

Central Coast & Elba



Despite what seems an enviable setting, the Central Coast is not burdened with destinations that most people have heard of. Anonymous working cities prevail, though significant medieval towns and well-preserved Etruscan sites give the area modest pride while providing travellers with a bit of diversity from similar, over-crowded attractions further inland.

The hinterland hides eye-catching places like the ancient villages of Suvereto and Campeglia Marittima, while offering a less-sweltering alternative to the summertime coast. As in Central Tuscany, tiny roads, blind switchbacks and remote villages mean the area is best – and judiciously – explored by car.

The port city of Livorno, like the primary school girl-bully, dares you to like her. Peculiar, intimidating and well-fed, amenable camaraderie is a possibility – if she doesn't punch your lights out first. The Parco Archeologico di Baratti e Populonia, containing a wealth of Etruscan civilisation enticements, combined with nearby medieval Populonia Alta make for an absorbing diversion. Livorno and Piombino are departure points for ferries to the breezy Tuscan islands of Capraia and Gorgona and, for those going deeper into the Mediterranean, to Sardinia and Corsica too.

The Central Coast also holds a modest resort scene. Many strands are worth exploring, especially on the southern Golfo di Baratti. The region's best seaside and al fresco activities, however, are a quick ferry cruise away on Isola d'Elba. All the classic appeal of a typical Mediterranean island, including the high-season tourist frenzy, without a single high-rise fronting the beach. The rugged interior demands to be tramped. Or mountain biked. Or admired from a sea kayak.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover the wonders of **cacciucco** (p217), a delicious and traditional seafood stew, while devouring Livorno's generous dining scene
- Combine a beach flop at **Golfo di Baratti** (p222) with an exploration of Etruscan tombs at the **Parco Archeologico di Baratti e Populonia** (p222)
- Escape to **Capraia** (p219) for some unspoiled diving, walking and sunbaking
- Conquer the tortuously steep streets of little **Suvereto** (p221)
- Alternate between the beach and copious activities on **Isola d'Elba** (p223), then indulge in a wriggling fresh seafood dinner



LIVORNO

pop 156,000

Livorno is Tuscany's second-largest city and a quintessential port town with few apologies. Its old churches and arresting architecture may be a strangely welcome change for Tuscan-weary souls craving a little variety. Camera-free, low-impact diversions such as the seafood, reputedly the best on the Tyrrhenian coast, and the popular beaches that start south of the city make a pre/post ferry layover agreeable. Leg stretching can be done in the worthwhile, if ambitiously labelled, 'Little Venice' district.

History

The earliest references to Livorno date from 1017. The port was in the hands of Pisa and

then Genoa for centuries, until Florence took control in 1421. It was still tiny – by the 1550s it boasted a grand total of 480 permanent residents. All that changed under Cosimo I de' Medici, who converted the scrawny settlement into a heavily fortified coastal bastion.

It was declared a free port in the 17th century, sparking swift development. By the end of the 18th century it was a vital, cosmopolitan city, functioning as one of the main staging posts for British and Dutch merchants who were then operating between Western Europe and the Middle East, with a permanent population of around 80,000. The 19th century again saw the city swell with injections into the economy, arts and culture.

Heavily bombed during WWII (it was one of Fascist Italy's main naval bases), the city was rebuilt with little regard for aesthetics, giving the centre a largely unimaginative face that only a sea captain could love. Its bizarre anglicised name, Leghorn, is rarely used – and only then by impish guidebooks.

Orientation

From the main train station on Piazza Dante walk westwards along Viale Carducci, Via de Larderei, then Via Grande into central Piazza Grande, Livorno's main square.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Caffè Grande (Via Grande 59; per hr €5; 7am-11pm Jun-Sep, 7am-11pm Wed-Mon Oct-May) Has four machines upstairs.

Frag Planet (Scali del Corso 9; per hr €2; 10am-1pm & 3.30-8pm, closed Sat & Mon mornings)

LAUNDRY

Niagara (Borgo dei Cappuccini 13)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital (☎ 0586 22 31 11; Viale Alfieri 36)

POST

Post Office (Via Cairoli 46)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist Kiosk (☎ 0586 20 46 11; www.costadeglietruschi.it; Piazza del Municipio; 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar)

Tourist Office (☎ 0586 89 53 20; 1 Jun-Sep) Near the main ferry terminal at Stazione Marittima.

Sights

The **Fortezza Nuova** (New Fort; admission free), in the area known as Piccola Venezia (Little Venice) because of its small canals, was built, using Venetian methods of reclaiming land from the sea, for the Medici court in the late 16th century. Laced with canals, what this area lacks in gondolas and tourists, it makes up for with a certain shabby charm. The waterways here are flanked by faded, peeling apartments that are brightly decorated with strings of washing hanging out to dry. The interior of the fort is now a park and little else remains except the sturdy outer walls.

Close to the waterfront is the city's other fort, the **Fortezza Vecchia** (Old Fort), constructed 60 years earlier on the site of an

11th-century building. With huge vertical cracks and bits crumbling away, it looks as though it might give up and slide into the sea at any moment.

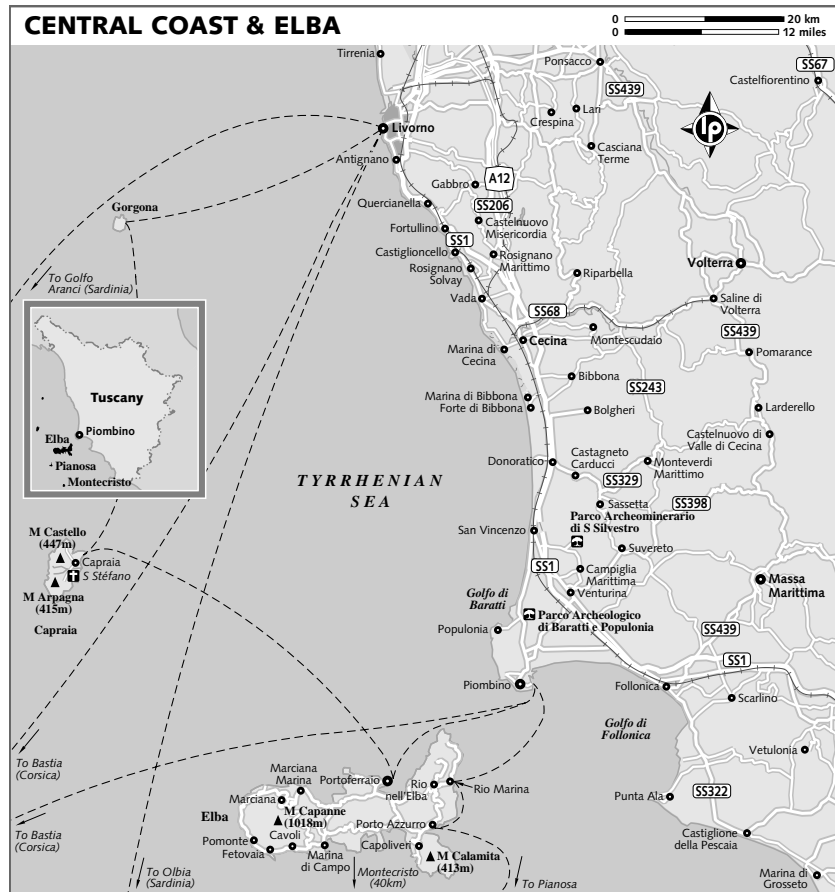
The **Mercato Centrale** (Via Buontalenti; 11am-6pm Mon-Sat), Livorno's magnificent late-19th-century 95m-long neoclassical food market, miraculously survived Allied WWII bombing intact. For us, it's the finest site in town, both architecturally and gastronomically (see p217). Big enough to house airplanes, market stalls sell food and beverages to satisfy any self-catering need. Get there early for the full effect of the fish section, which should charge admission to view its oddities.

Livorno's friendly and hands on **Museo di Storia Naturale del Mediterraneo** (☎ 0586 26 67 11; www.provincia.livorno.it; Via Roma 234; adult/child €10/5; 11am-1pm Tue-Sat, 3-7.30pm Tue, Thu & Sun) is an exhaustive, first-rate museum experience for the natural sciences. Expanded rooms with temporary exhibits will open in 2008, while the highlight of the permanent collection is a 20m-long common whale skeleton called 'Annie'.

The **Museo Civico Giovanni Fattori** (☎ 0586 80 80 01; museofattori@comune.livorno.it; Via San Jacopo in Acquaviva 65; admission €4; 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun), in a pretty park, features works by the 19th-century Italian impressionist Macchiaioli school, led by Livorno-born Giovanni Fattori. The group, inspired by the Parisian Barbizon school, flouted stringent academic art conventions and worked directly from nature, emphasising immediacy and freshness through patches, or 'stains', of colour (*macchia*). Though the style was noted/criticised for its 'lack of finish', it did not go nearly as far dissolving form into light as the simultaneous work done by French Impressionists. The museum often hosts temporary exhibitions.

The city's unspectacular **cathedral**, designed by visiting British architect Inigo Jones, is just off Piazza Grande. Jones later used this piazza's layout as a model for Covent Garden.

The Etruscan Coast (Costa degli Etruschi) begins south of Livorno. The town's beaches stretch for some way southwards but they are pebbly and generally nothing special. Overlooking a few are some grand old seaside villas that merit more than a glance. Bus No 1 from the main train station heads down the coast road, passing via the town centre and Porto Mediceo.



