CICERONI TRAVEL

PROSPERITY'S BOUNTY
LUCCA & THE RENAISSANCE GARDEN

SATURDAY 22 – THURSDAY 27 APRIL 2023 (6 DAYS)

LECTURER: TOM DUNCAN

£2335

- **Visit Lucca & Pisa, two of Italy's finest medieval cities**
- **Unhurried itinerary allowing for free time to enjoy its beauties**
- **Seven important villas & gardens included**
- **Many seen under private 'connoisseur' viewing conditions**
- **Excellent central quiet 4* hotel**

Camigliano, Lucca, Villa Torrigiani

OVERVIEW

The history of Medieval Italy is a most colourful patchwork of clashing egos. First, the Holy Roman Emperors and the Popes were always at loggerheads. Caught in the middle were all the Duchies, City-States and other assorted territories which had emerged from the chaotic end of the old, western, Roman Empire. They fought amongst themselves and Tuscany was a hot-bed of inter-city strife. Florence, Siena, Pisa and Lucca formed a bewildering series of alliances, engaging in endless betrayals of each other! This is most beneficial for us as Tuscany's strongly walled cities, magnificent castles and the fortified palaces of each city's noble families have all bequeathed to posterity the most extraordinary range of architectural and artistic delights.

Eventually, peace arrived in the sixteenth century. The leading families turned to a new fashion, born in Florence and then sweeping Italy – the *villa suburbana*! These were villas built just outside the walls of cities rather than at a great distance. Here, noble owners could enjoy the benefits of rural relaxation while staying close to political and economic events in town. Our visit to Lucca offers the perfect opportunity to examine this footprint of Italian history and culture as we too move back and forth, from palaces and churches to country villas of great beauty.

Lucca's ancient origins are pre-Roman and it was an important Imperial city. It enjoyed great wealth due to two factors. First, in medieval times it developed strong traditions in textile manufacturing; second, its strategic position on the medieval Pilgrim's Route to Rome, the *Via Francigena*, was of great value. Of course, it fought with all of its famous neighbours but then settled down when in 1369 it was given civic independence by Emperor Charles IV, an Imperial status it maintained until Napoleon annexed the city in 1799. During this long period of civic independence, the local noble families endowed churches, built palaces and then commissioned luxurious villas in the nearby hills, surrounded by a remarkable series of gardens.

Pisa enjoyed great prosperity in the early medieval period, the result of its trade with the wider Mediterranean world. By the eleventh century it was one of the four great maritime republics of Italy, together with Genoa, Amalfi and Venice. Wealth gained via trade was invested in a display of civic magnificence, with architecture and monumental sculpture to the fore. The iconic ensemble of cathedral, baptistery and campanile (the famous "leaning tower") need little introduction. This our six days spent discovering Lucca and Pisa will explore how economic success allows powerful elites to enjoy both urban sophistication and rural simplicity.

We shall stay at the **4* San Luca Palace Hotel**. This is ideally situated within the medieval town walls and it is a charming hotel, opened following a restoration of a part medieval and part renaissance palazzo.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Saturday 22 April – We fly from Heathrow to Pisa, arriving late afternoon. We drive to **Lucca** and check into our hotel, the **4* San Luca Palace**. Later in the evening we have our first group dinner – wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Sunday 23 April – The Medieval centre of **Lucca** is a most atmospheric place – "wall to wall loveliness" as described in one guide book. We begin at **San Michele in Foro**, built on the site of the city's ancient Roman Forum. It has Lucca's most festive Romanesque façade clearly based on traditions imported from nearby Pisa. We continue to the nearby church of **San Frediano**, dedicated to the Irish saint who converted the local Lombard ruler in the sixth century. After a coffee break, nearby is the delightful **Palazzo Pfanner**, a handsome palace with a fine period garden, enlivened by fountains and statues which ends our morning of visits. We pause for a group lunch in the highly evocative **Piazza dell'Anfiteatro**, the site of the city's Roman amphitheatre, the curved wall of the facades laid out on the template of the amphitheatre. Our day concludes with the city's **Duomo**, dedicated to San Martino, he who so kindly gave his coat to a deserving beggar. It is all executed in a most handsome Romanesque style. The interior contains very interesting paintings and above all, the famous tomb of Ilaria del Carretto delicately sculpted by the Sienese master, Jacopo della Quercia. The evening will be free.

