

Welcome to Lucca, the medieval city of a thousand treasures

You cannot miss a visit to Lucca, a medieval gem rich in history, art, and culture. This guide will help you discover the must-see places, whether you have just one day or an entire weekend.

The City Walls: A Walk Through History

Unique in their kind, Lucca's Walls are an extraordinary example of Renaissance military architecture. Their grandeur becomes apparent only when you walk on them.

Here are some main features:

1. **Length:** The current walls stretch for 4 kilometers and 223 meters. They were built to protect the city and are a remarkable example of military architecture. The last reconstruction campaign began in **1544**, a project by Alessandro Farnese that gave the walls their present form. Designed to withstand attacks and adapt to new war technologies, they were fortunately never used to defend the city from a siege. However, they proved useful in saving the center of Lucca from the violent flood of the Serchio River on November 18, 1812.
2. **Bastions:** There are **ten bastions** along the walls, each with its own history and a name dedicated to various saints, except one which is dedicated to Liberty, an important symbol for the people of Lucca.
3. **Height and Materials:** The walls have an average height of about **12 meters** and are built primarily of **red bricks**, giving them a distinctive and charming appearance.
4. **Urban Park:** Today, the Walls of Lucca are not only a historical monument but also a beautiful urban park where visitors can walk, cycle, or simply enjoy panoramic views of the city and its surroundings.



The Cathedral of Lucca and the Volto Santo (Holy Face)

Officially known as the **Cathedral of San Martino**, it is a place of great historical and spiritual significance. Here are some highlights:

According to tradition, the cathedral was founded by **Saint Frediano** in the **6th century**. Later, in **1060**, it was rebuilt by **Anselm of Baggio**, the city's bishop.

- The cathedral features a Romanesque style with Gothic influences, characterized by a decorated façade and an imposing bell tower. On the polychrome façade stands the statue of Saint Martin, depicted dividing his cloak with a poor man. On the right side of the entrance staircase, there is a labyrinth referring to the myth of Ariadne and Theseus and, symbolically, the path



of life in search of redemption.

It is located in **Piazza Antelminelli**, in the heart of Lucca, and is a landmark for visitors.

- **Opening hours:** It is open to the public and closes at **6:00 PM**. You can also contact **+39 0583 490530** for more information.

The Volto Santo (Holy Face) Inside the Cathedral

The work most cherished by the people of Lucca is the ancient crucifix of the Holy Face (or Santa Croce), which is believed to represent the true face of Christ. According to legend, it was sculpted by Nicodemus, aided by God's grace, to preserve Christ's true appearance.

The legend or story recounts that, after drifting across the Mediterranean, it stopped in the port of Luni and was brought to Lucca by Bishop Giovanni in 782.

Upon its arrival in the city, the Cross was placed in the Church of San Frediano, but during the night it disappeared and reappeared in the cathedral, where it has been kept ever since.

This event, **NOT TO BE MISSED**, is commemorated every year on the evening of September 13th during the Luminara di Santa Croce, a solemn procession starting from the Basilica of San Frediano and arriving at the Cathedral of San Martino. Here, a blessing is given, and the traditional *Mottettone* (a choral and instrumental polyphonic composition, newly composed each year by Lucchese musicians) is performed.

On the feast days of the Holy Cross, May 3rd and September 13th-14th, the Holy Face is adorned with its gold, diamond, and precious stone jewelry, which is displayed in the **Cathedral Museum** for the rest of the year.

The Monument to Ilaria del Carretto and Other Works

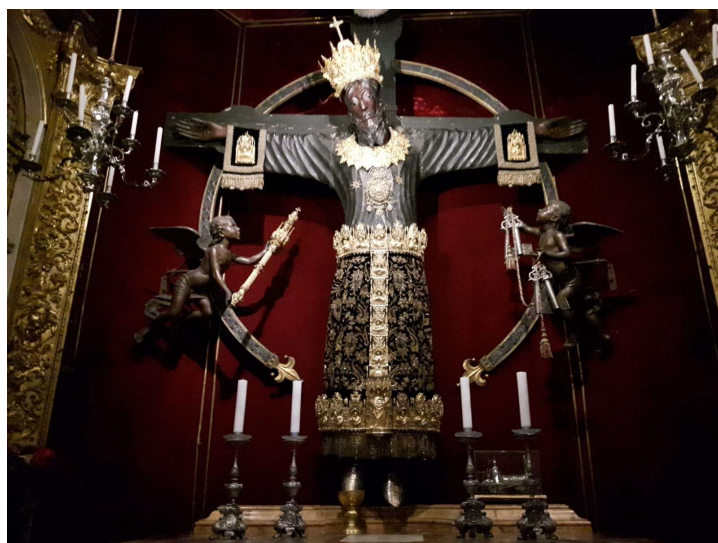
Inside the three-nave cathedral are preserved some extraordinary works of art, most notably the **Funerary Monument of Ilaria del Carretto**, wife of Paolo Guinigi, the lord of Lucca, created by **Jacopo della Quercia**.

