TUSCANY
ADVENTURE TIMES

It's time to explore Tuscany
Thinking about Tuscany, our imagination conjures up arty cities, villages sprinkled in the rolling countryside, swathes of scenery and specialities that seduce and beguile. When we look closer at the region’s geography realization dawns that other elements exist, which promise to whisk away travellers for unexpected and enthralling experiences. Impressive mountain ranges whose streams and river flow down to the valley, vast nature reserves, leafy forests with an ancient past and a gloriously long coastline that extends among Mediterranean shrub and across seven sublime islands. These natural resources are fully enjoyed by Tuscans and they are inspiring places for people from all over the world who are drawn to a lifestyle based on outdoor experiences. Opportunities are ripe for a new exploration of Tuscany, one that’s different, active and sustainable. It’s the start of a timeless adventure where time is a thing of the past. Follow the seasons for experiences that change dramatically with the weather. After all, there’s no such thing as an inclement time of year in Tuscany, where adventure is available year-round and every day is awash in possibilities, from tasting local specialities to visiting a museum, from the city to the countryside.

There’s more to the region than the art and beauty of “traditional” Tuscany. We urge you to expand your horizons. Although you won’t need to venture too far as, in Tuscany, adventure is always just around the corner.
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Travel, discover, savour. Experience nature, explore it in all its forms and let yourself be swayed by its ancestral beauty and pure outdoor spirit. The best way to do it is by striking a rhythm between your soul and feet while wearing a backpack.

Far from the usual tourism routes, going trekking means discovering while walking a wide variety of natural and wild landscapes, unexpected scenery and hidden historic treasures. It’s also a way of scaling the heights of the world. Step by step and with a difference in uphill gradient, mountain hiking leads to the conquering of summits, high-altitude viewpoints and new perspectives.

The ascent ups the pulse by taking on trail running and becomes even rockier, in all meanings of the word, beside high cliff faces halfway between sky and land. Climbing is a sport and a lifestyle, a way of ascending crags of varying difficulty, always down to the last handhold and foothold, in touch with the wildest of nature, inside and out. Even more immaculate is the impassable nature in underground caves and grottoes. Caving lures hikers who nurse an ardent desire to explore the bowels of the earth, armed with a helmet, in discovery of subterranean worlds.

A high-octane outdoor world in a single region, Tuscany, where mountaineering is life.
Mother Nature in Tuscany always puts on the best show of itself, ensuring that the dialogue between man and nature is continuously harmonious; landscapes with perfectly ordered cultivated fields, lush forests, peaks to conquer with breath-taking views, spectacular coasts dotted with promontories that overlook the crystal-clear sea. This variety of landscapes is home to rich biodiversity and unspoiled nature waiting to be discovered on two feet. The entire territory is sprinkled with hiking itineraries that wind through mountain trails, mule tracks and ancient roads, offering an array of opportunities for a day of trekking, no matter your tastes or skill level.

A natural watershed with the neighbouring regions, the Apennines and its sinuous landscape of peaks that reach as high as 2,000 metres above sea level is permeated with crisp air and ups and downs that make for proper mountain hiking. From the ski lifts on the Abetone and the Doganaccia, you can head out for incredible high-altitude hiking, while moving downhill just a little, you can explore the Svizzera Pesciatina, walking along the ring route of Monte Battifolle before resting at the thermal baths in Montecatini. The Apennines become “Florentine” once you get to the Mugello, a verdant hiking network that’s enviable by all and suitable for everyone, especially lovers of the peaceful quietude of the forest.

When we talk about mountain hiking in Tuscany it’s impossible not to think about the rocky Apuan Alps, the mountain range by the coast with its rugged peaks reminiscent of the Dolomites in northeastern Italy. If you have a craving for trekking but you prefer the sea to the mountains, the Maremma will fulfil your urge for hiking with hiking routes in the Mediterranean shrub, tall cliffs and trails that lead to the beach. Enjoy the all-round sea views on Elba Island due to the unexpected hikes provided by the Grande Traversata Elbana (GTE), which rises as high as the top of Monte Capanne, boasting unbeatable vistas over the other islands in the Tuscan Archipelago. Trekking is equally gratifying for body, eyes and spirit, even more so when the taste buds are added into the mix. The hills of Siena, from Chianti to the Crete, Valdelsa and Val d’Orcia, combine to conjure up an exciting day of hiking among verdant hills, expanses of oak forests and centuries-old villages, with tasty locally made snacks and wine along the way. Monte Amiata rises up to the south in the distance of this hilly landscape, try the 30-kilometre trekking route that runs around this ancient volcano.
For climbing and potholing lovers, Tuscany is lined with crags halfway between sky and land, as well as caves that lead into the bowels of the earth. The Alps, Apennines and Antiapennines are on hand for adrenaline-fueled ascents and descents, and especially for adventures hanging by a rope.

The Apuan Alps are among the wildest environments in Tuscany and a favourite destination for hikers. These mountains also appeal to climbers with their ropes, powder and snap hooks. Part of the Apuan Alps insinuating their way into the sea of Versilia is Monte Procinto, a chalky pillar with a sheer cylindrical rock face known as the “panettone”, whose summit can be reached using the “via ferrata”, the first to be opened in Italy in 1893, or by climbing. There are 40 crags of varying difficulty throughout the Apuan Alps, such as in Stazzema, Montignoso and Camaiore, Tuscany’s climbing capital. In Valdinievole other stunning cliffs include those in Monsummano Terme, natural gyms well-known among enthusiasts.

Monte Amiata is full of rocky ridges to go free climbing and bouldering, while along the Southern Tuscan coast, famous as a holiday destination, the Argentario is home to one of the loveliest rock faces along the Italian coast: between sky and sea, the Capo d’Uomo cliff.

Tuscany offers a vast range of climbing adventures with striking scenery to match. Those who enjoy descending into wild, subterranean nature will be impressed too. In addition to the Apuan Alps with the spectacular Grotta del Vento in Fornovolasco and the Antro del Corchia (whose 70 kilometres of tunnels and shafts make it the largest underground complex in Italy), the region is rich in natural caves that lead into mysterious environments that have intrigued humans for millennia. The curious morphology makes the caves naturally and historically important, irresistible places for potholing experts and aspiring amateurs ready to sound the depths of the earth. The heart of Tuscany is famous for its hills and ingredients, but it’s equally home to surprising underground spaces, such as the Montagnola senese and the karstic phenomena have given rise to count- less caves that can be visited during easy caving excursions or caving that requires technique and expertise. It’s a little known subterranean treasure trove, at the centre of a natural triangle with Sie- na, San Gimignano and Volterra forming its corners. Further south, an impassable, hidden world shaped by water, consisting of caves, stalagmites and stalactites, such as those concealed inside the Grotta di Sassocolato in the hinterland of Marem- ma around Grosseto. The name says it all in Italian: chalk concretions that rise up from the rock faces, giving rise to striking and fragile spectacles, a habitat whose purityhosts colonies of bats and other rare species, pristine environments to be preserved and admired through caving and the utmost respect.

Montecatini Terme is the perfect destination to combine a spa experience with a dash of adventure due to a tourism trail that leads to an unforgettable journey into the bowels of the earth. The Grotta Maona karst cave dates back 15 million years and it’s one of the few to have two different shafts, one to enter the different tunnels and one to return into the sunlight.

Expert mountaineers and aspiring amateurs in search of natural cathedrals to scale will find their natural habitat in Tuscany.
In addition to being intense, passion can also be quick. For those whose mantra is “I won’t stop when I’m tired, I’ll stop when I’ve finished,” it’s a wonderful thing to explore these trails with speed and balance. Runners with an outdoor spirit, lovers of wild rhythms, run on steep and rough trails, surrounded by beautiful landscapes of all kinds, but always natural, in harmony with ancestral practices. To indulge your passion for the wilderness, Tuscany offers a wide range of running trails.

Forming a capillary network of trails and marked itineraries, enjoyable even for adventure hiking, Tuscany is best experienced at speedy km/h. In the heart of the Casentino Forest, there’s one of the most famous mountains in Italy, where the source of the Arno river can be found, the Falterona. This mountain is crisscrossed by a number of trails that altogether create ring routes and boast characteristics perfect for the most mountainous kind of running: sky running.

In the Apennines, almost touching the sky, the Montagna Pistoiese are home to dozens of kilometres of trails immersed in the lush forests, surrounded by high plains and difficult slopes, for “high-speed” excursions in the wild of all levels. There are also many competitions, from the Ecomaratone and the 100 kilometres that cross the hilly landscape to the arduous elevations of the Ultra Trail in the Mugello and on the Via degli Dei.

Orienteering, being armed with maps and a compass for safely exploring an unknown territory, is the best way to truly come into contact with nature. The forest is the perfect environment to go orienteering; this sport and discipline is practiced in many green areas around Tuscany, but the city is also often included in compass-based competitions. There are many good places to try orienteering. From the Val d’Orcia in the south, climbing the slopes of Monte Amiata, covered in chestnut and beech trees, to the forests on the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines in the north, kids and high-performance athletes run through these woods in search of “lanterns,” checkpoints for orienting yourself in nature, experiencing Tuscany purely outdoors.

From the harmonious hills to the peaks of the Apennines, if you’re a runner with an outdoor spirit, Tuscany has just the thing for you: endless forests, steep slopes, spectacular ridges, all crisscrossed by trails that are perfect for running in the wild. There are also many internationally famous competitions, allowing you to defy nature, inside or out.

Ready, set, go! Tuscany boasts trails with physical destinations and none whatsoever, a way of going wild and testing your mettle as a trail runner.
In the mountains, but also at the seaside, here are a few ideas to take note of for your next weekend outdoors or to include in your list of favourite hikes. From north to south, there are many opportunities for hiking and spending long days wandering through nature, where humans have had little-to-no impact, places with breath-taking views, all waiting to be discovered with outdoor activities. In Tuscany, adventure is always around the corner.

**01 Parco dell’Orecchiella**

On the border with the Parco Nazionale Appennino Tosco-Emiliano, Orecchiella is immersed in the lush Garfagnana. At the centre, there’s a mountain that lends its name to a nature reserve: the Pania di Corfino. An Apuan-like massif that exceeds 1,600 metres in height and reachable via a stunning hiking trail along the coast, from its peak you can enjoy views that range from the Apennines to the Apuan Alps to the Garfagnana. The area around Pania also includes the Sasso Rosso summit, an ‘amusement park’ for climbers.

**02 Montagna Pistoiese**

Situated north of Pistoia, on the ridge of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, the Montagna Pistoiese is a haven for mountain hiking and trail running, and is home to many unique sceneries. Amongst the most beautiful is Lago Nero, a body of water with glacial origins located 1,750 metres above sea level that takes its name from the dark colour of the rocks that are reflected in its waters. The lake is surrounded by the imposing Apennines, which rise up 2,000 metres, and is reachable via the Valle del Sestaione, along a trail through forests of fir trees and comprising a few climbs.

**03 Parco dell’Uccellina**

Located in the Grosseto Maremma, the Monti dell’Uccellina rise up near the coast with hilly altitudes and are covered in dense vegetation. An easy hiking route leads to the Abbey of San Rabano. Built between the 11th and 12th century, it was originally a Benedictine monastery with an annexed watch tower known as the Torre dell’Uccellina. The trail continues to the sea, specifically the splendid, wild Cala di Forno beach.

