



Central Coast & Elba

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

Despite an enviable setting, this part of Tuscany is not burdened with well-known destinations. Anonymous working cities prevail, including primary-school girl-bully Livorno who dares you to like her – if she doesn't punch your lights out first. But saunter inland, along a trail of vineyards and olive groves, and pride is restored in the form of eye-catching medieval villages and astonishing Etruscan ruins woven together by tiny roads and blind switchbacks. Yes, car, bicycle or foot are the only ways to explore.

Meandering south, several sandy strands are worth a sun-drenched flop and seaside lunch, especially around the bijou Golfo di Baratti. But the best alfresco frolics are a ferry ride away on Elba, a classic Mediterranean island with orange trees, palms and not a single high-rise fronting its many hidden beach-laced coves. Tramp its rugged interior, mountain bike, and don't you dare leave without paddling a sea kayak.

When to Go

Late spring and early summer are perfect for touring the paradise-isle of Elba and its pinprick island counterparts. Come July and August, it is fast, hot and busy on the coast: bars open late, seafood restaurants are packed out, and beaches sizzle with water sports. Those preferring a slower pace might prefer the autumnal days of September and October, a mellow time of the year when the midday sun is less harsh, grapes are picked and villages along Livorno's coastal Strada del Vino celebrate the harvest with a bounty of food- and wine-driven festivals.

Itineraries

Stunning Seafood Livorno does seafood like nowhere else in Tuscany. Examine raw specimens bright and early at the Mercato Centrale, then walk across black-and-white checks on the Terrazza Mascagni followed by a seafood lunch at a Livorno eatery.

Along the Strada del Vino e dell'Olio Start inland from Livorno and wend your way scenically south through a rolling hinterland strung with medieval villages and laced with vineyards. Particularly fine tasting-stops – for wine and food – include San Guido and Bolgheri (linked by a beautiful, 5km-long Cypress Alley), from where it is a very wiggly 20km further south to Sassetta (a great place to overnight at La Cerreta). Next day focus on Val di Cornia DOC wines in Suvereto, then head 25km southwest to the Golfo di Baratti for a picnic between Etruscan ruins.

The Elba Experience The final leg of the Strada del Vino is across the water on this paradise island. Catch the ferry from Piombino to Portoferraio and spend the day exploring its waterfront, haggling with fishermen for the day's catch, lunching in the Old Town and visiting its forts. Elba's oldest wine estate, Tenuta La Chiusa is the place to stay – and taste/buy Elba's sweet red Aleatico dessert wine. Next day, explore western Elba, not missing a trip up Monte Capanne, an evening *passaggiata* in Marciana Marina and dinner at Ristorante Capo Nord.

GETTING AROUND

Livorno is a major port with ferries aplenty to Sardinia, Corsica and – closer to home – the tiny island of Capraia in the national park-protected Tuscan Archipelago; to sail to Elba drive 90km south along the A12 and subsequent SS1 and SP23 to Piombino. Livorno is on the Roma–La Spezia train line and is also connected to Florence and Pisa by train. Bus services throughout the region are limited and to explore properly you really need a car or bicycle.

Where to Stay

Livorno is the obvious place to stay but it is a busy port town. So if it's peace and tranquillity you're craving head south along the shore to the unpretentious Etruscan Coast, where pine-shaded beaches kiss vineyards and drop-dead gorgeous *agriturismi* (farm stays). For paradise island accommodation, Elba is the place.

DON'T MISS

The motoring, hiking and biking on Elba is magnificent. But to uncover the island's best beaches, set sail in a sea kayak, fish for your dinner and camp wild beneath the stars (p176).

Top Tastings

- » **Cacciucco** Livorno's signature fish stew.
- » **Wild boar & Sassicaia Super Tuscan** A marriage made in heaven.
- » **Schiaccia & Aleatico Passita DOCG** Elban cake dunked in sweet wine.

Dramatic Drives

- » **Colle d'Orano & Feto-vaia** (p187) The road linking these two golden sands on Elba's western coast is the island's most dramatic.
- » **Sassetta to Suvereto** (p174) Cyclists go wild over this hairpin-laced stretch of hinterland road.

Resources

- » Costa degli Etruschi: www.costadeglietruschi.it
- » Elba Link: www.elbalink.it
- » Tuscan Archipelago Tourist Board: www.aptelba.it

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