Other significant works include the **Madonna and Child with Saints Peter, Clement, Paul, and Sebastian** by **Ghirlandaio** and **The Last Supper** by **Tintoretto**.

The Museum of the Cathedral of Lucca

To the left of the cathedral lies the **Cathedral Museum**, featuring eight rooms. Among these, the most notable are the **room of choir books and illuminated manuscripts** and the **Treasury Room**, which houses the **Jewels of the Holy Face**.

A few meters from the Duomo is the **Monumental and Archaeological Complex of the Church of**



San Giovanni and Santa Reparata. Of the 12th-century church, only the monumental portal remains, while the interior, with its artworks and remains, tells the story of the city's evolution over the centuries.

The Churches of San Michele and San Frediano

Lucca is often called the "City of 100 Churches." This nickname refers not only to the visible churches within the city walls but also to private chapels annexed to palaces, some of which are still visible. After the **Cathedral of San Martino**, the two most important churches are **San Michele** and **San Frediano**.

San Michele is located in the square of the same name, which locals call *Piazza delle Catene* due to the characteristic capitals around the square connected by chains, where the Roman Forum once stood. Its standout feature is the towering façade, which rises above the roof and features a statue of **Saint Michael the Archangel**, depicted in the act of slaying the dragon. According to legend, the statue's finger bears an exceptional diamond that can be seen shining at night.



San Frediano is one of the oldest places of worship in Lucca, founded by the saint whose name it bears. Its façade features a rare **mosaic** (uncommon for a Romanesque church), and inside is a beautiful **baptismal font**. The church also houses the relics of Lucca's patron saint, **Santa Zita**.



Guinigi Tower and Torre delle Ore in Lucca

In the Middle Ages, Lucca once boasted **200 towers** of various sizes, used for spotting potential enemies attacking the city. Today, only two towers remain of significance, as the others have been demolished or repurposed for construction.

Some houses, still visible today, are referred to by the people of Lucca as "altane."

The only two towers that remain are the **Guinigi Tower** and the **Tower of the Hours**.

The **Guinigi Tower** was built by the wealthy and powerful family of Lucca merchants in the 15th century. It is **45 meters tall** and features a **hanging garden** at its summit, where beautiful holm oaks have grown for centuries.

The presence of trees atop the tower makes it one of the **most unusual landmarks in Lucca** and in Italy. Their shade provides a perfect retreat, especially in summer, after climbing the **230 steps** to the top.

The **Tower of the Hours** is an irresistible attraction for European enthusiasts of timekeeping mechanisms. Installed in **1754** by Lucca's clockmakers, it replaced an older clock and still operates manually today, with its **mechanism visible to the public**.

To reach the top, visitors must climb **207 wooden steps**, and the view is spectacular, as this tower is even taller than the Guinigi Tower.

Giacomo Puccini House Museum

A must-see is the **birthplace of composer Giacomo Puccini**, located in a palace on Corte San Lorenzo. Puccini was born here on **December 22, 1858**, and repurchasing the house—sold by his parents—became one of his lifelong obsessions.

Only after the success of his opera *Manon Lescaut* did he achieve his dream. Today, this **house-turned-museum** offers a journey through the life and works of the composer of *Tosca*, *Turandot*, and *Madama Butterfly*. Visitors can explore scores, photos, posters, and sketches, all donated first by his widow and later by the **Puccini Foundation**.

Piazza Napoleone and Piazza del Giglio

Piazza Napoleone is the largest square in Lucca but cannot compare in beauty to the smaller, harmonious **Piazza dell'Anfiteatro**. It stands on the site of the **Fortezza Augusta** and later the **Citadel of Lucca**, commissioned by Paolo Guinigi. The square is named after **Elisa Bonaparte**, sister of the French Emperor, who governed the Principality of Lucca from **1806**. She tasked architect **Lazzarini**



with creating an open space to enhance the **Ducal Palace**, which has served as the **political and administrative center** of Lucca for eight centuries. The palace's architectural evolution is closely tied to the political history of the **Res Publica Lucensis**.

