highly ranked restaurant dating to 1782 is a must-stop for visiting celebrities and politicians. The menu of deep-fried breaded lamb cutlets with artichokes, rabbit salad or roast guinea fowl with ham and grapes, and the romantic old-world setting, cannot fail to impress. Advance bookings recommended.

Osteria Baralla (☎ 0583 44 02 40; www.osteria.baralla.it; Via Anfiteatro 5-9; meals €35; 11 Mon-Sat) Dine beneath magnificent red-brick vaults against a backdrop of sotto voce piped jazz at this busy *osteria*, packed to the rafters by noon. Rich in tradition (the place dates to 1860) and local specialities, chef highlights include a hearty farro soup typical to the Garfagnana, deer chops with wild berries,

mixed boiled meat on Thursday and roast pork on Sunday.

Drinking

Festival time aside, Lucca turns in early. Piazza Cittadela has a couple of lovely cafés to drink in the company of Puccini.

Caffetteria San Colombano (☎ 0583 44 46 41; www.caffetteriasancolombano.it; Baluardo San Colombano; meals €35; 11 Tue-Sun) Enviously nestled in one of the bastions of the city wall, this stylish café is as much a dining spot as a drinking spot. The interior is modern and a mix of styles; outside, with its wooden decking and umbrella seating, is perfect retreat-from-the-sun territory.

I Santi Vineria (☎ 0583 49 61 24; Via Anfiteatro 29a; 11 Tue-Sun) A wine shop with a few tables and large green umbrellas in front, this is a tranquil spot to sip wine under the watchful eye of Madonna and child. Tasty morsels served are as predictable as a cheese platter and as unpredictable as stewed octopus. Wi-fi hotspot!

Betty Blue (☎ 0583 49 21 66; Via del Gonfalone 16/18; 11 Thu-Tue) A lively spot with 1960s-style mustard plastic-coated bar stools, op art on the walls and plenty of slouching space inside and out.

Entertainment

Teatro del Giglio (☎ 0583 4 65 31, box office 0583 46 75 21; www.teatrodelgiglio.it in Italian; Piazza del Giglio 13-15) Opera and theatre.

Villa Bottini (☎ 0583 44 21 41; Via Elisa) This beautiful 16th-century villa with formal gardens is home to the city's cultural department and its prime concert, exhibition and cultural-event venue.

Vino & Kino (☎ 0583 46 76 19; www.vinoekino.it in Italian; Via della Dogana 6; admission €1; 11 6pm-midnight Wed-Sun, screenings 9.30pm Thu & Sun) Cult and classic movies are screened twice weekly at this

cultural association where Lucca's cultured set meet for wine and aperitif nibbles.

Getting There & Away BUS

From the bus stops around Piazzale Verdi, **CLAP** (☎ 0583 58 78 97; www.clapspa.it in Italian) runs services throughout the region, including destinations in the Garfagnana such as Castelnuovo (€3.50, 1½ hours, eight daily); and **Lazzi** (☎ 0583 58 48 76) runs buses to/from Florence (€4.70, 1½ hours, hourly), Pisa (€2.20, 45 minutes, hourly), La Spezia (€5.20, three hours, four daily) and Marina di Carrara (€3.50, two hours, six daily) via Marina di Massa.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The A11 runs westwards to Pisa and Viareggio and eastwards to Florence. The SS12, then the SS445 from Forno, links the city with the Garfagnana.

TRAIN

Lucca is on the Florence–Pisa–Viareggio train line and there are also services into the Garfagnana. There are frequent trains to/from Pisa (€2.20, 25 minutes) and Florence (€4.80, 1½ hours) via Pistoia (€3.30, 45 minutes) and Prato (€4.30, one hour).

Getting Around

Most cars are banned within the city walls; don't even dare to drive in. This said, most hotels will give you a permit entitling you to park in spaces reserved for residents (indicated by yellow lines) and you can generally park for free outside the city walls.

Small CLAP electric buses connect the train station, Corso Garibaldi and Piazzale Verdi but it's quicker and more pleasurable to walk – a footpath cuts across the moat and up onto Baluardo San Colombano on the city walls.

Otherwise, follow the crowd and rent a set of wheels in bike-friendly Lucca: **Poli** (☎ 0583 49 37 87; www.biciclettepoli.com; Piazza Santa Maria 42) and **Cicli Bizzarri** (☎ 0583 49 60 31; Piazza Santa Maria 32) both rent regular city bikes (€2.50 per hour) as well as tandems (€5.50 per hour), *carrellino* (covered buggies to pedal along two small kids) and *cammellino* (one-wheel kid's bike to attach on the back of an adult bike). The Piazzale Verdi tourist office also rents bikes.

For a taxi, call ☎ 0583 95 52 00.

EAST OF LUCCA Villas

Luccan businessmen who had finally arrived built themselves opulent country residences – some 300 all told – from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Most have crumbled away, been abandoned or are inaccessible today but you will find at least a dozen fine examples of these beautiful villas still standing proud northeast of Lucca.

Much of the present appearance and meticulously planned gardens of **Villa Reale** (☎ 0583 3 01 08; Via Fraga Alta; garden tour €7; 11 10am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Nov), perhaps the most striking villa, 7km north of Lucca in Marlia, is owed to the tastes of Elisa Bonaparte, Napoleon's sister and short-lived ruler of Tuscany. Only the gardens can be visited, by hourly guided tour, March to November.

The neoclassical **Villa Grabau** (☎ 0583 40 60 98, 349 601 36 52; Via di Matraia 269; villa & park €6.50, park only €5.50; 11 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct), located just north in San Pancranzio, is framed by a vast 9 hectares of parkland with sweeping traditional English- and Italian-styled gardens, splashing fountains, more than 100 terracotta vases of centenary lemon trees and the Casa dei Limoni, a picture-postcard lemon house, still used to store lemons, built in 1700.

In the same village, the gardens of **Villa Oliva** (☎ 0583 40 64 62; www.villaoliva.it; garden visit €6; 11 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm mid-Mar–mid-Nov, by appointment only rest of year), a country residence designed for the Buonvisi family by Luccan architect Matteo Civitali (see his sculptures in Lucca's cathedral, p192) and summer residence of the Oliva family today, are worth a peep. Retaining its original design, the fountain-rich park staggers across three levels and ensnares a romantic cypress alley, a pergola unusually covered in *carpini* trees (rather than vines or jasmine), lime and eucalyptus trees galore, and stables reckoned to be even more beautiful than those at Versailles.

To reach these villas, follow the eastbound SS435 towards Pescia and turn north to Marlia, signposted 7km east of Lucca.

Collodi

A further 8km east along the SS435 brings you to a turn-off north for Collodi. Carlo Lorenzini, the creator of Italy's naughtiest and best-selling fictional character Pinocchio,

THE REAL ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO

Pinocchio is one of the best-known children's classics. A timeless tale of a wooden puppet that turns into a boy, it is among the most widely read and internationally popular pieces of literature ever to emerge from Italy.

In the early 1880s, Carlo Collodi, a Florentine journalist, wrote a series for one of united Italy's first children's periodicals entitled *Storia di un Burattino* (Story of a Puppet). Subsequently renamed *Le Avventure di Pinocchio* (The Adventures of Pinocchio), it would have made Collodi (real name Lorenzini) a multimillionaire had he lived to exploit the film and translation rights.

