

PROSPERITY'S BOUNTY  
LUCCA & THE RENAISSANCE GARDEN

TUESDAY 22 – SATURDAY 26 MAY 2018 (5 DAYS)

LECTURER: TOM DUNCAN

£1695

- Visit Lucca, one of Italy's finest Medieval cities
- Unhurried itinerary allowing for free time to enjoy its beauties
- Seven important villas and 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. These twin themes of urban art patronage, leavened by rural retreat, will be the focus of our five day visit.

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, recently opened following a restoration of a part Medieval and part Renaissance palazzo.

## ITINERARY OUTLINE

**Day 1:** Tuesday 22 May – We fly from Heathrow to Pisa, arriving late morning, and drive to **Villa di Corliano** for the first of our private visits. This historic property, lying midway between Pisa and Lucca, 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 visit and lunch – wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners. We continue to **Lucca** and check into our hotel, the 4\* **San Luca Palace**. The remainder of the afternoon and evening will be free. Guidance concerning where to eat will be available locally from our staff.

**Day 2:** Wednesday 23 May – 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. Nearby is 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. We pause for lunch, not included, 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.

After lunch we continue to the nearby church of **San Frediano**, dedicated to the Irish saint who converted the local Lombard ruler in the sixth century. It has a striking façade, unique in Tuscany as it features mosaic work, all set within the usual Romanesque arrangements. Nearby is the delightful **Palazzo Pfanner**, a handsome palace with a fine period garden, enlivened by fountains and statues. Our final visit of the day will be to **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. There will be a group dinner in a local restaurant.

**Day 3:** Thursday 24 May – We drive out of Lucca to **Villa Oliva-Buonvisi**, probably 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. Nearby is **Villa Grabau** – Medieval in origin, it subsequently underwent two transformations, one during the Renaissance, the other Neo-classical in the early nineteenth century. The interiors are cool and impressive while the surrounding gardens have truly magnificent trees.

We break for a festive group lunch in a local restaurant and in the afternoon we continue to the nearby **Villa Reale**. It takes its name from its time as home to Napoleon’s sister, Elisa. She joined together several adjacent properties to create a remarkable ensemble combining an elegant villa, formal gardens and a fine landscape park. We return to Lucca and the evening will be free.

**Day 4:** Friday 25 May – This morning we 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 return to Lucca and lunch is not included today and you will have the afternoon free for independent explorations. Later that evening we shall have our final group dinner in a highly regarded local restaurant.

**Day 5:** Saturday 26 May – We leave Lucca mid-morning for the final time and drive to the nearby village of **Collodi** for a visit to the formal **Garzoni Gardens**. Large semi-circular parterres and flights of terraced stairs and water cascades bring many of our garden themes to an apt conclusion. We then have a final lunch overlooking the gardens after which we make our way to Pisa airport for the evening return flight to Heathrow.

## PRACTICALITIES

**Price** £1695

**Price without flights** £1575

**Deposit** £275

**Single Supplement** £129 (Double for Sole Use)

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

**Flights** British Airways

Outward: **BA604** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **0825**, arrive Pisa **1135**

Return: **BA605** Depart Pisa **1955**, arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **2110**

**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 & 1 Lunch



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