

Toscana Trekking is our new “Eco-tourism programme” put together with the help of a group of guides specialised in hiking trips.

Under the auspices of Toscana Trekking, **VEGA BLU VIAGGI** proposes day excursions, hiking trips and nature and cultural packages with the services of fully-qualified, licensed hiking guides, members of AIGAE, the National association of hiking guides.

Our eco-tourist activities are completely different from traditional tourist packages in that they are aimed at people who enjoy hiking and walks and who prefer to stay in simple and informal accommodation while still maintaining a guarantee of good quality.

Each trip is distinguished by various levels of walking difficulty (which are clearly explained, with easier alternatives in the case of the harder routes). For each route uphill ascents and walking times are specified.

All hiking routes are covered at a relaxed pace (except in unforeseen circumstances) and according to the walking pace of participants. The emphasis of the itineraries is to get to know the surrounding countryside and its history rather than the hiking itself. Walking therefore becomes the means which allows us to discover the human dimension of the places we visit, to establish continuous and valuable exchanges with their inhabitants, and to get to know and understand the nature of these communities in the light of their history and popular traditions. The guide will adopt the role of the islander or mountain dweller, farmer or sailor, be it from Elba, Siena, Pavia or Ponza, and will try to involve participants in his or her enthusiasm for the history and the environment, and in a respectful curiosity for the local inhabitants.

Visits to various places en route and stops along the way are given ample time, in order to create a cultural holiday that is both relaxing and regenerating. A fundamental aim for Toscana Trekking is to create a “group spirit” that goes beyond the holiday itself and may lay the ground for lasting friendships.

Below we describe a number of example programmes. Each one can be tailored to suit group requirements, matching the example tours with the daily excursions.

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In the event of bad weather or unforeseen circumstances, all the indicated programmes are subject to variation at the Guide’s discretion

The itineraries described represent an outline of the programmes which are subject to variation at the discretion of the organiser, according to necessities connected with the planning of these itineraries and on the basis of the viability of covering the chosen itinerary, weather conditions and any unforeseen events due to circumstances beyond the control of the organisers. In the event of it being necessary to solve problems or unforeseen events which make it impossible for even just one participant to carry out the trip, the trip itself may be interrupted or suspended for the time needed to solve the problem or to arrange for the participant in question to be taken home.

Sud Tuscany and Islands

1. Hiking in the Tufi and the Colline del Fiora (Fiora hills)(GR)

5 days – 4 nights

A look at the famous Pitigliano Tufi (tufo sandstone formations) and the area between Fiora and Albegna, and a survey of the geomorphological mutability of the landscape

This is one of our most fascinating and exciting tours, with its splendid landscape, spectacular nature hikes in the woods that surround the medieval hamlets, along streams dotted with waterfalls and ancient bridges, and above all into the incredible Vie Cave dug into the tufo stone by the Etruscans and used for centuries as the only communication routes between one village and another. We will have the opportunity to visit the most famous Etruscan necropolises, the most picturesque medieval villages, and discover areas jealously guarded by the inhabitants (the famous “cellars” of Pitigliano which cut through from one side of the mountain to another). We will also be able to bathe in the well-known thermal waterfall at Gorello whose temperature allows year-round bathing.

1st day (day’s walking itinerary: Sorano – San Rocco; approximate walking time 2h)

Meeting with the guide in Sorano during the morning. Visit the Necropolises of San Rocco and walk to Sorano through the enchanting Via Cava di S. Rocco crossing the valley of river Lente. Short tour of the village and the Fortezza Orsini, with its museum and Lorenese underground. We move for dinner and overnight stay at the hotel.

2nd day (day’s walking itinerary: Sorano - S. Quirico; approximate walking time 4h30’)

After breakfast we move to Sorano. A splendid hiking route thru the wood will bring us to Vitozza, the most important rock village in the north of Italy which can be compared to the famous “Sassi di Matera”, where people lives from the middle age up to XVIII century. After visiting the caves, we proceed to S. Quirico to the hotel for dinner and overnight.

3rd day (day’s walking itinerary: Sovana – Pitigliano; approximate walking time 5h)

After breakfast we move to Sovana to visit the Necropolises of Grezzano, Follonia and the famous Hildebrand Tomb; tour of the village with its Cathedral the the ruins of the Castello Aldobrandesco. We will then walk from Sovana to Pitigliano along the magnificent Via Cava di S. Giuseppe decorated with the medieval “scacciadiavoli” (‘devil expellers’), votive niches against evil spirits which were thought to pervade these places. We will reach Pitigliano in time for a memorable bite to eat in one of the private cellars excavated in the rock below the village: we will be able to taste local cheeses and pork products accompanied by excellent Tuscan bread and Pitigliano wine. Tour of the picturesque medieval village, its principal monuments and its magnificent Etruscan necropolises, then back to the hotel in S. Quirico for dinner and overnight stay.

4rd day (day’s walking itinerary): S. Martino sul Fiora – Saturnia; approximate walking time 3h)

After breakfast we leave the hotel and head for S. Martino sul Fiora where a notable change in the landscape will mark our departure from the Tufi and our arrival in the geothermal area of the Travertini (travertine rock). From the village we will use paths and mule tracks to walk to Poggio Murella where we will see the ruins of an imposing Cistern and other Roman remains, reminding us how fond the Romans were of Thermal baths and also marking the vicinity of today’s spa area. In fact we will soon reach Saturnia via a stretch of the ancient Via Clodia. Picnic lunch (participants provide their own). Short tour of the village. Just outside the village we will gain an insight into the geothermal phenomenon from a geological point of view and will be able to experience the hot spas firsthand with a regenerating bath in the thermal waters of the famous Gorello waterfall which will conclude our short walking trip. Afternoon departure.

5th day (Day’s walking itinerari: Selva del Lamone and Sorgenti della Nova; walking time about 2h)

After the breakfast we move to the path. We walk crossing the inextricable “Selva del Lamone” up to the river Nova Source, a very important archaeological place related to the study of prehistoty, Pack lunch. Departure in the afternoon.

2. Hiking on the islands of Giglio and Giannutri

4 days – 3 nights

The two most southerly islands of the Tuscan Archipelago, tiny uninhabited Giannutri, with its lighthouse and its characteristic ‘Grottoni’ (caves), and the island of Giglio, a jewel just a short distance from the promontory of the Argentario, with a wealth of history and natural beauty.

Outline of trip:

- 1st day** – meeting in Porto Santo Stefano and departure for the island of Giannutri, the southernmost island in the Tuscan Archipelago, distinguished by its half-moon shape. Walk among euphorbia and herring-gulls’ nests to the lighthouse, situated right on the ‘Grottoni’ formations, cavities eroded by the action of the sea and the wind. Return to Porto Santo Stefano and board ferry for the island of Giglio. Arrival in Giglio 19.00 approx., proceed to 3-star hotel. Dinner and walk at leisure to the characteristic port-side village.
- 2nd day** – walk to Giglio Castello (400 mt), explore the history of this pretty village, then continue to walk towards the south of the island along the ridge. Packed lunch and descent to one of the island’s most beautiful bays. Return in the late afternoon. After dinner optional walk to the Arenella beach.
- 3rd day** – excursion from Castello up to capo Fenaio Lighthouse, the extreme north cape of the island. Back to the hotel for dinner and overnight.
- 4th day** – walk from “Castello” village to west to the island’s largest beach, Campese, where the sand is rich in quartz and pink fluorite, typical to the island. From the beach we proceed along the path that leads to the lighthouse that stands over the entrance to the bay. Return to hotel, board ferry and arrival at Santo Stefano in the afternoon

Technical details: Giannutri: easy walking, Giglio: hike of medium difficulty. Accommodation in 3-star hotel near the port.

3. Maremma and the island of Giglio

3 days – 2 nights

The natural, historical and scenic aspects of a wild and beautiful area, longtime symbol of the real Tuscany.

Programme

- 1st day** - Meet the guide at 11.30 at the Centro Visite del Parco della Maremma (Maremma Park Visitor Centre) in Alberese. Hiking in the Parco dell’Uccellina along the “Le Torri” route. Through the park’s luxuriant undergrowth to the medieval tower of Castel Marino, perched on the edge of the ancient cliffs. At the foot of the tower the Grand Duchy’s woodland which covers the vast plain area between the sea and the mouth of the Ombrone river, and as a backdrop the white sands of the beautiful beach stretching as far as the eye can see. Technical details: hiking of average difficulty in both directions, for averagely fit people. Route partly covered by vegetation. Average walking time 3h (one way); Approx. distance 6km; overall uphill ascent of about 170m. A shuttle bus will take us from the Alberese Visitor centre to the beginning of the path and will pick us up again on our return. Transfer to Fonteblanda by coach for dinner and overnight stay.
- 2nd day** - breakfast in hotel. Transfer to Porto S. Stefano and embarkation for the island of Giglio; The most hospitable island in the Tuscan Archipelago, Giglio has long been inhabited and is so near to the coast that it seems impossible that it should maintain its timeless atmosphere. Although most visitors come for the island’s beaches and miss its infinite natural beauties, by coming as a walker out of season we will be able to enjoy the island in all its splendour. Transfer by local transport to the historical centre and guided tour of

Giglio Castello; hiking along one of the most stunning paths in the Tuscan Archipelago, characterised by a variety of different environments, from the driest of Mediterranean scrubland to the reed thickets and jonquils along a cool stream, to the village of Campese with its spectacular beach and Medici watchtower. Transfer by local bus back to the port, board ferry for Porto S. Stefano. Coach transfer back to hotel. Dinner and overnight stay.

3rd day - breakfast in hotel. Transfer by coach to the following places:

- **Oasi del Tombolo della Feniglia (Orbetello)** – hiking. In the pinewood on the Ansedonia side it is quite common to see fallow deer and, though less frequently, even a few wild boar. If we take a supply of carrots or bread in small pieces, we might be able to coax the deer to come close to us, and with a bit of patience, may even be able to get them eating from our hands. These sightings are most likely to take place in the clearing or in the pinewood near the forest wardens' hut, while deer tracks and the holes dug by wild boar in their search for roots can be seen along the entire trail. The keenest eyes might even find a rare porcupine quill. If we lift our gaze, we are likely to see jays, which seem to observe and follow us as they fly from branch to branch. The park represents an area of wetland of international importance (Ramsar convention). It contains 300 hectares of saltwater lagoon dotted with tiny islands of silt covered in typical marshland vegetation. The 'Tombolo della Feniglia' is a sandbar lying along the coast and covered with rich Mediterranean vegetation, while the inland bank of the lagoon is covered with a wide carpet of glasswort. Further inland there are small isolated woods of poplar, cork-oak, ash and elm. Further south is the woodland known as the Bosco di Patanella characterised by wide stretches of heather. This environment is characterised by Mediterranean scrubland plants such as lentisk, *phillyrea*, myrtle, and strawberry trees; vegetation typical of sand-dunes like *agropyron junceum*, santolina, *ammophila littoralis*, alfalfa, caltrop and sea-lilies, and, in the lagoon area, wide stretches of salicornia. The quality of the environment, and its position on the migratory routes, ensures the concentration of thousands of birds in the wide stretches of water, birds like flamingoes, stilt-birds, great white egrets, grey herons, ospreys, northern shovelers, spoonbills and avocets. Mammals include foxes, badgers and porcupine.
- **Porto Ercole, Porto Santo Stefano and the Argentario aquarium** (entrance 3,00€/student) tour given by a marine biologist.

4. Hiking on the island of Capraia

4 days – 3 nights

The volcanic island of Capraia is perhaps the wildest of the inhabited islands in the Tuscan Archipelago. Its distance from the coast and its relative vicinity to Corsica have favoured the development of a typical and exclusive flora and fauna which make the island a perfect laboratory for the observation of nature. A variety of landscapes unroll in the space of a few hundred metres, creating a unique and stunning contrast between the arid asphodel-covered steppe with its windswept saddles and the spectacular water buttercups in the Stagnone marsh.