Collodi did not merely intend to pen an amusing child's tale. Literary critics have been trawling the text for the past century in search of ever more evidence to show that it was as much aimed at adult readers as children.

The character of Pinocchio is a frustrating mix of the likable and the odious. At his worst he's a wilful, obnoxious, deceitful little monster who deserves just about everything he gets. Humble and blubbery when things go wrong, he has the oh-so-human tendency to resume his wayward behaviour when he thinks he's in the clear. The wooden puppet is a prime example of flesh-and-blood failings. You thought Jiminy Cricket was cute? Pinocchio thought him such a pain, he splattered him against the wall (in the real, not the sanitised, Disney, version).

Pinocchio spends a good deal of the tale playing truant and one of Collodi's central messages seems to be that only good, well-behaved, diligent schoolchildren have a hope of getting anywhere or, in this case, of turning into a fine human lad. But Collodi was not merely taking a middle-class swipe at naughty-boy behaviour. He was convinced that the recently united Italy was in urgent need of a decent education system to help the country out of its poverty and lethargy. His text can be interpreted in part as a criticism of a society that is yet incapable of meeting that need.

Indeed the story, weaving between fantasy and reality, is a mine of references, some more veiled than others, to the society of late-19th-century Italy – a troubled country with enormous socioeconomic problems compounded by the general apathy of those in power. Pinocchio waits the length of the story to become a real boy. But, while his persona may provoke laughter, his encounters with poverty, petty crime, skewed justice and just plain bad luck constitute a painful education in the machinations of the 'real' world.

spent time in this hilltop village as a child and took the hamlet's name as his nom de plume – prompting the ever-grateful town to repay the compliment with **Parco di Pinocchio** (☎ 0572 42 93 42; www.pinocchio.it; adult/concession €10/7; 11 8.30am-sunset), a theme park in a wood just outside the village. With a series of mosaics recounting the main episodes in the puppet's life, statues and tableaux, it's as much a treat for grown-ups as for kids.

Collodi's other lure is the lovely **Storico Giardino Garzoni** (☎ 0572 42 73 14; Piazza della Vittoria 1; adult/child €12/10; 11 9am-sunset Mar-Oct, 10am-dusk Sat Nov-Feb), a historic terraced garden with a typical Tuscan open-air theatre, elegant lily-covered water pools and butterfly house tumbling around a richly frescoed baroque villa. Only the gardens and butterfly house, aflutter with 400 butterflies, can be visited.

Few buses between Lucca and Montecatini Terme stop in Collodi; it's a lot easier by car.

Pescia

pop 18,400

Pescia, split by the course of the river of the same name, is the self-proclaimed flower capital of Tuscany, with exports worth around €130 million annually. Every other September, in even-numbered years, Pescia hosts Europe's largest flower festival, the **Biennale del Fiore**.

In season, the fields around Pescia are spectacular to drive through but the town itself

SLEEP DREAM EAT VILLAS

Travellers dreaming of living like a wealthy 16th-century Luccan can do so thanks to the **Associazione delle Ville e dei Palazzi Lucchesi** (☎ 0583 90 01 115; www.villelucchesi.net), an association of historic villa owners who advertise their small collection of dreamy B&Bs and *agriturismi* online. See the website for details.

has little to detain you. At the northern end of Piazza Mazzini is the 13th-century **Palazzo del Vicario**, these days the **Palazzo Comunale** (Town Hall). Saturday sees the square – a car park other days – abuzz with a market.

CLAP buses connect Pescia with Lucca (€3, 45 minutes). Lazzi services run east to Montecatini Terme (€1.50, 20 minutes, half-hourly).

LA VERSILIA

The coastal area from Viareggio northwards to the regional border with Liguria is known as La Versilia. Although popular with local holidaymakers and some foreigners (mainly Germans, French and Brits), it has been blighted by beachfront strip development and gets packed with Italy's beach-loving hoi polloi.

It is very much a gay getaway too: Grand Duke Giancarlo Leopold I was the first in Italy to decriminalise homosexuality here in 1863. Its dynamic Open Versilia marketing campaign (<http://international.friendlyversilia.it>) lures a large chunk of the gay community here each summer to have fun in the sun.

La Versilia makes a good gateway to the Apuane Alps (see p204), with roads from the coastal towns snaking their way deep into the heart of the mountains and connecting with small villages and walking tracks.

Trekking Bike: The Tuscan Coast details 12 walking itineraries and a 661km-long bicycle itinerary along the coast, split into 12 easy one-day legs (each three to four hours), pick it up at tourist offices. Online see www-tuscan-coast.com and www.rivieratoscana.com.

VIAREGGIO

pop 61,800

This hugely popular sun and sand resort on the Versilia coastal strip is known as much for its flamboyant Mardi Gras Carnevale, second only to Venice for party spirit, as for its gorgeous line-up of old Art Nouveau façades on its seafront that recall the town's heyday in the 1920s and 1930s.

Literature lovers might like to pass by Piazza Shelley, the only tangible reference to the Romantic poet who drowned in Viareggio; his body was washed up on the beach and his comrade-in-arts, Lord Byron, had him cremated on the beach in Viareggio.

Orientation

It's a short walk from the train station to the waterfront, Via Regina Margherita, and central tourist office. The city is arranged roughly north to south on a grid pattern. South from the Canale Burlamacca, lined with pleasure boats, stretch the enticing woods of the Pineta di Levante. Another smaller wood, the Pineta di Ponente, occupies a large chunk of the northern end of town. Beyond it Viareggio merges seamlessly into the next beach resort of Lido di Camaiore.

Information

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 0584 4 27 41; Piazza S Antonio)

LAUNDRY

Wash & Dry (Corso Garibaldi 5)

POST

Post office (Corso Garibaldi)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Central tourist office (☎ 0584 96 22 33; www.versilia.turismo.toscana.it; Viale Carducci 10; 11 9am-2pm & 3-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun)

Tourist office kiosks Seafront (11 10am-12.30pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sun summer); Train Station (11 9.30am-12.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm & 4-6pm Sat & Sun)

Sights & Activities

The golden sandy beach is laden with cafés, climbing frames and other amusements for kids, and – bar the short public stretch opposite fountain-pierced Piazza Mazzini – it is divided into *stabilimenti*, individual lots where you can hire cabins, umbrellas, recliners and the like. Two recliners with umbrellas cost about €25 a day.

A good deal of the waterfront area as it appears today was built in the 1920s and '30s. Several of the buildings, such as Puccini's favourite, **Gran Caffè Margherita** (☎ 0584 96 25 53; www.ristorantemargherita.it in Italian; Viale Regina Margherita 30), wooden **Chalet Martini** (a clothes shop since 1860 with an equally fabulous interior) next door, and the old façade of the former **Bagno Balena** (public baths) a little further along, all retain something of their ornate stylishness.

When you tire of the seafront and its endless crowds and ice-cream kiosks, take a stroll along the tracks in the Pineta di Levante, beside the Canale Burlamacca and along Via Regina Margherita. And if you feel even the

most distant call of the sea, you'll thrill to the stylish pleasure vessels, big and small, being constructed or refurbished in the town's docks and shipyards.