MODIGLIANI DOES PARIS

Modigliani's portraits of women with their long necks, faces like African masks and tilted oblong heads are among the most readily recognisable of all of modern art.

Born in Livorno in 1884, Amedeo Modigliani showed talent as an artist at an early age and trained under the influence of the former Macchiaioli artists who had shaken up the Florentine, and indeed Italian, art scene in the years before and after Italian unity. Livorno's own Giovanni Fattori had been a leading light among the Macchiaioli.

Modigliani was soon drawn away from his home town. His early influences were the Renaissance masters, so he headed first to Florence, then on to Venice. From Venice, he made the move to Paris in 1906, which by then was the epicentre of the art world, and where he was influenced by Cézanne, Picasso and Cocteau.

Modigliani returned to Italy briefly in 1909 but, from then until the end of his short life in 1920, continued to live in the fertile artistic environment of Montparnasse in Paris. For the next five years he turned to sculpture, rapidly accelerating the process of simplification and emphasising the contours. This period was then reflected in his subsequent paintings – the long faces typical of his later work are a result of his venture into sculpture. In 1914 and 1915 he concentrated on portraiture and then, in the last years of his life, produced the series of nudes that figure among his best-known works and display a classical and serene eroticism.

His work, like that of so many artists, only began to receive wide critical acclaim after his death, particularly in the wake of an exhibition of his paintings at the Venice Biennale in 1930. Nowadays, his canvases are prominent features of art galleries the world over.

Ferry companies operating from Livorno are listed below.

Porto Mediceo

Toremар (☎ 199 12 31 99; www.toremар.it in Italian)

Daily services to Isola di Capraia (€10.50, 2½ hours).

Lloyd Sardegna (☎ 0565 22 23 00; www.lloydsardegna.it) Daily ferries to Sardinia (Olbia; €29, 11 hours).

Stazione Marittima

Corsica Ferries/Sardinia Ferries (☎ 019 21 55

11; www.corsicaferrries.com, www.sardiniaferrries.com; Stazione Marittima) Offers two or three services per week (daily in summer) to Bastia, Corsica (deck-class €25 to €32, four hours), and four services per week (daily in summer) to Golfo Aranci, Sardinia (deck-class €35 to €40, six hours express, nine hours regular).

Moby (☎ 199 30 30 40; www.moby.it) Has services to Bastia, Corsica (€15 to €30, three to four hours) and Olbia, Sardinia (€24 to €50, eight to 12 hours).

BUS

ATL (☎ 0586 84 74 08) buses depart from Largo Duomo for Cecina (€2.90, one hour, half-hourly), Piombino (€6.20, 2¼ hours, six daily) and Pisa (€2.30, 45 minutes, half-hourly).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The A12 runs past the city and the SS1 connects Livorno with Rome. There are several car parks near the waterfront.

TRAIN

Livorno is on the Rome–La Spezia line and is also connected to Florence and Pisa. Sample destinations and fares include Rome (€17.90 to €26, three to four hours, 12 daily), Florence (€6.10, 1½ hours, 16 daily) and Pisa (€1.70, 15 minutes, hourly).

Trains are a lot less frequent to Stazione Marittima, the station for the ports, but buses to/from the main station run quite regularly.

Getting Around

ATL bus 1 runs from the main train station to Porto Mediceo. To reach Stazione Marittima, take bus 7 or electric bus PB1, PB2 or PB3. All of these bus services pass through Piazza Grande.

AROUND LIVORNO

Toremар (opposite) operates boats to the islands of Capraia and Gorgona from Livorno. Along with Elba, and four other islands further south still (Pianosa, Montecristo, Giglio and Giannutri), they form the Parco Nazionale dell'Arcipelago Toscano (p217).

The elliptical, volcanic island of Capraia, 8km long by 4km wide, lies 65km from Livorno. Its highest point is Monte Castello at 447m and is covered mainly in *macchia*, or scrubland. Tuscany's third-largest island after Elba and Giglio, it has changed hands several times over the course of its history, belonging to Genoa, Sardinia, the Saracens from North Africa and Napoleon.

You can join boat trips (€12) around the coastline or trek across the island. The most popular walk is to the Stagnone, a small lake in the south. There are also seven popular dive sites off the coast; contact **Capraia Diving** (☎ 0586 90 51 37; www.capraiaiving.it; Via Assunzione 72). The only beach worthy of the name is **Cala della Mortola**, a few kilometres north of Capraia town.

The tiny island of Gorgona is the greenest and northernmost of the islands. At just 2.23 sq km, there's not much to it. Its two towers were built respectively by the Pisans and the Medicis of Florence. Part of the island is off-limits as a low-security prison. You can effectively only visit the island on Tuesday, when the 8.30am Toremар ferry from Livorno stops there on the way to/from Capraia, giving you about five hours from the arrival time at 10am.

INFORMATION

Agenzia Viaggi e Turismo Parco (☎ 0586 90 50 71; www.isoladicapraia.it in Italian; Via Assunzione 42) Shares the same space as the tourist office in Capraia and can advise on activities, such as trekking and boat trips.

Tourist office (☎ 0586 90 51 38; Via Assunzione 42; 9am–12.30pm & 4.30–7pm Fri–Wed Apr–Sep)

SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation on Capraia is tight, and there are no places to stay on Gorgona.

Da Beppone (☎ 0586 90 50 01; Via della Assunzione 78; s/d €45/75) A very friendly and reliable choice. Rooms are smallish but pleasant and the bar and restaurant are a bonus.

Il Saracino (☎ 0586 90 50 18; Via Cibo 30; s incl breakfast €85–105, d incl breakfast €170–210) Down near the beach, this place has bright, modern rooms with plenty of wood and white paint. There's a snazzy rooftop bar for a nightcap under the stars.

Relais La Mandola (☎ 0586 90 51 19; www.lamanola.it; Via della Mandola 1; half-board per person €65–140; p a s) A seriously swish hotel with private beach (and its own beach bar). Rooms have balconies, sea views and all mod cons. Prices drop dramatically out of season.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A daily Toremар boat to Capraia sails from Livorno (see opposite). On most days there is also a return trip but triple-check before you go. The one-way fare costs €10.50, whether you go to Capraia or Gorgona. In summer, there are excursions from Elba to Capraia.

THE ETRUSCAN COAST

The province of Livorno stretches down the coast to just beyond Piombino and the ferry to the island of Elba.

Overall, Tuscany's beaches are basic bucket-and-spade, though some have pebbles rather than sand. Watch out for the prices: you can fork out plenty for the privilege of a sun bed and brolly (around €8).

Several attractive small towns are scattered within the hilly hinterland, while the slender plain between coast and hills offers the possibility of discovering some of Tuscany's lesser-known, but often very good wines.

Livorno to Piombino

You can chug down the coast from Livorno by train or bus, but your own transport will give you greater freedom to explore.

Pio 11; 11 Mon–Sat) managed by the same people who run a much loved place in Lucca by the same name (p197), specialising in typical Tuscan and Livorno area cuisine.

For self-catering nirvana, visit Livorno's magnificent **Mercato Centrale** (11 6am–2pm Mon–Sat) to load up on all necessities, including produce, sandwich makings and seafood so fresh they think they're still swimming.

Drinking

The area around Piazza XX Settembre is the place for bars and cafés.

Barge (☎ 0586 88 83 20; Scali Delle Ancore 6; 11 8pm–2am Tue–Sun) Join the effortlessly hip young crowd inside this approximation of an English pub or enjoy the breeze on one of the trio of boat-shaped waterfront terraces. It also functions as a piano bar and restaurant (mains €15).

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Livorno is a major port. Regular departures for Sardinia and Corsica leave from Calata Carrara, beside the Stazione Marittima. Ferries to Capraia and Gorgona depart from Porto Mediceo, a smaller terminal near Piazza dell'Arsenale. Some services to Sardinia depart from Porto Nuovo, about 3km north of the city along Via Sant'Orlando.

There's a good small beach a couple of kilometres short of Quercianella. Heading south from Livorno, keep a watch out for a tower and castle atop a promontory. The beach is at the head of an inlet directly north of this. As you round a curve into the inlet, a small sign indicates a path down to the beach. There is limited parking.

In leafy Quercianella you'll find a couple of little grey-stone beaches. At the northern end of town, surfers gather even when an adverse wind is up. After another 5km or so, watch for the Parco Comunale di Fortullino sign. If you can find a place to park, walk down to the water's edge. The park is pleasant and a bar operates in summer. The beach, by contrast, is disappointing and rocky.

CASTIGLIONCELLO

This small seaside resort is agreeably unpretentious. In the late 19th century Digo Martelli, the Italian critic and patron of the arts, gave court here. He would play host to the Florentine Impressionist artists of the period, giving birth to the artistic movement known as La Scuola di Castiglioncello.

The small sandy beaches on the north side of town are the best, although sun-bed rental is expensive (from €8). At the heart of this straggling town is Piazza della Vittoria and the vast terrace of Caffè Ginori (below).

Information

Within the train station, there's a small tourist office (☎ 0586 75 48 90; Via Aurelia 632; 11 9.30am-12.30pm & 4-6pm).