While the island's history and its former penal colony are of great interest, its natural features will undoubtedly form the predominant part of our explorations, enabling us to get closer to that magical aspect of the island which is still largely unknown to mass tourism and urban life.

OUTLINE OF PROGRAMME

- 1st day**– meeting at the Toremar ticket office in the Porto Mediceo, Livorno. Departure for Capraia. Transfer to accommodation and leave baggage. Tour of the village of Capraia and walk to the Cala dello Zurletto (swimming possible in this cove); packed lunch, dinner at a restaurant.
- 2nd day** – Anello del Monte Penne (4h 30' walking time): this walk takes us to the “Stagnone”, the only natural area of water in the Archipelago. We then proceed towards mount Penne where there is an enchanting view of the western part of the island; packed lunch. We proceed to the buildings of the former penal colony. Back to the village in the early evening, with a refreshing swim on our return (guided snorkelling available). Dinner at a restaurant.
- 3rd day** – Walk out and back to mount Arpagna (3h of walking in total), an old military lookout site from where we can enjoy a view of Corsica on clear days. Packed lunch. From here we can proceed to Trattolo head (+ 1h30') where a small lighthouse marks the coast to sailors. Alternatively we can head for Piana dello Zenobito (+ 2 h) which overlooks the spectacular Cala Rossa, or, on our way back, we can detour to Cala del Ceppo (+1h) for swimming. Return early evening for a swim (guided snorkelling available). Dinner at a restaurant.
- 4th day** – Round the island by boat (28 places) or by dinghy (12 places) depending on numbers. Swimming. Walk through the Valle di Reganico; transfer to the harbour for boarding on the ship back to Livorno .

Technical details: hiking of average difficulty. Accommodation in small apartments in the village. Breakfast and dinner at a pre-arranged restaurant (2 dinners with a fish menu, 1 with a meat menu. Please notify any special dietary requirements at the time of booking). Packed lunches provided by individual participants (rolls, fruit, and pizza available from nearby shops).

5. Week-end including hiking tours and a squid feast on the island of Capraia

2 days– 1 night

To coincide with Capraia's Fishing Competition and Squid Feast ('Sagra del Totano')

To coincide with the gastronomic event organised by Capraia Island council, Toscana Trekking proposes a weekend of festivity and culinary treats, including historical and nature walking tours and participation in the lively Squid Feast. This event takes place on Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 November 2006 and includes a fishing competition to be held at about 5pm on the Saturday. The competition is open to anyone with a fishing rod and line, and takes place on the jetty. On Sunday, on our return from our second hike, we will be able to see the prize-giving ceremony and take part in the actual feasting. As in past years, all the restaurants in Capraia will devote their skills to the preparation of superb squid-based dishes. So prepare for an evening of feasting! ...

PROGRAMMA

- Saturday** Meeting at the Porto Mediceo in Livorno and departure by ferry. Late morning arrival in Capraia Island. After leaving baggage at the hotel, our walk begins at the buildings of the former penal colony and goes as far as the last prison sector, the Mortola, the first part to be dismantled.; from here we proceed to the Punta del Dattero, from where, on clear winter's days, you can see the entire Tuscan coast with the Apuan Alps and the splendid Ligurian Gulf. Picnic lunch (participants provide their own) and in the afternoon back to the village to see the start of the fishing competition. Optional tour of the village or freetime. Dinner in a restaurant and overnight stay.
- Sunday** After breakfast, departure on our hike to Cala del Ceppo, via the Piana area with its vineyards, visiting the remains of the church of Santo Stefano protomartire, the first church to be built on the island. Back to the village for midday to see the prize-giving and taste the delicious squid dishes. Departure from Capraia by ferry. Arrival in Livorno about 3 hours later.

6. The shooting stars of San Lorenzo on the Island of Capraia

2 days– 1 night (bivouac)

An exclusive camp in the most magical spot in this unspoilt island. A night dedicated to nature and the stars.

PROGRAMME

- Saturday** Meeting at the Porto Mediceo, Livorno, opposite the Toremar ticket office. Departure and arrival in Capraia. Historical and nature tour of the port and the village. Swimming in one of the island's delightful coves. Packed lunch (bring your own). Guided snorkelling possible. Shower (additional cost) and toilet facilities are also available. Our walk begins at 16.30 and we start by crossing the area formerly occupied by an agricultural penal colony. Tour of some of the buildings. Arrival at the Portovecchio sector where dinner made from products from the "Valle di Portovecchio" organic farm will be served. After dinner we will walk up to the area for shooting star gazing. Setting up of tents and camp. EVENING BENEATH THE STARS. The history and magic of the constellations.
- Sunday** Camp breakfast. Descent to the port, lunch at leisure (cold dishes available from 6 to 10€ in pre-arranged facilities); afternoon free, optional round-the-island boat trip with swimming stops in some of the island's most beautiful coves (additional cost). Departure on the fast ferry; arrival in Livorno 19.40.

7. Four-day hike on the Island of Elba

6 days – 5 nights

The summer months in Elba Island can be compared to market day in a small village: large earnings guaranteed, an exchange of people, a time for meetings, albeit frenetic, with different cultures and customs, but also a time of chaos, unrestrained consumerism, and the indiscriminate use of natural resources. This is, perhaps, what we feel ourselves when faced with the anxiety of the summer holidays.

So why not adopt a quieter pace of life and discover a different side of the island of Elba, in autumn, when it returns to a more human dimension.

The hiking trip I propose here aims at all these things: the discovery of an area – still largely unspoilt – in the season when the sounds of nature can once again be heard now that the bedlam of the seaside masses has subsided.

Crossing the island on foot, as its inhabitants used to do up until about fifty years ago, will bring us the enjoyment of watching panoramas pass in front of our gaze to the rhythm of our feet, rather than at the speed of a car. We will discover that the art of walking coincides with enjoying the world around us at a pace more suitable to human nature. This is “active relaxation”, a new, but at the same time ancient way of fully savouring a region, far at last from our frenetic daily lives and from consumerism. We will take pleasure in spotting wild life, in learning to recognise and use the essences of the Mediterranean vegetation, now green again after the scorching summer heat; we will learn about the history, traditions, and popular legends of every corner of the island, forget about television and savour the old-fashioned pleasure of a story. All this in the company of like-minded people, in perfect harmony with the natural setting around us.

This is not “touring”, but “living” the island, using our own bodies as our means of transport. It is much more than just coming into contact with nature: it is participating in the actual breath of nature, and becoming part of it ourselves.

PROGRAMME

1st day - meeting with the guide in Piombino in the afternoon; boarding the ferry for Portoferraio; transfer to Cavo; check into hotel; dinner and overnight stay

2nd day - breakfast in hotel; pick-up packed lunches and water supplies. Departure of GTE walk: Cavo - Mausoleo Tonietti – Il Serrone – Case Muti – Il semaforo di M. Grosso – M. Strega – La croce – Rio Elba (actual distance: 16270 m; total altitude difference: 585 m; likely walking time: 5h30') Evening arrival in at Rio Elba; check into hotel; dinner and overnight stay

3rd day - breakfast in hotel; pick-up packed lunches and water supplies. Departure of GTE walk: Rio Elba – Le Panche – Cima del Monte – Monte Castello – La Crocetta – Valdana. (actual distance: 9280 m; total altitude difference: 338 m; likely walking time: 3h20'). Transfer by local bus to Procchio; evening arrival and check into hotel; dinner and overnight stay

4th day - breakfast in hotel; pick-up packed lunches and water supplies. Departure of GTE walk: Procchio – M. Castello – Colle Reciso di Procchio – M. Perone – M. Maolo – Le Filicaie – S. Cerbone – Marciana Castello. (actual distance: 14070 m; total altitude difference: 957 m; likely walking time: 5h50'). Evening arrival in Marciana Castello; check into hotel; dinner and overnight stay

5th day - breakfast in hotel; pick-up packed lunches and water supplies. Departure of GTE walk: Marciana - Via Crucis – La Stretta – La Tavola – La tabella – Il Troppolo – Il Bollero – Serra Ventosa – Madonna del Monte – Via Crucis – Patresi (CAI path n°14). (actual distance: 17680 m; total altitude difference: 580 m; likely walking time: 5h50'). Evening arrival in Patresi; check into hotel; dinner and overnight stay

6th day - transfer to Portoferraio by local transport or own car; optional tour of Napoleonic Residence; board ferry and departure

8. Winter hiking on the island of Elba

4 days – 3 nights

Four days including hiking trails and festivities on the Island of Elba, discovering the least known corners of the island, its “Apennine” and coastal paths, its famous beaches freed of their high season crowds, and its characteristic villages and mild climate. We can climb to the highest point in the Tuscan Archipelago, at 1019m, or to the austere Castello del Volterraio and the peak of Monte Castello, and from here admire the entire island laid out before us like a map. This will be a New Year’s Eve with a difference, set in the splendid cornice of Elba in wintertime.

OUTLINE OF PROGRAMME

- 1st day** – meeting in Piombino at the port to embark late morning. Ferry to Elba (approx 1 hour). (lunch at leisure). Arrival in Rio Marina late morning; lunch; hike to Parco Minerario of Rio Marina and visit museum. Transfer to the Hotel for dinner. After dinner walk.
(total altitude difference 300 m.; likely walking, walking time about 3h)
- 2nd day** – After breakfast, transfer by car to the beginning of our path. Hike by east side of Island, from Cavo to Portoazzurro. Back to accommodation in the evening and after dinner, tour of the picturesque historical town of Portoferraio, with its Medici fortresses and Renaissance layout.
(total altitude difference 600 m.; medium-hard walking, walking time about 6h)
- 3rd day** – After breakfast hike to Monte Capanne. Packed lunch. Back in the evening, dinner and overnight stay.
(total altitude difference 600 m.; medium-hard walking, walking time about 6h)
- 4th day** – After breakfast, hike between the mountains and the sea, from S. Andrea to Marciana Marina. Packed lunch. Transfer to port for return by ferry to Piombino.
(total altitude difference 350 m.; likely walking, walking time about 4h30’)

9. Hiking on the islands of Elba and Pianosa

4 days – 3 nights

1st day - Piombino/Elba

Meeting in Piombino in the morning and embarkation with a minimum number of private cars; arrival at Portoferraio late morning; walk to Punta Calamita and tour of the Miniera del Ginevro, the only underground mine on the Island of Elba. Transfer (by private car) to Portoferraio, where we will check into our apartments. Dinner in a pizzeria-restaurant, then return to apartments.

Altitude difference 300m. Level of difficulty: easy. Duration: about 3 hours.

2nd day - Elba

Hiking on the island’s western ridge, from Cavo to Portoazzurro. Pick up cars (some will be left at the beginning of the route and some at the end) and return to our apartments in Portoferraio. Dinner in a restaurant, guided tour of the historic centre of Portoferraio, overnight stay.

Altitude difference 600m. Level of difficulty: moderately demanding; Duration: about 6 hours

3rd day - Pianosa

After breakfast, transfer to Marina di Campo and boarding of boat that will take us to Pianosa. Tour of the island and the abandoned prison sectors (additional cost).

Altitude difference 350m. Level of difficulty: easy. Duration about 4.5 hours.

4th day - Elba

After breakfast, hiking through the mountains to the peak of Monte Capanne. Return to Portoferraio to board the ferry for Piombino.

Altitude difference 350m. Level of difficulty: demanding. Duration: about 6.5 hours.