A couple of kilometres from the centre at **La Citadella di Carnevale** (☎ 0584 5 11 76; Via Santa Maria Goretti; admission free), 16 gargantuan hangars serve as workshop- and parking-space for the fantastic floats crafted with a passion by each highly skilled and prized *carrista* (floatbuilder) for Viareggio's annual carnival (right). The largest floats featuring a papier-mâché merry-go-round of clowns, opera divas, skeletons, kings etc; they are a staggering 20m wide and 14m tall, take five months to build and carry 200 people each during processions. Stroll around the complex and a *carrista* will inevitably invite you into his workshop. Otherwise, discover carnival history and the art of making *teste in capo* (the giant heads worn in processions) and *mascheroni a piedi* (big walking masks) in the Museo del Carnevale (⌚ 3.30-5.30pm Sat Dec-May, plus 9.30-11.30am carnival Sundays in Feb).

Should you exhaust Viareggio, pick up a copy of the tourist office's excellent free

booklet that describes in detail 14 motoring *itinerari turistici* around the coastal towns and inland mountains.

Festivals & Events

Viareggio's moment of glory lasts a good four weeks in February to early March when the city goes wild at **Carnevale** (www.viareggio.ilcarnevale.com), a festival of floats, many with giant satirical effigies of political and other topical figures, plus fireworks and a dusk-to-dawn spirit. Tickets for the Sunday processions cost €13 (under 10s free) and can be bought at the Fondazione Carnevale (Piazza Mazzini) or a ticket kiosk on the procession circuit.

Sleeping

There are half a dozen camp sites in the Pineta di Levante woods between Viareggio and Torre del Lago. Most are open April to September.

Viareggio boasts more than 120 hotels of all classes, along with *affittacamere* (rooms for rent) and villas. They jostle for space beside or a couple of blocks inland from the waterfront and are mostly modern, clean – and bland. In high summer, especially July, many charge at

least *mezza pensione* (half-board) and often *pensione completa* (full board).

Peralta (☎ 0584 95 12 30; www.peraltatuscany.com; d from €90, apartments per week from €700; ⌚ May-Oct; ⊆) High up a side valley, this wonderful abandoned hamlet resuscitated by an Anglo-Italian sculptor has stunning views. It's the perfect place to relax, though if you'd prefer a little self-improvement, there are courses in painting and cooking, plus hearty hill walking. Check the website since low-season rates can be more than 50% cheaper. Bring all you need as it's a long, vertiginous haul to the shops. Find it 10km from Viareggio, signposted from the village of Camaiole.

Eating

If you dodge full board in the hotels, there are plenty of restaurant options, although the waterfront places tend to be expensive and uninspiring.

Sergio (☎ 0584 46 12 56; Piazza del Mercato 130; meals around €12; ⌚ Sun-Fri) Beneath the arcades on the southern side of Viareggio's central market, Sergio is old kid on the block (around since 1955). More of a deli with excellent cheeses, cold meats and a few tables inside, this is the Viareggio hotspot for quick, nourishing, tasty fare to eat in or take out.

Da Giorgio (☎ 0584 4 44 93; Via G Zanardelli 71; meals around €35; ⌚ Thu-Tue) Run by the same family since 1948, this is *the place for fish* – and exclusively fish – of the freshest kind, succulently cooked. Its walls are plastered with testimonials from satisfied guests. Advance reservations essential.

Amaro (☎ 0584 96 21 83; Via San Martino 73; ⌚ Mon-Sat) Take your pick of designer chairs at this trendy contemporary restaurant-stroke-wine bar with a glassed-in kitchen for all to see and a solitary orchid on each table.

Getting There & Around

BOAT

June to September **Consorzio Marittimo Turistico** (☎ 0187 73 29 87; Via Minzoni 13, La Spezia) runs passenger boats connecting Viareggio (and also Marina di Pisa, Forte dei Marmi, Marina di Carrara and Marina di Massa) with coastal destinations in Liguria, such as the Cinque Terre villages and Portofino.

BUS

Lazzi (☎ 0584 4 62 34) and **CLAP** (☎ 0584 3 09 96) buses run from Piazza d'Azeglio, where both

have offices, to destinations around Tuscany, including services running direct or via Lucca to Florence (€7, 1½ hours, seven daily).

CLAP has fairly regular buses up the coast to Pietrasanta and Forte dei Marmi, as well as up to 12 daily to Lucca (€2.70) and between three and six services a day to Massa (€2.40). It also runs the town's local buses.

From June to September long-distance buses run to such destinations as Milan (€23.50). Buy tickets at travel agencies or the Lazzi kiosk.

TAXI

Call ☎ 0584 4 70 00 or ☎ 0584 4 54 54.

TRAIN

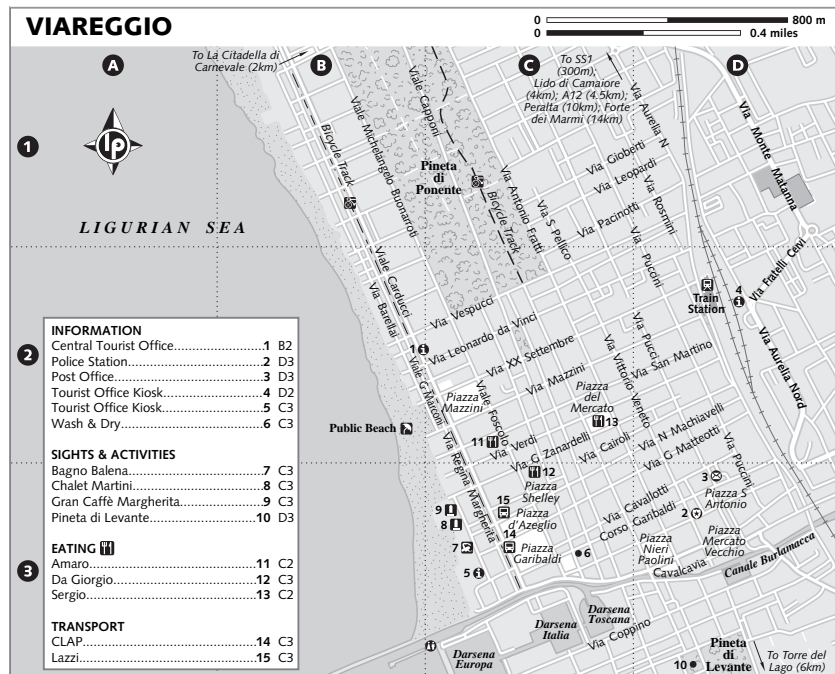
Local trains run to Livorno (€3.20, one hour), Pisa (€2.40, 20 minutes), and La Spezia (€4, one hour) via Massa and Carrara. Regular trains run to Florence (€5.90), via Lucca (€2.10). A couple of Eurostar Italia trains bound for Rome, Genoa and Turin stop by, as do four to five fast trains, bound for Milan and Turin.

AROUND VIAREGGIO

Torre del Lago

A few kilometres south of Viareggio on the other side of the Pineta di Levante, Torre del Lago is a quiet continuation of the seaside theme, but with a key difference: Puccini had a *villa* (☎ 0584 34 14 45; adult/child €7/1.50; ⌚ 10am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Oct, to 5.30pm Dec-Mar, to 6pm Apr & May) here by the lake where he wrote most of his operas, including *Madame Butterfly* and *Tosca*. Puccini fans can pay homage at his grave, inside a chapel in the villa; visit the villa; and watch an open-air performance of one of his operas during July and August's sensational Festival Puccini (www.puccinifestival.it).

