



29 JULY 2014



CATERINA POMINI



8341

BEAUTIFUL LUCCA, AN IDEAL LOCATION FOR A CITY BREAK

Located in the valley of the River Serchio, between the mountains and the sea, Lucca was a Ligurian and later an Etruscan settlement; after being conquered by the Romans, it presumptively became a colony in 180 BC.

The old town has preserved the rectangular Roman plan and traces of an amphitheatre can still be noticed in its famous **Piazza dell'Anfiteatro**; **Piazza San Michele**, where the wonderful **Church of San Michele in Foro** now stands, lies on the site of the ancient forum. Being situated at the junction of roads to Parma, Luni, Florence, Pisa and Rome, Lucca was apparently a wealthy city and was also an early **episcopal see**. After 476 AD, the city was governed successively by the **Goths**, the **Byzantines** and the **Lombards**; the **Frankish counts** replaced the Lombard dukes after 774.

Lucca also commanded the *Via Francigena* (the famous pilgrimage route running from France to Rome); however, it became even more prosperous in the 11th century thanks to the silk trade. When **Matilde di Canossa**

died without heirs in 1115, the city began to constitute itself as an **independent commune** and despite a series of conflicts with its powerful neighbours and noble houses, it maintained its independence for almost 500 years until **Napoleon** installed **Elisa Baciocchi** as “Queen of Etruria” (1805-1814). In 1815, the **Congress of Vienna** assigned Lucca to **Maria Luisa of Spain**, the city passed in 1824 to her son **Charles Louis of Bourbon-Parma**; thirty-six years later, Lucca joined the **Kingdom of Italy**.

Particularly appreciated for its **16th century intact walls with huge gates and ramparts**, Lucca hides an extraordinary amount of Medieval and Renaissance jewels; because of the overwhelming number of religious buildings, it is also known as the “**City of 100 Churches**”. Small enough to walk around on foot, it is the perfect destination for a city break as there is such a variety of sights and activities on offer. You can't miss **Piazza dell'Anfiteatro**, built in the Middle Ages on the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre: besides being beautiful, it also boasts cozy little restaurants, tiny cafes, local shops and occasionally outdoor markets. Climb 130 steps up the **Guinigi Tower**: you will enjoy breathtaking views over the city roofs. **Piazza Napoleone** is the heart of Lucca's political power and is home to the **Ducal Palace**; every July, one of the most important music festivals in Italy – the [Lucca Summer Festival](#) – takes place here.

Visit **St Martin's Cathedral**: Lucca's main church was begun in 1063; however, the nave and the transepts were rebuilt in the 14th century. Look for the **mysterious labyrinth** and the **Latin inscription** both embedded in the right pillar of the portico: “*this is the labyrinth built by Dedalus of Crete; all who entered therein were lost, save Theseus, thanks to Ariadne's thread*”. Located on **Via Fillungo**, the **Clock Tower** is the tallest tower in Lucca and is linked to the legend of **Lucida Mansi**, who is said to have sold her soul to the Devil in order to remain young and attractive... The **Church of San Michele in Foro**, dedicated to Saint Michael, has an astonishingly beautiful façade and a statue of the Archangel on its top. Other points of interest include: **Palazzo Pfanner** (where some parts of “[Portrait of a Lady](#)” starring **Nicole Kidman**, **John Malkovich** and **Viggo Mortensen** were shot); **Casa Puccini** (where the unforgettable Italian composer was born in 1858) and the **Orto Botanico Comunale di Lucca** (a splendid botanical garden established in 1820 by Napoleon's second wife, the **Duchess of Parma**).

Yummy Lucca

We recommend you grab some dinner at [Cantine Bernardini](#) (*Via del Suffragio, 7*), the food is delicious and the atmosphere is wonderful; after dinner, you can ask the owner to tell you about the **ghost who inhabits the cellars**, a centuries-old entity who was probably imprisoned there a long, long time ago...

Events and festivals

Besides the Lucca Summer Festival, the city hosts the annual [Lucca Comics & Games](#) (Europe's

largest festival for comics and related subjects) and, every year in November, the [Lucca Film Festival](#).

[Ciao Florence Tours and Travels](#) organizes full day tours to Lucca and [Pisa](#) with **Buccellato tasting**, a traditional Lucchese cake made with flour, eggs, aniseed and raisins. If you are visiting Florence and you feel like going on a [group tour to Lucca and Pisa](#), contact www.ciaoflorence.it for details.