**04 Casentino**

The Casentino Forest is home to a sacred place where faith and nature merge, the Camaldoli hermitage and monastery. This community of Benedictine monks was founded by St Romuald almost 1,000 years ago. Many trails lead there, like the mountain hiking route that starts in Badia Prataglia and leads hikers back around in a circular route. This itinerary overlaps for a stretch with the Alta Via dei Parchi, and is immersed in the mystical forests of beech and fir trees.

**05 Val d’Orcia**

Rolling hills and skilfully cultivated fields, the typically Tuscan countryside of the Val d’Orcia is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Located about halfway along a route that winds across gravel roads and through two of the most beautiful villages in Tuscany, Pienza and San Quirico d’Orcia, you’ll find the Vialata Chapel, a small deconsecrated building nestled between cypress trees and surrounded by a landscape that’s as simple as it is pleasant. It’s easily reachable with a leisurely walk or at a run.

**06 Monti Pisani**

The small, pleasant mountain chain of the Tuscan Sub-Apennines divides Pisa and Lucca. On trails through plateaus dotted with olive trees and colourful flowers, like the rare orchids that bloom in the springtime, you can reach the modest heights of the dominate over Vecchiano. From here, the view stretches beyond the horizon and ranges from the Apuan Alps to some of the islands in the Tuscan Archipelago. At the foot of the mountain are the Avane cliffs, rocky walls with easy and averagely difficult equipped trails for climbing.
In recent years, hiking in Tuscany has enjoyed new lifeblood, gathering speed as a sought-after form of tourism due above all to the dusting down of old tracks and trails, the roads which once connected distant places and which were travelled on foot. Step in the footsteps of our forefathers to straddle the history of this incredible region.

The Via Francigena is the most important of these ancient routes, which descends from the Great St. Bernard Pass heading for Rome and pierces Tuscany through the Cisa Pass. A large wooden cross reminds us, engraved with the words “Porta Toscana della Francigena” (Tuscan Gate of the Francigena), a magical threshold that transports wayfarers along 400 kilometres of breath-taking scenery, prized towns rich in art and amazing flavours.

A range of ecosystems embraces trail following in the footsteps of Sigeric, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 990. The route leads from the wilds of the Apennines to Pontremoli, a delightful town in the Lunigiana, to the sea of Avenza and the mountains to the other. The Via degli Dei still fulfils that purpose today for hikers and mountain bikers. You’ll need five days to travel through the silent woods and sudden clearings boasting surprising views: that’s the charm that every year drives people to retrace the footsteps of ancient wayfarers.

The same applies to the Via della Lana e della Seta (Wool and Silk Trail), a trans-apennine route from Prato, the historic city of wool production, to Bologna, where the manufacturing was mainly silk-centric. It’s a waterway too, since hydraulic systems, locks and old conduits can be seen along the route, which must have channelled water to the textile factories.

The uphill sections, some of which are very challenging, and the ridges that accompany the hikers’ slow gait, are steeped in history and heritage, like the villages that, one after another, embellish the trail, offering places to eat, drink and rest. If you have a hankering for sustainable tourism, check out the many other trails that crisscross their way through Tuscany before continuing along historic routes and centuries-old pilgrim routes.

The Via di Francesco, which starts at the La Verna Sanctuary, a place of immense spirituality and energy, follows Saint Francis’ pilgrimage and the hermitages named after him. The Via del Volto Santo (Holy Face Trail), which drops down from Pontremoli through the magical scenery of the Lunigiana and Garfagnana before reaching Lucca Cathedral. Via Romea, Via Chibellina, Via Clodia and Via del Sale: so many ways that overlap to create a network of routes that allows visitors to plan their trip for a brand-new Tuscan experience.
ANCIENT ROADS

CASENTINESI FORESTS

APENNINE PARK

APUANE PARK

TUSCAN ARCHIPELAGO

SAN ROSSORE PARK

MAREMMA PARK

MINING PARK

VAL DI CORNIA PARKS

The natural dividing line between the regions of Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, the Parco Nazionale Appennino Tosco-Emiliano stretches along the ridge and adjacent slopes of a section of the Northern Apennines, where some peaks surpass an altitude of 2,000 metres.

The park was founded in 2001 with one of the highest grades of legal protection and covers around 22,000 hectares of unspoiled nature and incredible views.

The Tuscan side of the park stretches across over 7,000 hectares of purely mountainous terrain, touching the provinces of Lucca and Massa-Carrara and embracing the Lucca side of the highest peak in Tuscany, Monte Prado (or Prato), standing at 2,054 metres above sea level.

The ridge boasts other summits well in excess of 1,800 metres, all known to devoted mountain hikers. Among these is Monte Sillara, which runs down into the historic region of Lunigiana: dotted with bewitching alpine lakes, it offers one of the most beautiful panoramas around.

Many of the plant species in these highlands are endemic and protected like the Apennine primrose, the mountain cowslip and fields of jonquils, the ‘poetic’ wild Narcissus that turns the meadows white in spring and creates scenes worthy of an impressionist’s paintbrush, none more so than the meadows of Logarghena in Lunigiana.

The park is also enriched by that most fascinating of predators, the wolf; the indisputable queen of the skies, the golden eagle; and his royal majesty of the forest, the deer.

The cultural and natural heritage is immeasurable, in a park where historical landmarks converge with places of worship sites from far-off ages. The little towns are as numerous as the castles, mills, shrines and parish churches that are spread throughout the area, places of timeless charm and thousands of years of history. This precious culture can also be found in typical protected designation of origin products like Lunigiana honey and Garfagnana spelt.

The park is a place to be enjoyed with all five senses and to be discovered on foot, especially on the narrow ridge that coincides with one of the longest trekking routes in Italy, the Grande Escursione Appenninica (G.E.A), around 400 km of footpaths that run from east to west over the northern Apennine range.

Inaugurated in the early 1980s, the route starts from the Bocca Trabaria pass, where Tuscany, Umbria and Le Marche meet, and sticks almost completely to the high Apennine crest until the Passo dei Due Santi, the pass between the provinces of Parma and Massa-Carrara. This is a great journey for great walkers, usually divided into 28 stages and challenging to do in its entirety, but less expert hikers will find it manageable in sections.

It’s not the only major hiking trail. The Via degli Dei and the Via della Lana e della Seta both thread their way through the Apennine forests, from Prato and Florence heading towards Bologna, while the Gothic Line retraces the historic front of World War II, slicing through the Apennines from the Apuan Riviera.
For single track enthusiasts in wild areas and woodlands, where pedalling means feeling free, Tuscany has much to offer. From ultra trails along spectacular ridgeline routes at altitudes in the range of 2,000 metres, with views across both sides over the peaks of the Tosco-Emilian Apennines. The ski lifts lead to downhill and freeride trails where adrenaline runs wild and fun is guaranteed. The rest of the Apennines, from Lunigiana to Garfagnana, Mugello and Casentino, is an endless web of routes where you can put your mountain bike’s suspension to the test. Technique and entertainment are also served in the Apuan Alps, where the scenery changes due to the uniquely rocky environment, a stone’s throw from the Versilia riviera. Further south, welcome to enduro territory along the coast of the Upper Maremma, a land of technical trails in the Mediterranean scrub that lead to coves and beaches: few places in the world boast tracks as memorable as these.

Road bikers know where to find inclines to test their legs, such as the Lucca area, the Empoli hills and the Pistoia mountains. Professional competitions and historic bike rallies have turned the spotlight back on Tuscany’s gravel roads, where white dust flies up along streets that link villages and vineyards, hills and views, a must for every cyclist. From Chianti to Crete Senesi, Val di Merse, Valdelsa and Val d’Orcia, the “heroic” cycling style is revived year-round, a vintage relationship with art, history and genuine Tuscan lifestyle. Dirt tracks and secondary roads, silence embraces road and gravel bikes. Cycling tourists can choose an adventure surrounded by astonishing beauty; from village to village, in art-filled cities, along the Tuscan Coast; the cycle paths of Versilia, the Etruscan Coast or the Argentario.
choose from the myriad circular routes, such as an e-bike ride from Abetone to Lago Nero, once a glacial basin, or the rinnenaries that run from Doganaccia to the stunning scenery of Lago Scaffaiolo. The Apennines descend slightly and become lush in Garfagnana, where a taste of mountain bike trails begins around Lago di Vagli, the lake that conceals a ghost town that only appears when the water is drained. Cycling along the dam is exciting, then the route climbs up through villages and along forest trails as far as Campocatino, where we come across a vast meadow, originating from an ancient glacial basin, with the striking rock of the Apuan Alps rising up before us. If the mountains are calling, continue to the perfumed high-altitude pastures and the sight of ridgeways from Monte Tondo to the Passo di Pradarena. Alternatively, head down valley, pedaling along the famous Ponte del Diavolo (Devil’s Bridge) and visiting the medieval town of Barga.

Further south and along the coast, the vegetation and aromas change, but the feelings and fun remain the same. Riding here means surrendering to the Mediterranean shrub, where the Tyrrhenian Sea meets the woodland of the Maremma hills and the climate stays mild year-round, especially by the sea. The Follonica, Punta Ala and Castiglione della Pescaia tri-angle, as far as the Massa Marittima hills, offers myriad enduro routes that connect the sea and beaches with the thick Mediterranean shrub. Cala Violina, a few minutes from Punta Ala, is the perfect place to try enduro with its fun-filled easy trails. It’s also a great place to mix sports and relaxation due to routes that lead straight to the beach, sunbathing ensured at the end of your ride. Nearby there’s the Bandite di Scarlino reserve, the land of long, technical and rocky ups and downs. Many cyclists choose this terrain as training ground for competition, complete with backpack and helmets. The fun continues in Castiglione della Pescaia with more entertaining and gentle routes, consisting of bends and shores. Not only does the coast teem with mountain bikers, so too does the entire inland area as far as Massa Marittima and continuing into the Colline Metallifere metal-bearing hills. Even further south, we simply have to mention unusual and charming destinations where mountain biking is practiced. The age-old Amiata volcano, with its chestnut, beech and fir forests, enjoys fresh air and is well-equipped for freeriders and downhillers, in addition to a loop that runs around the volcano, suitable for MTB and e-bikes. Another tip is the cycling paths on Elba Island, boasting views over the other islands in the Tuscan Archipelago. The Capoliveri bike park vaunts 5 permanent trails of varying difficulty covering more than 100 kilometres of tracks made famous by a spectacular World Cup edition, which was held along routes leading to Monte Calamita.
The penchant for cycling in Tuscany has been around for as long as cycling has. Historic fact and legend, it’s the region where the world’s first cycling competition Firenze-Empoli was held in 1870. The tradition continues today in professional meets and historic rallies that combine performance and competitiveness with festivals and the good life. Road and gravel biking enthusiasts will feel at home in Tuscany.

Amidst the streets and squares of Lucca, sat with an espresso in the coffee shops, it’s not hard to spot cyclists with their painstakingly maintained road bikes. The cycling culture is second only to the city’s beauty, whose province is often chosen by professional and amateur cycling teams for its quality of life and vicinity to the mountains with their inclines. From the city walls head for Monte Serra or scale the heights of the Apuan Alps, certain in the knowledge that the Versilia coastline is close by. Lands of champions and cycling teams, the Empolese Valdelsa and Valdinievole countryside are sought after for their hills and mountains. These glorious gradients were celebrated by the World Cycling Championships, which skirted towns like Montecatini with its thermal baths, to give an idea of the experiences available locally, and legendary climbs such as San Baronto, the natural arena of countless competitions and cycling rallies in the Lamporecchio municipality, the birthplace of many professional cyclists.