From the pontoons opposite Villa Puccini, one-hour boat excursions (☎ 0584 35 02 52; €7) run across the lagoon to the **Parco Naturale Migliariano San Rossore Massaciuccoli**, one of Tuscany's rare stretches of protected coastline. Part swamp, part pine forest, the 230-sq-km park hosts particularly diverse bird life, especially during the migratory periods, when species of falcon, vulture, duck, heron, cormorant and other water birds linger or pass through. Deer, wild boar and feral goats are the biggest of the quadruped year-round residents. Its main visitor centre (☎ 050 53 01 01; www.parcosanrossore.it; ⌚ 9am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Oct-May) is in Cascine Vecchie.



CLAP bus 4 links the centre of Viareggio with Torre del Lago.

North to Liguria

Heading up the coast from Viareggio, you cross into Lido di Camaiore. The development becomes sparser as you press on northwards and the beaches are usually less crowded.

When you reach Marina di Pietrasanta, turn inland 3.5km for the town of Pietrasanta itself. The centre of the old town is Piazza Duomo. If it's open, pop into the Chiesa di Sant'Agostino; its rather stark, Gothic façade may be off-putting but the cloister inside is pleasant. Also here is a 13th-century cathedral and the Palazzo Moroni, with a modest archaeological museum. An elegant B&B in this area is L'Arcadia (☎ 0584 75 71 34; www.arcadia.lu.it; Vai di Solaio 67c; d incl breakfast €80-150), a 200-year-old family home amid olive groves in a hamlet on a hill in Vallecchia, 3km north of Pietrasanta.

Back down on the coast, Forte dei Marmi is the most chic resort on this stretch of coastline (post-Cannes film festival over the border, several of the stars, starlets and satellites retire here to recover). You'll find plenty of places to stay, eat and drink close to the waterfront; the **tourist office** (☎ 0584 8 00 91; www.fortedeimarmi.it in Italian; Via Franceschi 8b; 9am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm Mon-Sat, 3-7pm Sat Oct-May) carries a list. Time your visit for the town's Wednesday market (repeated on Sunday in summer), when you can pick up designer label clothing for a relative snip.

Beyond Forte dei Marmi the seaside is fairly uninspiring, until you reach the border of Liguria and beyond.

APUANE ALPS

Rearing up between the coastal Versilia Riviera and, inland, the vast valley of the Garfagnana, is this mountain range protected by the Parco Regionale delle Alpi Apuane. Altitudes are relatively low – the highest peak, Monte Pisanino, is 1945m high – compared with the real Alps further north, but the Apuane Alps offer great walking possibilities (see p84), often with spectacular views of the coastline and Ligurian Sea. *The Alps of Tuscany* by Francesco Greco presents many more enjoyable multiday routes.

You'll find a good network of marked walking trails and *rifugi* (mountain huts). To guide your steps, pick up *Alpi Apuane Settentrionali*, published by the Massa and Carrara tourist offices with trails and *rifugi* marked up, or *Alpi Apuane*, produced by Edizione Multigraphic of Florence. Both are at 1:25,000.

Caving is the other big outdoor activity, the area riddled with 1300-plus caves. While some serve as spoil-yourself spas, others – like the Grotta del Vento (p210) or Italy's deepest (1200m) and longest (50km) cave, **Antro del Corchia** (☎ 0584 77 84 05; 2hr guided tour €12; 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, shorter hours Sat & Sun only mid-Mar–Jun & Sep–mid-Nov) near Levigliani – are truly sights to behold.

The main gateway into the Parco Regionale delle Alpi Apuane is Seravezza, an important centre for marble extraction since the 16th century. Here the park runs an **information centre** (☎ 0584 75 61 44; www.parcapuane.toscana.it; Via Corrado del Greco 11; 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Wed-Mon Oct-May) and **Castelnuovo di Garfagnana** (p210), which has the **Centro Visite Parco Alpi Apuane** (☎ 0583 64 42 42; www.parcapuane.it in Italian; Piazza delle Erbe 1; 9am-1pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Sun Jun-Sep, shorter hours Oct-May). Both centres are well-stocked with maps and brochures about the Apuane Alps and have mountains of information on walking, horse-riding, *rifugi* and so on.

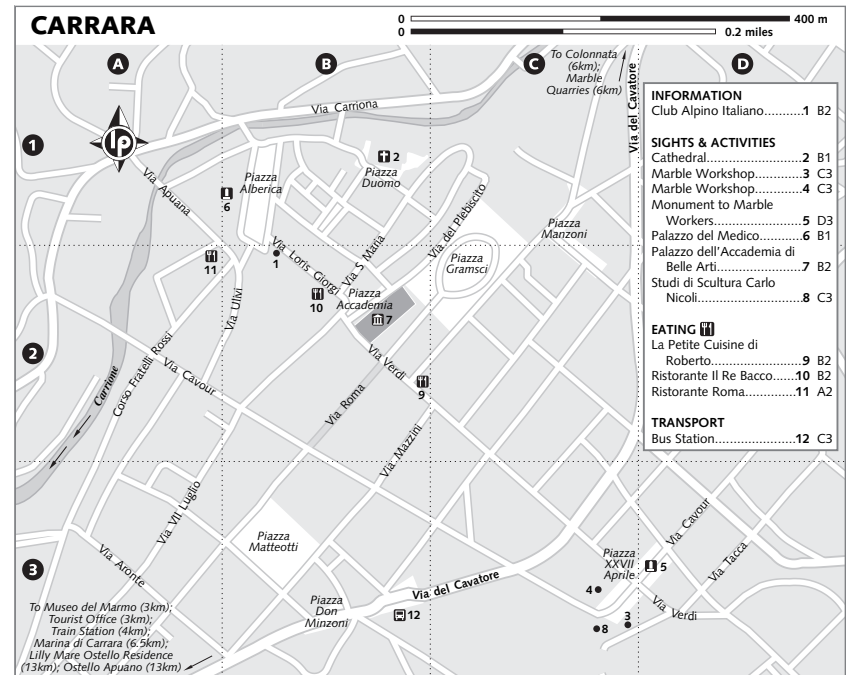
A recommended route from Seravezza is due southeast along the Vezza river to the picturesque hamlet of Stazema, high in the hills. The village entrance is marked by the Romanesque Chiesa di Santa Maria Assunta, and it makes a great base for walks in the Apuane Alps.

CARRARA

pop 65,000

Marble Mountain is what Carrara, about 7km northwest of Massa, is synonymous with: indeed, gazing at the panorama of snowy-white mountain peaks looming large behind the town of Carrara, at the foothills of the Apuane Alps, and you could be forgiven for thinking it is snow. Nothing more than a breathtaking illusion, it is in fact marble, field upon field of it, in vast quarries that eat into the hills.

Excruciatingly mean to the environment, yes, but sculptors still flock to these scarred foothills of the Apuane Alps in search of the perfect piece. The texture and purity of



Carrara's white marble (derived from the Greek *marmaros*, meaning shining stone) is unrivalled and it was here that Michelangelo selected marble for some of his masterpieces, *David* (actually sculpted from a dud veined block) included. In 2006 Carrara marble exports increased by 4.43% to 3.2 million tons, worth €1.8 billion.