10. 3 days' hiking on the island-prison of Pianosa

3 days – 2 nights

**'the prohibited island. the least known and the most fascinating in the
Tuscan Archipelago - A short trip exclusively for Toscana Trekking**

Currently lacking in civil settlements, but still a prison site, Pianosa boasts a rich historical and archaeological patrimony as well as being a protected nature reserve. The island possesses a paradoxical contrast between its unusual flat morphology and its high chalky cliffs; it has an original village designed in the very early days of the Kingdom of Italy; the magnificent Paleochristian Catacombs shrouded in mystery; the remains of the thermal baths belonging to Marcus Postumus Agrippa's luxurious domus; the prison sectors of the oldest Agricultural Penal Colony in the Archipelago, and innumerable coastal paths immersed in the Mediterranean vegetation. All this is waiting to be discovered on this exclusive trip. During our two day stay, "away from it all", we will be able to visit all the most spectacular corners of the nature reserve where daily visitors are not permitted and where only prisoners were once allowed to go. There will be a chance to experience an unforgettable swim in uncontaminated waters, rich with sealife: snorkel among groupers, Pinna nobilis, Spirographis and Nudibranchs and savour the feeling of being one of the privileged few to be allowed to spend a night under the uncontaminated sky of Pianosa.

OUTLINE OF PROGRAMME

Friday – meeting in front of the Stazione Marittima in Piombino at 7.30. Fast ferry for Pianosa (2 hour crossing). The ferry sails along the north-west coast of the Island of Elba. On arrival we will go to the guest quarters, followed by swimming and snorkelling in Cala Giovanna. Packed lunch (participants bring their own; lunch can be bought at the Coop. S. Giacomo canteen-restaurant at a fixed priceo fisso). Tour of the historical centre and the Catacombs (entrance fee 2 € to be paid locally). Afternoon hike to the prison area of the island, towards the enchanting coves on the southern coast. Dinner, evening walk under the star-studded sky; overnight stay.

Saturday – After breakfast, and early hiking tour in the prison area of the island towards the splendid beach of Porto Romano and the Golfo della Botte, where an ancient spring used to supply water to the Lavanderia Vecchia (Old Washing Trough). On our return, swim at Cala Giovanna. Lunch in canteen-restaurant and short visit to the archaeological site of the Baths of Agrippa and the photographic exhibition. Dinner in restaurant, after-dinner walk, and overnight stay.

Sunday – After breakfast, early hiking tour in the prison area of the island to Cala Brigantina, through the prison sectors and farms. Lunch in a restaurant. Swimming and snorkelling at Cala Giovanna. 17.00 return to Piombino. Arrival in Piombino at about 19.15.

Technical details: easy walking on flat but sunny ground. Overnight stay in guest quarters in four-bedded rooms with one bathroom each room, located in the village. Bring sleeping bag.

Suggested equipment: Wear lightweight comfortable clothing and light walking shoes or trainers. Besides personal luggage, which will be left in your room, you will also need a lightweight backpack for daily use, a water bottle, hat, sunscreen, swimming costume, beach towel, sandals or shoes for rocks/flippers, mask and snorkel. A torch may also be useful for evening walks. **Please bring sheets or sleeping bag and personal toiletries**. As the island is the site of a prison, you are asked to maintain appropriate behaviour and dress. We also suggest that you do not bring too much luggage given the simple nature of the accommodation and activities. The island is undescrivable: bring your camera!

11. Val di Cecina and Colline Metallifere

3 days – 2 nights

The Val di Cecina is one of those places where, over the centuries, an equilibrium between human activity and the natural environment has miraculously taken place; where the natural environment still thrives, respectfully “manipulated” by man. The area presents an infinite variety of possibilities for those coming for educational purposes. On this trip we will be dealing with the themes of alternative clean energy sources, geothermal energy, geology, the state of health of a river and the chemical, physical and biological parameters required to evaluate this.

PROGRAMME

- 1st day** - morning appointment with guide in pre-arranged place. Walk in the **Riserva di Caselli along the Ritasso river** (meeting place in Casino di Terra). The splendid Caselli reserve, an ancient mining area for the extraction of semi-precious stones, in a splendid route along the river and its bridges. An exciting day which includes a look at the geology and the nature of the Reserve, a search for chert and magnesite, and a hint of adventure along the river. Transfer to hotel for dinner and overnight stay. Technical details of the walk: medium-easy circular route which includes a slightly more demanding stretch (descent on rubble, with hand holds); total uphill ascent approx 75m; length of route 6100 m; actual walking time approx 2h 45’.
- 2nd day** - Breakfast in hotel. coach transfer to the Riserva di Berignone to start our route along the Cecina river to the **Masso delle Fanciulle (Pomaranche)**: walk with river bathing. The Masso delle Fanciulle is found at the intersection between three important sites and is a magical place with a unique landscape. A narrow valley encloses cool crystalline water in which we can enjoy and unforgettable swim. A beautiful route through rugged rocks and gentle hills will bring us to one of the most enchanting corners of Tuscany, below the ancient Castello de’ Vescovi, a medieval fortress with a wealth of history. Transfer to hotel for dinner and overnight stay. Technical details: easy route in both directions, with no significant slopes (alternatively, it is possible to take a partially covered circular route of medium difficulty with a number of detours, total length 6000m; uphill ascent 250m ; walking time 2h 30’). Bring a pair of beach shoes and a swimming costume.
- 3rd day** - Breakfast in hotel. Coach transfer to Sasso Pisano; geological and nature walk along the **Soffioni and Fumarole route**: natural geothermal manifestations. A walk that leads to the discovery of the natural marvels of our earth, with a look at geology and geomorphology to help us understand the origins of the shape of the landscape and the geographical conformation of places. A walk for the “curious” who want to find out all there is to know about one of the most well-known geothermal areas in the world, experiencing first-hand the workings of the industrial exploitation process, the natural geothermal manifestations and the spontaneous mineralisations of the so-called “Valle del Diavolo” (‘devil’s valley). It will also be possible to get a better understanding of the chemical and mineralogical aspects of the outcrops, and centre our educational walk around the chemical processes and the historical uses made of the various mineralisations. On request, we can find out how the famous Balze di Volterra are formed. Technical details of the walk: medium-easy walk in both directions, with continuous small inclines and terrain that can be slippery in the case of recent rain. Total uphill ascent approx 200m; length of route 4000m; actual walking time about 2h 10’ (data refer to outward journey only). Excursion suitable for children.

We suggest you bring a daily backpack with enough water supply, and a packed lunch. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes.. We suggest you bring a small axe and a few bags or boxes for collecting minerals in; daily backpack.

Northern Tuscany and Mountains

12. Weekend of chestnut gathering and walking at Vagli Lake (Campocatino - LU)

2 days – 1 night

On the Garfagnana side of the Apuane Alps, the picturesque village of Vagli lies beside the lake of the same name. The lake serves as a weir and the rooftops of the old submerged village can still be seen rising out of the water. During this weekend we will follow a path through autumn colours and the echoes of ancient hermitages hidden among the rocks, gather chestnuts and experience a typical family-run mountain hotel. The centuries-old chestnut woods, the intense aroma of wood fires lit once more after the summer, and the first chestnuts of the season enjoyed in good company while we tell legends and old village stories. A wonderful chance to savour the autumn.

PROGRAMME

Saturday Meeting at about 11.00 at Careggine (LUCCA) (ask at time of booking about getting to the village as it may be possible to travel with other participants). Check into hotel and beginning of walk near Campocatino. Packed lunch (participants bring their own – or can purchase one at Careggine). Return to hotel in late afternoon, dinner and overnight stay.

Sunday after breakfast, 9.00 start for chestnut gathering in a nearby chestnut wood. Return to hotel for lunch. In the afternoon, roasted chestnuts in front of the fire and walk in the village before our departure.

13. Week end in the Apuane Alps: the Pania della Croce and Foce di Mosceta

2 days – 1 night

Anyone who looks eastwards from the beach or a boat during the hot summers on the Versilia will see the spectacle of rugged mountains rising imposingly almost from the coast itself. As if in a mirage, their snow-white glare seems to cool the scorching summer heat. The white Apuan marble, known for its purity ever since antiquity, overlooks the Ligurian Sea below like a permanently snow-covered balcony. The famous Pania della Croce, a favourite destination for hikers and climbers in search of rugged and imposing peaks, is followed by the severe Borra di Canala and then by cool beech woods. These stretch as far as Foce di Mosceta, an 'apennine' valley where there are raspberries, blueberries and firs cooled by streams surrounding the Del Freo refuge, where traditional Garfagnana dishes can be enjoyed.

PROGRAMME

Saturday 9.30 meeting at PRUNO (division of Stazzema) near the car park. From Pruno we will walk through chestnut and beech woods to the Foce di Mosceta. Lunch (not included, but you can bring your own or purchase from the Del Freo Refuge). Walk in the surroundings of the refuge (possible ascent to M. Corchia). Dinner at refuge and overnight stay.

Sunday Breakfast at Del Freo Refuge, walk to the Pania della Croce and Pizzo delle Saette; packed lunch; return to Pruno in the afternoon.

Technical Information (Walking)

1st day's walking: Pruno - Rif. Del Freo: medium difficulty; average walking time: 2h30'; uphill ascent 720m;

1st day optional climb to the Vetta del Corchia (1676m): return route medium difficulty; uphill ascent 500m, walking time 2h there and back.

2nd day's walking: Rif. Del Freo – Pizzo delle Saette – Pania della Croce - Pruno: demanding route; average walking time 5h30'; total ascent 725m, descent 1400m

14. 5 Day hike in the Apuane Alps (continuous route)

5 days – 4 nights

1st day - (actual distance: 7 km; overall altitude difference: 574 m; average expected walking time: 3h15') - (in the event of a diversion to the Grotta all'Onda: distance 13.5 km; altitude difference 1159m; average walking time: 6h25') – Meeting with the guide in Versilia. Transfer to starting point of our walk. Route: Casoli – Foce al termine – Callare di Matanna – Monte Nona. Overnight stay and dinner in mountain refuge.

2nd day - (actual distance: 8 km; overall altitude difference: 477 m; average expected walking time: 3h20') – Walking route along the ridge: Monte Nona – M. Procinto – M. Forato – Pania della Croce. From this splendid route along the ridge we can enjoy the view on all sides: from the Apennines to the islands of the Tuscan Archipelago and Lake Massaciuccoli. The sunset seen through the famous natural arch of the M. Forato is a spectacular sight. Dinner and overnight stay in mountain refuge.

3rd day - (actual distance: 15 km; overall altitude difference: 861 m; average expected walking time: 6h50') – Route: Pania della Croce – M. Corchia – M. Altissimo – Alto di Sella – M. Tambura. This is the longest stretch in our hike, taking us into contact with the characteristic karst phenomena which have produced one of the deepest caves in the world. Through huge *ravaneti* (hollows), abandoned villages, old miners' routes and cool forests with streams, we can imagine what it must have been like to be a marble worker in these quarries. Dinner and overnight stay in mountain refuge.

4th day - (actual distance: 11 km; overall altitude difference: 772 m; average expected walking time: 4h40') – Route: M. Tambura – M. Pisanino – Foce di Cardeto – Orto di Donna. Approaching from its northern slope, we come to the highest peak in the Apuane alps, Monte Pisanino (1946m). We then descend towards Orto di Donna where we will stay in accommodation available there.

5th day - (actual distance: 12.5 km; overall altitude difference: 906 m; average expected walking time: 5h25') – Route: Orto di Donna - Foce al Giovo - M. Grondilice - M. Sagro - Campo Cecina. This is where the Garfagnana, Lunigiana and the Apuane alps meet, affording spectacular views over the three mountain systems and their valleys. It is also the main marble area where the world's largest marble basin is found. Some of the quarries can be visited, as well as the Fantascritti Marble Museum. When we get to the Carrara Refuge we will have a short stop before travelling back to our starting point by mini-bus.