The Mugello, split between rural areas and mountains, is also a favourite destination among grimpeurs, bikers who excel at high altitude, due to the wide variety of routes and the overall organization. Classic trails for road cyclists are the Valico della Crocetta and Passo della Futa at 903 metres above sea level, the scene of myriads battles during the Giro d’Italia. Another favourite for climbers is the Passo della Raticosa, reachable from Firenzuola.

Central Tuscany, from Florence to Siena, never stops enchanting cyclists. Experts in climbing and altitudes will know that it’s easier to accumulate gradients in hilly areas like these due to the gentle ups and downs, and occasional surprises, than in the mountains. The hills (and vineyards!) of the Chianti Fiorentino and Senese are ridden every day by small groups of cyclists, regardless of whether their preference is for secondary roads or more adventurous gravel tracks. The nearby Valdelsa and Val di Merse offer endless roads off the beaten track, where cyclists can discover a more intimate, less travelled Tuscany, greener and often spellbinding. It’s heaven for bikers, no matter if road, gravel or mixed terrain is your bag.

We’ve reached the area south of Siena, pedalling along the legendary gravel roads as far as the red soil of Siena and the mystical lunar grey of the Crete Senesi, prior to entering the magical Val d'Orcia, with its unforgettable contours. The permanent route of the L’Eroica, the world’s most famous historic cycling rally celebrating the beautiful fatigue of pedalling, is the perfect way to explore the exceptional biking around the Siena area.
PEDALLING THROUGH TUSCANY’S SCENERY

There are still some roads left to be discovered and others where pedalling is all you have to think about. Cycling travellers and bikepackers, your two wheels are welcome along Tuscany’s trails. The region should be explored slowly, leaving enough time for unexpected encounters with nature and history, as well as a few stops to savour local specialities.

If everything you need fits into your bike’s saddle bags, Tuscany’s roads will never be long enough and its bends too few. Slowness is the buzzword. Mountain passes, hills galore and coastal routes if you’re looking for a monotonous trip, this is not the right place for you.

In 8 days, cyclists can travel the entire region along the most famous route in Italy, the Via Francigena. Also by bike, the Siena area offers breath-taking scenery and the Argentario headland provides an outdoor museum where you can regain your love of nature.

Tuscany is never shy around two-wheel travellers. The region’s roads escort mountain and road bikers in their discovery of destinations, from medieval villages to nature reserves, skirting towns and cities, Etruscan and Roman sites.

It’s up to you whether to stay in the comfort of a hotel, the charm of farmhouse accommodation embraced by the quietude of hills, the authenticity of a bed and breakfast, the simplicity of a campsite or whether to rest in a pinewood by the sea. Tuscany’s hospitality is varied and affordable for all.

The entire Tuscan Coast serves up every shade of blue in a race to chase the next bend, the next view of the sea, the next unexpected encounter with the ancient history of the dune just metres from the sea. From Livorno to Piombino, the Etruscan Coast is a canvas of unadulterated beauty nestled between the Mediterranean scrub and the vestiges of the people who inhabited these lands before the Roman age. From the Populonia acropolis to Cala Moresca, via Buca delle Fate, the 2,500 years that separate the present from the Etruscan civilization turn into mere centimetres. The Sassetti to Suvereto route is every cyclist’s dream, one bend after another in the Vall di Cornia, surrounded by dense shrub and cork oaks.

The Versilia Cycleway is much loved among enthusiasts for all those wishing to take a dip in the sea while biking along the coast. From Massa to Viareggio the route hugs the sea with its long cortege of bathing establishments and equipped beaches. If you fancy more adventure, the Lago di Massaciuccoli is waiting for you with its myriad hues at sunset for a boat ride among the reeds.

Further inland, between Montalbano and Valdinievole, check out the trail inspired by Pinocchio or ride the Via della Fiaba (“Fairytale Road” in English). From the plain to the hills, gravel or tarmac roads, historic towns and silence, primitive nature reigns supreme every which way in the Maremma. The Grand Tour della Maremma offers the promise of a ride that crisscrosses a rich and eclectic land, where farming is still a way of life.

Another ride on the flat is provided by the Sentiero della Bonifica cycle route. Follow the Canale Maestro della Val di Chiana, a waterway commissioned by the Grand Duke of Tuscany Leopoldo to reclaim and transform this important farming area, famous for its food. The direct itinerary between Arezzo and Chiusi includes a detour with a nice incline up to the ancient Etruscan town of Cortona, boasting breath-taking views over the entire valley.

All of inland Tuscany was made for adventure with a bikepacking spirit, with technical gear reduced to the bare minimum and lighter bikes also suitable for offroad. From the Maremma to Lunigiana, from the untamed Apeninnes to the famous Via degli Dei, if you’re hardy enough to withstand a few days of independent cycling, bikepacking is the best experience imaginable. In Tuscany there’s no shortage of comfort, but the choice to travel light is repaid with an incomparable feeling of freedom.
From extreme differences in gradient for those who love a gravity and adrenaline rush to the endless network of dirt tracks that run alongside little-used secondary roads, for road or gravel bike enthusiasts. Then there’s lots of mountain biking, almost as much as in Tuscany’s mountainous areas. Even for the most cool and collected cycling tourist, the region is dotted with towns and villages bursting with art and culture, always worth visiting without haste, plus there are the cycling tracks along the Tuscan Coast. Camping sites along the coast, farmhouse accommodation in the countryside, and hotels and historic homes prove excellent travel companions.

**Gravity mania**

The Apennines boasts two draws for downhill and freeride enthusiasts. Abetone Gravity Park is one of the largest bike parks in Italy, served by a cable car that covers a difference in height of 700 metres. Nearby there’s the very active Doganaccia, also reached by a cableway over 900 metres. Other gradients that move visitors can be found around Monte Amiata, in the far south of the region: expect biker amenities, mountain air and the magic of an ancient volcano.

**Trail area**

Between Punta Ala and Castiglione della Pescaia along the coast and Massa Marittima inland there’s one of the most striking and best-equipped “reserves” for enduro lovers, with a dash of Mediterranean flavour for couriers intending to alternate relaxation with other sports. The enduro tracks of Rincine, in the Florence mountains, are another area, with easy and more technical stretches, well known to enthusiasts. Total freedom not far from the Tuscan capital.

**E-Bike**

Spellbinding nature with the chance to visit villages and taste local flavours form the perfect combination for e-bike tours. A borderland between sea and mountains, the Lunigiana is the valley of a hundred castles. In the autumn, the woods turn orange and red, showing the forests in their most magical light. Alternatively, pedal in the fresh air of the Casentino forests: along a former railway, the trails of the Lama forest, the cobblestones and tracks of the charcoal burners.

**Gravel paradise**

In Tuscany, gravel means everything because the legendary dirt tracks are everywhere. L’Eroica, the most famous historic cycling event in the world, and Strade Bianche, the southemmost professional road bike race in Europe, has made the routes of Chianti, Crete Senesi and Val d’Orcia into legendary areas, a must do for cyclists. Some itineraries, in certain cases permanent and well-sign-posted, can be used all year round. In the middle of Siena stands Piazza del Campo, a breath-taking square in which to stop for a coffee.

**Road & valleys**

The road cyclist is a collector of little-used secondary roads, gradients, bends and nice places to eat. Test the roads that run through vineyards and cypress trees between Bolgheri and Castagneto Carducci, continuing with one bend after another towards Sasseta and Suvereto. The 172 km of the Val di Merse Grand Tour can be done in one go or in stages, with a stop at the roofless San Galgano Abbey or spending the night at the bike hotels of Casole d’Elisa. Mugello is a must too, an area where the rural landscape and hills offer the perfect training ground for cyclists.

**Slow touring**

The ancient Via Francigena is the long and interesting cycleway that crosses the whole of Tuscany from north to south, stage by stage. Other enticement comes from the coast. Pedalling along the cycle tracks of the Argentario headland, along the stunning Feniglia spit, through pinewoods and nature reserves before finishing on the beach. In Versilia there’s the most “coastal” cycle path in Italy: totally beside the sea, it offers countless opportunities for a dip.
They’re also known as the Sacred Forests: 36,000 hectares of nature where for centuries the faithful have sought contact with the divine. Monks, saints and hermits have trodden the trails in the shade of ancient beech trees breathing in the spirituality that visitors still sense today. We tiptoe in, reassured by the riches of some of the finest forests in Europe.

These forests have inspired poets and guided saints and hermits in perpetual search of the truth, driving humans to strip the trees, a fixture bearing witness to the passing of time. The woods and ridges of the Parco Nazionale Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna guard a historic natural patrimony that can only be understood by walking their trails. Midway between Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, the 36,000 hectares of protected land deserve to be discovered on tiptoe without leaving a trace of one’s passage. These “Sacred Forests”, as they are known, have been frequented by humans for millennia, and for millennia humans have known how to protect them, sparking a symbiosis that has been passed down to our guardianship. The Lago degli Idoli, Camaldoli Hermitage and La Verna Sanctuary are vivid vestiges of the profound spirituality that resides in this nature reserve.

As the trail emerges from the undergrowth, the horizon is caressed by the vegetation of some of the finest forests in Europe. Its green heart is found in the Sasso Fratino nature reserve, a protected oasis where human beings have not set foot for centuries. It is one of the last remaining virgin forests in Europe, which thanks to its impassable terrain survived the search for timber to build Florence Cathedral. Its beechwoods, some of which are 600 years old, have been inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. These gigantic trees of rare beauty are witnesses to time that feels like it has stood still beneath the canopies. The immobility and silence of the undergrowth conceal the lushest of nature in constant flux. Since humans practically forsook this land, the vegetation resumed its undisturbed growth, strengthening an ecosystem rich in life over 1,000 plant species, centuries-old ash trees, fragile anemones and narcissi, wild boar, deer, mouflon and the predatory wolf, as well as the song of dozens of birds that avert the wood when intruders tread here. Six hundred kilometres of trails threading through the park are the most surprising way to visit it. Our footsteps are the only trace that will remain of our time here, soon forgotten in an ecosystem that has perpetuated the natural lifecycle for millennia. Leave your car at home as the trails are the only means of intensifying the harmony and richness that warrant discovery. Choose the routes to the top of Monte Falterona and Monte Falco, get lost in the solitude of the Grande Escursione Appenninica, embrace the silence and mysticism of the Sentiero delle Foreste Sacre (Holy Forests Trail). From winter walks wearing snowshoes to summer crossings of Lago di Ridracoli, the park always has something to offer. The quietude of a snowy clearing, the pounding Arno river as the snow thaws, the dense fir forests that tremble in the wind during a summer storm; the mewing of deer hidden in the autumn foliage.
ANCIENT ROADS

CASENTINESI FORESTS

APENNINE PARK

APUANE PARK

TUSCAN ARCHIPELAGO

SAN ROSSORE PARK

MAREMMA PARK

MINING PARK

VAL DI CORNIA PARKS

The deepest of valleys, steep sides and sheer rocky crags as well as caves that lead into the bowels of the mountain, the Apuans comprise an impressive environment that’s among the wildest in Tuscany. The harsh landforms have earned the area's suffix of Alps. A challenge for hikers and climbers, the contours of the Apuans switch between spectacular peaks, rocky arches and world-famous marble.

A unique mountain range in the whole of Italy, the Apuan Alps look like they rise up out of the sea to touch the sky with their rocky pinnacles. The geographical position and varied nature have created special habitats and unimaginable biodiversity to the extent that the area became a protected nature reserve in 1985, establishing the Parco Regionale delle Alpi Apuane.

The park extends across approximately 20,000 hectares in the Lucca and Massa-Carrara provinces and is bordered to the north by the river Magra, to the east and south by the river Serchio and its valley, and to the west by the Versilia plain, a strip of land that separates it from the sea.

