

# SPRING IN THE NORTH OF TUSCANY

## WONDERFUL TUSCAN GARDENS AND VILLAS

### 1° DAY: ARRIVAL

Check-in in the Hotel, placed in the sunny luxuriant country-side near Pistoia, and Montecatini Terme, among olive groves, cypresses and vineyards. Meeting with our assistant and accommodation in the rooms. Dinner and overnight in Hotel.

### 2° DAY: FLORENCE AND ITS FAMOUS ITALIAN GARDENS

After breakfast at hotel, departure for a full-day tour in *Florence by train* the celebrated capital of Tuscany, the city of art known all over the world like an exceptional open-air museum. Then a local guide will show you the wonders of the old town: starting by the celebrated medieval Basilica of Santa Croce, moving to Piazza della Signoria, the heart of the political Florence, and then reaching the famous medieval bridge Ponte Vecchio and finally the Piazza del Duomo, the religious center of Florence, with its wonderful Gothic Cathedral, its Romanesque Baptistery and the majestic Giotto's Campanile.

Free lunch. Possibility of having lunch in a characteristic tavern in the heart of Florence, tasting typical Tuscan viands (not included).

In the afternoon, you may have the possibility (not included) to discover three authentic treasures of Florence: the *Museo degli Argenti*, the famous *Boboli Gardens*, both inside the Pitti Palace, and the nearby The precious Museo degli Argenti (The Medici Treasury) houses the wonderful works of art collected by the Medici family, who has governed Florence for about four centuries: semi-precious stone vases, cameos, rock crystal objects, amber, ivory vases, rare jewels. From artistic to natural treasures: the beautiful Boboli Gardens, rising behind the Pitti Palace, originally designed for the Medici, are one of the earliest examples of the Italian Garden which later inspired those of many European courts. You'll discover its natural beauties and its fine open-air museum, with antique and Renaissance statues, grottoes and large fountains. With a pleasant walk through the Boboli Gardens, you'll reach another beautiful Florentine garden, historically belonged to the important antiquarian Stefano Bardini: you'll see many variety of colorful flowers, plants, fountains, a small English garden and a monumental baroque staircase, with a wonderful view over Florence.

Dinner and overnight in hotel.

### 3° DAY: THE WONDERFUL MEDICI VILLAS

Breakfast in Hotel and then departure for an interesting tour discovering the famous villas built by the Medici grand-dukes in the Tuscan countryside for spending their holidays or idle hours deep in the green hills of Florence. You'll start your tour visiting the wonderful *Garden of the Villa of Castello*, one of the first villas outside Florence owned by the Medici. The villa itself is not open to the public, but visitors can enjoy the splendid garden with its magnificent range of citrus ('limonaia') and other rare plants, ancient and Renaissance statues. Particularly fascinating is the Grotto, with animals carved in different types of stone and marble, which one must imagine with its original fountains and water jets. The tour continues with the visit of the nearby *Villa of Petraia*, one of the most attractive of the Medici villas, on account of its position in the Tuscan landscape, its fine pictorial decoration and the beauty of its garden and park. You'll see the fine interior, with its beautiful frescoes and rare furniture, and the pleasant terraced garden.

Free lunch. Possibility of having lunch in a typical Tuscan restaurant in the surroundings of Florence (not included).

In the afternoon the tour carries on with the visit of the wonderful Medici *Villa of Poggio a Caiano*, built by Lorenzo the Magnificent at the foot of the Albano hills, beautifully situated in a large estate between Florence, Prato and Pistoia. You'll see the interior of this Villa, with its rare ancient furniture and its fine frescoes celebrating the Medici family, painted by some of the most important Florentine artists of the sixteenth-century, like Andrea Del Sarto, Pontorno and Franciabigio. Your tour will continue in the nearby town of Artimino, where is placed another important Medici Villa called "*La Fernanda*", because wanted by the Medici grand-duke Ferdinando I. You'll admire its wonderful outside architecture, while your guide explain you the interesting history of the whole complex. Then you'll have the possibility of visiting the Farm of Artimino, which produces high-level wine and oil. At the end of the visit, you'll live a special wine and food experience: an elegant dinner inside the Medici Villa itself, tasting the fine wine produced by the Farm of Artimino. Overnight in hotel.

### 4° DAY: PISTOIA AND ITS SURROUNDING GARDENS

Breakfast in the hotel and then guided walking tour in **Pistoia**, a very charming and well-preserved medieval town full of fine artworks, excellent restaurants and quality shops. You'll visit the old medieval town: the central Piazza San Francesco, with its interesting Franciscan Church, and the Romanesque church of S. Andrea, housing a precious pulpit carved by the sculptor Giovanni Pisano, one of the town's greatest works of art. You'll also visit Piazza del Duomo, the heart of the old center, with its Cathedral, Baptistry and intact medieval palaces and then the nearby Piazza della Sala, where you'll get in touch with a typical picturesque Italian fruit and vegetable open market. You'll also see the Ospedale del Ceppo (the Ceppo Hospital), famous for Giovanni della Robbia's earthen glazed frieze. You'll visit the basements of this ancient Hospital: along an interesting route, you'll discover the secret underground architectures of this old building, including the prestigious Hall of Anatomy, designed as a true 'anatomical theater', and the special and valuable collection of surgical instruments dating from the seventeenth-century.

