








SECRET TUSCANY

-  DISCOVER THE GARFAGNANA: SOME OF ITALY'S FINEST UNSPOILT WALKING
-  5 DAYS' CENTRE-BASED GUIDED HIKING
-  TREK ALONG SUMMIT RIDGES OF THE APUANE ALPS
-  CLIMB MONTE GIOVO
-  RELAX BY THE POOL IN OUR WONDERFUL TUSCAN VILLA



Secret Tuscany: 8 days

5 days' trekking, 7 nights in a villa with swimming pool, set on an organic farm

Difficulty – Moderate

All Meals Included



Villa pool



Our villa is on an organic farm

INTRODUCTION

Our week in Tuscany allows you to explore the beautiful, unspoilt Garfagnana region: one of Italy's best kept secrets. Nestled between the marble mountains of the Apuane Alps and the dramatic limestone Apennines, the Serchio Valley is home to the traditional way of life of olive growers and shepherds. From our comfortable villa overlooking the valley and set on an organic farm, we will explore the surrounding Tuscan hills and mountains on established walking trails. During our hikes we will pass vineyards, olive groves, terracotta villas and will follow traditional shepherd trails into the higher mountain pastures and onto ridges and summits, where we will be rewarded with outstanding views of the whole area. Back at the villa you can relax by the pool in the warm evenings, and later on enjoy delicious Tuscan cuisine on the terrace, prepared by our hosts with produce from their organic farm.

ITINERARY

Day 1 – Transfer from Pisa airport

The group will meet at Pisa's international airport and take a transfer (approximately 1 hr 15 mins) to our delightful villa, high in the Tuscan hills and overlooking the tranquil Serchio Valley. There will be time to settle in to our traditional terracotta-tiled farmhouse before dinner is served on the terrace, surrounded by the farm's vineyard. The guide will give an informal briefing about the days to come, and will answer any questions you may have about the week ahead.

Day 2 – Walk from Palagnana via Foce delle Porchette to Monte Croce (1341m). Descend via Pioppo

Our first day's walk starts after a transfer through the steep-sided Fabbriche Valley to the hamlet of Palagnana (757m), where we have time for a coffee before our hike.

From here we follow a trail through beautiful beech woodland up to the Foce delle Porchette (980m). From the pass we are rewarded with superb views of the surrounding limestone hills, and on a clear day we can see over to the Mediterranean. We also have a view of the ancient marble quarries that are the origin of the stone for Michaelangelo's David. We then ascend along the side of a limestone gorge to the grassy summit of Monte Croce (1314m) where we aim to enjoy a relaxing picnic lunch. We descend via a different route into beech woodland, through the tiny hamlet of Pioppo and back to Palagnana to finish the walk with a well-earned drink in the local bar. Back at the villa there will be a chance to relax by the pool before dinner is served on the terrace.



Monte Croce

Distance 9 km

Total Ascent / Descent 580m

Approx walking time 5-6 hours



Day 3 – Walk to the village of Campaiana (1358m) and summit of Pania di Corfino (1603m)

Today it is time to explore the Apennines. We begin the day with a short transfer to the hillside town of Corfino (836m) and from here we make our way up to the remote village of Pruno. We follow a cobbled mule track through tranquil beech forests, stopping for a sip at the Fonte del Amore (Fountain of Love), until we reach our lunch stop at the charming 16th century village of Campaiana (1358m). After lunch we climb to the long summit plateau of Pania di Corfino (1603m), via a grassy hillside and a meadow bursting with wild flowers. From the summit we are rewarded with outstanding views over to the jagged peaks of the Apuane Alps. We then follow the well-worn shepherds’ trail down past Rifugio Isera and return to Pruno. We then return to the villa where there will be time to enjoy the pool and relax before dinner.

Distance 13 km
Total Ascent / Descent 775m
Approx walking time 6 hours



View from Pania di Corfino

Day 4 – Ascent of Pania della Croce (1858m)

This is the longest day of the trip and one of the most rewarding, with the ascent of Pania della Croce – the 4th highest peak in the Apuane Alps. We start today’s walk at the small chapel of Piglionico (1008m) and climb gently to the Refugio del Freo at Mosceta (1200m), followed by a rising traverse to the Focce di Valli pass (1266m) at the base of the Pania della Croce. From here we leave the greener alpine pastures behind and climb on a steady zig zag path to the summit ridge. We will enjoy our well-earned picnic by the summit cross (1858m), admiring breathtaking views across to the Tyrrhenean Sea and on a clear day the island of Corsica. This is the perfect viewpoint to see most of the summits that we climb during the week. Our descent takes a more direct route through the “Canale dell Inferno” before

crossing alpine meadows and back into the beech forest, then we take our transfer back to the hotel.