A few kilometres from the coast, impressive massifs rise up abruptly, touching almost 2,000 metres above sea level. Monte Pisanino at 1,946 m is the highest peak, followed by numerous other summits towering above 1,500 m like Monte Tambura, Cavallo and Pania della Croce. These ranges encompass the marble basins from which blocks of white marble were extracted and carved by the likes of Michelangelo and Canova, as well as decorating buildings worldwide. Weathering and the mining industry have shaped the chalky metamorphic rock, creating a majestic and surreal landscape.

The narrow Apuan valleys have been populated since distant times with countless vestiges of ancient nomadic peoples and prehistoric relics. It’s a land of myriad castles, fortifications and sanctuaries that speckle the more accessible slopes. The area is rich in history and habitats, home to rare endemic species that need pristine nature to live. Oak, chestnut and beech trees give way to mountain pastures at higher altitudes with flowers of all shades, plus a variety of ecosystems whose skies are circled by peregrine falcons, alpine choughs and the rarer red-billed chough, which has become the park’s symbol. Amphibians, such as the spectacled salamander and the Apuan alpine newt, make their home in the streams and rivers, while the speleomaniac prefers the darkness of the grottoes. Ungulates like deer and wild boar roam the woods; mouflon head for the steep slopes. The area’s rarity is the snow vole, a small rodent that came here in the Ice Age. Older than the Apennines, the Apuan Alps are a precious environment in terms of geology, flora and fauna, history and prehistory, offering unmissable scenery and a few food festivals where you can taste local specialities such as the famous cured meat Lardo di Colonnata..
More than 600 kilometres of coastline, split between islands and the Tyrrhenian Sea, plus the streams and rivers that flow through the rocks of the Alps and Apennines. Not only relaxation and wide-ranging views, but fun and adventure too. On or under the surface, Tuscany offers countless activities for water lovers, while rivers and streams wait to be tamed in the region’s woodlands and nature reserves. Every outdoor experience inspires excitement and emotions, from an adrenaline rush to feelings of freedom. Behind every activity there’s a community of enthusiasts, from north to south, in well-known and evocative areas: Versilia, Etruscan Coast, Maremma and the Silver Coast as well as the mesmerizing islands of the Tuscan Archipelago. On shore, the skippers and their crews exchange friendly advice about the wind as surfers, wind and kite, wait for the right wave. The mountains and forests of inland Tuscany are endowed with waterways. Garfagnana and Lunigiana, Montagna Pistoiese and Casentino are home to exciting action-packed activities. Whether you choose the thrill of white water rafting or opt for the calm of SUP from canoeing to kayaking, Tuscany’s waterways are perfect for people looking for something new to do as well as those who already know how to dominate the currents that inevitably lead to the sea. Being at one with aquatic nature is recommended to everyone who, oblivious to the seasons, yearns for the freedom to go exploring.
THE THRILL OF THE RIVER

Let yourself be carried by the currents and be immersed in wild and wonderful nature explored on or under the water’s surface, along rivers that have made Tuscany a lush land and a haven of water sports.

Tuscany’s contours are topped with high mountain ranges, where water, the main source of life, gushes forth. From the spring to the valley, fresh water flows throughout the region, carving a landscape that is as idyllic as it is wild. It’s hard to resist the temptation to explore these waters, so just surrender to the natural element and dive into a water adventure or two. Canyoning permeates on every level: venturing upstream against the current to discover extraordinary gorges carved deep into the rock by the same rivers with the passing of geological ages. You can even glimpse the sky reflected in their depths. Like the canyon that inspired Dante and his infernal scenes that we find in the Apennine foothills near Lucca: the Orrido di Botri, a canyon, very narrow at points, surrounded by a magical rugged landscape where humans have never interfered. The deepest canyon in Tuscany, whose sheer rock faces reach heights of 200 metres, is covered in luxuriant vegetation with unusually shaped beech trees on the slopes that climb up in search of light. At certain points, the canyon walls draw very close, affording low light filtration and creating a particularly fresh and damp microclimate to the extent that the beech trees grow in the climate lower than their usual habitat.

It’s an unusual landscape but it’s not the only one like this in Tuscany. The Lunigiana conceals a place that’s both wild and striking, worth exploring with water around our legs and even up to our waist, always looking up to the skies at the Stretti di Giaredo with its liver red rock faces. Jumping and sliding are the things to do at Rio Selvano and Serra in Garfagnana as canyoning experiences are served in some of the loveliest fresh water in Tuscany. Some rivers have carved wider valleys, perfect for unsinkable rafts, riding the rapids while having the best of fun. Garfagnana also offers myriad paddling adventures at every level, from easy-going experiences in the Serchio river, a great place to be introduced to the activity, to slopes along fast-flowing foaming rivers like the Lima, whose gorges are unforgettable.

The water that descends from the Apennines flows as far as Central Tuscany: the river Elsa around Siena and the Ombrone in the Maremma offers some unexpected riverside trekking and soft canoeing and kayaking experiences. If you’re a fan of still water, the Lago di Bilancino is the right place for you. The man-made lake in the Mugello area, which is one of the largest in Italy, quenches your thirst for the great outdoors with its canoeing and kayaking facilities. On the northeast shores of the lake there’s a nature reserve that’s a treasure trove of biodiversity. The WWF-managed Gabbianello Oasis is a wetland that’s home to rare bird species such as the white stork, pink flamingo, crane and osprey. It’s heaven for birdwatchers and water sports lovers, with a few beaches where you can catch some rays. Paddle in hand and going with the flow of nature, we cross through pristine nature, skimming historic villages and even arriving in city centres. By kayak, canoe or in a raft along the river Arno, surprising perspectives and curious panoramas of Florence are revealed as if by magic. It’s a way of going against the current, a brand-new way of getting to know the city in the great outdoors. Try SUP for an experience that’s accessible to all, even the mobility impaired. Tuscany’s waterways flow from north to south and can be enjoyed and explored by SUP, the perfect way of experiencing the rivers and discovering the most refreshing ravines.

CANYONING | RAFTING | KAYAK

The Apennine slopes and beyond, Tuscany’s many waterways offer opportunities to enjoy action sports in extraordinary settings, from gorges with the tallest rock faces to valleys crisscrossed by white water rapids.
The wind and the waves give a helping hand to the many outdoor experiences that can be enjoyed in Tuscany. Surfing, kitesurfing and windsurfing bring to mind exotic settings and beaches. It’s hard to think that some of these sports are equally popular in the Chianti hills, but enthusiasts know that, here, there are waves worth riding, acrobatics to try and winds to take flight. The Tyrrhenian Sea, which caresses the Maremma coast, invites us to go looking impossible out at sea, a dream come true for those who, awestruck and somewhat fearful, can only imagine the salty taste of freedom on the jetty of Forte dei Marmi. Who knows if this pier will become a launch pad for those who, inspired by the talent of others, decide to take on the waves with a new confidence-filled spirit of adventure, seeking professional instruction from one of the schools along this magical stretch of the Tuscan coast. Kitesurfing fans can listen to the wind and experience the Versilia breeze with swollen kites and wings at their feet, feelings that only the new Mercury-style sea gods. The Tyrrenian Sea, which caresses the Maremma coast, invites us to go looking on the horizon for the seven pearls, the seven islands of the Tuscan Archipelago, breathing in the clean air and dreaming of the blue depths, while the coastline throws down the gauntlet to surfers read to tame the treacherous waves of Ansedonia. Midway between the Maremma and the Costa d’Argento (Silver Coast), before encountering the beauty that the Argentario headland gifts us, Castiglione della Pescaia and Talamone Bay extend beneath the surfboard of those in pursuit of sea winds, capturing their power inside the kite and harnessing it through windsurfing, moving us like a sovereign who, perched in a palanquin, admires the endless majesty of his saltwater realm before seeking shelter in his apartments, to rest with the tiredness of the night, without ever stopping to observe the dark moonlit expanse, full of promise for the day to come. Elba is evidently a large island where the wind blows ceaselessly. The best-known beaches are home to many sailing and surfing schools with equipment to hire for all ages and levels of preparation. All you have to do is decide where to point your windsurf into the blue of the waves. The alternative’s not bad either enjoy a more relaxing adventure by SUP or kayak in the open sea.

**PHOTOS**

Left: in the background, the mountains of Corsica with the Elba Island sea in the foreground.
Photo by Roberto Ridi

Below: windsurfing in the Argentario sea.
Photo by Daniele Bettazzi

Right: a surfer riding the waves of Elba Island.
Photo by Roberto Ridi

**EXPLORE THE COAST, ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND**

Looking for waves? When surfing is a raison d’être and kitesurfing is a must, the Tuscan Coast is a marine theme park for adventurers who, on a board powered by the wind, take on the waves and develop the wings needed to be set free.
IN TUSCANY’S BLUE GOLD

Underwater treasures only discoverable to those who dive into the blue counterbalancing the sky. Plunge into contemplation of the coastal sea beds and islands of Tuscany to explore marine nature. Surrounded by coral, fish and colours so intense they don’t seem real, the experience consists in seeing the most hidden and little frequented part of the sea, where even history offers a hand to adventurers.

Snorkelling and diving are perfect activities for people who love to immerse themselves in contemplation, those who do not stop at the surface of things, but who want to explore, discover and find something absolutely new in a sea that conceals wonders just a few metres beneath the layer of light where we swim. For sea-loving explorers, the Tuscan coast gifts heightened emotions and the islands, luminous pearls on the surface, reveal themselves as ultimate destinations, oases of underwater beauty guaranteed by years of environmental protection.

The Etruscan Coast tells to those who dive into its waters the mysteries of the Gulf of Baratti, once a flourishing Etruscan port and commercial hub, now a tourist destination whose sandy sea beds could still hide the remains of a civilization that disappeared centuries ago. The rocky depths of Maremma around Grosseto are different again, home to countless varieties of fish that show their colours to people who approach them gently. There’s a treasure chest beneath the seven islands known as the “Pearls of the Mediterranean”, where the words of Venus in love still reverberate in the Tuscan Archipelago, a place so incredible and beautiful a few metres below the surface, where the water pressure transforms into a desire to discover. Going snorkelling off Elba Island means being astonished by the fish and seagrass architecture that distinguish these depths, of which anemones, octopi and coral form a single part. Diving off Scoglietto di Portoferraio means embracing something truly amazing. A protected nature zone since 1971, numerous underwater treasures can be found here, from multiple life forms. (During just one dive you’ll find practically all the varieties of marine flora and fauna that exist in the Mediterranean!)

During just one dive you’ll find practically all the varieties of marine flora and fauna that exist in the Mediterranean.

Photos
Left and above: snorkelling in the Elba Island sea. Photos by Roberto Ridi
Right: deep-water diving on the beds off Elba Island. Photo by Riccardo Buralli

Chapel of Punta del Fenaio in the north and Punta del Capel Rosso at the far south represent both arrival and departure points of a circular route around Giglio Island year round for those who aren’t bound by the seasons.

Capraia is a true paradise for people who love to snorkel. The island’s volcanic origins has made the coast rocky and ripe with opportunities to flipper past sea beds and ever crystal-clear water. Marvels can also be found beneath Pianosa, an island closed to the public for 150 years, keeping its environment well preserved. Through a diving mask, we can see a pristine underwater world, home to lobsters, eagle rays, sunfish and barracuda, happily swimming around visitors.

The lighthouses of Punta del Fenaio in the north and Punta del Capel Rosso at the far south represent both arrival and departure points of a circular route around Giglio Island year round for those who aren’t bound by the seasons.

