

A day out to the walled city of Lucca



Lucca is a lovely walled city located at the base of the Serchio valley in the Garfagnana, about 18 miles north east of Pisa. Founded in pre-Roman times it became prosperous through the silk trade and today is known for its extensive street market (selling antiques) and its high class clothing and shoe shops. Although one can easily drive there, it makes for a great day out by rail, the journey taking between 90mins and two hours depending on the route and time of day.

The city is small enough to explore in a day but large enough to contain a wide range of sights of interest. There are museums and churches to visit, towers to climb, parks to sit in, and piazzas in which to sit and dine.

Like Parma, Lucca was conquered by Napoleon (who placed his sister Elisa in charge) and after 1815 it remained a Bourbon-Parma duchy until in 1847 it became part of Tuscany ... there remains an air of French sophistication about the place.

Sights

The opera composer Puccini was born in Lucca and his home is now a museum containing his piano, musical scores, and other memorabilia. There is a bronze statue of Puccini in the piazza bearing his name: a pleasant square with several cafes and a restaurant.

The Holy Face of Lucca (or Volto Santo), a major relic supposedly carved by Nicodemus, arrived in 742 from Luni which had been overwhelmed by earthquakes, malaria and the silting up of its harbour. The relic is located in the free-standing octagonal Carrara marble chapel which was built in 1484 by Matteo Civitali, the sculptor-architect of Lucca, to contain it. Medieval legends stated that the Volto Santo had been sculpted by the Nicodemus who had assisted Joseph of Arimathea to deposit Christ in the tomb.



The 44m tall Torre Guinigi was (and still is) the most important tower in Lucca, and is one of the very few examples left in the region. It was built for the Guinigi family who once ruled over Lucca and defended the city against the Medici of Florence and has become one of the city's most famous symbols, especially thanks to its rooftop garden that can be seen from all over the city. Entrance costs €3.50 and the steps are easy to climb – even though there are 230 of them!



The walls enclosing Lucca's historic centre are some of the best preserved in Italy. They are flat topped and never less than 20m wide. Although never used to repel invasion, they have acted as an effective flood defence over the centuries. During the 1800s lawned areas were created and hundreds of trees planted so that the ramparts now form a continuous 4km linear park that encircles the ancient city. It is common for tourists to hire bicycles and ride around the walls from which there are excellent views.

Transport

Driving to Lucca via the coastal motorway takes 75mins (a fast but dull ride). A much more attractive inland route via Castelnuovo di Garfagnana (sandwiched between the Alpi Apuane and Apennine mountains) takes about 2hrs 40mins.

Our own recommendation would be to travel by train from Aulla Lunigiana station. This was completed only a couple of years ago - the original station located in the centre of town is no longer operational. There is extensive (free) car parking at the front of the station buildings. At Lucca the station is outside the medieval walls close to the Porta San Pietro gate.

There are two routes to Lucca and you need to specify the one you wish to take when buying tickets. This is because the ticket price is directly proportional to the distance travelled, and each route involves a slightly different distance. The scenic route is via Bagni di Lucca (92km: €6.40: old diesel multiple unit) and the short, less interesting, route is via Sarzana (80km: €5.30: more modern electric train). Be warned that ticket issue can be slow since there is but one automatic ticket machine and one ticketing clerk (who is very helpful, but doesn't speak English).

The way you ask for tickets is as follows:

“Due biglietti a Lucca andata e ritorno, per favore. Andata via Sarzana, ritorno via Bagni di Lucca”.

This means:

“Two return tickets to Lucca, please. Going via Sarzana, returning via Bagni di Lucca”.



The ticket clerk might ask you if you want first class or second class (“prima classe o seconda classe”) but probably won't – he'll assume you want second class.

Tickets are valid for two months but you must remember to validate your ticket using the machine located on the platform before boarding the train! Once date stamped, a ticket is valid for 6hrs.

JC 8132000		BIGLIETTO		N. 1 ADULTI	
TRENITALIA		TRENO ORDINARIO			
		DA CONVALIDARE			
UTILIZZABILE DAL 16/07/11 AL 15/09/11		← Dates valid			
From →	Partenza LUCCA	→ To	Arrivo AULLA LUNIGIANA		Classe 2
VIA B. LUCCA*		← Route: in this case via Bagni di Lucca			
KM 92		← Distance		Price →	
TARIFFA INTERA TAR.39/01				EUR *****6,40	
VALE 6H DA CONVALIDA					
TOT. BIGL. N. 1				P. IVA 05403151003	
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