The marble quarries, actually 5km north of town in Colonnata and Franscritti, have been worked since Roman times. It's hard, dangerous work and on Carrara's central Piazza XXVII Aprile a monument remembers workers who lost their lives in the quarries. These tough men formed the backbone of a strong leftist and anarchist tradition in Carrara, something that won them no friends among the Fascists or, later, the occupying German forces. Nowadays, environmentalists oppose the continual massive quantity of marble that is hauled from the hillside, while quarry owners fight back in their interest and that of their 8000-odd employees.

Bar the thrill of seeing its mosaic marble pavements, marble street benches, decorative marble *putti* (winsome cherubs) and mar-

ble everything-else, the old centre of palm tree-clad Carrara is unrivalling. Its cheap and cheerful coastal counterparts, Marina di Carrara and Marina di Massa, popular with holidaying Italians, and its quarries are really what make it a fascinating place to visit.

Information

Carrara tourist office (☎ 0585 84 41 36; Viale XX Settembre; 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr & May, 9am-1pm & 4-8pm or 9pm Jun-Aug, 9am-1pm & 3-5pm Sep-Mar) Signposted 'Checkpoint Bus Turistic', opposite the stadium; has maps of Carrara, its marble workshops and out-of-town quarries.

Club Alpino Italiano (☎ 0585 77 67 82; caicarrara@apuanet.com; Via Loris Giorgi 1) Walking information.

Sights

TOWN CENTRE

The **cathedral** (Piazza Duomo; 7am-noon & 3.30-7pm), at the heart of the old town, is one of the earliest medieval buildings to have been constructed entirely of Apuane marble. Building began in the 11th century and dragged on for two centuries. The façade – Romanesque

below and elaborately fretted Gothic above – was largely inspired by Pisan models.

Partly colonnaded 15th-century **Piazza Alberica**, with its festively painted houses, deserves a peek. On the west side is the exuberant 18th-century **Palazzo del Medico**, erected to speak power by the most powerful quarry owners of the time. Check out the cherubs below each window, leering gargoyles above and the family coat of arms sitting over the central window, all, of course, in Carrara marble.

The much-modified castle on Piazza Gramsci started life as a fortified residence of the Malaspina clan and is now the **Palazzo dell'Accademia di Belle Arti**, Carrara's fine arts school.

THE MARBLE QUARRIES

The two major marble quarries are **Cave di Colonnata** and **Cave di Fantiscritti**, both around 5km north of town. Follow the signs '*cave de marmo*' (marble quarries), crossing the Ponti di Vara, a viaduct built in the 19th century for the railways and a monument in its own right; at the time it was considered one of the great feats of modern engineering. In Colonnata, motorists must park 1km before the village and walk or hop aboard a minibus (€1) that takes you to the tiny village's central marble-paved square, Piazza Palestro.

To get an idea of the hard grind, visit the **Fantiscritti cave** (see the boxed text, opposite) or poke your nose into the dust-filled air of the workshops on Carrara's central Piazza XXVII Aprile 8. Artists frequently instruct the marble **laboratory** (workshop) on how they want a piece executed – or at least begun – thus cleverly avoiding the hard and dusty work themselves. **Studi di Scultura Carlo Nicoli** (☎ 0585 700 79; www.nicoli-sculptures.com; Piazza XXVII Aprile 8) arranges tours and sculpture courses.

Opposite the stadium, halfway between Carrara and Marina di Carrara, the well-thought-out and fascinating **Museo del Marmo** (☎ 0585 84 57 46; Viale XX Settembre; admission free; 10am–6pm Mon–Sat May, Jun & Sep, 10am–8pm Mon–Sat Jul–Aug, 9am–5pm Oct–Apr), with descriptive panels in English and a brilliant collection of modern sculpture, has more marble in more varieties than you'll ever have seen before (there are seven types of white marble alone, ranging from stately ivory white to striped 'onion' marble) and describes extraction from chisel-and-hammer days to the 21st century's high-powered industrial quarrying.

Sleeping

Ostello Apuano (☎ 0585 78 00 34; ostelloapuano@hotmail.com; Viale delle Pinete 237, Marina di Massa; dm €11; 11 mid-Mar–mid-Oct) This beautifully set HI-affiliated hostel is bang slap next to the sand. The handsome 1920s house – a German base during WWII – has basic clean dorms (four to 12 beds) with stunning views; room 12 even has a balcony starting nose-to-nose with the waves. Breakfast is €1.60, a packed lunch €7 and a packed dinner €9.50. Find the hostel in Partaccia, just north of Marina di Massa. From Carrara train station catch bus 53, marked Via Avenza Mare.

Lilly Mare Ostello Residence (☎ 0585 24 12 22; www.residence-lillymare.it; Marina di Massa; 2-person studio per week €230–470; 11 Apr–Sep; p s) The perfect family choice, this appealing well-manicured complex sits on the opposite side of the road to the beach and has plenty to entertain – flowery garden, climbing frame and playground for kids, pool and so on. Should camping be your thing, pitch up at its neighbouring pine-tree-backed camp site, Lilly Pineta.

Eating

The finest culinary opportunities are in Colonnata, where *crostoni lardo e funghi* (mushroom and lard-topped toasts) whet appetites for the chestnut-flour *tagliatelle*, *fresco* (fresh) and *stagionato* (mature) *pecorino* cheese and other local products.

Ristorante Roma (☎ 0585 7 06 32; Piazza Cesare Battisti 1; meals €20; 11 Mon–Sat) Just off the square, this restaurant offers smiley, speedy service, a menu that changes according to the season and a dozen-odd grappas to shoot back. Try the seafood risotto followed by a simple yet memorable vanilla gelato.

Also recommended for local cuisine: **Ristorante Il Re Bacco** (☎ 0585 77 67 78; Via Loris Giorgi 5; 11 Mon–Sat) Excellent wine list and tastings. **La Petite Cuisine di Roberto** (Via Verdi 4a; lunch menu €15; 11 Mon–Sat) Fresh fish and seafood.

Getting There & Away

From the bus station (☎ 0585 8 52 11; Piazza Don Minzoni), CAT buses serve Massa to the south and, in the Lunigiana area, Fivizzano, Aulla and Pontremoli.

Trains along the coastal line (from La Spezia, Genoa, Rome, Viareggio and so on) stop nearer Marina di Carrara, from where local buses shuttle into Carrara itself.

MARBLE MOUNTAIN

'Here we are, 600m from the beginning of the tunnel, 600m from the end of it, 430m above sea level and 400m from the top. We are right in the middle of the mountain', the Cava di Fantiscritti tour guide informs us.

Zippering down a dank, wet, unlit tunnel in a dusty white minibus, grubby headlights blazing, driver incongruously dolled up in a shiny shocking-pink bomber jacket, it is all somewhat surreal. After being inside the pitch-black marble mountain for only about five minutes, we are all told to get out.