PHOTOS
Left and above: snorkelling in the Elba Island sea. Photos by Roberto Ridi
Right: deep-water diving on the beds off Elba Island. Photo by Riccardo Buralli
Casting off, setting sail, distancing ourselves from terra ferma and looking toward the fixed line of the horizon, knowing that sooner or later we will reach a new land and a new port, this is the adventure that awaits those who choose the sailboat. Tuscany’s Tyrrhenian coastline beckons people with a seafaring soul and the mind of an adventurer, an invitation to cut through the waves and harness the wind in pursuit of new experiences and faithful old feelings.

Numerous routes are on offer, all different and interesting, for those wishing to navigate the open seas or dropping anchor to explore beaches and towns. Viareggio, in Versilia, is a fantastic place either to rest or to indulge in sports like surfing; sail south, rounding Marina di Pisa heading for Castiglioncello and Piombino, before making landfall after the beaches of Maremma around Grosseto and visiting Castiglione della Pescaia, while the Silver Coast (Costa d’Argento) offers sandy gems that entice sun worshippers, fishermen and photographers; stop off in Orbetello, a gateway to the Argentario. While it’s true that sunbathing is a summer pastime, it’s equally true that the coast and its locals don’t wait for the summer to make an appearance: they are here year round with their tales once you get to know them.

The islands of the Tuscan Archipelago never disappoint true seafarers. With their bright colours and shimmering shades of blue and green, in the summer the island waters resemble an ever-moving painting in which you could set sail, while in the winter they take on that unusual greyish blue hue, which tempts us fearfully with the centuries-old secrets concealed in the remotest depths of the maritime trenches, forgotten and waiting to be discovered.

Out of the seven islands, Elba is the pivotal point from which to explore the entire Archipelago. From here, the adventurer can reach the islands of Pianosa and Capraia easily, as well as circumnavigating Elba Island itself. On a good day’s sailing you can even enter what’s known as the Cetacean Sanctuary, a triangular area between Elba, Capraia and Corsica where whales and dolphins are often sighted. Two lighthouses attract attention and direct navigation to and around Giglio Island, which with Giannutri deserve their own inspection by sailing and fishing lovers. Professional or amateur fishermen will enjoy these waters, although there are restrictions. Fishing is not permitted in some port areas, especially during high season. The zone around Scoglietto di Portoferraio, a favourite with divers, is under environmental protection, so its fauna cannot be touched!

With their bright colours and shimmering shades of blue and green, in the summer the island waters resemble an ever-moving painting in which you could set sail.
From a region that vaunts countless kilometres of coastline it’s no surprise that a wide range of outdoor activities and sports are on offer all year round. Come armed with a spirit of adventure and go exploring, Tuscany and its beaches are waiting for you!

01 Surfing pioneers
In Italy, the first group of surfers to get to grips with this sport started right here in Tuscany. Thanks to these “pioneers of the board”, sea adventurers who imported surfing to the national soil, Versilia is still regarded as the surfing capital of Italy.

02 Traces of ancient civilizations
Having landed on the beautiful beach of the Gulf of Baratti, the unusual grey-black colour of the sand immediately makes an impact, bearing the traces of a centuries-old activity. Iron was worked locally here in ancient times, whose traces are still found in the dark shade of the sand due to ferrous residues that, shining in the sun, make the entire Gulf shine too.

03 In the footsteps of the great
Sailing around Elba might spark interest in the island’s history, dropping anchor near the Napoleonic residences. Napoleon Bonaparte stayed on the island during his first exile between 1814 and 1815. His residences were the Villa dei Mulini and Villa di San Martino, both of which are open to the public. Monte Cristo island, one of the seven islands that comprise the Tuscan Archipelago, was the inspiration behind Alexandre Dumas’s novel starring the famous count of the same name.

04 SUP and surf for all
Tourism becomes accessible also thanks to sport. The beaches along the Tyrrhenian coast are popular with athletes and assistants of the Italian disabled surfing team, offering opportunities to surf and do SUP for individuals with different types of disabilities. Cecina’s beaches also offer similar possibilities. Accessible SUP is on offer on the Arno river in Florence to see the city from a different point of view under the Ponte Vecchio.

05 Republican Pisa
The coastal Pisa area, suitable for different outdoor sports, might provide a cue to start a history and sports trail, a treasure hunt for clues about the age when business was thriving and Pisa was one of the four Maritime Republics. In the 11th century, Pisa won its freedom. The many sailing clubs along the coast testify to the tradition.

06 Suspended over the river
The Val di Lima is an outdoor adventure park, where water and nature play starring roles. It’s a place where unique activities can be enjoyed in absolute safety: go canyoning, abseiling suspended in the air by cables or plumb for the more relaxing option of SUP (Stand Up Paddleboarding) along the Lima river.

DIVING ALL AROUND

NATURAL EXPLORATION CYCLING & MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE
Seven islands, seven gems, each one different to the others, each vaunting singularities, cloaked in myth and history: seven sisters worth visiting, discovering, admiring and respecting, navigating between hiking, sport and respect for an extraordinary ecosystem. Welcome to the largest marine nature reserve in Europe.

PARCO NAZIONALE ARCHIPELAGO TOSCANO

There’s something eternal about the Tuscan coast and its islands, patches of land “linked” to the mainland since seven pearls from Aphrodite’s necklace dropped into the sea. Born as a woman out of the sea foam, the goddess sought to reach Eros who was waiting for her on dry land. Instead of sinking, the pearls stayed afloat, becoming the seven islands that comprise the Parco Nazionale Arcipelago Toscano. Although the divine origin of these islands is the stuff of legends, there are no doubts that they are genuine gems. Many areas enjoyed protected status and now the Archipelago is the largest marine nature park in Europe, a major attraction for active tourists.

The main island is Elba, surrounded by a sea so clear that it reminds us of faraway exotic beaches. Monte Capanne, the highest peak on the island, can be reached on hiking trails and by mountain bike routes, which thread their way all over the island, while Portoferraio reveals its underwater treasures to divers. The little coves of Giglio Island are almost a mirror image of the myriad sheer cliffs that drop down to the sea, where humans have built terraces that have now become characteristic of the landscape. The two lighthouses found at the ends of the island, Faro del Fenaio to the north and Faro di Capel Rosso to the south, point the way for sailors. The lush Mediterranean scrub echoes in the rare and protected wild fauna that, with a stroke of luck, you’ll meet on a long hike. Capraia is different again, a volcanic island whose rocky environment inhs unusual beauty, imbued with wild, untamed nature. An abundance of life extends near Pianosa, named after the oddly flat structure that distinguishes it from the other six islands. Less historic and more “novel” is the figure conjured up by Montecristo. The island on which Dumas set his famous book after he’d visited it is now a protected nature reserve. Only a few people can arrive on its shores every year: the only people who live here are the island’s custodian and his family, surrounded by unique fauna.

Although the divine origin of these islands is the stuff of legends, there are no doubts that they are genuine gems: the Archipelago is the largest marine nature park in Europe.
A white blanket covers the mountains of Tuscany all winter long, continuing into the first days of spring and making an early appearance at the end of autumn. The snow paves the way to a season of action sports, the outdoors, fun and creativity. All we must do is choose what activity to try and where to do it. Snow lovers, take heed, because you’ll be spoilt for choice. Downhill skiing, snowboarding and snowshoeing, whatever your favourite discipline, from the Alps to the Apennines, from the famous resort of Abetone, to Monte Amiata, Falterona and the Apuans, adventure is around the corner.

Skiing is a popular hobby, the winter sport par excellence. Skiing is freedom, speed and style. It’s competition and combines all disciplines that require snow and two long, flat boards attached to the feet. It’s pure adrenaline too, which builds as you climb the mountain slope and explodes on the descent down to the valley. Free or slalom, downhill skiing is one of the most entertaining ways to spend your time in the snow. But it’s not the only way. Snowboarding is exciting with one thrill after another on long days, always ready for a last-minute ride. Boards aside, we stick rackets on our feet for amazing hikes into the snowy woods. Step by step, one footprint after another and hovering over the snow, the scenery is at its most magical while snowshoeing.

While nature’s resting, Tuscany becomes even more candid and the outdoor spirit keeps us warm and ready for endless adventures in the snow.
In the winter, holidays and free time are synonymous with sport and the outdoors. Snow and physical activity that’s exciting and surrounded by nature spark adrenaline-fuelled skiing at full speed down mountain slopes as well as energetic uphill hikes. Beginners feel at home on the nursery slopes, ideal for taking your first steps on skis or snowboards. Exciting outings in the snow are not only the hallmark of Northern Tuscany. Monte Amiata stands in the central south of the region, in the pre-Apennine mountains, making the start of the Val d’Orcia, Val di Chiana and Maremma. Famous for fabulous hiking, in the winter the area makes for delightful snowshoeing and countless outdoor activities. The volcanic slopes are crisscrossed with entertaining ski and snowboard slopes winding along 12 kilometres of downhill, 10km of cross-country and vaunting eight ski lifts. Surrounded by immense views from the Apennines and the Apuans, there’s the small ski resort of Casone di Profecchia in the Castiglione di Garfagnana area. It’s linked by several kilometres of downhill and cross-country slopes to another nearby resort, Passo delle Radici, which in turn links to a third resort, Caregine, forming the Garfagnana ski district. In addition to the usual snow sport, here you can enjoy alpine skiing and snowshoeing with views that will take your breath away. Continuing west across the Apennines, we find an area famous for its castles and untouched nature: the Lunigiana. Among sea and mountains, the views range over the La Spezia Gulf, the Cinque Terre and its islands as far as Corsica. Winter in the Lunigiana is the land of snow adventures in the Zum Zeri-Passo Due Santi area. On the border between Tuscany, Emilia and Liguria in the region’s westernmost municipality of Zeri, Lunigiana offers something for all tastes: pistes of all levels, nursery slopes and a snowpark for skiing, snowboarding and snowshoeing fun, boasting incredible views of this corner of Tuscany, an outdoor theme park at
When the temperature dips, the adrenaline rises and outdoor fun is guaranteed in Tuscany.

zero degrees. Even where ski facilities are lacking you can still enjoy the charm of a Tuscan winter. A network of mountain trails in the Apennines and Apuans combine with routes suitable for exploring by snowshoeing and skins. Pratomagno in the Valdarno, Falterona in the Casentinesi Forests National Park and the mountains around Marradi in the upper Mugello are just some of the mountains to be enjoyed on foot in the snow.

If downhill skiing’s your bag, you’ll find snow and ice to your tastes. In the Apuan Alps enjoy the slopes affording sea views and unparalleled beauty. Where the incline becomes steep and stubby, the ascents take on an alpine style, forcing you to switch your skins for crampons. Excitement is ensured for wild walks strictly for experts only.

The mountains of Tuscany offer endless unforgettable outdoor activities when snow is on the ground.
In the winter the hours of sunlight diminish but the thirst for adventure is as strong as ever. Days are intense in the Tuscan snow-topped mountains. Skiing, snowboarding and snowshoeing mean the fun never ends and there's far more to sport than competitions. There’s no better way to end a long, snow-charged day than by devouring delicious local cuisine. Taste the lesser-known flavours discovering Tuscan farming traditions.

01 Doganaccia
The ski resort of Doganaccia is situated in the Pistoia mountains, near the medieval village of Cutigliano and Abetone, with which it is well connected. The area is equipped with winter ski camps and nursery slopes for novices, plus more than 15 kilometres of challenging pistes to get hearts racing among skiers, snowboarders and lovers of long snow days. Cross-country tracks take pride of place as well as countless snowshoeing trails surrounded by conifers and beech forests. The vegetation also clears to make way for downhill skiing.

