



# Northwestern Tuscany

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## Best Places to Eat

- Villa Bongi (p141)
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## Best Places to Stay

- Piccolo Hotel Puccini (p138)
- Locanda Gavarini (p160)
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## Why Go?

There is far more to this green corner of Tuscany than 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 is the place to take your foot off the brake and go slow – on foot, by bicycle or car. Allow for long lazy lunches of rustic regional specialities to set the pace for the day, before meandering around a medieval hilltop village or along an ancient pilgrimage route.

Even the region's larger towns – university hub Pisa and 'love at first sight' Lucca with its 16th-century walls ensnaring a labyrinth of butter-coloured buildings, Romanesque palaces and gracious piazzas – have an air of tranquillity and tradition that begs the traveller to linger. This is snail-paced Italy, and you're sure to love it.

## Road Distances

Pisa	55			
Lucca	40	23		
San Miniato	64	47	70	
Pietrasanta	68	31	30	77
	Pistoia	Pisa	Lucca	San Miniato

## Getting Around

Major towns and cities are well connected by the A11 and A12, but it's more fun to veer off the motorways and onto scenic secondary roads and narrow rural routes, particularly in the Lunigiana and Garfagnana. Pisa and Lucca have strictly enforced Limited Traffic Zones (ZTL) in their *centri storici* (historic centres) – be careful where you park! Regular trains link Florence, Pisa, Lucca and Viareggio, but less obvious places such as Lajatico require a car.

### THREE PERFECT DAYS

#### Day 1: Biking Lucca

Hire a bike, provision yourself with Forno Giusti's fresh-from-the-oven focaccias, pizzas and other picnic fare, and free-wheel along the city's medieval streets. Lunch atop the monumental city walls, or pedal east to picnic in a Renaissance villa's grounds. At day's end, listen to a Puccini recital in a medieval church.

#### Day 2: Backstreet Pisa

Fall in love with backstreet Pisa, squirreling away the tower and Pisa's picture-perfect Piazza dei Miracoli for the latter part of the day – the best shots of the tower are from the pretty cloister garden of the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. Iconic sight done with, head out of town for a late-afternoon mooch in the crowd-free, Slow Food town of San Miniato. Savour an *aperitivo* (pre-dinner drink accompanied by cocktail snacks) with valley view in one of its lovely quaint cafes and dine after dusk at Pepenero (book in advance) or out-of-town Podere del Grillo. Overnight at Tuscan truffle farm, Barbiaccia Nuova.

#### Day 3: Mountain to Sea

Shop for a picnic of local forest produce in Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, then motor up and over the Apuane Alps – allow plenty of time for pulling over to soak up vistas of monumental marble blocks being cut out of the mountainside. Picnic on the Passo del Vestito and visit its botanical garden, then drop down to the sea. In Massa, head north to Carrara (to see a marble quarry) or south to refined Pietrasanta (for contemporary art and creative dining).

## Where to Stay

- ➔ Pisa is the obvious place to stay, but it is traffic busy and quality accommodation is limited.
- ➔ Opt instead for lovely Lucca (tricky parking), a farm around San Miniato, or stylish art gem Pietrasanta: all three are an easy drive to northwestern Tuscany's key sights.

### DON'T MISS

The chance to savour *lardo di colannata* (pig fat aged for 12 or 24 months in marble vats of herby olive oil) over lunch in Colannata after visiting Carrara.

## Best Food & Wine Experiences

- ➔ Barbiaccia Nuova (p147)
- ➔ Mercato della Terra di San Miniato (p147)
- ➔ La Barchina (p158)
- ➔ L'Enoteca Marcucci (p157)

## Best with Kids

- ➔ La Citadella di Carnevale (p157)
- ➔ Cava di Fantiscritti (p154)
- ➔ Grotta del Vento (p152)
- ➔ Museo Piaggio (p133)
- ➔ Ponte del Diarolo (p153)

## Resources

- ➔ **Pisa Tourism** ([www.pisaturismo.it](http://www.pisaturismo.it)) Pisa tourist office.
- ➔ **Parco Regionale delle Alpi Apuane** (p148) The region's nature park.
- ➔ **Toscana Mare** ([www.tuscancoast.org](http://www.tuscancoast.org)) The Tuscan Coast.