Sleeping & Eating

○ **Pensione Bartoli** (☎ 0586 75 20 51; Via Martelli 9; www.albergobartoli.com; s/d €50/60; 11 Easter-Oct; p) Rich in character, this offers unbeatable value. It's an old-fashioned 'let's stay with grandma' kind of place with 18 well-dusted, large rooms, lace curtains and venerable family furniture. Rooms 19, the largest, and 21 have the best sea views.

Villa Parisi (☎ 0586 75 16 98; www.emmeti.it/VillaParisi; Via Romolo Monti 10; s €90-224, d €128-400; 11 Apr-Sep; p a s) This is a special-occasion hotel, perched on a headland. The rooms are stylish and good-sized and most have a seamless sea view. There is a pool, new fitness and massage rooms, a sea view gazebo as well as a large sun terrace, with private access to the beach.

Caffè Ginori (☎ 0586 75 90 55; Piazza della Vittoria; 11 daily Mar-Oct, Fri-Wed Nov-Feb) With its large, shaded terrace and redolent of the best of the 1950s, this is where locals drop by to jaw at the bar. Apart from the imprudently aged gelato, snacks here are delish. You can see why it was a favourite hangout of Italian heart-throb Marcello Mastroianni, who had a summer villa in town.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent trains to/from Livorno (€2.20, 25 minutes).

AROUND CASTIGLIONCELLO

Rosignano Marittimo perches high up a hill. Already a small settlement in Lombard times, Rosignano was one of Lorenzo il Magnifico's preferred bases for hunting. Although there has been a castle here since the 8th century, the fortifications date from the days of Cosimo I de' Medici.

Back down on the coast, **Vada** is a fairly characterless seaside spot but at least the beaches have sand. Another 8km south of Vada and you reach **Marina di Cecina**, where there is plenty of life, as well as hotels and restaurants that mainly front a beach. Children and the young at heart will enjoy splashing around **Acqua** (Via Tevere 25; 11 Jun-Aug), a family-friendly water park.

About halfway between the sea and the modern centre of Cecina, the **Villa Guerrazzi**, also called La Cinquantina, houses a couple of small museums: the small **Museo Archeologico Comunale** (☎ 0586 26 08 37; adult/child €4/2.50; 11 4-7.30pm Tue-Sun Jul-Aug, 3.30-7pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun) and, in the grounds, the recently established **Museo della Vita e del Lavoro**, a small folk museum with a collection of vintage agricultural machinery and bicycles from boneshakers to modern racers. It observes similar hours.

The train (€2.70, 30 minutes) and ATL buses (€3, one hour, every half-hour) both connect Cecina to Livorno.

MONTESCUDIAO

From Cecina you could follow the SS1 or minor coast roads south. Better still, head inland. The province of Livorno has developed a Strada del Vino (wine route), with a map and list of vineyards between Cecina and Montescudaio. It makes for a pretty drive, compared to the relatively drab coastal flats.

MARINA DI BIBBONA

Head south from Montescudaio to Bibbona, a medieval hill town that dominates the plain running beside the coast. A little further south and on the coast is Marina di Bibbona, south of which stretches a narrow strip of sandy beach backed by *macchia* and pine woods.

There's plenty of accommodation to choose from.

Hotel Paradiso Verde (☎ 0586 60 00 22; www.hotelparadisoverde.it; Via del Forte 9; d €56-100, incl breakfast; 11 Easter-Oct) is a small 15-room hotel located a Frisbee throw from the beach, with spick-and-span rooms and a small bar/restaurant out the front. You pay more for a balcony and sea view.

Agriturismo Le Fornacine (☎ 0586 65 30 13; www.agriturismolefornacine.com; d €65-90; s) was recommended to us by a delirious traveller whose glowing reports brought us to this small, modern place just outside Bibbona. Nearby activities include thermal pools, walks, beaches (7km), mountain biking and a book of tailor-made day trips meticulously researched by the affable hostess to Pisa, Florence and Volterra among others. Wine tastings can be arranged in nearby vineyards or the onsite wine cellar. There is a minimum one-week stay in August.

A short way south of Marina di Bibbona is the small but important **Rifugio Palustre di Bolgheri** (☎ reservations 0565 22 43 61; entrance just west of the SS1; adult/child €5/3; 11 visits 9am & 2pm Sat, 9am Sun Oct-May). This nature reserve is a key stop for migratory birds, and the best time for seeing them is in December and January. Two-hour visits are severely limited and must be arranged in advance. The entrance to the park is through a narrow tunnel that passes under the *superstrada*, just south of the cypress-lined, arrow-straight road that leads eastwards to the village of Bolgheri.

BOLGHERI

In Bolgheri, the castle that takes in the city gate and Romanesque Chiesa di SS Giacomo e Cristoro was restructured towards the end of the 19th century. Although very pretty, the village has been over-heritaged, with pricey restaurants and shops. Have a quick look around, take a few photos and move on.

CASTAGNETO CARDUCCI

The next stretch of the Strada del Vino takes you through dense woodland along

a minor road south of Bolgheri. The route rolls between vineyards and olive groves, then climbs up into the hills to reach Castagneto Carducci.

Behind its town walls lies a web of steep, narrow lanes crowded in by brooding houses and dominated by the castle (turned into a mansion in the 18th century) of the Gherardesca clan that once controlled the surrounding area. The 19th-century poet Giosuè Carducci spent much of his childhood here.

Traditional old recipes have been resurrected at the lovely **Ristorante Glorione** (☎ 0565 76 33 22; Via Carducci 6; meals €27-32; 11 dinner Wed-Mon Jun-Sep, Sat & Sun Oct-May), with its tiny, but swish chandelier-lit dining room. There is a palm-shaded courtyard for atmospheric, soothing summertime dining.

Pick up some locally produced olive oil and liqueurs, distilled on the spot, at the 100-year-old **L'Elixir** (☎ 0565 76 60 17; Via Garibaldi 7).

SASSETTA

Next stop on the winding, forested hill road is the tiny hamlet of Sassetta. Approaching from Castagneto, the houses here seem to be hanging on to their perches for dear life. There is a large map at the village entrance showing the main treks in the area.

Albergo La Selva (☎ 0565 79 42 39; hotel.selva@tiscalinnet.it; Via Fornaci 32; s/d incl breakfast €50/80), 1km north of Sassetta on the road to Castagneto, has squeaky-clean large rooms with a choice of bath or shower. All have balconies and there's a large terrace with positively swoony valley views. The restaurant does an excellent six-course dinner (€22).

SUVERETO

Nearby Suvereto, with its tortuous streets and steep stairways, has been a busy centre since well before the year 1000. For a while it was the seat of a bishopric, only incorporated into the Tuscan grand duchy in 1815. Today, it's a well-tended place where flowers and plants contrast with the soft tones of brick and stone.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0565 82 93 04; 11 10am-12.30pm & 5-10pm Mon-Sat, 5-10pm Sun Jun-Sep) is on Piazza Gramsci.

On the terrace of **Ristorante Enoliteca Ombrone** (☎ 0565 82 82 94; Piazza dei Giudici 1; meals €42-47; 11 Tue-Sun) you can enjoy fine traditional cuisine with the attractive façade of Suvereto's mainly 13th-century Palazzo Comunale looming before you.

Enoteca dei Difficili (☎ 0565 82 80 18; Via San Leonardo; meals €15; 1 Tue-Sun) is an atmospheric brick-and-beam spot for a drink, snack or full meal. Alongside an array of delightful snacks, salads and main courses, you can take a pick from the blockbuster selection of wines.

Mid-August sees the traditional *Corsa delle Botte*, when townsfolk race each other, pushing huge tumbling wine barrels along the town's cobbled lanes. In December they tuck into their *Sagra del Cinghiale* (Wild Boar Festival), with plenty of eating, drinking and a show of crossbow skills.

CAMPIGLIA MARITTIMA

From Suvereto, drop down onto the plains along the SS398, signed Piombino, for about 5km, then turn off right to head back into the hills. Aim for the dun-coloured stone houses of Campiglia Marittima, another near-intact medieval town, with its roots in Etruscan times.

The one building of special interest is the *Palazzo Pretorio*, up steep Via Cavour, which is these days also a wine information centre. Long the seat of government, its main façade, plastered with an assortment of coats of arms, resembles the bulky bemedalled chest of some banana-republic general.

The *Parco Archeominerario di San Silvestro* (☎ 0565 83 86 80; admission park, Temperino & Rocca €15; 1 10am-7pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Mar-May & Oct, 10am-4pm Sun Nov-Feb) is just 1.25km north-west on the road to San Vincenzo. Around 50m before the turn-off to the park entrance, a sunken lane on the right, signed *forni fusori*, leads to the remains of some Etruscan smelting ovens, once used for copper production.

The park tells the story of the area's 3000-year mining history. The highlight for most is *Rocca di San Silvestro*, a medieval mining town abandoned in the 14th century. The surrounding Temperino mines produced copper and lead, some used for the mints of Lucca and later Pisa.

There are two guided tours, one of Rocca di San Silvestro, the other to the Temperino mine and museum. The mine and museum (the latter is in the same building as the ticket office) are near the entrance, while Rocca di San Silvestro is accessible via a new underground train that ferries visitors through the mines on the way. Extreme claustrophobics can opt for the half-hour walk. Tours leave approximately every hour.