Best time of the year: spring and autumn

15. The 'Parco delle Apuane' from north to south (continuous route)

4 days – 3 nights

The Park of the Apuane Alps comprises a rather unusual mountain chain which, despite its vicinity to the sea and its not particularly high peaks, is given the term 'Alps' because of its geomorphologic features, characterised by sharp peaks, steep slopes and deep, narrow valleys. The beauty of the landscape is unique. The nature of the rocks gives rise to karst formations such as spectacular caves and crevasses. Our route takes us from north-west to south-east starting at M. Freddone in the north and ending near the village of Casoli to the south, near Camaiore.

1st day: (day's walking route: **M. Freddone – Freo refuge – actual distance: 7000m; overall altitude difference: 607 m; average expected walking time: 3h30'**) – Meeting with your guide at Pietrasanta railway station. Travel from Pietrasanta to Galleria del Cipollaio by mini-bus. The beginning of the path is found just after the end of the tunnel. This first part of the route, as far as M. Freddane, is quite demanding. We proceed at high altitude for about an hour, stopping for our packed lunch close to a small church. We then continue to climb for a short stretch and continue at high altitude to the Freo refuge, at the foot of the Pania della Croce, for our overnight stay. The path is almost entirely covered by beech woods.

2nd day (day's walking route: **Freo refuge - Pania della Croce – actual distance: 7800 m; overall altitude difference: 808 m; average expected walking time 4h15'**) – Departure at 8.30. We will head north to reach the Rossi refuge, walking round the Pizzo delle Saette, along a fairly level path, apart from the last part. The route is almost entirely shaded by vegetation. Weather permitting, we can walk from the refuge to the top of the Pania della Croce where the view sweeps down to the sea and the port of Forte dei Marmi and the beginning of region of Liguria. Mount Pania is arid, with outcrops of rock and stone. Moufflons may be sighted.

3rd day (day's walking route: **Pania della Croce – M. Forato – M. Procinto – actual distance: 6750 m; overall altitude difference: 683 m; average expected walking time: 6h**) – This is the most demanding day's walking and the route may be modified in the event of fog or strong winds. Departure 8.30. Starting from the Rossi refuge our route takes us along the *Costa Pulita* ridge of Mount Pania for a short distance, along which there are a number of solid *vie ferrate* (routes equipped with ropes, footholds and ladders). After this begins the long, steep slope covered in grass which leads us to Foce di Valli. From here we follow the entire ridge until we come to M. Forato, a picturesque natural creation through which you can see the coast and the sea. We then proceed along a slightly sloping path towards M. Procinto, after which we come to the Forte dei Marmi refuge where we will stay for the night. The first half of the route is unshaded and lies on a substratum of stones following exposed ridges. The second half, on the other hand, is a cool and pleasant walk.

4th day (day's walking route: **Forte dei Marmi refuge – M. Matanna – Grotta all'Onda - Casoli - (actual distance: 7550 m; overall altitude difference: 272 m; average expected walking time: 4h)**) – Departure 8.30. We set off towards M. Matanna: the road climbs up to the Matanna refuge where there is a restaurant and bar. This is where we will stop for lunch. Afterwards we will proceed downhill towards the enchanting Grotta all'Onda, with its cascades of water filtering through the rocks. From here we head for Casoli to meet our mini-bus which will take us back to the railway station at Pietrasanta.

Best time of year: spring and autumn

16. Hiking in the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines (in the Province of Modena)

2 days – 1 night

The Tuscan-Emilian Apennines are best known for their ski and winter sports resorts, although this is a rather superficial and un-natural way of considering the area. Visiting these mountains with specialised nature and walking guides will give you a sense of discovering and observing unfamiliar places from a new perspective. The walk will take you along a splendid mountain path which crosses a wide variety of natural environments, from beech to conifer woods and a lake.

1st day (Day's walking itinerary: Cosentini Refuge - Lago Santo – Walking distance: 6000m, altitude difference 400m) – Meeting with your guide at the Cosentini refuge where this short hike will begin. The first part of the route leads uphill to Foce al Giovo, then down through lovely beech woods where numerous mountain streams flow, and on to the Lago Santo lake where we will have dinner and stay overnight in the refuge. Optional short moonlight walk.

2nd day (Day's walking itinerary: Lago Santo – Lago Turchino – M. Rondinaio – Foce al Giovo – Casentini Refuge – Walking distance: 9000m, altitude difference 500m) – After breakfast we will climb from Lago Baccio to Lago Turchino (two lakes) and on to the top of M. Roninaio (1954m), from where there is a stunning view over the nearby Apuane Alps and the peaks of the Apennines. We will then begin our descent to Foce al Giovo through thick conifer woodland and return to our starting point where the walk ends.

When to go: Spring and Autumn

17. Hiking through the three Parks of Gigante, Orecchiella and the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines

4 days – 3 nights

An “easy” hike with return to the same Refuge each evening and transport of luggage by car.

1st day (Day's walking itinerary: Passo Le Forbici – M. Prado – Battisti Refuge – Actual walking distance: 7800m; overall altitude difference: 400 m) – Meeting with the guide at the Passo delle Radici and transfer to Passo delle Forbici where our hike begins (luggage will be taken by van to the Battisti Refuge where we will be staying for the three nights). Packed lunch. The route takes us along the ridge to M. Prado and then from Laghi Bargetana to the Battisti Refuge. Dinner and overnight stay.

2nd day (Day's walking itinerary: Battisti Refuge – Sprone di Prado – Abetina Reale – Battisti Refuge – Actual walking distance: 7000 m; overall altitude difference: 400 m) – A lower walk than the first day's, through woods of beech and conifer. Packed lunch. Back to the Refuge for dinner and overnight stay.

3rd day (Day's walking itinerary: Battisti Refuge – Bargetana Refuge – Battisti Refuge – actual walking distance: 6750 m; overall altitude difference: 300 m) – An easy route through the unspoilt mountain environment. Mouflons and marmots are frequently encountered along the path. Back to the refuge for dinner and overnight stay.

4th day (Day's walking itinerary: Battisti Refuge – M. Cusna – Battisti Refuge – Le Forbici – Actual walking distance: 16000 m; overall altitude difference: 450 m) – One of the most spectacular walks along the ridge of the Reggiano Apennines, affording views as far as the Alps and the Adriatic. Our walking trip ends at the Passo delle Forbici.

When to go: Spring and Autumn

List of possible daily extensions

Daily Extensions from Elba

1. *The Island of Pianosa from Elba*

The prohibited isle, the least known and most fascinating island in the Tuscan Archipelago: a day trip to discover its most beautiful corners

Currently lacking in civil settlements, but still a prison site, Pianosa boasts a rich historical and archaeological patrimony as well as being a protected nature reserve. The island possesses a paradoxical contrast between its unusual flat morphology and its high chalky cliffs; it has an original village designed in the very early days of the Kingdom of Italy, the magnificent Paleochristian Catacombs shrouded in mystery, the remains of the thermal baths belonging to Marcus Postumus Agrippa's luxurious domus, the prison sectors of the oldest Agricultural Penal Colony in the Archipelago, and innumerable coastal paths immersed in the Mediterranean vegetation. All this is waiting to be discovered on this enchanting day trip. You will also be able to swim in the splendid Cala Giovanna cove.

OUTLINE OF PROGRAMME – board the fast boat for Pianosa (2 hours crossing time). The ferry sails along the north-west coast of the island of Elba. Hike to the prison area of the island towards the south-east coast through the various prison sections – now abandoned farmhouses. Packed lunch (participants supply their own, or food can be bought at the Coop S. Giacomo bar-restaurant). Tour of the old town centre and the catacombs (€2 entrance fee to be paid locally). Swimming opportunity at Cala Giovanna. Back on the ferry for Elba at 5pm. NB. The programme is subject to change depending on weather conditions and group logistics at the discretion of the guide.

Technical details: easy walking on flat but sunny ground (about 2 hours' walking, total distance 5km).

2. *A day's hike on the Island of Capraia*

The volcanic island of Capraia is perhaps the wildest of the inhabited islands in the Tuscan Archipelago. Its distance from the coast and its relative vicinity to Corsica have favoured the development of a typical and exclusive flora and fauna which make the island a perfect laboratory for the observation of nature. A variety of landscapes unroll in the space of a few hundred metres, creating a unique and stunning contrast between the arid asphodel-covered steppe with its windswept saddles and the spectacular water buttercups in the Stagnone marsh (the only natural body of water in the Tuscan Archipelago).

While the island's history and its former penal colony are of great interest, its natural features will undoubtedly form the predominant part of our explorations, enabling us to get closer to that magical aspect of the island which is still largely unknown to mass tourism and urban life

Programme: Walk to Mount Arpagna, an old military lookout post from where you can see Corsica on clear days. Packed lunch. From here we proceed to Trattolo head where a small lighthouse marks the island to sailors. Historical tour of the village of Capraia, transfer to the ferry, embarkation at 6pm, arrival in Livorno at 8.30pm.

Technical details: hiking of average difficulty. 5 hours' walking, overall uphill altitude difference 250m; packed lunch provided by participants.

3. *Visit to the Ginevro underground Mine*

Departure from Capoliveri for an exciting visit to the only underground mine on the island of Elba, still intact and in its original state, untouched by tourism.

Technical details: easy underground excursion(-6m), about 2 hours' walking, insignificant uphill altitude difference.

4. *Excursion on a glass-bottomed boat*

Departure from Portoferraio or Marciana Marina. On board the Nautilus we will be able to enjoy the marvellous Elban seabed in complete comfort, sitting on this glass-bottomed boat. We will be able to see the countless species of fish that live around the island and prosper thanks to the measures taken to protect them by the Parco Nazionale dell'Arcipelago Toscano. On the way from Marciana Marina there is also a shipwreck on the rocky seabed.

Technical details: excursion by motor catamaran (30 m in length), duration of tour: about 2.5 hours.

Central-Southern Tuscany and the Islands

1. *Le Moie and the old Volterra railway line (Val di Cecina, Livorno)*

An unforgettable trip into the Tuscan hills covered in the velvety green May wheat. From Saline to Volterra along the old rack railway line which used to climb up to the picturesque Etruscan and medieval town where we can visit the Acropolis and the Roman Theatre, as well as the Rocca Vecchia's green park, now the site of the prison. After walking through town on the tracks of the civilisations which inhabited the area, we will return along the old mule paths, giving us an opportunity to get a privileged view of the mineral area of the salt pit. Tour of Volterra and its famous salt cliffs: a geomorphological and geological wonder.

Technical details of the walk: easy walking; total uphill altitude difference approx 400m; distance 10,000m; expected walking time approx 3 hours. N.B. the complete circular route (which is 18,000m long and takes 5.5 hours) will only be covered in one direction on foot, the return will be by car, so that we can also fit in the 'urban walking' in Volterra. For this purpose, some of our cars will be taken to Volterra before we start the walk.

We recommend bringing a lightweight backpack with adequate water supplies. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes.

2. *The Sterza waterfall, Renzano Woods and the serpentine rock flora (Val di Cecina, Livorno)*

This is the heart of the Mediterranean scrubland, made even more distinctive by the serpentine rocks which make the substratum toxic for most plants and therefore determine the exclusive make-up of the plant associations. The route takes in a number of educational itineraries which will allow us to observe all the aspects and vegetation stages of the *maquis* as well as the geology of the area. At the centre of the more coastal part of the Val di Cecina nature reserve, there is a submontane wood of Turkey oaks and hygrophilous plants, a living fossil from the last glaciation period. The

particular phyto-sociological value of this wood is added to by the beauty of the surrounding landscape, dotted with old millcourses and spectacular waterfalls, and the area has been declared a site of European interest and world heritage.