At the center of the square, there was supposed to be a grand statue of Napoleon, but after the fall of the Emperor, it was replaced by one of **Maria Luisa of Bourbon**, chosen as the regent of the new **Duchy of Tuscany**.

Today, the **Ducal Palace** houses the **Province of Lucca**, and the square is a lively space with shops, bars, and restaurants, serving as a thoroughfare for the city's streets and a meeting place.

If you find yourself in Lucca in July, don't miss the magical nights of the **Summer Festival**, which also takes place in this square.

National Museum of Palazzo Mansi in Lucca

In the 17th-century palace owned by the wealthy Mansi family, you'll find the most important **art gallery** in Lucca.

Visitors can pass through the magnificent family apartments, richly frescoed (featuring the notable work *Sacra Famiglia* by Van Dyck), to access the gallery, which includes **83 works donated to the city in 1847** by Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo II after the annexation of Lucca to the **Grand Duchy of Tuscany**.

In the **first room**, large paintings are displayed, including *The Contenance of Scipio* by Domenico Beccafumi and *The Triumph of David* by Rutilio Manetti. The two main works are *The Triumph of Galatea* by the Lucchese painter Pietro Testa and *Saint Sebastian* by Luca Giordano.

The **second room** is called the "Medici Room" because it houses almost exclusively portraits of the Tuscan family. Among these is the most famous painting in the gallery, *Portrait of a Youth* by Pontormo, depicting Alessandro de' Medici, Duke of Florence, followed by *Don Garzia de' Medici as a Child* and *Cosimo I* by Bronzino.

In the **third room**, smaller-format paintings, mainly with religious themes, are displayed: *Portrait of a Man* by Tintoretto, *Madonna and Child* by Francesco Avanzi, the 16th-century copy of *Madonna and Child with Saints Anne and John the Baptist* by Andrea del Sarto, and *Christ Carrying the Cross*, attributed to Beccafumi.

The **fourth and final room** contains several Flemish and French paintings.

Palazzo Pfanner in Lucca

Located near the walls of Lucca, close to the **Church of San Frediano**, this extraordinary 17th-century palace boasts a marvelous **Italian-style baroque garden** and is a must-see for its beauty and history. Built in 1660 by a wealthy local family, the project for the palace was entrusted to the architect **Martinelli**, while the garden was designed by the Messinese architect **Filippo Juvarra**. Over the centuries, it changed ownership until it became, in **1846**, the property of...



Pfanner Family - Brewers

The Pfanner family, brewers, established the first brewery in the Duchy of Lucca in this palace, one of the first in Italy, the Pfanner Brewery.

The palace also gained fame thanks to director Mario Monicelli, who directed Alberto Sordi in the film "*Il Marchese del Grillo*", and director Jane Campion, who directed Nicole Kidman in "*The Portrait of a Lady*". In these films, you can admire the monumental staircase, the palace interiors, and the gardens.

The Bridge of Maddalena or "Devil's Bridge"

Along the road leading to Garfagnana, where one is immersed in an extraordinary natural landscape rich in greenery, it would be a shame not to enjoy some of it during a stay in this Tuscan town. Near the **Serchio River Park**, you can stroll, canoe, hike, or simply have a picnic.

The "Devil's Bridge" is located near Borgo a Mozzano, along the SS12 road connecting Abetone and Brennero. Its construction dates back to the time of Countess Matilda of Canossa (1046-1115), who had great influence and power in this



area of Tuscany, Garfagnana. Its current appearance, however, is due to reconstruction by Castruccio Castracani (1281-1328), a military leader and ruler of nearby Lucca, in the early 1300s. The bridge has a classic medieval "humpback" design, but what sets it apart is its unique asymmetry: its central arch is so tall and wide that its stability seems to defy gravity. The bridge is commonly called the "Devil's Bridge" because of a local legend, reinforced by its peculiar appearance. A master mason began its construction but soon realized he wouldn't complete it by the set deadline. Terrified of the consequences, he sought the Devil's help to finish the work. The Devil agreed to complete the bridge in one night in exchange for the soul of the first person to cross it. The pact was sealed, but the builder, full of remorse, confessed to a local priest, who advised him to let a pig cross first. The Devil, thus deceived, disappeared into the river's waters.