02 Monte Tambura
One of the highest mountains in the Apuan Alps almost brushing 1900 metres above sea level, Monte Tambura is popular among downhill skiers and less so among climbing enthusiasts, which is unusual in this mountain range. It’s not particularly tricky to climb, making Monte Tambura ideal for those learning to ski downhill. Plus, the views become more incredible the higher you reach.

03 Pratomagno
The massif rises up and divides the Valdarno from Casentino, its wide ridge covered with verdant mountain pastures that enjoy copious snowfall in the winter. Pratomagno is perfect for peaceful snowshoeing, with striking views over the Arno Valley on one side and the Val di Chiana on the other; walking as far as the Croce del Pratomagno, the area’s famous cross. Opened in 1928, it’s a large iron monument marking the mountain’s highest point at 1548 metres above sea level.

04 San Pellegrino in Alpe
“Among the myriad flowers vaunted by the Apennines, San Pellegrino, you are the loveliest of all: protruding over abysses and amid the murmurings of the beechwoods, into the blue of the skies.” A lovely Garfagnana village on the border with Emilia, San Pellegrino in Alpe is the highest settlement in the Apennines at an altitude of 1525 metres. It’s a great base for snowshoeing through magical beechwoods that make way for views over the Apennines, Apuans and the Garfagnana Valley.

05 Monte Amiata
The prettiest of villages lie on the slopes of this ancient extinct volcano that boasts ski slopes and trails through age-old chestnut groves. As well as setting the scene, the forest serves up the sublime autumn fruit: the chestnut. Emblazoned with the IGP hallmark, it’s the key ingredient in recipes old and new, from desserts to pasta dishes, or simply roasted. Every occasion is a good one to enjoy Monte Amiata chestnuts: they’re even the stars of countless festivals and folk events.

06 Lunigiana
Land of castles and lush nature, the Lunigiana is a historic area that offers endless possibilities for outdoor activities, even in the winter. Sporting urges are not the only ones to be satisfied here. For a taste of Lunigiana, feast on local culinary specialities such as testaroli pancakes, herb quiches and panigacci unleavened bread, traditional fare often served in lodges and restaurants in the Zum Zen-Passo Due Santi ski resort after a day of snow-centric activities.
ANCIENT ROADS
vaunt important horse centres, home
ricina and San Rossore neighbourhoods
Horse riding is a tradition. Pisa’s Barba-
Borbone
located in the nineteenth-century
cork oaks. The park’s visitors’ centre is
Tenuta di Tombolo
Mediterranean shrub is the dominant fea-
va Palatina, are all found locally.
and pinewoods, the lifeforms and land-
sapes are extraordinary.
The large protected area is situated along
the coastline between Pisa and Livorno
and encompasses a range of habitats.
Tenuta San Rossore is the centre of the
park. 4,800 hectares that belonged to
the President of the Italian Republic until
the hills form a
coastal backbone, topping the deep greenery of the
woods and Mediterranean shrub.
The Alberese visitors’ centre is a hub
for cyclists and walkers before they
venture along the park’s trails, even on
night hikes led by professional guides.
In the winter a carriage ride offers
peace and wonder to visitors and bird-
watchers. It’s the perfect vehicle to
reach hibernation sites, even when the
weather’s inclement.
The long stretches of the Maremma
are ideal for Nordic walkers who adore
nature and are always looking for new
routes to explore.
Among the hidden coves
along the rocky coast or the
clearings in the pine groves,
you might come across
Maremma cows grazing and
guided by the “butteri”.

SAN ROSSORE PARK
A leap into the biodiversity brimming in 23,000 hectares of parkland, a treasure trove that extends to the beaches of the coastline between Pisa and Livorno. A silent approach is appropriate: walking the trails, discovering the waterways by boat and the life here that makes every encounter simply wondrous.

Because of its wide variety of environments and activities, the Parco Regionale di Migliarino, San Rossore, Massaciuccoli must be visited to be understood. And every season is ripe with opportunity. From the sand dunes that separate the hinterland from the sea to the Mediterranean shrub, swamps where birds nest and pinewoods, the lifeforms and landscapes are extraordinary.

The large protected area is situated along the coastline between Pisa and Livorno and encompasses a range of habitats. Tenuta San Rossore is the centre of the park. 4,800 hectares that belonged to the President of the Italian Republic until the mid-1990s.

The park is divided into four sections: Tenuta di Tombolo, a sumptuous complex of Mediterranean scrub and pinewoods, and the park’s visitors’ centre; the Oasi di Massaciuccoli, the exotic gardens of Villa Ginori, near Piaggetta, and the Oasi Lipu, an area where birds nest in the reeds of the lake; and Alberese, a natural reserve on the Uccellina mountains.

The Parco Regionale di Migliarino, San Rossore, Massaciuccoli is a kaleidoscope of different natural environments: sand dunes, Mediterranean scrub, the remains of an ancient pine wood, swamps teeming with life and stately buildings. On foot, horseback, by bike or boat, alone or with a guide, the myriad moments offered by the park will keep you entertained.

SAN ROSSORE PARK

Tuscany’s first and most amazing park due to its variety of environments and one of the wildest given the integrity of the natural habitats. Nature here is the focal point. Lower the volume to discover it: on foot, horseback or snorkelling. Leave only your footprints behind.

If you’re in search of the wild, the Parco Regionale della Maremma is a must. Tuscany’s first park protects an environment in which human actions have neither wreaked damage nor changed its appearance. Among the hidden coves along the rocky coast or the clearings in the pinewoods, you might come across Maremma cows grazing and guided by the “butteri”, shepherds on horseback who have led the herd here for centuries. Just like the local cowboys, a horse ride around the park catapults you into a timeless dimension.

The northernmost border is marked by the river Ombrone, whose placid waters can be enjoyed in a canoe as far as the mouth, even if you’ve never tried the activity before. Slightly south, you encounter the striking Calieno-go beach, a long stretch of sand that’s flanked by the Marina Alberese pine wood, where a sixteenth-century tower stands guard. Even further south, towards Talamone, fans of snorkelling can explore the nooks and rocky grottoes of Cannelle beach.

The Monti dell’Uccellina are a constant presence in the park. The hills form a coastal backbone, topping the deep greenery of the woods and Mediterranean shrub.

The Oasi di Massaciuccoli is a hub for cyclists and walkers before they venture along the park’s trails, even on night hikes led by professional guides.

The long stretches of the Maremma are ideal for Nordic walkers who adore nature and are always looking for new routes to explore.

Among the hidden coves along the rocky coast or the clearings in the pine groves, you might come across Maremma cows grazing and guided by the “butteri”.

www.parco-maremma.it

The routes that explore the Parco Regionale della Maremma start at the Alberese visitors’ centre. Here you can find information about accessibility and the trails that reach all over the reserve, from sandy coves to the woods of the Uccellina Mountains.

www.parco-marina.it
On leaving the monuments and graceful scenery behind, Tuscany has much to offer to thrill seekers. The region’s natural beauty and historic cities can be equally discovered from a point of view dedicated to those who dare.

In Tuscany there’s no shortage of chances to enjoy a panoramic flight or for travellers and sports lovers unique moments of absolute excitement. Choose the place and adrenaline level and let yourself be guided by an expert.

The destinations are diverse, from the mountains around Pistoia, with its harsh, wild environment, to Florence and Lucca, art cities par excellence and the surrounding hills shaped by mankind’s love of wine, the coastlines that plunge down to the sea, and even the Apennine forests.

No previous experience is needed; just the willpower to explore, overcome your limits and have fun. Take a few steps and you’ll be up in the air with a professional instructor: above you there are only clouds and the views extend as far as the horizon.

Whether you’re the one controlling the wing or relaxing with a drink while watching the sunset, taking flight in Tuscany will make you fall in love with this land like no other activity could ever do. And when your feet are back on the ground, you won’t be able to think about anything else.
Imagine the feeling of freedom of moving in the air, the wind our only captor. Imagine the wild beauty of the Apennines...

The wind rises up the hill, making the branches rustle. The wing tightens. The wait is over. Two steps and the ground is already far beneath our feet, above us there’s only sky and beneath there’s Tuscany.

Imagine the feeling of freedom of moving in the air, the wind our only captor. Imagine the wild beauty of the Apennines, the marble shades of the Apuan Alps, the green hills surrounding Florence, the varied scenery and history of the Garfagnana, the deep blue of Elba Island. There’s no need to use our imagination to blend these images as there are infinite ways of visiting Tuscany from the sky.

Vaunting more than twenty free-flying sites throughout the region, the only restriction on paragliding or hang gliding is the time you have available. Whether you’re a professional or you’ve never flown before, the choices on offer never disappoint. Paragliding and hang gliding are the freest form of flying that human beings can experience. Hanging from a wing or a glider, we are alone with our intuition and abilities. For some it’s recklessness, but ask anyone who flies and the doubts are cast aside: it’s the most exciting experience you’ll ever have.

The adrenaline is always high, but correct assessment and appropriate prudence mean that these are not dangerous sports. Have no fear: before jumping into the unknown, you will be entrusted with the expertise of a professional for your maiden flight.

If you’ve never tasted the intoxication of free flying, Tuscany is a superb place to begin. The many schools and associations throughout the region offer the possibility to make the jump for the first time with an instructor. Caressed by the wind and firmly attached to a professional, you can taste the breathtaking scenery from a bird’s-eye view.

If you have already been won over by paragliding and hang gliding, you can enjoy the courses organized to learn to control the wind and fly in absolute freedom. Experienced fliers will appreciate the myriad fully equipped takeoffs all over Tuscany’s main elevations. Whether you’re explorers, in pursuit of an escape from the rat race or free-flying enthusiasts, paragliding and hang gliding are by far the best ways to discover this multifaceted region. Take off from Elba Island and fly over its wild interior before heading for the coast, landing and going for a swim. Ascend the thermals of Monsummano Alto with a certified instructor: on clear days, beneath our feet we can see as far as Vinci, the birthplace of Leonardo da Vinci. Take flight from the medieval towns surrounded by the Monte Pisano woodland, between hills and mountains that make it perfect for takeoff, and then unwind among the art in Pisa and Lucca.
HANGING IN THE AIR OF ANOTHER TIME

It’s the wind that decides the speed and direction. All we have to do is close our eyes and picture taking a leap back in time to the Age of Enlightenment, when the hot air balloon was a symbol of scientific progress. The hot air balloon is the safest way to travel with your head in the clouds. Once you’re in the basket, all that’s left to do is to keep our eyes open and be open to wonder.

The basket leaves the ground and the sky already seems closer. In barely a few metres the wind transports us back to the dawn of flying, among adventure book explorers of other dimensions, to an age when the hot air balloon represented mankind’s dream of reaching the clouds. Only dreamers will understand this flight.

No experience will ever win you over like a hot air balloon ride does. The only limit on where you can go is your imagination. Dawn and dusk are the best times to take flight. When the sun’s rays touch the Chianti vineyards and gild the hills, the roofs of Florence are kissed by the sun waning on the horizon and the towers of San Gimignano lengthen their shadows across the surrounding hills, glimpsing the extraordinary Piazza del Campo in Siena in the distance.

There are no other words to define this experience: it’s unique. Forget the pictures you’ve seen on the Internet, the drone videos, the views through a plane window. Seeing with your own eyes the countryside that slowly passes beneath your feet is a valuable opportunity to fill your soul with peerless beauty. Don’t forget your camera! All you have to do is trust the pilot, let yourselves float in the wind and enjoy the views that open in every direction.