DETOUR: SAN VINCENZO TO PIOMBINO

For a low-impact day of scenery, picnicking and beach repose, depart from the San Vincenzo tourist office on Via B Alliata, take the coast road flanked by pine trees and dense woodland towards Piombino. Look for *tavoli* (picnic area) signs if you fancy stopping for a picnic with the luxury of tables and benches. After about 11km you'll see an old water tower to your left: park by the side and cross the road to a pleasant beach backed by wild brush and poppies (in season). Continue on to more good sandy stretches at Golfo di Baratti (below) or follow the road to Piombino.

SAN VINCENZO

Back on the road leading away from Campiglia, continue westwards to the moderately attractive seaside town of San Vincenzo, popular in summer with Italian visitors. There is a small tourist office (☎ 0565 70 15 33; Via B Alliata) here. Yachties can park their vessels in the marina, but there's not much to do after that. Sandy beaches stretch to the north and south of town; to the south beaches are backed by *macchia* and pine plantations. Although there are quite a few hotels, getting a room in summer is challenging and so are the prices. There's only one campsite.

Ristorante La Barcaccina (☎ 0565 70 19 11; Via Tridentina; meals €35-40; 1 Thu-Tue) serves fine seafood that matches this glassed-in restaurant's location on a great stretch of pale golden sand. Decidedly on the smart side, it's not the kind of place where you stroll in wearing your beachwear. From the coast road (not the SS1), follow signs to the parking area near the Parco Comunale.

GOLFO DI BARATTI

Thirteen kilometres south of San Vincenzo, a minor road leads off the SP23 and heads southwest for 5km to the Golfo di Baratti. This must be one of the Tuscan coast's prettiest mainland beaches, although, as the weird and wonderful postures of the trees attest, it's often windy – and so a favourite with windsurfers.

Inland from here is the *Parco Archeologico di Baratti e Populonia* (☎ 0565 2 90 02; www.parchivaldi.com.it; Populonia; whole park adult/child/family €15/10/39,

1 sector adult/child €9/5; 1 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Jun & Sep-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb) where several Etruscan tombs have been unearthed. Most interesting are the circular tombs in the Necropoli di San Cerbone, between the coast road and the visitors centre, which sells an excellent guidebook in English (€7.75). The *Via delle Cave* is a signed trail through shady woodland that passes by the quarries from which the soft ochre sandstone was extracted, and into which tombs were later cut. Allow one to two hours to see the visitors centre and the Necropoli or as much as five hours to thoroughly wander the full grounds, including the hands-on pottery exhibit in the Centre of Experimental Archaeology. Trainers and a sun hat are a must. Between March and October, there are guided tours (included within the admission fee) for each area or you can wander at will.

POPULONIA

Where the road ends, 2km beyond the park, is *Populonia Alta*, a three-street hamlet still owned by a single family. Walled in and protected by its 15th-century castle, the settlement grew up on the site of a Pisan watchtower. Its small, privately owned Etruscan Museum (adult/child €1.50/1) has a few local finds; opening times are sporadic. For superb views south along the coast, climb the *Torre di Populonia* (adult/child €2/1; 1 9.30am-noon & 2.30-7pm), north of the museum. Among several craft workshops along the main street, the gallery at No 19 has a permanent exhibition of glass sculptures and creative lamps by artist Laura Pescae and her daughter.

Next to the car park is the Etruscan acropolis (1 9am-7pm) of ancient Populonia. If your Italian is up to it, join a guided tour (every half-hour). The digs have revealed the foundations of an Etruscan temple dating to the 2nd century BC, along with its adjacent buildings.

Piombino

pop 34,400

A cursory tour of Piombino on your way to the Elba ferry won't significantly improve on the uncharitable coverage dispensed by those charged to write about it. A centre of steel production since the late 19th century, this Roman-era port city was heavily damaged during WWII. What precious little remains of the walled historical centre, whose focal point is the 15th-century *Torrione Rivellino*, and the fishing port are not entirely without charm.

The *Museo Archeologico del Territorio di Populonia* (☎ 0565 22 16 46; www.parchivaldi.com.it; Piazza Cittadella 8; adult/child €6/4; 1 5-11pm Jul-Aug, 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Jun & Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Sat & Sun Oct-May), in the western suburbs, complements and displays many of the artefacts from the Parco Archeologico di Baratti e Populonia (opposite), plus other sites in and around the Maremma.

Should you need, for whatever emergency, to stay, *Hotel Roma* (☎ 0565 3 43 41; www.htroma.it; Via San Francesco 43; s/d €40/60) is a reasonable, albeit monastically spartan, central choice two minutes' walk from the ATM bus stop.

Alternatively, *Il Garibaldi Innamorato* (☎ 0565 4 94 10; Via Giuseppe Garibaldi 5; meals €28-33; 1 Tue-Sun) on a tiny street near Piazza Bovio, is worth delaying your departure by an hour. Adorned with a variety of Garibaldi portraits and leftover equipment from its former butcher's shop incarnation, the menu consists of prices for a 'primo', 'secondo' and 'dolce' without further detail. The day's creative fish-centric offerings are related orally by an attentive server, testing your Italian to its limits and rewarding you with cuisine touted by both Slow Food (p370) and the Italian Celiac Association.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Piombino-based ATM (☎ 0565 260 11 18) buses running between Piombino and Cecina (€4, 1½ hours) usually stop at Castagneto Carducci, Sassetta, San Vincenzo and Golfo di Baratti. Another bus line serves Suvereto (€2.30, 40 minutes) on a regular basis on its way to Monterotondo. Yet another connects Piombino with Campiglia Marittima. ATM buses also run to Massa Marittima. All leave from Via Leonardo da Vinci 13 in the centre of town.

For Livorno (2¼ hours) change at Cecina.

For coastal destinations such as San Vincenzo, the train is a better bet, but the hill towns are generally a considerable hike from the nearest train station.

Piombino is on the Rome-Genoa train line and there are fairly regular connections to Florence too.

For Elba ferry information, see p226.

ISOLA D'ELBA

pop 30,100

Napoleon would think twice about fleeing from Elba had he been exiled here today. Though it's a bit more congested now than

ELBA TREK

The compact size and myriad transport options of Elba means accessing worthwhile walks is a snap. The bountiful website www.elbalink.it and the tourist office provide satisfactory information for well-marked trekking options, though walkers wanting to go where no-one has gone before – on *that* particular morning, Elba is only so large – should consider picking up an absurdly detailed trekking map at Il Libraio in Portoferraio (p227).

A few of the more appealing, well-trodden walks include:

- San Lucia to San Martino – A low-impact, 90-minute walk, starting just outside Portoferraio at the church of San Lucia, traversing meadows and former farmland being repo-ed by nature for about 2.2km and terminating at Napoleon's villa in San Martino.
- Marciana to Chiessi – A 12km trek starting on high in Marciana, dribbling downhill, past ancient churches, sea vistas and granite boulders for about six hours to the seaside in Chiessi.
- La Parata to Le Panche – A short but resolve-testing two hour walk along a ridge, through an oak forest, past the hermitage of Santa Caterina and the castle of Volterraio.

when he was charitably dumped here in 1814 (he managed to engineer an escape in less than a year, see the boxed text on p228), the island is an ever-glorious setting of beaches, blue waters, mountain trekking and mind-bending views, all supplemented by some very fine cuisine.

While the dismal remains of the once prevailing iron-ore mining industry groan on, the inevitable dominance of tourism has motored ahead. Over a million visitors a year take the one-hour ferry cruise out here and in Portoferraio, the primary arrival point, it sometimes feels like they've all decided to turn up on the same weekend. Elba is the largest, most visited and most heavily populated island of the Tuscan archipelago, yet this 28km-long, 19km-wide island has plenty of quiet nooks, particularly if you time a visit for April, May, September or October.

There are plenty of hotels, fine campsites and full-board resorts to satisfy any inclination, many of which offer drastically reduced prices outside of high-season.

History

Elba has been inhabited since the Iron Age and the extraction of iron ore and metallurgy were the island's principal sources of economic wellbeing until well into the second half of the 20th century. You can still fossick around to your heart's content in museums dedicated to rocks.

Ligurian tribes people were the island's first inhabitants, followed by Etruscans and Greeks from Magna Graecia. The iron business was well established by then, making the island

doubly attractive to wealthier Romans, who built holiday villas here.

Centuries of peace under the Pax Romana gave way to more uncertain times during the barbarian invasions, when Elba became a refuge for those fleeing mainland marauders. By the 11th century, Pisa (and later Piombino) was in control and built fortresses to help ward off attacks by Muslim raiders and pirates operating out of North Africa.