Torre del Lago - Puccini

Torre del Lago is a district of the municipality of Viareggio, about 30 minutes from Lucca. Its name derives from the tower on the shores of Lake Massaciuccoli, originally a lookout point and later transformed into a family residence. Torre del Lago is famous for hosting Italian composer Giacomo Puccini, who lived there. Today, the musician's Liberty-style villa has been turned into a house-museum, open year-round except on Mondays.

Visitors can explore the kitchen, the private chapel where Puccini is buried, and the Hunting Room. Upstairs, the bedrooms are accessible.

Every year, the **Puccini Festival**, one of Italy's most important opera festivals, takes place in July and August. The calendar includes internationally acclaimed operatic performances.

For a beautiful lake view, stop at **Belvedere Puccini Square**, from where you can glimpse the countryside villages of Massarosa, Quiesa, and Massaciuccoli across the shore.

Barga

Barga is worth a visit. It is the most populous center of the **Media Valle del Serchio** and, for its historical, artistic, civic, and demographic importance, has held the title of **City** since 1933.

Recognized among the "**Most Beautiful Villages in Italy**", it has also earned the **Orange Flag** of the Touring Club Italiano and the designation of **Cittaslow**.



The Cathedral

The Collegiate Church of San Cristoforo (or S. Cristofano) in Barga originated from a small church founded before the year 1000 at the highest point of the hill. Modest in size and likely protected by a simple wall, this primitive structure dates to the 9th or 10th century, according to local historians. Inside the Cathedral is a splendid pulpit (mid-13th century), created by an artist named Guido. Art experts, although divided, attribute it to Guido Bigarelli (known as Guido da Como) or to a master from the same workshop. The pulpit features carved scenes depicting the Nativity of Jesus, the Annunciation, the Adoration of the Magi, and a synthesis of the Gospels.

What to Eat in Lucca

As with Italian culinary tradition, Lucca's cuisine is second to none. There are many typical dishes worth mentioning, but the most renowned are:

First Courses

- **Tordelli Lucchesi with Meat Ragù:** These crescent- or round-shaped pasta parcels stand out for the unique combination of ingredients in their filling: beef and pork, mortadella, chard, pecorino, parmesan, celery, garlic, breadcrumbs, nutmeg, pepper, basil, and are always served with a rich meat sauce.
- **Red Bean and Spelt Soup:** Spelt is a classic product of the Garfagnana area and the star of this dish. Its simplicity is its strength: spelt, "scritti" beans (borlotti), and vegetables.
- **Homemade Lucchese Soup:** In Lucca, they say, "soup is soup from the garden," prepared in winter with whatever is available or preserved from the growing season. Ingredients vary by region and season but typically include: potatoes, celery, carrots, onions, garlic, chard, leeks, Savoy cabbage, black cabbage, pumpkin, wild herbs, rosemary, thyme, fennel seeds, extra virgin olive oil, and homemade Lucchese bread.
- **Garmugia:** This soup is made with spring vegetables and legumes—artichokes, peas, fava beans, and asparagus. A flavorful and precious dish with ancient origins, it is deeply tied to the seasonality of its ingredients.

Main Courses

- **Rovelline alla Lucchese:** A "recovery dish" where leftovers from the previous day's feast are repurposed. Thin slices of meat are breaded, fried, and then simmered in a tomato sauce with onions, garlic, parsley, oregano, capers, and pepper.
- Additional specialties: salt cod with leeks, Lucchese tripe, braised meat rolls, and pork liver skewers.

Side Dishes

- **Red Bean from Lucca "all'uccelletto", Cannellini Beans from San Ginese, and Field Greens.**

Desserts

- **Buccellato Lucchese:** A simple, traditional sweet bread enriched with eggs, anise seeds, and raisins. Each bakery or pastry shop in Lucca has its own recipe. Its traditional shape is a ring, as it was once carried home hanging from the wrist, but it is also available as a long loaf.
- **Torta di Neccio:** A chestnut flour cake, once a common snack for schoolchildren, it is among the humblest desserts in Italian cuisine. Made with chestnut flour, it is baked in a pan with rosemary, pine nuts, orange zest, and a drizzle of olive oil.
- **Necci:** Simple pancakes made with chestnut flour, cooked between "testi" (two iron discs with handles, traditionally placed over a fire) and filled with sheep's ricotta, preferably.

Torta co' Becchi: Named for its “beaks” decorating the edges, reminiscent of fortifications. Variations include chocolate, pear, or blackberry, but the original version features chard and/or wild herbs, with the addition of pine nuts, orange zest, and a hint of nutmeg.