Free lunch. Possibility of having lunch in a typical Tuscan restaurant in Pistoia's old centre (not included).

In the afternoon, transfer to the nearby Collodi for visiting the wonderful historic **Garzoni Garden**, one of the most beautiful in Italy, a felicitous synthesis between Renaissance geometry and the spectacular quality of the nascent Baroque. It's an absolutely unforgettable experience to look oneself among the wonders of this fantastic place: delightful parterres, grottoes, theatres carved out of box hedges, statues representing mythological creatures, satyrs, female figures, greenhouses with peacocks, forests of bamboo.

Dinner and overnight in hotel.

### **5° DAY: LUCCA AND THE LUCCHESIAN VILLAS**

Breakfast in hotel. In the morning, pleasant tour discovering the most beautiful Lucchesian villas and their parks: built on commission of rich noble families in the hilly countryside around Lucca, they're unique architectural and botanical treasures. Through our guided tour you'll discover the immeasurable beauties of **Villa Torrigiani Santini**, wonderful baroque villa belonged to the Lucchesian ambassador at the Versailles Court and still completely furnished, and the **Villa Reale di Marlia**, the favorite country residence of Elisa Baciocchi (Napoleon's sister), with its huge park and its fantastic gardens with a little "verdure" theater.

Free lunch. Possibility of having lunch in a wonderful Lucchesian farm-house, tasting typical food prepared with good Tuscan olive-oil (not included).

Afternoon dedicated to the visit of **Lucca**, fascinating town which has exceptionally preserved its city walls complete. Guided tour in the old town, visiting the Church of San Frediano, with its magnificent thirteenth-century mosaic representing *Christ in Majesty*, the nearby Piazza Anfiteatro, the most beautiful square of Lucca, the ancient Duomo dedicated to San Martino and finally the important Piazza San Michele, the central civic square of Lucca since Roman times. Dinner and overnight in hotel.

### **6° DAY: SAILING THE ARNO RIVER**

Breakfast in hotel. A full-day dedicated to a funny **boat ride**: starting by San Rossore, near **Pisa**, you'll sail aboard a special boat across the Arno river for a mini-cruise which will carry you up to the wonderful Park of San Rossore. You'll sail along the Lungarno, crossing the center of Pisa and admiring the palaces and churches overlooking the river from an unusual and very suggestive perspective. Your mini-cruise will continue with a nature tour: a naturalistic navigation up to the famous Park of San Rossore and to the mouth of the Arno river, admiring that stretch of the river which arrives to the sea. You'll arrive at Cascine Nuove (inside the Park of San Rossore) and then you'll reach by coach the beautiful place of Cascine Vecchie.

Free lunch in the Park of San Rossore. Opportunity to have lunch in a restaurant (not included).

After lunch, visit of Pisa-

At the end of the visit, inner and overnight in hotel.

### **7° DAY: STEAM TRAIN IN SCHEDULED DATE (OCTOBER), FROM PISTOIA TO MARRADI, THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS, BY CHESTNUTS FEST. Or in other periods of the year THE FUCECCHIO MARSHLAND AND THE MEDICI VILLA OF CERRETO GUIDI**

Breakfast in hotel. Morning dedicated to a guided excursion inside the wonderful nature reserve of **Fucecchio Marshland** ('Padule di Fucecchio'), the biggest inland marsh of Italy, a humid area rich in fauna beautifully situated in a large estate between the provinces of Florence and Pistoia. The nature reserve is one of the last refuge for many rare plants (like the yellow and white water lilies) and offers many attractions for the birdwatching lovers, especially during the spring: it's possible to see herons, migratory birds like cranes and black storks.

Free lunch in **Vinci**, the nice medieval village tightly linked to the figure of the world-famous scientist and artist Leonardo da Vinci. Possibility of having lunch in a typical Tuscan tavern placed in the heart of Vinci (not included).

In the afternoon, guided visit of the nearby **Cerreto Guidi/Montalbano**

Dinner and overnight in hotel.

### **8° DAY: DEPARTURE**

Breakfast in hotel. End of our services.

**WE'LL CREATE *YOUR OWN PRICE!***

All our tours have been designed and developed with the following basic features:

- 3 / 4 STARS HOTELS
- HALF BOARD, with the possibility of full board
- GUIDED TOURS AS PER PROGRAM
- TRANSFERS BY COACH or TRAIN

We can expand or decrease our offer according to some variables or specific requests: the period of stay (low, medium or high season), the number of participants, the ability to integrate the program with extras like cooking classes, entrances in museums not listed in the programs and so on.

Send us an email with your personal request and we'll respond within 24 hours with an ad hoc quote just for you! Customize and make your holidays in Tuscany special and unforgettable with the expertise and advise of *Tour in Tuscany!*

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