It is 16°C, foggy, damn dirty on foot (two Japanese had sensibly brought their wellies), and far from being a polished pearly white, it's grey – cold, wet, miserable grey. Rough-cut blocks, several metres long and almost as wide, are strewn about the place like toy bricks and marble columns prop up the 17m-high ceiling, above which a second gallery, another 17m high, stands tall. The place is bigger than several football pitches, yet amazingly there is still plenty of marble mountain left for the five workers employed at Miseglia's **Cava di Fantiscritti**, 5km north of Carrara, to extract 10,000 tonnes of white marble a month. The current market price: €200 to €1000 per tonne, with Carrara's very best commanding double that.

The hard graft – mechanical diamond-cutting chains, with the aid of water, slice through the rock like butter – is done in the cooler morning, leaving the afternoons free for **tour groups** (Marmo Tour: ☎ 339 765 74 70; 25min guide tour adult/child €6/3; 11 3.30–7pm Mon–Fri, 10.30am–7pm Sat) like us to slosh around. Marble dust is horribly fine; mix it with water and the goo is gross. Quarrying marble is definitely no holiday.

To learn how the Romans did it (the *very* hard way with chisels and axes), visit the open-air **museum** (admission free; 11 9am–7pm), next to the souvenir shop opposite the quarry entrance. Don't miss the B&W shots of marble blocks being precariously slid down the *lizza* (mountain pathway) to the bottom of the mountain, where 18 pairs of oxen would pull the marble to Carrara port. Indeed, these days, the bulk of marble is shipped off: see the blocks, marked in Arabic and other languages, at the port waiting to be worked elsewhere.

○ **Locanda Apuana** (☎ 0585 76 80 17; www.locandaapuana.com; Via Comunale 1; meals €15; 11 Tue–Sat, lunch Sun), located in Colonnata, 2km from Fantiscritti, is the place to zip to should hunger beckon. You can sate your taste for a different marble here – in the fantastic guise of *lardo di colonnata* (thinner than wafer-thin slices of local pork fat marinated in a mix of herbs and oils in shallow marble vats). Buy a vacuum-packed hunk to take home from one of the many *larderia* in the village: **Larderia il Poggio** (☎ 0585 755 80 29; Via della Fontana 52) sells lard aged for six months (€13.50 a kg) and 24 months (€17 a kg), as well as *crema di lardo* (€20 a kg) and a useful pamphlet (€1) loaded with recipes using Colonnata lard. The Rolls Royce of lard (€20 a kg) is marinated, salt-coated slabs of the black-pelted Cinta Senese porker.

Then head back to Carrara for a well-spent afternoon at the Museo del Marmo (opposite) or join Mario and Caterina at **Colonnata Trekking** (☎ 0585 76 80 80) in Carrara for a hike to an abandoned village and quarry in these hollow old foothills of the Apuane Alps.

Oh, and don't wear black.

THE GARFAGNANA

At the heart of the Garfagnana is the valley formed by the Serchio river and its tributaries. Historically a region of net migration as villagers packed their bags to lead less harsh lives on the plains, it's now revitalised thanks to tourism and to the paper mills that whirl outside most valley towns. (Diecimo's alone produces over 100,000 tonnes annually, including kilometre upon kilometre of Eco Lucart, the *soi-disant* environmentally friendly toilet paper.)

Prime launch pad for treks into the Apuane Alps, most visitors to this relatively undiscovered area of raw beauty are here for the active life, enjoying horse-trekking, hiking and biking. **Apians** (☎ 338 150 50 11; www.apians.com in Italian) in Castelnuova di Garfagnana organises canyoning, climbing, speleology, mountaineering and mountain-bike expeditions. An indispensable information source for independent souls keen to tour the Garfagnana and the Apuane Alps by bike is **Le Vie della Cantera** (www.panterabike.com), a truly comprehensive site

DETOUR: CARRARA TO FIVIZZANO

From Carrara take SS446 northwards, following signs to **Fosdinovo** and its formidable **Castello di Malaspina** (☎ 0187 6 88 91; guided tours adult/child €5/3; 1 Wed–Mon). Owned by the Malaspina clan since 1340 (still today, it belongs to a branch of the family), its defensive walls and towers were gradually modified from the 16th century when the family converted it into a residence. A charming legend has it that a young princess died of a broken heart within the castle walls and at full moon her shadow can be seen drifting from window to window.

From Fosdinovo, follow the SS446 until a T-junction with the SS63. Heading right (eastwards) will bring you to **Fivizzano**, a largely modern farming centre, from where a wonderfully pretty mountain road runs northwards over the Apennines and deep into Emilia-Romagna.

with download area to pick up its 10 suggested cycling itineraries, which range from an easy 18km to a tougher 231km long.

Approaching the area along SS12, you hit **Borgo a Mozzano**, with its wacky, asymmetrical **Ponte della Maddalena** (also known as **Ponte del Diavolo**, or **Devil's Bridge**). Each of its five arches is different. Typical of the era, this medieval bridge rises to a high midpoint, then descends to the other side of the Serchio – only the 'midpoint' here is well off centre so the whole thing looks like a rearing Loch Ness monster in stone.

Bagni di Lucca

pop 6550

Small town Bagni di Lucca is small indeed. Famed in the early-19th century for its thermal waters enjoyed by the gentry of Lucca and an international set (Byron, Shelley, Heinrich Heine and Giacomo Puccini were among the celebrity guests to take to the waters), the spa town today is a pale shadow of its former splendid neoclassical self when it had its own casino, theatre and atypically ornate Anglican church (look for the stucco lion and unicorn motif above each window), now the municipal library. In the small British cemetery baroque tombs speak volumes.

There are two distinct areas: the smaller **Ponte a Serraglio**, clustered around a bridge that crosses the Lima river, where the **tourist office** (☎ 0583 80 57 45; Via del Casinò; 1 9.30am–12.30pm & 3.30–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 9.30am–12.30pm Sun mid–Mar–mid–Sep, 9.30am–12.30pm Mon & Wed–Sat mid–Sep–mid–Mar) is; and the main town, 2km north, where most shops, restaurants and hotels are.

There is just one *terme* (spa), the **Bagni di Lucca Terme** (☎ 0583 8 72 21; www.termebagnidilucca.it; Piazza San Martino 11; 1 8am–12.30pm Mon–Sat Apr, May, Sep & Oct, 8am–12.30pm & 2.30–6pm Mon–Sat Jun–Aug),

where the weary can be revitalised with a salt, olive oil or stone massage, and the hale and hearty can rejuvenate after a day's hiking with a session in the *grotte a vapore* (steam grottoes). Should you want to flop all night, check into **Antico Albergo Terme** (☎ 0583 8 60 34; Via del Paretaio 1; d incl breakfast €78–94; p s) next door. Its thermal pool, free for guests, is a toasty 30°C.

Quell hunger pangs at **Circolo dei Forestieri** (☎ 0583 8 60 38; Piazza Jean Varraud 10; meals €15–25; 1 closed lunch Mon & Tue Easter–Oct), **Bagni's belle époque** 'foreigners club' where a splendidly royal lunch can be tucked into beneath chandeliers at splendidly pauper prices.

Lazzi buses run here from Lucca (€2.50, 50 minutes, nine daily).

The Lima Valley & Abetone

The SS12 continues northeast from the Garfagnana into Pistoia province. If you're going to the ski slopes, it's the most picturesque route. Possible minor detours en route are to **San Cassiano**, with its 12th-century church, and **Lucchio**, spectacular for its position on the northeast slope of a wooded ridge.

