

Elba & Tuscany

8 days from £899 May & September



Napoleon was famously banished to Elba, before he returned to...meet his Waterloo. An extremely nice place to be exiled to! Like him, you will travel across to one of Europe's most enchanting islands where, on two guided walks, you will wonder why he ever wanted to leave! But leave you must, too - to enjoy some of the scenic landscapes and beautiful cities in Tuscany. Visits to 'spooky' Volterra and magnificent Siena are included. From your base in the old city of Prato there is a third guided walk and mighty Florence is also easily accessible.

• 4 nights bb Tuscan mainland, 3 nights hb on Elba • 2 guided walks on Elba and 1 in Tuscany • Walking tour of Prato • Ferry trip to Elba

PROGRAMME

DAY ONE: Flight to Pisa. There is a short transfer to Livorno, Tuscany's second city, which has a Medici Fortress and mercantile 'Little Venice' area, for one night's bed and breakfast accommodation.

DAY TWO: After breakfast, depart Livorno and head inland to Volterra, 45 miles away, an ancient walled town on a hilltop dominating the rolling Tuscan countryside, with medieval and Renaissance buildings, Roman theatre, forum and baths. D.H. Lawrence called Volterra 'an inland island', and the popular vampire novel 'New Moon' (part of the Twilight Saga) was set there – you can see why! In the afternoon, you leave Volterra and drive to Piombino, 55 miles away, to board the roll-on, roll-off ferry to Elba, less than 10 miles offshore – the crossing takes just under an hour.

You continue the short distance to your hotel in Procchio for three nights half board accommodation. Your hotel is in a quiet location on the beautiful bay of Procchio on the north coast of the island, seven miles west of Portoferraio.

DAYS THREE AND FOUR: From Procchio you have two included walking excursions:

Walk 1: Elba's West: Short coach transfer to Zanca, at a height of 300m on the west coast of Elba, from where you walk down to Sant Andrea beach (about 40 minutes). After a break, you walk down to the resort of Marciana

Marina with superb sea views as you go (about 4 hours, 6 miles, 290m ascent, 400m descent). After free time in Marciana Marina, you return to your hotel.

Walk 2: Elba's South: Short coach transfer to the narrow Stella peninsula, on the south coast. Your first path starts from the village of Lacona and winds up 100m through wonderful Mediterranean vegetation (40 minutes), with umbrella pines and eucalyptus prominent. After taking in the stunning views, you retrace your steps and follow a different path around the peninsula – a further 3 hours walk. There is free time in the village of Lacona for lunch, after which there is a coach transfer to the island's harbour town of Portoferraio (time to climb to the fortress if you wish) and thence to Procchio. Distance walked approx. 6 miles, ascent/descent 250m.

DAY FIVE: Today you leave Elba and return to mainland Tuscany. You stop in Siena before continuing to the walled city of Prato (total today 150 miles). Siena is best known as the city of the spectacular bareback Palio Horse race. The race takes place on the spectacular, shell-shaped Piazza del Campo. St Catherine of Siena is, with St Francis, one of Italy's two patron saints – her head was supposedly smuggled out of Rome and is stored in the church of St Dominic: and don't miss the cathedral, one of Italy's most stunning Gothic churches.

You continue to Prato, just 10 miles from Florence (frequent train services take 25 minutes), historic in its own right, and well worth taking time to visit, but fortunately without the great Florentine tourist flows! Although Prato is an important modern centre for textiles, the old town within the walls is a world apart – a lovely place to stroll and enjoy the real Italy. Your hotel is just a few steps from the town walls, so it's easy to explore. Three nights in Prato on a bed and breakfast basis.

DAYS SIX AND SEVEN: Free in Prato, with an included half-day walking tour of the old city and an included walking excursion. Otherwise you are free in Prato – why not catch the local train to Florence, or to Pistoia, another attractive nearby town. Both are just 20 minutes train ride, or 5 euros away!

Walk 3: You meet your guide at the hotel and catch the local bus just out of town, to S. Lucia di Prato and walk through a rocky landscape with springs and caves. There are views of the river valley, old villages and woodlands. After your walk, you catch the bus back to town, for lunch and a free afternoon. The walk is about 5 miles with ascents/descents of 350m.

DAY EIGHT: Free time until your transfer to airport and your flight home. Depending on flight times, there may be time for some last minute shopping/sightseeing en route.

YOUR HOTELS

HOTEL GRAN DUCA ★★★★★, Livorno (one night)

The first night is spent at the Gran Duca in the centre of Livorno, overlooking the harbour. As well as a piano bar it has a first class restaurant (there are plenty of less expensive bars and restaurants nearby). Rooms are air-conditioned with bath/shower, wc, tv and fridge. (www.granduca.it)

HOTEL BRIGANTINO ★★★, Procchio, Elba (three nights)

A pleasant, family-run hotel 250m from the beautiful Procchio beach and a 15 minute walk to the small town centre. The hotel is set in attractive grounds and has a bar, lounge, reading room, restaurant and outdoor pool. Bedrooms have balcony, tv, shower and wc. The hotel has an agreement with a private area on the beach where sun loungers and parasols are free to hotel guests (May to September). (www.hotelbrigantino.com)

ART HOTEL MILANO ★★★★★, Prato (three nights)

The hotel is very handily situated close to the medieval centre (the magnificent 13th-century Palazzo Pretorio re-opened in late 2013 after a 20-year restoration) the other side of the river to the train station. The hotel has a lobby bar and breakfast room. Bedrooms have air conditioning, direct dial phone, hairdryer, free wi-fi connection, safe, digital tv. (www.arthotel-milano.it)

If you have friends who are not walkers interested in this itinerary, it is featured in our Escorted Holidays brochure with a touring programme.