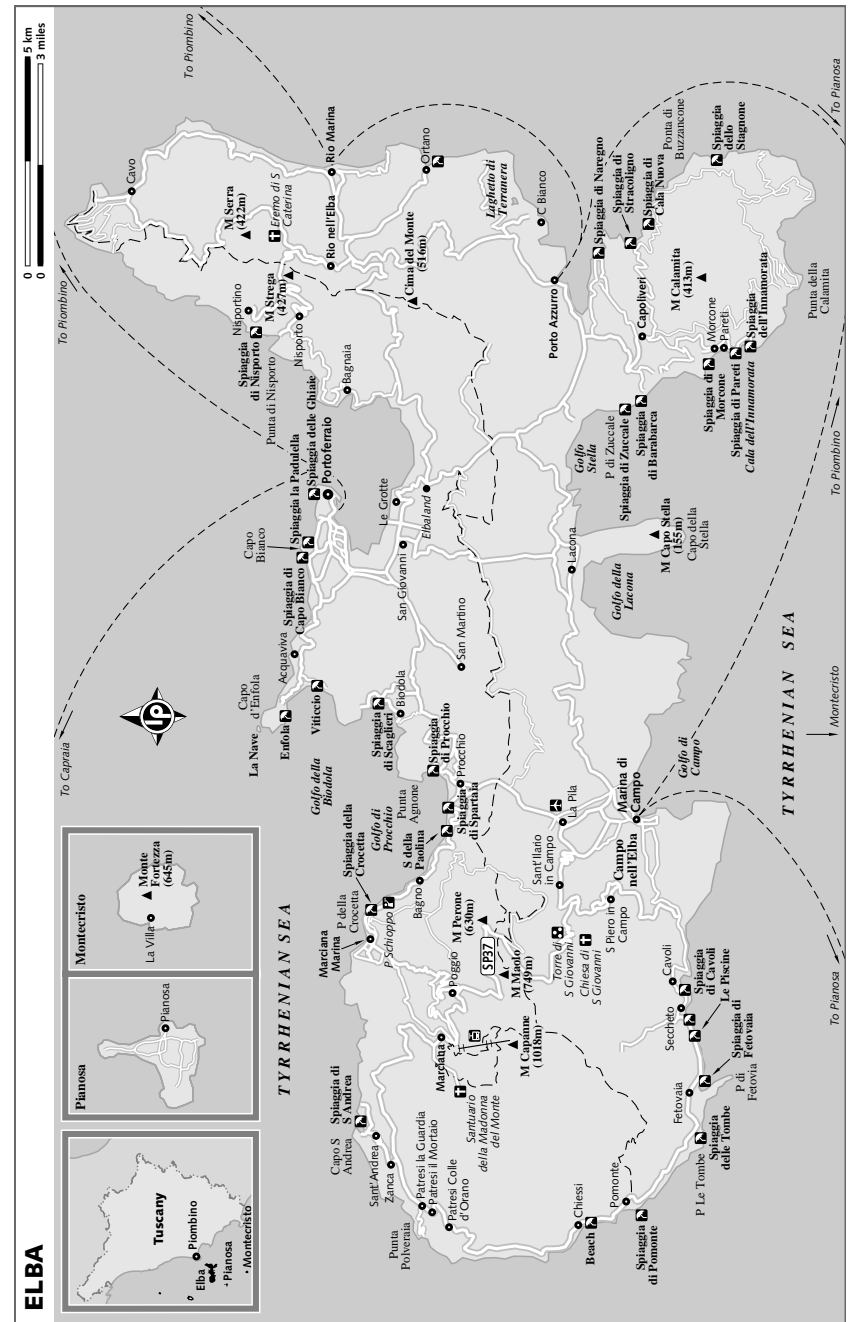
In the 16th century, Cosimo I de' Medici grabbed territory in the north of the island, where he founded the port town of Cosmopolis (today's Portoferraio). At the same time, the Spanish took control of the southeastern strip of the island.

In the 18th century, Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo II encouraged land reform, the drainage of swamps and greater agricultural production on the island. Nevertheless, the production of iron remained the major industry. In 1917 some 840,000 tonnes were produced, but in WWII the Allies bombed the industry to bits and by the beginning of the 1980s production was down to 100,000 tonnes. The writing was on the wall: tourism had arrived to take the place of the mining and smelting industries.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Most folk opt for the ferry but there's a small airport (☎ 0565 97 60 11) at La Pila, just outside Marina di Campo. Elbafly (☎ 0565 9 19 61; www.elbafly.it) flies to and from Pisa, Bologna, Bastia, Cuneo and Milan (Malpensa), mid-June to mid-September.



BOAT

Elba is an easy ferry journey from Piombino. If you arrive in Piombino by train, take a connecting train on to the port. Boats to Portoferraio are most frequent, while some call in at Rio Marina, Marina di Campo and Porto Azzurro.

Boats are run by **Moby** (% 199 30 30 40; www.moby.it) and **Toremari** (% 199 12 31 99; www.toremari.it in Italian). Unless it's a summer weekend or the middle of August, when queues can form, simply buy a ticket at the port. Fares (per person €6.50 to €9.50, per small car €20 to €49) vary according to season.

Toremari also operates a passenger-only hydrofoil service (€10, 40 minutes) year-round, and, between June and August, a fast vehicle and passenger service (two passengers/car from €69.20 return) to Portoferraio.

Getting Around**BUS**

Elba's bus company, **ATL** (% 0565 91 43 92), runs an efficient trans-island service. Pick up a timetable from the main bus station (Viale Elba, Portoferraio), almost opposite the Toremari jetty. From Portoferraio there are at least seven runs daily (all €2) to/from Marciana Marina, Marina di Campo, Capoliveri and Porto Azzurro. A day pass costs €7 and a six-day run-around, €19.

MOTORCYCLE & BICYCLE

Alternatively, you can steam around Elba by mountain bike or scooter. Typical high season daily rates are city bikes €15, mountain bikes €24, mopeds (50cc) €28, and scooters (100cc to 125cc) €40. You can hire small vehicles – just don't; the roads are already overclogged with cars in summer.

TWN (Two Wheels Network; % 0565 91 46 66; www.twn-rent.it; Viale Elba 32, Portoferraio), with branches at Capoliveri and other locations, and **Happy Rent** (% 0565 91 46 65; www.renthappy.it; Viale Elba 7), near the tourist office in Portoferraio, are two of many rental companies.

TAXI

In Portoferraio, call % 0565 91 51 12.

Portoferraio

Known to the Romans as Fabricia and later Ferraia (since it was a port for iron exports), this small harbour was acquired by Cosimo I de' Medici in the mid-16th century, when

the fortifications took shape. The walls link two forts (Stella and Falcone) on high points and a third tower (Linguella) at the port entrance. In 1814 Napoleon was 'imprisoned' here at the start of his fleeting exile on Elba (see the boxed text, p228). Steelworks began operating in 1902 but were destroyed by the Allies in 1943.

It can be a hectic place, but wandering the streets/steps of the historic centre and indulging in the exceptional eating options more than makes up for the squeeze.

INFORMATION**Internet Resources**

Elba Link (www.elbalink.it) Carries lots of detailed information about the island.

Laundry

Laudrette (Viale Elba 51)

Tourist Information

Associazione Albergatori Isola d'Elba (% 0565 91 55 55; www.albergatorielba.it; Calata Italia 20)

The island's professional hotel association, it can reserve accommodation.

Info Park Are@ (% 0565 91 88 09; Viale Elba; h 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm daily summer, Mon-Sat rest of year) Information office of the Parco Nazionale Arcipelago Toscano.

Tourist office (Agenzia per il Turismo dell'Archipelago Toscano; % 0565 91 46 71; www.apelba.it; Calata Italia 43; h 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sun Easter-Oct, 8am-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Easter) Near the ferry port it has a list of the island's limited internet log-on options.

SIGHTS

From the ferry terminal, the old town, enclosed by a medieval wall and protected by a pair of brooding fortresses, is a bit less than a kilometre along the foreshore. You can visit **Forte Stella** (Via della Stella; admission €1.50; h 9am-7pm Easter-Sep).

Up on the bastions between the two forts, is **Villa dei Mulini** (% 0565 91 58 46; Piazzale Napoleone; adult/child €3/1.50; h 9am-7pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), Napoleon's home while he was emperor of this small isle, with its splendid terraced garden and his library. During his brief Elban exile, the emperor certainly didn't want for creature comforts – contrast his Elba lifestyle with the simplicity of his camp bed and travelling trunk when he was on the campaign trail. While the history lesson is nice, the lack of actual Napoleonic artefacts is a tad disappointing.

The **Villa Napoleonica di San Martino** (% 0565 91 46 88; adult/child €3/1.50; h 9am-7pm Wed-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), where Napoleon occasionally dropped in, is set in hills about 5km southwest of town. Modest by Napoleonic standards, it's dominated by the overbearing mid-19th-century gallery built to house his memorabilia. A combined ticket for both villas costs €5.

The Linguella fortifications, near the port, house the modest **Museo Civico Archeologico** (% 0565 91 73 38; adult/child €2/1.50; h 9am-2pm & 6pm-midnight mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 9am-8.30pm mid-Sep–Oct, 10am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Apr–mid-Jun), with a collection generally focussed on ancient seafarers.

ACTIVITIES

If you're here for an active time, pick up the multilingual tourist office leaflet *Lo Sport Emerge dal Mare*. It has a useful map and summarises walking and cycling trails, plus lists where to sign on for scuba diving, windsurfing and other watery activities.

The **Centro Trekking Isola d'Elba** run by Il Genio del Bosco (% 0565 93 08 37; www.geniodelbosco.it) leads trekking, biking and kayaking excursions around Elba, Capraia, Giglio and Pianosa.

Il Libraio (% 0565 91 71 35; Calata Mazzini 10), on the waterfront beside the old town, stocks a variety of walking and biking maps for the island.