In every corner of Tuscany there are opportunities to take a hot air balloon ride. From a one-hour flight over the countryside to an exclusive toast looking at Brunelleschi’s Dome, all travellers can find the destination that intrigues them the most and visit it from the perspective particular to the hot air balloon.

A hot air balloon ride isn’t a naïve experience; nothing is left to chance. The pilot and the crew carefully assess the weather conditions and air currents before deciding whether to take off or not. It’s all part of the charm: the privilege of getting off the ground depends on the laws of nature.

If, after a flight, you’ve fallen in love with the experience, you can even cultivate the art of flying like the pioneers of air, with professional instructors ready to guide you.

PHOTOS
Left: hot-air ballooning around Montisi, Montalcino. Photo by Melissa Toledo
Top: spring in the Crete Senesi area. Photo by Michele Ortolano
Right: hot-air ballooning above the Tower of Pisa.

Only dreamers will understand this flight. No experience will ever win you over like a hot air balloon ride does.
FLYING ALL AROUND

Dress appropriately and wait for the conditions to be right. All over Tuscany there are many agencies, schools and experts who can accompany you in absolute safety. There’s no shortage of attractions worth seeing in Tuscany from the air.

01 Learning to fly
A maiden flight is your first paragliding or hang gliding experience. Make sure it’s unique! In Tuscany there’s no shortage of options: the Apuan mountains, the hills and mountains of Monte Pisano and Montalbano, the Valdinievole and Chianti hills all offer perfect high grounds to leave the ground behind and admire the scenery. Plus, the region’s not short on places to land either.

02 Leonardo’s sky
If the great Leonardo da Vinci could have made his dream come true, he would have chosen his hometown as the place to take flight. Vinci is situated between Florence and Pistoia, a few kilometres from the gliding centre at Monsummano Terme. The Montalbano area is another super place for countless outdoor activities. Once the hike or flight is over, head for the Leonardo Museum to find out more.

03 Discover Monte Pisano
Monte Pisano is a magical place for your first paragliding experience. The geography of the low-lying hills, sun exposure and sea breezes make this area suitable for safe flights, even reaching high altitudes. The area is popular with flying enthusiasts and countless experts who choose it as the place for maiden flyers.

04 Flying over Florence
The cradle of the Renaissance has a totally different flavour in the sky at sunset. Enjoy the medieval geometries of the city centre during an exclusive flight with a glass of Champagne. When the wind allows, enjoy all the marvels of the sun setting over the city. Repeat the experience in stunning Siena and lovely Lucca.

05 A taste of Tuscany
If a flight isn’t enough, combine it with other activities for an even more original experience. If you’d like an unforgettable memory of Tuscany from the skies, take part in a photography course from an absolutely unique perspective. If you’re in search of traditional flavours, participate in a hot air balloon ride taking off from the region’s wineries and farm estates.

06 The Chianti towns
Discover Chianti from on high during a paragliding or hang gliding experience or in a hot air balloon. The most beautiful towns of Tuscany are a short distance away without having to drive. Take off and survey San Gimignano, Colle di Val d’Elsa, Barberino Val D’Elsa as they draw closer. A flight over Chianti is one of the options offered by many flying professionals throughout the region.
In the bowels of the earth, industrial archaeology, mines and geothermal energy. Outside, the lushest of nature. The Colline Metallifere, also known as the metal-bearing hills, is an extensive area in the Tuscan Antiapennines. It’s home to the Parco delle Colline Metallifere, a magical nature reserve that encompasses industrial archaeology and profound traces of local mining history among the greenery.

Pyrite, alum, antimony and lignite are just four of the minerals that have been extracted in this area between the sea and the hills from the Etruscan age to World War II. The local landscape is dotted with Mediterranean scrub and lovely villages as well as a network of official hiking trails and the UNESCO Geopark, a parkland popular with walkers and lovers of the great outdoors in a historical setting. The Parco delle Colline Metallifere stretches across seven municipalities with just as many equipped entry points instituted in 2005. Information, hiking maps and even the possibility to book guided tours are available in these visitors’ centres. Many routes can be used to explore individual areas, each with a specific theme. Vestiges of major surface mining plants can still be seen along the Pyrite trail, while the Mines route covers all the sites where alum, lignite and copper were extracted. Plus, there are the Iron, Silver and Geothermal itineraries. Those who decide to venture here can choose whether to explore one of the many culverts that descend into the bowels of the earth on foot or by vintage train, in addition to visiting extraction wells and age-old kilns, observing interesting volcanic phenomena or walking in unexpected scenery, where the rocks verge on the garish, like at Le Roste, a place where copper was once mined and processed with its dark red shades of the earth that seem to belong to a distant planet like Mars rather than to the hills above Massa Marittima.

The eleven medieval castles in the park stand in contrast to these environments linked with a recent mining past. Alongside the area’s geothermal activity, the castles set the scene for a different sort of tourism, based on direct contact with nature and exploring local history. The Colline Metallifere boast adventures and attractions that will lure you into reliving pieces of history with the most profound roots.

Those who decide to venture here can choose whether to explore one of the many culverts that descend into the bowels of the earth on foot or by vintage train.
On foot or horseback, exploring Tuscany means discovering established traditions, following traces of ancient civilizations and being surrounded by natural phenomena that you would never have expected to encounter.

Ride through the land of the Maremma cowboys, known as the “butteri”, through long nights to the sound of hooves, among nature that entices you to trot into the countryside and to climb along trails that lead to fresh air halfway between hills and mountains. Archaeological trekking takes us in search of the relics left behind by the Etruscans and Romans, which centuries ago when the civilizations were in their infancy claimed Tuscany as their lands. Amphitheatres and burial grounds are still visible as well as underground tunnels and age-old paintings. Old roads, which can still be travelled, allow visitors to tread exactly where past peoples once did.

A dash of science fiction and the unexpected can be found in the geyser area with jets of white steam and long silver tubes that carry and supply geothermal energy. Ten per cent of the world’s production originates here. The subterranean activity adds a certain charm to the region providing the benefits of sulphur-rich pools and wells to Tuscany’s well-known thermal baths.

Grab your binoculars, wait for dawn or the golden hour at sunset to observe the inspiring seasonal flight of migratory birds. Peace is guaranteed.
With hills, countryside and mid-mountains, Tuscany opens itself up as a space where you can ride between arable fields, vineyards and olive groves, or across nature reserves where the landscape becomes harsher and wilder, following the clip-clop of the hooves, that natural rhythm to which this land has pulsed for centuries.

The approach to the horizon is slow, but it doesn’t matter. When you are on horseback, space and time run differently: you follow the beat of the hooves on the ground, measured by a free gallop or a lively trot, and stretch out as that rhythm slows to walking pace.

Venturing out on a horse is an experience for free spirits, for those who feel part of a nature that is alive and waiting to be explored. Tuscany opens its arms to the rider; the ground glides by under the hooves and the manifold beauty of endless panoramas is revealed. The countryside and the low mountains, the vineyards and the olive groves offer ideal riding routes, and the numerous farm stays, buried deep in silent countryside, are perfect bases from which to start your adventures. Life has a different flavour when it is lived in the saddle, one that evokes the spirit of explorers and knights who for centuries have left their tracks along the Via Francigena.

The towers of Monteriggioni and San Gimignano watch over those who cross Val d’Elsa, searching for traces of long-ago battles in the woods and meadows. Roads, half-hidden from view, snake over the vine-covered hills of the Chianti Senese and Fiorentino. The scenery changes around Fucecchio, a town along the Via Francigena and a land of horses, neighbourhood pride and the famous Padule area, the largest swampland in Italy, which can be explored year-round.

The most delightful hills, however, are those of Val di Chiana, which draw the gaze deep into the southernmost part of Tuscany. Numerous roads can take you to the Val d’Orcia and the Monte Amiata areas and, whether by a direct or a more circuitous route, to the chestnut woods and the enormous masses which, now covered with moss, testify to the ancient volcanic activity of the Amiata complex. You then head towards the Maremma, riding across the luxuriant Mediterranean scrub that is home to the “butteri”, the Maremman cowboys, rooted in this land and passed down as part of an identity in which horses have played a role for hundreds of years.

Follow the sea to keep riding. Elba Island opens the roads and trails of the nature reserve that is home to Monte Calamita, whose circular routes beginning in Bosana allow riders to leave behind the more touristic part of the island.

If you were to follow the Pole Star, you would come to territory that was once Etruscan and to the variegated landscape of the Colline Metallifere, which shows signs of its mining and metalworking. Further north, the Parco Regionale di Miglianico, San Rossore, Massaciuccoli closes this circular, pan-Tuscan journey, as you leave the Mediterranean scrub for a view of sky and sea. The salty air is restorative for both the traveller and the horse.

PHOTOS
Left: horse-riding in Passo della Colla, Tuscany-Emilian Apennines. Photo by Concari-Cattabiani.
Right: horses in Val d’Orcia, on the horizon the fortress of Radicofani. Photo by Matteo Dunchi.
For birdwatchers, Tuscany offers an extraordinary wealth of species. Countless ecosystems enable birds to feel at home in the likes of Burano Lake, the Fucecchio Swampland, Capra Matilda Oasis and Roccioni Forest.

If you’re patient enough, Tuscany offers riches that reveal themselves to those who wait for the right moment. Grey herons, cormorants, black-winged stilts, ospreys and flamingos are a familiar sight at sunset on the Orbetello lagoon. Indeed, dawn and dusk are invariably the best times for birdwatching, as entire flocks fly over the wetlands, leading to unexpected flight patterns.

Swamps and marshes are the best places to encounter Tuscany’s avifauna as these ecosystems are where the landscape is dominated by water, greenery and thousands of lifeforms. One of the best-known sites is Lago di Massaciuccoli, a coastal freshwater lake surrounded by a vast swamp zigzagged with canals. Birdwatching at lake Massaciuccoli dates back to the 1800s; over 300 bird species have been observed here in more than 120 years of twitching.

The Orbetello lagoon, with its amazing views over the Argentario headland, is one instance of phenomenal avifauna. During migratory periods, the entire lagoon serves up unparalleled scenes, with the arrival of aquatic birds from all over the Mediterranean. Slightly further south, dunes separate the open sea from a swampland that is home to a large variety of native species: this is the Lago di Burano, in the deep south of the Tuscan Maremma. Once a hunting reserve, now the 410 hectares are a true oasis boasting seven observation points, photography huts and sighting towers.

In the Padule di Fucecchio, the largest wetland in Italy, spring is the best time for sightings. At the beginning of March, hundreds (sometimes thousands) of cranes congregate in the sky above the swamp, circling for days as they look for the right place to perch. When you’ve finished birdwatching, take a tour led by expert boatmen to discover the rushes in traditional boats that have cut through the marshland since time immemorial.

A few kilometres from Grosseto, in an area like Castiglione della Pescaia with a focus on outdoor activities, the Diaccia Botrona Nature Reserve is regarded as Tuscany’s generic reserve due to the extraordinary variety of bird species that gather here throughout the year. Casa Ximenes is the perfect place to visit the local area and to observe the avifauna from boats.

**PHOTOS**

Left: seagulls soaring in the wet areas of Marina di Vecchiano. Photo by Montepisano Travel.

Right: a walk around Lake Massaciuccoli, in the San Rossore Regional Park.