Technical details of the walk: the walk follows a figure-eight circuit along paths and gravel roads. Level of difficulty: easy - moderate; overall distance 10.5 km; uphill altitude difference: 380m; average duration 4h45'.

We recommend bringing a lightweight backpack with adequate water supplies, and a packed lunch. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes. The Cascata della Sterza waterfall is a site of European importance and bathing is therefore prohibited.

3. Colle Val d'Elsa and the Via Francigena (Provinces of Pisa and Siena)

The ancient pilgrims' route to Rome along one of its most fascinating stretches through the gentle Tuscan hills and the Sienese *Crete* (clay hills). This is a distinctive landscape consisting of clear streams, velvety green hills and thick copses. Walking along this legendary route is like going back to daily medieval life and the history of ordinary people, surprising for their gaiety and modern relevance, in contrast with the stereotype of the dark Middle Ages with their feudal transgressions. In this land of Boccaccio and Arnolfo di Cambio we will search out the original easygoing, learned Tuscany from which today's Tuscan character descends.

Technical details for transfer to the beginning of the path: we will use our own cars to get there. In order to avoid covering a stretch of tarmac road on foot, we will leave some of the cars in the village and pick them up on our return. The remaining cars will be used to get to the beginning of the path.

4. The legendary Cornate di Gerfalco, Tuscan Dolomites with a sea view (Provinces of Siena, Grosseto and Pisa)

Just the sound of the name brings to mind myths and legends of long ago, but the fascination of these mountains does not stop there: the Cornate (literally, 'horns') di Gerfalco, rising to 1060 metres and overlooking the Tuscan Archipelago, offer an incredible dolomite-type itinerary situated in the heart of southern Tuscany. Around the limestone mountain a natural reserve known as the 'Cornate e Fosini' reserve has been created, so as to preserve an environment that contains many endemic species and many ancient traces of the work of man, from the widest of pastures to the mines where silver and other precious metals were extracted, making the fortunes of the families of the village of Gerfalco, now one of the remotest places in Tuscany. Our itinerary takes us on a discovery of the history, the geology and the fossils of this part of the Metalliferous Hills and we will be able to walk through ancient and modern oceans below the wing of the Fosini and Gerfalco castles.

Technical details of the walking tour: a star-shaped path of medium difficulty because of the altitude difference from the western slope of the Cornate to the top at Castello di Fosini and to the Fonte del Canaluzzo. Total altitude difference (uphill) 500m; average walking time: about 4 hours.

5. *The Windmills at Orciatice and the Mofette at Lajatico*

The valley of Lajatico is rich in history and curious natural features: during this excursion we will see the Windmills at Orciatice and visit the Mofette at Lajatico where the carbon dioxide gurgles at the bottom of the stream creating a fascinating 'boiling' of the water. Along the wild Fosce river we will find the remains of ancient water mills, hidden in the woods. A path leads to another unusual natural activity, that of the escaping of gases rich in sulphuric acid which deposit sulphur crystals around the openings through which they escape.

Technical data for the walking itinerary: a circular medium-easy walk; length of walk 10,000 m; average walking time about 4 hours

6. *The Rocca di Pietracassia - Lajatico (Province of Pisa)*

A walk through unusual woods of oak and juniper on the gentle Tuscan hills to admire the many colours of the landscape during the ploughing season. Walking through this breathtaking pastoral scenery we will follow in the tracks of our medieval ancestors to the legendary fortress known as the Rocca di Pietracassia, still standing majestically above the rich Metalliferous Hills.

Technical data for the walking itinerary: an easy route along an uneven and sometimes muddy path; overall distance 11,500 m, uphill altitude difference 281m; average walking time 3 hours 40m.

7. *Le Balze di Certaldo: in search of Fossils*

An unimaginable landscape just a short hop from Florence, with its steep vertical walls (the spectacular cliffs of sand, or *balze*, even more imposing than the famous ones of Volterra) and ravines rich in fossils. A day dedicated to geomorphology and paleontology to reconstruct the area's ancient geography using the techniques employed by geologists.

Technical data for the walking itinerary: an easy circular route; uphill altitude difference 400m; overall distance 8000 m; average walking time about 3hours. **Walk suitable for children**

It is a good idea to bring a small axe and a few small bags or boxes (and some absorbent paper such as toilet paper) for collecting fossils in. Also bring a small back pack, and wear comfortable clothes and walking shoes. Since the land is clay-based, it can get muddy after rain: wear clothes that you don't mind getting dirty.

8. *The evocative Diago potholes on the river Egola (Montaione – Province of Florence)*

Scattered among the hills of the Elsa valley, the fabulous potholes dug out by the devil himself – the Diago – form a frame for one of the most superb and least known panoramas in mainland Tuscany. Among woods of hornbeam and stretches of thick Mediterranean scrubland which alternate because of the change in temperature and the ophiolitic rocks, we will come across the remains of ancient mills and bridges originating from the Middle Ages, the era that also created the "Tuscan Jerusalem" at San Vivaldo.

Technical Data: we will travel in our own cars; journey from Piazza Gramsci to the beginning of the walk, about 10'. Walk of medium difficulty, distance 7km, actual walking time 3 hours. Much of the route is in the shade. In the case of recent rainfall it might be possible to bathe in the river's cool potholes.

Recommended equipment: a lightweight back pack with at least 1.5 litres of water per person, and a packed lunch. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes. We recommend you also bring a pair of beach sandals and swimming costume.

9. The Anello Montalbano (circular route), the Renaissance in the Land of Leonardo (Province of Pistoia)

In the Medici lands of Montalbano Leonardo found his first inspiration for the study of Art and Science. The Medici had already sensed the immense value of this generous and maternal land by protecting it in their Royal Reserve. This walk will take us along those paths rich in history and nature that we can try to imagine through the eyes of Leonardo as a boy: with a sense of curiosity for even the slightest change in the landscape and vegetation, for the rocks of marine origin which make up the substratum, and for all the archaeological and historical remains which make the area so precious. And in order to immerse ourselves completely in the Renaissance atmosphere of these places we will also try out some of the authentic flavours that Leonardo himself appreciated, with a visit to the **Agriturismo “Il Calesse”** for a **Renaissance style Banquet**.

Technical data for the walking itinerary: technically easy circular route, of medium difficulty in terms of its length of 14km; uphill altitude difference 500m; average walking time 5h 30’; the most difficult stretch is the climb from Bacchereto to the Tower of Sant’Alluccio, covering a distance of 3km and a climb of 340m (average gradient of 9%; time taken 1h15’).

We recommend that you bring a small backpack with sufficient supplies of water. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes. Return to cars for 6.30pm. Renaissance lunch at the Agriturismo “Il Calesse”.

10. Volterra Reserve: Stroll Falls and Pieve della Nera parish church

This walk is dedicated to medieval archaeology, in search of traces of the history of this area with its ruined villages and castles hidden in the scrubland and conserved by popular memory, and splendid parish churches between the woods and the fields. It is also a pleasant walk, allowing us to admire one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the Tuscan hills, surrounded by the dense Mediterranean vegetation and characterised by plants belonging to the microclima of the gorge formed by the Strolla river. The Montenero Reserve stands out with its rugged ophiolitic rocks like a wild island against the “sea” of gentle cultivated countryside.

Technical data for the walking itinerary: circular walk of medium difficulty because of the uneven ground; total distance 9,300m; total uphill altitude difference 280m; average walking time 3h 30’.

11. A Day’s Walking on the Island of Capraia

The volcanic island of Capraia is perhaps the wildest of the inhabited islands in the Tuscan Archipelago. Its distance from the coast and its relative vicinity to Corsica have favoured the development of a typical and exclusive flora and fauna which make the island a perfect laboratory for the observation of nature. A variety of landscapes unroll in the space of a few hundred metres, creating a unique and stunning contrast between the arid asphodel-covered steppe with its windswept saddles and the spectacular water buttercups in the Stagnone marsh (the only natural area of water in the Tuscan Archipelago)

While the island's history and its former penal colony are of great interest, its natural features will undoubtedly form the predominant part of our explorations, enabling us to get closer to that magical aspect of the island which is still largely unknown to mass tourism and urban life.

Programme: Walk to mount Arpagna, an old military lookout site from where on clear days we can enjoy a view of Corsica. Packed lunch. From here we proceed to Trattoio head where a small lighthouse marks the coast to sailors. Tour of the old village of Capraia, transfer to the ferry, embarkation at 18.00, arrival in Livorno at 20.30.

Technical details: walk of medium difficulty; 5 hours of walking; uphill altitude difference 250m; packed lunch to be provided by participants.

12. Livornese Hills: the Calvario circular walk and the Colognole aqueduct

A splendid day's walk during which we will see the remains of the 18th-century windmills along a lush, ridge-top path with a mixture of evergreen and deciduous vegetation. The circular route allows us to touch on various small villages separated by long stretches of natural countryside rich in traces of a rural culture that has now been lost. These include the tiny hamlet of Pandoiano, and the village of Colognole hidden in the green path that leads along the 18th-century aqueduct, with its bridges and little temples which guard the precious sources of water that gurgle from the rock.

Historical and scenic interest.

Technical details: easy circular route, partly on open land. Length of walk 11,910 m; total uphill altitude difference 345m; average walking time: approx. 4h 30'

13. Hike through the Livornese Hills – The Chioma Valley

The beautiful Mediterranean maquis in the wild and little known Livornese Hills is at its most attractive at this time of the year with its shiny myrtle berries and tasty red strawberry fruit. Along the path there are some interesting shepherds' buildings from the 18th century and traces of old Lombard outbuildings, as well as an exceptional outcrop of Miocene Coral Rock: in fact, 8 million years ago these hills were surrounded by sea and can only be described as 'Fossil Islands'. At the convergence between the River Chioma and the Botro Quarata we can rest for a while and eat our picnics before setting off again through the secular wood of holm oak back to the beginning of the path.

Technical details: easy circular route partly on open land and partly through woodland; total uphill altitude difference: about 160m; length of walk 8,250 m; average walking time: about 3h 30'

14. The Miocene Gypsum at Cava Serredi (Livorno Province)

Spectacular gypsum crystals emerge like precious stones from the rough clay. Like the remains of an ancient civilisation, they recall a distant natural history made up of wide salt basins which preceded the seas of today. During our walk, which takes in panoramic farmland and stretches of Mediterranean maquis and holm oak woodland, it is possible to get to the Fonte di Ricaldo, an ancient washing basin now half-covered in vegetation, which represented the most important source of water up until the 18th century. Its importance was such that it merited the paving of an interesting ancient route.

Technical Details: easy return route, partly covered by vegetation; distance: about 4km, minimal altitude difference; average walking time: 1 hour each way. A small backpack and sufficient water supplies are recommended; wear comfortable clothes and walking shoes.

15. Hike through the hills of Castellina Marittima (Pisa Province)

This hike through woods of oak and holm oak will lead us on a discovery of the environment and vegetation around the characteristic village of Castellina Marittima from where you can gaze at the sea, the islands of the Tuscan Archipelago and Corsica on one side, and the snowy peaks of the Apuane Alps on the other.

Technical details: a challenging hike because of the repeated changes in slope; average walking time: about 4h 15', distance: about 12km.

16. The Mines of Montecatini Val di Cecina (Pisa Province)

A day dedicated to the geology and history of the Val di Cecina area with its mines, salt mines and its enchanting panoramas.

In the morning we will visit the historical part of the village of Montecatini from where we will then depart on our hike towards the Poggio alla Croce from where, on clear days, the panorama stretches from the Apuane Alps as far as the south of Tuscany. Picnic lunch. The pleasant path, with its wealth of anemones and cyclamens, leads us on a discovery of the typical Mediterranean fauna of the sunny slopes and through the chestnut woods on the northern slopes in the company of grazing cows.