Distance 12km
Total Ascent / Descent 940m
Approx walking time 8 hours



Pania della Croce

Day 5 – Free Day

Today you are free to spend the day enjoying the peace and calm of the villa, or exploring the surrounding area. The nearby delightful city of Lucca is well worth a visit, with its medieval walls, splendid piazzas, cobbled streets and beautiful basilica, and is only 45 minutes away by train. There is a complimentary taxi service to the station in the morning with a return service in the late afternoon. Of course you may prefer simply to relax at the villa for the day. Spend time by the pool, relax in one of the many hammocks in the garden, or enjoy a local walk. We can also arrange for a local massage therapist to visit the villa to sooth tired limbs. Breakfast is included today, but lunch and dinner are not, so you are free to choose where and when you want to eat. In the evening, we recommend a stroll along to the local restaurant.



Lucca

**Day 6 – Monte Giovo (1991m) and Barga**

We start by taking a transfer through the Serchio valley and up into the foothills of the Apennines. After driving through Renaio, our walk begins today at Vetricia (1308m) and takes us to Monte Giovo, the highest point of the trip at 1991m. After leaving Vetricia we climb steadily through beech woodland to the open pastures at La Porticciola (1700m). After a short descent via “Hannibal’s camp” we arrive at the picturesque Lago Santo (1501m). From here it is a steep climb directly above the lake to the summit cross. The aim is to have lunch at the summit while admiring the extensive views across the Apennines. After lunch we descend to the historic town of Barga and an obligatory refreshment stop at the local gelateria before returning to Vetricia to meet our transfer back to the villa.

Distance 11 km

Total Ascent / Descent 930m

Approx walking time 6-7 hours



Giovo ridge

Day 7– Monte Forato (1223m)

A perfect way to end the week with an ascent of Monte Forato. Today’s walk starts with a wander through the cobbled streets of the quiet village of Fornovolasco. From here we follow the forest trail up to the mountain pass of Foce di Petroschiana, with views across to the rock tower of Monte Procinto and the mountain chain which leads all the way to the Mediterranean. Following the ridge we then ascend to a magnificent limestone archway below the peak of Monte Forato. A short climb brings us to the summit, and outstanding views of the Tuscan hills. After our picnic lunch, we continue along the ridge to the Foce di Valli pass, then descend through alpine meadows to the beech forests below. Upon our return to Fornovolasco, we can enjoy refreshments at the local gelateria in Galliciano. Back at the villa it’s time for one last dip in the pool and an evening of

delicious local cuisine, and a toast to our successful Tuscan adventure.

Distance 10km

Total Ascent / Descent 915m

Approx walking time 6-7 hours

Day 8 – Departure day

We enjoy a final breakfast on the terrace before our transfer to Pisa airport.

WHAT TO EXPECT**The trekking**

Our daily walks will typically be around 6-7 hours of hiking on well-marked trails, with ascents of 500-1000 metres. There will be a couple of longer days when we climb Monte Giovo and Pania della Croce. You will need to have a reasonable level of fitness to complete the walks, and the fitter you are before you arrive the more you will enjoy the week. We strongly recommend that you try and fit in some long hilly walks before the trip, especially if you have new boots. All days on this trip are optional. If you have any concerns about the fitness level required please do get in touch. Please note that the above itinerary is a sample of the week, and is not set in stone: the leader may change the routes depending on the weather and the ability of the group.

Altitude

The maximum altitude reached on this trip is 1991m, on the Monte Giovo climb. Our ascents will be steady and on most days the maximum height reached will be between 1300-1700m. We return to the valley every evening so there will be limited time spent above 1500m, and as a result we would not expect altitude to be an issue on this trip.

Accommodation

Villa sitting room



Our base for this week is a truly stunning traditional Tuscan villa with exposed Garfagnana stone, chestnut beams and terracotta tiles. We really think we have found something special here: our villa is the perfect haven in which to relax after a hard day's walk. Swimming in the pool and dining on the wisteria-clad terrace surrounded by vineyards and overlooking the Serchio valley, add the final touches to make this the perfect holiday in a perfect setting.

Antique furniture, art and excellent quality beds add a hint of luxury to this rural retreat. The sitting room has a wood-burning stove, and there are plenty of books, as well as cards and games for you to use during your stay. The kitchen terrace has an enormous barbecue and ancient bread oven. There is a covered table tennis table, marked badminton court, and a tented yoga deck for those who wish to stretch at the end of the day. Dotted around the gardens you will find hammocks and there is a swimming pool and hot tub set in beautifully landscaped gardens.

Accommodation is based on 2 people sharing: a single room may be available for a supplement. There are five bedrooms and three bathrooms with walk-in showers.