THE CAMPY SIDE OF ITALY

Boy, do Italians like their outdoors. Camp sites are descended upon almost as soon as the earmuffs are packed away. Camp sites range from pitiable dirt lots overlooking the motorway to three-star, seaside facilities with bungalows, restaurants, bars and water sports centres. No tent? No problem. Many sites have permanent tents with cots – or modern cabins for those who only like their nature until shower time. The choices on Elba are dizzying. Check www.elbalink.it or www.elbaonline.com for exhaustive options. Here are a few sites that struck us:

Scaglieri Camping (% 0565 96 99 40; www.campingscaglieri.it; per person €7-13.60, per tent €9.50-20, 2-person chalet €60) More a resort operation than camping. Diversions include golf, swimming pool, diving, kayaking, horse rides and kid-oriented organised games, sports and even dance lessons. The onsite restaurant, pizzeria and bar eliminate the risk of charcoal stains on your sarong.

Acquaviva (% 0565 91 91 03; www.campingacquaviva.it; per person/tent/car €12/13/3; h mid-Mar–mid-Oct) About 4km west of town, Portoferraio's nearest campsite is a more traditional campground experience compared to many island schemes. Dirt paths encased in foliage connect pitches and modular, lego-like 'chalets' with common areas, including a tent restaurant. Modest apartments and 'mobile homes' are onsite as well. Their beach, a humble, but private 70m affair, is steps away, while other beaches are within reasonable walking distance. A great choice for simple sunsets over the sea.

Ville degli Ulivi (% 0565 97 60 98; www.villedegliulivi.it; per person €6.50-13, per tent €6-15, apt €67-137) Another impressive three-star, variable intensity camping experience with sleeping arrangements ranging from pup tents to condominiums. A sit-down restaurant, water park, gymnasium and wellness centre are onsite and organised parties kick off nightly.

You can spend a more sedentary but nonetheless enjoyable two hours out on a glass-bottom boat with **Aquavision** (% 328-709 54 70; Portoferraio harbour; adult/child €15/8; h Easter–mid-Oct).

SLEEPING

In the height of summer many hotels operate a compulsory half-board policy.

Albergo Ape Elbana (% 0565 91 42 45; www.ape-elbana.it; Salita de' Medici 2; s incl breakfast €40-70, d incl breakfast €60-100; p a) In the old town, overlooking Piazza della Repubblica (where guests can park for free). This butter-coloured building is the island's oldest hotel, where guests of Napoleon are reputed to have stayed. The position is its best feature as rooms, while large, are a little soulless – and occasionally malodorous. Ask for one of the larger ones looking onto the piazza.

Villa Ombrosa (% 0565 91 43 63; www.villaombrosa.it; Via De Gasperi 3; s incl buffet breakfast €52-126, d incl buffet breakfast €78-230; p) This is one of the very few hotels on the island that is open all year round. With a great location overlooking the sea and Spiaggia delle Ghiaie, it also has its own small private beach. Half-board, that is considerably more creative than many other hotels' bland buffet fare, is obligatory in summer.

Hotel Acquamarina (☎ 0565 91 40 57; www.hotelacquamarina.it; Località Paduella; s €52-104, d €78-180; a p) Just 400m away and under the same ownership as Villa Ombrosa, Acquamarina is a knockout hotel, also within strolling distance of Portoferraio. Rooms are sunny and bright with large balconies overlooking the naturally wild gardens. A path leads down to a small cove.

EATING

○ **Cafescondido** (☎ 340 340 08 81; Via del Carmine 65; meals €25; 1 Mon-Sat) Way up the hill, toward Fortezza Falcone, the fronting raucous café gives no sign of the delicious food served in the back room. Servers deftly explain Elba-centric culinary permutations on the menu. The table wine is better than average and the

chocolate mousse will make you wish weeping in public was socially acceptable.

○ **La Libertaria** (☎ 0565 91 49 78; Calata Matteotti 12; meals €30; 1 Apr-Oct) Yes, two 'our pick' restaurants in one place, we just couldn't decide. In the unlikely event that nothing on the menu turns your crank, the kitchen is open to requests! Seating capacity and backdrops are meagre ('would the gentleman like to sit in the alley or out on the sidewalk, 5cm from speeding traffic?'), but the food is divine. The *linguine sarde e finocchietto* (pasta with sardines and fennel) is an unlikely treat and the cooked-to-perfection *tonno in crosta di pistacchi* (tuna fillet with pistachio crust) may actually keep you in Portoferraio an extra night for a second helping.

Trattoria La Barca (☎ 0565 91 80 36; Via Guerrazzi 60-62; meals €32; 1 Mon-Sat) A good place to slurp a plate of *cacciucco*. The place is popular with locals in the know, so there's not much elbow space between tables. Go for the terrace if there's room.

Stella Marina (☎ 0565 91 59 83; Banchina Alto Fondale; meals €35-40) A justifiably popular fish and seafood restaurant. Stuck in a car park beside the Toremar ferry jetty and unpromising from the exterior, its cuisine is fine and imaginative, though drinks are overpriced.

DRINKING

Sir William's Irish Bar (☎ 0565 91 92 88; Via Manganaro 28) The very name tells you the Celtic connection is tenuous, but this is the place for a wee dram o' whisky or a pint of bitter. It generally doesn't start jumping till at least midnight and pulls in all sorts, from local punters to the casually hip.

L'Inferno (☎ 0565 91 87 83; Le Foci 2) Locals pile into their cars and head to this lively bar with dancing about 5km west of town on the road to Marciana Marina.

West to Capo d'Enfola

Several modest beaches spread west from Portoferraio. Quite nice, although narrow and shelly, are **Spiaggia la Padulella** and its counterpart just west of Capo Bianco, **Spiaggia di Capo Bianco**. A couple of similar beaches dot the coast along the 7km stretch out to **Capo d'Enfola**. You can have a dip here or head south down the coast a few kilometres to **Viticcio**, with its handful of restaurants and hotels, where the road ends. From here you can walk to the beaches of the **Golfo della Biodola**.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Scoglio Bianco (☎ 0565 93 90 36; www.scoglio-bianco.it; Viticcio; half-board per person €39-88) This hotel has bright, spacious rooms set around a central patio decorated with deckchairs and cats. The downstairs Pizzeria da Giacomino has a terrace over the sea. The small price increase for a 'superior' room is well worth the expenditure.

Hotel Paradiso (☎ 0565 93 90 34; www.elbatouristica.it; Viticcio; B&B per person €40-85, half-board €55-120; 1 mid-Apr-Oct; p a s) Owned by a British-Italian couple, Paradiso is set in the Tuscan National Park and has expansive sea views. Many rooms have good-sized balconies. Set high above the road, there is a vast outdoor bar, pool, tennis court and private beach access.

Emanuel (☎ 0565 93 90 03; Enfola; menus €19-29, meals €28; 1 Easter-Oct) At road's end on Capo d'Enfola, Emanuel offers splendid views over the water. Enjoy a lingering dinner on its beachfront terrace, shaded by a magnificent fig tree. The cuisine is consistently good. Fish and seafood predominate but there are always a couple of inventive meat dishes and two vegetarian *degustazione* menus.

West to Marciana Marina

From Portoferraio, a provincial road heads south and then forks westwards along the coast to Marciana Marina, via Procchio.

The pick of the beaches are the sandy strands lining the **Golfo della Biodola**.

Hermitage (☎ 0565 97 40; www.hotelhermitage.it; La Biodola; half-board per person €105-295; p a s i) is pure Beverly Hills. One of the island's truly luxurious hotels, it's a gorgeous retreat complete with infinity pool overlooking the sea and a golf course just over the fence. Amenities include a beauty centre, wi-fi and a new wretchedly excessive Jacuzzi.

PROCCHIO

In season, Procchio is a small bustling place with the added bonus of sandy beaches.

○ **Osteria del Piano** (☎ 0565 90 72 92; Via Provinciale 24; meals €29; 1 Apr-Oct) is an unassuming restaurant on the Procchio side of the junction where the road peels away towards Marciana Marina. The open-plan kitchen means you can watch and listen – the owner is wonderfully chatty – to the creative energy. Innovative dishes include the black-and-white spaghetti served with a crab sauce.

THE EMPEROR NAPOLEON TAKES EARLY RETIREMENT

At precisely 6pm on 3 May 1814, the English frigate *Undaunted* dropped anchor in the harbour of Portoferraio on the island of Elba. It bore an unusual cargo. Under the Treaty of Fontainebleau, the emperor Napoleon, who had held all Europe in his thrall since the turn of the century, was exiled to this seemingly safe open prison, some 15km from the Tuscan coast.

It could have been so much worse for the emperor, but the irony for someone who hailed from Corsica, just over the water, must have been bitter. Napoleon, the conqueror who had stridden across all Europe and taken Egypt, was awarded this little island as his private fiefdom, to hold until the end of his days.

His arrival was greeted with considerable pomp. The guns of Portoferraio shot off a 100-round salute, to which the English frigate replied. That, at least, is French author Alexandre Dumas' take. Other sources reckon the guns were actually firing *at* the frigate.

Whatever the case, Elba would never be quite the same again. Napoleon, ever hyperactive, threw himself into frenetic activity in his new, humbler domain. After touring the island, he prescribed a mass of public works, which included improving the operations of the island's iron-ore mines – whose revenue, it is pertinent to note, now went his way. He also went about boosting agriculture, initiating a road-building program, draining marshes and overhauling the legal and education systems. On many occasions, he would order some of the 500 members of his faithful guard to pitch in.