Day 3: Monday 24 April – We drive out of Lucca for the first of two days in the immediate countryside around the town. We begin at **Villa Reale**. It takes its name from its time as home to Napoleon's sister, Elisa, who joined together several adjacent properties to create a remarkable ensemble combining an elegant villa, formal gardens and a fine landscape park; all of which we shall visit. We break for a group lunch and then continue to the nearby **Villa Oliva-Buonvisi**, built by a Florentine architect in the early sixteenth century. The gardens extend to a park of about twelve acres and it is divided into a series of formal and more informal areas, now lovingly maintained by the Oliva family from Genoa. The villa itself is not open but we shall have the privilege of a private visit when the owner will show us her art collection. We return to Lucca and the evening will be free.

Day 4: Tuesday 25 April – Our half day in Lucca begins at nearby **Palazzo Mansi**, where the real treat is the series of rooms retaining magnificent textile embellishments, the walls hung with tapestries and the famous local silks and velvets. After coffee, we walk across the town to the visit **Villa Giunigi**, Lucca's principal museum displaying art and objects from its ancient past to the neoclassical period. Lunch (not included) and the remainder of the afternoon and evening will be free for private explorations of Lucca.

Day 5: Wednesday 26 April – This morning we drive the short distance to visit **Villa Bernardini**, still lived in by the family who built it in 1615, and who will be our very charming hosts. It has changed hardly at all internally and is a wonderful amalgam of treasures collected by generations of the family. The gardens are charming and the eighteenth century box theatre is particularly special. After a break for coffee, we continue to **Villa Torrigiani** which is a splendidly ornate celebration of the influence of Versailles. It has truly stunning frescoed interiors with remarkable contents. The grounds have been adapted partly to reflect the style of an 'English Landscape Park'. We pause for lunch nearby (not included) and end our day with a visit to nearby **Villa Mansi**. In many ways the villa is a 'smaller sister' of Villa Torrigiani though no different in ambition and statement. We return to Lucca where later that evening we shall have our final group dinner in a highly regarded local restaurant.

Day 6: Thursday 27 April – On our final day, we visit **Pisa** and spend the morning in **Piazza dei Miracoli**, one of the world's great architectural complexes. The **Cathedral** is the perfect expression of the Pisan Romanesque, and the interior has some wonderful sculptures including Pisano's elaborately carved Pulpit. Nearby is the iconic "Leaning Tower" or *campanile* and the Baptistery, the largest in Italy. The **Museo dell'Opera** highlights works of art associated with all the nearby church buildings. We then drive to **Villa di Corliano** just outside of Pisa. This historic property is the home of the Counts Agostini Veronesi della Seta. Sixteenth century in origin, it has a series of fine reception rooms and the gardens, Renaissance in origin, were laid out in their present form in the nineteenth century. The Count and Countess will be our hosts for our late lunch and visit. Following our visit, we drive the short distance to Pisa airport for the evening return flight to Heathrow.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £2335 **Price without flights** £2160 **Deposit** £325 **Single Supplement** £75 (Single) £150 (DSU)

Hotel 5 nights with breakfast at the 4* San Luca Palace Hotel

Flights British Airways

Outward: **BA612** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1410**, arrive Pisa **1725**
Return: **BA607** Depart Pisa **2015**, arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **2125**

Price includes 2 dinners & 3 lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, City Tax, the services of Tom Duncan & our local Tour Manager, James Hill

Not included Travel to/from Heathrow, 3 dinners & 2 lunches

CICERONI TRAVEL
2 The Square, Aynho, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX17 3BL
Telephone **+44 (0) 1869 811167** Fax **+44 (0) 1869 811188**
Email **info@ciceroni.co.uk** Website **www.ciceroni.co.uk**

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