Twin room

Food



Dining is part of the experience on this holiday, and breakfasts, picnic lunches and dinners are provided. Dinner is a 2 course meal with wine. All meals are prepared using local seasonal produce, which often comes from the villa gardens and organic farm. Dietary requirements can be met: feel free to ask us if you are concerned, and please do let us know in advance. On your free day, breakfast is provided to allow you to make the most of your day, and there is no shortage of excellent local restaurants.



Dining Terrace

Money

There are cash machines at Pisa airport. You will need money for any refreshment stops: coffees at the rifugios cost around 2.50€, and gelato is around 2€ per scoop. For the meals on your free day we suggest a budget of 25-30€ per person including wine. Return train tickets to Lucca cost approximately 9€ and to Florence 21€. Massages are approximately 50€ per hour. We estimate that 150-200 euros will cover all miscellaneous personal expenditure.

Weather

May, June, September and October are ideal months for a walking holiday in Tuscany. The days are sunny and warm and the evenings cooler, but still warm enough to enjoy dining outside. In May the meadows are full of spring flowers and in late October the beech forests glow with autumn colours. The hottest (and busiest) months are July and August where temperatures can reach the high 30s. The wettest months tend to be April and November.

Travel Arrangements

The starting point for this trip is Pisa International Airport (PSA). There will be a group transfer by private minibus, which normally departs at 15:00 and takes just over an hour. If you are unable to make the group transfer, it is easy to reach the local town of Barga-Galliciano by train, and we can



pick you up from the station. The journey from Pisa airport (Pisa Fermata Aeroporto) takes around 1.5 to 2 hours and costs around 7€. At the time of writing you normally take a bus to Pisa Central Station, then train from here. The train for Barga-Galliciano is usually going to Aulla or Piazza al Serchio. Train information can be found at www.trenitalia.com.

If you arrive early, then why not visit the city of Pisa and see the famous leaning tower. There are left luggage facilities in the airport (approximately 7€ per day per item) and the train ticket office and information centre can be found next to the left luggage. There is a station at the airport and the journey to Pisa Central Station is just 5 minutes. The return fare is approximately 3€.

At the end of the holiday there will be a group transfer after breakfast, arriving at the airport around 10:30.

What's included in the price

- Accommodation on a twin-share basis in our Tuscan villa including use of swimming pool
- 7 breakfasts, 5 lunches and 6 evening meals
- Return airport transfer (see Transport section for timings)
- All transport required in the itinerary (excluding excursions on the free day)
- Qualified International Mountain Leader

Not included in the price

- Flights
- Personal drinks or snacks
- Lunch and dinner on free day
- Train tickets if not on group transfer
- Train tickets on free day
- Travel insurance

Insurance

It is a condition of booking this holiday that you must be insured against medical and personal accident risks (this must include helicopter rescue and repatriation costs). You may find that your annual multi-trip insurance covers this trip, but you should check that you are covered for trekking up to 3000m. We would also recommend that you take out holiday cancellation insurance, as your deposit is non-refundable. We recommend The BMC www.thebmc.co.uk or Snowcard www.snowcard.co.uk for UK residents, or Travelex www.travelexinsurance.com for US citizens or residents. In addition to travel insurance, UK citizens should also obtain or renew the EHC card from www.ehic.uk.com. This is not a

replacement for insurance but it allows you to be treated on the same basis as a resident of the country you are visiting, and unlike insurance it includes treatment of a pre-existing condition. You would normally have to pay for treatment at the time and then make a claim on return to the UK.

Vaccinations

You should attend your own doctor and dentist for a check-up. No special vaccinations are required for Italy.

First Aid

Your leader is first-aid qualified and will carry a first-aid kit, but you should also bring your own first aid kit which should include the items mentioned in the equipment list at the end of these Trip Notes, plus any prescription medication you normally take.

Electric Supply and Plug

The electricity supply in Italy is 220-240V and uses "Type L" electrical sockets with 3 linear round pins (left-hand picture). This is usually, but not always, compatible with "Type C" plugs (right-hand picture). Sometimes a standard round UK to European adaptor doesn't fit all the sockets, as the prongs can be a tiny bit too wide, so it is a good idea to bring at least 1 Italy-specific adaptor.



Recommended Reading and Maps

Rough Guide to Tuscany & Umbria
Under the Tuscan Sun – Frances Mayes
The Hills of Tuscany – Ferenc Mate

The 1:50,000 Kompass-Verlag Alpi Apuane – Garfagnana – Carrara – Viareggio map will give you an overview of all the walks that we do. If you'd like more detail then the 1:25,000 Edizioni Multigraphic maps are good. Sheets 101/2 (Alpi Apuane), and 18 (Appennino Modenese Garfagnana) cover most of the hikes.

Please note that you are not expected to carry maps, it's just in case you are interested!