Tour of the Mine of Montecatini and the famous Pozzo Alfredo from where the minerals were brought to light.

Technical details: circular route along paths and 'white' (or unpaved) roads ; difficulty: medium-easy; overall length 7 km ; uphill altitude difference 200m; average time required 3 h.

A small backpack and sufficient water supplies are recommended; wear comfortable clothes and walking shoes.

17. Exploring the Mills and charcoal pits between Castagneto Carducci and Sassetta

One of the most interesting and panoramic routes on the Etruscan Coast. Starting out from the medieval village of Castagneto Carducci, we will go in search of the numerous water mills which characterise the area, some still in ruins, while others converted into villas or farmhouses. The route is marked by its Mediterranean maquis, the garrigue and evergreen and deciduous woodlands. Along the way you will see countless former charcoal pits showing how the forest resources were exploited up until recent times.

Technical details: we will travel by using our own cars; the walk starts in Castagneto Carducci. The hike is of medium difficulty, length 8km, time required 3h 30'.

18. The Island of Pianosa

The prohibited island, the least known and most fascinating in the Tuscan Archipelago. A day trip to the most beautiful corners of the isle.

Currently lacking in civil settlements, but still a prison site, Pianosa boasts a rich historical and archaeological heritage as well as being a protected nature reserve. The island possesses a paradoxical contrast between its unusual flat morphology and its high limestone cliffs; it has an original village designed in the very early days of the Kingdom of Italy; the magnificent Paleochristian Catacombs shrouded in mystery; the remains of the thermal baths belonging to Marcus Postumus Agrippa's luxurious domus; the prison sectors of the oldest Agricultural Penal Colony in the Archipelago, and innumerable coastal paths immersed in the Mediterranean vegetation. All this is waiting to be discovered on this enchanting day trip. We will have a chance to swim in the splendid Cala Giovanna.

Meeting point outside the Stazione Marittima in Piombino at 8.00am. Board the fast boat for Pianosa (a 2h 15' journey). The ferry sails along the north-western coast of the island of Elba. Hike into the prison part of the island, towards the south-east coast, through the prison sectors which are now abandoned farmhouses. Picnic lunch (participants supply their own) (lunch can also be bought at the Bar Ristorante Coop. S. Giacomo). Tour of the historic centre and the Catacombs (entrance fee €2 to be paid locally). There will be an opportunity for swimming at the Cala Giovanna. Embarkation for Piombino at 17.00. Arrival at about 19.15.

19. Eastern Elba: the Mines at Rio Marina

This day trip will take you on a discovery of the most traditional and authentic aspect of the island of Elba, that of the mines which brought the island worldwide fame. We will walk along the historical mining routes and through the various quarries. At the end of the walk we will visit the Museo Minerario (mining museum).

Technical details: an easy open route, overall distance 5700m, total uphill altitude difference 225m, average time taken 2h 20'.

20. The Rocca di S. Silvestro and the Temperino Mine

This walk is dedicated to geology and history. We will enter the Park along an external path in order to reach the evocative medieval fortress ('rocca') of San Silvestro where you can still breathe the atmosphere of the tiny hamlet at the time when it was abandoned. This is an exceptional and internationally unique archaeological site. Our itinerary will allow us to discover first-hand the infinite mineralisations of the Metalliferous Hills and their geological history, including an exciting visit to the historical Temperino Mine.

Technical details: overall length 9000m; uphill altitude difference about 450m .

21. Hike to the ruins of the Convent of Monte Muro (Grosseto Province)

Close to the old village of Scarlino, our path will take us through the "Bandite di Scarlino", a vast area of woodland overlooking the gulf of Follonica taking in the municipalities of Castiglione della Pescaia, Gavorrano, Scarlino and Follonica. Our route along the ridge will lead us to the evocative

remains of the 15th century Convent of Monte Muro, between charcoal pits and chestnut woods through which you can glimpse the splendid gulf of Follonica.

Technical details: we will use our own cars; this is a circular route of medium difficulty; length 8km, actual walking time 3h 30', uphill altitude difference 330m.

Bring a small backpack with at least a litre and a half of water per person, as well as a picnic lunch. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes.

22. The splendid Nature Reserve of the Farma River (Chiusdino, Province of Siena)

The Farma Nature Reserve, situated between Monticiano and Roccastrada, incorporates the middle stretch of the beautiful, wild valley of the river Farma, the main tributary of the river Merse. The whole Farma valley, especially the part within the reserve, preserves a number of natural features which are unique to the province of Siena and among the most interesting in the country.

In the valley there are numerous historical traces of the Middle Ages, such as the mills and the iron mines where iron was worked, powered by the energy provided by the water. The river Farma became an industrial centre for the working of iron. The most important ironworks, which we will visit, used to be known as the "Ruota" ('wheel') and is now called the "Ferriera". The whole building can still be seen, as well as a dam for the collection of water a few hundred metres upstream.

When we get to the attractive river we can bathe in the clear water and have lunch in the peaceful surroundings in the shade of the lush vegetation. We will have another stop for bathing at "Canaloni", a stretch of about 150 m of river characterised by a marvellous alternation of waterfalls and bars, while framing this is one of the most ancient rocks in Tuscany (about 350 million years old).

Technical details: we will use our own cars; journey from Ginestra Fiorentina to Scalvaia in order to reach the beginning of our path. This will take about 1h 15'. Route of medium difficulty, length 10km, actual walking time 4 hours (if necessary we can take one of the cars towards the end of the route in order to avoid the last uphill climb). The first part of the path has little vegetation for shade. The second part is almost entirely shaded.

Bring a small backpack with at least a litre and a half of water per person, and a picnic lunch. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes. A pair of beach sandals and a swimming costume are also recommended.

23. The Abbey of San Galgano in the Valley of the river Merse (Province of Siena)

Whether for adventure or for pleasure, crossing the Merse Valley one cannot fail to be enchanted by the beauty and primitive charm of these places, and it does not take much to imagine you are still in the Middle Ages. The splendid Abbey of San Galgano and the hermitage of Montesiepi rise in the valley of this river, between Chiusdino and Monticiano in the province of Siena. A characteristic wooden bridge will lead us across the river Merse to our destination. We will visit this important religious complex with its wealth of history and legend, and we will see the famous sword which, according to legend, San Galgano drove into the rock. On our way back we will visit the medieval village of Chiusdino, the birthplace of San Galgano, which still conserves the relics of the saint.

Technical details: easy route with negligible uphill slopes; actual walking time 2h 30'; length about 5 km.

24. Indian Summer at Cala Violina, one of the most beautiful beaches in Italy (Province of Grosseto)

In the area between the Puntone di Scarlino and Punta Ala, halfway between the lush Mediterranean maquis and the crystal clear sea, this walk offers breathtaking views over the Gulf of Follonica and the southern islands of the Tuscan Archipelago.

Taking advantage of the late summer weather, we could head for the beach that is known as one of the most beautiful in Italy, reachable only via one of the many paths. It owes its name to the violin-like sound perceived when walking along the fine white sand. The clear, warm water might entice us into having the last swim of the season, having walked through the lush Mediterranean vegetation and holm-oak woods.

Technical details: a circular route along paths and "white roads". Difficulty: medium-easy; uphill altitude difference about 300m; average walking time 3h 45'.

25. Birdwatching at the Mouth of the Ombrone River

This walk leads through the lush vegetation of the river delta marshland at the mouth of the Ombrone. It is a charming route offering opportunities for birdwatching and sightings of the various mammals present in the park. We will walk through the Granducale pinewood to the wild sandy coast where we can swim while admiring the view of the Tuscan islands.

Technical details: easy circular route, partly shaded by plants and trees. Average walking time: 2h; length 5km. No altitude difference.

Bring a small backpack with at least a litre and a half of water per person, and a picnic lunch. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes. A sunhat, sunscreen, towel, binoculars and a swimming costume are also recommended.

26. Hike around the Towers in the Parco dell'Uccellina (Province of Grosseto)

Through the lush vegetation of the park to the medieval tower of Castel Marino, perched on the edge of the ancient cliffs. Below lies the Granducale pinewood which covers the wide plain between the sea and the mouth of the Ombrone river. In the background you can see the white sands of the attractive beach.

Technical details: return route of medium difficulty for averagely fit people. Partly covered by plants and trees; average walking time 3h (each way); length, about 6km; total uphill altitude difference 170m. From Alberese Visitor Centre a shuttle bus will take us to the beginning of the path and will pick us up again on the way back.

Bring a small backpack with at least a litre and a half of water per person, and a picnic lunch. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes.

Northern Tuscany and the Mountains

27. Apuane Alps: the Antro Cave and Ascent of Mt. Corchia

From Levigliani the park's shuttle bus will take us to the entrance of the cave. Following a guided tour of the Antro del Corchia (a 2h tour with a specialised guide, along steel walkways, for a total of 646m; constant temperature of 7.6°C) we will climb to the Del Freo Refuge (return route of medium-easy difficulty; total uphill altitude difference about 280m; actual walking time about 1h). We will have a break for lunch near the refuge (either own packed lunch or at the refuge – to be arranged). From the refuge we will climb to the top of Mt. Corchia (1676m) (optional) (return route of medium difficulty; uphill altitude difference 500m). On the way back we will stop again at the refuge before beginning our descent to the entrance to the cave where the shuttle bus will meet us to take us back to Levigliani.

28. Apuane Streams: the Candalla Cavities and the Lombricose Factories

In the lush surroundings of the southern Apuane Alps, this striking route takes us along the Rio Lombrici with its cavities formed by the erosion of the water over thousands of years and the surprising ruins of the ancient factories which exploited the energy of these waters, maintaining a harmonious balance with nature. We will have a chance to bathe in the cool stream, and can visit the only remaining factory in use, the Antica Ferriera Barsi, an ironworks where a friendly blacksmith will introduce us to one of the marvels made possible by water.

Technical details: return shaded route of medium difficulty with a number of detours; overall length 6000m; uphill altitude difference 350m; average walking time 2h.

Bring a small backpack with sufficient drinking water (although you can drink at the many fountains en route), and a picnic lunch. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes; a pair of beach sandals and a swimming costume are also recommended.

29. Apuane Alps: Mt. Forato

Monte Forato is one of the best-known and unusual peaks in the Apuane mountains (its two peaks rise to 1223 m and 1209 m). It is easily identified because of the arch that spans its peak, measuring about 32 by 25 metres. At certain times of the year the sunset can be seen through the arch, and on clear days you can see the sea, the region of Liguria and the islands of the Tuscan Archipelago. The walk will start from Stazzema.

Technical details: a medium-difficult route; actual walking time, 4h; overall uphill altitude difference 500m; length about 8km.

30. Climbing Mt. Gabberi, the “Balcony” over the Apuane Alps

A day's hike along the southernmost ridge of the Apuane Alps, through chestnut and maple woods to the spectacular “Versilia Balcony” affording views that stretch from the islands of the Tuscan Archipelago to Corsica, the Cinque Terre, the islands of Tino and Palmaria and across all the peaks

of the Apuane Alps, like an immense map. The circular route from the village of Farnocchia will take us close to the legendary “Pietralunga” where the Devil is supposed to guard a treasure consisting of a hen and twelve gold chicks, hidden in the pinnacle of grey limestone. Retracing the history of the terrible massacre of S. Anna di Stazzema, our walk will look at the area from a different point of view as we make our way through the little villages and past the historical roadside *maestà*.

Technical details: medium-easy circular route: total uphill altitude difference 600m; distance about 9km, actual walking time about 4h.

Bring a small backpack with sufficient drinking water. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes.