Abetone (www.abetone.com in Italian) on the Emilia-Romagna border, has some 30 hotels, most of which insist on half-board in season. It's Tuscany's main ski resort and also makes a good base for a day or two of summertime striding. See p90 for more detailed skiing information.

Ostello Renzo Bizzarri (☎ 0573 6 01 17; bucaneve@abetone.com; Via Brennero 157; dm/d incl breakfast €13/40; 1 Dec–Apr & mid–Jun–Sep), **Abetone's** large, secluded HI hostel with its enthusiastic staff, is very well equipped for skiers and summer walkers.

For those without their own transport, the easiest way up is to catch a bus from Pistoia (see p163).

Barga

pop 11,000

Barga is one of those irresistibly slow Tuscan hilltop towns with a disproportionately large and dynamic English-speaking community. The place is tiny yet it has its own English-language bookshop, newsletter, blog and website (www.barganews.com, which, among other things, votes on the best toilets in town) and a fair share of foreign toes tapping in its **Jazz Club** (☎ 0583 72 38 60; www.bargajazzclub.com). The village honours its patron saint on 25 July with an opera festival and throws a **Sagra del Pesce e Patate** (fish and chip festival) for 10 days of the same month. But heh! This is Italy's most Scottish town, as any Bargaian whose ancestors emigrated to Scotland in search of a better life in the 19th century will proudly tell you.

A lovely patchwork of narrow streets, archways, ancient walls and small piazzas, the steep old town tumbles downhill at the foot of the cathedral, which was built between the 10th and 14th centuries. The cathedral's pulpit in particular is exquisite, carved by the idiosyncratic 13th-century sculptor **Guido Bigarelli**, and sits on four red marble pillars. The two front ones rest on lions that dominate a dragon and a heretic, while one of the back pillars rests on a disconsolate dwarf.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0583 72 47 45, 800 028 497; www.comune.barga.lu.it; Via di Mezzo 47; 1 9am–1pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm & 2.30–7pm Sat, 10am–12.30pm & 3–5pm Sun)

DETOUR: LUCIGNANO

On the SS445 between Bagni di Lucca and Barga, take a turn right after 9.5km, past alpine meadows and just beyond Calavorno. Signposts read to the picturesque stone village of **Lucignano**, perched high above to your right. At 4.7km cross a bridge over the river and watch for the magnificent view of the medieval village of **Montefegatesi** to your right. At 10km you will enter the village. Conquer the narrow ascent in first gear, squeeze your wing mirrors through the stone gateways and you'll find yourself in a world of leaning passages, cobble squares and bent but welcoming old women. Park and ponder the magnificent view from the stone wall due north of here, before winding your way back to the main road.

has plenty of info on Barga's multitude of cultural events and **Tuscany Walking** (☎ 0583 72 40 47; www.tuscanywalking.com; Via Al Monte 12) is a recommended English-speaking set-up which leads groups of two to 12 people on one-day guided hikes (€50 to €65 including transport if needed and lunch) from Barga into the Garfagnana and Apuane Alps.

Barga is a popular day trip from Lucca, and CLAP buses link Barga and Lucca (€3.50, 1¼ hours) up to 10 times daily, stopping in **Piazzale del Fosso** by **Porta Mancianella**, the main gate into the old town.

SLEEPING

Albergo Alpino (☎ 0583 72 33 36; www.bargaholiday.com; Via Pascoli 41; s/d €45/65; 1 closed Nov) In the hands of the Castelvecchi family for nigh on a century, this 1920s lodge-style hotel opposite the post office has a great bar and restaurant. Rooms are tidy, clean and comfortable and the old town's a mere five minutes' walk away.

La Pergola (☎ 0583 71 12 39; www.hotel-lapergola.com; Via del Giardino; d €50–66) Don't be tricked into thinking the abandoned building on Via San Antonio is La Pergola; it moved premises a while back and remains a prettily floral place with restaurant and stunning views of the hilltop village from its 3rd-floor sun-trap terrace.

Casa Fontana (☎ 0583 72 45 24; www.casa-fontana.com; Via di Mezzo 77; d incl breakfast €98–109; 1 mid–Mar–Oct) Six stylish en-suite doubles reside inside this 18th-century townhouse with racing-green shutters and cherry, sunflower-yellow façade. Find it clinging to the steep stagger up to the old town.

EATING

L'Osteria (☎ 0583 72 45 47; losteria@barganews.com; Piazza Angelo 13–14; meals €15; 1 Fri–Wed) This small bistro with wood-decked terrace overlooking one of Barga's loveliest pedestrian squares, is a truly Tuscan affair. Be it sausages and beans scented with rosemary and sage, or slices of local *pecorino* cheese with pear sauce or honey and nuts, ingredients are strictly local and seasonal.

Caffè l'Altana (☎ 0583 72 31 92; Via di Mezzo 1; meals €25; 1 Thu–Tue Mar–Jan) Another dead-simple, unpretentious eating spot where you could hang for hours: feast on the flamboyant frescoes, peppermint-blue walls and a satisfying fare courtesy of daughter Angela and mama Camilla.

Castelnuovo di Garfagnana

pop 6050

Castelnuovo, the main town in the valley, towers over the confluence of the river Serchio and its smaller tributary, the Turrite. Apart from the formidable 14th-century Rocca, a castle built for the Este dukes of Ferrara, there's little to see, but the town is a prime source of information on the Apuane Alps.

On the main square, the Centro Visite Parco Alpi Apuane (see p204) provides pretty much the same information as the **tourist office** (☎ 0583 64 10 07; www.garfagnanaturistica.info; Piazza delle Erbe; 11 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Sun Jun-Sep, closed Sun Oct-May) opposite. Both have mountains of documentation on walking, mountain biking, horse riding and other activities as well as lists of local guides, and *agriturismi* and *rifugi* off any beaten track. They also sell hiking maps, including one of the park entitled *Parco delle Alpi Apuane* (1:25,000, €6.20), and *Appennino Toscoemiliano: Reggiano, Modenese e Garfagnana* (1:25,000, €6.20), both published by Florence's Edizioni Multigraphic Firenze whose map catalogue is online at www.edizionimultigraphic.it (in Italian). At the tourist office, you can also get the coastal side of the park mapped on *Versilia: Parco delle Alpi Apuane* (1:50,000, €6.20).

Hardened walkers can meet local hardened walkers at the local branch of **Club Alpin Italiano** (☎ 0583 655 77; Via Vittorio Emanuele 3; 11 9-10pm Thu, 6-7pm Sat).

SLEEPING & EATING

Da Carlino (☎ 0583 64 42 70; www.dacarlino.it in Italian; Via Garibaldi 15; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €50/70/85/90, half-/full board per person €55/70) Until WWII Da Carlino operated as a tiny little restaurant on the opposite side of the street. Still run by the Anoreucci family but across the road, the flower-bedecked hotel-restaurant is a cosy spot indeed to eat and sleep. Its trout and homemade meringues are practically local legends in town.

Trattoria Marchetti (☎ 0583 63 91 57; Via Testi 10; mains from €6) This earthy, inexpensive lunch spot with tables beneath the arcades has warm wooden innards and a busy counter dishing up massive plates of delicious local dishes. For starters, dig into their *zuppa di farro*, a rich soup made from Tuscan spelt.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

There are up to 10 CLAP buses from Lucca on weekdays (€3.60, 1½ hours).