**Responsible Travel**

We care about the places we visit, and our philosophy is simple: that each and every one of our trips has a positive impact on the local community and environment. We make an effort to always use local produce, and to stay in family-run hotels wherever we can.

General information

Please note that we specialise in Adventure Travel, the nature of which means that we cannot always follow our itinerary for a variety of reasons. All of our holidays can be subject to unexpected changes and you should be prepared to be flexible to accommodate these where necessary.

We update our itineraries on a regular basis to take into account such things as changes to trekking routes and the conditions of footpaths, but it is not always possible to guarantee that any of our holidays will run exactly according to the proposed itinerary. If during your holiday the itinerary is affected by immediate or local circumstances, the leader will make any changes that are necessary.

As a reputable tour operator, Cloud 9 Adventure supports the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office "Know Before You Go" campaign to enable British citizens to prepare for their journeys overseas, and we recommend that all our clients take a look at the FCO Travel Advice for their chosen destination on the official FCO website www.fco.gov.uk. North Americans can also check out the US Department of State website: www.travel.state.gov for essential travel advice and tips.

Cloud 9 Adventure treat the safety and security of all clients as the most important aspect of any trip we organise. We would not run any trip that we did not consider reasonably safe. Should the FCO advise against travel for any reason, we will contact everyone booked to travel to discuss alternatives. We have an office in the Alps and monitor the conditions regularly to ensure that our trips are run safely.

Group Size and Holiday Status

For each of our group adventures, there is a minimum number of participants required in order for the trip to go ahead. Once the minimum number is reached, the trip status will change from "Available" to "Guaranteed". In order to achieve minimum numbers, we run the trips in conjunction with several other small companies. We find that this means almost all of our trips become "Guaranteed". We are a small company with a high level of customer service, and we make sure that we only run trips in conjunction with companies who share our ethos. We know them well and have worked

with them for years, and only use leaders who we know and trust to do an excellent job. We steer clear of large groups and cap our group size at 10 people for this trip, where many of the larger operators take up to 16 people.



SECRET TUSCANY KIT LIST**Essential items :**

- **Rucksack** – approx. 20-30L. You will need to carry your picnic lunch plus water for the day, along with some spare clothes.
- **Hiking boots** – it is possible to do a lot of the trip in hiking trainers, but you should make sure they are trekking-specific trainers (or trail-running trainers). Sandals are not appropriate for mountain walking so please do not bring these for trekking.
- **Waterproof jacket and trousers** – both essential items, should be as light as possible (not insulated: your other layers should provide the insulation).
- **Socks**
- **Underwear**
- **Trekking trousers** – bring something lightweight.
- **Shorts**
- **T-shirts** – wicking t-shirts are better than cotton as they are lighter and dry faster.
- **Mid layer** - fleece jacket is good
- **Warm hat** (lightweight woolly hat is fine)
- **Gloves** (a mid or light pair of gloves is fine)
- **Sun Hat**
- **Sunglasses**
- **Suncream** (small bottle to save weight)
- **Lip protection** (with sun protection)
- **Water bottles / camelback** – you should have the capacity to carry at least 2 litres of water
- **Wash bag & toiletries**
- **Head torch** – just a lightweight torch, such as a Petzl Tikka / Zipka is fine. It's just for emergencies as we don't plan to walk in the dark!
- **Plastic bags / dry sacks** to keep essentials dry if it rains
- **Passport**
- **Cash** – around 150-200 euros should be more than enough to cover drinks & snacks.
- **Basic first aid kit** – your leader will carry a large first aid kit, but you should bring a small first aid kit containing plasters, blister treatment, painkillers, antiseptic cream & diarrhoea treatment (rehydration sachets & immodium)

Optional items:

- **Walking poles** – These hover close to the essential items – they are not obligatory but most people find them helpful. The leader doesn't carry spare poles in case you decided you did want them after all!
- **Swim wear for the pool**
- **Buff** – can be useful for extra warmth if it's cold, or sun protection for your neck on a hot day
- **Camera**
- **Book**
- **Lightweight sandals / flip flops** – nice to change into at the villa after a day's walk
- **Trainers** – it can be nice to give your feet a break from your walking boots on some days. Your leader can advise on which days this might be suitable, and if you are thinking of doing this, your shoes must be suitable for trekking in!
- **Mobile phone** – there is phone reception for the majority of the trip. It is not essential to bring a phone but I like at least 1 other group member to have one in case of emergency.
- **Spare laces**
- **Snacks** – hopefully you will find our lunches perfectly substantial, but do bring extra snacks if there is anything in particular you really like to have, or if you think you might want to eat a bit more!
- **Antibacterial handwash**
- **Insect repellent**
- **Travel clothes & shoes**