A great deal of ink has been spilled over the diminutive emperor's dictatorial style and seemingly impossible ambitions, but he can't have been all bad. To this day, they still say a Mass each May for his soul at the island's Chiesa della Misericordia.

Napoleon installed himself in the bastions of the city wall, in what became known as the *Residenza dei Mulini*. He'd drop into his so-called country or summer home, outside town in San Martino, for an occasional stopover on excursions but he never slept there. Some weeks after his arrival, his mother Letizia and sister Paolina rolled up. But he remained separated from his wife, Maria Luisa, and was visited for just two no doubt hectic days by his lover, Maria Walewska.

At the Congress of Vienna, the new regime in France called for Napoleon's removal to a more distant location. Austria, too, was nervous. Some participants favoured a shift to Malta, but Britain objected and suggested the remote South Atlantic islet of St Helena. The Congress broke up with no agreed decision.

Napoleon was well aware of the debate. Under no circumstances would he allow himself to be shipped off to some rocky speck in the furthest reaches of the Atlantic Ocean. A lifelong risk taker, he decided to have another roll of the dice. For months he had sent out on 'routine' trips around the Mediterranean a couple of vessels flying the flag of his little empire, Elba. When one, the *Incostante*, set sail early in the morning of 26 February 1815, no-one suspected that the conqueror of Europe was stowed away on board. Sir Neil Campbell, his English jail warden, had returned to Livorno the previous day, confident that Napoleon was, as ever, fully immersed in the business of the island.

Elba lost its emperor and Napoleon, his little gilded cage. He made his way to France, reassembled power and embarked on the Hundred Days, the last of his expansionist campaigns that would culminate in defeat at Waterloo – after which he got his Atlantic exile after all, dying there in 1821, from arsenic poisoning, according to the most accepted contemporary theory, probably from the hair tonic he applied to keep that famous quiff glistening.

West from Procchio, the road hugs the cliffs, offering fine views all along the winding coast. If you can manage to park, **Spaggia di Spartaia** and **Spaggia della Paolina** are part of a series of beautiful little beaches, all requiring a steep clamber down.

Marciana Marina

Unlike most cookie-cutter marinas, Marciana Marina, 20km west of Portoferraio, has character and history to complement its pleasant pebble beaches. It's a fine base for attacking the island's best walking trails.

Hotel Marinella (☎ 0565 9 90 18; www.elbahotelmarinella.it; Viale Margherita 38; B&B per person €40-87, half board €48-94; ̣ Easter-mid-Oct; a p s) is a well-aged classic – waning tennis court included – beside the sea front. Rooms in the annexe overlook the garden but the best are those in the main building with balconies and sea views.

Casa Lupi (☎ /fax 0565 9 91 43; Località Ontanelli 35; s €30-42, d €45-70; ̣ closed Jan-early Mar; a) is about half a kilometre inland on the road to Marciana. Beside a vineyard, with a garden of peach trees and rose bushes, it's a small hotel in peaceful surroundings. Rooms are no-frills basic but comfortable and clean.

Il Ristorante Scaraboci (☎ 0565 99 68 68; Via XX Settembre 29; meals €40; ̣ Thu-Tue) is a promising fish and seafood venue where all pastas and desserts are homemade. Try, for something special, their *spaghetto al sugo d'astice* (spaghetti with lobster sauce).

Poggio & the Interior

A twisting 4km ascent into the mountains from Marciana Marina brings you to the attractive inland village of Poggio, famous for its spring water. It's an enchanting little place with steep, cobblestone alleys and stunning views of Marciana Marina and the coast.

Publius (☎ 0565 9 92 08; meals €35-40; ̣ closed Mon, Dec-Feb), at the northern entrance to the village, is the place to spill money on a great meal. The plunging views down to the coast should keep your mind off the commensurately steep prices.

From Poggio you can choose from two options: either proceed west to Marciana then head around the coast (see right), or opt for the narrow, spectacular SP37. Heading towards Marina di Campo, it winds through some of the highest, most densely wooded and tourist-free countryside on the island.

Following the SP37, park at the picnic site at the foot of **Monte Perone** (630m) – you can't miss it. To the left (east) you can wander up to the mountain, with spectacular views across much of the island. To the right (west) you can scramble fairly quickly to a height that affords broad vistas down to Poggio, Marciana and Marciana Marina. From there you could press on to **Monte Maolo** (749m).

The road then descends into the southern flank of the island. On the way, you pass the granite shell of the Romanesque **Chiesa di San Giovanni** and, shortly after, a ruined tower, the **Torre di San Giovanni**.

The two small hamlets here, **Sant'Illario in Campo** and **San Piero in Campo**, are short on sights but still pleasant enough and little affected by tourism.

Hotel La Rosa (☎ 0565 98 31 91, 349 076 82 25; www.larosahotel.it; Piazza Maggore Gadani 17, San Piero; half board per person €40-65) is an old-fashioned hotel in a side street with large but rather dark rooms. The restaurant is popular, specialising in enormous plates of pasta at rock-bottom prices.

Marciana & the West Coast

From Poggio, it is possible to continue west to Marciana, both the highest (355m) and oldest town on the island and an engaging, peaceful, tightly packed place. Puff up the town's 'pitiless' streets and stairs, past arches, flower boxes and petite balconies to drop-offs revealing views of Marciana Marina and Poggio below. Once an important defensive position under Pisan rule, Marciana subsequently passed to Piombino, the French and finally to the grand duchy of Tuscany.

The much knocked about **Fortezza Pisana** (̣ Apr-Sep), above the village, is a reminder of the old medieval days. Down a cobbled lane below it is a modest **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 0565 90 12 15; Via del Pretorio; admission €2; ̣ Wed-Mon). A 40-minute or so walk west out of town brings you to the **Santuario della Madonna del Monte**, the most important object of pilgrimage on the island. A much-altered 11th-century church houses a stone upon which a divine hand is said to have painted an image of the Virgin.

Some 750m south of Marciana, a cable lift (☎ 0565 90 10 20; one way/return €10/15; ̣ Easter-Nov) with open, barred cabins like parrot cages operates in summer and whisks you almost to the summit of **Monte Capanne** (1018m), the island's highest point with views as far as Corsica on a clear day.

The road west out of Marciana pursues a course around the island, maintaining a prudent distance and altitude from the often precipitous coastline.

Sant'Andrea is a popular new resort with a concentration of a dozen or so hotels winding back up the hill to the main road.

Hotel Barsalini (☎ 0565 90 80 13; www.hotelbarsalini.com; Sant'Andrea; half-board per person €50-87; ̣ Easter-late Oct), just 20m from the beach, has been designed with a lot of TLC. Rooms are spacious, bright and comfortable and the aquarium-flanked restaurant has an excellent and varied menu.

Following the road round to the south side of the island, you pass several small beaches. **Chiessi** and **Pomonte** have pebbly beaches, but the water is beautiful. **Sandy Spiaggia delle Tombe** is one of the few spots on the island with a nude-bathing scene.

At **Fetovaia**, **Seccheto** and **Cavoli** you will find further protected sandy beaches, accommodation and restaurants. West of Seccheto, **Le Piscine** is another mostly nudist stretch.

Marina di Campo

Marina di Campo, on the south side of the island, is Elba's second-largest town. Curling around a picturesque bay, its small fishing harbour adds personality to what is otherwise very much a holiday-oriented town. Its beach of bright, white sand pulls in vacationers by the thousands; coves further west, though less spectacular, are more tranquil.

Camp sites abound along this stretch of coast and the place gets ridiculously packed in the height of summer. But this is where some of the island's action can be found too; several discos help keep the brat-pack happy through the hot months.

There is a seasonal **tourist office** (☎ 0565 97 79 69; Piazza dei Granatieri; ̣ Jun-Sep) in town.

Just northeast of town in the **Lacona/Porto Azzurro** direction, over 150 Mediterranean species swim, crawl and wave about in the **Acquario dell'Elba** (☎ 0565 97 78 85; www.acquarioelba.com; adult/child €6/3; ̣ 9am-11.30pm Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-7.30pm mid-Mar-May & mid-Sep-Nov).

Montecristo (☎ 0565 97 68 61; www.hotelmontecristo.it; Viale Nomenini; s €52-126, d €76-224; s p) is a pleasantly posh hotel on the beach, with flower-framed balconies and a bar and pool overlooking the sea. The large sunny rooms have Scandinavian-style light furnishings and king-size beds.

Thomas Hotel (☎ 0565 97 77 32; www.elbathomas.hotel.com; Viale degli Etruschi 32; per person €32-62, incl breakfast; ̣ mid-Mar-Oct; p), barely 100m away, is a three-star hotel, attractively set among pine trees. Popular with scuba divers, it's only a short walk from the beach and is one of the more affordable options in the town itself.

Il Tinello (☎ 0565 97 66 45; Località Casina), on the outskirts, is a heaving drinking and dancing dive, especially on summer nights.

