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THE TUSCAN ARCHIPELAGO, BORN FROM THE PEARL NECKLACE OF VENUS

It is said that when Venus emerged from the Tyrrhenian Sea, her necklace broke and 7 pearls fell into the water, forming 7 islands. Located between the Italian mainland and Corsica, the Tuscan Archipelago includes the islands of Gorgona, Capraia, Elba, Pianosa, Montecristo, Giglio and Giannutri, all of which are protected as part of the Tuscan Archipelago National Park, established in 1996.

Each island has its own history, climate and landscape; if you are thinking about visiting them, you must take into account that only 5 of them are open to the public: the Island of **Elba**, **Capraia**, **Pianosa**, **Giglio** and **Giannutri**. Permission to visit **Gorgona** has to be granted by the Italian Justice Ministry (the Island has been home to an **agricultural penal colony** since 1869) and access to **Montecristo** is strictly out of bounds: permission has to be granted by the State Forestry Corps. Having said that, further detailed information and updates can be always found on the Tuscan Archipelago National Park official website

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Elba is the largest and most visited island of the Tuscan archipelago and can be reached by ferry from the port of **Piombino**. Rich in sights and easy to get around, we recommend you visit **Napoleon's two villas** and the tiny village of **Marciana**, with its picturesque alleys, small squares and cobblestone streets. As for the beaches, we suggest you go to **Fetovaia**, **Cavoli**, **La Biodola**, **Lacona**, **Procchio** and **Marina di Campo**... they are simply wonderful.

Situated about 13 km south-west of Elba, **Pianosa** can be reached from **Marina di Campo**, **Portoferraio** and **Rio Marina**. Inhabited since prehistoric times, it became famous when Augustus - the first Roman emperor - banished his grandson and ex-heir Agrippa Postumus there. The Island was also the site of a **maximum-security prison** which closed down in 1998; besides visiting the ruins of a **Roman villa**, some **2-level catacombs** and its ghost village, tourists can swim in the crystal clear waters of **Cala Giovanna**.

From **Porto Santo Stefano** – province of Grosseto – you can reach **Giglio Island**, definitely smaller and more secluded than Elba. Visit **Giglio Castello**, perched on top of one of the highest Island hillocks and enjoy the view from the **Rocca Aldobrandesca**: when the sky is clear, you can see Elba and Corsica.

Giglio's most beautiful beaches are **Arenella**, **Cannelle**, **Caldane** and **Campese**; as for the sights, you must see the **coastal towers** and the **Roman ruins** at **Giglio Porto**.

Wild **Capraia** is the most distant island of the Archipelago and can be reached from **Piombino** and Livorno. It has only 1 km of paved roads, so you don't really need a car here. The Island is about 8 km long and has **steep rocky coasts**; it encompasses a **tiny village** and a small lake named **lo Stagnone** which gets surrounded by buttercups in spring. We recommend you rent a small motor boat and visit **Cala Rossa**, a gorgeous red cliff situated at the southern-most tip of the Island.

From **Porto Santo Stefano** you can also reach **Giannutri Island**, a ferry service operates from April to mid September. There are no hotels on Giannutri and camping is forbidden; however, you can rent small private accommodations. Keep in mind that **you cannot access the Roman villa and other protected areas** (you don't want to incur a penalty fee, right?); if you are interested in taking a guided tour and/or exploring the sea bed, please contact the Tuscan Archipelago National Park Authority Officers.

The best way to enjoy these stunning islands is to sail between them: besides admiring the scenery, you have a good chance of spotting **dolphins**, **fin whales**, **sperm whales**, **swordfishes** and **tunnies** . If you own a boat, **make sure you know and follow the Islands rules and regulations at all times** ; if you're considering a bareboat charter or a skippered yacht charter, there are a lot of **yacht charter companies** available along the Tuscan coast. In case you need a car to reach Piombino, Porto Santo Stefano, Livorno and/or other harbours, you can find further information at Florence car rent -