Rent a bike from **Cicli Maggi** (☎ 0583 63 91 66; Via Nicola Fabrizi 49; half-/full day €8/15).

Around Castelnuovo di Garfagnana

Several scenic roads fan out from Castelnuovo. If you've steady nerves, try the concertina of hairpin bends that lifts you, via Castiglione di Garfagnana, to the Foce di Radici pass across the Apennines and into Emilia-Romagna. The scenery in parts is quite splendid. The minor parallel road to the south leads you to **San Pellegrino in Alpe**, the site of a fine monastery.

Walkers will enjoy the small **Riserva Naturale dell'Orecchiella** on the narrow road via Corfino, itself a pleasant village with several hotels. Seven kilometres further north is the park's **tourist office** (☎ 0583 61 90 98; 11 9am-7pm Jul-mid-Sep, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Jun & late Sep), where you can pick up information and maps for walks within the reserve. For the most scenic route to the park, turn west to Villa Collemantine along a tiny road just beyond Castiglione, then right along the road for Corfino.

The SS445 follows the Serchio Valley to the east of the Apuane Alps and bores into the Lunigiana (see p211) at Tuscany's northern limit. It's a pretty, twisting route that leads you through lush green countryside. About 8km north of Castelnuovo at Poggio, there's a turn-off to the pretty, artificial **Lago Vagli** along the Torrente Edron stream. You can do some pleasant short walks in the area, or simply a circular driving route that brings you back to Castelnuovo.

Hollowed within these hills are an astounding 1300 caves, nearly all requiring a guide and special tackle. The most accessible and spectacular is the **Grotta del Vento** (Wind Cave; ☎ 0583 72 20 24; www.grottadelvento.com), 9km west of the SS445. Here, the wonders of the underground abysses, lakes and caverns contrast with the bleak landscape above. From April to October, you can take a one-hour guided tour (adult/child €7.50/5, eight times daily), a two-hour option (adult/child €12/8.50, four times daily) or a three-hour full monty (adult/child €17/11.50, at 10am and 2pm). November to March, only the one-hour tour is on offer. Bring your woollies; it can feel chilly down there, even in high summer.

THE LUNIGIANA

Among Tuscany's wildest and least-known pockets is the Lunigiana, a landlocked enclave of territory bordered to the north and east by Emilia-Romagna, to the west by Liguria and to the south by the Apuane Alps and the Garfagnana. Pontremoli, charming in its own right, makes a great base for exploring this relatively unexplored, rugged territory.

The medieval Via Francigena, a vital route connecting northern and central Italy in Roman days and later a key access for armies and Rome-bound pilgrims alike, roughly follows the modern A15 autostrada from the Cisa pass south to Sarzana, just over into Liguria and on the coast.

VILLAGGIO

pop 4635

A one-time waystation on the Via Francigena, Villafranca was, so local legend says, a medieval tourist trap where the difference between local tax collectors and plain old thieves was decidedly vague. At the village's northern end is a once-thriving mill turned ethnographical museum, the **Museo Etnografico della Lunigiana** (☎ 0187 49 34 17; Via dell'Antico Molino; admission €2.30; 11 9am-noon & 4-7pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm Tue-Thu, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-May). Find it wedged between the church and the footbridge spanning the rocky Magra river.

Albergo Manganelli (☎ 0187 49 30 62; Piazza San Niccolò 5; d €50; p), mustard-yellow, family-run and graced with plenty of old B&W photographs of Villafranca several aeons ago, is a true bargain. Rooms are big and airy and there's a popular restaurant manned by grandma in the kitchen downstairs. Find it next to the tall finger of a ruined tower on the south side of town.

PONTREMOLI

pop 8100

An enchanting place to meander, this small town oozes charm: its cobbled piazzas are surrounded by colonnaded arches that give shade to enticing bars and cafés, and its shops are a fascinating mix of old-fashioned farm shops selling local produce, and retro boutiques showcasing 1950s Italian design.

A primary halting place along the Via Francigena, the original old town is a long sliver stretching north to south between the Magra

and Verde rivers. These watercourses served as natural defensive barriers in what was a key position for the control of traffic between northern and central Italy. In the 17th century the town enjoyed a boom and most of the fine residences date back to those times.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0187 83 37 01; www.inlunigiana.it in Italian; Piazza della Repubblica 6; 11 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat) operates on Saturdays from a different office within the town hall on the opposite side of the square.

From central Piazza della Repubblica and adjacent Piazza del Duomo (the latter flanked by the 17th-century cathedral with its neoclassical façade), walk along Via Garibaldi then bear left along Vietata l'Affissione, a pretty alley that staggers uphill to **Castello del Piagnaro** (☎ 0187 83 14 39; adult/6-16yr €4/2; 11 9am-noon & 3-6pm summer, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sun winter). Although originally raised in the 9th century, what you see today is largely the result of 14th- and 15th-century reconstruction. Views across town are enchanting and inside is a small museum showcasing several striking primitive stele found nearby.

CAT (☎ 800 22 30 10) buses run regularly south to Aulla and other destinations around the Lunigiana and you can also get to La Spezia. Pontremoli also sits on the Parma-La Spezia train line.

SLEEPING & EATING

○ **Costa d'Orsola** (☎ 0187 83 33 32; www.costa-dorsola.it; Orsola; s/d incl buffet breakfast €62/99; 11 Mar-Oct; p i s) For a true taste of this beautiful untamed region, spend the night in what was a cattle shed (hard to believe) on this lovely old farmstead where three families toiled until the 1960s. Subsequently abandoned, Gianni, Daniele and Adele stepped in to breathe new life into the place in 1989, using wholly natural materials. Perfect walking terrain, consult hiking maps in the old stone or simply meander past fields and groves where 43 sheep graze (for meat) and olives slowly ripen in the sun (the farm makes its own olive oil). Lounging by the pool all day is heaven indeed and in spring and autumn, the farm runs gardening courses. Find it 3.3km from the centre of Pontremoli and 1.6m from the motorway exit, at the end of a country lane.

Da Bussè (☎ 0187 83 13 71; Piazza del Duomo 32; meals €25; 11 dinner Mon-Thu, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun) Literally in the shadow of the cathedral, this *osteria* – simplicity itself – has been here since the

1930s and is known far and wide for its rich picking of mushrooms in season. It opens for dinner at 7.45pm.

Caffè degli Svizzeri (Piazza della Repubblica 21-22; h Tue-Sun). As a notice inside entreats at this delightful village café overlooking Pontremoli's central square, refrain from leaning your elbows on the marble-topped tables. The tables, like the café itself, which is all in panelled wood, are well over 100 years old (it dates to 1910). In winter, huddle around the ceramic stove eating *spongata degli svizzeri* (almond

cake) and *biscotti della salute* (aniseed biscuits). In summer, sit beneath the arcades licking an aqua-blue ice and try to guess what flavour it is. A cappuccino costs €1.10 (€1.43 with service!).

Il Castagneto della Manganella (☎ 0187 85 07 07; Via Garibaldi 3) Dried sweetened cranberries, cranberry grappa, chestnut flour and mushroom pasta are among the many fruits of the forest sold at this delightful local produce shop just off the central cathedral square. *Porcino secco* (dried porcini mushrooms) cost €80 per kg.