Capoliveri & the Southeast

Up a precipitous ridgeback in the southeastern pocket of the island, this village is flirting with too-enchanting-for-its-own-good designation. The steep, narrow alleys and sandwiched houses are certainly pretty, but the tourist hoards detract. At least one Italian newspaper writer has remarked tartly that one may as well hoist the German flag at Capoliveri. Come out of season and you can discover some of the peace of this hamlet, which used to live off iron-ore mining.

EATING

Freccia Azzurra (☎ 0565 96 89 68; Via Verdi 4; meals €15-25) This is a popular budget restaurant. There's not much squeeze-by space in the dining room but its terrace on Capoliveri's main square is vast. Try the *penne gamberetti e rucola* (shrimp and rocket penne) for a real tastebud treat.

Il Chiasso (☎ 0565 96 87 09; Via Cavour 32; meals €40) One of the best restaurants in town, with a classy set menu. The décor is a savvy combination of traditional and trendy and there's an excellent wine list.

DRINKING

Fandango (☎ 0565 93 54 24; Via Cardenti 1; drinks from €4; ̣ Tue-Sun) Right beneath the main square, here you can taste fine Tuscan wines in pleasant surroundings.

Velvet Underground (Vicolo Lungo 14) This is only a short stumble from the main square. It's a pub-style bar that feels like a real local.

ENTERTAINMENT

Sugar Reef (☎ 0338 917 90 26; Località La Trappola) The place on the island for a little hip-swinging salsa, both live and DJ-mixed. It's about 1km south of Capoliveri on the road to Morcone.

Around Capoliveri

Directly west of Capoliveri (take the Portoferraio road and watch for signs) are the beaches

of Spiaggia di Zuccale and Spiaggia di Barabarcia. You end up on a dirt track – leave your vehicle in the car park and walk the final stretch.

If you take the road heading south from Capoliveri, another three charming sandy little coves – Morcone, Pareti and Innamorata – come in quick succession.

East of Capoliveri, you have two choices. One road takes you to the comparatively long stretch of beach at Naregno, fronted by a series of discreet hotels.

The more adventurous should follow signs for Straccoligno, one of the first in a series of beaches running down the east coast. The road at this point becomes a dirt track and, if you don't mind dusting up your vehicle, you can push on to a couple of less-frequented beaches. Cala Nuova is a nice enough little beach with a good restaurant.

Ristorante Calanova (☎ 0565 96 89 58; meals €35; ½ summer only) is a table-for-two kind of place, wonderfully secluded with only the gently lapping sea for company. As you'd expect, the menu is based on seafood.

Another 4km or 5km and you reach a path down to the Spiaggia dello Stagnone, which even in summer should not be too crowded, if only because of the effort required to rattle down this far.

Porto Azzurro

Overlooked by its fort, built in 1603 by Philip III of Spain and now a prison, Porto Azzurro is a pleasant resort town, close to some good beaches.

Hotel Belmare (☎ 0565 9 50 12; www.elba-hotelbelmare.it; Banchina IV Novembre; per person €35-65, incl breakfast; ½ year-round; a) has an enviable location on the main promenade. This traditional green-shuttered hotel is nothing fancy but rooms are comfy enough, and there's a small bar and TV room for post-beach R&R. Only some rooms have air-con.

Albergo Villa Italia (☎ 0565 9 51 19; www.villaitaliahotel.it; Viale Italia 41; d/tr/€80/90/105, incl breakfast; ½ mid-Mar–Oct; p a i) is a friendly, family-run place. Their 12 clean bedrooms are small but spruce and about the cheapest in town. It's on a fairly noisy road yet scarcely 200m from the beach. The wi-fi is free.

Ristorante Cutty Sark (☎ 0565 95 78 21; Piazza del Mercato 25; meals €32-37; ½ closed Tue in winter) has a mainly fish menu with a couple of concessions to carnivores. Savour their *raviolini all'Ammiraglia*, large ravioli filled with cour-

gettes (zucchini) and shrimp meat and bathed in a shrimp and tomato sauce.

Osteria La Botte Gaia (☎ 0565 9 56 07; www.labottegaia.com; Via Europa 5-7; meals €35-40; ½ closed Mon in winter) is Slow Food-featured and deservedly so. Homemade pasta supplements the ever-changing daily menu that runneth over with just-caught fish options and a few veggie plates. Just 100m further up the road from Albergo Villa Italia.

The Northeast

If, on leaving Portoferraio, you swing around to the east and head for Rio nell'Elba and beyond, you will experience the least-visited part of the island, with lovely, albeit pebbly, beaches and glorious views.

The road hugs the coast on its way around to Bagnaia, the first worthwhile stop. En route you will scoot by San Giovanni, home to a rather expensive and dull mud spa, and Le Grotte, where a few stones still managing to stand on top of each other are all that remain of a Roman villa. At the Porto Azzurro and Bagnaia fork is Elbaland (☎ 335 819 46 80; www.elbaland.com; Località Fonte Murato; adult/child €7/9; ½ 11am-sunset Jul-Aug, 10am-sunset Jun & Sep, 10am-7pm Apr-May), which is an ambitiously-priced, oversized park that has swings and minor attractions.

From Elbaland head north to Bagnaia, a lush, green part of the island with an attractive beach and some accommodation, including a camp site.

Pizzeria Sunset (☎ 0565 93 07 86; Bagnaia; pizzas from €5.50; ½ May-Oct) offers great views across the gulf to Portoferraio, a hang-out beach-bum atmosphere, happy hour and sangria in addition to good pizza. At night, there's a head-thumping disco that spills out onto the beach.

From Bagnaia you can follow the 3km dirt road to Nisporto and then on to Nisportino with spectacular views along the way. Both have a small beach and, in summer, snack stands and one or two restaurants. From Nisportino, head back a few kilometres to the junction with the road that links Nisporto and Rio nell'Elba. About halfway along this road, stop for a short stroll to what is left of the Eremo di Santa Caterina, a tiny stone hermitage, and more good views.

The road plunges down to the inland bastion of Rio nell'Elba, the heart of the island's iron-mining operations. It's a little gloomy,

THE COUNT OF MONTECRISTO

This feel-good swashbuckling tale was born from author Alexandre Dumas' acquaintance with Jérôme Bonaparte, Napoleon Bonaparte's brother, whom he accompanied on a trip to Elba. Dumas became aware of another island, the deserted Montecristo, deeper in the Mediterranean, and determined to write a novel in remembrance of the trip. In the person of the swashbuckling Dantes, Dumas takes a dig at the corruption of the bourgeois world. The dashing officer is imprisoned for a crime he hasn't committed and vows to get even. He escapes and, after a tip-off, searches for treasure on the island of Montecristo where, after much adventure and jolly japes, our man wins all the prizes – getting rich, becoming the Count of Montecristo and exacting a full measure of revenge on those who framed him.

Of course, it's all a tall tale (and no-one has ever found any treasure on Montecristo) but this particular yarn has made a lot of loot for a lot of people. At least 25 film and TV versions of the story have been made, with greater or lesser skill. Among the better ones are the oldies: Rowland Lee's 1935 film and the 1943 version by Robert Vernay were equally good celluloid yarns. In Italy, Andrea Giordana had women swooning at their TV sets in the 1966 series by Edmo Fenoglio. Richard Chamberlain had a go at the lead role in David Greene's 1975 *The Count of Montecristo*, as, more recently, did Gérard Depardieu in *Montecristo* (1997).

but the simple fact that it caters little to tourism has its appeal. The Museo della Gente di Rio (☎ 0565 94 34 11; Passo della Pietà; admission €2.75; ½ 10am-1pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sun mid-Apr–Sep) has 200 rare mineral specimens from the east of the island and Monte Capanne.

Next, take the short run downhill to Rio nell'Elba's coastal outlet, Rio Marina, with yet another mineral museum. This apart, not a lot will hold you up.

Hotel Rio (☎ 0565 92 42 25; www.hotelriomarina.it; Via Palestro 31; s incl breakfast €37-48, d incl breakfast €74-156; ½ Apr-Oct; a) is a well-worn hotel with family-size rooms, some with a sea view, plus TV room, garden, lots of paintings of dubious quality and an overall homey, retro-1970s feel. Some rooms have air-con.

Da Oreste La Strega (☎ 0565 96 22 11; Via Vittorio Emanuele 6; meals €30; ½ Wed-Mon) is an attractive seafood restaurant, with large windows overlooking the harbour and an excellent wine list.

The best beach whereabouts is a little further down at Ortano. To get there, go back a couple of kilometres towards Rio nell'Elba and swing southwards. It's a nice location

but, once again, the beach is that part-sand, part-pebble mix.

MINOR ISLANDS

Seven islands, including the island of Elba, form part of the Parco Nazionale dell'Arcipelago Toscano (see the boxed text, p217). Two out of the park's seven islands, Capraia and Gorgona (see p219), are in the central coast area and the islands of Giglio (p289) and Giannutri (p289) are further south. The remaining two are Pianosa and Montecristo.

Pianosa, 14km west of Elba, is a flat, triangular affair measuring about 5.8km by 4.6km. From 1858 until as late as the mid-1990s it was a penal colony. Day trips (return €25) to the island leave from Porto Ferrario and Marina di Campo during summer.

There are no ferry services to Montecristo, 40km south of Elba, which was also briefly a prison island. Since 1979 it has been a marine biological reserve and can be seen only as part of an organised visit; you need special permission from the Ufficio Forestale in Follonica (☎ 0566 406 11) on the Italian mainland.

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