Below: the Padule di Fucecchio natural reserve.
A journey to the roots of Tuscany begins with its most ancient history, the history of the peoples who forged civilisation in central Italy. Reminders of the Etruscans and Romans peep out from so many of the region’s nooks and crannies that going hunting for them guarantees a mysterious, fascinating journey. The area that we today call Tuscany was once the heartland of the Etruscans, an enigmatic, artistic and musical people, producing architecture that has survived thousands of years to the present day. The twelve cities founded by the Etruscans were used as architectural models by the Romans, who little by little extended their power over the whole peninsula. Volterra, Populonia, Cortona, in many of these places we find sombre fragments that allow us to visualise the grandeur of the culture that they represent. The imposing presence of the Etruscans on Elba gets lost amid the origins of metal extraction. It’s not hard to envisage how, during the Iron Age, the island’s ports were populated with ships from all over the Mediterranean, interested in the precious metal in abundance on Elba. The remains of that ancient age can be seen around Monte Castello on a hike a couple of kilometres from Procchio. Along the coast, opposite Elba Island, stands Populonia, a singular Etruscan city by the sea that overlooks the beautiful Gulf of Baratti: a must for days spent at the coast. After a swim, all that’s needed is a walk to visit the San Cerbone and Grotte burial grounds. In Chiusi, known to the Etruscans as Clevis, there survives a rich structure of elaborately decorated tombs, and one cannot ignore the Labyrinth of Porsenna, a network of tunnels designed to carry rainwater. The Etruscan Vie Cave offer a unique opportunity for footsloggers and mountain bikers. Imagine walking along a path carved out between two walls of tuff that reach up to twenty metres high, imagine, too, that this path is more than two thousand years old. The Vie Cave are a system of roads that connected the settlements and necropolises between Pitigliano, Sovana and Sorano, shielding the travellers from every danger. Nowhere else on the planet can exercise the same fascination as these paths, nor the magical air evoked by the protected natural environment, by the silence that reigns between the stone walls, and by the distant murmur of the river Lente. Sovana itself deserves a visit of some hours for its ochre houses, decorated with flowers. Among the thick vegetation that lies beyond the inhabited centre, you will find the archaeological park and its numerous Etruscan necropolises, along with remnants of the medieval period. In Roman times the Vie Cave became part of the Via Clodia, which nowadays you can walk 260 kilometres from Grosseto to the capital of the Roman Empire. Those who want to follow Roman civilisation in Tuscany will not have to look long. A necessary stop is the ancient city of Cosa and its gigantic defensive walls. From its strategic position on a low hill, Cosa dominates the magnificent Argentario promontory and the Fosgiglia, the spit of earth that connects it to the mainland. Volterra allows us to mentally synthesise the most glorious epochs of Tuscany’s history. Its Roman amphitheatre is one of the best preserved in Italy, and it stands only a few metres from the fourth-century baths and the forum. The imposing ring of walls mixes the architecture of the Etruscans, visible in the ancient city of Cosa, and the Etruscan collections in Italy; if you have ever heard of the Uma degli Sposi or the Ombra della Sera, it will not disappoint.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE ETRUSCANS AND ROMANS

Those who go into the heart of Tuscany with open eyes cannot help but see traces of its millennia-old past. Etruscans and Romans initially lived here side by side, then they fell out and fought between themselves. Today they are united in the region’s historical identity. In painted necropolises, theatres, ancient trails and other pieces of architecture: the keys to understanding the Tuscany of today.
Visitors to the old fortress of Rocca Sillana who look out from its ramparts may get a view that they might not have expected from Tuscany: puffs of vapour rising from behind the hills and the sun’s rays reflecting off strange silver tubes. We need not fear, only understand that we are at the centre of one of the largest geothermic areas in all Italy. We are in the Colline Metallifere, and specifically in the Valle del Diavolo (Devil’s Valley), which owes its name to the columns of white water vapour that rise from the ground. Here, in the Pomarance municipality and in particular its hamlet of Larderello, 10% of the world’s geothermal energy is produced, powering a million houses. The landscape might put us in mind of science-fiction films: long silver-coloured pipes carrying the vapour to the turbines, entering and emerging from the earth, running up hills and through conifer woods, while grey cooling towers stand on the ridges with their great white plumes.

For those, however, who would like to observe the area’s geothermic phenomena up close, there is the Parco delle Biancane in the nearby district of Monterotondo Marittimo. The park takes its name from the calcium rocks, which, upon contact with hydrogen sulphate emissions, transform into chalk. A long path allows us to explore a truly bewitching environment and to see at first hand the little geysers, fumaroles, famous spumes of gas and small pools of magmatic mud.

On a smaller scale, we can see the same activity at Sasso Pisano, not far away. The thermal properties of the water here were known even to the Etruscans, and although the sacred thermal complex of Bagnone, one of the most historically important of its kind, is now only an archaeological site, the area still boasts a great many springs, each with its own specific attributes. Some of the waters can be bottled and drunk, others will accommodate those who want to bathe and enjoy their natural benefits. Very close indeed to Bagnone there are two natural wells from which the water emerges at 65°, the hottest in the whole region, and a little further up lies the spring Le Lumiere, isolated and difficult to reach. The most fascinating spring, however, is that one that fills a medieval washhouse close to the cemetery, a beautiful roofed basin where the water arrives at a temperature of 40°, allowing year-round bathing.

The geothermic activity in Tuscany fills visitors with a surge of primal energy, thanks to the surprising, even unimaginable terrain, the thermal baths and a splash of science fiction.
EXPLORING ALL AROUND

In Tuscany, exploring is for everyone, especially families and children. From adventure parks to age-old grottoes, the variety of experiences is breath-taking and ready to slake the thirst of those who dare to have fun in total safety.

1. Prehistoric adventures
   In the heart of Garfagnana, a stone’s throw from the Apuan Alps, the Selva del Buffardello Adventure Park offers family-friendly trails. For tomorrow’s explorers, the prehistoric village set up in the park provides fun, educational workshops and activities, bringing young adventurers closer to nature. It’s a family day out to remember.

2. Between sky and land
   Other adventure parks offer raised routes, suspended platforms and Tibetan bridges that are perfect for the whole family. Vincigliata, in the Fiesole hills with views over Florence, IndianaPark, in the fertile Val di Chiana, and Saltalbero, tucked in the Monte Amiata woodland, are just a few of the adventure parks that serve up excitement in total safety. Fairy-tale adventures can be found in the theme park dedicated to Pinocchio in Collodi, the birthplace of the puppet’s inventor.

3. Underground worlds
   The karst caves of Equi comprise the Earth’s memory dating back hundreds of thousands of years. Open to visitors, the grottoes contain shafts, caverns, subterranean lakes and streams as well as bone remains that testify to the presence of humans and animals like as bears. A striking 20-metre underground route winds its way in Grotta Maona, near Montecatini Terme. It’s a natural attraction with an entrance and exit shaft between which various tunnels weave, wow-ing adults and kids in equal measure.

4. Skeletons on show
   The Natural History Museum of the University of Pisa, in Calci, is one of the oldest museums in the world. It consists of countless thematic rooms housing vast and vivid collections, some of which are shrouded in mystery. Check out the massive whale skeletons that died out thousands of years ago, the perfect demonstration of the inescapable beauty of natural evolution.

5. Canyoning
   An adventure park has cropped up around the exciting Val di Lima canyon. Expect to get hands on with nature, the adrenaline of hanging by zip lines above the Lima river switches with the excitement of being carried along by the current. Relax and enjoy the local environment by practising SUP and yoga. It’s the perfect place to experience nature all round.

6. Tarot and mosaics
   Near Capalbio, the artist Niki de Saint Phalle has established a magical place of mirrors, mosaics and strange figures. The Giardino dei Tarocchi (Tarot Garden) is an attraction and a surprise, where the arcane of tarot cards, while not predicting the future, look at and accompany visitors beside curiously shaped and unusually coloured buildings. Every corner hides something different.
Those who explore the paths of the Parchi della Val di Cornia find that nature and history demand an attentive ear. Archaeological treasures are unearthed here, little by little, amongst the extraordinary Mediterranean scrub that lies always within sight of the sea. Six natural and archaeological parks preserve the environment and the remains of ancient civilisations, for those who have the courage to leave the well-trodden paths and venture out on foot, bike or horse.

Between Piombino and San Vincenzo, in an area squeezed between the Gulf of Follonica and Massa Marittima, lies one of Tuscany’s strongest concentrations of natural parks. Indelible remains of Etruscan settlements hide under the Mediterranean scrub, on a slice of land between the sea and the hills in a valley where archaeology melts into nature. Val di Cornia is the southernmost tip of the Livorno province and, as yet unspoiled by mass tourism, it retains its wild local charm. It has six parks in which to discover a natural area spared the use of its soil and lined by a network of paths that balk at neither walkers nor bikers.

At the southernmost point of Val di Cornia we find the coastal Sterpaia park, a space where the woods grow unthreatened. Oaks, turkey oaks and ash trees of monumental proportions make up a botanical jewel set in 155 hectares of wooded parkland. Natural wonders speak of agricultural life in the upper Maremma, closely integrated with the landscape. Ten kilometres of coastline lead to an ancient commercial seaport at Carbonifera and a sixteenth-century tower that once surveyed the unloading of mineral goods. Only a few kilometres on, we find ourselves in the archaeological park of Baratti and Populonia, looking out over one of the most beautiful bays in Italy, in the presence of one of the most ancient civilisations in Europe. This is where the Etruscans left their mark, in the burial mounds that face the sea from the great necropolis of San Cerbone, and in the fragments of iron that reflect the sunlight from the ground.

Leaving the coast, we climb again and join the route of the charcoal burners, arriving at Sassetto, in the woodland park of Poggio Neri, where every year the charcoal industry is commemorated with a festival. The Via del Carbone traces the profession that sustained the people of Sassetto for generations, explaining everything from slow cooking the wood in charcoal kilns to transporting it from the mills to the merchant ships. Charcoal production is something common to all Val di Cornia right up to the natural park of Montioni, which is populated by roe deer, fallow deer and wild boar. Its paths meet the remains of Etruscan and Roman settlements, take us to medieval ruins like the Castle of Montioni Vecchio and the Montioni thermal baths, and lead us to stand astounded before the Napoleonic village of Bonesprit. All the while, you never lose sight of the sea.

**PARCHI DELLA VAL DI CORNIA**

The Parchi della Val di Cornia are a sum of nature reserves, archaeological sites and places of cultural heritage, to be visited by foot or by bike. The paths, cutting through Mediterranean scrub and important Etruscan settlements, are also suitable for horse riders.

![Photo](Left: the Etruscan necropolis of Grotte, in the Archaeological Park of Baratti and Populonia. Top: the niche tomb in the necropolis of San Cerbone. And the Fortress of San Silvestro in the Archaeological Park in Campiglia Marittima. Photos by Enrico Caruso.)

![Map](The Parchi della Val di Cornia are a sum of nature reserves, archaeological sites and places of cultural heritage, to be visited by foot or by bike. The paths, cutting through Mediterranean scrub and important Etruscan settlements, are also suitable for horse riders. www.parchivaldicornia.it)
SPECIAL THANKS
Fernando Bardini, Valentina de Pamphilis, Lorenzo Castiglia, Roberto Vergottini, Paolo Roverani, Emiliano Pinzi, Francesco Gentile, Pierangelo Caponi, Tommaso Bellini, Maria Angela Turchetti, Andrea Gelli, Matteo Venzi, Tommaso Castelli, Andrea Borchi, Mirko Bardelli, Alessandra De Paola, Loredana Ferrara.

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Kayaking in the clear waters of the Elba sea.
Photo • Roberto Ridi

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