31. The Grotta all'Onda Cave (Camaione – Province of Lucca)

For much of the way this fascinating route follows an old aqueduct through oak woods to the spectacular cave – Grotta all'Onda – with its enchanting shower of water. The Grotta all'Onda is in the Apuane Alps, on the southern slope of Monte Matanna at 710 m above sea level. This large cavity takes its name from the marked convex or wave-like feature above the entrance to the cave.

Technical details: return route, partly shaded, of medium difficulty for averagely fit people; average walking time 2h (each way)

32. Apuane Alps: from Pruno to Foce di Mosceta

This route leads through secular chestnut woods, past wayside shrines where wayfarers used to shelter from medieval times. Our destination is the Foce di Mosceta, an enchanting saddle with typically Apennine features overlooked by the most famous Apuane mountains

Technical details: medium-easy return route of about 7000m; total uphill altitude difference 700m; actual walking time about 5 h.

Bring a light backpack and drinking supplies, as well as a packed lunch (food can also be bought from the refuge). Comfortable clothing and walking shoes are recommended.

33. Mt. Tambura and the Apuane Marble Quarries (Carrara, Province of Massa)

The age-old tradition of the miners in the splendid setting of the Apuane mountains

From Arnetola we will follow the long series of bends up the "Via Vandelli", the old mule track planned by abbot and engineer Domenico Vandelli to connect the Duchy of Modena with the Garfagnana and Massa. The easy path winds first of all through beech-woods, then through rocky meadows with isolated trees. Passing two deep Karst chasms and the entrance to an old iron mine (hematite and pyrite) it leads to the Tambura Pass (m. 1620). From the pass it takes about 40 minutes along the easy, rocky ridge to get to the top of Mt Tambura (m. 1895) which is second in height only to Mt Pisanino (m. 1946), just over 3km to the north-north-west.

The breathtaking panorama takes in the Apuane Alps, the Gulf of La Spezia, the Livornese hills and the islands of the Tuscan Archipelago and Corsica. On very clear days you can see as far as the Alps.

Technical Details: return route of medium difficulty for averagely fit persons. Route partly shaded by vegetation. Uphill altitude difference 600/800m; average walking time 3h to the top, but walkers can opt to stop at the saddle.

Bring a small backpack with sufficient drinking water and a packed lunch. Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes.

34. Through the Chestnut Woods of the Monti Pisani: The Mirteto Hermitage

In the magical Valle delle Fonti, on the western slopes of the Pisan hills, the charming ruins of the Mirteto Monastery rise unexpectedly from the maquis at the beginning of the tranquil 'chestnut paths'. Long avenues surrounded by age-old chestnut trees will lead us on a leisurely walk back to our starting point.

Technical Details: medium-easy circular route, overall altitude difference 500m, distance, about 10km. Actual walking time: about 3h30'. We will leave some of our cars at the end of the route in order to go and get those left at the beginning, thus avoiding having to walk a stretch of asphalt road on the way back.

35. Monti Pisani: The Circular Route to the 2 Springs (Buti –Province of Pisa)

From the village of Buti, situated in a lush green valley, we will walk through olive groves on an asphalt road which quickly becomes a cart track, leading uphill for 30 minutes to a pinewood and a stretch of flat ground. We carry on to the Church of the Madonna della Neve ('of the Snow') near which is the Rio Magno stream with a spring of delicious drinking water. Still surrounded by dense vegetation, we come to the Mezzo Pane spring. From here a path leads downhill along the stream, winding through pines and ferns back to the village of Buti. If we want to we can visit the charming village and its olive press where, during the pressing season, we can taste and purchase oil (not included).

Technical details: a medium-easy route; distance 7 km; altitude difference 608m; actual walking time, 3h 30'.

36. Cycling to the Calci Valley (Pisa)

Along the banks of the River Arno to the charming Caprona Tower, with a walk to the tower. We proceed towards the lovely valley of Calci with its ancient parish church and the characteristic villages. If we want to we can visit the Natural History Museum and the Carthusian monastery at Calci(entrance fees not included)

Technical details: a technically easy return route over level ground, of medium difficulty in terms of distance (30km). Actual cycling time 4 hours.

37. Cycling from Pisa to the Lake of Massaciuccoli

A cycling tour to explore the Pisan coast and its varied environment from a new perspective. We will ride through part of the presidential estate of San Rossore where we may be able to see some of the abundant wildlife that inhabits the park and which has little fear of passing bicycles. We

proceed through the Park of Migliarino, through pinewoods and coastal areas to the village of Torre del Lago. Picnic lunch. After lunch we will visit the Lake of Massaciuccoli with its aquatic fauna, and the archaeological remains of the Roman villa. Depending on time available, we may be able to take a boat trip on the lake.

Technical details: a technically easy return route over level ground, of medium difficulty in terms of distance (40km); actual cycling time, 4 hours.

38. Walk from Calci to the Verruca Fort - Pisa

A circular route through olive groves and woodland on the Pisan hills to Mt Verruca dominated by the 13th-century Pisan fort which crowns the mount of the same name at about 540m. Its origins and history are closely linked to the village of Calci which lies in the middle of the valley below and which has always participated in the vicissitudes of the powerful town of Pisa and all the wars that it was involved in over the centuries. From the walls of the legendary fortress we can enjoy the splendid panoramas stretching from the Pisan Plain to the sea and the island of Gorgona.

Chance to visit the Carthusian monastery and Natural History Museum at Calci (entrance fees not included).

Technical details: medium-easy circular route with a slightly more difficult stretch. Actual walking time about 3 hours.

Outside Tuscany

1. *Hiking in the 'Oltrepò Pavese' region: where the Alps meet the Apennines*

3 days – 2 nights

An unusual itinerary, off the beaten track, in search of unexplored environments, atmospheres and landscapes: the Oltrepò Pavese region with its misty hills cloaked in vineyards, its kind, industrious people who warm the grey winters with their cordial humour, and its mountains - unknown to most, where the Alps meet the Apennines – sunny islands floating on a sea of clouds. This land of the “Four Provinces in Four Regions” (Piacenza in Emilia, Pavia in Lombardy, Alessandria in Piedmont, and Genoa in Liguria), despite its administrative borders, retains the cultural identity of the ancient “High Lands”, inextricably linked by the historical Via del Sale along which the Liguri people marched through centuries of history up until Longobard Christianity and the Malaspina feuds. We will discover a unique natural environment along the Val Trebbia, Val Staffora and Val Curone valleys and on the mountain paths in the heart of the two Italian mountain ranges. We will be able to see the highest peaks of the Alps and the Apennines and will discover the mitigating influence of the nearby Ligurian Sea on the natural environment.



Useful information: medium-easy hike. Optional canoeing on the River Trebbia (additional cost). Breakfast, packed lunches and dinners supplied by the hotel (please advise of any special dietary requirements). Participants will use their own cars for transfers; we can use a minimum number of cars and share the costs. There will be a group leader and GAE guide for the duration of the trip.

OUTLINE OF PROGRAMME

We are proud to have put together this programme which embraces every aspect of this fascinating area of Lombardy which, being still relatively unknown, offers landscapes of rare beauty, in some places rugged and wild and in others pastoral and tranquil.

1st day – outward journey from Tuscany using own means of transport or travelling with other participants, as organised by the group leader. Alternatively, meeting with the group leader in the central square of Bobbio (Parma Province) in the late morning. By car to the beginning of the path (packed lunch to be provided by participants). Hike of about 2h 30'. Transfer to hotel for dinner and overnight stay. After-dinner walk to Romagnese for traditional Easter celebrations (“Galina griza”) and village fair. Opportunity to attend Easter mass at midnight.

(On this first day our hike will take us into the Mediavalle, from Passo Penice to Pietra Corva and the slopes of Romagnese through green meadows and mountain pastures where time seems to stand still. The rural silence is interrupted now and again only by the mooing of the roaming cows and the gurgling of streams. The Pietra Corva, with its rugged ophiolitic rocks and its pioneering vegetation, stands out clearly like a pinnacle over the gentle valley with its

endless carpet of flowers. In the evening we can join the people in the village for the Easter celebrations, taking part along with these reserved and hard-working people in these most important of religious events.



2nd day – After breakfast we will set out for a day’s hiking along the Apennine ridge “of the four regions”, on the border between the Alps and the Apennines (average walking time 5h). Packed lunch provided by the hotel. Return to the hotel in the evening for dinner. After-dinner walk to one of the nearby villages. Overnight stay.

(The second day will be dedicated to the two elements, **river and mountain: the Pavia Apennine and the splendid Val Trebbia**. From the Brallo Pass and the ancient village of Bocco we will climb to the top of mounts Colletta, Tartago and Terme through centuries-old beech woods and slopes covered in blackcurrants, slopes which become the reign of the ski lift during the winter. From here, as we make our way along the panoramic ridge, we will be able to make out the peaks of the Ligurian, Piedmontese, Parma and Lombard Apennines in the majestic weave of valleys rich in history (the Staffora, Curone, Tidone, Trebbia, Aveto and Nizza valleys) and famous Roman and medieval routes. In fact, Hannibal passed along the same route during the Second Punic War, as did San Colombano di Bobbio, called by the Longobard Queen Teodolinda to the centre of her Kingdom in Pavia. The mortal remains of Saint Anthony also passed through here on the way to Sardinia via the historic Via del Sale. From a geological point of view this is exactly the point where the Alpine chain meets the Apennines, where immeasurable pressure pushed the rocks of ancient sea beds to altitudes of over 1800m. From the top of the majestic Mount Lesima we will be able to see the top of Monte Rosa and other Alpine peaks to the North. At the end of our mountain route we will descend along the Val Trebbia with its narrow incised meanders form a picturesque canyon, where the most important moments in the history of geology took place with the discovery of deep-sea turbidite processes right in the centre of peninsular Italy. The river Trebbia will be our playground again at the end of the day, offering the chance to take an energising swim in its cool clear water and enjoy the last rays of sunshine on its white beaches.



3rd day – After breakfast we will set off on a hike through the Tidone, Trebbia and Staffora valleys, following the winding streams and rivers of the Oltrepò Pavese. Packed lunch. Return in the afternoon.

(our third day will be dedicated to the Val Staffora with a cultural and natural itinerary that will include two charming hermitages in the woods – San Ponzo and Sant’Alberto di Butrio. This third route is characterised by lush vegetation with perfumed valleys cut away by age-old river courses and wide fans of detritus on the slopes of the rocky walls which look as if they have been cut by a sharp blade. A close look at all these elements will give us a greater understanding of the evolution of the landscape.



What to wear and bring: Wear light comfortable clothing (in layers) and walking shoes. You will also need a rain jacket, a small back pack in addition to baggage that will be left at the hotel, a water bottle, torch, trainers for river walking, and a swimming costume.

2. Hiking in the Pontine Islands

5 days – 4 nights

The islands of the Sorceress Circe, with their extraordinary landscapes, lace-edged rocks, stacks and caves, can be visited from a naturalistic point of view in order to get the most from the outstanding natural beauty of the area. We will also be able to meet the lively and welcoming local people.

Ponza, with its wealth of history and natural beauty, will be our base. Every corner of the island holds a fascinating story, still alive in the memory of its inhabitants. The culture of hiking has not yet taken off on the island, its economy being based on the hords of summer seaside visitors: our stay during the spring will bring us into contact with the more authentic side of the island, known as the “most beautiful in the Mediterranean”. From Ponza we will go to Palmarola, an abandoned rocky settlement with a rich seabed and many small sandy bays. Zannone, on the other hand, is completely different. This island, which is part of the Circeo National Park, is the site of an ancient monastery and has different geological origins to the other islands. Like Palmarola, it is also uninhabited and we will be able to enjoy its wild beauty from its highest point from where you can also see the entire Pontino archipelago and the coast of Lazio.

OUTLINE OF PROGRAMME:

1st day – outward journey from Tuscany using own car or travelling with other participants, as organised by the group leader; alternatively, meeting with the group leader at the port of Formia (NB: the cost of the guarded car park in Formia is about 8€/day); ferry for Ponza (about 2h 30’ crossing time). Our guide will meet us in Ponza from where we will take the local bus to Le Forna where we will check into our small apartments. Dinner in restaurant. Evening to explore and get to know Le Forna.

2nd day – Transfer by local bus to Ponza Porto. Hike to Monte Guardia and the necropolis of Bagno Vecchio; bathing opportunity in the charming bay below. Lunch at own leisure in the old town centre. Afternoon in picturesque Ponza Porto, tour of the old town centre and the spectacular cemetery clinging to the cliffs.

3rd day – Short walk to the Caletta (cove) where we will board a boat for the island of Zannone, part of the Circeo National Park and never inhabited. We will make the short walk across the island and up to the highest point, to the ruins of the Cistercian-Benedictine monastery. Visit to the Roman Bath near the landing point, where morena eels were bred by the Romans. Return to Ponza by boat and trip around the island with lunch on board, with a chance to visit the Pilato Caves (part of which involves walking through water), the spectacular basins used for the breeding of morena

eels which were sacred to the ancient Romans. They are connected by a maze of long passageways all practicable on foot. We will be able to swim in the island's coves and most beautiful caves, and snorkelling and marine biology will also be possible. Return to our accommodation and dinner in restaurant. After dinner we can either go to Ponza Porto (by bus) or to Le Forna.

4th day – Boat trip (lunch on board) with a tour around and to the island of Palmarola. Short and easy walk to the highest point on the island where the remains of a medieval Cistercian monastery and the cave-houses of the ancient rock settlement dug into the *tufo* (a kind of rock) are found. Swimming in the most attractive caves with their emerald coloured water. Return to Ponza and our accommodation, dinner. Evening walk.

5th day – hike to Forte Papa and the natural baths (or another cove of equal beauty and charm); transfer to the Port by local bus; lunch at leisure; ferry back to Formia.

NB: The programme is subject to variation depending on weather conditions or other unforeseen circumstances.

Useful information: easy hiking and boat trips (extra cost including lunch on board), with stops for swimming and guided snorkeling. Breakfasts and dinners at our designated restaurant. Packed lunches provided by participants or by the restaurant at an additional cost. During boat trips lunch will be served on board (if weather conditions prevent boat trips, we will organise trips on land and lunch will be bought by participants). Transfers by public transport (€1 per journey); group leader and GAE guide will be present for the duration of the trip.

What to wear and bring: shoes for the rocks, mask and snorkel, swimming costume, sunscreen, sunhat. Wear light comfortable clothing (in layers) and walking shoes. Also bring a small back pack in addition to baggage that will be left at our accommodation, a water bottle, and a torch. Sheets and towels also required.

3. Hiking-Tour of Corsica

6 days – 5 nights

Corsica is an island to be explored. There is a surprise round every corner: unexpected vistas and breathtaking landscapes, a variety of environments, a crystal clear sea, lush vegetation, desert, snow-capped peaks and wild deserted beaches – all these varied elements are enclosed within this one precious treasure chest surrounded by the Tyrrhenian Sea.

During this trip we will have an opportunity to enjoy every characteristic, every environment, and all the beauty there is to see on this island, including its interesting and laboured history. We will discover the island by walking along its paths in search of its natural wonders.



1st day – *The enchanting north coast and Saleccia beach (total hiking time 3h)*

Ferry at 9.00 from the Port of Livorno. Arrival in Bastia at about 13.00

Packed lunch or from the self-service restaurant (not included).

On our arrival in the port of Bastia we will be able to admire this characteristic town from the ferry. It is the largest commercial port in Corsica. We will then board a coach and set off for the graceful and charming little town of Saint Florent, known as the Saint Tropez of Corsica because of the magnificent boats moored in the gulf on which the town lies. We will take the characteristic boat to the marvellous beach of Saleccia with its fine white sand which slopes gently into a breathtakingly clear blue sea. It was on this beach that the landing scenes from the film “The Longest Day” were shot. After a short stop on the beach, we will take the panoramic path which leads along the coast to another enchanting beach called Plage du Loto (2h). After a refreshing swim we will take the boat back to St Florent where we will be given a guided tour of the village, including the fortified citadel dating from 1439. Return to Bastia by bus,

passing through the Patrimonio region famous for its fine wines. At Col di Teghime (536m) we will be able to admire the plain of Bastia and the Biguglia wetlands – a nature reserve – and the islands of the Tuscan Archipelago. On very clear days you can even see the Italian coastline. Dinner and overnight stay in hotel.

2nd day – [Regional Natural Park of Corsica and its waterfalls \(hiking time 2h 45'\)](#)

Departure from Bastia at 8.45. We will head first of all in a southerly direction along the eastern edge of the island, turning inland through the Forest of Bavella where the finest group of needles in Corsica is found. Their beauty derives from their unusual shape, due to the action of the wind, and from the changing colour of the rocks which soar above the pine trees. Lastly, we will come to an impressive oak tree which grows between two stones. This is where our short walk starts to the pretty succession of basins which make up the *Cascades du Polischellu* (45 mins return). We can swim in one of Corsica's clear rivers. Packed lunch. We will then set off for another enchanted spot, the *Cascade Piscia di Gallo* (2h return): across the Col di Bavella, a spectacular pass at 1200 m from where there is a splendid view, and on to our destination. We will descend into the gorge to see the source of the River Oso; the sight of this impressive waterfall 50 metres high in a surreal landscape will make up for the minor effort required to reach the spot. We will then take the coach to Porto Vecchio. Possible stop in the beautiful gulf and beach of Santa Giulia. Dinner and overnight stay in hotel.

3rd day – [Bonifacio, between white limestone and emerald seas; Ajaccio and the enchanting Sanguinaires islands \(hiking time 2h\)](#)

Departure 8.45. We will walk from the lower town in the gorge of Bonifacio to the old Citadel with its powerful fortifications overlooking the sea. Guided tour of this incredible village with its Italian feel, the island of Sardinia only 12 km away, with views of Santa Teresa di Gallura in the distance. Bonifacio is an unforgettable place of outstanding beauty. Walk to the lighthouse of Bonifacio and Capo Pertusato. The path leads along the coast on the high cliffs of white limestone typical of this area (2h). Packed lunch. Return to the lower town by bus. Chance for a swim in the little cove of Granello di Sabbia.

Afternoon: possible boat trip, highly recommended if weather conditions permit because of the beauty of the scenery and the sea. Departure by coach mid-afternoon. Stop in the village of Sartene, famous for being the most Corsican of the Corsican towns, or at the archaeological site of Filitosa. Evening arrival in Ajaccio where we will watch the spectacular sunset from Punta della Parata, reached along a short path from where we can see the Sanguinaires islands, so called because at sunset they take on stunning tones of red. Dinner and overnight stay in hotel.

4th day – [The Calanches at Porto, pink granite protected as a World Heritage Site \(total hiking time 3h 20'\)](#)

Departure 8.45. Guided tour of the town of Ajaccio, administrative centre and "most French" town in Corsica, the birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte. Afterwards we will head for the Calanches. Panoramic walk (2h 20' return) along the cornice of this marvellous mass of pink granite sculpted by the wind and rain in the most incredible manner. The panorama over the Gulf of Porto and the Natural Reserve of Scandola is unmissable! Return to the starting point and short walk to the Chateau Fort (1 h return), another fantastic viewpoint. Transfer to the village of Porto and swimming from the splendid beach at the foot of mount Capu d'Ortu (1294m). Dinner and overnight stay in hotel.

5th day – [The immense Aitone Forest and the splendid Gradule Waterfalls \(total hiking time 5h30'\)](#)

8.30 optional visit to the Genoese Tower in Porto. Departure by coach for the Aitone Forest, a splendid forest of Austrian pine which was once used by the Genoese for boat-building materials. Walk to the Aitone waterfalls which slide over rocky masses alternating with basins of cool water (1h return). We will cross a pretty bridge before returning to our starting point. Transfer to the path for the Gradule waterfalls. Beginning of our walk. Packed lunch. The environment has changed dramatically: we are at about 1330m and, through tranquil birch woods, we will come to the shepherds' goat sheds used during the summer months., and then to the cool waterfall which forms a lovely emerald coloured pool (4h30' return). After a rest, we will retrace our steps. Transfer to the Balagne region for dinner and overnight stay in hotel.

6th day – [Visit to the fortified town of Calvi and the capital of Upper Corsica, Bastia](#)

Departure 8.45. Guided tour of the fortified citadel of Calvi which claims to be the birthplace of Christopher Columbus; transfer to Bastia, capital of Upper Corsica and the most important commercial town on the island. Guided tour of the town and the fortified citadel known as the Terra-Nuova. Packed lunch. 15.00 departure by ferry for Livorno.

4. Salsomaggiore, the historic Spas and the Parco Fluviale (riverside park) of Stirone (Province of Parma)

2 days – 1 night

A weekend dedicated to spa relaxation and peaceful walks in the gentle green hills of Salsomaggiore Terme, with its history and therapeutic waters. A surprising trip into the province of Parma in Emilia-Romagna, to the area where the River Stirone marks the boundary with the province of Piacenza. The River Stirone environment is a Site of European Importance and around it the splendid riverside park, the Parco Fluviale, has been established, with its crystal clear water, lush riverbank vegetation and rocks rich in fossils.

OUTLINE OF PROGRAMME:

1st day – Meeting at the entrance to the Stirone Park in the late morning. Beginning of our walk in the Parco Fluviale dello Stirone (distance 8 km, average walking time 4 hours – Our path winds along flat ground, following the River Stirone for the most part, where we will find the riverbank plant life and fauna typical to the area). Packed lunch on one of the pretty pebble beaches along the river. Visit to Pietranera, an enchanting ophiolitic spur which represents the remains of rock which in the Jurassic era formed the bottom of the ancient Tethys ocean. The environment here is extreme, but still contains a flora that has adapted to the particular nature of the substrata. On the other side of the valley the rock is dominated by the characteristic medieval village of Vigoleno. Check-in at hotel in Salsomaggiore, half an hour's rest at the Berzieri Spa, the area's oldest and most famous thermal waters, in a splendid art-nouveau atmosphere. A chance to regenerate in the therapeutic waters of Salsomaggiore. Guided tour of the spa complex. Return to hotel and dinner. Evening walk through the streets of the town, and overnight stay.

2nd day – Departure after breakfast at 9.00. Visit to the Herb store and the Botanical Garden of Gavinel, with more than 450 species of aromatic and officinal plants cultivated with passion and skill in an area of 12 hectares, of which more than 50,000 sq m is open to the public. Standing out from the many plants is the extraordinary White Salsomaggiore Lavander. Walk in the gentle green hills of Salso (9 km, about 3hours of walking), from where we will be able to admire the splendid view over the lush natural environment and the town itself (some stretches are along secondary asphalted roads). Packed lunch. Departure after lunch in the early afternoon.

What to wear and bring: Wear light comfortable clothing (in layers) and walking shoes. Rain jacket, a small backpack in addition to luggage that will be left at the hotel, a water bottle, torch, shoes for walking in the river and a swimming costume.

5. Weekend at Bardi Castle, walking in the Ceno Valley (Province of Parma)

2 days – 1 night

A weekend in the Parma Apennines exploring the beautiful Ceno Valley area, between streams and mountain ridges around the imposing Castello di Bardi. The spectacular castle's massive bulk rises on a spur of jasper, standing guard over the valley below where the rivers Ceno and Noveglia meet. The ancient atmosphere with its pastures and thick woods of Turkey oaks is accompanied, of course, by the castle ghosts.